

# Letters from the Feminist Press

WE WRITE TO YOU IN THE NAME OF JOY

16 Days Of Activism  
November, 2024



“Empire, we are here, we are together, we are powerful, beautiful, magical and we will keep resisting your oppressions. We will build Black feminist worlds – drawing energy from each other, loving each other even as you rain down bombs and try to crush us with your boots. Black Feminist Movements, I love you. You are beautiful, you are magical. Here’s to joy, liberation, I love you. You are beautiful, you are magical. Here’s to joy, liberation, and all our freedoms.”

- Nadia Ahijo

## Acknowledgements

**Curated and compiled by** *Mubeezi Tenda*

**Letter Writers:** *Mbabazi Joan Komungaro, Rose Wakikona, Isibindi, Kikaawa, Evelyn Hilda Nakyondwa, Mubeezi Tenda, Lisa Charity Nabuchabo, Catherine Komugisha, Danielle Mulungi Wandera, Namara Kasande, Pamela Kente, Nakato Claire, Precious Tricia Abwooli, Hawa Kimbugwe Nakijobe*

**Editorial support:** *Helen Liyang, Olabukunola Williams*

**Design layout and graphics** by *Sarah Ijangolet*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this guide..... 5

**FOREWORD** ..... 6

**Do You Dream of The Morning After The Revolution?**

By Mubeezi Tenda.....6

Guiding Question.....11

Notes To Spark Joy.....11

**LETTERS ON FEMINIST JOY FROM AFRICAN FEMINISTS.....12**

Quote..... 12

**LETTERS TO SELF..... 13**

**You Are As Woman Now As You Will Ever Be**

By Isibindi.....13

**To My Soul, My Foundation, My Baby Girl...**

By Danielle Mulungi Wandera.....16

Notes To Spark Joy.....20

**There Is So Much Time And Energy Saved When I Speak My Truth**

By Namara Kasande.....20

Quote..... 22

**I Will Care For Myself As A Tribute To How Far We've Come**

By Lisa Charity Nabuchabo.....23

**To My Past Self: I'm Sending You Long, Tight, Comforting Hugs**

By Hawa Kimbugwe Nanjobe.....28

Notes to Spark Joy.....30

**Letter To The Loves Of My Life (Every Me That Ever Existed)**

By Catherine Komugisha.....31

Quote..... 33

Notes to Spark Joy.....33

**LETTERS TO A FEMINIST SISTER IN NEED OF JOY.....34**

**I Don't Mind Jumping In The River With You**

By Mbabazi Joan Komungaro.....34

Notes to Spark Joy.....35

<b>To My Beloved Sister, This Time I Will Take Care Of You</b>	
by Rose Wakikona.....	35
<b>Draw Strength From The Women Who Paved The Way For Us</b>	
By Hawa Nanjobe Kimbugwe.....	38
<b>You Are My Ancestor Now, You Sit At The Same Table As The Rest Of My Guides</b>	
By Nakato Claire.....	40
<b>Did I Tell You About The Noose Around Everyone's Neck?</b>	
By Pamela Kente.....	43
Quote.....	47
<b>GUIDELINES TO RESTORING LOST JOY.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>TO FUTURE FEMINIST GENERATIONS.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>I Want To Begin By Expressing How Proud I Am Of You</b>	
Hilda Evelyn Nakyondwa.....	54
<b>We Must Create Spaces Where Rest Is Sacred And Joy Is Political</b>	
Precious Tricia Abwooli.....	57
Notes to Spark Joy.....	59
<b>LETTERS TO THE COMMUNITY.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Do You Sometimes Look At How Far You Have Come?</b>	
By Kikaawa.....	60
Notes to Spark Joy.....	63
<b>LETTERS TO THE LAND.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>As Long As You Are Here, Through Every Crisis, We Know That You Will Hold Us Safely In Your Lap</b>	
By Mubeezi Tenda.....	63
<b>Notes on Joy.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Readings We Love!.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>About Akina Mama wa Afrika.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>About GBV NET.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>About QWESHUNGA.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>About MAKE WAY.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Join us in building a feminist utopia.....</b>	<b>73</b>

## About this guide

Akina Mama wa Afrika, the GBV Prevention Network, Make Way and QWESHUNGA joins the global campaign for 16 Days of Activism with a resounding message; amidst it all, we must reclaim our feminist joy.

Why Feminist Joy, you may ask? Well, because, as African feminists dreaming and working towards better futures for ourselves and others, all our efforts come down to the pursuit of collective joy.

However, ironically, in our advocacy work for the wellness of others, we are robbed of our joy as we constantly clash with the systems that stand between us and the lives we could all live. Our happiness is also perpetually robbed of us further as we experience and witness the socio-political-economic and climate crises.

Part of our resistance to this sustained attempt to rob us of our joy is to theorise and practice continuously reclaiming our happiness. Of course, as African feminists, we believe this must be done collectively, from personal to communal to political levels.

As part of our offering, Akina Mama wa Afrika, convened Ugandan feminists to discuss pathways to reclaiming feminist joy. The letters feature feminist perspectives and recommendations on feminist joy towards the self, women, minoritised communities, future generations and the land.

This guide also provides resources on how to build joy centered communities through letters, poetry and notes.

## FOREWORD

*...but chant it out loud, it is a potent spell to summon the beautiful revolution*

This poem is a redirection towards the joy that awaits us the morning after the revolution. It is an invitation to turn our eyes away from the strife and be warmed by the feelings of the end result of our work.

### **Do You Dream of The Morning After The Revolution?**

BY MUBEEZI TENDA

Tell me, sibling,

You want the revolution but do you, dream of the morning after the revolution?

Can you see it, sister?

Can you feel it, sibling?

Can you smell it, elder?

Can you sense it, child?

Picture this sibling,

The systems have crumbled worldlessly, like yesterday's bread,

The patriarchy lies in a sorry pile at our bejewelled feet  
What will we do with that rubble?  
Perhaps the children will know what to do with them?  
Use the ruins for their own amusement  
Perhaps fling them around in a lively game of “Ssonko”  
Or make giant mosaics art pieces out of them  
Tell me sibling,  
What will you do with the ruins and rubble  
from the oppressive edifices that once towered over you?  
On the morning after the revolution?

Tell me sibling,  
You want the revolution but do you dream of the morning  
after the revolution?  
Can you see it, sister?  
Can you feel it, sibling?  
Can you smell it, elder?  
Can you sense it, child?

Listen sibling,  
The town crier is running through the land like a gale,  
Capitalism is Dead!  
She cries...  
The law of this land is no longer, Work or Perish!  
“Earning a living?” that vulgar deplorable mess is light  
years behind us

The breath in your lungs is a currency sufficient enough to  
get you cared for

Time is yours, to do with as you please

Tell me sibling, how will you spend your time?

When you are no longer sentenced to these concrete  
miserable jails

When you don't have to say, my name is... I work at...

Tell me sibling, who will you be, first to yourself,  
who will you be to your beloveds,

Who will you be to the stranger you just met?

Tell me sibling,

You want the revolution but do you, dream of the morning  
after the revolution?

Can you see it sister?

Can you feel it sibling?

Can you smell it elder?

Can you sense it child?

Walk with me sibling

It is the morning after the revolution

The giant chasm between our existence and the divine has  
closed

Our ancestors are holy again

Not the Arab, not the Europeans, not the Indo-Asians.

But ours



No...

Wangari Maathai is holy, Ama Ata Aidoo is divine, Lakwena is a saint, Nyabingi is an archangel, Omugabekazi Muhumuza is holy, Nomzamo Madikizela is holy.

The African Goddesses have resumed their thrones in the sky,

in the trees, on the land, and in the waters

Everything on our land is holy and sacred to us and we hold it as such...

There is no separation between us and the divine.

She eats with us on the papyrus mats at a moonlit supper

She accepts our ablutions of sweet banana wine with delight

She is neck to neck with the mother as she labors at the birthstone, she sees her through safely

She resides in the waistbeads of the young maidens, she guides them to themselves

She is in the anklet around the children's feet, she keeps them from falling

She sits in the bodies of those who have transcended gender, she expands our souls through their limitlessness.

None of us are an abomination, our existence is holy again

There is a temple out there and our name is on it

You are welcome everywhere

Tell me sibling,

You want the revolution but do you dream of the morning after the revolution?

Can you see it sister?  
Can you feel it sibling?  
Can you smell it elder?  
Can you sense it child?

Sibling, close your eyes and follow me,  
It is the morning after the revolution  
The quiet moments are punctuated by the laughter and  
song of our people, of your people  
The granaries are overflowing with grain and seed  
The waters are clear and bubbling with fishes  
The children are in the courtyard making up new games  
The old women are playing Kwisso Bando in the grasslands  
The young maidens are extracting perfume from madonna  
lilies  
The men are making flower garlands  
The queers are planning feasts for the commune  
The enbies are lighting the incense pots for the devotion  
time  
And you sibling,  
Who are you sitting next to?  
Who came with you to the revolution?  
Remember... There are no clocks ticking  
You are held in the tenderest of care  
You are loved and you are free to love

Any work you engage in, is beautiful work  
It is work rooted in your deepest desires  
This is the morning after the revolution  
Can you see it sister?  
Can you feel it sibling?  
Can you smell it elder?  
Can you sense it child?

*notes to SPARK JOY*

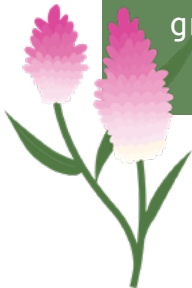
*Voices rise in song,  
a harmony of courage—  
fearless, fierce, and free*

**Guiding Question**

How can we rekindle the embers of feminist joy amidst everything?

How do we ensure that joy is not just for a few but for all of us?

How do we snatch joy from the grips of capitalism?





# Letters on Feminist Joy from African Feminists

“If they get you to lose hope, if they get you to lose joy, if they get you to lose entirely your peace of mind, your ability to love, your ability to focus on small things, then they’ve won.”

- Arundhati Roy

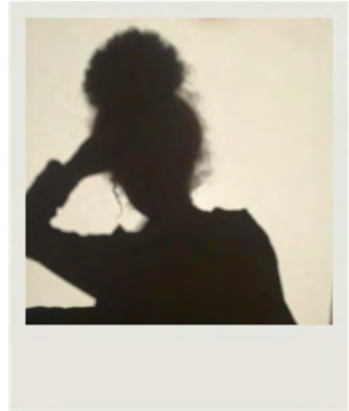
# Letters to Self

## You Are As Woman Now As You Will Ever Be

BY ISIBINDI

Dear Isibindi,

When your 9-year-old self felt enraged when your mom singled you out from the rest of the children about the burning food and how you couldn't keep a man if you kept up like that, your rage was valid.



When you wondered why the boys never cooked while you spent your hours cooking and cleaning yet they were human beings like you, your curiosity was valid.

When you ran and cried your guts out when your mother forced you to pull your labia and allowed house helps to invade your private parts to help you pull, your rage was valid.

When your mother said that this was to help you give birth and you ran to the cafe to research whether longer labia eased birth only to discover it was all a lie but a belief that it would help the men enjoy sex better, the disgust and rage you felt was valid.

Why did you have to go through so much pain to please someone you didn't know or hadn't met?

Remember the joy you felt when you decided you would not disfigure your private parts to please strangers? Hold on to that.

Remember the liberation and rest you felt when you petitioned your mother to have each of your brothers assigned a week to cook and clean at home. Do you remember how rested you felt? Hold on to that.

What you felt as a little girl and what you feel now all attest to the resistance you now boldly embrace as a feminist.

I am super proud that now, you not only feel the rage but you speak up too and resist the oppression.

I hope you never let romantic love or a man define your identity. I hope you never panel-beat yourself again to fit societal expectations of what womanhood should look like.

When you feel lonely or shunned by family because you boldly oppose their views on womanhood, I hope you remember the joy and freedom that speaking up has afforded you.

When your mother tells the whole clan about how you are a big-headed child and how she fears to speak to you because you have an opposing view on what womanhood should look like, I hope you remind yourself that you are no less a woman because you are unmarried or do not have children.

When your mother says that you can achieve all the academic qualifications, make all the money there is to

make in this world, and get all the jobs you ever wanted but that it is all nothing if you are unmarried, I hope you stay put and find joy in the present season of life. I hope you never feel less than. I hope you remain unphased.

I hope that while you sip your freshly brewed tea under the moonlight on your porch, you remember that you are here because you fanned that flame of resistance of that 8-year-old girl.

I hope you continue to remember that you are not only speaking up for yourself but also for the generations to come.

And while your resistance continues, I hope you hold on to the daily pockets of joy that this life affords you, I hope that with reckless abandon, you pour back into yourself, I hope you continue to create and sustain the beautiful community of female friendships who have held you up in all the seasons of life.

And if you ever desire anything within the box of what society expects of a woman, I hope that even then, you will remember that you are no more woman then, than you are today.

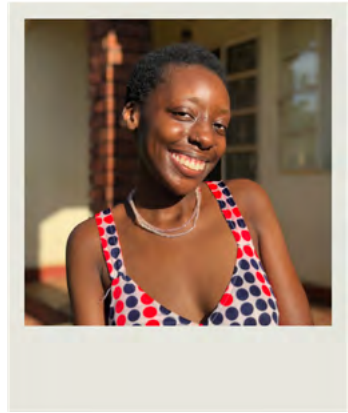
Yours forever,

*Isibindi*



## To My Soul, My Foundation, My Baby Girl...

BY DANIELLE MULUNGI WANDERA



You were always writing to me, I thought it was time I wrote back.

I know you are very forgetful and always forgetting that you are loved. I am here to remind you that you have always been seen and loved by me, the you of the future.

I have many things I need to say to you—most long overdue. I figure now is as good a time as any to translate my regard into words and action.

I recall that you never thought you would get here. But guess what? You did. You'll be 24 in a few months. Can you imagine? Not only do you not have the degree—you didn't even start the medical degree. You started a diploma and had to drop out because of your health. On top of everything, you do not want to be a surgeon anymore. In fact, you spend as much time in hospitals being a patient as you thought you would as a med student; I'll tell you more about that in a bit. The most surprising thing of all? You left Christianity just over a year ago. Yes! Girl, it's crazy this side like you would not believe.

—But I did not write you to read you the news.

You were always a big dreamer, Danielle.

I am so so so so so (x infinity) proud of you for always



looking beyond your circumstances, your challenges, your failures and keeping your eyes on the goal. You are one of the most responsible, disciplined, focused teenagers I ever knew. I still look up to you. I always will look up to and respect you. Hopefully, soon I will stop judging the kids for not being like you at their age.

You were always considerate of me.

You loved me by going on, you loved me by never giving up, you loved me by sacrificing for me... You gave up your joy so you could survive—and I could thrive.

Before I go on, I wish for you to know that I am so sorry, my precious girl, for the situations that made you like that. You deserved to be a child, not a survivor. You did well, but you could have done without it.

I have been scratching my head (I cut my hair again btw), looking for a way to show you how beyond grateful I am for your sacrifices and love. I know the best way to show gratitude for love is to just receive it, but you know we have always been an overachiever; that has not changed.

I figured out what was missing all that time.

A few months ago, I was talking to mommy and she said you were an open book as a child and then something happened and you closed yourself in. She noticed when you lost your joy, baby. She noticed before either of us. That is what was missing, baby: We were sad. We were terrified of the future. We made a home in our head.

This year, I decided to search for our joy.

I am glad to report that your love was not in vain: I found

them (the joy). I am the happiest either of us have ever been, my love. I am incredibly joyful, and content too. I am learning to live in the moment.

Danielle.

You did the best with what you knew and I will always always think highly of you for that.

However, in your mission to keep us alive, you ironically almost killed us.

I am not blaming you, babe; I want you to see that your choices are not independent. I am sick, Danielle. It's chronic and many of the doctors do not know what they are doing. There is no cure—yet. I want to end us sometimes. While we are on this, I also sought help for all those moodswings the girls whispered about in school. There is a name for the monster you became around your period: it's called Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD for short). It has no cure either. And it has only gotten worse the more we have grown.

My life looks nothing like you could have ever imagined. It looks like the total opposite actually. All this time I have to myself has made me extra reflective, as you might imagine and I realised that you were so busy trying to make me happy that you hardly stopped to be happy.

That is what I wanted to tell you today:

Joy is not reserved for the future. Joy is not at your destination. Joy is supposed to be your passenger princess, helping you pick out the music for the journey. Joy is supposed to be there even in the hardest of times. Ask me! I am simultaneously having the best and worst year of my

life!

The medical system, our body and brain occasionally, and our increased awareness of the socioeconomic state of the world are the devils working overtime to depress you to death.

But our friends and family, our new and old reclaimed hobbies, and having the freewill of an adult are also doing wonders for us.

Guess what? I run a newsletter now. And I actually recited a few poems this year. You were so scared of not being good enough that you stopped writing and performing spoken word, but now I do both of these things in all the wrong ways and not only have I not passed away, I was happy to have done them, however imperfectly.

If I could go back in time, I would show you how to steal joy from the mundane. I would teach you how to make yourself laugh in private and public. I would teach you to laugh as loudly as you wanted to. I would direct your eyes away from yourself and show you that nobody, but me, is watching. And I am not judging you; I am smiling proudly at you.

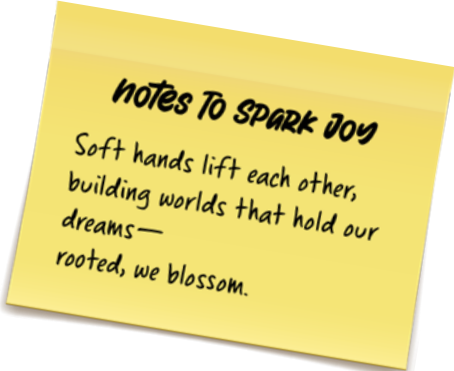
Joy was always waiting for you to grab their hand, baby. They could not and would not abduct you. My gratitude is shown in my embracing the moment. Not to say that I stopped planning for the future (am I really you if I am not practical?), but that I am where our feet are, as we always should have been.

I love you.

Thank you for getting me here.

Every belly laugh is for you, every step forward is for you, every hospital visit is for you, every newsletter, every stage, every application, every honoured invite... it is all to honour you. Thank you for giving me the privilege to choose joy.

Always and forever,  
*Danielle from 2024*

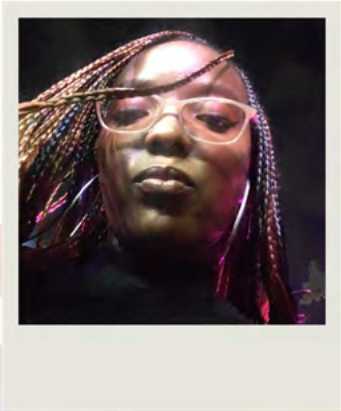


## **There Is So Much Time And Energy Saved When I Speak My Truth**

BY NAMARA KASANDE

Hi Mya,

One of the earliest memories I have is looking up words in a dictionary for fun. There was one that sat with me however and it is the word “chauvinist”. I have lived many days and nights knowing the heaviness of that word. I remember waking up, twenty-four years old and relaxing



my shoulders for what felt like the first time. I couldn't believe I had lived for that long unaware of such relief. Now, to be turning twenty-seven soon and coming to terms with the reality of having been raised in a household that confirmed the findings of my curious earlier years, is absolutely beyond disappointing to say the least.

As a child, preferring silence as the safer option and choosing the tight cloak of invisibility it brought me up in, quietly and unheard is something I'm currently salving. The only beauty of this cloak I can appreciate is the powerful skill of observation. Growing up, I became observant but especially to the shame that comes with choosing to exist and live freely as a woman in our society. Audre Lorde hammered the nail perfectly for me when she said 'We are Black women born into a society of entrenched loathing and contempt for whatever is Black and female. We are strong and enduring. We are also deeply scarred.' I have therefore decided I cannot afford to not love myself by intentionally seeking for joy.

There is an undeniable and shameless curiosity in me for something else, something far different from the norm and that is resistance enough for me and when I look at myself now, how far I have come and how far I have to go, I can't help but be joyful to make up for all the quietly lost time I didn't chose myself, my own desires, joy and peace. I guess I've felt and I'm still feeling joy in resisting that silence. I'm coming to realize the joy in speaking truth, my truth; the one that no one wants to hear or say out loud because there is a man and his feelings somewhere to protect and coddle.

I have found there is so much time and energy saved when I speak my truth.

Prioritizing what pleases my soul best is so liberating having been raised to put other people's needs and wants first before my own. The time, effort and thought I put into planning activities I enjoy is how I thank my past self. It's the adrenaline I feel fighting the fear from my mind and body that reclaims my joy. Doing the actual work and executing all the plans I've made protects my joy because it reminds myself and most importantly those around me that I am my own self and that there is nothing wrong with it, that there is no shame in resting and to try and stop feeling guilty for choosing to rest. Pursuing these joyful moments for myself also improves my self-confidence to be the woman I want to be, to dream the dreams I have and to continue resisting not just for myself but for everyone else uncomfortable in their silence.

"In our joy, we create a new world."

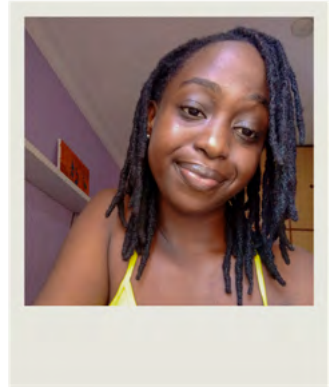
– **Adrienne Maree Brown**

# I Will Care For Myself As A Tribute To How Far We've Come

BY LISA CHARITY NABUCHABO

Dear Lisa I.O,

You won't believe this: we moved into our own home at 24. I know how much you'd love this moment because we've always longed for the taste of independence, the quiet thrill of imagining a place where we could unfold ourselves fully. You were always drawn to freedom, to the idea of living life on our own terms. We've never been ones to bend to rules and there was always a restlessness to us, a readiness to push past boundaries, to make a way where there seemed to be none.



You've carried countless lessons into this present moment, each one an important piece of who I am now. You're the heart of my nesting doll, a core I hold in memory with a clearer understanding today.

At 22, we were finally diagnosed with Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). We weren't "crazy" after all, despite years of misdiagnoses and feeling deeply misunderstood. It was a struggle we had borne unknowingly, and I witnessed you endure ableism, confusion, discontent and mistreatment at the hands of the people around you and a health-care system that didn't even recognize what you were dealing with. Back then, you hadn't yet found your voice. You were still trying



to understand the dissonance within your own mind and body.

1 in 20 women/afab people live with what I call “the beast.” PMDD remains the bane of our existence, and I’m in awe of how you navigated those early years with no awareness, stumbling and searching until you began to see it for what it was.

Cynthia Jones captures it perfectly in her poem about PMDD: “PMDD is a thing with limbs, that wakes worried and walks woeful, rolls in after half a month’s absence, then melts me millimeter by millimeter to my mattress to make sure I know just how flat I am.”

PMDD is an invisible illness that gnaws at us from the inside. It’s not because you were a lazy, overly sensitive teenager that was just anxious for no reason. This letter is my chance to tell you what you deserved to know back then—that your wandering wasn’t a waste, that your pain was real and most importantly, it isn’t your fault. I remember how lost you felt when no one else could see or explain it to you, and how often you blamed yourself. That was a heavy weight for a child to carry—a mental illness, undiagnosed, in an ableist world.

PMDD has a way of stripping away your idea of self, a loss of control over heart, body, mind, and spirit. And yet, somehow, you held onto yourself, finding and sometimes, taking pieces of who you are amidst the chaos. Your resilience was staggering. Severe depression coloured most of our childhood in shades others couldn’t see. It broke us—and still does—but you were the foundation of strength, the one that led us to seek help, to seek out that diagnosis. You made it into that hospital room out of



sheer stubbornness and asked for answers. I admire your dedication to self-reflection and discovery. I'm in awe of your intuition and fortitude.

This year has been a test of persistence—I moved out with no money, almost nothing, in a leap that seemed reckless to others, but it was a leap toward healing, toward belonging. That freedom you once imagined has become real, and it's brought peace to the darkest corners of my depression.

This home—our home—has become our sanctuary, a place crafted to meet the depths of our needs, even the ones we didn't fully understand before. Living here has allowed us to create a space that nurtures our neurodivergence, accommodating every tender, raw part of us. I can tell you now, I'm both loved and fully seen in this space. And in this home, I'm surrounded by friends who don't just tolerate my idiosyncrasies; they wrap me in care, in understanding, moving alongside me through the roughness of PMDD.

I remember your tears, the graceful and sometimes very messy ways you survived each day. You carved a path with audacity, fearlessness, clarity and precision, one that I still follow to this day.

I'm here because of you. Thank you for showing up. I'll care for myself as a tribute to how far we've come. I'll care for myself to say thank you to no one else but you. This year has been one of painful undoing, unraveling back to who you were and what you needed then.

I see your fears, your joy—what joy meant to you then. I see your passion and your curiosity, but most importantly, your pain, the one thing no one else saw. I see the limitations

of what you knew, and I can confidently say: You did your best. I'm still searching within myself to find you, to take your hand and walk beside you. Perhaps this letter is the beginning.

This isn't a soaring proclamation of how much farther I've come, nor is it meant to compare where I am to where you were, because fear still lingers, the world remains harsh and indifferent, ableist and unyielding to our needs. The weight of our trauma still presses down, with nowhere to lay it, yet.

But I can tell you this—I'm doing what no one else could for you. I'm doing the work to lift the weight from your shoulders, separating you from this illness, so you can breathe freely, see yourself clearly, without its shadow darkening every step. Not the version of you shaped by others' fears and misconceptions, but the you beneath, untouched, vulnerable and whole.

Because PMDD is like a shadowed storm, a heaviness only you could feel, its claws buried deep into our skin, though invisible to the rest of the world. I remember the way your eyes shone, teary and afraid, questioning why no one else could understand.

It's because of your bravery that I can say, now, no one—not even PMDD—can define me, nor tell me who I am. You taught me that. We are resilient, we are fierce beyond measure, more than we could ever have believed. You stood your ground then, and I will continue to stand firm because if there's one thing you gifted me, it's the strength to listen to my own knowing, to walk unshaken in the power of my own spirit.

In the heart of my new home is joy, that word that used to feel so elusive. The community I've built, the friends who showed up when I felt alone, have become my foundation. Together, we've created a place to land softly, a shelter to gather into vulnerability.

It's like Ijeoma Umebinyuo wrote: "In moments of deep grief, the women gather, they pay you visits, they help wash your body, they help clean the house of sorrow."

My friends have done this for me, stopping their worlds to hold me in love. They remind me that joy is not a solo endeavor; it's a collective heartbeat, pulsing in those who hold space for you when you feel you have nothing left.

And this joy, it has taught me so much. I once thought joy had to be conquered, that I had to chase after it, earn it through grit. But I know now that joy is something softer, something woven into connection, in being loved just as we are. My friends are where joy begins and ends. With them, I'm disarmed, seen, reassured.

This joy feels like being met at every scar, every frayed edge, and held there, gently, as if to say, You're still whole.

Today, joy looks like community. It's in the laughter over dinner, in the quiet check-ins, in the certainty that I'm not carrying the weight alone. Protecting this joy means fighting, yes, but fighting with love, letting love be the thing that drives me forward, that holds me up even when the world seems determined to deny it. I've learned to walk that fine line between strength and vulnerability, to stand tall and yet yield, embracing my softness without shame. It's a practice, this reclamation of joy—one where I must love harder than I fight, where I protect what we've built

with a fierceness that is, at its heart, tender.

As I look forward, I dream of freedom, not just for myself but for all those still bound by the weight of the world's many injustices. I dream of a life where community is not a privilege but a given, where radical acceptance blooms in every heart. I want love to be our doctrine, community our strength. I want for us—and everyone around us—to know abundance, to see beauty, even in our pain, even in our grief, knowing that love, somehow, will always be there to lift us through.

And so, I thank you, Lisa 1.0, for clearing the path, for carrying the weight when no one else saw it, for the quiet resilience that continues to pulse in my veins. I will keep listening, and I will keep holding that space for both of us, a testament to the courage you've gifted me. Together, we are learning to stand in our own light, unmoved by the shadows that once tried to claim us.

With gratitude and the promise of more joy,

*Lisa 2.0. ;)*

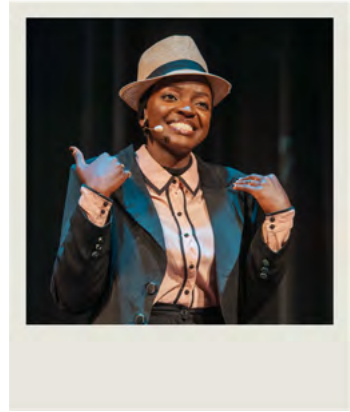
## **To My Past Self: I'm Sending You Long, Tight, Comforting Hugs**

BY HAWA NANJOBE KIMBUGWE

As a girl, I've often been told that I project positivity into the world, but I didn't internalize it until a defining moment. I was seeking help from a male boss and instead of addressing the issue, he said, "Naye mwe, mulabika muli

bakazi banji, ngenda bateekamu omusajja,” – ‘It seems you women are your own enemies, I’ll go find a man and include him in your team’.

That’s when I vowed never to ask him for help again. Feeling extremely disappointed, yet juxtaposed with the urge to prove him wrong, I turned to the women I worked with and said, “Ladies; I’m not against men but I am for Women; I narrated to them the story of what just happened and added “it’s time we put our differences aside and unite. Let’s look out for each other so fiercely that they suffocate.”



I asked if I had ever offended anyone or if anyone had an undercurrent bias about me and sought reconciliation. We started building an alliance, supporting each other, and sharing responsibilities. When rumors spread, we clarified the truth. Our bond grew strong, our alliance became unbreakable and the men on the team began to feel threatened.

This was a pivotal moment; I have never felt such immense joy in resistance and self-liberation. I chose to unite with my female colleagues against the patriarchal norms and narratives that pitted us against each other. I showed my boss that women can work together collaboratively, be results driven and defy expectations by challenging the status quo.

To my past self: I’m sending you long, tight, comforting

hugs. You did the best with what you had the best way you knew how. Understand that there's no such thing as naivety; the world isn't always positive, just, fair or harmonious.

To my present self: Celebrate your growth! You've unlearned, relearned, and discovered new things. You're soft, kind, empathetic, and resilient. Keep learning to draw boundaries and prioritize self-care. I wish you a life of ease, good health, and abundance, surrounded by women who experience love, grace, compassion, support, and safety.

With Warmth, Peace and Love,

*Nanjobe*



*notes to SPARK JOY*

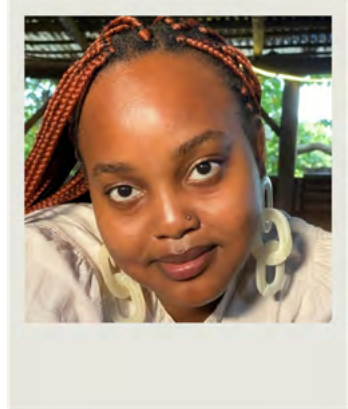
*We dance in sunlight,  
shadows can't hold us captive—  
power in each step*

# Letter To The Loves Of My Life (Every Me That Ever Existed)

BY CATHERINE KOMUGISHA

My love,

There is so much for you to know, so much that I must tell you. Is it exciting? Are you excited amidst all the uncertainty that surrounds you? I've seen you suffer. I've seen you suffer because you were good, because you were hurt. I've seen you suffer because you were bad, because you hurt. I've seen you embrace your humanness, your imperfection. I've seen you try so hard. And for that I'm proud of my darling. I'm proud that you looked for yourself and that you are finding her every day. I am deeply proud of you for protesting restraints cloaked around your gorgeous existence, defining you, commanding you to be mundane in a fascinating world. I applaud you for breaking free.



Every human on earth walks around with the burden to define themselves, find their purpose and do the “thing” they were born to do. It's hard. I wish we knew earlier that we didn't have to. Maybe it was part of the journey, the becoming; but I need you to know that you are everything.

Experiencing joy has been a puzzle for you, especially in a world that says people's happiness must precede or lead to yours. In Sunday school, you were taught, J is for Jesus, O is for Others and Y is for You. Your joy was supposed to



come from the joy of others. In this patriarchal society, your joy is supposed to come from the happiness of your family, the one you were born into, the one that you must create with a strange man. Your joy has been defined for you already so you couldn't tell when to be happy for yourself. I remember you doing so well in school. You're intelligent and that is what brought your parents joy. You didn't think about doing anything else. To write, to dance, to sing, because those didn't bring as much joy for your guardians as when you got good grades. You've seen what bringing joy for yourself has done. It has brought a huge rift. But you smile when you look into the mirror. You are growing into who you are. You bring yourself joy.

Helen brings you joy. I don't think joy is an emotion you were familiar with before she used the word. She wishes it for me. She wishes herself for me. Friendship and Community bring so much joy for us. I'm happy that you chose that. Finding feminism was scary, for lack of a better word, but it was also liberating. We're in a space where each day, you are reminded of the suffering of the non-white man, you are exhausted. Sometimes you feel guilty that you're safe. Somehow you still feel like it's your responsibility to make sure everything is okay. I'm sorry about that. Your community reminds you to do what you can, and you are placated. They bring you so much joy. The way they alleviate our fears and support our dreams is unmatched. Keep them close to you. Being for them who they are for you brings you so much joy.

My darling, as I conclude, I want to remind you to strive for real happiness and not the illusion of it. In this world where happiness is performed, feel it from the depth of your heart. I love you. I love who you are, everything you've been and everything you are to become. You are my biggest



source of joy.

Yours forever in love

*Catherine*

“Social protest is to say that we do not have to live this way. If we feel deeply, as we encourage ourselves and others to feel deeply, we will, within that feeling, once we recognize we can feel deeply, we can love deeply, we can feel joy, then we will demand that all parts of our lives produce that kind of joy. And when they do not, we will ask, “Why don’t they?” And it is the asking that will lead us inevitably toward change.”

— Audre Lorde

**notes TO SPARK JOY**

Stories intertwined,  
histories reclaimed with pride—  
sisters, hand in hand.

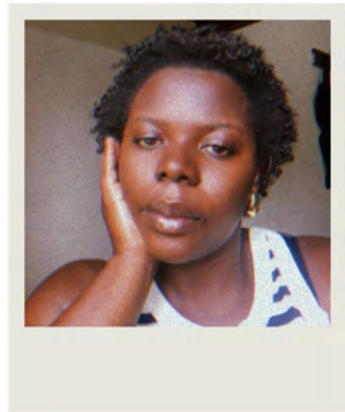
# Letters to a Feminist Sister In Need of Joy

## I Don't Mind Jumping In The River With You

BY MBABAZI JOAN KOMUNGARO

I love you...

I have been thinking about you lately. Still true to yourself, still ambitious, still loving and caring. Your cackle loud and echoing through the air; just living. I love you. You have always carried the burdens of choices, past and present, mudslid through your fears and anxieties, concealed your pain to invisibility, effortlessly. I both deeply loved and envied you for it. You have not been spared from the fast turning tides of life. You have been flung to the parts where your pain, your love and fears have been termed a taboo; to forever be unspoken, and consequently unheard. Where you cannot openly express yourself without the sharp gait of the people you hold dear piercing through your fragile skin! I am sorry. I am sorry I cannot understand or pretend to understand the peculiarity of your pain in all its rawness, unfiltered, like I did in the past. You are fractured, torn and overburdened, your tongue forcefully rolled behind your throat by the censor. I love you!



I see you! I see you going down the river. It's a violent current carrying you along its path. You hold onto a log along the way; to slow you down, to keep you buoyant. But the current is too strong, you don't want to sink, I know. The log you are holding onto is rotten and disintegrating, I know. But you don't know. You are too busy trying to stay afloat to notice. Or too scared to let go.

So here I am, telling you that I love you. Telling you to let go of the rotten piece of wood and grip onto my outstretched hand. I don't mind jumping in the river with you. We will swim against the turbulence, towards the sunset together. We will find another log; fresh, light and buoyant, together. We will make it to the banks. We will find relief. We will find joy, together. Because I love you!



## **To My Beloved Sister, This Time I Will Take Care Of You**

BY ROSE WAKIKONA

You have lived a life full of sacrifice, from the time I was born, you were forced to look after me after all, I am your

baby sister. You had to bathe me, feed me, dress me, and share your bed with me when I had nightmares at night. Prompted by our mother using phrases like 'you are the eldest' and 'she is a baby' you gave up all childhood play to ensure that I was safe and happy and became my deputy mother. Even at school, teachers would pull you out of class to wipe my tears, settle my fights, and put sense back in my head after all you are my elder sister.



When our father lost his job and all his wealth along with it, you abandoned your education to relocate to the land of the colonizer in order to provide for our family. Diligently every month, with absolutely no complaint, you sent money home to ensure that our school fees were paid, that we had food on the table, and that we had a roof over our heads. Only later did I learn you did this by cleaning different buildings, working for long hours in fast-food restaurants, and sleeping on park benches. With your efforts, I managed to graduate, get a good job, and earn a good salary. All you got out of this was deportation and being left behind by friends and family.

I saw how much you yearned for marriage and children of your own, praying and fasting to God for years to fulfill this beautiful dream of a nuclear family promised to you by the patriarchy where your husband would fully love and provide for you. You would look after him and your beautiful children together the way God intended for families to be. I saw the joy in your eyes as you walked down the aisle and when you gave birth to my two

beautiful nieces.

I now see the horror in your eyes upon realizing that your husband never loved you and that he probably never will. It is now dawning that that beautiful dream of a nuclear family may not become a reality for you. You have cleaned, cooked, and washed clothes for this man, but it is never enough for him. You have also given him children, and sex, and done everything you were told to do to make a man happy, but he has paid you back with ridicule, constant criticism, tantrums, and total neglect for who you are and what makes you special.

Everyone from friends to the church and family is telling you to be strong, that there are better days ahead, that he will come to his senses, and that you need to do more to make this man happy. Everything is your fault, after all, you are the wife, and it is the duty of the wife to keep her family together. But I see the toil that this is taking on your life, you used to love dressing up but you do not do this anymore. You were always smiling, carefree, and confident; now, you are constantly exhausted and bitter from trying to keep your family together.

Your work with abandoned women and children is important; you give them hope and offer solutions for them to raise their children with dignity. Even with this, why are you still being underpaid, barely able to make ends meet, making impossible your dream of building and living in your own house and taking my nieces to the best schools? You work hard and are devoted to your mothers. Unfortunately, there seems to be no proper reward for your hard work.

My beloved sister, as you make the dreams of others come true, I fear you are letting your dreams die. I do not want you to waste away in a land of lost opportunities; I want my nieces to grow up with a vibrant mother who achieves her fullest potential. You always tell me you are a nurturer, and I agree, but it is time to nurture yourself, be selfish, throw caution to the wind, and pursue your joy.

This time, I will take care of you.

Love always

*Your baby sister*

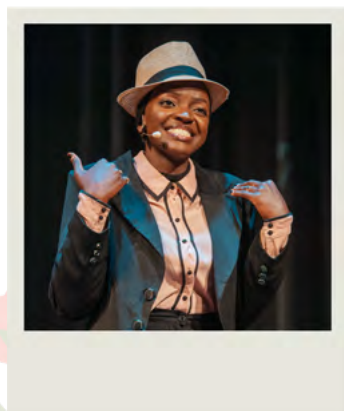
## **Draw Strength From The Women Who Paved The Way For Us**

BY HAWA NANJOBE KIMBUGWE

Dearest Sister,

I hope this letter finds you standing tall, choosing yourself in a world that constantly seeks to diminish your existence, choices, and actions.

As I reflect on the journeys of women who came before us, I'm reminded of the resilience and strength that flows through our veins. You are not alone in your



struggles; countless women have walked similar paths.

You are not the first to face single motherhood, divorce, or societal judgment. But I want you to know that your feelings, experiences, and questions are valid.

Don't let the patriarchal status quo define your worth. Instead, draw strength from the women who paved the way for us. Their stories, struggles, and triumphs are testaments to our collective power.

Remember:

- Every regret from the past is a wake-up call to forge a different path.
- Every contribution is a stepping stone for growth.
- Every story shared is a beacon of hope.
- Every voice raised is a monument to boldness.
- Every hope carried is a promise of a better future.

Let the lives lost to gender-based violence fuel your determination to fight on. Remember Cheptegei, who burned to death, Desire Mirembe, Rose Nakimuli, I could go on and know that their fate could have been yours or mine.

As I return home, I honor the women who came before us, whose efforts, with all their complexities, paved the way for our progress.

To heal, we must stand as victors.

To climb, we must stand on each other's shoulders.

To learn, we must share our stories.

To survive, we must raise our voices.

To hope, we must pay it forward.

To rejoice, we must collaborate.



This movement needs each one of us; loving, supporting,  
and standing by each other, no matter the cost.

We are Women! Joyful Women!  
We are Women! Bold Women!  
We are Women! Liberated Women!

With peace, warmth, and solidarity,

*Hawa NK*

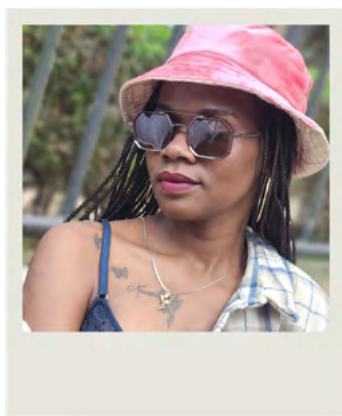
## **You Are My Ancestor Now, You Sit At The Same Table As The Rest Of My Guides**

BY NAKATO CLAIRE

To my most fierce and brave  
grandmother,

I remember the voice of your  
daughter, my mother, going on  
and on about you—the kind of  
woman you were, your grit, your  
strength, the way you loved to  
dance, the way you spoke your  
mind, the way you refused to  
settle. I remember how these  
qualities meant so little to me—at  
that age, all I cared about was that I ate and slept through  
the night without a nosebleed.

I, however, always looked forward to meeting you in





person. You see, growing up, I always felt like an outsider. The rules of the house, the rules of the community, the laws of the individual parents, and the rules of church and school never made sense to me. Consequently, I rebelled. I need you to know that I rebelled against everything, including the clothes I put on my body – they were never mostly my choice. I need you to know that as a result of my rebellion, I was named a problematic child, and I have paid the price of being difficult with my soul. I have battled endlessly with feelings of being misunderstood. I always shouted and screamed that I wasn't wrong. I just need you to listen.

In 2006, when I got to meet and live with you, I was overjoyed, but like they say, like poles repel. We fought. We didn't get along. I have this memory stuck in my mind forever: when we went to harvest Irish potatoes from one of your farms, and I accidentally cut your head with my hoe. You always said, "These Kampala kids have kyeejo" – the incident confirmed just that, but hey, how dramatic of you how you handled the situation? You cried and called me a murderer and insinuated that I plotted this way before. You gathered the entire village to witness how your first grandchild intentionally led to your almost demise. I carried a lot of short-lived shame from that experience.

You were so quick to move past that and then chose to take revenge with your drunkenness. You gave me/us sleepless nights because when you drank, we all had to stay up for your entertainment. How silly of me to hold a grudge against you until the end of your life for that? You were quick to forgive the murder, and I couldn't forgive your expression of freedom, joy, and life.

I am an adult now. I see a lot of you in me. I do not settle

and live life on my terms. Your life is a blueprint of freedom in a closed-minded society.

Your life is a reminder of how to BE. I hope you understand your impact on my life—the effect you are still creating. You are my ancestor now and sit at the same table as the rest of my guides. This is a love I cannot fathom. You have loved me in life, in death and the afterlife. My most profound experience of this love is when you came to warn me against a lousy friend. Your voice, as loud as it was in life, brought me back to my senses and discernment ever since. I have enjoyed our interactions through the medium – when she mentioned how stubborn your spirit was, I couldn't help but be proud of how authentic you've always been. In my eyes, you're a powerhouse.

Your spirit is powerful, and I am proud to come from a lineage of powerful women like yourself. You're an example of freedom, expression, love, and feminism. Thank you for looking out for me and my loved ones, and thank you for your life.

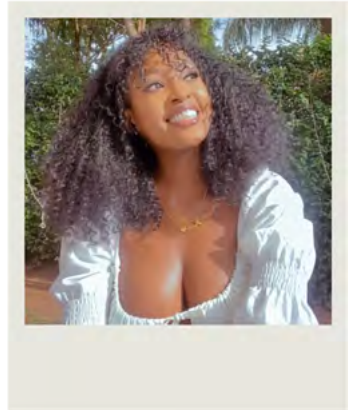
I love you!

# Did I Tell You About The Noose Around Everyone's Neck?

BY PAMELA KENTE

Dear Olivia Lutaaya

Did I tell you what I dreamt about last night? It's a dream I'm sure we've had the unfortunate fate of living through, well, dreaming through, day or night. In fact, I'm sure many of us, even from centuries ago, have floated around the earth daily, either trying to shake off this dream, or letting it consume us. There is a smaller percentage of us, I don't know whether to call them brave, mad or arrogant who have tried to make sense of this nightmare. They call themselves philosophers. I'm sure you're wondering what I'm blabbering about and what it has to do with you, but I'll get to it in a moment.



Last night I dreamt about the noose around everyone's neck. The one that tightens when we aren't consumed by everything man has invented to distract himself from what's coming any minute from every direction. We are all desperately searching for the meaning of life – at large, but especially intimately. We all believe we're special; at least we have to believe we are, if our life must have purpose. We are all, at one moment or another precariously balancing on one end of a structurally compromised see-saw: On one end is the idea that life is inherently meaningless, and we are but a spec on the radar of the entire universe, and so we can live as dishonestly

and immorally as we want because nothing really matters in the grand scheme of things. Only a pompous fool would assume that they could make a difference, that their actions would cause even the tiniest ripple in the vast ocean. After all, if it's impossible to wrap one's head around the concept of eternity, imagine comparing that to the probably eighty years a human being can live for? How big a mark can a mortal etch on the fabric of the universe? Man, designed to dread pain and suffering, is bound to choose the easy way out – selfishness, looting, plunder, murder, rape and destruction. On the other end of the see-saw is hope. Ever so slight, with grace and humility is the idea that because life is meaningless, our purpose is to give it meaning. It's so simple yet so beautiful. You are the architect, the artisan, the artist, the painter, the writer, the storyteller. You are the world because when you are gone, it ceases to exist, at least the one that was strapped on your tiny fragile back when you were thrust on earth. You are here to give your life meaning. You get to decide whether you want to live for something, or die for nothing. The best part of being the captain of your ship is you get to decide what counts as something and nothing.

You know the first thing people do when chaos ensues? They look to someone else to take charge and make sense of everything. They become these super humans who get to decide what's important and what's trivial. They get to decide who should live and who should be sentenced to death. Who should be free and who should be held captive. What is criminal and what is lawful. I don't know why we all forgot that there's a noose around everyone's neck and these men are just like us- on the see-saw, dreaming the same dream and tugging at the rough, barbed, immovable knot. These are the ordinary men who have decided that your freedom and joy is the price they're willing to pay

so they can sit their backsides comfortably on the rotting side of the see-saw. They've singled you out as the biggest threat to their ability to pretend that the noose around their neck doesn't exist. In the same way knowledge is a threat to oppression, standing up for something is a threat to living for nothing. You stood up for something. No, yanked yourself out of your own world, your problems, from your passions, your dreams, your hobbies, the trivial things that made you smile and grateful to be alive. You gave your life purpose. Some, even yourself when you're feeling disillusioned, may say that this purpose was thrust upon you, but, in truth, you stood at the top of that fulcrum, and you saw into the future. You peered into both futures, as far as the human eye can see, as deeply as the human mind can stretch and still rested your entire weight on the side of the see-saw with little to no joy to spare. You could've chosen to sit on the decaying side - After all, no one knows the exact moment when the rot will fall away completely and drag with it everything and everyone living, feeding and fattening off of it. It still carries the majority vote, and there's safety in numbers. If you go down, at least you won't go down alone. You could probably ensure a softer landing if you strategically fell on a pile of guilty bodies. If the worst comes to the worst, you could even do what they do on that side: Keep throwing off your fellow men, to buy yourself more time on the rotting lever. What's the saying? It's not over till the fat lady sings, and her voice is hoarse and crooked as we speak. It will be a while before her voice is louder than a whisper.

Olivia, we both know those weren't your only two options. You could've chosen not to get on the see-saw at all. It's what those who value self-preservation above all else did and do every day. It's a basic human instinct. The same instinct that tells you to run when you see a group

of people running, even if there's no logical reason you should follow suit. In the same way sharks can smell blood from 400 metres away, humans can sense the havoc that a single choice can wreck on their lives and those they love. Cities have fallen from the decision of a single person. You could've rescinded and no one would've broken down your door and hauled you onto the back of an unmarked truck kicking and screaming.

But that's not what you did, is it? No, you emptied all the reserves of strength, courage and resilience you had on you and hoisted yourself up. You stood up for my right to live a dignified and fulfilling life. You don't even know me but you demanded for my right to thrive and reap the rewards of my hard work. You pitched your tent in front of these ordinary men's mansions – these men who bleed red just like you and I and told them the rest of us deserved better and they whispered to the rest of the world that your wish was to dismantle and destroy everything in your path. They rounded us up and told us you were outside all our houses with songs of war and destruction spilling from your lips. Their deception only made you braver, taller, fiercer and louder. Their violence merely exposed the illusion of freedom they'd been peddling on the streets.

When a man feels the noose around his neck tightening, and there's no way to yank it away, his only source of comfort is to tighten the one around his neighbour's neck. He dedicates his life to devising chains that will cut into the white of your bones and strip you of your will to live because where there is a will, there is a way that leads to the extinction of his oppression. He sits at your prison door, a stopwatch swinging from his wrist as a reminder of how much time he can still rip away from your bleeding hands that have been wrung dry. The truth is, he has to

watch it like a hawk to distract himself from the clock on his own wall, furiously ticking away. He is suffocating and his other hand won't keep away that noose for much longer.

Did I mention that I dreamt about you last night? There was no noose around your neck.

Yours in solidarity 🤝

*Pamela Kente*

*NB: Olivia Lutaaya is a political prisoner, the only woman among 48 individuals who were arrested in Kalangala during the 2020 campaigns for NUP president Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine. After her violent arrest, she was detained incommunicado and eventually spent close to four years in prison before later being charged with treachery.*

"We cannot have a meaningful revolution without humor. Every time we see the left or any group trying to move forward politically in a radical way, when they're humorless, they fail."

– bell hooks



# Guidelines to Restoring Lost Joy

Restoring joy through a feminist, intersectional lens means understanding that our experiences and responses to crisis are shaped by intersecting identities, like gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability. Here's how to foster joy in ways that honor these layers of identity and create resilience in a more inclusive and affirming way:

## 1. AFFIRM AND HONOR ALL PARTS OF YOUR IDENTITY

Embrace and celebrate the unique aspects of your identity. Recognize that your intersecting experiences bring strength and resilience, even in difficult times. Affirming who you are, and all the communities you belong to, can be deeply joyful and empowering.

## 2. SEEK REPRESENTATION AND ROLE MODELS

Seeing yourself represented in media, books, and online spaces can be uplifting. Find joy in reading, watching, and listening to diverse voices who speak from similar experiences. Witnessing others thrive who share your background or struggles can be a source of hope and pride.



### 3. CREATE OR JOIN INCLUSIVE, SUPPORTIVE SPACES

Connect with communities that prioritize inclusivity and understanding. Whether they are online groups, local organizations, or affinity groups, these spaces can help you feel seen and heard, providing solidarity and shared joy.

### 4. CELEBRATE CULTURAL AND COMMUNAL TRADITIONS

Lean into the joy of cultural or communal rituals, holidays, or traditions, as these often have resilience and celebration at their core. Participating in these can be grounding and joyous, reconnecting you to roots and values that are meaningful.

### 5. ENGAGE IN INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM OR ADVOCACY

Working toward change, even in small ways, can be deeply fulfilling. Advocating for justice and equity, or supporting initiatives that lift up your community, can bring a unique joy and sense of purpose, especially in times of difficulty.

## 6. ALLOW FOR REST AS RESISTANCE

Rest can be an act of reclaiming agency, especially in societies that often devalue or exploit marginalized identities. Honor your need for rest, relaxation, and recovery as an essential part of resilience. Rest is vital to restoring joy, especially when viewed as a radical act of self-care and self-worth.

## 7. RECLAIM PLEASURE AND SELF-CARE WITHOUT GUILT

Taking time for pleasure is a form of self-celebration, especially when societal pressures may discourage this. Find joy in practices that bring you pleasure, whether through creative expression, beauty rituals, or activities that center on your own happiness and wellness.

## 8. UPLIFT JOY-CENTERED NARRATIVES AND MEDIA

Mainstream media often fails to highlight joy within marginalized communities, focusing instead on struggle. Seek out and share joy-centered stories, media, and art that celebrate the achievements, beauty, and resilience of diverse identities. Joy can be an act of resistance when we insist on celebrating positive stories.

## 9. CULTIVATE BODY POSITIVITY AND SELF-LOVE PRACTICES

Work on self-love by honoring your body and its uniqueness. Especially if your identity intersects with expectations around beauty or able-bodiedness, cultivating a relationship of acceptance and care with your body can be transformative. Self-love, in this context, becomes a revolutionary joy practice.

## 10. USE ART AND STORYTELLING TO EXPRESS YOUR TRUTHS

Art, writing, and other forms of storytelling are powerful ways to process, reclaim, and share experiences. Engage with these as tools for both self-expression and community connection, transforming struggles into shared narratives that can bring healing and joy.

## 11. REDISCOVER ANCESTRAL OR CULTURAL PRACTICES

Many cultures have practices that emphasize healing, joy, and resilience. Whether it's through storytelling, music, food, or spirituality, reconnecting with these traditions can restore a sense of joy and belonging.

## **12. COMMIT TO ONGOING LEARNING AND GROWTH**

Educate yourself about intersectional feminist perspectives and practices that validate your identity and experiences. Learning about the resilience and joy of others with intersecting identities can offer comfort and empower you to take pride in your own.

## **13. FIND JOY IN SMALL ACTS OF REBELLION**

Celebrate your identity by challenging stereotypes or expectations. Expressing yourself freely, whether through style, language, or activism, can be a joyful, empowering way to push back against limiting narratives imposed on you.

## **14. RECOGNIZE THE JOY IN COLLECTIVE HEALING**

Healing in community can be especially powerful. Consider group therapy, healing circles, or communal practices that provide a space for shared processing and joy in solidarity with others. Healing together brings collective resilience and joy.

## 15. PRIORITIZE JOY AS JUSTICE

Insist on joy and fulfillment as your right. In a world where marginalized communities are often expected to accept hardship, seeking joy is a statement that your happiness matters. By prioritizing joy, you're advocating for your own worth and humanity.

An intersectional, feminist approach to joy is about claiming space for authentic self-expression, justice, rest, and celebration. It involves building and nurturing communities that reflect and affirm who you are, reminding you that joy is a form of power and resistance.

# To Future Feminist Generations

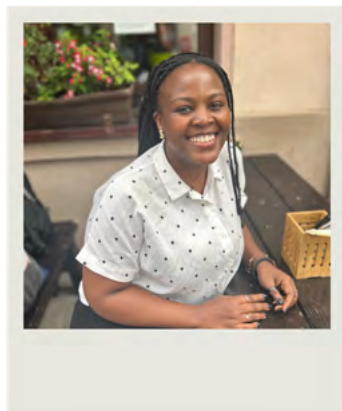
## I Want To Begin By Expressing How Proud I Am Of You

HILDA EVELYN NAKYONDWA

Dear future African feminists,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I want to begin by expressing how proud I am of you. I know feminism means breaking away from societal expectations and ways of thinking and you have done the work, you have unlearned or are in the process of unlearning. Unlearning what you have been taught as norm, choosing your own path in other words choosing yourself and that alone is commendable.



Sometimes though, this work, the work of the feminist movement can be submerging /overwhelming or even depressing because you get to see the world as it treats women and it's just too much, too saddening. It can feel like embracing joy and celebration is impossible or that we are unworthy of joy in the face of all women's realities. It can feel like taking a break for yourself is not an option.

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you that it's okay, to rest, to take that break, to just commune with your friends to catch up and party. Apart from the fact that you deserve it, it's rejuvenating and sometimes that's exactly what you need.

Something that gives me hope right now and I hope it will give you hope as well is that we aren't where we used to be. In terms of women's rights, queer rights, we are not fighting for the same things our ancestors were fighting for. Not everything at least, some victories have been won. We can see the change, we can see how those rights / fights won by the feminists before us have positively impacted women now. I know the things we are fighting for now will be won and they will positively impact maybe not us in our lifetime, but maybe yours and that gives me hope. The changes might seem slow or even invisible but in the bigger picture they are so important, this work is so important. For us, for you, for those who came before us. We are continuing their work and simultaneously living in the victories they won for us. I hope this encourages you not to give up on the work, that the thought of it gives you joy.

I would love to encourage you to celebrate the small wins, in your personal life and in line with the movement. I have found that life is always evolving and there is always bigger fish to fry, making us gloss over the small wins in the moment, but these small wins give you vim to continue pushing for the big ones and show you what you are capable of. They give you hope in moments when things are not going so well.

I have also found joy in my friendships with other women and comrades in this struggle. I would like to encourage

you to purposefully make friends / community with others in the movement, people with whom you share politics and goals. People who will prioritize your well-being and look out for you in times of need as you do them. People who will understand you to levels you wouldn't be understood otherwise. Purposing to keep community involves intentionally keeping up with these people, being there for your people, putting them off pedestals and holding space for them to be human and that involves making mistakes. It therefore requires conflict resolution, it requires sitting down and talking things out, it requires apologizing when we wrong others or holding space for our friends when they apologize.

These communities can also involve meet ups to discuss politics, to theorize and share ways forward and to educate. There is also joy in such communing for those who are called to. I feel immense joy in such spaces, to know that there are others fighting for what I am fighting for. To have someone else say the words I want to say but sometimes better or even clearer. These spaces give you that. I hope you find such spaces and thrive in them.

I know there is a lot I have not said but I trust that you will find a way, to joy, to hope, to community and to rest. I love you and I appreciate your dedication to the movement.

Your ancestor,

*Hilda Evelyn Nakyondwa*



# We Must Create Spaces Where Rest Is Sacred And Joy Is Political

PRECIOUS TRICIA ABWOOLI

I write this letter to celebrate our incredible feminist work and the joy we boldly place at the heart of our shared struggle for liberation. I call on us to look at ourselves as humans who have experienced the world in all our diversities and are affected by all the expectations of existing systems. The world that oppresses our minds and our bodies in a way that no system can explain by itself. So, we come to that idea, and I want us to call forth our most profound lost desires and dreams for liberation. Let us lean into our justified rage and allow ourselves to engage in radical, unapologetic fantasies of a liberated future.



Because our lives have been reduced to survival, we must constantly remind ourselves that we deserve to dance, laugh, and love as loudly as we resist. I need us to embrace what Audre Lorde called the “erotic,” the deep, unshakable connection to life itself, where pleasure, joy, love, and justice are intertwined threads of our revolutionary fantasy.

Joy, in our feminist revolution, is not a mere distraction but a strategy. It is our refusal to be defined by trauma and struggle alone. It is that dance we do after a victory, the song we sing in the face of struggle, the contagious laughter that rings even when the world feels heavy.

Joy gives us the courage to imagine a future beyond oppression, where we not only survive but truly thrive. It is the cream that soothes our wounds, the sun that breaks through the thick black clouds, and the fuel that keeps our movements alive when exhaustion threatens to wear us down.

So, how do we survive in a world devoid of meaning? What can we do for now to continuously live our feminist truths? We must keep organizing. We must practice collective care by grounding our movements in radical joy. We must create spaces where rest is sacred and joy is political. We must share moments of celebration, dance at protests, sing songs of resistance, and embrace the beauty of our collective victories. When we centre joy, we declare that our fight is not only against what oppresses us but for the vibrant lives we deserve. Joy is how we build the future we want.

To centre joy, we must ground our bodies and do our personal healing work. We must understand our own internal infrastructure and landscape and be unmovable and unshakable even when we are being shaken. We must not despair, we must have rigour, and we must FEEL because that is depth and will lead us to critical consciousness. We must weave joy into our movements like the fabric of our kitenge, the beats of our drums, the rhythm of our poetry and songs. It is in the moments when we hold each other close that we experience joy as our guiding star and our shared language of resistance. In these moments, we are offered a blueprint of a world where liberation is not a distant dream but an experience.

## *notes To SPARK JOY*

Like waves, we gather,  
carving futures, fierce and  
bold—  
tides of change we bring.



# Letters to The Community

## Do You Sometimes Look At How Far You Have Come?

BY KIKAAWA

Dear Community,

Remember when you came into existence because of our ancestors—firefighters and dreamers of change—who yearned to create a space on this planet where they could heal and be authentic? They sought a place to draw in energy and continue living, a sanctuary for those looking for rest and belonging. Do you remember all their dreams and hopes, the blueprints they laid for your existence, and the purpose they breathed into you to bring you to life. They nurtured those dreams just to see the vibrant bloom you are today.

Sometimes, take a moment to reflect on how far you have come. Consider how many of us have filled you over the years since your inception. Some of us crossed paths with you due to our ambitions; for others, it was through our struggles and a need for belonging (people who understood our kind of “crazy”). Then, there are those who were simply tired, looking for a space to rest and heal their spirits so they could continue on their journey of life, even when it feels limited and wearisome. You welcomed us without hesitation.

I am sure you have made our ancestors proud. They must

be pleased with all you have meant to each of us. You have adapted in countless ways over the years to accommodate our diverse needs, which are ever-changing. You reshaped yourself to suit each new generation.

Yet, you have endured many “insults” and misunderstandings from those who fail to recognize that you and your occupants sometimes operate under different principles. Nevertheless, you took it all in stride, protecting your members from individual attacks and allowing them the space to fight for you as a collective while you fought for them as individuals. Only you know how much easier it would be if everyone on this planet understood the intricacies of community. Over time, you have learned to let those negative thoughts fade.

Because of these misconceptions, abuse, and “poor branding,” some of us have left, while others may hesitate to engage or nurture you. But I hope you remember that for those of us who were meant to be part of you, your ancestors sent. Please never forget that you may not be everyone’s cup of tea, but for those who resonate with you, you will always be everything. When others leave you behind, remember that you served your purpose in their lives during the time they connected with you. Gently allow them to move on.

Here are some things from me that I want you to remember: -

- Never doubt your purpose in the lives of those who cross paths with you.
- Always acknowledge how much the individuals who have filled you with their presence, have also changed

you for their fulfillment and comfort, even those who nourished you during your times of struggle.

We have a very paradoxical relationship that even though you exist for us and so cannot exist without us, we can't exist without you either. Even amidst the chaos of life, where everyone wants to take from you or where you may feel you have disappointed us, remember that we all feed into one another and impact one another in profound ways. So thank you for your presence, even when we tore you apart or diminished your importance in our lives on this planet.

Above all, my hope is that amidst all our struggles—yours and ours—you never forget why you exist. Forgive us for the times we fall short, and also forgive yourself for not meeting our expectations. Find peace and joy in knowing that you will always be here for those who know you and choose to engage with you.

***P.S. Although some of us may not have chosen you, many have over the years, which counts for something.***

Yours truly,

*A Lover of Community*

### *notes To SPARK JOY*

The land hums with songs,  
old voices, soft and steady—  
joy lives in each step.

## Letters to The Land

**As Long As You Are Here, Through Every Crisis, We Know That You Will Hold Us Safely In Your Lap**

BY MUBEEZI TENDA

I had always taken you for granted in the same way that children take their parents for granted. Even though you stretched out beneath my nose as a dark, rich green coveted paradise, for me, you were ordinary. I was always looking out the window to the other side, drawn in by the adverts of faraway snowy lands draped in fairy lights where everything had clean lines and a glossy finish like shellac nails.





The older I grow, the more those faraway lands lose their seductive gaze. It all started with my sore back and aching knees, which catapulted me off my couch into my natural environment in search of the promise of relief from exercise.

My daily walks have reintroduced me to you, and you have revealed yourself to me with your beautiful undulating hills, gentle breeze, happy rains, warm sun, flowers ever in bloom, and dark green canopies fanning us all around.

Each time I walk, I am in awe of everything that you are and have always been.

Your rich, thick soils are more than pesky dirt to wipe off my shoes. These are some of the fruitful soils on the continent that give up the sweetest pineapples, the chunkiest beans, and the richest millet.

These bushes and trees do more than host stinging bugs. The sun is more than the sun. The rain is more than the rain. And the air is more than just a space.

All that you are, our beloved land continues to be a vessel of sustenance for my people and I.

You are heavy with priceless wealth, above and below the earth's crust, and now I understand why you continue to be a magnet of plunderers.

The older I grow and understand what we must do to get free, the more I appreciate you. You have always been ahead of us, protecting our people in the way that only mothers can.

You were called the dark continent because you built an



impenetrable wall for marauders and thieves, with harsh deserts, thick forests, giant lakes, and mountains that were slippery and jagged like glass shards.

Thank you for providing protection and cover for our liberators as they fought bitter wars against the oppressors, leading us to independence.

I appreciate the soils that have brought us the best seed, making us a strong and resilient race. By feeding us on the very best from the earth's core, you prepared us for a long life of resistance against all the physical and psychological forces that would rail against us.

Our ancestors have always held you in high regard, willing to lay down their lives for you and protect you. Every tree, mountain, river, and lake was a deity and a seat of the ancestors, and now I see why.

Our dearest mother, you continue to be our source of joy, pride and sustenance. You are a sacred place, and for as long as you are here, through every crisis, we know that you will hold us safely in your lap, like the great ancient mother you are.

Love,

*Mubeezi*













## ABOUT AKINA MAMA WA AFRIKA

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) – translating into, “Solidarity with the African woman” is a feminist Pan-African development organization, founded in 1985 and operating in Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Tunisia, Rwanda, Zambia and Ethiopia.



Through the African Women’s Leadership Institute, AMwA has relentlessly worked towards increasing the individual and collective power of women, girls and gender expansive persons to influence policy and transformative social change by uprooting patriarchal, imperialistic and capitalistic systems of oppression.

Through the African Women’s Leadership Institute, AMwA continues to train a critical mass of feminists in intersectional feminist analysis and strategies in the areas of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Women’s Political Leadership and Economic Justice and Climate action, to bring about justice, equity, equality and justice.

## ABOUT GBV NET

Established in 2003 in Kampala Uganda, GBV Net is a vibrant network of activists, organizations and friends working to prevent violence against women (VAW), united in our mission to create a safer world for women.



The Network uses multiple strategies to mobilize the movement around VAW in the region through including enhancing member organizations’ feminist analysis

of VAW, fostering solidarity between and among members, and increasing activism at the individual and organizational levels to prevent VAW.

## ABOUT QWESHUNGA

The origin of Qweshunga is a testament to the power of creativity and the human spirit's innate longing for joy and healing. It all began with a simple phrase, "OMWESHUNGO," in the beautiful Runyankole–Runyakitara language, meaning playfulness.



Qweshunga is more than just a call to play; it's a holistic approach to learning, healing, and living. It flows through the veins of curiosity, stokes the fires of creativity, and nurtures essential social–emotional and physical skills needed to succeed in life. The Qweshunga community is a vibrant, fun–filled space, where various hubs work tirelessly to support this visionary mission. These hubs serve as beacons of inspiration, playfulness, and wholesome living, demonstrating that through the art of play, we can unlock the doors to a brighter, more joyful world.

## ABOUT MAKE WAY

Make Way is an international programme that aims to break down barriers to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) by promoting a new way of looking at, and organising, SRHR issues, through an intersectional lens.



This means making overlapping vulnerabilities visible to



understand their effects on people’s SRHR. With insights and sound data, as a consortium, Make Way develops innovative tools and build capacities of other civil society organisations to advocate for the needed policy and societal changes.

**Join us in building a feminist utopia**

Access African decolonial radical feminist theories and strategies here:







**Stay in touch here**

**Website** [www.akinamamawaafrika.org](http://www.akinamamawaafrika.org)

**Phone** (+256) +256 200 904483

**X/Twitter** @amwaafrika

**LinkedIn** Akina Mama wa Afrika

