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CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

## “A LETTER TO LOVE” BY MILLICENT WANGUI

*CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.*



Dear Love,

I'm not sure how to feel about you because I feel like my heart is quite fine and full, thank you very much. All the same, I'm still looking because I need to know what you feel like. I'm told that finding you would be like finding the piece of my heart that I never knew was missing; Where are you? I'm only 23 years old but I feel like I've been on a lifelong mission trying to find you.

I want to experiment this feeling that can launch a thousand ships.

As you see, I am a bit of a skeptic, but that's something that just comes with the territory when you've never been in love. I'm certain that once I drown in your depths, I will convert into a staunch believer. Till then, I continue to live vicariously through those that are madly in love, hoping that one day that will be me.

I guess we'll find out in due course.

Yet, you'll be happy to know that I've been putting a lot of effort in my search for you I've put myself out there and I've tried to be as open as I can be.

Initially, I decided to just wait for you to come to me organically. In my mind, I'd bump into someone on my way to work or perhaps in my favourite restaurant, something akin to what usually happens in the countless romantic comedies that I've watched. Problem is, I'm no Sandra Bullock and my life isn't a grand motion picture. **My hopes of the classic love at first sight movie scene got me nothing but weird stares as I hopelessly sighed and batted my eyelashes at every attractive man that looked in my direction for more than a millisecond.**

I quickly gave up on that and tried to find you the old-fashioned way, which was basically me asking my friends and relatives to refer me to any nice guys they knew. But they just weren't what I was looking for; **there was always something that rubbed me the wrong way; I blame romance novels for this. I found them either too chauvinistic or too self-centered or not romantic enough and so forth.** I decided to broaden my search to the online realm; I figured that between my friends' introductions and online dating I had to find you, right?

I set up my profile in a bunch of sites (Tinder, AfroIntroductions and CloudRomance to name a few) describing myself as funny, outgoing and intelligent.

I also made sure to mention that I was looking for something serious and long-term to wade out the jokers. Surprisingly enough, I was a hit and got numerous matches, as a result, I've been on my fair share of dates, something which has turned out to be quite the eye-opening experience.

One of the main obstacles I've encountered while dating is that I might just be the only person looking for you, everybody else seems on a whole different agenda, I must have missed the memo. Over time, I've come to categorize the people in the Nairobi dating pool into five main groups: the Passerbys, the Social Stars, the Gold Diggers, the Chronic Cheaters and the Hopeless Romantics.

### Passerbys

The Passerbys do exactly that; they pass by. They are looking for something fast and fun to pass time. They just want someone to temporarily warm their bed and make them feel good about themselves. A passerby will take you out so he can be spotted together with a girl.

Passerbys live by the You Only Live Once (YOLO) slogan; as such, they are always looking for their next adventure. They also love to go with the flow, their allergy to commitment is only rivaled by their hatred for relationship labels. They have the tendency to get bored very quickly. The romance has an average lifespan of one month before they are on to the next conquest.

I met my most distinct passer-by, Rick, on Tinder, he was good looking and we had nice conversations so I thought, why not? When I met him in person, I was blown away by his energy; he was charming and so full of life. We went out a bunch of times and I really began liking him. Problem was though, our dates were always at the latest club, not exactly the ideal place to have intimate conversations. On top of that, Rick was always the life of the party, so instead of paying attention to me he was always paying attention to his adoring fans.

I kept trying to get us to the next level, but he just didn't want to. The relationship, if you can even call it that, fizzled out after about six weeks and he was on to his next escapade.

## Social Stars

Social Stars are the latest emerging trend brought about by the digital era. They tend to believe that they've found you when all they've found is someone to pretend they are in love with. In most cases, their main goal is to be one half of the next big YouTube couple. They love to fill their timelines with romantic photos and videos to show just how crazy in love they are.

Social Stars almost always have couple names and couple pages on popular social media platforms i.e. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. They also tend to post very frequently in an effort to keep their online in-laws updated about their relationships. Hashtags such as #CoupleGoals #Bae #Baecation and #CouplesChannel are always included in their captions next to nauseatingly sappy declarations about being together forever.

The most striking Social Star that I've ever known was a budding fashion designer called Martin. I personally didn't date him but he was in a relationship with a close friend of mine named Jessica for about a year. Martin had a hilarious personality, I constantly found myself clutching my ribs with tears of laughter rolling down my face every time I was around them. He always seemed very attentive, considerate and romantic towards Jessica. He was seemingly the perfect guy except for one glaring flaw, he was always on social media updating his followers about everything happening in his life, including her.

I remember one time they got into a heated fight and Jessica broke up with him in a haze of anger. A few days later, she received a notification on her phone that he had tagged her in a photo. She quickly logged onto Instagram and was met by a picture I had taken of the two of them a few months earlier. In the photo, they were looking into each other's eyes with huge smiles on their faces.

The caption was what caught her eye though, "My love, as we walk together in sync, may we forever dance to the beat of our hearts."

Despite the fact that she had ended their relationship and they hadn't spoken in days, he still had the gall to post lies in an effort to keep up with his online "perfect boyfriend" persona. Needless to say, that was the straw that broke the camel's back, she never spoke to him again after that. When he realized that she was completely done with him, he took down all of his posts about her, un-followed her on every platform and went on a tornado of social media rants assassinating her character.

## Gold Diggers

The Gold Diggers are the most distinct in the pool and are popularly known as "Slay Queens." They are mostly women identifiable by their beauty, excessive makeup, expensive hair, designer clothes and long nails. They love all things luxurious and always expect their dates to take them to exclusive places where they can order the most expensive food and drinks. They also love to travel and are always being spotted in exotic locations.

In most cases, gold diggers come from humble/middle-class backgrounds; as such, they are willing to be with anyone who can give them money. They are also quite tech savvy and have taken full advantage of the digital era to perpetuate their lifestyles. They tend to use social media and numerous dating platforms to lure and capture their targets by posting suggestive photos and videos. Most of the men gold-diggers attract tend to be married and much older than them, these men are popularly dubbed "Sponsors" or "Benefactors."

The only gold-digger that I know on a personal level is my friend Vicky (not her real name). I met her on campus and we've been fairly close ever since. Vicky only dates wealthy men who can provide her with a steady supply of money.

She has this uncanny ability to get them to give her what she wants, when she wants it and how she wants. Due to that, she lives the type of life the rest of us merely dream about; she owns countless designer products and frequently flies to beautiful destinations. Despite being unemployed and not having a business of her own she already owns a nice uptown apartment and drives quite a good car.

Vicky once told me that her secret weapon is her ability to pretend to be in love with the men she dated until they believed it themselves. She told me that all it took was her showering them with attention and affection till they were willing to do anything that would make her happy and content.

## **Chronic Cheaters**

In Nairobi, it has become popular to have a romantic or sexual relationship on the side, such relationships are popularly referred to as "Mpango wa Kando" or sidepieces. In this case, a sidepiece can be either a side chick or a side dude. Due to this, chronic cheaters make up nearly half the percentage of the dating pool. Somehow, they are on all the dating sites and popular hangout joints masquerading as single and ready to mingle. In most cases, they are either married, engaged or in a relationship.

Most chronic cheaters cheat on their significant others for the thrill of it, others do so because they want to keep up with the current trend of having a sidepiece, others do it because their spouse isn't giving them attention and some do it simply because they can. They all have one thing in common though, they all have the same signs and symptoms; they only want to go to specific places, they hate being photographed; they don't want to be posted on social media; they don't want to say where they live but prefer to meet up in hotels and rentals and they will never let you look at their phones.

My personal experience with a chronic cheater was very short-lived.

I was having lunch at Charlie's Bistro, a popular restaurant in Nairobi's Central Business District, when a well-dressed, handsome man approached me. He told me that his name was Robert and that he had seen me from across the room and was immediately very attracted to me. He offered to pay for my meal and went ahead to ask for my contacts. Feeling very lucky, I happily gave them to him and he told me that he would call me to arrange a date.

Soon enough, he called me and we went on the first date which rapidly turned into a few more. However, I quickly noticed that Robert had some very suspicious behaviours; I couldn't call him unless he called me, whenever I texted him he would take some hours to reply, we could only ever meet up according to his availability and when we were together, he would always put his phone in a strategic angle so that I couldn't see his screen. After a few weeks, it dawned on me, he was either married or in a relationship, I immediately confronted him about it. He didn't even bother denying it; he confirmed my suspicions and said that he wanted us to have something casual as he was planning to get married very soon. I instantly cut off all ties with him, good riddance.

### **Hopeless Romantics**

Last and unfortunately least, are the Hopeless Romantics, these are the people who have an unwavering belief in true love. They usually fall in love with an open heart and are very loyal once they are with somebody. They are marked by their consideration, attentiveness and loving natures. Hopeless romantics normally shower their partners with love and affection and are usually willing to do anything to ensure their happiness.

They are the ones who plan romantic surprises and elaborate date nights for their significant others. In most cases, hopeless romantics have been brought up in loving homes where they have witnessed strong and lasting love between their parents. Due to their loving nature, they are extremely forgiving which is not always a good thing.

Sadly, the number of hopeless romantics is quite low compared to the rest, this may lead them to morph into one of the other categories after experiencing a string of heartbreaks like passerbys or gold diggers. To some extent, I feel like I used to be a hopeless romantic back when I was a teenager. I used to have so much faith in you and firmly believed that I would one day find my soul mate. Don't get me wrong, I still believe in you so much but now I know that sometimes life doesn't always go the way we've planned it out in our heads.

I do know a hopeless romantic though, his name is Patrick, and he's in a relationship with my friend Joan. Patrick is the closest person to a perfect partner that I have ever met. He's full of love and positivity and effortlessly pours that into his relationship. Even when they're arguing and going through typical couple issues, he makes sure to communicate, listen and compromise for the sake of their relationship. He frequently plans romantic surprises and makes sure that they have weekly date nights.

One of the sweetest things that he's ever done was on Joan's last birthday. He contacted all of her friends and family and asked them to make a video message wishing her a happy birthday and telling her what they love about her. He then compiled it and played it for her during the birthday dinner that he had planned. On top of all that he still gifted her a beautiful birthday present and is currently in the midst of planning them a couple's getaway. I can only hope to one day find a man like him.

And that, dear Love, is a summary of the situation that I am currently in, I can give you more details but that will have to be a one-on-one conversation. I have no regrets though, due to the knowledge I've acquired, I can easily spot a man in any of these categories from a mile away, that will go a long way in my search for you.

I hope to soon find you in a hopeless romantic, till then I shall continue wading through the murky waters of the Nairobi dating pool.

I'm not going to lose faith though, for I know that once I find you, it will have all been worth it.

Yours lovingly,

Millicent

