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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY

From late-night Instagram stalking to coffee house memories, these raw confessions about unforgettable exes will have you in your feels
P.4&5

More than just the headlines

Their 20-year age gap sparked debate, but their love story silenced the noise—here's how they found each other against the odds.

When gospel artist Guardian Angel met Esther Musila, he had no idea his life was about to change. Their love story is one of faith, resilience, and breaking societal norms.

In this interview, Esther Musila opens up about her journey with Guardian Angel.

How did you meet Guardian Angel?

You know, when we first met, neither of us could have imagined where we would be today. It wasn't the usual love story where you meet someone, feel a spark, and then everything just falls into place. For me, it started with his music. I remember it was in 2019, just before my 50th birthday in 2020.

I had prayed to God, asking for a fresh start, a 360-degree change in my life as I entered this new milestone. I wanted to experience life differently, to know God on a deeper level. I felt like I was ready for something new.

One morning, as I was getting ready for work, I heard a song on the radio that just spoke to me. The song played for just a few seconds, but it was enough. I heard the lyrics "Rada Ibadlike," and I was immediately captivated.

I thought to myself, "Wow, this song is speaking directly to me." I called Maina Kageni to ask who the artiste was. That is when I first heard the name "Guardian Angel." I had never heard of him before.

When Maina shared that it was a song by Guardian Angel, I was intrigued, but I still didn't know much about him. A few days later, he played some of his songs for me, and I was struck by how powerful his lyrics were. It was almost as though God was guiding me to this artiste. I felt like he had a message I needed to hear.

So you were drawn to his music first, not the person?

Absolutely. My initial interest was purely based on his music. I wanted to know more about him, especially because I felt like his songs had such deep messages.

I even reached out to Maina, and said, "I really want to meet this artiste. I think he's got something special." A week later, Maina arranged a lunch meeting with Guardian, and our first conversation was all about music.

At that point, I just wanted to see how I could support his career. I felt like his talent was underrated, and I wanted to help elevate him in any way I could.

It was a very professional meeting, with no romantic intentions at all. But as we spoke and got to know each other, something clicked. We exchanged numbers,



Kenya gospel singer popularly known as Guardian Angel with wife Esther Musila on their wedding day. PHOTO: IPOOL

The untold love story of Esther Musila and Guardian Angel

and the rest, as they say, is history.

How did things progress from there?

Well, just two weeks after our first meeting, Guardian invited me to be a part of one of his music video shoots. The role was simple: I was supposed to run towards him and save him. It was during that shoot that we spent more time together, talking and getting to know each other. I was impressed by his maturity.

Despite his age, he spoke with such wisdom and insight about life. It was clear that he had lived through some tough times and had a deep understanding of the world.

We started talking more, and over time, we shared our personal stories. We were not looking for a relationship, but there was a connection. A friendship began to blossom, and from there, it just grew. The lines between friendship and something more started to blur.

What was it that first attracted you to him?

What really drew me to him was his maturity. I was amazed at how, despite being younger than me, he carried himself with such wisdom. It wasn't just about age; it was about how he viewed life

and the world. He was different from anyone I had met. He didn't speak just to fill the silence; every word he said had meaning.

And even though I wasn't looking for a relationship at that time, I had come out of a marriage and wasn't thinking about love – I could feel something special between us.

It was not something I was actively seeking, but I couldn't deny the bond we were forming.

Was there a moment when you realised there was more than just friendship?

Yes, there was one moment that really stood out. After our video shoot, when we were saying goodbye, Guardian hugged me. It wasn't just a normal hug.

There was something about it that lingered with me. For days, I kept thinking about it, wondering what it meant. I was unsure whether I was just imagining things, but the hug felt different. So, I texted him, asking, "What did that hug mean?"

He replied, "Whatever you're thinking, it's exactly what you think." That's when we both realised that there was something more between us. We began talking more, and our connection deepened.

When did you first talk about

love?

I think it was about two weeks into our relationship when he first told me he loved me. And I was like, "No, no, no. It's too soon!" We were both still getting to know each other, and I wasn't expecting that. But at the same time, I felt the same way. It wasn't just about the words; it was about the way we connected and understood each other on a deeper level.

I had never considered being in a relationship with someone younger than me, but with Guardian, it didn't feel like a problem. Our bond was built on respect and understanding, and it just felt right. The love grew naturally.

How did Covid-19 impact your relationship?

If I am being honest, Covid was a blessing in disguise for us. It was during the lockdown that we spent most of our time together. We couldn't go anywhere, so we had no choice but to get to know each other deeply. We spent 99 percent of 2020 together, and it gave us the chance to build a solid foundation.

Because of the pandemic, we weren't distracted by the outside world. It was just us, and we were able to talk about everything, our

past, our dreams, our values. It was during this time that we really solidified our connection.

How did your children react to your relationship with Guardian?

My children are all grown now, with the youngest being 26, so they were a bit curious when they saw me spending so much time with Guardian.

At first, they didn't know exactly what was going on, but they could tell that I was happy.

They were supportive, but it took some time for them to fully understand our relationship.

Guardian met my children on my birthday that year, and from then on, they started to warm up to him. They respect him, and they have even become close friends.

My sons call him "G," and they confide in him about all sorts of things, even personal matters. It has been wonderful to see them bond.

What about Guardian's family? How did you fit into his world?

Guardian was raised by his mother, who lives in Canada, and I have only met her once.

As for his other relatives, I haven't met many of them yet, as Guardian is an only child.

Guardian has never pushed me to meet his family right away, and I respect that. We are still building our lives together, and we take things one step at a time.

How has the public's reactions to your relationship impacted you both?

When we first went public with our relationship, we were met with a lot of criticism, especially about our age difference. Some people couldn't understand how I, a 50-year-old woman, could be with someone younger. But the truth is, love doesn't have an age limit. Our relationship is based on mutual respect, love, and understanding. We don't answer to anyone but ourselves.

At first, the public scrutiny was tough. We were trending for days because of our age difference, and the comments were harsh. But as time went on, we realised that we couldn't let the opinions of others define us. We know who we are and what we mean to each other.

What's your message to people who criticise your relationship?

My message is simple: Focus on your own life. Don't try to dictate how others should live theirs. Guardian and I are happy, and that's what matters most. We don't live to please anyone else, and we will continue to build our lives together. If people can't understand that, then that's their problem, not ours.

At the end of the day, it's about respect, love, and understanding. We've found that in each other, and that's all that matters.

How do you and Guardian intend to celebrate this special

month, and what does love mean to you daily?

Honestly, I feel like every day is Valentine's Day for us. We don't even celebrate Valentine's on the 14th because we live in love every day.

I honestly don't understand the excitement some people have about just that one day. For me, love is not confined to a date, but it's a daily experience. Guardian shows me love every day, and I love him the same. So there is really no need to emphasise just one day to celebrate it.

For those who may not fully understand, what does it mean when you say every day is Valentine's Day in your relationship?

I believe in celebrating love every single day.

We don't need flowers or grand gestures. I am not someone who enjoys being bought flowers or gifts, but I experience love every day in other ways, whether it's through support, attention, or simply being there for each other.

How have you maintained such a strong bond in five years?

Interestingly, the only time we have ever been apart was the night before our wedding! I had to return to my place that night, and we were apart from 10pm until 9am the next day.

That is the only time in five years we have ever been apart. We are inseparable, and I cherish that deep connection.

What advice would you give to people who believe that you need to know someone for years before settling down?

Every relationship is unique. For us, our relationship is built on friendship, and I believe that's the key. Friendship is the foundation of everything. When you are friends, you can be open with each other, correct each other without judgment, and truly understand each other.

We don't feel the need to follow anyone else's timeline for love. The most important thing is mutual respect, love, and trust.

You have mentioned that you don't feel societal pressure, especially when it comes to big milestones like your honeymoon. How did you and Guardian navigate your relationship on your own terms?

We don't believe in living up to other people's expectations. For our honeymoon, we drove ourselves to Mombasa, stayed for three days, and then returned home. It was simple, just the two of us. Sometimes, on anniversaries, we will just decide to go to Naivasha, or sometimes we let the day pass and simply enjoy being together.

We never feel the pressure to do what others are doing, especially with the influence of social media. We do what makes us happy and what feels right for us.

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Hustler

Safara finds himself in a pickle on the Eve of Valentine

I found out that the Valentine weekend would cost me a cool Sh50,000 at the resort.

BY MIKE SAFARA

It started innocently enough this last Monday morning, with a call from Martha, the sales manager from the Tsavo.

"Are you willing to appear in a TV programme about savvy investors, now that you are part of my network that is going to be investing in your own apartments?"

I had never been on TV, but being a proper hustler, you don't say no to television.

You never know who will be watching, and get impressed enough to get in touch.

And, as it turned out, that Wednesday 6-7 PM one-hour T show was life-altering!

The host of the weekly business show was a buxom woman with cat-like eyes called Eve Valentine, but who went with the funkier short form 'Eval'.

She was a gracious host, who listened politely as me and three other budding investors spoke about how, even as ordinary wananchi, we were buying into the "Sunset II" apartment-investment project, and asked sensible, pointed queries.

"Great show," Eval enthused afterwards, as she personally came to re-

move the microphone from my jacket lapel.

"Un-miking Mike," I joked, "that could be the title of an entire TV series, ndiyo?"

Eval laughed, as she had at my many little bon mots during the one-hour show.

I could tell she liked me, but was taken aback by her brass when she whispered:

"Wait for me at the reception, Mike. I will buy you dinner. Let me go change..."

"Where's your car?" Eval asked, as we walked out into the parking lot.

"I came by cab," I said, trying to sound casual, but in reality, I was embarrassed.

I wasn't going to tell this beautiful woman, who looked younger without the heavy TV make-up, that I had sold my vehicle in the September of 2022, 18 months after our Covid-19 layoffs, when I realised I wasn't going to be recalled.

"No worries," she said brightly. "We will go to Westie for dinner in my moti."

Her car was an old Subaru Impreza, but very clean and well maintained.

"2000 GX wagon model," Eval explained, as I got into the hatchback next to her.

"Almost as old as me," I joked, and that got her giggling again.

She had chosen a Fonda Taqueira, and asked me if I "liked Mexican..."

"I have never had any," I said, risking a risqué joke, that just set her laughing again.

Saying hello to a friendly lady whom she called Salisha, we went to our table.

The restaurant had Mexican artwork and served real Mexican food and drinks.

I ordered the taco, because at least I knew that one, held together with tortillas; and for poetic rhyme, as I told Eval, took it all down with lots of tequilas.

Eval ordered herself guacamole with chippies, two cheesy quesadillas (giving me one, which was flavourably delicious) and a sonoran burrito, and I began to understand the TV hostess's curvy figure.

As Eval delicately sipped the orange liqueur in her margarita, I quaffed tequila, and eager to impress, told her about my many recent trips - my 'land buying' trip to Malindi in November, to Tsavo in December, and to the Mara early in January - but leaving out details that they had all been paid for by others for my hustle.

The Mara, you will remember, had been funded by my winter bunny cousins?

I loved how Eval's eyes lit up as I regaled her with my tall 'Tembea Kenya' tales.

She paid the entire bill, and stopped at the table of the couple of Salisha and Yash to say bye.

"You married Salman Rushdie?" I joked to Salisha.

Her hubby did look like the great author.

"You eat at there often?" I asked, on the ride back home.

She shrugged: "I am single. Just like you. Which is your favourite restaurant, Mike?"

At some point, I had revealed I was separated from my baby momma, Lora.

"Mama Njeri's kibandaski," I said, but she just chuckled and said "you're funny."

The drink had made me sentimental, though, and I found myself telling the TV host about how much I missed my recently deceased first cousin, Safari Safara.

Just before I staggered out of the car, Eve-Valentine (who had told me her father chose 'Eve' as she was a first born, and her mom 'Valentine' as she is a February 14th) responded to my 'Happy pre-date birthday, Eval' with a proper kiss.

I slept a happy and deep sweet sleep that night.

When I woke up at 8am yesterday, there was a WhatsApp message from her.

Next to an image with four first class tickets for the SGR with my name and hers, Eve Valentine had left a stunning voice message: "Good morning, Mr. Handsome.

Pardon me, I used your ID registration details at the TV from yesterday, today, to book you, and me, a train to Mombasa tomorrow morning at 8am. First Class.

I've done the transy to-and-fro, you can do the sea resort, severin is so very nice!

It's my birthday kesho, and I want to celebrate my new decade with you, Safara.

We'll leave on Friday after lunch, get the 3pm SGR, and be back in Nai by Sunday 8pm.

Ready for a new week, and a new year, after the most romantic time in life (sic)."

Oh dear, I thought, this presumptive person had given me her 'birthday surprise,' except after my stories, she thought and expected me to pay for accommodation!

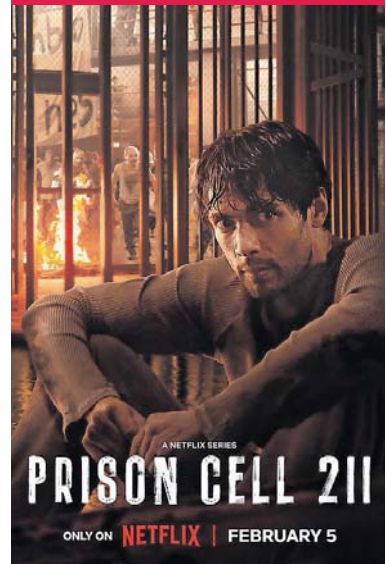
She had actually spent almost 20K on transport, and after I googled, I found out that the Valentine weekend would cost me a cool Sh50,000 at the resort...

I had the money, but it was for my deposits and rent at the Sunset, to be paid by the 15th of the month, which is tomorrow, if I am to move in, in a fortnight.

What on earth will I do?

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Movie Review



BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

PRISON CELL 211

Where: Netflix

Genre: Drama series

Prison Cell 211 is a gripping new drama series on Netflix, based on the 2003 novel by Francisco Perez Gandul. Directed by Gerardo Naranjo and Jaime Reynoso, the series follows Juan, a dedicated human rights lawyer, who finds himself trapped in a violent prison riot while visiting a client in Ciudad Juárez.

The series opens with Juan's visit to the prison to meet Flavio Gonzalez, a prisoner whose treatment he is investigating. Unbeknownst to Juan, the prison kingpin, Calancho, is planning a riot to take a high-profile inmate, Baldor, hostage. When the riot erupts, Juan is inadvertently caught inside and must disguise himself as an inmate to survive.

Diego Calva delivers a stellar performance as Juan, capturing the character's desperation and moral conflict as he navigates the brutal prison environment. The series doesn't shy away from depicting the harsh realities of prison life, including overcrowding, corruption, and violence. The supporting cast, including Noé Hernández and Gerardo Taracena, also deliver compelling performances, adding depth to the story.

Prison Cell 211 is a dark and intense series that explores themes of survival, corruption, and the thin line between right and wrong. The first episode sets the stage effectively, introducing the main characters and the chaotic environment of the prison. However, some viewers might find the middle episodes slow-paced, as the series takes its time to build tension and develop the plot.

The final two episodes, however, are particularly strong, bringing the story to a satisfying conclusion. The series raises thought-provoking questions about the nature of justice and the impact of extreme circumstances on a person's moral compass.



An open letter to the one that got away

Young Kenyans get real about lost love, 2am social media stalking, and why some people live rent-free in our heads forever.

BY MICHAEL OCHIENG

Scrolling through Instagram at 2am, you freeze. There they are – your ex, living their best life at that new aesthetic café in TRM, Thika Road that just opened. You know the one. Your thumb hovers over their story, and boom – there goes your heart doing that annoyingly familiar dance it always does when you see them.

Remember those Sunday afternoons at Java House Kimathi Street? Just you, them, and that shared plate of masala fries you'd always fight over (but not really, because you loved how they'd always let you have the last bite). Their laugh would echo over the buzz of coffee machines, turning heads because you both were always a little too loud, a little too happy.

Now your favourite booth sits there, probably hosting another couple's story, while you're stuck in your bedroom at midnight, overthinking every TikTok they post. They're out there glowing up, hanging out with their squad, while you're still saving their old WhatsApp statuses. (Yes, we both know you still do that – no judgment here!)

The thing about Nairobi love stories is how they linger in every corner of the city. That Campus parking lot where you had your first kiss. That random matatu stop where they surprised you after class. Even that silly fight outside your local that now makes you laugh because, honestly, who breaks up over someone double-tapping their ex's photo from 2019?

You're probably reading this on your phone right now, wondering if you're the only one who feels this way.

Trust me, somewhere in Kenya, someone else is also lying in bed, thinking about their "what if." But here's the real question, bestie: between all these memories living rent-free in your head, when are you going to start writing your next chapter?

Here, just like you, a few people write to the loves that slipped away.



I can't reconcile reason you left

Jatoth Jemimah, 29 is a data analyst in pharmaceutical at Summers Kenya.

Bae,

"I've spent so much time thinking about everything that happened between us. Even though you've moved on, I find it so hard to forget you. Babe, we shared something special, and I'll always remember the love and care you showed me. The six years we spent together felt like a dream. We were even planning a future, building a family and I was excited for what we were creating, especially when I gave birth to our child.

But that's when things started to change. I realised there were things happening behind my back, things I could never have imagined, like you getting back with your ex. I confronted you about it, but it felt like no matter how much I tried, nothing got through. It became a constant source of chaos, and I felt like I was always the one fighting for your attention, fighting for us, but it seemed like she was your priority. Eventually, I had to take a step back, especially with our newborn in my arms. The stress was too much, and that's when I decided to part ways.

Healing from all of that took time. Being a first-time mom without you by my side was difficult than I could've ever expected. There were days I couldn't hold back my tears, even at work. I would hide in the

bathroom just to cry, and eventually, I had to seek therapy to get through it. I kept asking myself if I made the right decision to let go. I reached out, tried to talk to you about being there for our son, but the pain of it all kept me questioning if there was still something worth holding on to.

I tried to move on after that, but the next relationship I entered was even more disappointing. The man I turned to ended up being unfaithful, leaving me even more confused about what I wanted and needed. It made me wonder if we could've made things work, if we could've been the family I always dreamed of. But now, with you married to the same woman who came between us, that chance has passed. You may still say you have feelings for me, but I know now that your actions don't match your words. I won't let myself be used again.

I've always believed there's a right person for everyone, and for me, you were that person. I imagined us raising our child together, creating a life, but now, it seems like just a dream. The reality is, I can't have you.

It's made it so much difficult for me to trust anyone or fall in love again. You were the first man I truly loved, and it breaks me to know that, in the end, you chose someone else.

The thought of our past, of what we could've had, still haunts me. Having a child with someone who's moved on feels like a constant reminder that maybe you never cared for me the way I did.

I know you'll always find a way to come back into my life, for the sake of our son. But right now, I'm focused on raising him and taking care of myself. I'm not ready to be in a relationship again. My son is my priority, and I want to make sure he's never a burden to anyone. He's my motivation now, and being a single mom has only pushed me to work harder for a better future for both of us.

All the best,
Jatoth"

I let go to make room for the right person

Brian Makori, 26, is an entrepreneur, a photographer and a model based in Nairobi.

Sweetie,

"I remember meeting you back in 2016. From the moment we crossed paths, I knew there was something special about you. You were beautiful, kind, and had everything I'd ever wanted in a partner. We got along so well, and it felt like we were building something meaningful. I truly thought you were the one I was meant to settle down with.

But something started to shift. The signs were few at first, but eventually, I couldn't ignore them. It felt like you were slipping away, like there was someone else in the picture, even though you kept saying you loved me. I didn't want to believe it because you were the one I wanted to be with, the one I im-

agined a future with.

When I found out the truth that you were seeing someone else I was hurt more than I can explain, especially because I had invested so much of myself into our relationship.

Loving you felt like I was having a one-sided conversation. I gave you my heart, shared my dreams, and showed you care in every way I knew how, but it always felt like you didn't see me. I would wait for your texts, long for your attention, but I was left in the dark. Even when we were together, I felt invisible, like my efforts didn't matter. It was like everything you told me was just a lie, and eventually, I had to walk away and it broke me to do so.

I was ready to take the next step with you, to introduce you to my family, and to start a life together. I loved you deeply, and it hurt to see you move on with someone else. I would still see your posts online with him, and it felt like a reminder of what we could've been. I tried reaching out to you, hoping that things could be different, but you turned me down. Maybe I wasn't the right person for you, even though I truly felt that you were the one for me.

I could never quite understand

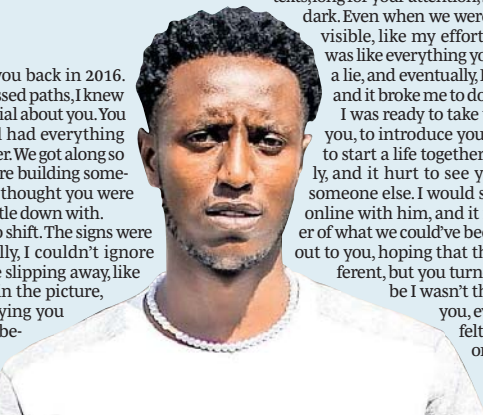
why you chose him over me. He seemed to want a different lifestyle, a more carefree, party-oriented life, and I couldn't offer that to you. It was hard because, despite everything, I still cared about you. But I realised we wanted different things, and that's something we couldn't change.

After we broke up, I moved out of the place we shared. It was hard to stay in a place full of memories of you, especially when you were no longer there. So, I threw myself into what I loved doing most, basketball. It helped me keep my mind busy and slowly start to forget the pain of losing you.

Emotionally, I was lost for a long time, longing for someone I couldn't have, even though I thought we were meant to be. But over time, I learned my lessons. I focused on myself and didn't let your posts online get to me. I acted like everything was fine, even though inside I was hurting.

Four months later, I met someone new. She's different, but in all the right ways. She cares for me, gives me the attention I need, and loves me for who I am. At first, I wasn't sure I was ready to move on, but as time went by, I realised she was right for me. Her actions and support made me see that sometimes, we have to let go of those we thought were meant for us to make room for the right person. I wish you all the best with everything, and I hope you find the happiness you're looking for.

Yours,
Brian"





Give me another chance, I have changed

Phoebe Gathoni, 30, is a Customer Relations Officer at Rama homes.

Babe,

"I remember when we met back in 2020. You were hard-working, God-fearing, and those were qualities I really admired. Our relationship felt like a little piece of heaven, and for the two years we were together, I thought we were building something great. But in December 2022, everything changed. You broke up with me, and I think the reason was that you felt I wasn't where you needed me to be.

Babe, you didn't like that I was into parties and wasn't going to church at the time. I understand now why those things bothered you, but at the time, I don't think I was ready to make those changes.

I sometimes wonder if it was the right decision to end things like we did. Maybe if you had given me more time to change, I could have been the person you wanted me to be. I was still young, still trying to figure things out and have fun. I think with time, I would have grown into what you needed, but we never really got that chance.

Since then, I've changed a lot. I don't drink anymore, and I don't go to parties. I started going to church again. It's like I've grown into the person you probably hoped I would be back then. But we never got the chance to grow together, and that still hurts.

The breakup really tore me apart. It wasn't easy, and it's been a long and painful journey. I cried a lot, hoping that maybe tomorrow would be easier. I kept wondering if things would work out with someone else, but nothing felt right. We had something special, and I was sure it was what I wanted.

I tried other relationships, but none of them worked. Maybe it's because I was still holding onto what we had, or maybe I was just scared of repeating the same mistakes.

I regret not reaching out to you after the breakup. I wish I could have tried to make things right, to talk things through and see if we could work things out. Our egos got in the way, and we never tried to fix things. Looking back, I realise that I was the one who was wrong, and I didn't fully understand that at the time.

I know you've probably moved on by now. We don't talk anymore. But if I had the chance, I'd want to understand if I ever gave you what you needed. I'd want to know why we didn't try to sort things out, and if you truly loved me the way you said you did. I also want you to know how much



Maybe if you had given me more time to change, I could have been the person you wanted me to be. I was still young, still trying to figure things out and have fun.

Phoebe Gathoni



Phoebe Gathoni, 30, a Customer Relations Officer is on a journey of personal growth. POOL

your influence changed me. You made me a better person.

Sometimes, I believe that maybe good things don't last forever, or that love isn't just about being there for each other. I thought you were the one, and when things ended, it made me question everything. Maybe there isn't just one right person for everyone, after all.

I don't know what the future holds, but I do believe that if we met now, things might be different. I've changed a lot since then, and I'd like to think that we could work things out if we ever got the chance.

Love,
Phoebe"

I'd want to ask why you married my best friend

Sharlyne Wanjiru, 32, is a self-employed interior designer and decorator.

My love,

"I recall our time back in church, the year was 2010. At the time, you were just a fellow brother to me. But over time, something changed, and by 2011, we began to notice each other in a different way. Our connection felt so natural, and we shared so much in common. We had dreams and goals for the future, and everything seemed perfect. Our relationship was beautiful in the beginning, and for three years, I thought we were building something solid.

Eventually, things started to change. Our communication became difficult, and I couldn't understand why every conversation seemed to lead to arguments. No matter how much we tried to talk

things through, we couldn't agree on anything. I began to notice that you would walk out of the room to take phone calls, and I realised you were talking to someone else. The trust between us started to fade, and I found myself overthinking. I felt like I couldn't continue in a relationship where I wasn't fully respected or trusted.

I decided to take a break from you. I didn't want to lose you, and I hoped that the time apart would give you space to think things over. When we decided to give things another try, I was hopeful. But unfortunately, things only got worse. You started flirting with other women, proudly boasting about how many women were interested in you. That made me feel insecure and reminded me that you weren't ready for the kind of relationship I wanted. It became clear that we were on different paths, and I couldn't stay in a relationship with someone who wasn't ready to settle down.

So, I walked away. I wanted to be in a relationship that could lead to something more, and I wasn't getting that from you. A year later, I tried to move on, and I began dating someone else. But even then, you couldn't let go. You would still reach out, check in on me, and show me the things I needed

to see when we were together. It confused me, and I started to question whether I made the right decision. I didn't know what I wanted anymore, and I struggled with whether I had made a mistake in letting you go.

Then, the unexpected happened. You married my best friend. That hit me more than I ever expected. The man you became seemed like the one I had always wanted you to be, the focused, mature person I had hoped for when we were together. I couldn't help but feel betrayed, but at the same time, I had to let go. Love is unpredictable, and sometimes you don't realise how deep it is until it's gone.

I tried to focus on my new relationship, but my mind kept wandering back to you. It didn't feel right because you were already married,



and I knew I couldn't have you back. But if I'm being honest with myself, a part of me still wonders what would've happened if things had worked out differently.

Now, I find myself reluctant to fall in love again. I've become someone who pushes people away because I'm afraid of getting hurt again. I want to be alone for now, but deep down, I still think about you. If I ever saw you again, I'd want to ask why you married my best friend. I'd want to know if you would have ever given me another chance, if we had decided to try again. I don't know where life will take me, but I wanted to say all of this because it's something I've been holding onto for so long.

Dejected,
Sharlyne"

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Fighting spirit I don't care too much about being the first lady to do it.

Felista Mugo: Kenya's 'Young Queen' Taking Over Martial Arts

Q&A

From karate to the cage, she is rewriting Kenya's MMA history with fearless grit and global ambitions.

BY GEOFFREY ANENE

Where did your journey in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) start from?

I didn't know I would end up in MMA when I started martial arts. I started as a karateka for self-defense. Then after two or three years of doing karate, I came across Kenyan mixed martial arts promotion company LFNE based in Nairobi in 2020. They asked me if I could fight. I dominated Kenpo Karate from 2019-2022. LFNE asked me if I could do mixed martial arts. I didn't know anything about it, so I just said I would give it a try. I started believing I could excel in MMA when I won my first two amateur fights here in Kenya in 2021.

How did your parents react to your involvement in MMA?

My mother is always like "You don't have to do this". Nonetheless, she's very supportive. She is my number one supporter. It worries them when I get into the cage.

You came from karate and Tong-Il Moo-Do to MMA. How challenging was it to transition?

It was very difficult. In karate, you deal with mostly kicks that I'd say have not so much power as the kicking in MMA. I'd say in karate, you just touch and move, but in MMA, you have to use great speed and force and let it slide. I was green in my first MMA fight not knowing what to do. But, you keep learning and getting better. Karate was more of kicks, but in MMA you're using your hands and you are tackling. I didn't know the rules of the game when I started.

Who was coaching you then?

I didn't have a coach when I started MMA, but I got one for my first fight. But after my first two amateur fights, I looked for a



Kenyan mixed martial artist Felista Mugo poses for a photo during a training session at Absolute Fitness Gym in Kitengela in January 2024. PHOTO / DENNIS GIKERA

coach to sharpen my boxing skills. My punches got better and that helped me a lot.

I want to become the champion of Africa. Before I retire, I want to see myself in that top-level competition in the UFC.

Felista Mugo



For MMA, I learned ground fighting in elite training in the Democratic Republic of Congo. My current manager Yadam "Yakuza" Moser, before he became my manager, saw my videos, and texted me on Instagram. He told me that he would like to manage me after watching my videos. He said he could see something in me. I was a bit skeptical. It took almost a year before I responded. I still had doubts about whether I wanted to do MMA. He believed in me more than I believed in myself. We later signed the contract. He sponsors everything for me.

What challenges did you face by relocating to DR Congo?

Although most of the food is not different from Kenya's, I must admit I did not like some of their food. But I had no choice. You have to take it. I said to myself this is my life now and I have to take the sport seriously. I just had to accept everything and grow in it. Language was also an issue because I did not know French. Fortunately, my manager knows some Swahili and French. I had to take some basic French lessons, though.

How receptive was your mother regarding the DR Congo trip?

She was against it. We had to fight when I told her that this gentleman had approached me after seeing what I did and he wanted me to go to DR. It was a very big fight. She asked, "Why Congo?" And then she was like, "If you sign this contract, this is your life." But you have to let somebody follow their passion and the career they want. Eventually, she had to accept it.

How did losing feel to be on the receiving end in your first two professional fights?

I was in Congo for one month before I turned pro. I did not like my first fight. It made me question myself. I was offered another fight in the Extreme Fighting

Championship (EFC) in South Africa which I went on to lose by ground. After that fight, I told myself that I can't give up. I knew I could do it, so I had to pick up the pieces and promise that I'll do whatever it takes to be up there.

How did it feel to win your next two fights?

It felt reassuring. I felt like I was one of the fighters. I had extra classes. After those two victories, I felt I could do it. I got the courage. My mind was now relaxed after I won. I told my mum about it and she was so happy.

You are the first Kenyan woman to win in the EFC. How inspiring is the win?

I don't care too much about being the first lady to do it. But it is encouraging because I have a goal. I want to reach the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC). In the next two years, you should see me in UFC.

How do you improve your skills?

I attend training camps. We've been in Congo, so I will get some fights. Additionally, I have applied for a belt in EFC for strawweight. If I get the contract in EFC in South Africa, I think I'll just fight two or three fights and then I can go to big MMA organisations. Your record speaks a lot, so I working towards improving it. A good record will make you attractive to big organisations. I also watch a lot of fights online and take notes.

What does your training day look like?

On a normal day in a camp, we have three trainings. You wake up, run for one or two hours, and then take a rest. In the afternoon, you have a boxing or weightlifting session. After that, in the evening, around six or seven, you have a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (BJJ). In my last fight, I finished with a rear-naked choke. So I can see the improvement. A rear-naked choke is a chokehold in martial arts executed from an opponent's back.

Why do they call you the Young Queen?

The Young Queen came from my coach Calvince Ouma. I got it because everything I did was going well. I'm also a competitive girl. Like I can't accept defeat. I like the nickname. If I get defeated, even in sparring, I'm like, what did I not do? Why did this come? I'm very competitive. I have tried CrossFit in Kenya. I came number one and it was my first. I was like, okay, I have that heart. So the way he saw me, he was like, you're a queen, of course, the precious one. I need to live it and to earn it.

What did you aspire to be when you were young?

My dream was to work in the Kenya Defence Forces. I was a scout from class one up to class eight when I was in school. My grandmother used to tell me I'd be a police officer. Nothing stopped me from following that route, but I'm now in MMA.

Are you able to make a good living from MMA?

Yes, for now, I'm getting some good money from it.

What's your ultimate goal in MMA?

In May 2025, I'm going for a title fight in South Africa. That is my first goal. I want to become the champion of Africa. Before I retire, I want to see myself in that top-level competition in the UFC. It is everyone's dream to be in the UFC, or the Professional Fighters League (PFL).

What's your message to people who believe MMA is exclusively for men and a woman cannot do it?

It's not for men only. Women are taking and building their lives on it.

From early setbacks to stunning victories

• Felista "The Young Queen" Mugo has won her last four fights in MMA after she defeated Nigerians Precious "Empress" Okoh in Flyweight, Chidimma Faith in Strawweight and Merit Nwaji in Flyweight and South African Aneesha Mayman in Strawweight. She had lost her first two fights against Congolese Sephora Kiala in Flyweight and South African Nicole "Li Miss Feisty" Van Wykin in Strawweight in 2023.

• Before joining the paid ranks, Felista beat compatriot Peris "Iron Lady" Githeka in two amateur bouts in 2021

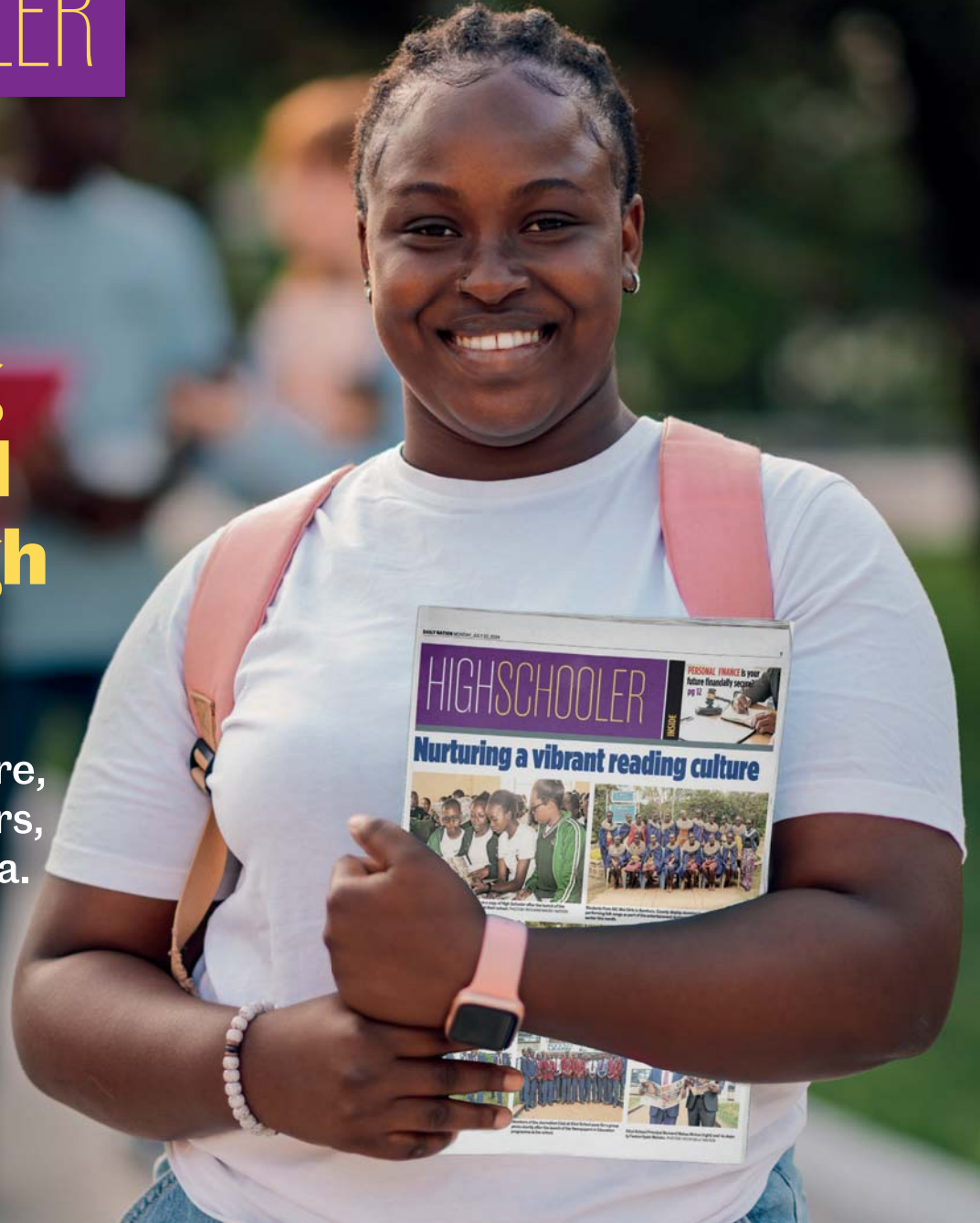
• Felista honed her combat skills through karate and tong-il moo-doo before undergoing MMA training in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She is a two-time Mombasa Open Tong-Il Moo-Do International champion

• Her role models are mixed martial artists Zhang Weili from China and American Rose Namajunes

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