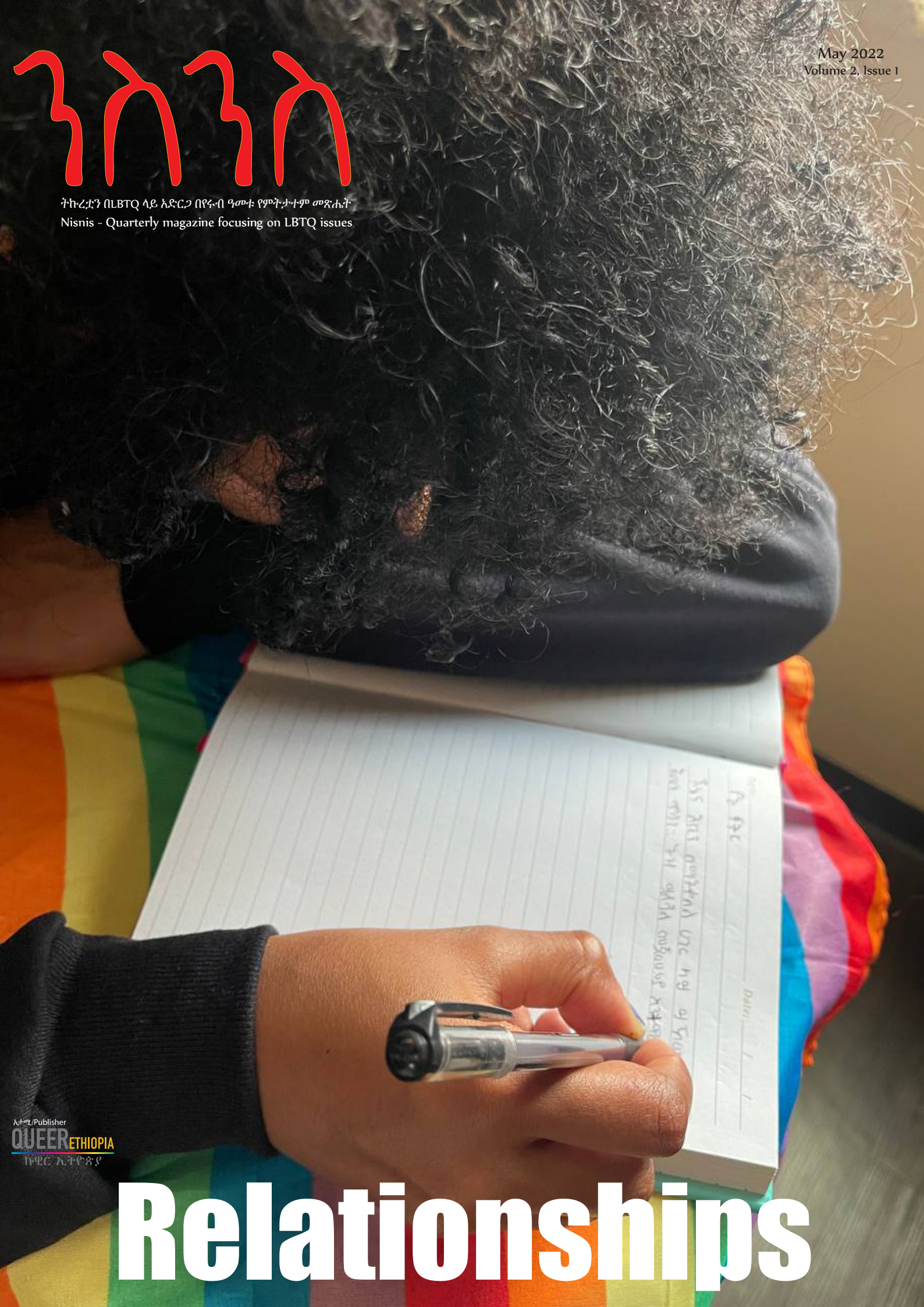


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Nisnis - Quarterly magazine focusing on LBTQ issues

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QUEER ETHIOPIA
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Relationships





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Volume II, Issue I

Ninis is a quarterly magazine that focuses on the issues of LGBTQ Ethiopians in Ethiopia and in the diaspora.

For all inquiries:
etqueerfamily@gmail.com

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QUEER ETHIOPIA

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“Queer Ethiopia” is an alternative space created by a group of queer Ethiopian women. It is designed to be a space for a diverse group of Ethiopian queer women whose sexual and gender identifications vary. It includes cis, trans and nonbinary individuals who may be lesbian, bisexual or asexual. This is a space where the experiences of queer people takes center stage. We hope to include personal experiences from our daily lives as queer people, various stories, interviews, original artwork and poetry. We hope it will also serve as a place where Ethiopians in Ethiopia and Ethiopians in the diaspora come as themselves to explore and create an online community.

 queerethiopia.com

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from the editors

“We are just like any other Habesha couple,” Fitsum reiterates while discussing her relationship with her partner of eight years, with whom she lives. It is a simple yet profound statement. It is a testament to our ability to transcend the difficulties and challenges that are a constant part of our lives as queer people in Ethiopia. Fitsum’s loving and lasting long-term relationship is just one example of the fact that our lives are filled with insurmountable love.

Welcome to the fourth issue of Nisnis where we cover romantic relationships within the LGBTQ community. LGBTQ Ethiopians across such spectrums of gender expressions, ethnicity, class, religion, and the rural/urban divide examine relationships from various angles.

Some are in committed monogamous relationships like Sara and Mahder, who initially met through Tinder for a hookup but nine months later are planning on how to build a life together. The way we find our way to each other might differ but our need for love is one aspect of being human and it reflects the stories of so many in our community.

Our stories are as varied and as complex as our community. In part, what complicates our stories is the fact that not all of them are conventional. One of our contributors is a bisexual woman who discusses her relationship with her husband and the room that she has created for exploration. She writes “Gender plays a major role in the way that we are relating to each other right now ...”. What can non-monogamous relationships look like and what are some of the necessary negotiations?

A previously married Muslim woman who divorced her husband when she realized that she was a lesbian is still not able to express her sexuality or be in a romantic relationship with women. She writes, “I still have not had a romantic relationship or sex with a woman due to society and religion”. The hold that society has on us is reflected by her decision to not act on her articulated desire. This too provides yet another angle by which to examine the role that internalized homophobia plays in the lives of queer people.

Another contributor asks, “How do I fit into a dating world that feels like it expects all queer folks, especially those of us who are masculine-presenting, to have an *adequate* amount of sexual experience?” What are our expectations from our relationships, and how do assumptions and biases within our communities affect our relationships – be it quick hook-ups or a desire for something longer-lasting? What do our first loves, our first relationships, and our first breakups look like? What does it mean to purposefully commit to not dating? Do we feel supported in our relationships from within the queer community and what are the challenges of finding and being in a solid relationship, in whatever way one defines it?

These are some of the issues we explore in this issue of Nisnis. We have raised issues that we as a community collectively need to reflect on. Those who have taken part in this issue of Nisnis have generously given their time to fuel discussions about these issues and help us navigate the landscape of queer dating and relationships.

We ask more questions than provide answers and believe these are the steppingstones to learning to reflect on ourselves, in all our complexities.

As always, thank you to everyone involved in the production of this magazine. Thank you to those who shared their stories and artwork and to all those who are reading us.





Sheltered by love

Fitsum and Leila are a couple who have been together for eight years and live together in Addis Ababa. Fitsum sat down with Nisnis to discuss her relationship journey - equally dealing with the sweet, rewarding, and challenging aspects of their relationship. Here are the excerpts of the interview which have been edited for space and clarity:



... we kept looking at each other from a distance the whole night and I finally called her and said: “I feel like kissing you”.

Fitsum

Nisnis: How did you meet?

My friends brought her to my house for a party, but we didn't really talk to each other that much. We accidentally met again a few days later at a club and that is when we exchanged numbers.

Nisnis: Did you both feel attracted to each other when you first met?

She remembers the first day we met in a negative light. She had said “I think I know you from somewhere” and I didn't respond because I did not know her. Leila was not happy since she felt I had ignored her. We then met at a club soon after and we kept looking at each other from a distance the whole night and I finally called her and said: “I feel like kissing you”. She was shocked and left without saying anything. Then she asked me for my number, and

I told her to check the number from which someone had sent her a “Happy Birthday” message. A mutual friend had used my phone to wish Leila a happy birthday as her birthday was the day before. She called me and we went from there.

Nisnis: How did it progress?

We come from very different cultural backgrounds, and we sometimes have misunderstandings. Things became difficult as we started spending time together. Her family situation did not allow her to leave the house as much as she wanted. I would go to her neighborhood to spend time with her, and her family would call her after five minutes telling her to come back to her house. She would then call me just as I got closer to my house to ask me to come back as the coast was clear and

we could hang out a bit more. I would drive back to her house even though I lived very far away from her.

There were times when she would wear a *shittie* (pajamas) to meet me. It provided the guise that she was not going very far from the neighborhood. We would then buy clothes for her to wear as we made our way to the city. The situation often tested our patience.

We slowly started to get to know each other under these circumstances. Leila was under a lot of pressure from her family and so she finally introduced me to her mother telling her “This is the person I am spending time with”. Her mother’s biggest worry was that her daughter would hang out with someone of the opposite sex so I was considered safe. My being a woman made it easier for Leila to introduce me to her mother. There were also a lot of challenges in terms of my straight friends who mostly didn’t know about my sexuality. I was worried about how to introduce her to the group, how to put her at ease and how to stop them from hitting on her. She was scared and we had yet to figure out how to negotiate these situations. To tell you the truth, it was very challenging.

Nisnis: Were there LGBTQ+ people around you when you first met?

There were none on that day. The day that she first came to my house, one of my best friends was there and he knows about me. There was another woman there who



She may worry about how to negotiate with the environment around her, but she knows exactly who she is and what she wants.

Fitsum

invited Leila to the house, but I can’t say much about her since I don’t know for sure. I convinced Leila that my friend did not know anything about me since I knew she would be scared if she thought he already knew.

She used to be very scared of going to places where other queer people gathered. My friend is very supportive, and he used to cover for me, so I initially told her he did not know anything about my sexuality. If I had told her that he knew,

she would not have felt comfortable hanging out while he was around. I told her the truth after some time and she used to tease me saying “So you lied to me?!” but she understood I was doing it for a good reason so she was able to laugh about it. The two of them have now become much closer to each other, he is even closer to her than he is to me.

Nisnis: What effect did your inability to disclose that you were dating have on your interaction with your friends?

I have a lot of friends but only two of them know about me. It is common for people to invite others to join the group. For example, I have a friend that I really love, and he was interested in Leila and felt he had a chance since they have the same religion. I am usually open and speak bluntly so it was hard for me to not be able to express myself in that situation.

Nisnis: How long did the situation remain like this and did meeting her mother make things easier?

It was like that for about four or three months. It became easier after that as we started working together. We also knew each other better by then so we would tell her parents we were busy with work or that we were traveling to the regions for work, and we would then spend the night together.

Nisnis: Were you concerned about the impact of her lack of freedom when you started thinking about your future?



Nisnis: How did you start living together?

When we were dating, I would drive her home and just when we got to her house, we would say “Let’s go out for tea and we will come back” and then we would end up spending the night at my house. To be honest our moving in together just sort of gradually happened. I don’t think it was something that we really planned; we simply could not be apart. Then her family slowly started to accept it more although she still has problems even now. For example, just two or three days ago her sister called and said, “We have found a husband for you”. It’s hard to understand what her mom is thinking, especially when her mother tells the rest of the family to leave Leila alone by saying, “No, let her be. She has a boyfriend abroad.”

I am very close with her family. They come to stay at our home with us and when I think about it, I think they already know but they have not dared to ask, and we are waiting for them to ask. Sometimes you see things that make you think that maybe they don’t know. Both of our families know each other well and our families have sort of become joined. For example, when my sister got married, her family was at the wedding.

Nisnis: How is living together?

It has its challenges but there are really nice things too. I don’t know how to put it. I’m happy although sometimes things happen when you live together. We laugh a lot at

It didn’t worry me. One, I really liked her. Leila was not the first person I dated but I was the first person she dated. There were some arranged meetings with men that her family had set up and she met one of the guys they arranged for her a couple of times but other than that I am the first person - male or female - that she has ever dated.

Nisnis: What were her thoughts in regard to continuing the relationship

given how stressful the situation was?

I think she knew about herself, and she also knew about her situation. It really did not seem consistent with anything else [that she valued]. She is usually very clear-focused in how she approaches situations. She may worry about how to negotiate with the environment around her, but she knows exactly who she is and what she wants. So, I don’t think it worried her too much.

home. The challenge, I think, is not from the things that happen between the two of us but from something that comes from outside.

For example, we have two bedrooms. When her or my family comes, we refer to the two bedrooms as hers and mine. Sometimes we lack privacy and because they don't know the situation our families just stay with us. They will move the mattress into a bedroom we are sharing saying they don't feel comfortable, and they will stay for a week or more. These are the types of challenges we deal with, but we really don't have any major issues that arise between us. We have issues like everyone else and we talk about them openly. We are just like any other Habesha couple.

Nisnis: What are some of the good things about being in a relationship?

I can only speak from my perspective. It is nice because you are certain that there is someone beside you. Not only are you not alone but there is someone who really loves you and whom you don't want to lose. When I was single, I used to be able to come and go as I pleased, and no one would bother to check on me. But there is something nice about living your life knowing there is someone who worries about you, loves you, and thinks about you. I have experienced both being single and being in a relationship. So, I enjoy questions like "Where are you?" and "Did you eat or drink?". We both do these things. I like knowing that



... there is something nice about living your life knowing there is someone who worries about you, loves you, and thinks about you.

Fitsum



I am valuable in someone's life and that I add value to someone whom I love. It is really nice.

Nisnis: What is your day-to-day life in regard to work?

I am involved in different types of work. We work together in one of those endeavors, but she handles the majority of the work. She also manages our home. She manages our work and our home really well and I don't

have much to contribute to the running of the household.

Nisnis: Are there issues that arise as a result of working together?

When you are in business and you are working with employees, you can make whatever decisions you want. But when you work with someone, you cannot make these decisions even when you know they are the right decisions. She may ask me why I treated a customer a certain way or why I interfered in a deal she was making or why I offered a certain amount. We may strongly disagree, but we don't let it interfere and we don't bring it into our personal life. This is what we have learned and what I have realized over time.

We don't bring our frustration or anger to our relationship even if we disagree about work or something else. I may need some time to cool off when I am angry and she may need the same amount of time but when we calm down, we come back to our senses, and we come back to each other.

Nisnis: In your relationship, what are some of the challenges that you face from society?

Everything. I think what helps is the fact that even if she were straight, her culture and religion would not allow her to openly express her feelings. When we are out with friends, we may sit far from each other, but we communicate with our eyes. She may sit next to me as well and it does not bother me. I

think if it was possible, we would like to be open about some things.

I would love to make it clear to everyone that she is mine and she would also want to make it clear that I am hers. In fact, we wanted this experience so much that we celebrated our third- or fourth- year anniversary in Bangkok. We requested songs announcing it was for someone that we loved, and it was obvious that we were celebrating as a couple.

Hiding our relationship is hard and it has an impact on our lives at home. When her or my family come, we are like friends and not lovers.

Nisnis: How do you deal with the pressure from society?

We have a lot of time to be free to be ourselves since we live together and since our housemate is also queer. We like being around queer people since it gives us freedom, I am not that invested in that, but she really likes it when we have queer people at the house. She wants queer people around our home, and she likes it when we have parties at the house with queer people since it allows us freedom. She loves people who are like us. When we used to go to bars that had queer people it offered us more freedom. You can express yourself freely even if you are single. It is nice to go to such places and she likes it as well. She wants to go to places that have people like us. Even when we are in spaces with people like us, we still behave in regard to how we



We like being around queer people since it gives us freedom, I am not that invested in that, but she really likes it when we have queer people at the house.

Fitsum



act. I am OK either way. I don't care who is around.

Being able to balance the two is great. If you only focus on the external, you will be hurt when that validation is not there. You need to have inner strength. I don't even worry about things like what I am wearing. I don't care about the comments I hear. I don't tone down my presentation, in fact, she sometimes worries about me.

Nisnis: How many people know that the two of you are in a relationship?

She is not out to anyone as a single person. Right now, I don't know of anyone she is out to but as a couple because of me and our friends, there are people who know. We have about 50 people in the queer community who know about us, and we do meet with them.

Nisnis: Is being in places where you are out as a couple important to you?

We enjoy going to such places. But even if they do not define us as a couple, if she is with me, I do not care. I can't do many things without her to be honest. I don't really feel comfortable going out without her or even being at home if she is not there. I need to know where she is and what she is doing, and if she is with me, I will not worry about much else.

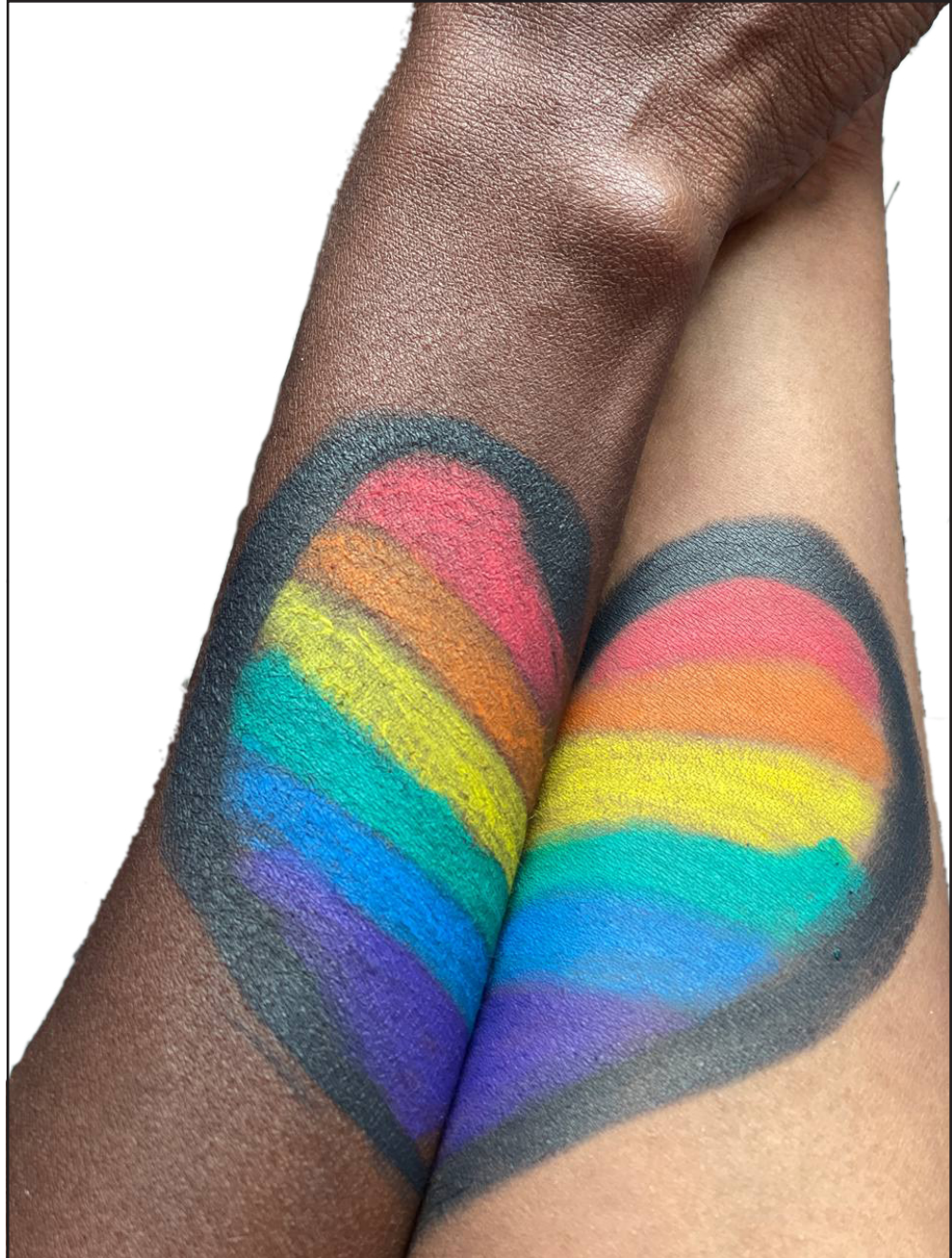
Nisnis: How would you describe what you have learned in eight years? What is the key to staying in a long relationship?

It is about finding who

you are in the relationship. It's about being yourself. Don't talk about things that are not real because since you are in a relationship the things that are not real will eventually come out so just be yourself. Whether it is a good or a bad character just be yourself and then you can work together on changing the things that are not good. I used to be a very different person. You could not get a hold of me; I took up a lot of space and I was set in my ways. I don't think these things worked in a relationship. We are both good people who should be given an equal amount of space. We can never look down on one another. In the way that this world measures people, we cannot try to make each other smaller. I deserve respect and so does she. I slowly realized that what I used to be like was not right and I started to change. She is very smart as well and knows how to handle me. I love her and I listen to her, and she listens to me. You must work on yourself if you want to be in a relationship. Other than that, I would say just be yourself.

Nisnis: How do you resolve conflicts in your relationship?

We don't allow anyone to meddle in our relationship. Disagreements arise and we may not even always resolve them. We may go our separate ways and have enough time to cool off and then we can sit down with each other to resolve them. Some of the issues just sort of remain there without being resolved and it does not always mean that it



I slowly realized that what I used to be like was not right and I started to change. ... I love her and I listen to her, and she listens to me.

Fitsum



If someone asked me what time I would come, I used to say, ‘You will see me when I come’. Now if she asks me what time I will be home, I say ‘What time should I come?’

Fitsum

must be resolved. Sometimes we would agree to let the issues go. And some issues will always be a point of contention. This is also not a problem. I don't like holding things in and she knows this so she will say "let it out of your system", I think we have been friends for a long time now and we know each other well. Our friend always gets surprised by the fact that the two of us can have an entire conversation without talking to each other and we will each make the same decision. So, sometimes we will just laugh about it and tease each other.

Relationships are beautiful for those who want to be in one and there are ways that you have to learn to be if you want to be in a relationship.

Nisnis: What were your past relationships like?

I have been in relationships before, and it was not easy. I am constantly amazed, and I often ask myself, "Am I the one who has changed over time, and should I apologize to the women I dated in the past?" I was a very difficult person. I would not listen to reason at all, and I didn't even want to be asked where I was. If someone asked me what time I would come, I used to say, "You will see me when I come". Now if she asks me what time I will be home, I say "What time should I come?"

She is my joy, and to be honest, I feel sad if she is sad. If I wake up in the morning and if she seems upset, I spend all my energy trying to cheer her up. I try to make

her laugh. I was not this kind of person. In the past, even if something was my fault and the woman, I was dating said something, I would get very upset. But now I just pay attention to her emotional state: Is she OK? I try to reflect on our interaction to check if something I said might have made her upset. I was telling her yesterday that she is my happiness. I don't want to see her sad. I will go to whatever lengths needed to make sure she is not sad. She has paid a huge price; it is not easy to do something that you know will upset your mother. She left everything for me. She did not listen to her family, and she put me first. And I don't want to see her sad, especially because of me. I just want her to be very happy. I'm serious, making her happy is my dream.

Nisnis: Do you both express this openly?

Yes, we do. Sometimes, I can be a bit abrasive. We talk and I tell her what I just told you. She may not be as open as me, but she also expresses it.

She worries if I have eaten or not; she will turn the house upside down to make sure I do, you could say she is like my mother. We have a friend who always says, "She doesn't care who is around. Her primary concerns are your well-being, whether you have eaten, and your comfort!" She doesn't care. I told you how having our families here can be stressful but if she feels like I am sad or that I want something but am unable to get it, she will disregard

everyone and everything else and make sure I am OK. Sometimes it surprises me. She is ready to take any risk and so am I. Whatever it takes, she is my biggest priority. We got to this point after experiencing and passing through so many challenges and happy times. You get to this good place after you have been through a lot together.

Our biggest challenge now is having a child. This is the challenge that we are currently discussing. How do we have a child? She wants a child and I do too, but I look at the way things are and wonder if maybe we are better off without one. Regardless of what happens, I think we will do anything to have a child. I think this will define our happiness, especially since she wants to have a baby so much. She worries that she may miss this opportunity and, although I may not share it openly with her, this makes me really sad. When I see her friends get married and have children, I say nothing to her, but I am ready to accept any ideas that she may come up with to have a child. When I see her playing with her nieces and nephews, it bothers me because it is not something that I can give her. Other than this issue, we are in a good place in our relationship. Sometimes I wonder if we should sell what we own here and leave. And then I think about how and when we will do this and wonder what we would do if it does not work out. We have thought about adopting but we both want to participate. We cannot do that in this country. These



[Our families] address us as a unit. My mom calls and she does not ask me “Do you have Shiro? Do you have Berbere?” she asks “Do you two have Shiro? Do you two have Bereber?”

Fitsum

are questions that don't seem to have answers. We have thought about everything and just cannot answer this question. What are we gonna tell our family? It is not going to work.

Her family would find it difficult if she had a child before marriage. Maybe if we do it outside Ethiopia, they will hear the news in a

way that will not hurt them. Sometimes because we know that nobody will act as a mediator if we were to fight, we are ready to reconcile. We both don't want to spend the night at home being sad and miserable and we know no one will come to help us reconcile so we find ways to make peace and live in harmony.

Honestly, our living together is not a big deal for her or my family. Her family used to wonder, and they used to ask her, but now when they ask her to come to their home and she says, I can't come because Fitsum is not home they tell her "Come when she comes back". I pick up her sisters if she is not around or she can't pick them up for some reason. When her sister comes to our home and I am not around, she gets bored. My sister is bored at our house if Leila is not around. So that's how we live. When my brother comes home, he asks Leila for what he wants, not me. Her family is the same way. They address us as a unit. My mom calls and she does not ask me "Do you have Shiro? Do you have Berbere?" she asks "Do you two have Shiro? Do you two have Bereber?" And if I tell her, "Mama, I don't know" my mother will say, "Just ask Leila". Her mom will call her and ask "Has Fitsum eaten lunch? Should I send her food?"

We honestly have no issue other than having kids if you ask me. Her sisters sometimes call and say "We have found you a husband" and we laugh at it. We are very happy.



“Things between us felt really nice. The more we got to know each other, the more it became about love, but this was initially not part of the plan.”

- Mahder

Strengthening our love

In what is perhaps an indication of the height of domesticity, when Nisnis calls to conduct an interview on Sunday afternoon with Mahder and Sara, Sara apologizes for the delay in starting the interview and by way of explanation says, “Sorry, Mahder is doing laundry”.

As a couple who have been together for the past nine months, the two have grown into a settled relationship that has involved challenges and shown them the value of working on their relationship.

While the assumption is that relationships are naturally and “theoretically” easy, they require constant communication to ensure that the values and expectations of the couple are aligned, Mahder said. The work that they do in their relationship helps them focus on what they deem important. The fact that they both want the relationship to work and actively invest their time and energy has kept them going, she said.

Sara and Mahder met online. They had both signed up on Tinder and were looking for a hookup. It was an instant match, but Mahder was not a frequent user of the app and thus did not see that she had matched with Sara. They started a conversation right after Mahder reached out, they exchanged Telegram accounts and proceeded to meet in person after two days.

Sara recalls that Mahder was initially nervous about meeting up after matching on Tinder.

“I was the one who was pushing. She was scared. I waited until she was done with work and directly went to her house,” Sara said. “I have not left since then! It was romantic. I took the pizza; she bought the wine and we continued our journey from there”.

Initially, each met the other with the understanding that this would simply be a hookup and so they were pleasantly surprised when it progressed into something more committed and exclusive. It was a gradual process that was made possible by the fact that they



I waited until she was done with work and directly went to her house. I have not left since then! It was romantic.

Sara

were meeting frequently, having discussions, and getting to know each other at a deeper level.

“I don’t know but I didn’t think we would last this long,” Mahder said. “Things between us felt really nice. The more we got to know each other, the more it became about love, but this was initially not part of the plan”.

Despite the queer community being small, the two had never crossed paths prior to meeting on Tinder. Sara is more active within the queer community and Mahder, who has had very limited interactions with the community, has since met many of Sara’s friends in the LGBTQ+ community.

Sara fondly remembers that Mahder was “sweet” and that the good conversations that they shared made her yearn for more interactions. Their connection has become

stronger as a result of a few conscious decisions that they have made early in their relationship, Sara said. They try to spend as much time together as they can, they have reserved the weekend as their couple time, they respect each other’s space and each other’s work.

“It does not feel like just nine months, our strong connection makes it feel like we have been together for nine years,” Sara said. “There are a lot of things that come as a result of love”.

Given the homophobia in Ethiopia, navigating queer relationships can be challenging. Sara and Mahder have discussed moving in together but this discussion has proved difficult given Mahder’s relationship with her mother. While Mahder and Sara spend the majority of their nights together in each other’s home, moving in together has been made harder in part by Mahder’s consideration of her mother’s reactions. Mahder comes from a close and conservative family and as such her mother is invested in Mahder meeting Ethiopian societal expectations of what a woman must do as she reaches her mid-twenties. Her mother constantly asks when she plans to get married and have kids.

“This is really the only issue we argue about. I have asked Sara to give me time so that I can slowly work on my parents to get them used to the idea of my being with Sara,” Mahder said. “I cannot tell my mother to not be an active part of my life. I need to give my mother time [to process]”.

Mahder's mother considers Sara Madher's best friend and that is the role that she plays despite wanting to be seen as her life partner.

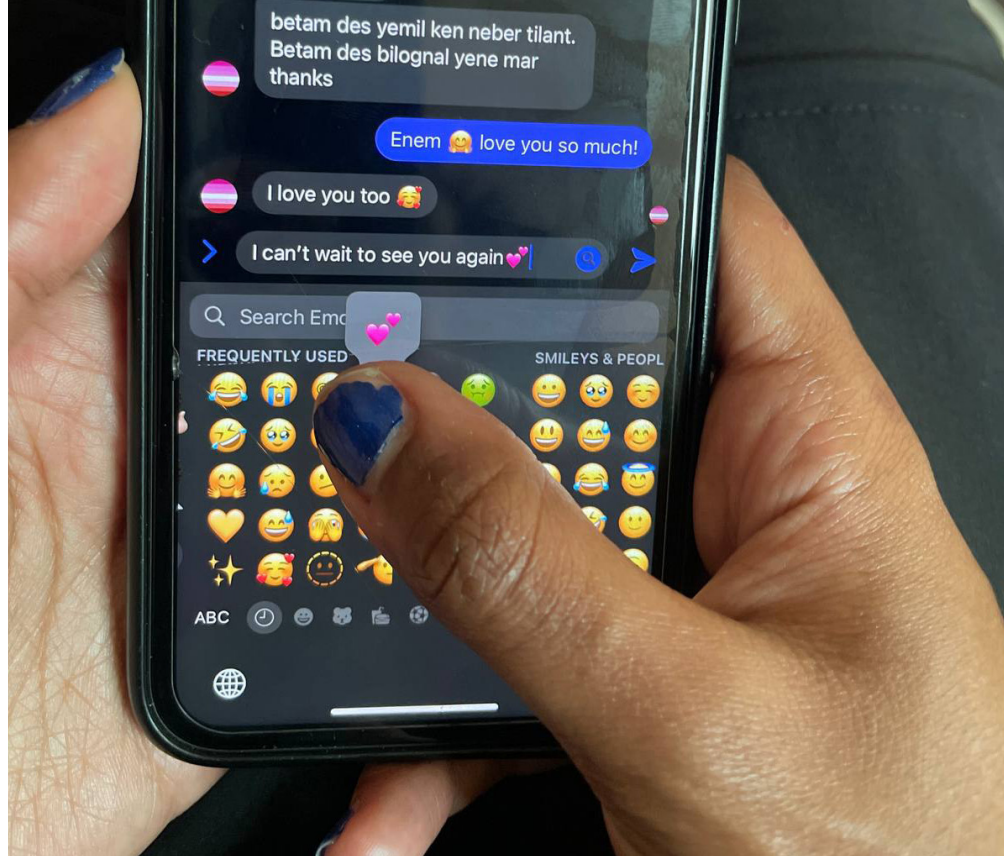
Sara's family dynamics are very different from Madher's which sometimes makes it difficult for Sara. She has lived on her own since she was young and is not very close with her family of origin. While Sara assumes that her sister might know about her lesbianism, she is not worried about her family finding out.

"[My family] would be sad if they knew about me and I wouldn't want them to be sad but other than that, I stand to lose nothing even if they were to know," Sara said. "They would actually not be a consideration or an issue in any decision that I want to make".

On the contrary, the support that they receive in the queer community and the sense of being seen as a couple, instead of best friends, is a positive that helps bring them together. Being able to say, "she is mine" and holding hands or showing affection in places that are safe such as at gatherings for LGBTQ+ people gives both of them joy and a sense of comfort, Sara said.

"I am mostly very happy," Sara said laughing. "The only time I remember being sad is when she cut her hair. I really liked her hair and she cut it because managing it became a problem for her in regards to her work".

Mahder further notes that they have avoided major relationship problems because they are able to discuss them at length. Mahder points out



that, relationships are hard to maintain within the queer community because people don't invest enough energy to communicate with each other.

Mahder has only had one serious relationship before Sara and says her unhealthy understanding of relationships and lack of support were the reason that those relationships did not work out. She credits Sara with "showing her what love is" and wishes she had the support of the larger society as it is essential to sustaining relationships. No one in her family or friends knows that she is a lesbian and that she is in a relationship with Sara which makes it very hard to find someone to talk to about her problems and challenges.

"This is one of the reasons relationships don't last," Mahder said. "There is no one to mediate between us if we are having problems and there is a lot of pressure from society. So, we need

to be strong to sustain our relationship".

Sara said she has often felt that most lesbians in the community don't respect and support each other's relationships. This lack of support contributes to those in the community not having a network of people they can rely on to sustain their romantic relationships. One of her previous relationships broke down because they were not able to articulate what each needed and because they could not talk honestly about what each needed. Another reason is also the lack of support from within the community. Heterosexual couples can rely on the traditions of mediation by "elders" to help them find their way back to the relationship and each other.

"In my experience, I have noticed that a lot of my lesbian friends have not been supportive of my relationships," Sara said. "We



You see straight people supporting each other through ‘mahbers’. We don’t do this as a community.

Sara



need to consider if this type of thinking can be challenged and changed. We have a lot that we still need to do and the fact that there are so many couples who break up in our community makes me really sad”.

There are fundamental things that can be done to ensure that relationships in the community have a better chance of lasting if that is what the couples want. Sara identifies certain elements as being critical for the longevity of relationships. One of those elements is couples remaining strong to work on their problems. The other is ensuring that they create economic stability for themselves as that will give them independence and the freedom to be able to lead their own lives without relying on anyone. Sexism also plays

a role and women must work hard to empower themselves.

At the community level, Mahder insisted that we need to find better ways of supporting each other. While people in the community raise funds to support each other, they only come together as a community for socializing. These events and gatherings are essential for creating a sense of community, but Mahder insists they should also be used to discuss various issues that are important to the LGBTQ+ community.

“There are parties. You get together to drink and to dance and then you go your separate ways,” Mahder said. “Sara took me to an event like that. There were people sitting in groups. Those who knew each other just stayed in their groups. We ate, we danced, we drank and then we said goodbye to each other. I wish there was something more to it like maybe a discussion [about something substantial to the community]”.

Sara agrees that there need to be open discussions within the community and that meaningful friendships should be built as a way of supporting those in the community.

“Discussions can really change people. It can help us to support each other. You see straight people supporting each other through “mahbers”. We don’t do this as a community because a lot of us are ‘bottle friends’,” she said. “I have been out for over 10 years, and I have seen so many friends leave this life and get married or give up hope on life. We need to change this.”



dating . as a queer person

Approaching dating as a queer person who accepted themselves in their early 20s feels complicated. Recovering from religious indoctrination and self-censorship play their role in my choice to put dating on the back burner. But, if I'm being completely honest with myself, having an anxious-avoidant attachment style coupled with the mainstream expectations of queer sex and/or dating play a bigger role.

I want loving and respectful partnerships that create space for growth both individually and as a unit. I crave that level of intimacy on a romantic plane, but I'm scared of being abandoned or hurt. And I do feel like I'm missing out. There's nothing specifically queer about this experience, except maybe the type of abandonment most Black/African queer folks may experience through their families of origin and what that does to their trust in other people.

I've read that one of the ways to work through the anxious-avoidant attachment style is to form strong relationships with those who have a secure attachment style. So to that end, I think often about venturing out into the dating world, and sometimes even manage to swipe on the



I want loving and respectful partnerships that create space for growth both individually and as a unit.

apps.

The pressures around queer dating aesthetics and what a queer sex life can look like also make me hesitant to date. I'm not sure if I'm on the asexual spectrum but sometimes I feel weird about not being able to participate in (ethical) hook-up culture.

I understand the need to speak openly about queer sex for all the reasons that history can demonstrate and I'm in full support of it. But the almost exclusive emphasis on destigmatizing/honoring

queer sex makes me feel like I won't be queer enough until I have a sexual experience with another queer person. How do I fit into a dating world that feels like it expects all queer folks, especially those of us who are masculine presenting, to have an *adequate* amount of sexual experience? The expectation to occupy these cis-het sexual roles with anyone I find attractive makes me feel anxious about going on dates. I've been on dates where I felt no attraction to people who would be seen as "attractive" in the queer aesthetic hierarchy and have felt like there was something wrong with me. Experiences like these make it difficult to fully participate in dating and building romantic/sexual relationships.

One of the reasons I'm grateful for my queerness is that it has opened my world up in a way that feels liberating. But the queer world isn't immune to the limiting labels and binaries that exist when discussing sex. I think we can have more discussions around the dating the experiences of queer people whose interest in and experience of sex does not match the mainstream depictions of dating as a queer person.



a requiem
for my
first love



First love: She was home, my true north ...



She has always served me well; even from a distance, she is a gentle presence who would tell me to fly even at the risk of breaking off my wings.

I find her in the middle of Joan Armatrading's Love and Affection. The saxophone at around the 2:50 mark reminds me of how she laughed at the fact that that was my favorite part of the song. She introduced me to Armatrading and I still cannot listen to her music without conjuring up dark winter days, her bright smile and sometimes loud laugh.

I find her in the middle of reading anything by Gloria Anzaldua, Audre Lorde, Pat Parker and so many other thinkers and writers of color. We had a routine that involved reading in bed every night and she would read aloud a sentence or a paragraph that resonated with her. I found some of these thinkers long before I met her but the reverence that she had for them meant that to this day I cannot hear their names and not think of her. She once read me an entire novel with me lying on her chest and I was captivated by her voice and her heartbeat underneath me as much as by the book itself.

I find her when I am out and about in the garden. I see her in every hibiscus and bougainvillea plant that I come across. Her eyes would brighten at the mere sight of them - purple bougainvillea being her favorite - and I took immense pleasure in discovering places that had

these plants and taking her to them. Sharing them with her multiplied my joy because her simple appreciation and excitement was something that had the capacity to light up the world.

I find her in life. She was a solid ground. Someone in whose heart I could build a home and know that the foundation would sustain me for a lifetime. When I faltered, she was there to lend a steady hand. Gently reminding me that I was strong. That I would persevere and come back stronger. When I became frustrated or angry - mostly at the injustice around me - she understood my rage as a revolutionary act.

I find her in the everyday. She was a warm blanket. Someone who kept me grounded from across the room with a simple gaze. She said so much without saying anything. A simple touch, a simple look, a simple caress would undo me. She was unassuming. Ready to give. Ready to receive. Both done with the utmost grace.

I find her in the challenges that life throws at me. She never let me off the hook. She insisted that I always be on my best behavior - considerate, honest, respectful, attentive, and kind - and she extended the same. When I failed, she did not sugarcoat her words. She was

firm. Forceful in her demand that I shape up and take full responsibility for my actions or inactions. But oddly, instead of leading to a falling apart, our arguments always led us back to each other. Stronger because we had aired our differences and engaged with them instead of letting them fester. Closer because we had both learned to argue with intention and never doubted our love or commitment to each other.

I find her in the emails that we now exchange. We have kept in touch after all these years - two kindred spirits who have learned that what they hold is bigger than just a romantic love. She is now a married woman with wonderful kids. Her kids have her heartwarming smile and - she assures me - her open and engaging personality. From all the stories I hear of her kids, her wife and her have done an incredible job of raising joyful, strong and resilient kids.

I find her in any revisiting of my past. Distance broke us up. Perhaps, if I had known what I now know - mainly how hard creating this sort of connection is - I would have held onto her tighter.

I find her in a future that I have recently started to envision for myself. She was home, my true north even when I was not able to ascertain the trajectory of my life. And thus, she has been the yardstick by which I measure potential lovers and relationships. It was never a conscious decision. I just could not help wanting - as a basic requirement - what I had with her: A sense of being heard,



**She was
a warm
blanket.
Someone
who kept me
grounded
from across
the room
with a simple
gaze.**

seen, and understood.

As I stand at the precipice of another new beginning, one that simultaneously feels very similar and yet very different from what I had with her, I find myself yet again feeling closer to her. She has always served me well; even from a distance, she is a gentle presence who would tell me to fly even at the risk of breaking off my wings. So, I am choosing to fly into this new thing. To borrow the words of Armatrading, this time as the first time, I am choosing to do it with dedication, with affection and once more with a feeling.

She was my first love. And the love that convinced me to always refuse to settle for anything less than home.



Uphill battle

Navigating attractions

**I am not out
and it is hard
to live in two
worlds. I tried
dating online
but I just
couldn't do it.
I make
excuses and
distance
myself.**

My first relationship with a man was when I was in the seventh grade. It was after that puppy love ended and I started ninth grade, that I first experienced what I think was my first love. We liked each other intensely; this was the relationship where I truly listened to my feelings and to which I dedicated all my time. Many of my friends at school had sexual relationships with their partners but I was strongly against it. At that time, I was not religious, and I'm not sure why but I did not want to have sex. We were emotionally compatible, and we loved each other. Surafel and I stayed together from ninth grade until the first year of college. When I joined college, I became very religious. I was not raised in a religious household, but I became extremely religious. I began wearing hijab all the time; I did not shake hands with men. Surafel and I broke up for this reason.

After breaking up with Surafel, I met my husband near the end of my first year. Semir is a follower of the Islam faith; he is educated and a hard worker. I was 18 or 19 years old at that time. Sometimes, when dating within the Muslim faith, you can't do anything - no sex, nothing. At that age it was easy, and I think I had a Nikha ceremony mainly because I wanted to sleep with Semir. After two years, I had a Nikha ceremony. We had sex for the first time, and I did not like it at all. I liked kissing but I never wanted to have sex again. I did not know why but I was very unhappy. I made



After two years, I had a Nikha ceremony. We had sex for the first time and I did not like it at all. I liked kissing but I never wanted to have sex again.

up excuses to avoid seeing him. When I finished college, what was expected was that we would move in together, but I did not have any plans to do that.

One time, when I was a second-year student, I saw a girl on campus. I had never seen a more beautiful woman in my life... I felt like I was struck by lightning. I remember that I ran back to my dorm and told my friends. They all laughed at me. I saw her again two or three months later, but it was from a distance. I was excited and I told my friends, and we all did not understand why I could not introduce myself to her.

After a while, we met on a staircase - I was shocked.

I said, "Hi." She smiled back and said, "Hi." I think she saw how shocked I was. Anyway, I ran past her - It was the most profound reaction. I didn't know what to do, so I avoided her. It was a new emotion. There was no way I would relate it to my sexuality. I didn't have the resources to call the situation an attraction.

The next one is the relationship I had with Ferid, another beautiful woman I met on campus. She was friends with some of my friends and we slowly got to know each other. We got closer when we both got selected to travel to another region for training. A lot of men wanted her, and I was very protective. She was not interested in any of them, and I would interfere when they tried to talk to her. I would say, "She is not interested." We got very close at the training session. We started spending a lot of time together. Whenever men tried hitting on her, she would say that I'm her boyfriend, but I did not realize what any of it meant. I remember Semir was not happy about our relationship. Ferid and I were together on campus from Monday to Friday and we also spent the weekend together.

Even after we graduated, Ferid's and my offices were close to each other so we would hang out after work until the evening. Me and Semir stayed together for six years. Then I got the chance to go to the US, and to be honest, I was very happy about separating from him. We tried to continue the relationship long-distance. He would call all the time, and I

was very stressed about the situation. At that time, I did not know why but I wanted to break up with him. And after a year of living in the US and trying to make it work long-distance, I don't remember what happened but I finally told him that I wanted to break up.

Since the day I arrived in the US, Ferid and I would speak every day. Three years later, Ferid also came to America with her family. Even though we were in different cities, we maintained our friendship in the same way.

To this day, I don't know what our relationship means but it is a special relationship. I was so happy when she came to the US. I did not have any knowledge about sexuality. I had no clue that there were many different sexualities. My high school sweetheart came to the US at some point and the plan was to have sex with him. But when we met up, I did not want to sleep with him. He was incredulous. I still don't know how he thought of it - maybe it's the male ego yelling "How does she not want me?!" - but he asked me "Are you into girls?" I was shocked and I asked him, "Why would you say that to me?" He didn't know where to take the conversation so he said, "No, I was just asking". I don't know what he was thinking when he asked me that question. We actually have a good friendship now, and I must ask him. After that day, I began thinking a lot about what he said. I kept asking myself, "What is this?" I think I wanted to date and sleep with

men because I did not want to listen to what I felt.

I began wondering why I would get emotionally involved with a man but I would not have any sexual desire for him. There was another similar situation. I met another man and I of course did not want to have sex with him. He was confused and asked, "Do you like women?" I could not believe it. I was shocked. I denied it and got through the moment. I tried very hard to deny my identity. It took me years to think about my identity again. I began thinking that maybe I am attracted to women or maybe I just don't like sex. At that time, Ferid and I were going to be in the same city for a wedding. The city had a big queer population and I was scared that people would know about me. Still, I didn't know anything about why I wanted to hide. After that, I began being protective of Ferid; I started feeling guilty whenever I thought of her. I did not want to lose our friendship.

I only accepted myself after all those obstacles passed. It has been about 10 years since I realized and accepted myself for who I am. But I still have not had a romantic relationship or sex with a woman due to the respect I have for societal norms and my religion. Even if I have accepted myself, my religion has not given me the space to be myself. I've distanced myself from religious spaces, but I still find it difficult to form relationships with women. I am not out and it is hard to live in two worlds. I

tried dating online but I just couldn't do it. I make excuses and distance myself. During all these years, I did not have sex let alone romantic relationships because I fear that I don't know what I'm doing and that I am not enough. I think about my family and community and get worried. I make my own money and live alone but the closeness I have with my family is keeping me away from pushing myself to understand my identity.



It has been about 10 years since I realized and accepted myself for who I am. But I still have not had a romantic relationship or sex with a woman due to society and religion.



Negn

We rarely get to tell our own stories; and those few times that we do, it often comes from a place of trauma, pain, and anguish. Navigating life as queer bodies in a hostile environment is not easy, but our pain is not the only thing that defines us. Every day we challenge and shift our worlds just by being ourselves because being queer is not just an identity, but a daily act of rebellion. There are moments of joy that we hold on to, moments that are intimate and our own, unadulterated, and pure. Negn is born out of the need to tell those stories.

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Lesbian breakup 101:

learning to be friends





I identify as a lesbian. As someone who lives in a homophobic country, I've attempted to "heal" myself by dating different men. Even though I realized I was dating men because of societal pressure in my adulthood, I couldn't reconcile the thought of loving and living with a woman with my culture and faith.

My mid-twenties were a period in my life when I was close to the church and tried to hide my attraction to women. I intended to marry the man I was dating at the time. I made every effort to avoid thinking about women or asking myself any questions about it. When you're living a lie, life will put you to the test!

Hermela and I met at work. We hit it off right away and spent time together on the first day. We've been texting each other every day since then. We always had so much to talk about because we had similar thoughts and opinions on a wide range of topics.

When I began wanting to spend more time with Hermela than with Biruk, when I wanted to talk to Hermela for extended periods of time rather than receive Biruk's call, and when I began canceling my plans with Biruk to meet Hermela, I realized the feelings and attractions I had buried had begun to surface.

My strong desire to see

her began to frighten me, but I couldn't resist. It took some time to figure out what was going on in her head. I kissed her while we were talking at her place months after we met, and she didn't respond. I couldn't say anything since I was shocked. We didn't discuss it, and I left to return home.

After that day, we gradually gained courage. I began texting her, telling her how much I missed her and how much I was thinking about her. Surprisingly, she would send similar texts. We affirmed our love over chat, even though we couldn't talk about it in person. I had a guilty feeling in the back of my mind, but I couldn't stop. I didn't have the self-acceptance I needed to stop dating Biruk, and because of the love I felt for Hermela, I couldn't stop seeing her.

Even though I knew what I had with Biruk was not true, I insisted on fulfilling the standards for our tradition. I can't believe I stuck it out for three years in that relationship. My second year with Biruk was when I met Hermela. Our love got deeper and deeper as time passed. Every day, we'd call and meet up, and we'd sleep together. I'm not sure how I made it through with this double life.

Even though I was madly in love with Hermela, I couldn't imagine living with her or establishing a future with her, and one of the main reasons was a lack of self-acceptance. The double life I was living made me anxious whenever the topic of marriage came up with

Biruk instead of excitement.

Hermela understood that Biruk was my boyfriend and made a lot of effort to understand me. But Biruk had no idea about my life and keeping my status a secret wasn't easy.

And although I believe in being truthful, how can I tell the truth here? Being with Hermela brought me so much joy, but it also brought me a lot of anxiety. Not just for me, but also for her.

Hermela and I dated for two years. Our relationship couldn't change or progress throughout those two years since we couldn't make any concrete decisions. In the meantime, Biruk and I had broken up. Surprisingly, my anxiousness was exacerbated by the fact that my relationship with Hermela was not based on self-acceptance. With the "independence" we finally had, I became more anxious than while Biruk was still there. The battle with myself was fierce. During this time, I told her that we should call it quits on our relationship. For both of us, it wasn't easy. Above all, I wished to be one of her close friends. I love Hermela because of who she is as a person, how well we get along, and how much we care for each other.

It took some time. Being friends with someone you've dated takes time. It wasn't simple to control our feelings, sexual desire and establish an understanding. Hermela and I have become close friends over the course of four years.

We talk openly and



Even though I was madly in love with Hermela, I couldn't imagine living with her or establishing a future with her, and one of the main reasons was a lack of self-acceptance.

easily about our dating lives. We giggle about our youth as we reminisce about our time together. Hermela is now one of the few people in my life who I don't want to lose.

“I get to be in a relationship with myself and we have a lot to explore”.

I decided to stop dating over the summer of 2019. The idea originally started as a break from intimate relationships after a summer fling ended, I wanted to take some time to myself. So I did and I redirected my time into my friendships, my job, my health and I thought I was doing everything I needed to. Then the pandemic hit and all those ways I thought I was coping fell apart. I was left at home with only myself to answer to. I struggled with all the parts of myself I had never taken the time to get to know. So I started asking the hard questions and learned who I was in my queerness with no one watching. I let go of all the ways I showed up for others before myself in relationships. I stopped performing for others. I learned (am learning) how to show up for myself first.

I started with my gender, I stopped feminizing myself and accepted my fluidity instead. I cut my hair and focused on what made me feel comfortable. Lots more questions popped up then about how I wanted to show up as this self. I reevaluated how my communities influenced how I saw and felt love. I mourned the ways I made myself small to fit into their narrow ideas of my otherness. I let their edges of who I thought I was fall away.

Now, I have the vastness of my queerness left. I get to be in a relationship with myself and we have a lot to explore.

“When I kissed my girlfriend, I suddenly felt excitement and pleasure that I didn’t experience before”.

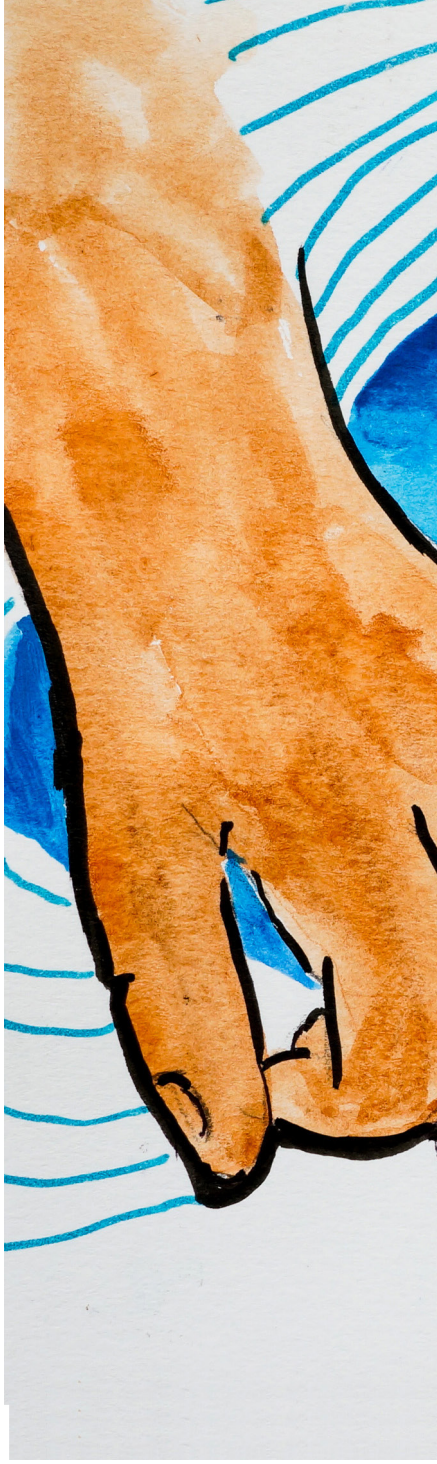
There were many things wrong with my first relationship. My girlfriend and I were both in the closet and hid our relationship from our parents.

The relationship also had toxic traits and our communication was very bad. We were both 19 when we met and dated for around a year with a few months of on-off dating in between.

But this relationship reassured me as a lesbian. I already knew before that I was into women because I had been in love with and mostly felt attracted to women before. But by being with a woman for the first time, I felt validated in my queerness. I had kissed boys before, but never really enjoyed that.

When I kissed my girlfriend, I suddenly felt excitement and pleasure that I didn’t experience before. It showed me that the feelings I had were valid and that I was able to feel love and joy in a relationship.

Or non-monogamy





... and exploring bisexuality while married to a cisman

I am a bisexual woman who is currently married to a man. We were not ready to get married at the time but there was a lot of pressure from both our families. The primary reason we got married was because of our child, as each of our families felt it was smarter to get married as it offered us the protection that only a legal marriage certificate can. It was more a safety measure for our child rather than what we felt the relationship needed.

From an emotional perspective, we see each other as being a couple and not necessarily married with all that that word implies in the traditional sense.

At the beginning of our relationship, my bisexuality was a focus, and we had several lengthy conversations with my now husband. I needed him to know and be OK with the fact that I just couldn't get everything that I needed from him. It's interesting because there's a part of me that I can sort of explore, experiment, and play with - for lack of better words - but I am also in a relationship and so I want and need to honor that. My curiosity has increased as I have become older, my bi identity has solidified, and I have a stronger need and desire to experience and experiment. Doing this while in a relationship with a man can be challenging and it's hard.

The fact that I can openly talk to him about my thoughts and that that's something that he already knows about me makes it easier. I am grateful that he gives me space to explore because he's aware that there is a side of me that I can't just turn off. But even this openness from his side is at times problematic because as a cis male, a part of it is just the intrigue of two women together. For example, if I'm interested in being with a more femme woman, he would push to be included in the conversation and would insist that all three of us discuss together. Whereas if



I am at a point where I want to explore my sexuality and different ways of being and doing relationships.

i am interested in more of a stud/butch woman, he would either keep his distance or ask if this is really what I want to do. I think he takes it as sort of a threat to his manhood if I were to sleep with another man or with a more masculine presenting woman.

And the fact that we have not actually had an explicit discussion about our relationship status when it comes to non-monogamy presents challenges. Although we have never explicitly agreed to be in a non-monogamous relationship, in practice we have entertained and continue to entertain other people while we are still in a relationship with each other. Let's just say that currently our non-monogamy is just more situational and more on a case-by-case basis.

Gender plays a major role in the way that we are currently relating to each other and in his comfort level with my bisexuality and other

potential partners. The more femme the woman is, the more open he is to my taking it further. He has always dated cis heterosexual women. And I am at a point where I want to explore my sexuality and different ways of being and doing relationships. He has tried to be understanding and to give me the space that I need to explore but it's a major challenge. It's a challenge for him and it's a challenge for me. We need to set better boundaries. I think it'd be easier if we were saying, "Okay, we're not monogamous and you can go do your thing and I can do my thing" but this is not how we have it set-up.

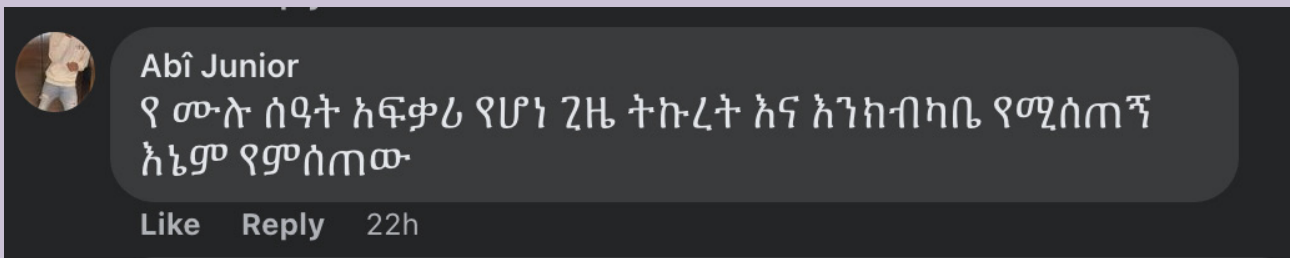
I really respect his level of openness and willingness to not take anything away from us as partners and his efforts to build on what we have. That's something that I really love and respect about the relationship that I have created.

But how to explore bisexuality while being married to someone of the "opposite" sex, how to be in a non-monogamous relationship, how to negotiate gender and gender expressions in a way that he feels safe and in a way that does not feel limiting to me has been challenging. It gets tough when emotions get involved and sometimes emotions arise for various reasons.

Working through relationships like this is something that obviously none of us have a manual or written book for but I am committed to exploring!

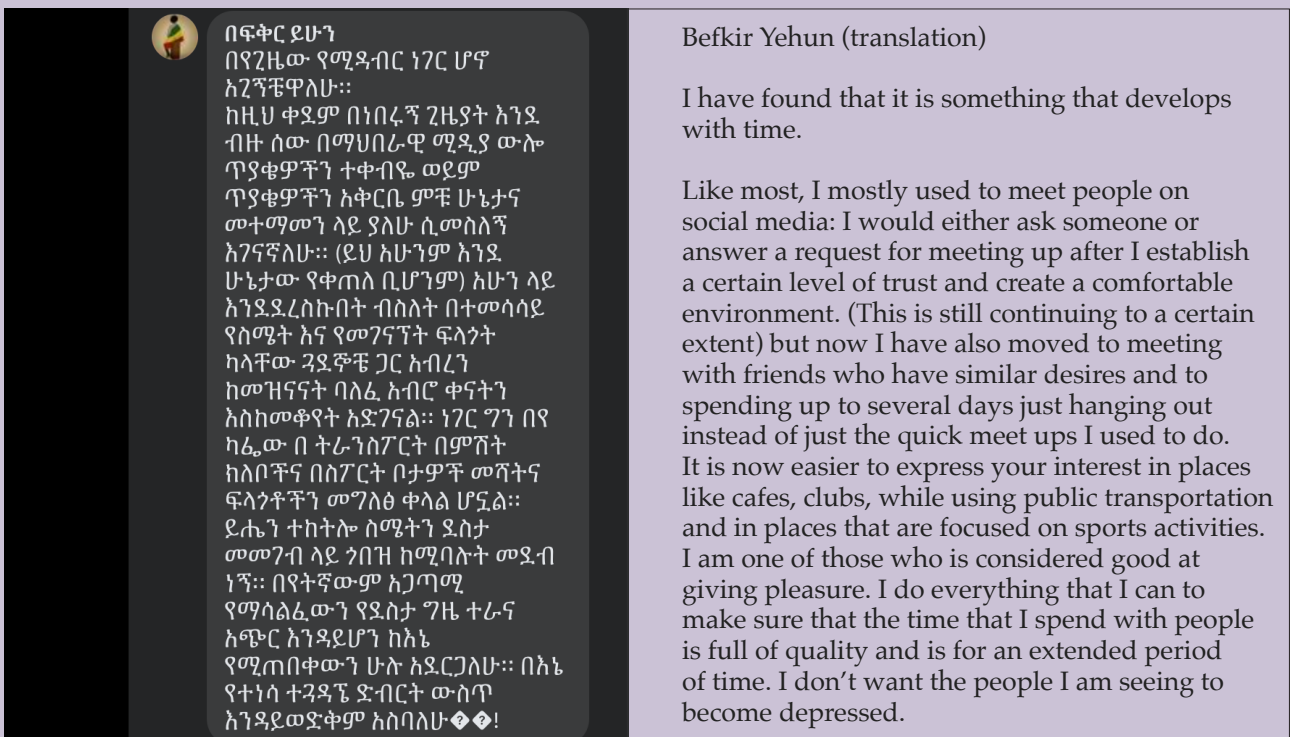
Where do you meet potential dates and what kind of relationships do you want?

These are samples of responses from a questionnaire that was posted on a Facebook page ...



Abi Junior (translation)

I want someone who is a “full time” lover and is able to give me time, their full attention and care and to whom I can give the same



Befkir Yehun (translation)

I have found that it is something that develops with time.

Like most, I mostly used to meet people on social media: I would either ask someone or answer a request for meeting up after I establish a certain level of trust and create a comfortable environment. (This is still continuing to a certain extent) but now I have also moved to meeting with friends who have similar desires and to spending up to several days just hanging out instead of just the quick meet ups I used to do. It is now easier to express your interest in places like cafes, clubs, while using public transportation and in places that are focused on sports activities. I am one of those who is considered good at giving pleasure. I do everything that I can to make sure that the time that I spend with people is full of quality and is for an extended period of time. I don't want the people I am seeing to become depressed.

ለምን እንደዚህ ዓይነት ሰዎች (ኢትዮጵያውያን) ማግኘት እንዳልቻልኩ በእርግጠኝነት ምክንያቱን ባላውቅም ስገምት ግን ተስፋ ከመቁረጥና ሀገሪቷ ላይ በሕግም የተከለከለ ስለሆነና ሁሉም ነገር በድብቅ ስለሚሆን ምንም ባደርግ ብዙዎች ከአንዷ ጋር ስላለኝ ግንኙነት ስለማያውቅ ችግር የለውም ብለው ከማሰብ ይመስለኛል... "ሰው ምን ይለኛል" የሚል ጥያቄ ውስጣቸው አይፈጠርም ይህ ደግሞ የሚሆነው ለራስ/ለሕሊና ካለመገዛት/ ክብር ከማጣት የተነሳ ነው:: የምፈልገው ከምንም በላይ ለራሷ ክብር ያላትና በራሷ የምትተማመን ብትሆን..... 🙌

Name withheld upon request (translation)

Although I am not sure about the reason I have not yet met Ethiopians who are not in relationships, I guess it is because they have given up hope, because it is illegal in the country and because everything is done in hiding. So they think they can do anything because no one will know about the relationship they have and so it is not a problem. In a sense, they will not think "What would people say?" and this is because they are not guided by their conscience and they don't have respect for themselves. What I want is someone who has self respect and self confidence.

NaNi FikR ታማኝ አፍቃሪ ግልፅ የሰራ ሰው የፀዳ ፈታ ያለ...በዛ እንዴ 🙌

NaNi FikR (translation)

Trustworthy, capable of loving, hardworking, easygoing ... is this too much[?]



Mes Robel
እስከአሁን ከሰማሁትና እኔም በዋናነት ከfb ጋር ግንኙነት ይጀምርና በውስጥ መስመር ማውራት ይጀምራል "መተማመን" ደረጃ ሲደረስ ስልክ መለዋወጥ ከዚያም በአካል ተገናኝቶ.....የሚሆን አይነት ካልሆነና ካልቀጠለ መጀመሪያ ከተዋወቅኩት ዙሪያ ካሉ ሌሎች ጋር የመተዋወቅ ዕድሉ ስለሚኖር 😊 (እንዴት፣የት እና በምን መንገድ፣ ለሚለው በአጭሩ በFb፣Fbላይ እና በሜሴንጃር 😊)

Mes Robel (translation)

From what I have heard and what I have also done ... you start by being friends on fb [Facebook] and it then moves to dm and then when you establish a certain trust level, you exchange numbers and meet in person ... and if it is not something that can continue, there is still the possibility that you might meet the rest of the people in that circle ... (for the how, where and in what way, in short it happens through Facebook and Facebook Messenger)

እኔ በበኩሌ እንዲኖረኝ ምፈልገው relationship...

- ዘላቂ የሆነ አንዲሆን አፈጋገላሁ
- በመነጋገር የምታምን አንዲሁም ፍፁም ፍቅር ያላት
- በሌሎች ተፅዕኖ የማትወድቅ (በቤተሰብ፣በግዴታ ሌላም)
- ፍፁም እንዳልሆንን የምትረዳ አንዲሁም ባለን ነገር የምትረከ
- የውስጤን የምትረዳልኝ ጥሩ የህይወት አላማ ያላት
- ነገሮቻን በብዙ አቅጣጫ የምትመለከት እና እና የቃላት ብቻ ሳይሆን የተግባር ሰው ብትሆን እና ፍፁም መተሳሰብ ያለበት በፍቅር የተሞላ ንፁህ የሆነ relationship እንዲኖረኝ ነው ::

Name withheld upon request (translation)

The relationship that I want to have is ...

- I want it to be long lasting
- She has to believe in communicating and has a lot of love
- Who would not be influenced by others (family, friends and others)
- Who understands we are not perfect and is satisfied with what we have
- Who really understands me and has a purpose in life
- Who can see things from multiple directions and is a doer and not just a talker. I want a relationship that is pure, considerate and is filled with love.



Boney Ye Kele

በፍቅር ግንኙነት ውስጥ ወደ ህይወቴ ልጋብዘው የምቸለው ሰው፡-
 ::ለህይወት ያለው አመለካከት ጤናማ እና ያልደበዘዘ በነገር ሁሉ አመሰግኛ
 እና ከሌሎች ጋር የታረቀ የጋራ ደስታን ለመፍጠር የማይከብደው ::
 :: ሃይማኖት፣ ባህል እና ቤተሰብ ከሚያመጣበት ግጭት አራትን ሙሉ በሙሉ
 ነፃ ያወጣ እና ኩዋር በመሆኑ በአካምሮው እና በልቡ የማይወቀስ እና ከሌሎች
 ጋር በዚህ ጉዳይ ፍፁም ስላም የሆነ፡-
 :: ከኔ gender identity ጋር(i am non binary crossdresser) የፍቅር እና
 የወሲብ ተማርኮ ያለው እና የጀንደር ኢፎዎቶን በአግባቡ የሚረዳ፡-
 :: ለኔ ባለው ስሜት እና ቦታ ፍፁም ኦርገንደር መሆን የሚችል ቸኩሎ
 የማያስቸኩል በጣም ደግሞ ዘግቶ የፍቅርን አሳት የማያዳፍን፡-
 :: በደልን በይቅርታ ለመሻር የማያመነታ እና ሰዎች ስለ ስለሰው ከሚያወራት
 ይልቅ ገለልተኛ ሆኖ በሌሎች ሰውን የማወቅ እና የመረዳት ዝንባሌ ያለው፡-
 :: ፍፁም መጽበስበስ በሌለው ሁኔታ ስለ አርሱ ማወቅ የፈለኩትን ነገር
 በግልፅነት የሚያሳውቅ፡- አርሱም ማወቅ የፈለገውን የሚጠይቅ፡-
 :: በህይወት ላይ በሚያጋጥሙት ፈተናዎቻቸው ውስጥ የኔ ከጎኑ መሆን ዋጋ
 አንዳለው የሚያምን፡-

Boney Ye Kele (translation)

A person that I can let into my love life:

It has to be a person whose view of life is healthy and who is clear-headed, grateful and who has made peace with themselves and is able to work towards mutual happiness.

[They] have fully freed themselves from religious, cultural and familial pressure and who have completely accepted themselves and are at peace with their sexuality.

Someone who understands gender issues well and is romantically and sexually attracted to me and has no issues with my gender identity (I am a non-binary cross dresser).

Someone who is sure of their feelings for me and my value in their life, someone who is not hurried and who will not hurry me but will also not take so much time as to put out the fire.

Someone who will not hesitate to forgive and who will take the time to listen and to understand people and situations instead of arriving at a conclusion based on what others say.

Someone who is able to give clear answers about themselves when I ask instead of trying to be elusive. And someone who is able to directly ask what they want to know about me.

Someone, when met with difficult situations in life, believes that my being with them is of value.



Deve Love

በዋናነት፡-መተማመንና መከባበር ወሳኝ ነው

Deve Love (translation)

The main thing is trust and respect

በዚህ ሕይወት ውስጥ ያሉ
 ያወቅኋቸው በጣት የሚቆጠሩ
 ኢትዮጵያዊያን ቢሆኑም እኔ
 እንደምፈልገው/እንደምመኘው/
 ዓይነት relationship ውስጥ ያሉም
 የሚፈልገው ለሌሎች ምሳሌ
 የሚሆኑ ዓይነት ሰዎች አይደሉም
 ለማለት እደፍራለሁ፡-
 ማንነታቸውን የተቀበሉና
 ለራሳቸው ክብር ያላቸው ሰዎችን
 እስካልተዋወኩኝ ድረስ ምንም
 አይነት ሌሌሽንሺኝ ከማንም ጋር
 አልፈልገም

Name withheld upon request (translation)

While I can count the number of Ethiopians I know who are in this life (LGBTQ+), I can say they are not in the type of relationship or their view of relationships are not like those that I want (or wish) to have or ones that can be held as an example for others. I do not want a relationship with anyone until I meet someone who has accepted themselves and have respect for who they are.

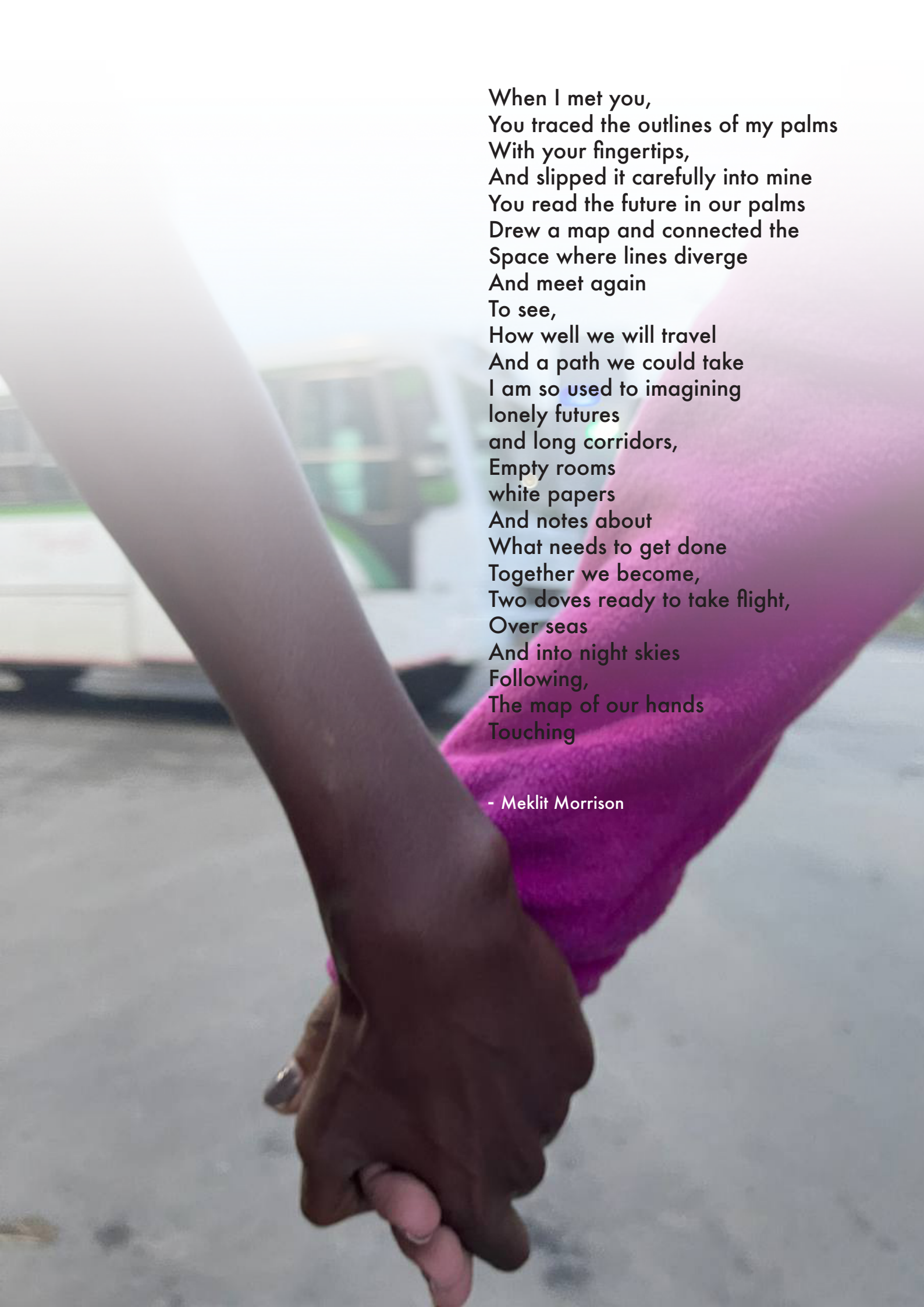


በተሰፋ ፍቅር ያሸንፋል

በዚህ ህይወት ስንኖር በተቻለ አቅም ውስጣችን አሳምነን ነው አንዳንድ
 ሰዎች ሳይቀበሉት ይህን ህይወት ግን ግንኙነት ያደርጋሉ በዚህ መሃል
 ሁለቱም ተጋጁ ይሆናሉ ስለዚህ አንድ አስተሳሰብ በቅጽሚያ ሁሉም
 የሚፈልገውን ከመማሰብ በፊት አራትን መቀበል ውስጡን ማዳመጥ
 አለበት ባይ ነኝ ያኔ ሁሉም ነገር መልካም ይሆናል አራትን ሳይቀበሉ ግን
 ሌላውን አቀበለው ብሎ ግንኙነት መጀመር ከሌላ አልፎ የሰውን ስሜትም
 ገደል መከተት ነው እና ልናስብበት ይገባል፡-

Be'tesfa fekir yashenefal (translation)

To a certain extent, we have to convince ourselves [being an LGBTQ+] is OK when we live this life. Sometimes people form a relationship or connection with someone when they have not yet accepted themselves and this makes both people suffer. So, I think, people should start by accepting themselves and listening to themselves before they start relationships. This will make everything easier and better. But starting a relationship thinking that you will accept someone else before you have even accepted yourself is a recipe for hurting yourself and others so we must really think about this.



When I met you,
You traced the outlines of my palms
With your fingertips,
And slipped it carefully into mine
You read the future in our palms
Drew a map and connected the
Space where lines diverge
And meet again
To see,
How well we will travel
And a path we could take
I am so used to imagining
lonely futures
and long corridors,
Empty rooms
white papers
And notes about
What needs to get done
Together we become,
Two doves ready to take flight,
Over seas
And into night skies
Following,
The map of our hands
Touching

- Meclit Morrison