

DEAR LOVER

by Rebian Sharon Atieno

Dear Lover

I have stayed before

I have been here all this while

We have been held with these vows

Dear Lover

It has been one I Do to another I Don't

For now it is just don'ts and more don'ts

Dear Lover

I have agreed to things before

I have nodded and believed in things before

I said Yes

I said I do before, I agreed before

I said I do before but not anymore

I remember saying Yes

I said Yes but not to these

I didn't say Yes to this madness

Not to this service of punches for breakfast

Slaps for lunch and kicks for dinner

I don't remember agreeing to insults as a way of communication,

Signing my death certificate in the place of our marriage certificate

And when I vowed "till death do us part",

I didn't mean you tear me apart

My "I will do anything for you" wasn't about being dragged in the mud

Being thrown around the house

I have tried but I'm sick from the migraines you cause every time my head is hit on the wall

I am sick from the blows you give me

I am suffocating under this broken jaws

I am sick, so sick, very sick and tired of the red eyes I have from the tears I cry every night after beatings, crying after this sham of marriage

I don't want to wake up with a black eye then wear sunglasses even on rainy days just to cover my dying eyes in the face of your inhumanity

I don't want to apply layers of make up to conceal these bruises

This foundation of lies to hide me from the shame of my washed up dignity

Eye shadow and mascara after mascara to keep the pain in

I don't want to keep a smile face for friends and family just to show everything is okay when I know it's only a matter of days before they are invited to my wake

I don't want to keep walking deeper into this death trap

I don't want to keep lying to myself that you will change
That if I become better you will too
I don't want to keep praying to God to change you from an abuser to a loving husband
I am so tired, everything hurts
And now I am full of regrets for ever believing the sweet nothings that you said to me
For the promises that you swore your life on
I have been saying I don't for sometime now
I have been slowly disagreeing
Slowly taking this marriage apart
Getting my voice out of these pieces you call vows
I hope I am not too late.

Rebian Sharon Atieno is a spoken word artist, an actress and activist based in Nairobi, Kenya. Rebian uses her artistry to advocate for social justice, defending human rights and amplifying women's struggles in the society. She has performed spoken word poetry on various stages including the Usawa Festival, the SWAN Festival, and the Mashujaa Festival. Currently, she is working on a personal project highlighting the effects of marginalisation of youths in Kenya. In this poem, a woman is talking to the lover, explaining all the things she has done to make the marriage work but his toxicity is too much. She is taking her life back by standing her ground - she is not to be silent about the violence.