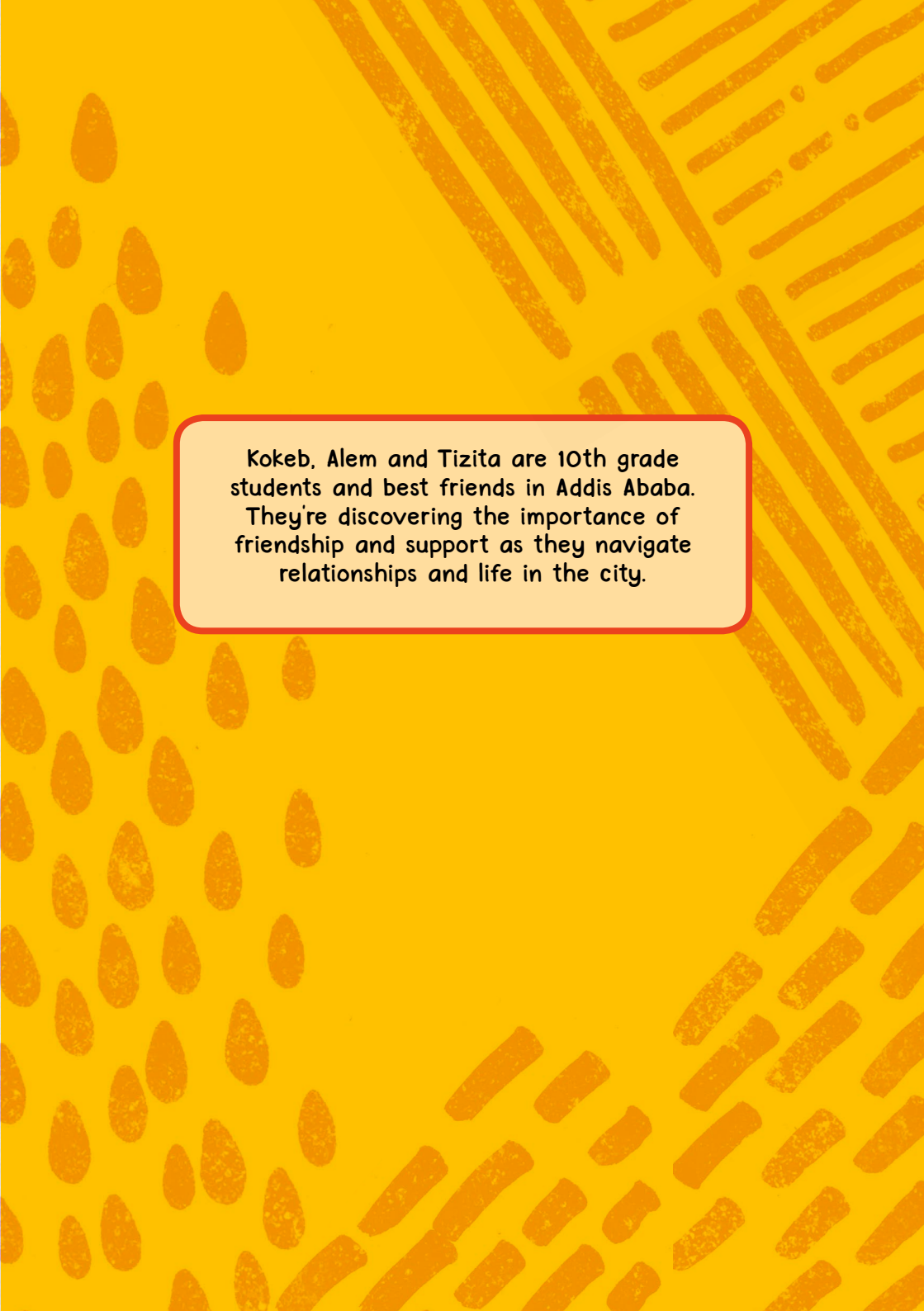


KOKED'S STORY





Kokeb, Alem and Tizita are 10th grade students and best friends in Addis Ababa. They're discovering the importance of friendship and support as they navigate relationships and life in the city.

MEET THE CHARACTERS

I'm Kokeb. I live with my single mom and two younger siblings in Addis. My mom sells corn and other snacks on the street, sometimes I help her out of school hours. Sometimes, I take care of my younger siblings too. My boyfriend Zelalem works across the street from school.





I'm Alem. I live with my parents and three older siblings. I have many house chores, but I love to hang out with my friends outside of the house. I'm a bit outspoken, but the teachers love me really!

When I grow up, I want to become an engineer. The city is growing so quickly! I want to help build it.

I'm Tizita. I live with my parents and 6 year old brother. My father works as a cross-country truck driver, so he is not often at home. It's usually just me and my mom. I help her with chores, and when she needs help at her vegetable stall.

I'm quiet, I guess. I do not have many friends but I try to be good and kind. My teachers admire my commitment to education. I've never dated or had sex with anyone before. I'm not sure if I'm ready to start dating. I don't want it to conflict with my studies.



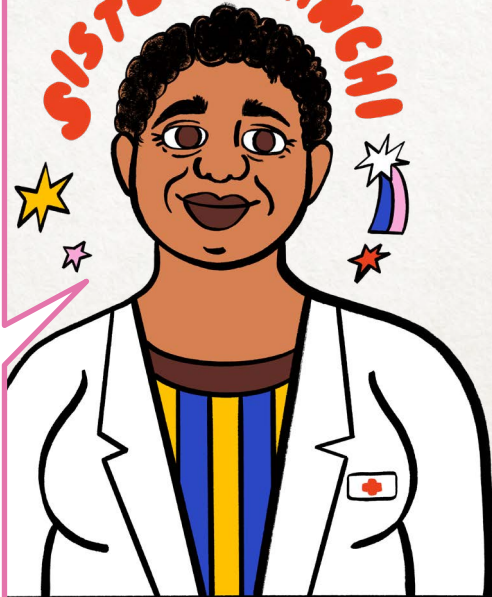
ZELALEM



I'm Zelalem. I'm 21 and work in a small mobile shop. I went to school till high-school, then vocational school. I don't need to go to university, I want to hustle and make money. I'm street smart.

I'm Sister Bianchi and I'm a nurse who has worked as a health-care worker for over 30 years. I love my colleagues (and I think they like me too). I think it is important to be warm and welcoming to patients visiting the health center. I mostly work with teenagers who face unplanned pregnancy and other sexual and reproductive health challenges (SRH). I understand their problems, and I want to ensure they know their SRH rights and can make informed decisions on their reproductive health and choices.

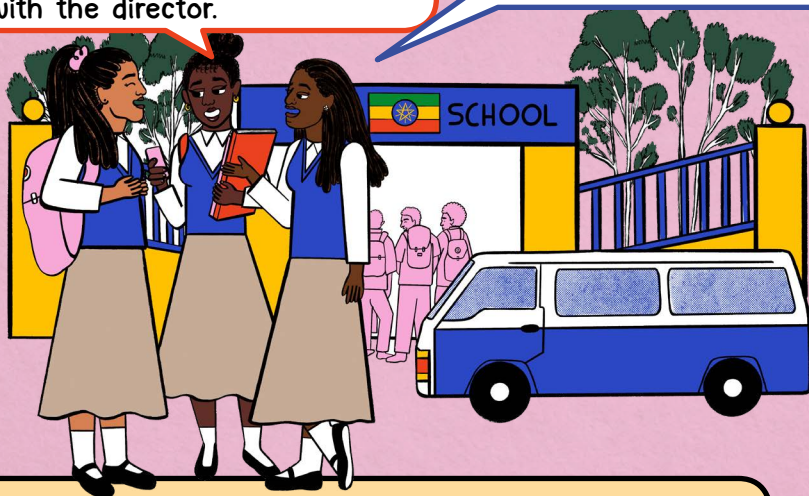
SISTER BIANCHI



KOKEB IS GOING TO BE FAMOUS!

KOKEB: So I proposed this idea for Teacher Teferra to start a new program for mini media. He seemed excited about it. He's going to discuss it with the director.

TIZITA: That's awesome! I'm so happy for you... you're so dedicated to this thing.



KOKEB: I hope it will work out! Imagine! I can interview our economics teacher... you love her so much, right? Wouldn't you want to know more about her?

TIZITA: Oh my God! I want to know everything about her. Please make her your first guest!

ALEM: Then I will be your second guest. I want to be famous and I promise I won't forget you when I get rich.

T: I think Kokeb is going to become famous and rich before you. We're gonna have to be nice to her!

K: Yes, I should start ordering you two around!

A: Please! Don't flatter yourself, Kokeb!
Anyway, which way do we walk home today?

K: Ahh, I'm actually gonna meet with Zelalem so I won't be joining you today.

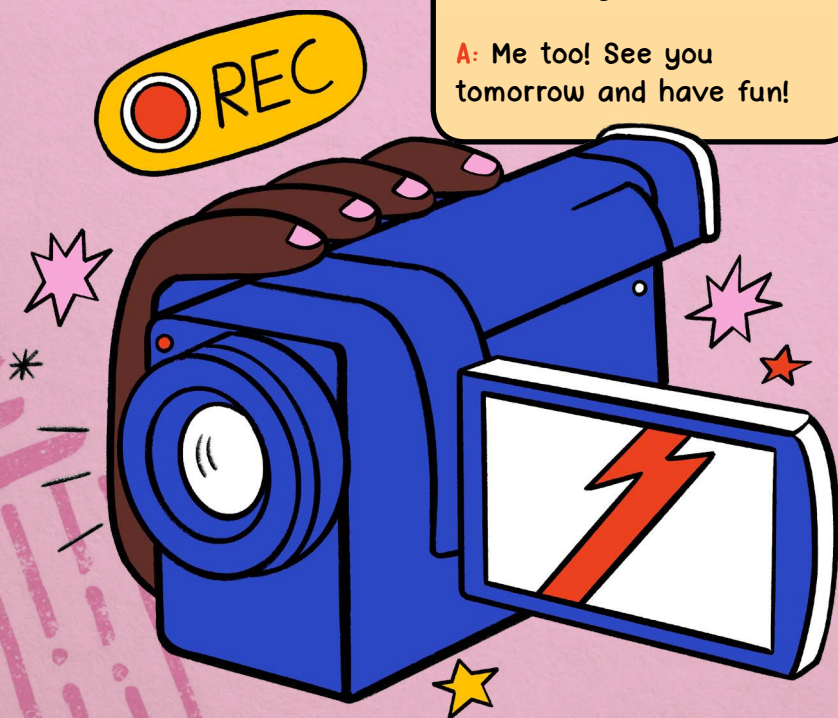
T: Ohhhhhh! Now you're ditching us for him?!

K: No! You are always my priority! But...

A: But you're in love! We know, we know right, Tizita?

T: It's ok, we still love you anyway! I have to go early so I'll see you tomorrow!

A: Me too! See you tomorrow and have fun!





CELEBRATING WITH ZELALEM...

ZELALEM: Hey hun!
How was your day?

Z: Did you? I must have
forgotten... what about it?

Z: That's great! Well done! So
you're going to be the Oprah
of your school now...

Z: This calls for a celebration
though... don't you think?

KOKEB: It was great! Guess what!
Remember I told you I am planning
to start a show at the mini media?

K: Hmm, I did mention it recently.
My teacher really likes it! He's
going to help make it a reality.

K: I wish! But it's gonna be fun.

K: Let's go to our cafe and you
can buy me a cake. I have to
go home early anyway...



ZELALEM: No, I mean like a real celebration... you know what I mean?

Z: What about tomorrow afternoon? We can have a nice lunch and go to our favourite pension, spend our afternoon there.

Z: I'm sure you can make something up to convince your mom. Tell her you have some school work.

Z: I promise it will be better this time! Don't make it a big deal. You know I love you and care about you. Don't you feel the same way?

KOKEB: Hmm, I have to go home early and help mom for the weekend though.

K: Hmmm. I don't think I can come out tomorrow.

K: But Zelalem, I don't think I want to do that, not yet! Remember how it was painful for me last time we did it? I didn't even enjoy it...

K: I do, but I would rather wait longer for us to do that again before...



Z: Why is this such a big deal to you?
My friends' girlfriends love it. I think you
just don't love me. Why don't you show it?

K: No! I do, Zelalem but
it's just that I'm not ready...

Z: Ready for what? You're not a virgin.
We did it once. I don't understand why
you wouldn't want to do it if you love me.

K: I just don't want it to be a
distraction for me right now.

Z: Well, if I am your priority,
you wouldn't say this. Other girls
aren't as uptight and careless about
their boyfriends.

K: Why would I be with
you if I didn't love you?


Z: Please, let's just meet tomorrow? I
want to buy you lunch as a celebration
of your program. We can spend the
afternoon together!

K: Okay. I will try.
I have to go now.


Z: Good night and I will
see you tomorrow.



THREE MONTHS LATER...



KOKEB: I have been feeling so tired and nauseated lately. I haven't been sleeping well. Sometimes, I can't even stand the smell of food.



ALEM: Girl, did you get knocked up without telling us?

K: Wait! No. Zelalem.

A: What do you mean?
Do you, you know...

K: I didn't want to.
He insisted and...

A: Did you use a condom?

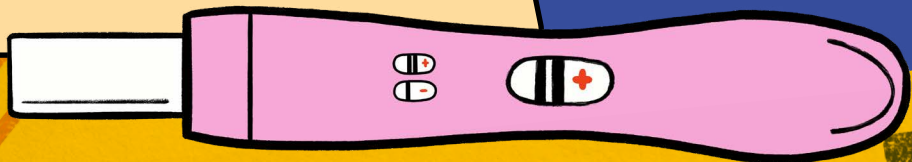
K: No. Oh my God.
My life is screwed!

A: When was the last time you
had your period? Did you have
it after you last had sex?

K: No, I don't think so. I didn't.

A: Okay so we need to get you
checked. Don't worry, you will be ok...

K: How? Imagine if I get pregnant! My
whole life is going to turn upside down!



A: Calm down, Kokeb! You will need to get checked first, we
can grab a pregnancy test from the pharmacy or head to the
health-care center. Whatever happens, you have choices.

K: I don't understand how things can be OK.

A: There is a story I never told you guys before. I never
told you because I was scared and it was very difficult...

ALEM SHARES HER EXPERIENCE...

Remember when I was dating Melkamu last year? One time he insisted we spend our day together in a pension. I really didn't want to, but he insisted. He promised we were just going to watch TV and hang out. I didn't want to be stubborn, I trusted him.

At some point we were kissing, and he began to insist we should have sex. I said no but he said, "We didn't come all the way here to not do anything". He forced me. I was scared he'd beat me and everyone would find out. He wouldn't use a condom.

Two months later, I was having similar feelings to those you're having right now and I went for a check up. I was... pregnant. I was so shocked. In my darkest moments, I even considered killing myself. I was so scared of my family and the shame if people found out.





TIZITA: Then what did you do?

ALEM: I had an abortion, thankfully! It was still at an early stage so I was able to do the procedure with pills and nobody found out. You are the first people I'm telling this to. My best friends, I trust you. It's been difficult and lonely to not share my experience.

T: Did you tell Melkamu?

A: I tried but it was around the end of school. 12th graders were already out by then. He didn't care, he never picked up his phone.

KOKEB: What if Zelalem tells people? You know some of our classmates are his friends! What if my teachers and mom find out? I can't let them down! Why did I say yes to Zelalem? I knew nothing good was gonna come out of that.

A: Kokeb, listen to me. We are here for you. I shared my story with you so it makes you stronger. If you like, I will take you to the health center. You can go alone if you would like. It is your right. But I'm here for you. Let's go after school so you can get tested. If you're pregnant, they will help you with getting an abortion.

GETTING HELP AT THE CENTER...



SISTER BIANCHI: Hi Kokeb! Welcome! How are you today?

KOKEB: I'm OK, Sister. I'm... worried.

SB: Your test shows that you are nine weeks pregnant. Would you like to tell me how you got pregnant? It's ok, your secret will be safe here. I work with many young girls like you, Kokeb. Normally, everything between the patients and their healthcare workers should be kept private and confidential. You can trust me and only share the information you want to. You will not be forced to do anything.

K: It is my boyfriend. I didn't want to, but he said I had to prove my love for him.

SB: Did you or he use any form of protection?

K: No, I asked him to use a condom but he said it is not the same and it will not be equally satisfying... he said if I trust him, I won't mind not using it. So we didn't use anything.

SB: Kokeb, I would like us to talk about your experience.

K: Sure...

SB: What happened to you is not necessarily consensual. You might be blaming yourself but your boyfriend emotionally manipulated you. He insisted you agree on his terms. Next time, you must know you have every right to say 'no' if it doesn't seem right, or you don't want it, alright?

You are still at an early stage, you have two options for your abortion. But you have to listen carefully to me, OK?

K: I understand.



SISTER BIANCHI: The first type is medical abortion. There are five tablets of which one is taken orally and the other four will be inserted in your vagina. The process for this will be a total of about four days - the first day you will take the Mifepristone pill orally. Then, you will come back after two days where I will help you to take the rest of the pills, they are called Misoprostol..

The second type is a surgical method where a very clean and safe instrument will be inserted in your vagina. This may sound harmful but it is a very safe method used by many girls and women. It will not hurt you physically and I will be there with you through the experience. The procedure is quick and you should be able to spend only a couple of hours at the facility.

Are you following, Kokeb? Which option do you feel most comfortable with?

KOKEB: Yes, I understand... I think I'll have a medical abortion. I'd prefer to take tablets.

SB: Sure, after the first pill there may be some side effects such as cramps and light bleeding like your period. But usually these will happen after the four pills.

The bleeding may be heavier than your period but it shouldn't be more than two days. You may come down with a slight fever, vomiting, headache or diarrhea for a few hours after the pills. But we will give you painkillers that you can take if you need to. If any of this continues for more than two days, come back to the health center immediately.

SB: You might have some light bleeding similar to your period after the second day, but not as heavy as the first two days. So, if anything like that happens, you must come back here or your nearby health center in no time!

Okay, so you will come back after two days – which is Friday, right? And I will help you to insert the remaining pills. The weekend is coming so you will be able to rest and recover at home as well.

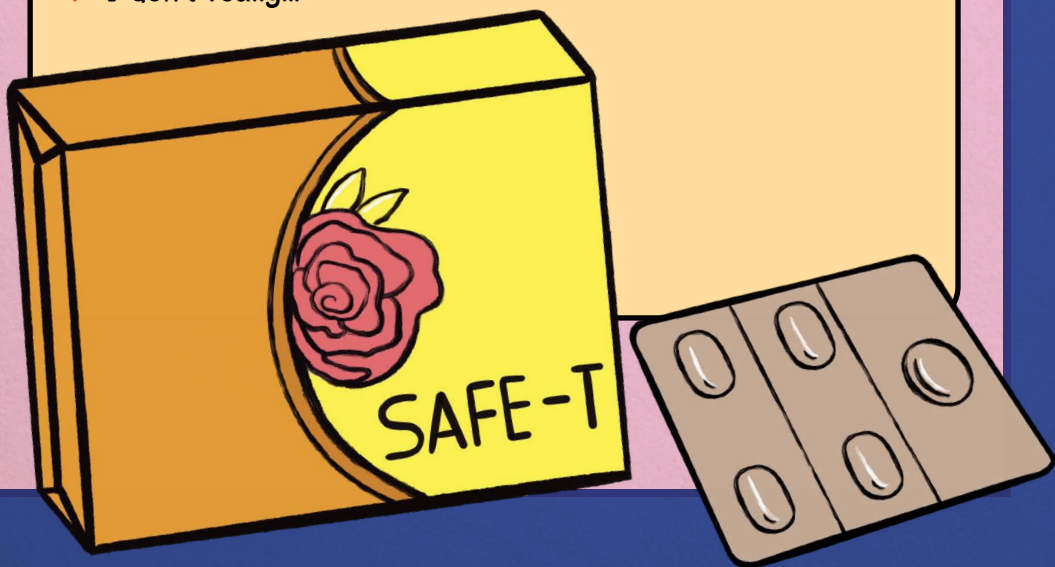
K: I can't thank you enough, Sister.

SB: Remember to come back here if the side effects continue more than two days or anything seems unusual, okay?

K: I will.

SB: Another thing I'd like us to talk about is contraceptive methods that will keep you safe and prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Do you know about any of those?

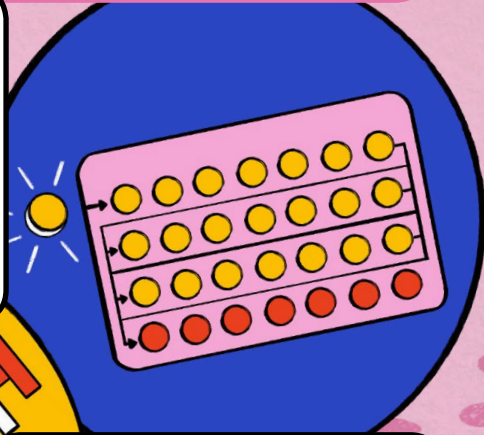
K: I don't really...



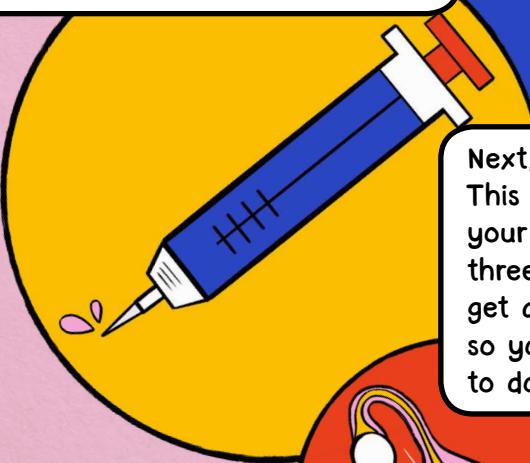
SISTER BIANCHI: Okay, these options can be taken right away, right now, immediately.

There are three types of contraceptives that include different methods such as oral, injection and long-acting types.

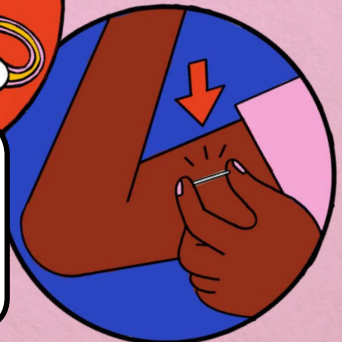
The oral tablets are required to be taken every day at the same time, which means you will need to set a daily reminder to make sure you take them on time. If you miss a day or don't take it at the same time every day, it will not be as effective.



Next, there is the injection. This requires you to visit your health center every three months where you will get a new shot every time... so you will need to remember to do that.



Finally, the IUD or the implant. These will last for 3 to 5 years without any need to change it... it will serve you for all those years effectively.



SB: Kokeb, do you understand all of these options?

All of them are effective but, as I told you, the other two are more short term and require constant reminders which can make them less convenient and less effective if you mistime them.

KOKEB: Thank you so much.
Yes, I will think about it...



HAVING AN ABORTION...

I can't wait for all this to end. I want to focus on my classes without being distracted. I am so grateful to have friends like Alem and Tizita. Without their knowledge, would I have attempted unsafe methods? They're so dangerous. I'm so thankful for my friends' support.

It's already been four hours. I think that's why I'm starting to have some cramps... and also a headache. Sister Bianchi gave me a painkiller, I think I will take it. It'll help me to complete my homework, and help my mom sell a few things in the afternoon.





Medical abortion might sound scary, but this is a clean and safe procedure that only takes a few minutes.

If the side effects continue for more than two days or the bleeding gets heavier than 2 pads per hour, please do visit your health center or contact your health counselor immediately.

If you experience no bleeding or have little bleeding within 4-5 days after taking the 4 pills, it may mean the medicines did not work and you are still pregnant.



OZELALEM



RELIEF AND MOVING ON...

KOKEB!!

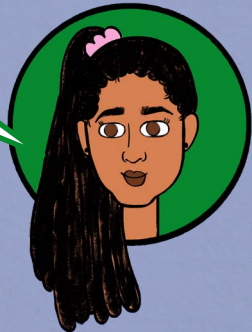


How are you? You look a little tired, are you ok?



I'm still feeling a little stressed, but I am much better. Thanks to you two!

I'm happy to hear it! Tize and I have been saving since last week to buy you ice cream today so you are going to eat whether you like it or not!



Ha! That's so sweet of you! I have no appetite though. I don't know...

TIZITA: Give yourself time, everything is gonna be ok now. We are so proud of you and we are here if you want to talk at all, okay?

KOKEB: Thank you so much! I've deleted Zelalem's number! I called him to tell him and he was shocked. He hung up, making excuses about work. But he never called back. He wouldn't pick up my calls.

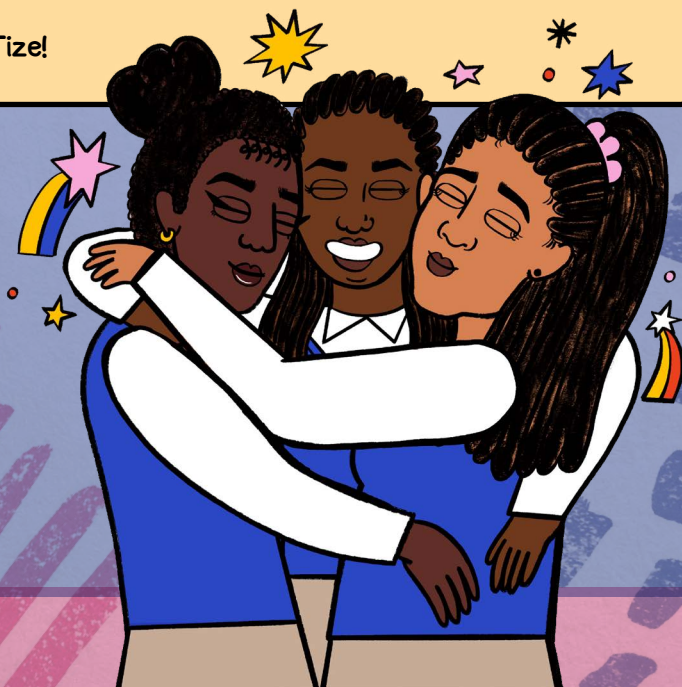
ALEM: I'm so sorry. Listen, forget about him, now you should focus on yourself and we're here for you.

K: I thought he would be supportive. I was scared and it was painful. I'm worried Zelalem will tell his friends and everyone at school would find out.

A: I don't think he will do that. It would affect him too. Don't worry about that.

T: I agree with Alem, he won't tell anyone, don't worry! You're back to school now and that's what you should focus on. Leave it behind.

K: Thank you, Tize!



T: You know, I've learned so much from you two! I am sorry you both had to go through these things but the fact that we talked about it taught me so much. If I become sexually active soon, I know my rights and how to use contraception without feeling ashamed. I owe it to you both! Thank you.

K: Thank you for being there for me - both of you. I wouldn't have done it without you. I appreciate both of you so much.

A: Shhhh! Save that for when you become famous! Don't forget us then! Your show is starting next week, right? Are you ready? You should focus on that now.

Don't worry about being in trouble again. You made it through and learned a lesson. That's how I felt last year.
Next time you will be more careful,
and you've chosen a contraceptive, right?



T: So.... who is going to be your first guest?
Is it gonna be our Ms. Hanan? You promised!

K: You will have to pay me for that! We don't have a deal yet.

T: Come on!

NOTES

Scriptwriter: Selam Mussie Tadesse

Illustrator: Jacky Sheridan

Research and development: Blain Rezene, Saba Kidanemariam,
Tamara Feters & Professor Ernestina Coast

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