

Finding Your Color

by Praise Osawaru

The alarm clock on the nightstand rang, springing Zogie to life. She blinked her eyes repeatedly, lifting herself off the bed when her sight cleared. She felt different today. Something poked her pants. She bent her head down and saw a stick-like object attempting to pierce through her pants.

“Gah!” she yelled.

Her heart raced as she darted to her mirror. She staggered at her sight. Her breasts were no more. Her long, dark hair was reduced to a shiny, trimmed cut. Her face no longer had its round shape, it had transformed into an oval shape. She was still 5’4, though. That remained the same.

She struggled to understand what had happened; how she slept as a girl and woke up as a boy. But the opening of her door halted her thoughts. She gazed at her mom, who shot her the look she gave strangers.

“Who are you? Where’s our daughter?” Her mom asked as she scanned the room. “Ehizogie! You snuck a boy into our house!”

“I-I can explain,” Zogie responded, frightened. “It’s me, Zogie. I don’t know what happened to me,” she added, walking towards her mother.

“Don’t come near me! You can’t be my daughter! Honey! Honey! Come to Ehizogie’s room. What have you done to our daughter? Where is she?”

Zogie’s dad arrived at her doorway. His face stiffened. “Oghomwen, call the police.” He tossed his phone to her. Her mom dialed the emergency number.

“You’ll tell us where our daughter is,” her dad snarled.

Zogie's body trembled. She searched the corners of her mind, looking for what action to take. Her eyes landed on her open window, and without a second thought, she launched forward, held the windowpane, and leaped out.

If their home was a two-story building, she would have broken her legs. Thankfully, it was a bungalow, and her late forties parents couldn't jump after her. She landed on the floor and rolled. The prickling in her pants had subsided. She breathed. There was no one she could go to, only her girlfriend.

With nothing but her white socks, she ran the streets of Ijoro. As she fled, a reel of last night event played before her eyes.

She sat at the lake, throwing stones into the water and smiling. She'd just left the town's old flour factory; the building which had been abandoned. That was where she and Mutiat went to hang, away from the judgments of everyone. Their religious parents condemned their relationship, but they met behind their backs, anyway.

She'd thrown the last stone within proximity to her when she heard a bubbling. She froze. The water parted and a huge liquid-like figure emerged from the lake and stopped a few inches away from her. The height of this figure was double her size, Zogie had to tilt her head upwards to grasp its face—a ball of water.

“I see you won't let me sleep. What bothers you little one?”

“Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to—I didn't know the lake was alive. I mean you are—what are you?”

“I'll save you the worry by not explaining my being. Something bothers you. What is it?”

Zogie paced back and forth, and after a few seconds, she stopped.

“There’s this girl I like, but our parents’ beliefs won’t let us be together peacefully. I mean, it’s just hard, you know? 18, still can’t be who I am. Sometimes, I just wish I was someone else, or somewhere else. I’ve not even seen the world beyond Ijoro. I feel so suffocated. And I don’t even know why I am talking to you. You, who I don’t even know what you are or how you are you? Have you been alive all these years? What are you? Oh wait, you’re some sort of *Mami Wata*, right? I have heard tales, but I never believed.”

“What if you could be different? Would you be happy?”

“Different how?”

“Different so you can be with the one you love.”

“I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

The water figure turned around and sauntered back to the lake. While Zogie yelled, “What do you mean?”

Zogie panted heavily, bending, and clutching her knees. She’d arrived at Mutiat’s house, which was two streets away from hers. It was a story building. It was still early morning, and her parents were at home. She could see Mutiat’s father’s car parked out front. She couldn’t walk through the front door, so she crept to the backyard. There were some stones there, she picked one and threw it at Mutiat’s windows. It wasn’t her first time doing that. That was how she signaled Mutiat to come out every time.

Mutiat peered out her window and saw a boy in purple pajamas crouching behind the backyard flowers. Her eyes thinned. In her mind, the question, “Who the hell is this?” lingered. She opened her window, stretching her hijab-covered head out.

“Who are you?”

“It’s me, Zogie,” she responded curling her left thumb and index finger to form a circle, placing it atop a stretched right index. In their code, it meant I with a dot.

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A police car drove around in search of a male suspect, following Zogie’s parents’ description. Elsewhere, Zogie and Mutiat laid on a red blanket in the old flour factory, gazing at the sunset through lengthy translucent windows.

“So what are we going to do now?”

“What if we ran away together? I’m tired of everything here. I know you are, too. We could start a life together.”

“But we’re just 18. What if our parents?”

“Don’t you think it’s time we left their necks and make a life of our own?”

“I can’t just leave. I have to say goodbye, at least.”

“Okay. Let’s go back, write a goodbye letter, and take the night train out of here.”

Mutiat left hastening home, prepared to write the letter, and pack a bag. She, too, had grown tired of her parents dictating what she can or cannot do. Zogie took the other route, heading home.

She hadn’t walked a mile when her bones cracked. She shrieked and tumbled to the ground. She could feel her body reassembling itself under the dark and starry night. Her screams filled the air, but there was no one in close reach.

Her screams ceased when her body stilled. She lifted herself on her feet and staggered to the lake which was in sight. She fell by the waterside. Her reflection sent a chill down her spine. She had reverted to her old self; a girl.

“No. No. No. No.” She slapped the water. “Lake! Lake! Lake!”

A distending silence swayed in the air. She glanced around; she was all by herself, nothing happened. She grabbed a stone by her side and threw it into the lake. The water bubbled. She took another stone and threw it in. This time, the water parted, and the water figure emerged out of the large body of water.

“What do you want now, little one?”

“Change me back.”

“No.”

“No? Change me back!” She screamed, pulling herself up and throwing a fist at the figure. Her hand plunged into the water-chest and stayed. She yanked it out and fell to the ground.

“Things don’t just happen. For every desire, there’s a sacrifice. Something has to be given for you to receive. That is the order of life.”

“I don’t understand.” She said as she stood on her feet.

“Are you willing to pay the price?”

“What price?”

“If I change you back, you can never procreate.”

The words hit Zogie hard. She stroked her chin and paced back and forth, then stopped. “Yes.”

“It is done.” They responded almost immediately.

Zogie’s bone shifted, and she dived to the ground. She roared into the night. The water figure turned around and walked back into the water, settling with the large body.

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Zogie stared at his house from across the street, hiding behind a bush. There was a police car out front, but no officer. He hurriedly darted to the other side. He peeked through the living room window. His parents sat on the sofa with a uniformed man opposite them. They all had mugs in their hands.

He went around, taking the back door in the kitchen into the house. He walked carefully, creeping into his room. Once in, he opened the closet and pulled out a bag. All the clothes were female clothes, but he was different now. Luckily, he had some neutral jeans. He plucked the jeans and some cardigans and shoved them into the bag. Sweatpants he saw, he wore it and a polo shirt.

He threw the bag on the bed and bent down to look underneath it. There was a white piggy bank. He retrieved it, smashing it with his knee. The sound didn't attract anyone, so he thought. All the money he'd been saving since the beginning of the year finally had a use. He thrust them into the bag, too.

Running away was a thought he'd harbored for a long time, but he never thought he could actually do it. He penned a goodbye letter on a paper and folded it on his desk. The words of the letter: I can't be who you want me to be. What good is living if I can't be true to myself? Don't bother looking for me. I'll be okay. Bye, Zogie."

He sat on the bed, fitting his legs into a pair of sneakers, to compliment the new clothes he wore. Sweatpants, multi-colored polo shirt, and a jean jacket. He gripped the bag, dialing Mutiat with his phone in his left hand. The creaking of the door jerked his heart. It was a police officer.

"Freeze."

Zogie sprinted towards the window and leaped out, shattering the glass and landing on his sides.

“Ow.”

“Dispatch, this is Officer Chinwe, I’ve got the suspect.”

Zogie sprung himself up and fled, dodging two shots fired at him. He kept running until he arrived at Ijoro Train station, to catch the train leaving for Upper Lagos. Mutiat was waiting for his arrival.

She wore a gown bearing colorful butterflies on its material. And a scarf was snaked around her head. She’d never dressed like that in all the years they’d know each other.

Mutiat grinned at the sight of Zogie. They kissed for a moment, and suddenly the world paused.

Nothing else mattered, just the two of them.

“All aboard the train.” The train sliding door opened and passengers walked in one by one.

Mutiat held out two tickets in the air. Zogie held her left hand, and they walked in.