

Finding Expressions

By Stephen K Mugo

She peered at me through the top of her glasses. They seemed lazy, the glasses, lying on her shiny nose all the time. I glared at the glasses, my ocular senses taking in their symmetry, shiny metallic frame and a pair of lenses through which Mrs Dulveghi's skin and lower eye lids showed through. The glasses were oval in shape. Their wearer had a round face. The two did not belong together.

I had a sudden urge to grab the glasses and yell at them to find something to do, other than laze around on such an oily face. Didn't they feel nauseated? I did. Like I always did after biting too much of an avocado.

"What is white?" I stepped closer, "And what is black?"

"Are you talking about colors, Mark?"

"You know what I want to know," I replied and stepped even closer. Mrs. Dulveghi leaned back in her chair. The chair groaned and creaked in protest. I winced slightly, then blessed the injured chair with a sympathetic look. It was a beautiful piece of furniture, parts of wood once apart now joined in a harmonious assemblage of tenons, mortises, dovetails, nails and glue. It did not deserve agony.

Then, I closed my eyes as if in pain. I hated it when furniture cried for relief.

I reaffirmed my decision; I would grow up and become the minister of furniture. Then I would grant all things made from wood all the rights they would want. But first, I'd hire a lawyer to represent our kitchen table. I sighed heartily at the image that sought audience in my mind. Our

kitchen table; where my comfort and my safety had placed me as she fed me. I loved the color reflected by that piece of furniture; through the lacquered finish peeked a swirl of beiges and browns; a source of awe for young, impressionable eyes. Four sturdy legs supported the beautiful top. Not once or twice did I hug those legs with unabashed expressions of affection. The same way I used to hug my comfort and my safety whenever she cooed to me with a tender regard.

That stoic piece of oak had supported my comfort and my safety as her life flowed out in crimson rivulets, to where I didn't know. The lawyer would prove that the silently suffering table was indeed on my side and thus, against the man I called father. Then he would be gone, the man I called father, never to hurt that beautiful table again.

"Mark?" I opened my eyes. Mrs. Dulvegghi was staring at me without blinking. I accepted the unissued challenge and stared back. Suddenly, she broke her gaze and her face crumpled, her oily skin creasing into so many folds.

"Can't you let it go?" she whimpered in resignation. I shook my head slowly. A bad sound came from her when she breathed in and out. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Her lazy glasses did nothing to help. She yanked them off her face and placed them on the table. It wasn't a very remarkable piece of furniture, but I was still concerned that it had to support so much; books, folders, pens, pencils, and a small, green fan.

"Mark..." she hiccupped, "I'm..." she paused to let a sob out. I imagined I could see the sob leave her slightly open mouth. I saw it rise in the air. It resembled brown fog with beady, bright red orbs that sensed light. It wrestled for a bit with the fan, won, and floated out. I was concerned it would wander in the halls aimlessly and attract unwanted attention.

"I just want to know if I have the right answer." I placed my hands on the table. I was careful though not to lose focus- it wasn't the right moment. In any case, I had promised the table at home loyalty and complete devotion. I was just touching this one with my hands, I reasoned. I leaned over and across the table. All the while, I was careful not to let my hands wander. Mrs. Dulvegghi squinted at me through red eyes. No longer were the lazy glasses in the way. She whispered something. I closed my eyes and opened my ears. I waited for her whisper to find its way in. It did, and my eardrums vibrated the rarefactions and compressions, which my brain picked up and interpreted. She wanted to assure me. I leaned even closer till our faces nearly touched.

"Is he still doing it?" She asked softly.

"Yes." I nodded, "The table will not survive if I don't do something." I whispered back. I loved whispers. They caressed, they soothed, but mostly they retained confidentiality. I didn't consider it betrayal though. Our kitchen table was very understanding when it came to matters of the heart. Indeed, it had to.

Our faces were so close, I could see her dark pupils constrict and dilate with emotion. I knew mine were doing the same. I wouldn't be able to decode what was passed between our eyes though until we broke our gazes.

"What will I do?" I whispered, then caught myself as I felt my hand start to slide along the edge of the table.

"Realize it." She whispered back, "And this time, do not open your mind again."

"What about my question?"

"White reflects while black absorbs."

"Thank you." I started retreating, and at the same time grabbed the glasses on the table.

It wasn't fair, with all those books on the poor table and now glasses, lazy ones at that.

I left. Mrs. Dulveghi was sighing as if the tears were about to flow again. I knew she expressed herself better that way. I liked her.

I wanted to be home as fast as possible, now that the decision was confirmed and my mind was still sure. I rushed for the exit...

"Mark?" I paused. Damn that girl!

Why couldn't my mind overcome this small but significant obstacle to my reality? I turned around. She was running towards me, knees knocking as she threw one leg in front of the other.

Susan, same kind and age as me but significantly different, physically and emotionally. The dark hair on her head followed her in cascading waves as she rushed towards me.

"Mark..." she breathed happily. I groaned inwardly.

I sensed my mind start its now-familiar betrayal, and yet we had agreed, me and it; it would not let anything that I didn't allow or like to develop. I did not want to feel attached to Susan. And still, the fact that our differences, physical, mental, emotional, real, and imagined; complimented and complemented each other made me realize that I was not whole. My mind had let on too that at some point, a hole needed filling. Whose, I didn't know and didn't wish to find out at the moment.

"I thought you had left..." she panted, "It wouldn't have been nice of you!" She bumped me gently while a smile expressed her present feelings.

"What did you think of the new teacher?" She lifted her legs, each in turn, and tugged at her white socks.

Why did I need monochromatic expression on all of my troubles at home?

I needed my mind, but Susan had taken it. I was yet to figure out what it was about her, but then, she was different, and perhaps, from her point of view, I was too. I knew, and the slight discomfort between my legs made sure I understood. It was beyond black and white reasoning.

I concentrated on her face and felt the sensations wash over me. My eyes disobeyed my will and started scanning. Beautiful girl, my mind interpreted the visuals it was receiving. Large, brown eyes, very expressive of her thoughts. Very smooth skin, and perhaps soft.

My nose, not to be left out, allowed into the same mind the scent of her breath as she stood so close and straightened her backpack.

Fresh, dewy, and very feminine.

I was finding all these observations strange but fascinating and alluring as if I didn't want it to stop. My ears sent her voice into my brain, which in turn converted them into pleasing sounds as she rattled on and on about something.

"Why are you staring at me?" She breathed sweetly. I stepped closer.

"Say something!" She prompted and smiled. I liked what my mind did to my senses as a consequence of the smile, and especially the warmth that spread in my chest.

"I found out." I said, "Black and white. I know what they are."

"What are you talking about?" Susan allowed a frown to crease her face. I wondered how it felt to be a girl.

"Do you like what you are?" I asked her. My mind had just cautioned me about answering her question about the colors. Despite its weaknesses when it came to Susan and my feelings, I still trusted it.

"What do you mean?" She frowned again.

We were now outside. There was a large tree in the middle of the field. A tulip tree, I knew. Its leaves rustled in whooshing greeting when I stepped outside. The breezy wind carried the greetings and I received them with a delicious shiver. I even hugged myself in reply, for my skin received most of it.

I wanted to rush home. My mind lied it did too, but I knew it didn't. I knew it was still betraying me by convincing me that I felt good by being around the girl. The whole thing about love needed rational thinking, but something was off; my instincts were stronger than my reasoning at such moments. I couldn't trust what I had not reasoned with logic. Still, I failed at taming my instincts. I felt I wanted to take her hand. My traitorous mind jumped at the idea. I moved closer. I wanted to look into her eyes too. I wanted to run my hand through her wavy, dark hair. I didn't know what good it would do, but I sensed that pressing my lips against hers would be pleasurable. Beyond that, I was firm; I would not seek to explore her physical differences, and neither would I permit her to do the same to me. No, I cautioned my smitten mind, until the black and white problem was solved, I would not let lose my emotions.

"Mark, you are weird... are you okay?" Her beautiful face was reflecting a look of concern.

Once upon a time, I was in a dark place, but one day when I knew and felt I was ready, I was freed. The place had been warm, safe, and comfortable. Once out, the arms I landed in were warmer, safer, and more comfortable. The voice that nurtured me was soothing too. The look, however, the look that I learned to trust and cherish, was that of concern. It gave me assurance and from it, I drew hope that I would survive. It was love. Now, I had none of that to go home to.

I wanted to her to know how I felt but I could not gather the courage to express myself. But seeing Susan standing there with that same look reawakened in me a very nostalgic feeling. Without warning, I felt my emotions sneak out and before I could prevent them from expression, I gasped as my hands, as if on their own accord, wrapped themselves around the girl in a hug. I felt her warm body squeezing into mine, this time my heart might have skipped two beats.

"I love you, mom." I heard my voice say; just as I quickly took control of the situation and chased the runaway emotions back into their safe, which I then secured with a blank expression devoid of the slightest hint of feeling. Susan must have understood too, dear girl. She gave me one shocked look, turned, and took off. With her went all the senseless feelings for her that my will had been unable to suppress. Good girl, I thought as once again the tulip tree sent a particularly chilly cheer in the form of a breeze. I received it with a shiver and started for home.