

I WILL FALL IN LOVE NEXT WEEK TUESDAY

by

Afolabi Boluwatife Micah

Fear is a powerful thing. And it's different for everybody. For some people, fear is hearing the compound gates swing open when they haven't washed the dishes like they were supposed to that morning. For others, fear is standing at the edge of the highest point on Olumo rock. For me, fear is people finding out I have blue hair.

I was 12 years old when I saw my first blue strand sticking out of my head. I had just washed my hair so thought it was a trick of the light clashing with the water in my eyes. I had wiped my eyeballs dry with a towel, but there it still was. Blue hair.

The thing is, at the time, I did not panic because I wasn't really sure what it was. It was not until I ran out in excitement to show my mother the strand and I saw the panic in her eyes that I knew maybe this new thing that I saw was something shameful. She had expertly and swiftly and quietly plucked out the strand from the roots out of my scalp before I could say anything. Then she had set it on fire at the kitchen counter.

In this world we live in, you can either have blue hair or regular brown hair. Regular brown hair indicates you're normal and useful to society. Blue hair means you are the spawn of satan, evil incarnate. There is no proof that blue hair necessarily makes you a worse or better person, it's just something a bunch of people decided, and now that is how the world is being run.

There is no direct cause for getting blue hair, as it arrives in puberty. All the doctors and scientists found no common denominator in all the blue-haired people they did studies on. Having blue hair was not hereditary and was purely a thing of chance.

And that is what makes the hate so amusing to me. Many people pretend not to know that having blue hair is not something that's done on purpose, so they can have an excuse to feel superior as brown-haired people. And as usual, my beloved country Nigeria overdoes. We have the highest blackmail and homicide rates targeted against blue-haired people.

'How many blue-haired people did you hear of in the bible?', one brown-haired aunt of mine had asked me once.

'People with blue hair are evil and should all be killed', said one of my secondary school classmates, a girl who had neither seen any blue-haired person in real life nor seen anything being killed.

'Blue haired people can't help it, but they can at least dye their hair brown and stop being such nuisances', said a popular social media influencer in a video I saw once on Youtube.

'Wale, there are hospitals that do hair transplants', my mother had said to me as she was pulling out three blue hair strands that had grown on my head overnight when I was 14.

We had both known that hair transplant stories were hearsay and that some people even died from the procedure (due to infections from meeting quack doctors), but here my giver of life was, suggesting it to me. That was when I had the sense to know to hide my hair from everyone. I became an introvert by force. People can't judge you when they don't see you.

I started buying brown hair dye and using it every week. I have severe damage but at least I now have normal hair. My mother doesn't know about the dye so she thinks I no longer have that problem.

I don't think my mother mentioned it to my dad, who I never really see around as he travels a lot for his work.

I once said to him, 'Daddy, I'm going to become the President' when we had just got back home from my secondary school's valedictory service.

'And I will fall in love next week Tuesday', he replied.

I remember wondering what the heck he meant by that. My dad is distant and honestly, a bit of a weirdo. We don't understand each other, so we barely speak.

I'm 19 and now in the university, discovering that people are fascinatingly amusing. The hate for the hair color has even transcended to all other areas of life. The trendy kids dye their hair every colour except blue. People don't wear blue clothes or use blue paint. The hate runs deep.

It's 10am on a Friday and I am in my room in my hostel, skipping class for the 4th day in a row. I get up to cook some concoction spaghetti when I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror and pause. There was a full big bright blue afro sitting on my head, all the curls going every which way as I haven't yet tamed them with a comb. This is the most amount of my natural hair I have let live on my head at one point. I had washed off the brown dye four nights ago and decided to take the week off from classes. Why? Because I'm a lazy bum and my lecturers are stressing me out.

Staring at my reflection, I suddenly feel an overwhelming sadness. Then the sadness dissipates, with hatred taking up space. I see the knife I used last night to slice oranges on my reading table still sitting underneath orange peels. I pick it up and place the blade near my neck. I think about how it would hurt so I change my mind. Why would I try to end my pain by bringing myself more pain? What if I don't die? How would I explain a big dash on my neck to people? I'd have to always wear turtlenecks.

My phone vibrates. I check and see a message from Temidun that reads 'You better not just be getting dressed. I'll be at the junction in five minutes'. So I panic, like the unfocused queen I am.

By the way, Temidun is the love of my life, the cockroach in my cupboard and all the other brouhaha. We are both in our final year and have been dating for two years now. I hastily put on a dress and it was not until I saw my hair in the mirror that my anxiety doubled. Of course Temidun doesn't know I have blue hair, am I crazy? He has never really said anything negative about blue-haired people, but there are just some things I would rather keep to myself. Even my mother doesn't know, so who is he?

My phone vibrates again. I knew it. You're just taking your bath now, aren't you?, the text from Temidun reads.

Calm your balls. You'll see me now, I text back, then return to panicking.

I could cancel but I don't want to because Temidun is finally taking me out on a proper dinner date and I should have dyed my hair yesterday, but I am a lazy cow and I woke up late, so here we are now.

I put on a wig that Temidun had bought for me two months ago and tie a bandanna to cover my baby hairs. When I'm sure that not a streak of blue is to be seen, I put on my sneakers, ignoring the vibrations on my phone. Temidun is probably livid that I'm late but he loves me like that.

By the time I get to the junction and see Temidun's Hilux, it's been over 20 minutes.

'Madam, you said I'll see you now and this is 30 minutes after', Temidun says as I slide onto the car seat beside him.

'Don't lie. It's just 20 minutes', I retort.

'I thought you said you wanted a fancy date. You're dressed like you're going to class'. He starts the car.

'Says the person who is wearing a t shirt and shorts', I reply.

I excitedly wait to see where he would take me for this fancy date that I have been begging for since we started dating two years ago. My excitement fades away when I see that we are pulling up at his apartment complex.

'Noooooooooooo', I sing.

'Don't be dramatic', he says coolly.

'It's not me and you that will have a date in your house. Again. I want a proper restaurant', I say.

'Okay, let's just watch a movie before we go. Our reservation isn't until noon', he says.

Even though I know he's a fantastic liar and that there is probably no restaurant, I go up with him into his apartment. The AC is on, but I still feel hot, so I start patting my wig.

'You can take off your wig o', Temidun says.

'I'm fine, thanks', I answer.

'But you're sweating na', and then he yanks off my 250 thousand naira bone straight off my head in one swift motion.

I freeze for a moment to take in what just happened. Temidun can see my natural hair.

I slowly turn to look at him in horror, anger and shock. Temidun always plays too much and now he has gone too far. He looks surprised as he stares at my hair.

'Wale, you..'

'It's a new dye I ordered online', I quickly interrupt, my heart pounding loudly in my ears.

He just stares in silence. I hurriedly snatch my wig from him and put it back on. I feel sick in my stomach.

'Why would you choose blue of all colours?', he asks me.

His question is direct but rhetorical. We both know blue hair gets people harassed or killed.

I already start to imagine life without Temidun. I actually really like him a lot and I wonder if he was going to tell anyone. What kind of lie can I say to go back from this?

'Let me see', he says and my heart drops. He reaches out for my wig and I recoil.

'I..I have to go', I say and run out of the apartment. I ignore him as he calls out my name. I just want the ground to swallow me.

I don't even remember how but I get to my room in what seems like seconds. There are so many tight knots in my stomach that I just crouch on the floor and cry silently. I remember that I haven't eaten yet and now I have to cook concoction spaghetti and that makes me cry some more.

It's now 5pm and Temidun has been calling me all day but I never answered. What can I possibly say to him? Temidun has most likely figured everything out and wants me to explain myself. I am eating my pain away in the form of Viju chocolate and gala while I google the price of flight tickets to Cotonou, where I can start a new life.

I hear a knock on my door. I assume it's one of those student evangelists so I stay quiet so they can go away.

'Wale, it's Temidun. I know you're inside', the person at the door says.

I scream silently into my pillow. The light is on so I can't pretend that I'm not in the room. I muster all my courage, drape a bedsheet over my head and go to open the door. I plan to deny, deny, deny.

'I've been calling you all day', he says and walks past me into the room.

'I've been busy', I say and lock the door.

'Look, we have to address the elephant in the room', he says facing me.

I stare at him, waiting for the inevitable breakup.

'It's okay. I love you', he says and hugs me. 'I don't care', he adds.

It feels like a heavy weight I didn't know was there has been lifted from my shoulders. I hug him back and sob. After a few minutes, he says, 'Let me see'

I hesitate, but then I remove the bedsheet over my head. He pauses for a bit then bursts into laughter, like the silly gremlin that he is.

'I'm sorry. I'm not laughing at you', he says, gasping for air.

'Right', I hiss, moving away.

He draws me back and holds my waist. 'I'm serious. You look like a cute troll doll'

Then he kisses me.

Temidun has seen this thing that I've been hiding all my life and he is kissing me. A mix of relief, sadness and pure ecstasy fills my heart.

'I taste Viju. Do you have some left?', he asks.

It's a Wednesday evening the next week and I'm at Temidun's apartment, completing an assignment I was supposed to submit last week.

Temidun has been an absolute sweetheart, asking me all kinds of questions. I still hate my hair but I am relieved that I can at least tell Temidun.

'That's crazy', he says when I tell him I've been dyeing my hair since I hit puberty.

'Mad', he responds when I tell him I have had to dye my eyebrows and pubic hair.

'No wonder eating you out always tastes metallic. I just assumed your ph was off', he says.

'Waka', I say and throw a pillow at him.

'How many people know?', he asks me.

'Just you'

'Not even your parents?'

'Nope. I'm even saving up so I can try a hair transplant'

'Or you can go bald. Or we can just run away to a country where it's not so out of place', Temidun suggests.

I crash on the bed face down. Temidun also lays face down across from me.

'Temidun, I'm always anxious', I say. 'I hate it so much and it makes me so sad', I say, staring into his eyes.

He looks right back at me. He sticks a finger in my hair and pulls a strand gently. 'But Wale, it looks so beautiful'.

When I go to the bathroom later that evening, I look in the mirror at my hair for a long time. I then unlock my phone and call my dad.

I hear his light voice over the phone. 'Hello Ayowale, how are you?' he said.

'I'm fine', I respond. 'Daddy, I have something to tell you'

'I'm listening'. I hesitated for a long time before I said, 'I have blue hair. I've had it since I was 12'

'I know', he says flatly.

Record scratch.

'What?', I ask.

'You're forgetting that we live in the same house in Lagos. I'm not blind'

'It doesn't bother you?'

'It's not something I can control. It's like me saying that I'm going to fall in love...'

'...next week Tuesday', I cut in, smiling with relief.

I finally understand.

Regardless of all the shit we go through, blue-haired people flourish online behind anonymous social media accounts. Sometimes I recognize people I know. An old classmate, the imam down the street, my mother's best friend.

I catch glimpses of people all around the world living their best lives with all shades of blue hair. Some are Presidents and world leaders, some are regular students like me. I even found an indigenous tribe in the Cayman Islands who all have blue hair.

I can't shake away all the guilt and fear, because the world is still unsafe for people like me. I will close the doors and shut the world out. I must live, somehow.