

HERE

**By: Izien
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She was 14 when she left Lagos, to join her father in Houston, Texas. High hopes of one day attending a prestigious institution in the New England region, her education was at the forefront of her imagination. After all, isn't this a part of how the American Dream is sold? Do well in school, work mad hard, then end up at the throne of riches. But you see...they don't tell you that there are levels to all of this. That immigrants from Africa, and their descendants in America, don't have the same start as the people who the Declaration of Independence — truly embodies...and so, she becomes this zombie.

This zombie that trades her gele for a fedora.

This zombie that perms her kinks to hair that's bone-straight.

This zombie who is named a glorious name, by the Yoruba name: Omoyemi,

*But in class...she prefers to be called:
“Olivia”*

When the Nigerian substitute teacher looks down on the attendance sheet and tells his students to say loudly “HERE” when their name is called...he reached her name — but no one answered. At this point, he required everyone to pull out their school I.D., and to his surprise, there was one girl without it — Omoyemi.

Mister Babayemi: Why did you not speak up when your name was called?

Omoyemi: Sir, they've been making fun of me since I got to this part of the world. I stopped wearing my head-wraps. They don't like my hair; I've been called 'nappy roots.' Now my hair is straight. They say my name is from the jungle, so they've created a name for me.

Mister Babayemi: Did your father not tell you the rich history of our culture!?

Omoyemi: My mother is always working. By the time I come home she's asleep, and by the time I awake — she's gone.

Mister Babayemi: Omo, you don't need people to acknowledge you in order for you to acknowledge yourself. Your teachers have said that you are one of their brightest students. Life is so transient. Some of us are here today; some of us will be gone tomorrow. Please learn to be at home with yourself. I say this because I've spent many

years trying to manipulate who I was for the sake of acceptance. It is a turbulent spiral. I beg, Omo, please learn to be at home with yourself.

She now sat with the wisdom Mister Babayemi gave her. The chains that locked her brain began to break as her mind expanded.

On the last day of school, Omoyemi's original teacher returned. As he went down the roster — when her forename was called, she immediately got out of her chair and proudly declared:

“I

AM

HERE.”



“A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking, because her trust is not on the branch but on it’s own wings. Always believe in yourself.” -Unknown