

“Walking Stick” A Folk Tale by Nneoma Prudence LaMarche

There was once a young scientist, named Maya, studying in her lab. She was examining DNA and the differences between the chromosomes between males and females. She knew and noted that the chromosomes for males are XY and for females they are XX. Under her microscope she examined her own cells; she also examined the cells of her younger brother. They shared the same parents. They had the same genetic makeup. However, she could not understand why scientists needed separate letters to represent them.

She asked Professor Okore. He said, “That’s just the way it is. We’ve had those letters representing the chromosomes for as long as I can remember.”

As she examined the human karyotype, she perceived that the chromosomes for males and females were primarily the same, except for on the 23rd chromosome. The female’s 23rd chromosome of XX are equal lengths and bear the same resemblance. The male’s 23rd chromosome is not the same. X is long and Y is short.

After jotting her findings in her lab notebook, she went to Professor Aziz, her female professor, to discuss them. Maya mentioned “I’ve been attempting to discern why the chromosomes are represented by different letters for males and females.”

Professor Aziz replied, “I’m glad to learn about your curiosity. What did you find?”

“Well, I noticed the difference in lengths of the 23rd chromosome in males and females. It seems that the Y for males is shorter than the X chromosome for the both of them. Maybe it means that God didn’t give men as much as women on the inside.”

Professor Aziz replied, “That’s a good observation. Did you also notice that the letter Y only has one leg?”

“Yes. I still haven’t learned why someone chose to represent the chromosomes with those letters.”

“Well, think about it. You said for yourself that maybe God gave women more on the inside. X has two legs. Women have two X chromosomes. Maybe God is telling us women that we have enough within ourselves to stand on our own.”

Maya thought about it. Then she said, “Maybe you’re right. I guess that explains why my brother and I haven’t been getting along lately. Since he doesn’t want to fight, he’s been ignoring me. So I’ve been submerging myself in my studies. God must be telling me that very thing.”

They both laughed.

“I guess so,” Professor Aziz responded.