

SAC: After the Storm

Riding in the back seat of a packed car, watching the trees and birds and the sky whiz by me like the snapshots one sees before dying, I begin to think about life after this storm. We've been through them before, most of the time preferring to huddle together on the living room floor around dancing candlelight and sleep it off. However, we knew this one was going to be impossible to slumber through. We had to leave.

Before I could think about the man I called Cookie Monster, whose auto parts store was on the corner of the block I grew up on in Pigeon Town or the shop on Leonidas where I first got my hair straight-combed, I thought about them. Their faces coming back to me like a favorite song forgotten or an old lover's face. Their laughter echoes in my mind, and I see their grinning teeth, shining in spite of their mournful eyes, eyes that tell the truth about the pain and confusion in their lives. Their giggles strangle and stifle cries of hopelessness.

Before I thought about the place I used to get my chicken sandwiches from on Freret St. or Ms. Sadie the iceberg lady right off of LaSalle St in the 3rd, I saw Maria and Rodneka, Earlnika, Keva, and Daniel. I thought about Douglass High School and the gloomy hallways that always made me feel that I was in a scary movie or something. I wondered what would be next for them, no longer having Students at the Center. I thought about the schools they may be forced to go to, those cold, stiff rooms where the real world never becomes part of the lesson plan, so that kids like me and nameless others get irritated when we think of the real world waiting to suck us up in a vortex just right outside.

Revisiting the halls of Douglas in my mind, I never knew how much these kids meant to me, and although I have always been grateful to SAC, I finally realize the saving grace it has been. So many times I've walked these dusky halls and felt that I had just entered the walls of an abandoned ship stacked high with forgotten treasure. I size up the bounty of pliable, young bodies and make note of the brilliance exuberating from their eyes and their hair and their mouths, and I think, "Why hasn't anyone claimed this treasure, this fountain of youth, this elixir of life!?"

I watch these students watch me skip through the halls, and I wonder if they know how much like them I am. I wonder if they can see the confused and hostile child tucked away behind the ruffles of my bohemian skirts. Maybe when they look into my eyes, they become face to face with a young person once so afraid of my own power that I refused to read pieces in class and spent many nights dreading the next day. More than seeing me as a college graduate or the quiet girl with the camera skills, I want them to see my transformation and the roles they along with SAC play in my continuing growth.

By Ashley Jones,

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