

PROJECT ID:

TITLE:

KEYWORDS:

AGE OF STUDENT(S):

Momma's last kisses

A loud thud that breaks the eerie silence is the first thing I hear as I wake up. The large, shiny metal we once called the roof of our house, is now flying like a bird that has just been released from its cage, creating a huge aperture at the top of our tiny house. As I get out of the drenched sponge I sleep on, I realize that throughout the night more rainwater leaked slowly into the house creating a lake that rises past my knees when I step on the floor that can no longer be seen.

“Bibi” yells momma, “Wake up your siblings, we need to leave the house”

“Yes momma”, I yell back

Despite the microscopic water comets that fall from the sky hitting the house and our faces, the little ones are fast asleep. I rub my hands on their arms which look studded because of the tiny droplets all over them to wake them up, but only Tula and Rob's eyes open, revealing their rich dark irises that only show their true colors when sun rays hit them. I carry the youngest one on my back and carefully tiptoe to the kitchen where momma is. My heart starts beating faster every second and my stomach growls louder as I see the water slowly rising up my siblings' waists, almost as if my body knows that we might not make it out alive this time.

After saying goodbye to the only picture we have of daddy, the one where he is wearing an olive green military suit and a smile that shines brighter than the sun, we open the old metal door which produces creaking sounds in protest. Things don't look good outside, the water comets that fall from the fat angry clouds that cover the once bright blue sky, fall at a faster rate, blurring my vision and feeding the lake we walk on. Our neighbors' roofs, tree branches that were separated from their moms, and multicolored debris travel through the air like birds, twisting and turning every time the evil whistling wind tells them to. I try to be optimistic and think that this will be like the last times, meaning that we'll be back home in a couple of weeks after the storm dissolves, but the loud thunder that almost leaves me deaf as well as the water current that makes me lose my footing every few minutes tell me otherwise.

My eyes meet momma's dusky glowy eyes, her loose ebony skin tells you that she has been everywhere and seen everything even though she is only 40. That's what raising 4 kids on your own does to you. Furthermore, her rough hands with chipped vermilion nail polish on her yellowish nails, hold in them the story of every single crop she has yanked off of the muddy soil just to feed us. Her strength always amuses me because when you look at her as an outsider you see a scrawny lady with hollow eye sockets; not a fighter, which is exactly what she is. The little half smile she gives me comforts me for a split second. Everything will be okay.

There's a neon orange object floating on the water in the distance, as it comes closer we realize that it's a boat, a rescue boat and this shaves off a part of the heavy weight on our chests. Momma and I are the first ones to yell “HELP HELP HELP!!!” Then Rob and Tula join our cry for help. Our tired mahogany arms wave in above our heads when our vocal chords give up on us, we do everything humanly possible to try to get the orange savior's attention. As the floating savior gets closer to us, I perceive that people were sardined into the boat leaving almost no space for us. My heart sinks to the bottom of the lake.

“Go with your siblings Bibi, I'll find a way of meeting you at the school” says momma with wet crimson eyes which make mine humid as well.

“I can't leave you alone momma ” I object, no longer being able to keep the little puddle on my eyes from falling apart. That's when she wipes her tears and wraps the baby which she was holding on my back, using his favorite brightly coloured ‘capulana’ to secure him onto me. Although I want to protest, I know that it will be better if I go with the little ones to make sure that they are safe, so I ignore the heat in my cheeks and the pain in my throat and nod reluctantly. She wraps her skinny arms around me. Her cozy embrace takes me back to my earlier childhood, when these cyclones weren't a monthly thing, when daddy was here giving me life lessons every time he could, and when I had school friends who I played with everyday after school. Those moments are all gone now, and so is the hug. The little ones are oblivious to the fact that the next boat will probably come here in a couple of days if not a week, for a second I envy them because they live in a little happy bubble that shields them from the darkness around them. Knowing that this might be the last time I see momma in a while, I carry Rob, Tula and the baby onto the boat then get in myself, never taking my glance off of momma.

“Bye momma” the little ones say in unison with their high pitched pure voices.

Momma waves back and blows kisses at them.

On the boat, millions of people are piled into it like pieces of debris at the landfill, they have different shapes, sizes and shades of the earth as well as dissimilar stories that somehow brought them to this floating fluorescent savior, leaving it almost falling apart due to the massive weight it holds. The fetidness of the people on this boat including us tells you that frothy soap bubbles are a luxury around here. Despite the tragedy that follows the citizens of Bobole, a district which has an evil spell of recurring cyclones cast upon it, people mumble traditional chants and prayers to thank god for keeping them alive up until this point. This almost makes me forget the sound of little waves created by the wind, they climb up to a peak before crashing producing a roar. I look back, and momma's gaunt figure is gone, leaving only a vast body of dirty water for me to look at. Another piece of my heart was ripped away.

Suddenly, a high pitched squeal, which turns out to be the youngest little one's cry, attacks my ears. After unwrapping him from my back and holding him in my hands which are ice cold compared to his burning hot forehead, I perceive how hungry he actually is, however, there isn't much I can do about it given that I'm just a sixteen year old with absolutely no golden milk in my breasts. His cries subdue slowly as I move his body in a swinging motion while singing his favorite lullaby, the one momma used to sing for him every time he got upset. A kind lady looks at me with sympathetic eyes, gives me the most genuine smile i've seen in days and says:

“We're getting to the shelter soon, don't worry”

I smile back and kiss the baby's warm forehead gently.

Once at the shelter, multiple flashbacks run through my head reminding me of the times we stayed here during the other tropical storms as well as the lessons I used to have here as a child. The walls were still the same dirty flaxen color with tiny footsteps all over them from the games

we used to play in class when the teacher was absent; the classroom still had an earthy scent and cold amber tiles that contrasted with the jade green chalk board. Multiple kids and their mothers were seated on these tiles with cadaverous faces and exhaustion all over their bodies while waiting for the next meal which might come in either a few hours or a few days. Tula's head rests on my lap and Rob is holding the baby, that's when I realize that my childhood is long gone and that I have to take care of these kids as if they were my own. Another chunk of my heart is ripped away.

Days later, golden sun rays peek through the window enthusiastically, the clouds are now ceramic white and fluffy like cotton candy and the sky is a beautiful cyan shade; the rain has stopped. The scent of warm fresh bread floats around the classroom making my ravenousness very apparent due to the loud growl that my stomach produces. After making sure that Tula, Rob and the baby have had a taste of the scrumptious bread as well as warm tea, I eat the leftovers, just like momma would.

The kisses that momma blew at the little ones and myself when we got into the boat turned out to be the last ones she would ever blow at anyone again.

