

Becoming an Outsider

First, there is no difference. No one deserves more or less. No color should matter more than the other. Learn history, don't do the same. Early in life is better. Open your school books, but don't forget where you are coming from. Be open-minded.

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"Mom, can you braid my hair, please?"

"You're a grown-up, you have to learn."

Patiently, you sit in front of the mirror and start to figure it out. At church, everyone has perfect hair, so you learn more. Your arms hurt, but you show your mom. She congratulates you, and as a reward, you're going around the island. Mother and daughter time. Remember when you were little, you used to do this with your family. *Cyparis, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon*. Don't forget that it is your heritage, your roots. Congratulations, you know how to take care of your own hair. Now do it with your teeth.

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No more green pieces stuck in your braces. Your mom tells you that you have a perfect smile. You can become Miss Martinique. You refuse, but still smile at everyone. The elders from church come and pinch your cheeks. They are red, even if you wonder if it is possible for a black person. They compliment your beauty while saying, "You know, I've known you since you were little, what a daddy's girl." Their eyes switch to his face, and he smiles as well.

Be baptized young. Embrace Jesus' path since your first breath. Follow him blindly and be content with what you have. In 5th grade, you join the choir because it seems cool. The same year you join the twirling baton team. You wonder which one is cooler. The contest intensifies as your faith decreases. Again, a Sunday you are missing. They wonder where you

are. Your dad yells at you: “You can’t do this, people are asking.” As you cry, you wonder again what is more worthy.

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Shift the focus. Good grades, good school, good girl. Smile proudly and accumulate awards. You like high school; you have found yourself. In history, you learn about the story of France and its development. Some Spanish used others to exploit lands. Columbus, the colonizer, is in the mouths of all your teachers, even the laziest one. World War II, your people are fighting for the cause of the “big country.” They make the nation proud. Unfortunately, you will continue to know more about their history than your own until you leave.

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Cold, dry Utah is your new home. Make friends, don’t stay alone. Get to know the culture, it is better for your experience, your advisor tells you. Say yes, you understand. So, you get involved in the marching band. You are a color guard. Smile, no one will notice that you have learned the choreography in two weeks. This is fun. You like the girls who are around you. It is hard to do the same hair and makeup as them, but they are nice. The red suits your skin color, and you enjoy it. You want to come back.

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Second year, you are a sophomore. It was hard to leave your friends again, but it is for the best. Again this summer, they asked you how you could live out there and you responded: “It is not as bad as you think, it is not the same as on TV.” They still wonder but hope to see you succeed.

Here you are, working, practicing, and studying. You have nine roommates. They are kind. They even helped you to take out your braids during the first week of school. The apartment is not big. The sink gets full of dishes really fast, but they find solutions. Gossiping

on the couch or dancing to Mariah Carey Christmas songs, and one of your roommates wants alone time with you. “Please never change, you are a sunshine, cheering everyone up with your smile at any time.” You stay there processing while she gives you a hug. You didn’t think of it like this. So, you smile at home, you smile at practice, you smile in class. You smile more in general.

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Cooking in the kitchen, some mustard pork, one of your mom's favorites. You are tired. Your clothes are dirty, and your body is sour. You just came out of a winterguard camp. The sound of the sizzling oil in the pan resonates in the house. But coming out of the Institute dance are two of your roommates with one boy each. They sit on the couch and debate what they want to watch. You focus on your food, *smiling* at the smell of it, until you hear this boy. You understand why *history* was important.

Roku stick in hand, running through the Disney+ catalog, your roommate asks him:

“Have you watched the new Percy Jackson TV show?”

“I started it, but stopped when they made Annabeth Black.”