

STORM

Written by

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Logline:

An African American teacher in a suburb of Dallas fights the district, its leaders, and parents to make her school the new home to a large number of students of color displaced by Hurricane Katrina, while trying to hold on to the storms she has building in her personal life.

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EXT. PINEFORD HIGH SCHOOL - MORNING

A massive two story brick building with a sports complex in the back. The rolling LED marquee outside reads, "Welcome to Pineford High—simply the best and the brightest. September 2, 2005."

INT. NATASHA'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

A large black box theatre that has been converted to a classroom. The walls are filled with posters of famous people from literature and playwrights. Posters of Angela Davis and August Wilson hang above the teacher's desk.

NATASHA MCCRAY (30s), African American, grounded and strong in her presence, thinks while a young NELL CARTER stands to the side as the class of students prepare to watch a performance.

NATASHA

Sam, you ready?

SAMANTHA PETTY (16), Caucasian, makes her way to the front of the class. Sam's style is that of a preppy girl accented with black boots, a Gay-Straight Alliance t-shirt and rainbow jewelry.

SAM

(performing)

I wasn't scared because I told her that I loved her. I was scared because she never said it back. I was scared because I felt like I had given up.

NATASHA

(from the side)

How much did that hurt?

SAM

It was all I wanted to hear. The first girl I ever loved, telling her that I loved her and holding my breath until she said it back... but she didn't.

Sam pauses for a moment, then the class begins to clap.

NATASHA

Really nice.

(to the class)

The assignment was simple.

(MORE)

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Give an example of a love that you gave but didn't receive the response you hoped for. Let's take three minutes to write down a few notes on this performance. Remember to ask yourself-

EVERYONE

Could I see the love?

NATASHA

(smiling)

I love it when you listen.

The students' heads drop as they write intensely in their notebooks.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS, LA - MORNING

Flood waters settle on the streets of New Orleans. A handful of people wade through chest high water full of tree branches and debris, and random pieces of life float in the contaminated water.

A CHILD (5), who is dressed only in a pair of shorts and one shoe, cries and sits alone on top of a car. The sound of LAUGHTER overlaps the cries of the child.

INT. NATASHA'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Natasha writes on the board as the students copy her notes on a drawing labeled, "Plot diagram." Natasha checks her watch.

NATASHA

That's time. Sam, really nice job and don't forget, that was her loss not yours.

Sam nods.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Let's look at the idea of a plot diagram.

RUTH SANDERS (16), Asian American and an overachiever who enjoys being right and learning when she's wrong, raises her hand. Natasha points at her.

RUTH

I wanted to do it.

NATASHA  
 (fun challenge)  
 You're not ready for this.

EVERYONE  
 Challenge! Challenge!

Natasha offers Ruth the dry erase marker. Ruth comes to the front of the room as Natasha goes back and sits in the desk Ruth was in.

RUTH  
 First, the exposition.  
 (writing)  
 The who, what, when, where and why  
 of the story.  
 (to the class)  
 Who- Sam and the girl-

NATASHA  
 But...what if we switch this up.  
 What if this story is of Hurricane  
 Katrina?

The whole class turns to look at Natasha.

NATASHA (CONT'D)  
 You are in an advanced literature  
 and theatre class. Let's work it  
 out together.

Ruth turns back to the board and begins to write.

EXT. NEW ORLEANS, LA - MORNING

An empty school bus drives down a street. The water covers its wheels. MS. PAT (60s), an African American, short, round woman wearing a blue city bus driver's uniform, brings the bus to a stop. A small group of kids stand in front of the bus.

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

Ms. Pat opens the doors of the bus. Water rushes onto the steps.

MS. PAT  
 You kids got somewhere to go?

KID  
 No, ma'am.

MS. PAT

Come on in. The city got us using school buses to find lost kids. We headed to Dallas, TX.

KID

How is our momma gonna find us?

MS. PAT

Trust me, honey. You're gonna be just fine. You safe with Ms. Pat.

The kids get on the bus as Ms. Pat pulls away.

INT. NATASHA'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Ruth stands next to Natasha at the front of the room. Ruth writes as Natasha speaks.

NATASHA

So, what's the climax?

DEVIN MILLER (16), a Caucasian, well-built boy wearing a football jersey, raises his hand.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Talk to me, Devin.

DEVIN

The hurricane hit.

SAM

Or the levees broke.

NATASHA

Two good points but if the climax is the highest emotional point, which one of the two wins?

DEVIN

It'd be the levees breaking Ms. Mc.

NATASHA

Why?

RUTH

Because the levees broke, the flooding happened and then...

Ruth catches herself. A moment of silence fills the room.

INT. BUS - MORNING

Ms. Pat turns the corner, looking in both directions. She sees two boys waving their hands, sitting on a tree branch. Ms. Pat drives the bus under the boys as they JUMP off the branch onto the top of the bus.

Ms. Pat parks for a moment and opens the roof emergency exit assisting DARIUS TOMLIN (16), an African American boy, who is confident, tall and skinny. He drops in first. Darius reaches up and assists his little brother JACE TOMLIN (14), who is scared and trembling. Jace avoids eye contact with Ms. Pat, who smiles at him.

MS. PAT  
You two okay?

DARIUS  
Yes, ma'am.

Darius and Jace sit as Ms. Pat gives them each a snack.

DARIUS (CONT'D)  
(to Jace)  
Say thank you.

JACE  
Thank you.

MS. PAT  
You are very welcome.

DARIUS  
Thanks.

Ms. Pat goes back to the front of the bus.

MS. PAT  
Now, I need ya'll help. If you see any kids on the street, ya'll let me know. Only kids.

Ms. Pat looks in the rearview mirror. Everyone slides to the windows and focuses outside as Ms. Pat pulls away.

INT. NATASHA'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

Natasha sits on the table at the front of the room.

NATASHA  
These people lost everything they had.

(MORE)

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Could you imagine going to bed with a house and all of your family and waking up to nothing?

Natasha scans the room for a minute.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Ruth, what would you miss most?

RUTH

My crazy-ass mom.

EVERYONE

Language!

Natasha smiles then points to EVE ST. JOHN (16), who looks like a mean girl but can be nice.

EVE

Can I not answer? It doesn't seem fair to play this game when people really did lose everything.

NATASHA

That's fair, Eve, but as actors, it's called empathy. Write that down. It's how we emotionally connect to the experiences of others.

The students all write this down in their notebooks.

INT. BUS - MORNING

The bus continues to move, turning left out of the neighborhood. The WIND blows, shaking the bus as water hits the windows. The kids continue to look out at the devastation only feet away.

INT. NATASHA'S CLASSROOM - MORNING

ROLAN WASHINGTON (15) is an African American boy with a soft presence and a light stutter, but he definitely excels when he performs.

Natasha nods as Rolan makes his way to the front of the class.

NATASHA

Rolan wrote a little something for us.

DEVIN

Showcase!

SAM

Go, Devin.

The class claps for him, clearly to build up his confidence. Rolan takes a deep breath.

ROLAN

A woman named Katrina just stole a city. Turned it into a show that all the world watched with nowhere to go. Waves of water rippling through a city that used to be so pretty. The sound cries and the smell of death are balanced by the bodies of our neighbors to the south wondering...

Rolan pauses and looks to the room.

ROLAN (CONT'D)

When the hell are we coming to help them?

Everyone claps as Rolan makes his way back to his seat. Students pat him on the back.

NATASHA

Poetry is-

EVERYONE

Truth.

NATASHA

And truth is-

EVERYONE

Always honest.

NATASHA

That's right. The bell is about to ring, so get all of your journals back in the class tote. Good connections today.

ROLAN

Thank you, Ms. Mc.

The kids collect their belongings and toss their notebooks in a tote at the back of the room as the bell rings.



INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Natasha stands in the hallway during passing period with KASEY CRAIG (late 20s), a Caucasian, energetic, beer drinking and deer hunting kind of girl from Florida. Kasey stands next to Natasha as they both sip their coffee.

KASEY

Did you hear?

NATASHA

Hear what?

KASEY

Buses of kids from New Orleans are coming here for reunification.

NATASHA

Really?

KASEY

Yeah, they gotta find some place for those kids to live and go to school.

Kasey walks away, leaving Natasha in a zone at her door.