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## A Rainy Day

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the blue-and-white-colored crowd, I felt the same happiness and excitement that little kids feel on Christmas morning.

Cheerleading brought me an escape, and no matter what was going on outside of the field, with my pom-poms in hand, I always felt relevant. I felt a sense of belonging with my teammates, because of the bond that we shared that other people couldn't quite understand. We knew each others' strengths and weaknesses, and we knew that no matter what ridiculous number of sprints our coaches forced us to do, we were going to pee our pants laughing the whole time they yelled at us. We knew that we were always together, and if people were to judge us, they could judge us all, because it was just jealousy. Being very secretive about my problems and insecurities, I suppose cheerleading served as some sort of perfect, happy, pretty girl mask for me. It was a superficial façade for the girl I really was underneath, and it gave me two temporary hours of happiness once a week under the stadium lights. It made me feel recognized and necessary, something that I have always struggled with and still have a hard time with today.

So, I suppose the obvious lesson I could have learned from having my childhood dream ripped from my fingertips was that life isn't fair. Oh, but obviously this broken, insecure, fake-happy cheerleader must have already known such a thing. No, I didn't learn that life isn't fair. I learned that we all wear masks in this life, to hide who we truly are. Although cheerleading was what I did, it was also too much a part of who I was.

This striking epiphany hit me hard, and still continues to affect me. Not making the team still irks me to this day, 8 months later, because I feel strongly about the fact that I deserve to be on that team more than many people who are luckier than I am. Yet, as time passes, I realize how freedom is acknowledging that mask that we all wear, and possessing the strength to take it off. Maybe I didn't voluntarily take it off, rather it was thrown away, but without it, I can clearly see the world, and they can see me. Being the insecure girl without cheerleading has taught me how to



**A RAINY DAY** TAMANEECA SMITH

be myself, an individual, without the safety of the team to fall back on, without 23 other girls who looked and acted just like I did. I cannot say I'm not still bitter about the situation in general, but at least I know I have stood strong in the face of adversity, stared it in the eye, with my own two eyes. Maskless.