

FADE IN:

INT. CITY BUILDING - DAY

The lobby of a typical modern city building with a large staircase in the middle. The walls are made of windows, illuminating the room in natural light.

SARAH and MOM descend down the staircase while having a conversation about the accepted students day they just attended.

MOM

So, what did you think of this school?

SARAH

It was fine I guess. I think I need to see the other schools I got into before making a decision.

MOM

That's fair. This school is quite small and specialized so if you're certain you want to go into this field, it's a good choice. But if you want more options, it might be better to go to a bigger school

SARAH

Yeah, that might be a good idea.
(in her head, but spoken aloud for audience)
Besides, this school's ranked the lowest anyway. If I go to a different one, I'll be less of a disappointment.

MOM

Also..I would not mind never having to make this drive again. Moving you in here would be a pain.

SARAH

(laughs) Too true.

(in her head)

Mom would hate moving me in BU then. Good thing I didn't get in. Glad I don't have to worry about what others would think of me if

SARAH suddenly stops at the bottom of the staircase

MOM
You alright?

SARAH
(after a pause). This school isn't a bad
school. It's a fine school

MOM
Yes it is.

SARAH
The people who go here aren't dumb or less
than the people at my high school and yet..I
know that some of them would look down on me
everyone here.

MOM
Really. Why?

SARAH
Why? You really need to ask that? This isn't
even a top 100 school. It's a tiny liberal
arts school and

MOM
Why does that matter?

SARAH
I .. don't know. College choice is supposed
to determine if you'll have a good career.
But the only good schools I hear about are
BU level and up. Everything else is
considered failure.

MOM
Why?

SARAH
Because smart people get into better schools
and dumb people like me get into

MOM
Sarah, stop.

SARAH

But the people here aren't dumb. And Mary isn't dumb, despite what the school has told her. So why would people look down on people that go here? They're not better people just because they got into a better school. And people from all colleges get jobs, sure getting into Harvard opens many doors for you but you'll still find a job no matter where you go to college.

MOM

Well yes. We both knew all of this already. Aside from the part about you being dumb, I've agreed with everything you've said before this, so why are you talking about it like its some sort of revelation?

SARAH

I don't know. I guess, maybe a part of me didn't believe it. The part of me that likes to believe that I am a dumb horrible person.

MOM

Now that would make sense. Well maybe that part of you will listen to reason more and accept that you're not dumb.

SARAH

I am such a hypocrite.

MOM

It's okay. That part of you latches on to whatever it can to try and tear you down. Remember this moment as a reason not to listen to that part of you.

SARAH

Okay, that sounds good. Let's head home

Artist's Statement

I chose to write about the moment where it suddenly clicked in my head that the culture of my high school was toxic. I went to a pressure cooker high school and took several high level courses. This put me in groups of people who only cared about grades and what college they went to. My school was highly ranked and we were reminded of this often. While it was often accompanied by a message of “appreciate your privilege in attending this school”, these reminders helped reinforce a subtle message the school gave out “You are all special”. The school and teachers would praise us for simply doing the things they asked. They told us that we were all leaders and that we were very smart, kind and special. As someone who struggled with depression throughout her entire adolescence, I did not take well to these compliments. I did not think that myself or most others were deserving. So I used this, as well as the knowledge that I was less smart than many of my peers in AP and Honors classes, to tear myself down. In doing this, I too became convinced of the mindset that my “smart” peers were slightly superior to me and to others when in reality, most of that specialness came from privilege and buttering up from adults. While my peers were in no way dumb, their success should not be compared to someone with less money and time or connections. It was in this moment that for some reason, I fully realized how stupid it all was. As mentioned in the screenplay, I had talked about all of this before with my mom. I had complained countless times about my peers' attitude towards grades, specifically when they said things like “that's fine for you but I have to do better. Yet some part of me still clung onto that idea. I think the “Best of the Best” reading describes this phenomenon well. My peers and I were trying to make sense of the privilege we had. Our school led us into a mindset that we did deserve our results and were better than others because in the end we worked

hard, and society successfully reproduced the socioeconomic class we were born in. Somehow, through depression and friends who were not told they were smart, I was able to eventually break out of the mindset that I had to do certain things to be successful and that my school was better than others. Even if I didn't fully drink the Kool Aid, I was more stuck in that mindset than I like to admit. Luckily, I understand now why I and others thought the way we did, the error in our ways and I think I am more successful because of that.