

Like A Black Girl

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Educ 254

Abrupt Open:

INT. School - Classroom - Night

A little 6-12th private school in Boston Massachusetts is having an exhibition of every student's schoolwork for the trimester. Students are dressed up and standing by their work under the nauseating florescent lights. Practically everyone is white. White students, white mothers and fathers, white teachers, white siblings weaving through the rows of tables. The number of BIPOC people in the room could be counted on one hand. Anyone who ISN'T white, is silently yet consistently reminded of this fact except for CAMERON who doesn't seem to notice. CAMERON, a freshman, stands by their work in the corner, alone.

Parents make their way to their children's work, then to their children's friend's work, sending CAMERON brief polite yet awkward smiles, as if to apologize for their parents being absent. One parent breaks the cycle. She too, is white.

She is this school's equivalent of a PTA mom, and probably would be if this little hippy school had one. She is dressed head-to-toe in expensive thrifted clothes. RANDOM PARENT is the classic middle-class mom who "does not see color."

RANDOM PARENT

(Awkward, yet overly familiar)

Oh! Cameron! Your band performance was lovely! How are you dear?

CAMERON mentally rolls their eyes, exhausted by this stranger's formalities. They have no clue who this woman is.

CAMERON

(With a BIG smile)

I'm good! How is...

CAMERON knows better than to ask for a name. CAMERON subtly yet desperately reaches for any hint of who the hell this woman is.

RANDOM PARENT

(Far too excited)

-Claire? OH, they're lovely! Already looking at colleges! Such a motivated 7th grader!

RANDOM PARENT gestures over to her student who is clinging to her side rather than standing by their project. It is clear the teachers are too scared of the woman to make a fuss about it.

RANDOM PARENT

So... dear... where are your parents? I'm sure you're so disappointed-

This isn't CAMERON'S first exhibition, much less CAMERON's first exhibition alone. They are comfortable with it, but they don't seem to understand why everyone else is not.

CAMERON

(interrupting RANDOM PARENT, as if rehearsed)

-they have work.

RANDOM PARENT

Well, I'm sure they could've taken the night-

RANDOM PARENT trails off, clearly nervous under CAMERON'S silent, blank stare. She coughs awkwardly, clearly suddenly uncomfortable. The woman shifts her weight slightly, and

suddenly straightens herself to then dawn an unwarranted motherly smile.

RANDOM PARENT

... well ... I'd love to see what you've worked on! I mean *someone* has to read it! HAHA!

RANDOM PARENT continues, clearly unaware that her attempt to break the ice has only made the air frosty.

She reaches for the essay nearest to her hand titled "Intersectional feminism; the role of BIPOC women in mainstream feminism."

The woman freezes, looks up at the student who is still staring, and quickly returns to the paper.

RANDOM PARENT

(Skeptical and condescending)

Wow sweetie ... this is a ... umm ... big topic!

RANDOM PARENT flips through the paper, clearly only skimming. She chuckles to herself as she continues.

CAMERON

(Confidence dwindling)

Is everything alright?

RANDOM PARENT

Oh! Of course! I'm just impressed! This is ... wow ... and you're so well spoken!

CAMERON freezes. They've heard this before, however this time felt different. Usually this "compliment" would make them puff

their little chest. The ultimate testament of acceptance: the approval of a white woman. But her comment sat with them differently this time. They felt small. CAMERON musters a hesitant "thank you."

RANDOM PARENT waves down the head of school, JOE, who happens to be lingering nearby, proudly boasting to any parents who'd give him the time of day. He, of course, is a white man.

RANDOM PARENT

Joe! Your students are just lovely! Cameron is just so well spoken for a ...

RANDOM PARENT catches herself.

RANDOM PARENT (cont.)

(Regaining momentum)

Young lady... Joe, you must be so proud!

Without looking at CAMERON, JOE proudly agrees, as if claiming credit for CAMERON'S essay. CAMERON despises JOE. He always makes them feel small.

RANDOM PARENT and JOE continue to talk, clearly dancing around something that neither of them would ever admit. CAMERON feels it but can't tell what it is.

JOE

Oh yes! Cameron is so talented! They're such a great role model for younger students.

CAMERON scoffs and JOE throws a swift side-glare. Just earlier that day he made them cry after not-so-subtly questioning their intelligence for struggling in his math class.

JOE

They're so involved too! And...

AUDIO becomes muddled as the lights grow obnoxiously more florescent. CAMERON is still frozen. The camera slowly zooms on their face as the muddled audio grows louder.

Remaining voice speed up until they practically overlap

RANDOM PARENT

They're so smart for a-

JOE

So lucky for a-

RANDOM PARENT

A good example of a-

BOTH JOE AND RANDOM PARENT

See, it doesn't matter that they're a-

Chaos stops, Abrupt black screen

CAMERON

Black girl

Cameron Smith

Artist Statement

Education In Film

The high school moment that I chose to write about highlights my first time realizing I was being microaggressed. Throughout my time at the school, there was an air of color blindness that I participated in because I simply knew no better. From grades 6 through 9 I knew the surface level facts: they are white, I am not; they are middle class, I am not. But we never spoke about it. No one was blatantly racist, so I assumed there was nothing to talk about. But throughout those 3 years there were little things that never sat quite right with me that I always brushed off because there was no “tangible” issue.

“You are so well spoken” is a phrase I heard far too often throughout my 7 years at this school. It was always an awkward, condescending, backhanded statement that I am ashamed to admit that I believed was a compliment. I had worked so hard to walk their walk and talk their talk, that hearing those 5 words made it all feel worth it. It was usually said by a friend’s mom or a beloved teacher, so I never felt any malintent. The scene that I wrote about takes place at a time when I actively minimized my identity in order to assimilate into this space. The character Joe is based off on my head of school who used me as a token student, but I saw this as acceptance. In his eyes I was not academically advanced for him to like me, but involved and well-liked enough for him to need me. He had put me on admissions panels and flaunt my achievements in open houses to show off “the black girl who *can* do it,” while consistently reminding me that I was less than my peers. In his interaction with the Random Parent character, it was the first time I could see the avoidant dance they were doing; dancing around words they knew they could not say, at least not in front of me. It felt like I was only their proof that Black students could excel just like other students in the school.