

## LOOK WITHIN

The glorious building I had seen in photographs multiple times now stood in front of me. I had stopped in the middle of the sidewalk to admire its beauty. I could feel the crowd of people pushing to get around me, the loud chatter of college students, discussing their plans for the night and complaining about the loads of work they had to do. The strong smell of espresso lingering in the air from the Starbucks down the block filled my lungs along with the odor coming from the woman smoking across from me. I didn't mind though; I was still trying to process the fact that I was standing in front of one of the most amazing libraries in the middle of my dream university.

"Come on, we need to get going!" I looked over my shoulder at my good friend who I had dragged to this open house. I rushed behind her to catch up with the rest of our group. Our tour guide was explaining the importance of The Park, and even though it was open to the public, it served as the center for the university.

I looked around at the sea of college students claiming their territories around the park, with their books wide open, coffee in their hands, chatting with groups of friends or simply just listening to their music. I took it all in and *click*, the camera inside my head took a picture of the scene in front of me. The feeling of independence and responsibility took over me, imagining myself in the same crowds I saw before me. I felt like I could see the future, and it was all laid out so beautifully. I already knew the classes I would take, the professors I would have, and best of all: the opportunities that would come. It all seemed so realistic. So close.

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I opened my eyes. My mother was holding the phone; my dad was on the other end. He wasn't aware of the trip I had taken. I knew he would have thought it would be pointless to get my hopes up. After all, the tuition fee would be unbearable unless I took out loans, but then they would become sufferable too. And besides the expenses that come with living in an extravagant city, forget it! I would fall into the high-society traps and into the dangers of smoking and drugs. And what was my choice of major again? Oh, why couldn't I go into something medical-related or even teaching? I would obviously have better chances of finding a job.

"I have worked in this city in the lower sector for these high-class people. I know how it is. I am experienced, so listen to me. Stop with your nonsense. You cannot dream big, not when you come from a small family," I listened to the same lecture once again. Father knows best whereas I am just an airhead with my head in the clouds.

I felt the tears in the back of my eyes, and I tried my best to stop them from flooding out. I failed. I think the call ended at one point as I sat up on my bed, facing the mirror. My face looked blotched up with tears, my cheeks and eyes so red. Was I just a daydreamer? Maybe I did dream too high to forget the present tensions, but was that so bad? And were my dreams even possible? In this day and age, getting into a top-notch college isn't so easy. But was it too much to ask for some support in this "nonsense" of mine?

I got up and looked more closely at my face. I felt truly gutted staring at my reflection. Who was I looking at really? I felt like my face did not even belong to me, that I was staring at something else, but it wasn't me. Who was I, anyway? The daughter of Indian immigrants? A high school student with responsibilities? An aspiring journalist? A teenager crying for the future? Those all define me, but who was I really? Maybe I am a daydreamer, but my dreams are

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not nonsense. When my head is in the clouds, I am brainstorming ideas for my next article and writing new pieces. I am not stubborn; I am strong-willed. Yes, I am insecure about everything from my face to my homework to my dreams, but what teenager isn't? And no I am not sure where I'll end up in the next year or so, but does that mean I stop trying?

I have struggled to find my true identity, stuck between this world of mindless possibilities and the world of my immigrant parents. They were never taught to dream big, they were taught to find security. They were not given the opportunity to choose their futures, but where does that place me? I can run around free in this world, become who I want to be. Yet I am in the middle of an empty void where I am neither their perfect Indian daughter, nor the success-driven American. I do not feel close to either culture, but they both define me somehow. I cannot see the future; I do not know what will happen. But I do know I am not a quitter. I may not know how to define myself or how to validate my aspirations, but I want to find out. Looking deep within, I know what I want and for now, that is enough.

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As a high school student with immigrant parents, I have come to realize that my ideals are not going to be the same as those of my parents', especially in terms of my future. I am stuck between two worlds, not sure of where I belong. But looking within me, I know there is so much more to me than the labels placed on my head; I know that one day, I will achieve the aspirations I dream of. And it's definitely not going to be easy, but then again, nothing worth achieving comes without a challenge.

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Look Within