

IN BETWEEN

FADE IN:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

A garbled VOICE that sounds like static drones on as a classroom of STUDENTS whisper and crumple papers. Desk chairs scrape the floor, and Students fidget in their seats.

A female TEACHER leads a discussion. LEAH TATUM, 15, a sensitive hearing-impaired freshman student, naturally pretty and lithe, sits in the front row next to another GIRL STUDENT who takes random notes which she shares with Leah.

Leah looks directly at the Teacher's lips. The Teacher's voice sounds distorted.

TEACHER
(sounding like static)
And capitalism is defined in
several ways. Give me one example?

The Teacher points to a waving STUDENT in the middle of the room. The Student's voice is also distorted.

STUDENT
A market-based economy?

TEACHER
Yes, with a focus on making a
profit, whereas socialism...

Leah tries to follow the conversation, and turns her head to watch each speaker's lips, but the movement from Teacher to Students is too fast. Leah glances at the Girl Student's notes and sees only one meager sentence scrawled down.

INSERT - GIRL STUDENT'S NOTES, which reads:

"Comparing Economic Systems"

BACK TO SCENE

The Teacher passes out papers to the Students and then walks over to Leah.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
(loudly)
Leah, are you getting this?

Leah notices that some of the Students watch her, so she nods with a nonchalant expression. She looks at her blank paper, but the worry in her eyes says that she does not get it.

Leah glances to see movement outside the classroom window. A curious bird frantically pecks on the window and appears to want to get inside. It gives up and flies away.

Leah turns back to her blank white paper with a hopeless stare.

EXT. TATUM'S BACKYARD - DAY

A large majestic oak tree proudly stands in the middle of the Tatum's backyard.

SUPERIMPOSE: "A Few Months Later."

The branches barely sway in the stifling heat of Indian Summer. Sparse but well-tended grass and picket fences reveal a sense of pride in this working class neighborhood.

An old wooden swing that hangs from the tree barely creaks. A well-worn screen door going into the back of the house has been patched over, many times. Bees buzz. Dogs bark.

EXT. STREET SCENE - DAY

A garbage truck moves slowly and clangs noisily down the street.

The noise recedes and the front of the Tatum's bungalow comes into view. It is a small but attractive home, with its tidy, inviting porch, but it needs paint.

INT. TATUM'S HOME - LEAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

A small room displays art canvases lined across a wall and some propped on a dresser. A few opened packing boxes sit piled in one corner of the room.

Leah, now 16, sits in the window seat of her cramped, messy room, drawing on an artist's pad.

The room is enveloped in complete silence.

The Tatum's dog OBI lies below Leah's feet. Leah is intent on her chore, and she stops to analyze her work every few seconds.

Obi suddenly jumps up and appears to bark, although the room is silent. Leah glances down at Obi, then turns back to her work.

Leah takes her drawing to the mirror above her dresser and holds it up beside her face. The drawing is an amazingly accurate likeness of the very sad girl in the mirror.

The bedroom door opens slightly and a woman's hand enters and flicks the light switch. Leah turns toward the door.

LEAH (MOS)
(in subtitles)
Come in.

JANET TATUM, Leah's mother, 36, attractive but rather tired-looking, pokes her head in the door.

JANET (MOS)
(in subtitles)
Come help me in the kitchen?

LEAH (MOS)
(in subtitles)
Sure. Be right there.

Leah checks her reflection in the mirror again and forces a smile. She picks up her hearing processor from the dresser, puts it on and walks out of the room. The sounds of the Tatum household now become apparent.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

The Tatum's L-shaped kitchen is leftover from the 1960s, with large wooden cabinets and Formica countertops. The atmosphere is warm and cozy.

Leah sets the table while Janet prepares dinner. Pots and pans clatter and dishes and utensils scrape. Leah turns to look at Janet when she talks so she can read Janet's lips.

JANET
Can you fill the water glasses?

They both turn to a knock at the door. Obi excitedly wags his tail.

In walks Janet's friend, MARY, 40s, with her off-the-wall disposition. Leah fills water glasses.

Mary babbles excitedly.

MARY
... A guy rear-ends me, and the officer finally shows up and takes this guy off to jail.

Leah watches Mary with a confused look.

MARY (CONT'D)
 Wanted by the police! Just my
 luck, no insurance. Nada!

Janet looks at Mary with sympathy and turns to Leah to explain. Leah watches Janet's lips.

JANET
 Mary was in a wreck and the man
 that hit her has no insurance --
 and he's wanted by the police!

Mary looks apologetic as she realizes Leah couldn't follow her story.

MARY
 Oh, sorry.

Leah turns to Mary.

LEAH
 (affected speech)
 I'm so sorry. Glad you're okay.

Mary looks straight at Leah with her head cocked.

MARY
 Well, that remains to be seen, but
 thanks. Hey... you're starting
 your new school tomorrow. Excited?

Leah shakes her head with a slight frown. Mary looks sympathetic.

MARY (CONT'D)
 Well then... Good luck!

Janet pulls bowls out of the cabinet and sets them on the counter.

JANET
 Sophomore -- I can't believe it.

Mary gives a slight shake of her head as if in agreement, then she gives her attention to the simmering soup.

MARY
 Man... this smells heavenly. I'm
 so thankful you moved here. You're
 going to love West Woods.

INT/EXT. CAR - DAY - TRAVELING

The traffic is light with a few buses and cars that slowly cruise the streets of the town of West Woods. A few JOGGERS and DOG WALKERS are also out to enjoy this bright sunny day.

Janet, dressed in her nurse's aid scrubs, drives Leah to school. Leah is fresh-faced and wears a crisply laundered yellow shirt.

Janet hands Leah a note and turns her face slightly toward her.

JANET

Here's where I'll be working this afternoon... after my meeting with your principal.

LEAH

I want to die...

Leah leans her face against the window pane of the car door. Janet sighs as she recognizes the look of dread on Leah's face, and she appears concerned.

They reach the school, and Leah gives Janet a nervous smile.

EXT. WEST WOODS HIGH - STREET SCENE - DAY

The high school is a large brick building situated near the middle of town. Cars form a queue to drop off STUDENTS who move toward the building. Some Students are in a hurry, but others hang back. Leah hops out.

LEAH

Thanks, Mom.

INT. CAR - DAY

Janet waves and begins to pull away but notices Leah's lunch bag on the seat.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Janet rolls down the window and flags down a young MALE STUDENT.

JANET

Hey, excuse me, my daughter left her lunch.

(MORE)

JANET (CONT'D)
 Could you run give this to her,
 please? Yellow shirt. Thanks.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

The Male Student takes the bag from Janet.

MALE STUDENT
 Sure, no prob...

As Janet drives away, the Male Student eagerly runs up to Leah, and she turns with a surprised look. He smiles and hands her the bag.

MALE STUDENT (CONT'D)
 You left your lunch...

LEAH
 (embarrassed)
 Oh, thanks.

The Male Student has a quizzical look on his face. Leah turns away from him.

MALE STUDENT
 Hey... do I know you?

Leah, obviously not hearing him, walks away. The Male Student, confused, holds his hands out.

INT. WEST WOODS HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY

The first day of school chaos begins. The halls are overrun with excited chattering STUDENTS happy to see their friends. Lockers bang shut. TEACHERS try their best to monitor the commotion. Civility is not to be found, not today.

Uplifting music portrays the mood of the scene as Leah navigates the hallways. Some Students glance her way, others ignore her. An excited young BOY STUDENT nearly runs into her.

LEAH (V.O.)
 They don't know I can't hear...
 yet... I hope it's better than my
 last school.

A cluster of GIRLS gossip in a circle. One Girl breaks out singing. The others Girls follow her lead. They giggle and search the hallway for boys. A couple of JOCKS at their lockers pretend they don't notice the looks.

LEAH (V.O.)
 I wish I could be invisible -- No,
 I can do this, it's me here. Leah.

The group of Girls breaks up and they go their separate ways as the bell rings.

LEAH (V.O.)
 I've learned there are two types of
 people... those who listen and
 those who don't.

Leah sheepishly walks into a classroom and keeps her head down. She tries not to look at any of the other STUDENTS and takes a seat in the front row.

LEAH (V.O.)
 And I don't mean listen with your
 ears... I mean listen with your
 soul.

INT. WEST WOODS HIGH - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

In a windowless room at a long polished wooden table sits MS. KERCHER, 30s, Case Manager, business-like with glasses, who flips through stacks of papers.

MS. KERCHER
 We're here to discuss Leah's
 educational plan for the school
 year.

PRINCIPAL BRUCE, 50s, somewhat apathetic leader of the school biding his time for a comfortable retirement, sits back in his chair to listen. Janet Tatum sits across the table and is stony-faced, ready to plead her case.

MS. KERCHER (CONT'D)
 I see that Leah received
 significant accommodations in her
 prior school program.

JANET
 Well, a few, but the main one Leah
 needs is the one that her old
 school system couldn't provide...

Ms. Kercher glances over at Principal Bruce who suddenly sits up in his chair and straightens his tie.

JANET (CONT'D)

Which is real-time captioning with a transcriber in each of her classes.

Principal Bruce leans forward, elbows on the table with his hands clasped. He suddenly gets a serious expression on his face like he has bad news.

PRINCIPAL BRUCE

Ms. Tatum, what you are asking for is very costly, and at the present, we don't have funds for this type of intervention.

JANET

I believe my daughter should have the same opportunity to learn as other students have. She has an above average I. Q...

Principal Bruce leans forward with a patronizing expression.

PRINCIPAL BRUCE

Well... her tests don't show that she would be able to keep up, even with a transcriber.

Ms. Kercher locates a certain paper and reads from it.

MS. KERCHER

Her last Reading Comprehension grade was in the eighty to eighty-five percent range, above average.

Ms. Kercher waits for a response. Principal Bruce glances at the paper, closes his eyes, sits back and crosses his arms. Janet refuses to let his actions annoy her and keeps her composure.

JANET

Other deaf students in this school district have an interpreter in every class, but Leah doesn't use sign language.

MS. KERCHER

As Leah's case manager, it's my job to find the best possible plan for her success, costly or not.

Ms. Kercher slowly turns to Principal Bruce who is now drumming his fingers on the table. Principal Bruce levels his look at Janet.

PRINCIPAL BRUCE

I'll put it before the board, but Leah must improve her grades. If not, the deaf school is the next step.

Janet stares at Principal Bruce in disbelief. But she shows determination to get what Leah needs.

JANET

We'll see how her grades are once she receives the accommodations she needs.

Principal Bruce checks his watch, gives a slight nod and leaves the room. Ms. Kercher turns to Janet with a sympathetic gaze.

MS. KERCHER

I want you to know I'm committed to helping Leah. But at this point I can't guarantee the board's decision.

JANET

I appreciate your help. I feel this is the best plan... maybe the only plan.

Janet looks helpless as Ms. Kercher nods and picks up a paper to show Janet some more test results.

MS. KERCHER

Leah's social and behavioral testing shows that she lags in this area. Does she have hobbies?

JANET

She stays busy with her art, but she's lost interest in dance...

MS. KERCHER

She could join a school club? These sometimes help in academic areas as well as providing social benefits.

Janet looks at the paper and nods.

JANET

I'll talk to her.

INT. TATUM HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Janet talks on the telephone. She holds the phone on her shoulder as she stirs the dish she's preparing.

JANET
I'm only asking for the
transcription service to put her on
even par...

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Leah walks down the hallway. Janet's face is framed in a mirror and Leah studies her lips.

JANET (CONT'D)
The principal's a wimp. He said if
Leah can't improve her grades, she
has to go to the deaf school!

Leah freezes for a second and makes a troubled face. She turns and runs to her room and slams the door.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Janet turns sharply as she hears the door slam and looks concerned.

MARY (V.O.)
Push for this. That's why you
moved here! And the deaf school is
where?

JANET
All the way over in Claremont. An
hour away. But all the kids use
sign language there. Hey, Mary,
sorry, I've gotta go.

Janet hangs up the phone and moves toward Leah's room.

INT. LEAH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Janet finds Leah face down on her bed. Janet touches her shoulder and Leah turns with tears streaming down her face.

JANET (CONT'D)
I was going to tell you about the
meeting --

LEAH
Why do I have to be different!
They don't know what it's like.
(MORE)

LEAH (CONT'D)

I don't fit in at this school and I don't fit in with the signers...

JANET

You need help with your classes, and you're going to get it. You're smart. You'll amaze everyone!

Leah looks doubtful but makes an effort to cheer up for Janet's sake. She picks up a tissue and blows her nose and slowly makes an effort to sit up.

LEAH

Thanks. I may need some help with an assignment tonight.

Janet does a quick assessment of Leah's room. There are clothes scattered all over the floor, dirty dishes on the tables and rumpled coverings on the bed. She smiles.

JANET

You've got it! But your room's a wreck. You can study better if it's not so messy. I'll help.

Leah hops up and throws her dirty clothes in a laundry basket. Janet gathers dishes. Leah suddenly stops and turns to Janet.

LEAH

I almost forgot -- I'm thinking about trying out for the dance team at school.

JANET

Well, you're certainly a wonderful dancer, but have you thought about an art club?

LEAH

Art is something I'll always love, but -- it's just that I want to meet people.

JANET

Well then, let's dance over here and start cleaning up!

INT. WEST WOODS HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY

Leah sits on the front row of the classroom along with other STUDENTS.

MS. MENCHIE, a sour but seasoned English teacher, 40s, passes out a copy of an article the Students will use for class work. Ms. Menchie takes a long hard look at Leah.

INSERT - THE ARTICLE, which reads:

"Fact or Fallacy: Deaf people are
Dumb?"

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

Leah stares down at the article and then looks back up at Ms. Menchie. Other STUDENTS steal glances at Leah, and she turns red. Leah tries to keep her composure, but she looks like she will burst into tears.

Ms. Menchie faces the classroom and avoids looking at Leah.

MS. MENCHIE

Okay now... your assignment is to read the article and make a list of fallacies and facts presented. You have 30 minutes to work.

A couple of the Students sitting close to Leah look at her and shake their head incredulously. A couple of GIRLS giggle in the back corner of the room.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

MS. MENCHIE (CONT'D)

Let's begin our discussion. What is the first fact presented in the article?

Hands are raised as Ms. Menchie looks out over her classroom. Leah looks down at her desk and tries not to show her feelings. She peers at the notes taken by the Student next to her.

LEAH (V.O.)

I know what you're thinking -- this would never happen -- But it did. And she got away with it! I wanted to shrink until I was invisible...

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - LATER

The bell rings. Leah is so flustered from the class that she spills her books on the floor. She bends over to pick them up. HEIDI, 16, a petite girl with a magnetic personality and a trendy taste for fashion, walks over to help Leah.

Heidi looks at Leah squarely in the face.

HEIDI

You're Leah? I'm Heidi. Glad to meet you!

Heidi gives Leah a genuine smile. Leah warily smiles back as she takes the books from Heidi.

LEAH

Thanks. Sorry, I'm a klutz.

HEIDI

Hey. Rough class today. See ya later.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Case Manager Ms. Kercher, Principal Bruce, Janet Tatum and SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN, 50s, a business executive type, sit at the long wooden table. All eyes are on Janet.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

Ms. Tatum, tell me exactly why this real-time transcription is so important to Leah?

Janet looks directly at the School Board Chairman and, although nervous, evenly replies.

JANET

Leah's deaf. She had surgery for a cochlear implant when she was three. The implant gives her sounds, but it's far from perfect.

The School Board Chairman nods as if he understands. He slides on a pair of reading glasses and flips through a file.

JANET (CONT'D)

Her speech processor sends sounds to a transmitter... but word discrimination is hard for her... she also needs to lip read.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

So Leah reads lips and has a cochlear implant. Isn't that enough?

JANET

No, it's not...

Janet looks pleadingly at Ms. Kercher.

MS. KERCHER

With classroom dynamics the way they are, it's impossible for Leah to follow what's being said.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

So a transcriber would be typing notes so Leah could read them on a computer?

JANET

Yes, in real-time. The transcriber types what is said orally in class.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

This would be tremendously expensive for our school system...

Janet glances briefly at Ms. Kercher.

MS. KERCHER

If you consider the training expense for both, the cost would be much less than for a sign language interpreter.

Principal Bruce looks like he needs to leave and glances at his watch.

JANET

Leah has unique talents. It's hard to explain, but she's very visual and intuitive...

An ASSISTANT walks in the room and hands a message to Principal Bruce.

SCHOOL BOARD CHAIRMAN

(dismissive)

Yes, all students are special in their own way. I'll get with the Board and let Ms. Kercher know our decision.

EXT. TATUM'S BACKYARD - DAY

Janet walks into the backyard with Obi and looks up high into the upper branches of the oak tree. She waves a brightly colored scarf and plays keep-away with Obi, trying to get Leah's attention.

UP IN THE TREE

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