Smear The Queer

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

WAYNE OVERBAY (12) - icy blue eyes, tubby, Pac-Man shirt, ill temper etched in his freckled face - stands in front of a swing set, an American football in his grip.

> WAYNE (to friends OFFSCREEN) Hey, assholes...Let's play Smear The Queer.

A GRASSY FIELD IN THE PARK - MOMENTS LATER

Like a slow-motion highlight, DECKER (12) - feathered hair parted in the middle - runs knees-to-chest across the expansive green lot, a football lodged in his armpit.

From behind, CHANCE (12) - mohawk, Sex Pistols tank top launches, jams a shoulder into Decker's kidney. Decker grimaces and stumbles, Chance clamped to his waist.

LINDER (12) - blonde, surfer tan - and SCOTTY (12) - shaggy locks, cropped Chargers football jersey - emerge behind Chance and pile on mercilessly as Decker is dragged to the ground.

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (IDLING) - DAY

Those same icy blue eyes - now slightly weathered - stare forward trancelike; those same freckles now cluster the markedly feminine face of NORA NEWLIGHT (49). She sits behind the wheel at ten-and-two and recalls--

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

FLASHBACK - SERIES OF SHOTS - THE SMEAR THE QUEER GAME

A football sails end-over-end through the air. A criss-cross of hands reach up. They jostle for the pigskin--

Chance rushes with the ball, jukes left to avoid Scotty, but Decker is there to rag doll tackle him--

Linder runs the ball, leapfrogs a tackle attempt by Decker but is walloped by Scotty before his feet hit the ground--

Scotty hauls the ball but is clothesline-tackled by Wayne--

Wayne stands over Scotty, cackles menacingly.

2.

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (IDLING) - DAY

Nora shakes the reverie, eyes drawn past the windshield to--

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

A football - ten feet in front of the sedan's grill - skirts the faded, cracked roadway.

A spry BOY (12) approaches, scoops the ball, spirals it playfully from hand to hand; inquisitive eyes on Nora.

Nora's steely glare fixes on the Boy.

The Boy finally dismisses Nora, punts the ball back up a driveway, bounds toward it and away from the street.

Nora refocuses, hits the gas, rolls past outmoded tract homes shaded by magnolia trees.

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU UNIT - MARLEY'S ROOM - DAY

Rhythmic beeps and suctions from medical equipment.

MARLEY (9) - tow-colored, close-cropped hair contrasting with black and purple bruises on her swollen face - lies unconscious in bed, a breathing tube in her mouth.

SAVIT (45) - Asian Indian, business casual - sits bedside. His depleted eyes sink toward his hand and lock on a--

CELLPHONE SCREEN

A series of unanswered texts to Nora - IN ICU WITH MARLEY. DAY 3 NO CHANGE. LEFT YOU MSG. ? ???

SAVIT

His jaw tenses.

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (MOVING) - DAY

A neglected cellphone shifts on the vinyl bench front seat.

NORA

Her brow furrows as the car drifts past cookie-cutter neighborhood housing. Her eyes narrow as she recalls--

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

FLASHBACK. Wayne and "the boys" (Chance, Linder, Decker, Scotty) have gathered post-scrum in the grass lot.

Metal music blares from a boombox next to Chance. Wayne dawdles a football in his lap. Decker sprawls on the grass, rubs his kidney; half-moaning, half-chuckling.

> WAYNE (to Decker) Pussy.

The boys snicker. Wayne hocks up a glob of phlegm, spits it for distance. His gaze settles on--

AARON RIGBY (10) a dainty-framed boy near an edge of the lot that borders a street. He sports a New Wave 'do, tennis shorts barely past his groin, knee-high tube socks.

Aaron kneels next to a Huffy girls' bike - complete with banana seat and sissy bar. He fixes a dislodged gear chain.

> WAYNE(CONT'D) Guys, check it out. Aaron Rigby. (limp wrist gesture, mocking tone) Hey, Aaaaron!...

Aaron pays no mind.

WAYNE (CONT'D) Whatsamatter, faggot? 'Got sperm in your ears?

Aaron ignores Wayne, continues to tinker with the chain.

The boys hang on Wayne's reaction.

Wayne leers stone-eyed at Aaron.

BACK TO:

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (MOVING) - DAY

Flashes of the mundane neighborhood reflect off the windshield but are lost on Nora's distant gaze as she remembers--

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

FLASHBACK. Wayne and the boys are fanned out in front of Aaron and his bike. Aaron's eyes pan their faces.

Wayne twirls the football on one finger.

WAYNE Guess what, homo - Smear The Queer. You're the queer.

He flings the ball. It bounces off the rear tire and wobbles at Aaron's feet. Aaron tinkers, unperturbed.

AARON Thanks, Wayne, but no, thanks.

WAYNE I'm not asking, gay boy. Pick it up and run.

Aaron gauges Wayne's threatening tone and scowl. His eyes shift toward glowers from the boys, then back to Wayne. Cautiously relenting, Aaron scoops the ball. A pause, then he darts to his right, determined to outrun the group.

Wayne snags Aaron by a stretch of his shirt, whirls him in a circle, bear grips and slams him to the ground. Aaron whimpers. The ball plops in front of him. Belly laughs from the boys. Aaron rolls to his side, clutches his ribcage.

WAYNE (CONT'D) (towering over Aaron) Pick it up again.

Aaron winces.

WAYNE (CONT'D) Do it, faq.

All eyes on Aaron. We fuckin' dare you.

Aaron rises to his knees, clasps the ball with both hands, holds it in front of his chest. A tense pause. Wayne glares, ready to bring the hurt.

Just as Aaron shifts his body to run, he instead cranks his arm backward, canons the ball right into Wayne's groin. Wayne huffs, doubles over in pain.

The boys look on bug-eyed as Aaron bolts across the street. They soon chuckle and give chase. Chance kicks Aaron's bike over on his way past it.

Wayne rises, snags the ball. Fiery eyes at Aaron.

BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU UNIT - MARLEY'S ROOM - DAY

SAVIT'S CELLPHONE SCREEN

Changes from the text message sequence to a SCREENSAVER WALLPAPER of MARLEY'S RECENT SCHOOL PHOTO; bright smile under side-swept bangs, collared denim shirt under a suit vest.

SAVIT

holds on the photo, taps and swipes the screen en route to--

A RECENT PHOTO - SAVIT, NORA AND MARLEY

in a classroom - Marley stands behind a desk, class projects atop it. Wayne and Nora on either side of her. Smiles.

SAVIT

His eyes drift from the photo as he recalls--

SAVIT (PRE-LAP) Marley came to me. She knew how you'd react.

INT. SAVIT'S REALTOR OFFICE - DAY

FLASHBACK. Savit stands behind a desk. A wall logo reads - DIGNA REALTY GROUP. Sales achievement plaques and photo profiles of current listings adorn the walls.

Nora - disconcerted - stands across from him.

NORA How should I react? Our child is being terrorized at school. Are we not going to do anything?

SAVIT

We talked to the school. You know they're afraid of lawsuits. We talked to this jerk kid's parents. They don't want to hear it.

NORA

(flustered) So when is it going to stop - when Marley's in an emergency room?

SAVIT I understand where you're coming from...what...you went through. (MORE) SAVIT (CONT'D) But we'll figure out the best way to deal with this.

NORA I'm going to deal with this, Savit. I swear to you - if this kid ever does something to Marley and we lose-

A painful pause. The mere thought ruddies Nora.

NORA (CONT'D) I'll deal with this kid myself.

Nora stomps out of the office. Savit eyes her, concerned.

END SAVIT'S FLASHBACK

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - REAR ENTRANCE ALLEY - DAY

NORA'S FLASHBACK. Aaron Rigby flounders his run escape, falls next to a dumpster that abuts the store building. Cackles from Wayne and the boys as they surround Aaron, who curls against the dumpster, looks up with uneasy eyes.

Wayne stalks toward Aaron, hovers at point blank range.

WAYNE Whaddaya got now, dick lover?

He taunts with the football. Aaron cowers. Wayne fires the ball at Aaron's face. Aaron blenches and turns away, but the ball thuds against his raised arm. His head pings against the metal dumpster. A group cackle.

Aaron uncurls, looks up to find Wayne right in his face.

WAYNE I hope you die, faggot. Better yet... (almost nose-to-nose) I hope you kill yourself.

BACK TO:

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (MOVING) - DAY

The vehicle brakes at a stop sign in the endlessly similar neighborhood backdrop. Nora grips the wheel. Her stinging eyes pan toward the empty passenger seat--

INT. CHRYSLER NEWPORT SEDAN (PARKED) - DAY

FLASHBACK. At a curb just outside the chain-link fence entrance gate of an ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; Nora behind the wheel, Marley in the passenger seat. A smattering of GRADE SCHOOL KIDS and PARENTS at drop off.

> NORA You're strong enough to be who you are, and he isn't.

> MARLEY If he's the one with problems, why take it out on me?

NORA We will straighten this out, and he won't bother you anymore.

Marley looks toward the foreboding school entrance, to Nora.

MARLEY (through tears) Why do I have to go? I hate that I always have to be strong. You and Daddy said you would help me.

Nora leans across the bench seat, grips Marley gently by her shoulders, locks on her with resolute eyes.

NORA If Daniel DeFay or anybody else lays another hand on you, it will be the last time.

PRE-LAP - A VENTILATOR ALARM BELCHES

BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU UNIT - MARLEY'S ROOM - DAY

A MALE NURSE taps a computer screen to shut off the alarm. Marley's weary eyes flutter open and find Savit at her bedside.

SAVIT

Hey, Kiddo.

The Male Nurse discards the dislodged breathing tube. Marley tempers her breathing, tries to gain her bearings. Savit strokes the bangs out of her eyes, caresses her hand. SAVIT (CONT'D) Marley...can you tell me what happened?

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - A DILAPIDATED HOUSE - DAY

The Chrysler's trunk pops open. Nora scowls into the dark space at--

DANIEL DEFAY (12) - husky babyface but terrifying to smaller peers. He is curled up in a fetal position. Duct tape covers his quavering mouth, binds his wrists. Tears and sweat mottle his face and long-sleeve sweatshirt.

Daniel looks up at Nora with pleading eyes, mumbles incoherently through the tape barrier.

Nora stares daggers at Daniel. She then glances over her shoulder toward--

A SIGN posted on a chain link fence - PROPERTY CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC. NO ENTRY WITHOUT PERMISSION.

Behind the padlocked entrance is a dilapidated house - a scabrous structure barely held together by rotted plywood boarding, tarp, dust, and luck. Shards of sunlight poke through missing slats in the roof and walls.

Nora glares down at Daniel, not phased by the boy's squeals. She reaches into the trunk, pulls out a set of bolt cutters. Her eyes trace across the blades, then drift as she recalls--

FLASHBACK - TIGHT ON the face of YOUNG ADULT NORA (22) - recently transitioned from Wayne. The icy blue eyes and freckled face are gentler; no youthful angst.

Only a patch of sky and the high leaves of a wispy tree are visible behind her. She stands still, gazes downward.

YOUNG ADULT NORA I just wanted to tell you that...I finally found the courage that you had all along.

Her eye line falls on--

EXT. CEMETERY - AARON RIGBY'S GRAVESITE - DAY

A GRANITE PLAQUE GRAVEMARKER

Embedded in a well-groomed lawn. It reads - AARON LIONEL RIGBY 1972-1982 BELOVED SON

YOUNG ADULT NORA

Her eyes brim with tears as she holds on the plaque.

FLASH CUT TO:

WAYNE - IN THE ALLEY

Looking down at Aaron, from AARON'S POV.

WAYNE I hope you kill yourself.

BACK TO:

YOUNG ADULT NORA - AT THE GRAVESITE

Her guilty face trembles.

BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU UNIT - MARLEY'S ROOM - DAY

Seated at Marley's bedside, surrounded by the Male Nurse and NURSE ASSISTANTS - Savit wears a look of shock and sadness as he fixes on Marley.

Propped upright in her bed, Marley's tired eyes lock on Savit as she relates--

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - BATHROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK

Marley stands before a mirror, rinses her hands in a sink.

DANIEL (OFFSCREEN) Hey, mutant.

Marley freezes. Water cascades over her still hands. She dares to peer into the mirror, sees Daniel towering behind her. She tries to remain calm, does not budge.

> DANIEL (CONT'D) You should be using the boys' bathroom if you wanna be a boy so badly.

Marley does not move or respond.

DANIEL (CONT'D) Is that what you want, you freak? You wanna be a boy? Marley deliberates, then musters courage, turns around slowly, cautiously; no threat in her look or her tone.

MARLEY

I just wanna be me.

Daniel holds his disapproving stare, finally relents. He turns toward the bathroom entrance.

Marley turns to the sink, closes her eyes, exhales in relief.

In an instant, a pair of hands snatches Marley by the back of the collar. Daniel yanks Marley away from the mirror, then growls as he launches her back toward the sink bowl. Her head smashes face-first into the ceramic.

Blood smatters over the sink. The force whips Marley's body backward. The back of her skull thuds hard onto the porcelain tile. Her body goes limp, eyes locked shut.

Daniel's eyebrows raise. The brutal result surprises even him. He bolts toward the bathroom door.

BACK TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU UNIT - MARLEY'S ROOM - DAY

Shame-faced and weary, Marley looks at Savit.

Savit's lip trembles, his eyes well with tears. His comforting hands caress Marley's.

INT. HOSPITAL - ICU CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER - DAY

Savit pushes past the door to Marley's room, his face guiltridden as he lumbers into the corridor.

After gathering his bearings, he pulls his cellphone from his pants pocket, pushes buttons, swipes.

SAVIT'S CELLPHONE SCREEN

shows a MAP that has pinpointed Nora's location.

SAVIT

His brow furls. He considers, swipes.

SAVIT'S CELLPHONE SCREEN

a PHOTO APP - an area for ALBUMS. Savit scrolls past folders, falls upon one in particular - DIGNA CONDEMNED PROPERTIES.

SAVIT

His eyes pinball across the cellphone screen as he swipes.

SAVIT'S CELLPHONE SCREEN

His finger falls upon a thumbnail file - 725 THISTLE AVENUE. He presses it. It expands, shows a street view PHOTO of the property - the same dilapidated house where Nora took Daniel.

SAVIT

His eyes shift in thought, gears turn.

EXT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - DAY

Below the "Property Closed" sign, a steel chain hangs loosely around the gated entrance of the chain link fence. A sheared key lock has fallen to the sidewalk in front of the gate.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Daniel - gagged with duct tape, bound wrists in his lap, all alone - sits on a rusted, heavy duty rolling work stool in the middle of the shadowy, dusty, concrete room. Lambent sunlight splashes through an open staircase entryway.

The boy dodders in ominous expectation. His snivels are suppressed by the duct tape gag.

Nora descends from the stairway into the room, eyes like blades on Daniel. The boy grimaces, his stifled pleas higher-pitched. Nora halts in front of Daniel, leans in, locks on the boy.

> NORA It was you. I know it was you. It's always you.

Daniel's head dips in shame, then through sweat and tears, his penitent eyes look up at Nora.

NORA (CONT'D) And now it's never going to be you again.

Daniel recoils. This is for real.

INT. 4-DOOR COUPE / EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

Savit speeds past homes along a path previously navigated by Nora. He turns a corner.

IN THE STREET

An idling, flickering garbage truck blocks progress in front of him. In the oncoming lane, a mover's truck juts into traffic.

Savit brakes, puffs in frustration, maneuvers gingerly through the narrow pathway between the vehicles, smashes the gas again.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Daniel squirms, mewls beneath the gag. Nora leans in closer.

NORA

You want to apologize? For which day, of all the days Marley came home in tears...with bruises. And every time we demanded something be done about you, nobody did a damn thing. And you didn't care then. And I don't care now.

Nora pulls out a sharp kitchen knife, raises it between her and Daniel. His eyes bug, he forces muffled squeals, leans back, shakes his head, begs.

> SAVIT (OFFSCREEN) Nora!

Nora pivots toward the stairway.

Savit stands at the landing, a look of disbelief as he registers the scene in front of him.

SAVIT (CONT'D) (softly) Nora...what are you about to do?

NORA I told you I was going to deal with it. He's been getting away with torturing our child...our family...And now he's done.

Savit takes slow, cautious steps toward Nora.

SAVIT Listen to me, Nora. (MORE) SAVIT (CONT'D) Marley woke up. She told me what happened. They're moving her out of the ICU. Her vitals are stable. She's going to be ok.

NORA

She'll only be ok until the next time. But I'm sick of next time.

Savit looks at the trembling, sobbing Daniel.

SAVIT

Nora, we don't have to do this.

NORA We have to do something. And this is how I'm going to deal with it.

Savit sees her determined, almost obsessive look. He sees the shiny knife raised toward Daniel.

SAVIT What exactly are you planning to do, Nora? You're going to torture him? Cut him into pieces?

Daniel quavers. Nora shoots an insignificant look at the knife.

NORA

I'm going to cut the tape loose. (resolute eyes on Savit) Then I'm going to use my bare hands, and I'm going to beat the holy shit of life out of him. I'm going to punch and stomp and choke him until dies, and then I'm going to bury him under this basement slab, of this property that you and your partners are about to purchase. And your contractors will build a new home over the hole in the ground where he's going to rot, and nobody will ever find him. Nobody will even miss him. And he'll never touch Marley again.

Daniel cringes, tears stream down his cheeks. Savit tries to maintain his composure, tries to get through to Nora.

SAVIT I know that you're suffering. God knows, we've all suffered. (MORE) SAVIT (CONT'D) But this is not the way this has to end, Nora.

NORA Yes. It is.

She turns back to Daniel. He cowers. Muffled begging. She steps closer, motions toward Daniel.

SAVIT Nora, please...

She grips Daniel's bound wrists extends her sharp blade. Daniel squeals and gyrates, anticipating the horror.

SAVIT (CONT'D)

Nora...

Nora glares at Daniel, thrusts the blade upward between Daniel's wrists, saws back and forth.

Savit falls to his knees.

SAVIT (CONT'D)

No!

The tape rips. Nora pulls Daniel's free wrists apart. He yowls as she snatches him by the elbow to settle him back onto the stool before her onslaught.

Just as she does this, Nora's eyes catch something on Daniel's wrist. She pauses, holds intently on the area. Daniel stops screaming and resisting. He stares puzzled at Nora. Savit looks on, still shocked, but bewildered.

Nora looks to Daniel's wrist, back to Daniel. Daniel follows Nora's eye line to his wrist, to see that Nora has noticed--

ON DANIEL'S WRIST AND FOREARM

Red lines poking out from the sleeve of the boy's sweatshirt - cut wounds.

NORA

looks again at Daniel, then back to--

DANIEL'S WRIST AND FOREARM

Nora pulls Daniel's sleeve away to reveal a long, scattered row of cut wounds - some fresher than others - running along his forearm from the wrist up to the elbow.

NORA

holds on the forearm, then lets it drop gently from her grip. She takes a step back from Daniel. Her eyes drift to the floor.

SAVIT

Still on his knees, looks on - tenuous, frightened.

NORA

Her look shifts to her covered forearm. She slowly pulls her sleeve back to reveal--

NORA'S FOREARM

Prominent scars from wounds in a similar pattern to those of Daniel; somewhat faded by years, but the reminder is there.

NORA

looks to Daniel. She wonders. Her eyes land on--

DANIEL'S WAISTLINE

Nora reaches for the bottom of his sweatshirt, brushes it back to see the edge of his underwear. She tugs on them, pulls them upward to reveal a pair of silk women's panties.

Nora holds on Daniel. He averts his welling eyes, slackens in shame. Nora takes a step back. Her look drifts to the floor as she recalls--

INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM / MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

FLASHBACK - twelve-year-old Wayne Overbay, before even a twinkling of his life as Nora, stands in front of a sink and vanity mirror. He wears a loose-fitting women's bra, and a pair of silk panties. He tries to staunch tears and shame.

Through the open door behind him, the mirror reflects an open closet in an adult's master bedroom. Women's dresses, coats, and garbs hang from a clothes rod; wrinkled garbs - indicating they have been tried on - are draped on a bed mattress.

Wayne winces, reaches for a kitchen knife atop the sink bowl, grits his teeth as he slices into his forearm, below a row of recent, healing cuts. Blood trickles from the blade's path as he wrings it through his skin.

He stares in contempt at his reflection in the mirror. His face then crumbles in tears.

16.

INT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE - BASEMENT - DAY

Nora locks on Daniel, her face now awash in empathy. Daniel stares back at Nora, tears in his eyes.

Nora releases her grip on the knife. It clangs on the concrete. Her hand reaches out to Daniel's face. Daniel tenses. Nora grasps a corner of the duct tape over Daniel's mouth. He flinches as she pulls it off. She drops it to the floor.

Daniel - exhales deeply, catches his breath, an apprehensive stare at Nora.

Nora's tender hands move again to Daniel's face. They cradle his cheeks. Nora studies his face. Her lip quivers, tears well. She rests her forehead against his, starts to cry as she closes her eyes tightly.

Savit rises to his feet, his face glazed in exhaustion, along with a hint of relief.

Nora releases her hold on Daniel, pulls away from his face, opens her eyes to look at him. Seated in the stool she sees--

WAYNE OVERBAY

Nora's twelve-year-old self; an outraged, confused, lost little boy who took his perceived problems out on Aaron Rigby, unaware of the lifelong consequences and how it would all come back to haunt her through the trauma experienced by her own child.

Like a ghost from the past, Wayne stares childlike back at Nora; contrite, heartsick. Nora looks at Wayne with relenting eyes. ANGLE BACK TO THE STOOL, as now Nora locks on--

DANIEL DEFAY

seated on the stool. His shoulders convulse, he stifles tears.

Nora's face wrenches. She realizes what she has done, what could have eventuated. She backs away from Daniel, turns to Savit as he approaches. He comforts her with an embrace.

Nora's body jolts in Savit's arms as she breaks down. Savit's soothing hands rub her shoulders.

Daniel looks to Savit. Savit nods to Daniel.

SAVIT (softly)

Go.

Daniel exhales, bounces up from the stool. He steps toward the stairway, pauses.

DANIEL (through traumatic tears) I won't tell anyone, I swear. I'm so sorry. I'll never hurt Marley or anyone again, I promise. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.

Daniel bolts up the stairs. His repentant cries reverberate through the house. Savit and Nora are left to decompress and comfort one another. They hug tightly.

INT. 4-DOOR COUPE / EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - DAY

A new day. A new beginning. The solemn family - Savit behind the wheel, Nora in the passenger seat, a bandaged but recuperated Marley in the backseat - sit in quiet reflection as the coupe motors along.

Savit turns onto a paved roadway lined on both sides by lush green grass. The coupe rolls to a halt in the middle of--

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Nora exits the vehicle, looks out at the vast view of plots and gravestones. She steers toward a particular direction; a particular destination. She walks a path toward--

EXT. CEMETERY - AARON RIGBY'S GRAVESITE - DAY

Nora's sullen eyes look down at the granite plaque. She kneels in front of it, places an object next to Aaron's name--

A MINI TOY BICYCLE

similar to the one Aaron rode.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER - DAY

Savit and Marley stand next to the coupe. They watch Nora as she makes her way back to them.

Nora arrives. The family shares a peaceful, private embrace.

FADE TO BLACK

18.