

STIGMA

Written by

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FADE IN

ESTABLISHING SHOT

A wide expanse of woods in a suburban town

EXT. SKY OVER MIDDLE OF THE WOODS

A spiral-shaped portal spins wider and wider in the night sky. One at a time, tiny lights drop from it, like raindrops crashing through the treetops.

EXT. MIDDLE OF THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

A homeless man is tending to a makeshift tent propped up between two trees, when the raindrops, now clearly the size and shape of humanoids, start landing feet-first all around him. Peering out, he can see a small unit of muscular, majestic aliens, wearing uniforms like soldiers. Each one is carrying a handheld device, similar to a cellphone, and scanning the area. They are the last of their kind, a lost race. Their single, simple goal is to find a mysterious "connection", something they feel is key to finding their way home.

Before he can gasp or react at all, a body lands directly on the tent, sending him and all of his belongings sprawling out onto the forest floor. He barely manages to sit up and blink, when he finds himself face to face with another alien. Both begin screaming bloody murder, equally frightened by the other. This alien is different, however. He is short and stout, weighed down by gears and devices worn on his vest and belt. Oddly enough, he resembles actor/comedian Patton Oswalt. With a kind and inquisitive face, and an item resembling a stethoscope hanging around his neck, the creature will come to be known as DOC.

DOC is an empath with abilities far beyond the comprehension of his peers. However, they believe their machines and technology are key to achieving their goals. So DOC fills the role of engineer, among others. He also serves as medic, able to diagnose and tend to virtually any illness or wound. Yet, despite providing so much, he is still treated as an outcast.

DOC is the first to regain his composure. The man, however, is frozen in terror.

Placing a stubby hand on the man's shoulder, DOC makes friendly eye contact, and is suddenly seized by a flurry of images.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE

The homeless man receiving medication for schizophrenia at a clinic.

CUT TO:

The homeless man getting fired from his job.

CUT TO:

The homeless man fighting with a woman, while a kid looks on.

CUT TO:

The homeless man walking the street, disheveled, finding an alley to sleep in.

CUT TO:

The homeless man being assaulted by a group of teens.

END MONTAGE

In the middle of the images, DOC snaps out of it as two sentries grab him violently and begin to pull him away. They are acting on orders from their commander, heretofore known as LEADER, whose face appears as a hologram emitted from one of the sentries' handheld devices. DOC has faced LEADER's disapproval many times.

We stay on DOC's face as his expression turns from kind and inquisitive to frightened and sad, until a blinding light consumes them both.

EXT. OUTER SPACE

A blinding flash lights up the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. A tiny vessel is floating behind Ceres, a dwarf planet and the largest asteroid in the system.

INT. TINY VESSEL BRIEFING ROOM

LEADER is disciplining DOC, who is still in the grip of the two sentries.

However, they are now on the command deck of their ship. The sentries release DOC and begin to tend to other duties. Leader sits behind a desk-like object, indicative of his prestige, while DOC sits before him in an uneven chair, designed to keep him off-balance and uncomfortable.

LEADER

What is your purpose?

DOC

My role is to treat the sick and the wounded, to assist in the search for connection.

LEADER

This is correct-

DOC

My purpose is something else entirely.

LEADER

What does-

DOC

I see their journey. I feel their suffering. What if the connection we seek-

LEADER

ENOUGH! You are not to intervene at all. You are only to support the mission. Am I clear?

DOC

Yes, sir.

LEADER

This is a warning. If you do not heed it, you will be banished, unmoored. Sentenced to drift through time and space...forever.

DOC
Yes, sir.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. IN-PATIENT ADOLESCENT UNIT - MORNING

Eyes open to blinding light. After focusing, we can see a ceiling. Some patients are milling about. An aide named DYLAN, a recent college grad in good shape, with a beard and a man-bun, leans into view.

DYLAN
You're on watch. We had no room downstairs.

Pull back and we can see that several padded chairs have been pushed together to form a makeshift bed, almost like a crib.

PETER is barely awake, heavily drugged and standing in the middle of Wing 6, an in-patient unit for adolescents, age 13 to 18, who are chemically dependent or have certain co-occurring emotional health and addiction problems.

PETER is sixteen, of average height and weight, with unruly black hair that shags over his ears, and pale skin. Patches of barely there facial hair cover his face. He appears rugged for his age, weary beyond his years, somewhat resembling the actor, Timothee Chalamet.

PETER listens to mostly goth or industrial bands but he reveres bands introduced to him by his brother, BEN, such as My Chemical Romance, Linkin Park, Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Alice in Chains. His fashion consists primarily of black band t-shirts, often with "inappropriate" logos, and baggy jeans, as well as leather wristbands, chain belts and Converse. His ears and nose are pierced. Being in an inpatient unit, however, means he is not permitted to wear most of that, which means spacers in the ears, no shoelaces on the Converse, a weird buckle-less belt with draw straps on the side, and pretty much none of his favorite shirts.

PETER is called over to the nurses' station. His blood pressure and temperature are taken. He steps on a scale and is weighed. Just as he steps down, DYLAN calls morning meeting. All of the other residents file in and take seats around the television set, while DYLAN remains standing in front of them.

DYLAN starts to move the chairs back in place in front of the old television set.

Other aides are busy with their own tasks. DYLAN sets his gaze on one resident in particular, a pale, pasty-faced boy named HERMAN, with acne and brand new, scraggly facial hair.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Hey, Herman. You gotta go to group,
buddy.

HERMAN barely looks up.

DYLAN (CONT'D)
Come on, I let you get away with
not going yesterday because it was
your first day. But if you go to
all your groups, you can go to the
cafeteria and outside for some
fresh air.

PETER plops down next to Herman and looks up at DYLAN.

PETER
What sort of group?

DYLAN gets up and grabs a schedule from the nurse's station.

DYLAN
Ummmm... Art therapy?

PETER (TO HERMAN)
Wanna go?

INT. IN-PATIENT ADOLESCENT UNIT - MOMENTS LATER

Group therapy. A therapist is seated near the door. Seven patients are sitting in a tiny room. One is fast asleep. A cart sits in the middle of the room filled with art supplies: markers, colored pencils, pastels, paper, etc. Some patients are hard at work, while others aren't. DYLAN opens the door and PETER enters. HERMAN follows, trudging and avoiding eye contact. He takes a seat next to HERMAN.

THERAPIST
Hi, what's your name?

PETER
Peter.

The therapist writes his name down on an attendance sheet on her clipboard.

THERAPIST
Hi, Peter. Why don't you grab
yourself something from the cart?
(MORE)

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

We're just having an open session,
so whatever you're feeling right
now. I may stop the others but you
can keep on working on it.

PETER grabs a sheet of paper and some colored pencils, and
starts to draw. The therapist asks everyone else to stop.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Alright, everyone. You can stop
what you're doing. We can go around
the room and you can share what you
did, let us know how it made you
feel, or if you're uncomfortable,
you don't have to.

The other patients share their art. One of them is HERMAN.
Some explain what their work means, while others shrug and
require some prompting from the therapist. After everyone has
a turn, the therapist arrives at PETER.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Now, Peter, I know you just came in
at the end, so if you don't have
anything to share, that's OK.

Everyone starts to get up, when PETER holds up his sheet of
paper, revealing a rough sketch of Batman. They immediately
sit back down, and take interest in Peter's work. The
therapist is also impressed.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Wow, Peter. You came up with that
in such a short time! Is that
Batman?

PETER

Yup.

THERAPIST

Why don't you tell us why you chose
to draw Batman?

PETER

My brother, Ben, and his girlfriend
are into comic books.

THERAPIST

Ah, so you miss them.

PETER

Yeah.

THERAPIST

OK. What else does Batman mean to you? You could have drawn any superhero, right?

PETER takes a long pause.

PETER

I guess it's because he lost his parents.

PETER takes another long pause.

PETER (CONT'D)

My parents died when I was little. And, um, yeah, Batman just channels the pain into fighting injustice. He tries to stop what happened to him from happening to anyone else. And always knows what to do. He's always ten steps ahead of his opponent.

THERAPIST

I see, I see. My kids love Batman, but you know, I always thought his story is about trauma, you know? The memory of his parents' murder never fades. It's always reoccurring. And there's a word for that heightened awareness, it's called hypervigilance, or hyperawareness, where you always are looking out for trouble, around every corner.

HERMAN

Is that why they call him a vigilante?

THERAPIST

Ha. Maybe. Peter, do you ever feel like that?

PETER

All the time. Ben says I wake up every day, looking for trouble. I get into a lot of trouble at school. But when I wake up, it's like my brain is already up and running at 100 miles per hour.

THERAPIST

Well, that's bipolar disorder for you.

PETER

Yeah.

THERAPIST

And how old were you when your parents died?

PETER

Thirteen.

THERAPIST

Wow, that's a young age to go through all that. I'm sorry.

PETER lowers his head, with a slight nod of agreement.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

OK, well our time's up. Thank you for that, Peter. DBT is in room A, on the other side. You can head there now.

All of the patients exit the room, while HERMAN heads over to Peter. The therapist starts to gather any stray materials.

PETER

What's DBT?

HERMAN

Dialectical behavioral therapy. It's like class. They give you a workbook and shit.

PETER

That sucks.

HERMAN

Yeah, but it's something to do. You coming?

PETER

I guess.

HERMAN and PETER exit together.

INT. COMIC BOOK CONVENTION - EVENING

The comic book convention is a smaller event, not like New York or San Diego Comic-Con, being held in a local sports arena. PETER's older brother, BEN, has just entered with his girlfriend, SOFIA.

BEN is 23, with tightly cropped black hair, and tall, with a workman-like build. Ever since work took over his life, he barely manages to wear anything other than polo shirts and khakis. He grew up listening to dark, brooding bands but in the past year, SOFIA's love of classic pop songs, and female singer/songwriters, has begun to rub off on him.

The two met at work. SOFIA is an account representative at an art supply manufacturer. Cosplay is her obsession and escape from the daily grind of work. BEN works in shipping at the same company. While more of a casual fan of superhero movies, he was drawn to SOFIA's bold, vibrant personality; a nice contrast to his own laidback, easygoing demeanor.

SOFIA is 26, with long, bouncy and curly platinum blonde hair and Eastern European features. She wears glasses but tends to stick to contact lenses that do very little to dampen the effect of her light bluish grey eyes. Unlike BEN, she strips off her work clothes, typically pantsuits, every chance she gets and switches to comic book tees and hip-hugging jeans, usually while working on her latest costume idea.

BEN is the primary caregiver for his brother, PETER. Before meeting SOFIA, the amount of hours he had to work, however, barely give them a chance to spend time together. Missing work could mean not being able to afford the rent for their tiny apartment. Meeting SOFIA, however, has allowed the trio to live in a modest two-bedroom, located in the suburbs, not too far from downtown where BEN and SOFIA work. While SOFIA brings home the higher pay, BEN has been able to focus more on looking out for PETER. The task is not easy, however, due to PETER's mental health issues. When their parents died in a car accident, BEN was barely old enough to grieve properly, but PETER was too young to fully understand. Troubles followed shortly thereafter.

Only moments after arriving at the convention, the couple begin to attract stares. She is dressed in costume, as what can only be described as a sexy Jedi. She is attracting all the attention as they walk down the main thoroughfare. They are headed towards the cosplay competition, when BEN spots a booth with information about mental health awareness. BEN picks up a pamphlet.

BEN

Look, Sofe, there's going to be a panel about comics and mental health. It's too bad Peter's not here.

BEN's expression turns to one of sadness. SOFIA silently pulls him close and hugs him tightly.

BEN (CONT'D)

Can we go?

SOFIA

Sure, baby...

BEN slowly begins to smile.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

...after I destroy the competition.

BEN

Of course.

When they arrive at the cosplay stage, SOFIA heads toward the backstage area.

SOFIA

See you later, baby.

BEN

Don't take too long

The two kiss. SOFIA giggles and exits. Three girls in costume approach BEN.

GIRL # 1

Your girlfriend looks like such a slut.

GIRL # 2

Yeah, she's why everyone gets cosplay all twisted.

GIRL # 3

She makes us look bad.

GIRL # 2

That's what I just said.