

SMILE by Elisa Di Napoli 2002

WHITE ROOM. INT. DAY.

VANESSA is a girl of about eight. She is standing in the corner of a white brightly lit empty room. She presses against the wall, wishing to disappear in it. Something is not quite right.

She looks frightened. She looks at the door. It's closed. She looks at the rest of the room. It's empty.

Then PERSON1 appears. It is a little boy of about the same age. He stands still looking at VANESSA without expression. Then PERSON2 appears. She is also a little girl. She also looks at VANESSA vacantly.

Then PERSON3 appears. This time it is a boy. He does the same. So on and so forth for PERSON4 (girl), PERSON5 (girl) and PERSON6 (girl).

VANESSA looks at them as if they were a menace to her.

VOICE1- what's wrong Vanessa? Aren't you having fun?

VOICE2- why does she stare like that?

VOICE3- she looks so stupid

VOICE4- she's ugly

VOICE5- You are weird. Why do you crush yourself against the wall? Are you crazy or something?

VOICE6- there's something wrong with you.

While VOICE1 speaks, PERSON1 stays still in her position except for a moment in which her face is distorted in an expression of mocking.

The same is true for VOICE2 and PERSON2 and so on, except that PERSON2 wears an expression of disgust, PERSON3 becomes suddenly patronizing etc, each for a moment matching what their correspondent voice is saying.

VANESSA is disturbed. She grows more and more so as the voices continue to speak.

VOICE2- I don't like her. Who does she think she is?

VOICE1- I thought you loved being the center of attention

VOICE3- she is probably really dumb

VOICE5- you are just not normal. You're not like all of us

VOICE6- there's something wrong with her

VOICE4- nobody's ever gonna like you. Who would ever want to be with you?

VOICE1- What is it? You don't like it when everybody looks at you?

VOICE2- She thinks she's the best. But all she cares about is herself

VOICE5- they should put her somewhere with all the other loonies

VOICE6- what is wrong with you?

VOICE3- she looks kinda evil

VOICE1- maybe you should try to smile. Why don't you cheer up girl?

VOICE4- with that face no wonder nobody wants you

VANESSA desperately tries to escape into the walls, climbing them to no avail. It is at the climax that two MALE NURSES come in and forcibly take her out of the room.

VANESSA- No! No! No!

2. CLINIC'S ROOM. INT. DAY

A table is in the middle of the room. Three psychiatrists sit behind it. DOCTOR sits in the middle and is the most important of them. Only He interrogates her. The other ASSISTANTS whisper to DOCTOR once in a while while assuming still positions on the table and wearing the same expression on their face like it was a mask. Vanessa's MOTHER and FATHER are sitting on the left side of the table and Vanessa's BROTHER is sitting on the right side. They silently watch as the NURSES enter the room and place VANESSA to sit on the chair that is facing the table.

VANESSA- No! No! No!

VANESSA comes to a still as she sits in front of the doctors.

Her FATHER and MOTHER look at her with disappointment.

She slowly scans the room. She is bewildered by her parents' presence. She feels betrayed by them. Her brother has a condescending manner about him.

Once things come to a still the DOCTOR looks at her intently and addresses her

DOCTOR- So, Vanessa, I hear you've been having some problems at school...

VANESSA feels uneasy. She is suspicious of everybody.

DOCTOR- do you want to tell us about it?

VANESSA doesn't want to respond.

MOTHER gives her a look as if to say "speak to the doctor!"

FATHER- The doctor is speaking to you.

DOCTOR sends a look to her father as if to say "it's ok"

DOCTOR- I've been told you don't get along with the other kids. Can you tell me more about it?

(silence)

DOCTOR- and your parents tell me you question the teachers...why do you do that?

MOTHER- the doctor is here to help you darling.

DOCTOR- Now, it's not just about the teachers is it? Your parents tell me you are aggressive with them too. That you don't obey them and you refuse to kiss them goodmorning or goodbye. Don't you love your parents?

FATHER- Suddenly she doesn't want to kiss us anymore. We aren't good enough for her or something.

DOCTOR- why don't you want to kiss your parents Vanessa? Don't you love them? They love you very much.

FATHER- She's the one who doesn't appreciate us.

DOCTOR- perhaps you're angry.

FATHER- angry?

DOCTOR looks at FATHER gesturing to let him go on.

DOCTOR- What are you angry about? You can tell me.

VANESSA is confused. She looks at BROTHER for a second as if to look for an answer or support.

BROTHER- you should listen to the doctor Vanessa. He knows what's best for you.

VANESSA- No!

FATHER- No! No! Always no! That's all you're ever able to say! Can't you just say yes for once?!

MOTHER- Don't you love us Vanessa? If you loved us you'd listen to us.

FATHER- She doesn't know what it is to behave. She always knows better!

DOCTOR- Well, perhaps we should talk about something else. Your parents tell me that you don't like to dress like a girl. That you refuse to wear skirts. Is that right?
(pause)

Why is that Vanessa? Don't you like pretty dresses?

FATHER- All she wears is baggy trousers and mens' shirts. She's ashamed of being a girl.

VANESSA frowns

MOTHER- Come on darling, why do you frown now? Give us a smile!

VANESSA looks at her mother with hatred and gives her a fake smile.

FATHER- How do you dare treat your mother like that? You're lucky we're not at home or you'd get a good spanking for that!

DOCTOR- now, Vanessa, smiling is good for you, you're parents only want your best when they say you should smile more..

AT this point PERSON1 appears in the room addresses VANESSA and then fades away

PERSON1/VOICE1- Come on Vanessa! Smile! Don't you want everyone to like you?

PERSON3 appears now, addresses her and then fades away. Same happens with each person/voice.

PERSON3/VOICE3- She's nasty. That's why nobody likes her. She's bad.

PERSON2/VOICE2- What's wrong with you can't you smile?

FATHER- She's angry with the world, that's what's wrong with her!

PERSON1- no boys are ever gonna like you if you don't smile!

MOTHER- If you smiled a bit more, you'd look so much more beautiful

FATHER- She doesn't know how to smile.

DOCTOR- Why don't you make a little effort to smile Vanessa? You'll feel better afterwards.

PERSON6/VOICE6- She looks like someone has just bitten her!

PERSON4/VOICE4- Cheer up girl!

Now EVERYONE is appearing closer and closer to VANESSA giving the impression of advancing towards her in a menacing way

EVERYONE- (in a crescendo) Smile! You should smile! Come on give us a smile! Smile! Smile! Smile! Smile!

The CAMERA ZOOMS IN closer and closer to the people's faces showing their mouth moving as they are saying "Smile"

VANESSA(V.O.)- Nooooo!!!

CUT TO

INT. BEDROOM. EARLY MORNING.

CLOSE UP of VANESSA'S mouth as if it had just stopped screaming. She has just woken up and is sitting up in bed. Her eyes look ahead at the camera with a frightened expression. All around is dark. Slowly the light becomes stronger all around her.

INT. KITCHEN. MORNING

VANESSA is sitting at a table eating from a bowl of cornflakes. Her FATHER and BROTHER are eating at the table without talking. The FATHER is reading a newspaper which occupies the entire space of his face. The BROTHER is reading a comic book and eating at the same time. The MOTHER is eating a toast standing at the window, with her back to the table. They look like "the perfect family", except something is not quite right. The MOTHER puts the toast down and says:

MOTHER- She had another nightmare last night

Nobody reacts.

INT. CAR. MORNING.

VANESSA is sitting in the back seat of a car with her BROTHER sitting next to her, looking out of his window. Her FATHER is driving the car and her MOTHER is sitting in the passenger's seat.

P.O.V. VANESSA.

It's raining and not much can be seen except for the windows wipers and the upper body of her father and mother in the front seat.

FATHER- It's about time we deal with this once and for all

OUT. WHITE BUILDING ENTRANCE. MORNING

VANESSA is walking towards the building. Her MOTHER is walking on her left side and her FATHER on her right side. The BROTHER is walking next to the father.

They advance towards the entrance until they cross the threshold and disappear on the other side.

INT. BUILDING. DAY

P.O.V. VANESSA.

The back of a woman that looks like a NURSE up to the waist walks ahead.

Here and there feet of children scurr around. It could be a school. The camera is at waist level, as if to show the point of view of a child. The NURSE walks across a hall and a couple of corridors until she reaches a white door. There she stops, turns the handle and steps aside to reveal the same room we saw in scene 1..

NURSE(V.O.)- Now, you can wait in this room.

The corner gets into focus and the fluorescent light becomes brighter and brighter until there is nothing left but blinding white light.