

A SHOE ON THE OTHER FOOT

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SCENE 1

ETHYN'S HIDEOUT.

ETHYN, a 21-year-old man, picks up a pair of white Converse trainers. He examines them before dropping them back onto the floor. Getting out a big pair of scissors, he rips the shoes to pieces.

He then tactfully arranges the remnants on the floor and walks over to his easel. He starts painting, glancing back every so often at the ruined footwear.

Just as he's getting into the rhythm of things, there comes a loud knock on the door. Ethyn jumps and falls onto the floor. Hedgehog-like, he curls up into a ball.

There is another loud knock. Ethyn doesn't move.

Third knock. Ethyn looks up and slowly uncurls himself. He gets up and opens the door.

HARRISON, a 22-year-old man, is standing outside.

HARRISON

Is it you?

(beat)

Am I at the right place? There aren't many run-down shelters in the woods now are there? It is you, yeah?

Ethyn doesn't react.

HARRISON

No? Maybe the doctor gave me the wrong directions.

Ethyn tilts his head like a confused dog.

HARRISON

The doctor. Dr Gladstone. Do you –

Ethyn slams the door.

HARRISON

– know her? I'll take that as a maybe.

Ethyn curls back up into a ball and begins shaking.

Harrison knocks again.

HARRISON

It is you, open up!

The knocking persists.

ETHYN

No, go away!

HARRISON

I'm not going away. I've found you.

(beat)

You're a sod aren't you?

ETHYN

Please just go!

HARRISON

A sodomite, a non-breeder. A gay.

ETHYN

Just leave me alone.

HARRISON

I want to know what it's like.

ETHYN

What?

HARRISON

To be a non-breeder.

ETHYN

Why?

HARRISON

Because I'm interested. Look, the doctor sent me here and gave me directions. She wanted me to meet you, but more importantly she wanted you to meet me.

ETHYN

So you could mock me? Or attack me? Or torture me?

HARRISON

None of those things.

ETHYN

Well why then?

HARRISON

Isn't it obvious already?

(beat)

Because I'm a non-breeder too.

Ethyn stops shaking. He slowly gets up and opens the door.

He stares at Harrison's face for a long time, then inspects the rest of his body.

ETHYN

The doctor sent you?

HARRISON

You are the other non-breeder, I knew it.

ETHYN

I'm the only non-breeder.

HARRISON

Well, you were.

(beat)

Can I come in?

Ethyn examines Harrison's face again. Harrison recoils.

Ethyn walks away from the door, leaving it open. Harrison walks in and shuts the door.

Ethyn removes the canvas from the easel and replaces it with a blank one. He begins painting.

Harrison picks up the old canvas.

HARRISON

Nice shoes.

Ethyn takes no notice.

HARRISON

It's no Moaning Lisa though.

ETHYN

Mona.

HARRISON

What?

ETHYN

It's the Mona Lisa.

HARRISON

Huh, I always thought it was 'moaning'.

ETHYN

It's beautiful.

HARRISON

You make it seem like you've seen it in person.

ETHYN

What's left of it.

HARRISON

No way! How did you manage that?

Ethyn doesn't answer but continues painting.

HARRISON

Right, it's a secret. I get it.

(pause)

What are you painting now?

Ethyn glances at Harrison, doesn't answer, then continues painting.

HARRISON

You are allowed to speak you know.

ETHYN

I'm painting –

HARRISON

– I can see that but –

ETHYN

– you.

HARRISON

Come again?

ETHYN

I'm painting you.

Harrison inspects the canvas.

HARRISON

You've painted a phallus.

ETHYN

Well maybe I think you're a dick.

HARRISON

Good one.

ETHYN

I haven't painted the rest yet.

HARRISON

But how would you know what my – ?

ETHYN

Imagination.

HARRISON

Well imagine it bigger.

Harrison looks around the room, noticing the pair of ruined trainers.

HARRISON

You must have gone on some walk to make them fall apart like that.

ETHYN

Didn't need them anymore.

HARRISON

Why? How often do you leave the house?

Ethyn pauses to think.

ETHYN

Not often.

HARRISON

So you don't go outside and paint?

ETHYN

No. I remember what the outside looks like.

HARRISON

Sometimes your memory can deceive you.

(beat)

You should go outside.

ETHYN

I can't, I'm painting. Your voice is distracting me.

HARRISON

Oh, I see. Should I just leave then?

Harrison walks towards the door.

ETHYN

No, don't go.

Harrison stops.

ETHYN

(pause)

It's just... I'm not used to other voices. I work in silence.

HARRISON

Oh. Do you prefer the quiet?

ETHYN

Sometimes. Other times I wish I had company.

HARRISON

And what do you want now? Quiet or company?

ETHYN

Quiet company.

(pause)

You say you're a non-breeder.

HARRISON

That's right.

ETHYN

But I'm the non-breeder. There aren't any others. I would have been able to tell.

HARRISON

So you're saying I'm lying?

ETHYN

No, sorry, it's just that, for all that time I felt all alone. Like no one else could relate to me. And now you're here.

HARRISON

Here I am.

(pause)

What's your name?

Ethyn finishes painting.

ETHYN

My name? Did the doctor not say?

HARRISON

No.

ETHYN

It's Ethan. With a 'y'.

HARRISON

Y?

ETHYN

I don't know, my parents gave it to me.

HARRISON

No, I meant a 'y', as in the letter 'y'. Wouldn't that make you 'Ethany'?

ETHYN

A 'y' instead of an 'a'.

(beat)

What's your name anyway?

HARRISON

Harrison.

ETHYN

Harrison?

HARRISON

Yep.

ETHYN

Like, Harrison from the—?

Ethyn backs away.

HARRISON

Yes, that Harrison. But I'm not like that any more.

ETHYN

No, no, no. I knew you looked familiar. Get out. Get out! I remember what you did.

HARRISON

No, I'm not like that. Really, I'm not like that. Plus, I can't leave, can I? You'll be alone again.

Harrison puts his hand on Ethyn's shoulder. He shrugs it off.

ETHYN

I shouldn't have let you in.

HARRISON

Ethyn, listen.

ETHYN

I don't want you in here.

HARRISON

Please listen.

ETHYN

I think you should go.

HARRISON

Listen to me!

(pause)

Look, you might think you know who I am because you know what I've done, what I did. But you've been in hiding for a long time and a lot has changed since then.

You're judging me and my entire future on mistakes I've made in the past. And it's been hard for me too, if anyone knows what I've been through, it'd be you. I didn't go into the woods today to find a fucking teddy bear's picnic, I came here to see you. To talk to you. After years of everyone pretending you don't exist any more, doesn't that mean something to you?

ETHYN

Everything. But I don't believe you.

HARRISON

I'm a non-breeder too, I'm telling you!

ETHYN

Really? Then prove i-

Harrison pecks Ethyn on the lips.

HARRISON

Happy now?

ETHYN

I've never kissed anyone before. It feels...

Harrison nods, cocksure.

ETHYN

...disappointing.

HARRISON

Thanks.

ETHYN

No, I don't mean that. That was good, it's just, I think I built it up too much in my head.

HARRISON

That's because you've been surrounded by your own thoughts for too long. Sometimes you're your own worst enemy. Too much time on your hands means too much time to think, so you allow yourself to stew. And if you stew for too long, eventually you'll start to boil. So let's take you off the heat.

ETHYN

I don't get what you're saying.

HARRISON

I'm saying you need to go outside.
(beat)
Do you have a bathroom in here?

ETHYN

Kind of.

HARRISON

Great. Well go into the bathroom and get yourself cleaned up. I want to take you into town.

ETHYN

Into town?

HARRISON

Yeah, I know it sounds scary but trust me on this. I'll get you a new pair of shoes whilst we're there. It's time to get you back into the world.

They exit.