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Boredom Backstage

“What scene are we on, anyway?”

“The one where she kills herself.”

“Fake kills herself or for-real kills herself?”

“No no, fake kills herself. The real thing is still in a while.”

One actor sat on the floor against the wall while the other sat across from him on a fold-out chair. The one in the chair was doing some idle task on his phone, while the other sat in anxious wait for the lead to finally kill herself for real. The one on the floor looked around.

“God, but I do get tired of all this waiting,” he said.

“I dunno, I kind of like the down time.”

“Well sure *you* like the down time, you have all of five fucking lines in the entire show!”

“Don’t act like you have any more, man. We both auditioned to be minor roles.”

“All I remember is auditioning to not be the lead, which doesn’t mean I didn’t want to be a notable character. And besides, I speak almost exclusively in monologues. Do you know how boring that gets?”

“I should hope so. I’m practically the only one that listens to them.”

The wall-sitter adjusted himself so his legs wouldn’t fall asleep, and the other leaned forward since he realized his participation in this conversation wasn’t optional.

“Not all of your monologues are boring, you know. You have some pretty good substance in there, it just seems like you don’t give a shit.”

“So you’re saying I’m boring?”

“No, I’m just saying you’re bored.”

“Well Jesus, isn’t the entire cast bored?”

“Shit man, even the director’s bored at this point. The point is that a bored actor shouldn’t project his boredom to the audience. Thus the term *acting*.”

“Yeah, but God man, this show has been going on for months! I’ve made no connection to the characters whatsoever, and none of the extras around me even care what’s going on. They sit there picking their noses while I have to deliver a page-long sonnet to them while seeming like I don’t have my thumb up my ass!”

“Once again, it’s called acting for a reason. And in their defense, not one of them has a single line to go off of. You complain about monologues while these kids are virtually invisible in the script! You think you’re bored, imagine sitting there just looking at the actors the entire time.”

“Yeah, but they barely even have to go onstage! They’re there one second, gone the next. Assholes like *us* drift in, deliver what few lines we have, and then sit around listening to the lucky fuckers that actually have good--”

“Shh!”

The single exclamation echoed down the hall, whispered yet thrown across the fifty-foot expanse of the backstage area. The exclaimer of the piercing syllable was known to both actors before they looked. Their gangly stage manager strode quickly down the corridor.

“Now what are you two getting so loud about?”

“We’re just discussing whether the extras or us short-changed actors have it worse when it comes to boredom,” said the one in the chair.

“What, you think you guys are bored? You that actually have lines?” He crouched down to the chair’s level at an uncomfortable distance. “Boredom is waiting back here every day in anticipation of the show’s next set change, your only presence in the show being a silhouette that carries props on stage or rotates a block! You guys get applause, when tech members like me get nothing. I mean c’mon, even the light & sound guy gets some applause!”

“He makes a good point,” said the one on the ground.

“He does indeed, but it could be argued that you techies put the least effort into the show. You guys move some stuff, sure, but you’ve only been around for a couple weeks. We’ve been stuck in this shit since the first week of school.”

“Besides, if you really wanted to be in it, you probably should’ve auditioned. They let practically anyone into these shows. Just look at the fucking extras.”

“What, and end up with a crappy part like you two? Give me a break.” The stage manager laughed and walked back down the hall, the two following him with their gaze.

The two actors sat in silence for a minute or so, looking at the ground and their feet. The seated one looked up.

“But if you had gotten a major role, would you really have wanted it?”

“I don’t know man, it depends on the part.”

“What about the lead?”

“Too much work, too angsty of a character.”

“You could have played it differently.”

“Are you shitting me? Some of his lines might as well be out of a fucking ‘Being Emo for Dummies’ book. The show’s *begging* for a 90s adaptation.”

“My Chemical Romance shirts and all...you think that exists?”

“What?”

“A ‘Being Emo for Dummies’ book.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me, they have one for everything else.”

“I think it could’ve been a fun part nonetheless.” He paused for and leaned back in the chair. “Did you have a specific role in mind when auditioning?”

“Being an old guy’s always fun.”

“So you would rather be a whore to type-casting than an honest actor?”

“Get the fuck out of here with honesty! Acting’s all about lying.”

“No, acting’s about persuasion.”

“Jesus man, they’re practically the same thing.”

“Now that is debatable, out of everything else from this conversation.”

The looked into each other's eyes, weighing their own opinions on the matter while trying to guess what the other might think. The seated actor decided to speak first.

“Acting is about convincing the audience that what you’re saying to them is true. Its truth is already self-evident to your character, that’s why you’re saying it to them.”

“And if you’re lying to them?”

“No no, you never lie to the audience. You only lie to them if you’re a shitty actor. You only lie to the characters.”

“What if it’s a soliloquy?”

“Then you’re just talking to yourself.”

The one on the ground leaned back, causing his legs to slide forward on the smooth floor.

“Well you’ve certainly given this some thought, Mr. Future-Theatre-Teacher.”

“Oh fuck off, and you haven’t Mr. Big-Ass-Monologue?”

“I’ll have you know I don’t give a single monologue about asses. If that were the case, you certainly wouldn’t be getting any complaints from me.”

“Even if you gave a monologue solely about a guy’s hairy, sweaty ass?

“Shit, it’d be more interesting than what I’m saying.”

Their silence was tinged with humor.

“And I have thought about acting, just in a different way I guess. I guess the real problem I have is that all of my lines are just me going on and on about the same fucking thing. Like honestly, who the hell introduces a statement by saying that they’re about to say something?”

“Sadly, I can name a few people.”

“Yeah, but I know for a fact that we both find those assholes boring as shit.”

“Absolutely, and I totally see your point regardless.”

“Maybe I’ll cut The Bard some slack. But only because he was writing in iambic pentameter.”

“Probably a good call, considering he’s literally the Jesus of playwriting.”

“Literally? Funny, I don’t remember the crucifixion part of the latter half of his career. Must have made for a hell-of-a-play.”

“Definitely.”

They sat in smiling silence once again, until the door near them opened and a head popped out.

“She’s dead.”

“For real?”

“For real.”

As they stood up, they met each other's eyes once more.

“Well, I guess this is that part where we don’t act bored, right?”

“It is indeed,” said the one against the wall. “I’m a minor role anyway, so who really gives a shit?”

“Hopefully the audience, to some degree.”

“Hopefully.”

They smiled and walked confidently through the door and towards the bright lights of the stage, towards the glowing faces of actors both good and bad and towards the invisible gaze of the audience that stood in silent anticipation of the finale. The actors were in their own worlds, ruling the stage with all eyes on none but themselves, if only for a moment.