

WINTER PEOPLE

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ACT ONE

A winter storm brews with the billowing gusts of hurricane force winds.

It shakes the foundation and roof of an unlit cabin. Moonlight pours through its windows. It illuminates naturally, and casts shadows.

The winds pound against the cabin and windows and door until the noise becomes unbearable, something like being caught under the riptide of a slaughtering ocean.

It becomes unbearable, until ACTION. And lights hyphenate.

ALAN is against the front door. TED is against the opposite wall. The two of them as far as away from one another as can be.

ALAN

I'm thinking, 'If you aren't gonna take me the way I'd anticipated, ...why'd you even invite me over here.'

TED

Who am I to argue. I'll give you everything you say, and everything else I think you'll need.

ALAN

Well, if you think you're such a good listener –

TED

I am.

ALAN

I wonder if you're also as good an observer.

TED

You came dressed to the thing in a way I like.

ALAN

Like a copy boy.

TED

So you know I like a copy boy? I just approached you tonight.

ALAN

I heard it's because you like your boys looking like a present.

TED

I'd prefer you always looking 'presentable.' Which batch of them told you about that?

ALAN

A few of them had come to consensus before telling me, it sounded like. That you like presentable presents. Playing with them all alone, all by yourself. Like a cat. Or an animal.

TED

Yeah, I'm definitely more of an animal than I am a cat.

ALAN

'Like a kid that doesn't want morning.' Which is in about three hours.

TED

I'm pacing myself. Which is to say I am also already inhibiting enormous levels of patience.

ALAN

Maybe I should've just followed you home, instead. Been more of a brat. An impatient intruder! Something that would take me from this door –

TED

I think you're only capable of trying to be a brat and may potentially be the kind of person who tells other people just what kind of guy exactly they know they are.

ALAN

Someone likes the verbal. Okay. Sure. That why you want me all to yourself? To shut me down before you... shut me up...?

TED

Like with a sock?

ALAN

From the dirtiest depths of your hamper.

TED

I just did laundry.

ALAN

Sharp, ...then

Yeah? How'd you do that? Take the Amish pony into town? ...Why'd you agree to bring me back here?

TED

You'd asked enough times. I figured if I gave you what you wanted, you'd finally leave me alone.

ALAN

And go home in this storm alone?

TED

I'd call you a car. Honest. I'd make sure you're okay.

ALAN

You brought me back here just to get rid of me.

TED

I'm a lot to endure. Even to myself.

ALAN

Whatever it is you're afraid of giving me, I can take it. I've got a checklist already all laid out.

TED

Maybe I'm weary of making you an addict. Suddenly coming back for more. To fill that list.

ALAN

I wouldn't have to come back if you just found a way to keep me now. There's consensus on you. I know what you are. I don't mind.

TED

And I just met you.

ALAN

Surely you've heard things about me.

TED

I haven't.

ALAN

You sound so sure.

TED

If I'd even thought to ask, I'd have done so. And heard things.

ALAN

We've locked eyes for a long time now. Many parties as things have slimmed since Summer.

TED

Your eyes drifted at times. Claimed some other statues some of the times.

ALAN

Yours moved differently for me.

TED

Especially when you looked at other statues.

ALAN

But you recognized me. You... remembered me?

TED

Yeah. You interested me, still always standing on your own even as the parties 'skinnied.'

ALAN

Come Halloween, there's going to be nobody left. Halloween is when you seal the deal. You're purposefully in costumes. You need to coordinate beforehand if you're going to land the costumes. And then get the photo that locks it all in –

TED

Let's reel it back to right now really quick.

ALAN

Because that's comfortable for you?

TED

...Yeah.

ALAN

Reality is you waited for me until I was alone. That's not slim-picking's, that's – manipulation.

TED

And I find the idea of that is incredibly repugnant. I said I saw you looking around. I was looking at you when you were still looking around. Well past the point until the only other person standing in the room was me. I'm all that's left for you, and I'm sorry if you think that's funny.

ALAN

I am all that's left for you. Clearly.

TED

That's different. I'm particular.

ALAN

Because you're sober or because you love abandon?

TED

...Who are you to know so much about me? You're audacious.

ALAN

I actually like that I'm entitled. I don't think you like 'entitled.' If I had that guess, you don't really like 'stupid money.'

TED

They say that too, huh.

ALAN

They say many things. That that's why you've got this cabin. Far away from the rest of them.

TED

I like my solitude. I like my privacy. And I like to go off the wagon every once in a while.

ALAN

When no one's looking?

TED

When no one would be able to say a thing about it.

ALAN advances.

ALAN

What else do you like to do alone?

TED

Don't come any closer yet.

ALAN stops. But then ALAN advances again.

ALAN

You said the door would hold.

TED

Not about the door.

ALAN

So you lied. You asked if I'd take your most deranged, and then I said yes, and then you blew smoke in my face and I still came home with you.

TED

I asked if you'd take anything I got.

ALAN

...All of us knows that means deranged.

TED

'Deranged' how?

ALAN

Punish me and I'll tell you. You've already let me in.

TED

I didn't have a choice.

ALAN

You chose. You just don't know how to stick with things. 'Commit,' as one of them said it –

TED

Do you want me to tackle you?

ALAN presses himself against TED.

ALAN

I want you to keep me under your floorboards. As long as it takes to entirely empty yourself into me.

TED

I'd be happier just taking care - for as long as I want? – (ALT – I'd much prefer just draining you).

ALAN

Until at least Mid-March.

TED

So, for all of Winter?

ALAN

We could start off slow if we start right now.

TED

And then we'll call your car.

ALAN

Right. Only after the storm passes.

TED pulls ALAN away from him. ALAN smiles.

TED

I'll start a fire.

TED goes to make a fire. ALAN retreats to the kitchen.

ALAN

This is you 'pacing?'

TED

What else do they say about me? These boys.

ALAN

You got a drink?

TED

There's a bar cart in the kitchen. Just don't touch that open bottle of whiskey.

ALAN

This one?

TED

I said 'please don't' –

ALAN

You just said 'don't.'

TED

It's important to me. Please.

ALAN

The others did say you were oddly receptive, for being so... 'committed'... to yourself.

TED

I've learned to practice discipline.

ALAN

On others as much as yourself, I hope.

TED

Earlier when I said the other boys, that they don't want to go home with me. Was I right?

ALAN

I'm having gin. Do you want something from the cart?

TED

I'll take a fake beer from the fridge.

ALAN goes to the fridge and fishes a fake beer.

ALAN

But I said I want all of you.

TED

My impression is that that's sorta the consensus right now. Lately. For the last year and several months. That the boys don't want to go home with me –

ALAN

No. They think something else about you. But even if they did. And say instinctually, I bought it? I still wouldn't wanna buy it. I still think I'd win.

TED

That sounds desperate. Even for cuffing season.

ALAN

'Cuffs.'

TED

But I don't think that's why you want me, either. Not to win.

ALAN

Even if winning simply means bagging a big man to get me through the holidays?

TED

That's not all you've heard.

ALAN

I maybe heard a thing about your latent desire to be a little boy?

TED

...Not 'little.'

ALAN

And not necessarily 'helpless' either. Kinda like you feel safest being spoon-fed while you posture like a big boy in your highchair.

TED

...You literally told me the reason you liked boats more than anything was because more than anything you wanted to someday be held for ransom at some abandoned marina.

ALAN

Roped up in my Sperrys.

TED

And I'm the child?

ALAN

There's nothing wrong with having fantasies involving the man you hope you'll be.

TED

A juvenile captive?

ALAN

A guy worth holding up for ransom.

TED

And who do you hope will save you? Your captor? Where am I?

ALAN

You haven't had a guy like me. Maybe some guys *like* me. But. Of me? Dressed like this *for* you? You have no idea the things I can hold onto until it's time to get back. I'm like a vending machine.

TED

You knew I'd be at this thing tonight.

ALAN

It's what all the boys with all their winter boyfriends said. That you like a boy wearing a necktie because of what you could do to the guy wearing one.

TED

Just the one?

ALAN

I'm assuming you've got plenty more laying around.

TED

I've got plenty of things.

ALAN

They said that too. Alas –

TED

All of it locked away. Secured and put aside for good.

ALAN

Jealous.

TED steps away from the fire.

TED

Fire's lit.

ALAN

Drinks are made.

ALAN hands TED his fake beer.

Maybe after this, you could help yourself to a real one. Cheers.

TED

Sure.

They clink. They sip.

ALAN

I'm sure that tastes like none of the fun but all of the bloat.

TED

It masquerades as something else late at night.

ALAN

You ever go to AA?

TED

No way. Too many faggots acting pious over abstaining from a thing they were never really dependent on to begin with. Toads, just. Half of them on their phones. It ain't like the movies. Looking to reaffirm some sanctimonious personality bullshit that isn't even theirs to claim. 'This one time at Pride, I had vodka and got fisted.' Fuck off –

ALAN

Yeah. 'Me too.'

TED

That's exactly right. Bunch of LARPerS. Nowadays, using it as a cosmetic thing; it's not like they never had any issue with it to begin with, they just gave it up in pursuit of softer skin.

ALAN

But not you.

TED

I'm fucking hardcore.

ALAN

Sounds like you also need somebody watching over you.

TED

Nah, I'm competent enough.

ALAN

You live a life hiding out here.

TED

Yeah. Where I get to I read and write and work out and work and do my thing, consider calling my ma then talk through things afterward with my Chat and I – ...what do you know about things aside from what you overhear the boys talking about? What do you know? Who are you? What do you offer me?

ALAN

What do you mean? –

TED

You act cool, talking outloud the stories you've heard about me, but I haven't heard a single one about you, first of all –

ALAN

Is all of this because you admitted you go to therapy with an AI chatbot? –

TED

And secondly – you oughtta know that it isn't particularly 'cool' to lambast the perceived personality traits of a person, you only began speaking to upfront tonight! –

ALAN

...‘Lambast,’ ...are we in some kind of novel? –

TED

Who says ‘some kind of novel’ without referencing some name of some author first? –

ALAN

I don’t need to know novel authors to know what a silly word is. You’re completely out of touch.

TED

Oh, that’s just bullshit.

ALAN

People will tell you I am as confident about others as I am open about myself.

TED

Would they.

ALAN

They would. They would even tell you I am thriving in my truth.

TED

Well, I have heard about you too. Just you know. That you’re insufferable.

ALAN

...Do you suddenly have friends I wasn’t aware of?

TED

Apparently, you think everybody *is* your friend. They say you meet a person once and then you’re talking about them like you’ve found a home in them. They say you’re like an interloper begging to be chased around the house. Hoping at some point, they’ll stop asking you to leave.

ALAN

I really get into who I come for.

TED

Who are you exactly. Where did you come from.

ALAN

My house.

TED

How do you find the stamina to get inside everything?

ALAN

The more I'm inside a thing the better chances I get of being asked to stay.

TED

You're a stray.

ALAN

I'm just a guy from the motherland, West Virginia. I'm motivated, and I read plenty about plenty of things. I work at a comic book shop, so I know what I'm talking about. Also, if you wanted to take it up a notch, I'd be down to let you interrogate me right now.

TED

You love a scenario.

ALAN

As long as there are rules in place. Especially when there are rules that allow the fantasy to become the real thing.

TED

Rules that can be overruled.

ALAN

I think life's easier with rules. Makes it easier. Easier to tell when something's unfair. And when it's time to break them for yourself. Like with flinching. When you're playing and there's flinching... as long as no one's snapped their fingers, unless they unwillingly choose to forget to, or, shouted out the safe word, flinching only means you get to go harder. As hard as you can until there's no reaction. Just reality.

TED

Okay. Have you got a safe word in mind?

ALAN

I was thinking... 'Penelope.'

TED

...‘Penelope?’ Are you out of your mind?

ALAN

Like Penelope Ann Miller in *The Shadow*? Superheroes and noir. I really love noir.

TED

‘Penelope,’ ...got it –

ALAN

Same way I love cabins, real cabins. I’m really hoping this place is as quiet as everyone says it is. I really like spending real time on ‘scenarios,’ and I’d love to be held prisoner here.

TED

Is that something I can bank in my head for later use?

ALAN

As long as you keep it to yourself until you finally do so. With no chance of chat. It’s like they say. Silence is golden. But duct tape is silver.

TED

Jesus Christ. Whatever. Fine –

ALAN

I saw that on a shirt once.

TED

Yeah. I’ll bet you did.

ALAN

I need another drink. How’re you doing?

TED crushes the can of his consumed fake beer.

ALAN goes to the kitchen.

TED

Gimme a real beer. This is draining.

ALAN

Words I’d love to hear at a later time.

TED

I think this last fake beer was the last fake beer I got. I really need a real one now.

ALAN

Slowly dribbled down on your chest?

TED

What a stupid waste of resources. Maybe.

Beat.

How would you want to be, then.

ALAN

There he is.

TED

On the floor or on the sofa or atop the ottoman?

ALAN

Whatever's going to be most comfortable in the long run.

Beat.

Have I done something that has caused you to suddenly relapse? By the way?

TED

Don't ask stuff like that. You come off an ignorant know-it-all.

ALAN

It does?

TED

Only a rare few study the exact ways people think about other people.

ALAN

You could take some pointers.