

INT. DRAMA CLASSROOM – DAY

The bell rings. SHAWN is hunched over, packing down his copy of Twelfth Night into his bag as the room is filled with a cacophony of idle chatter and laughter, drowning out MS. TRETHERWEY'S attempts at assigning homework.

MS. TRETHERWEY

(loud, commanding)

Year 8, I want you to have a monologue memorised by Monday next week!

(directed towards

Shawn)

Shawn, could I have a word with you after class?

Shawn freezes. His vision blurs up as he feels his classmates' eyes shift to him. He pulls up his hood and shrinks into his shoulders slightly, burrowing his face in his forearms. He's avoiding looking at anyone else in the room as his classmates leave the two alone.

SHAWN

(mumbling)

Am I in any trouble, miss?

Ms. Trethewey walks around her desk to face the boy. Shawn continues to avoid making eye contact with her, looking down at the back of his wrists with discontent.

MS. TRETHERWEY

(gently)

Shawn, are you alright? Any worries at home, any issues with friends or family?

Shawn tenses up.

SHAWN

Me? No.

Ms. Trethewey crouches down to Shawn's eye level, trying to get his attention. Shawn looks up to meet her gaze. Her disappointed face juxtaposing her gentle voice.

MS. TRETHERWEY

Shawn, this isn't the first time we've had this talk. If you won't talk to me or the school counsellor, we can't help you.

MS. TRETHERWEY (CONT'D)

We are rapidly approaching the end of the spring term, and you are currently on track to fail not just drama, but also P.E. and music.

MS. TRETHERWEY (CONT'D)

I know you don't want this but if your grades aren't up by the end of May, I fear you might need to resit year 8.

Shawn looks back down at his wrists in disbelief. He clenches his fists and presses his eyes closed, overcome with fear. He does not respond to Ms. Trethewey.

MS. TRETHERWEY

Shawn? Are you okay?

Shawn tries to collect himself, wiping away some tears from his eyes. He goes to speak, but as his voice cracks he stops himself.

SHAWN

(trembling,
mumbling)

M-miss, please. I... I-I can't improve in...

MS. TRETHERWEY

Shawn, speak from your diaphragm, like we learned in class. I can't hear you.

Shawn takes a moment to gather himself fully, taking a deep breath, trying to ignore the guttural sounds he produce, and looks back at Ms. Trethewey.

SHAWN

(soft-spoken but
intelligible)

I can't improve in all my failing classes. Isn't there something I can do to please not have to resit?

Ms. Trethewey thinks for a moment. She sighs, stands up and takes off her glasses, putting them on the desk behind her before pinching the bridge of her nose.

MS. TRETHERWEY

There is one thing I can have you do, and I'm willing to give you some drama credit for it.

MS. TRETHERWEY (CONT'D)

We are still in need of an actor for the leading role in this year's theatre production.

MS. TRETHERWEY (CONT'D)

I had hoped that someone from this class would have auditioned but none of you have.

MS. TRETHERWEY (CONT'D)

If you take on this role, I will give you a passing grade in Drama. Does that sound fair?

Shawn's eyes glaze over, his vision blurring. He pictures himself on stage, wearing a costume highlighting his disproportionate and grotesque body, making horrific noises when reading his lines. He grows nauseous at the thought.

SHAWN

T-There must be something else, anything else I can do instead of that, right?

Ms. Trethewey shakes her head and grabs her glasses.

MS. TRETHERWEY

Shawn, I'm sorry but you either do this, or... This is your one chance. I would not be so quick to throw it away.

Ms. Trethewey puts her hand on his shoulder.

MS. TRETHERWEY

(gentle)

Please. At least consider it. I will give you until the end of Friday to decide.

Shawn, still nauseous, gets his things together in a hurry. He rushes to the bathroom, feeling an urge to throw up.

Novel
Nirvan