

Ugly Shoes Must Die

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Honestly, Norah Trevan thought, men were such babies. Unable to handle even the slightest negative comment and constantly deigning to regress back to some over-emotional response that has no impact whatsoever. It's not like her comment was unwarranted or anything; the dude was wearing Ed Hardy, for God's sake! *Ed Hardy*. One of the ugliest brands ever, save for toe shoes. If anything, the guy was asking for it.

Their impromptu staring (or rather, glaring) match ended as the boy's mobile pinged, signaling the arrival of an email. He fumbled as he pulled out the phone from his neon orange basketball shorts and Norah couldn't help the roll of her eyes. Dork. 'Ed Hardy' gave her a quick scoff in return and an "I don't even know what I expected from *you*..." look before turning and trudging back down the empty hallway.

She squinted at his retreating back, mentally cataloguing every item of clothing he was wearing, from his hideous slip-ons to his sloppily unbuttoned dress shirt. God, he dressed like early 2000s throw-up. And not in the almost semi-bearable frosty lipstick midriff-bearing top way either.

Now don't read her wrong or anything, Norah wasn't that much of a judgmental person. Well, OK, she was, but not like ... *that* much. Just enough to prance around with a brain aimed at pinpointing ugly footwear and coming up with witty and/or rude commentary.

Look, shoes were very important to her, okay? Like, majorly important. Shoes were ... they were the reason why she got up every morning; the reason why she was broke every month; the reason why she didn't get that internship position at Elite—well, let's not go there right now. She only just got her winged eyeliner right today, no point in ruining it over a random sob story.

As 'Ed Hardy' hunched away, Felicity whistled long and low next to her. "Damn girl, you didn't have to be so mean to him. Dude was just tryna ask you something. I mean, like, I *know* they're ugly shoes and whatever but what he do to you?"

Now Felicity McIntyre was as cool as cool can be (side effect from hanging out with Norah for ten years, she usually sniggered to herself) but the girl had a heart of solid rose-gold and eyes as blind as Brian Atwood when he designed for 2015's Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. Not the best combo to complement Norah's usual sardonic way of living. Nor was that the best year for Brian Atwood. Tacky seemed to be his M.O.

Norah gave her a side eye and snorted, "Um, I don't need to explain myself. I think we both saw that frayed fringe and distressed lining." Tightening her grip on her tote bag, she tilted her chin towards the now empty lobby, desperately trying to will the image of those ill-patterned shoes away from her mind. "C'mon, we gotta get to Applied Footwear Design. Hopefully Valerie's wearing another tacky fur vest from her 'collection.' Still can't get over last week's leopard print, like how she could she have even left her dorm looking like *that*?"

Felicity shook her head at Norah's diversion disguised as an incoming rant but dutifully tossed her empty drink in a nearby bin and hurried to keep up with Norah's pace. "You feeling alright, Norrie? You're not still cut up about Elite, yeah? I know you said you didn't wanna know who got the internship but—"

Norah shot her a look. “—*No*, Felicity. I told you, I super don’t care about who got it! Why would you even bring this up?”

Though, truthfully, yes, Norah was *definitely* still cut up about not receiving the internship. Word on the street (aka Twitter) was that someone else from their uni got the position for their “unique shoe designs”, and that meant that Norah didn’t get it, and that meant that her dream had crash-landed into a pile of shattered pieces of her broken heart, and now she was never going to become a fashion designer or own that metallic stiletto line or meet Jimmy Choo, and then she was going to die alone with nine cats for company and—

“—you’re doing it again. Stop thinking so hard.” Felicity laid a comforting hand on her shoulder. “Take a deep breath, c’mon. You’re only 21, girl, you’ve got so much time! Just apply for more; Elite’s not the only one out there.”

Norah sniffed back her incoming tears and tried the attitude she was so known for. “Wh-whatever. They needed me more than I needed them anyway.”

Felicity watched her friend stride away, flatforms tapping insistently against the polished wood. If only she knew.

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So OK, who told spring it could be a season of total and absolute *crap*? Seriously, who? Because Norah wanted to meet that person right now and have a long talk with them on the merits (or lack thereof) of keeping a young woman with anger issues inexorably unhappy.

Spring was meant to be a time for tearing through her favourite blogs, binge obsessing over Paris Fashion Week, or sewing little daisies onto her sandals! Spring was *not* supposed to bring her more tears and more rejection emails than she could bother counting. Norah slammed her laptop shut and spun to face her tawny cat, currently purring away on three of her corduroy blazers and two cashmere scarves.

Despite his current regal air, Chairman Meow was her goofy American Wirehair cat who was usually a good companion (victim) to vent to. He’d always look at her inquisitively, head tilted to the right, and would only interrupt her rarely with a loud “*mrow*” to remind her that, despite his looks and intelligence, he was still just a cat.

Norah shifted to kneel next to her beloved lump of fur, hands gripping the edge of the bed as if in reverence of even being allowed near the resting kitty. Taking on an affected Southern accent, she nestled her head near his. “O Chairman Meow, pray tell me, will I ever be able to work for Elite?”

One meow meant: *I dunno, human*. One long meow meant: *Give me a treat, you human wench*.

And whaddaya know? A long meow.

Norah wrinkled her nose in annoyance. “Chairman! That’s it, no treats for you for the whole day, greedy guts.” Chairman Meow meowed plaintively and leapt off her bed to dash out of the room. “Well, fine, it’s not like I ever loved you anyway!”

“Hey girl.” Norah looked up from her fake wounded-styled sobbing just as Felicity staggered in with a massive pile of clothes in her arms. “I just saw Chairman yowling by the window. You say anything to his majesty?” To

this, Norah just groaned into her bedspread. “Mm, thought as much. Anyway! There’s a party tonight at Dizzy’s and—” Felicity tossed what seemed to be the entire contents of their (considerably large) wardrobe on top of her. “—we’re going. No excuses.”

Norah struggled to escape the confines of a sparkly pair of leggings. “*Save me.*”

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The party was in full swing when they arrived, several people already milling about on the balcony, waving to random people below as they sloshed their drinks everywhere. Beside her, another horde of Felicity’s legions of friends hollered back at them, their diamond bracelets and plastic rings twinkling in the light of the streetlamps.

Norah darted Felicity a look to say: *Seriously, these are your friends?*

Felicity just shrugged: *I met them that one time and now they won’t leave me alone.*

Their small group waded through the scattered crowd lounging outside the entrance of Dizzy’s apartment. Taking the stairs one at a time, Norah couldn’t help herself this time and scoffed loudly to Felicity over her shoulder. “Seriously, this has to be the most generic group of shoes and people I’ve ever seen.” This was met with the expected scandalised gasps and angry mutterings.

One of the girls in front of Norah sliced her a snide glance and stage-whispered to the guy next to her, “I can’t stand that ho! Could she be any more *rude*?” She said ‘rude’ as though it were a curse word of huge proportions.

Well, a big shocker, it really wasn’t to Norah Trevan. She had to deal with that particular comment from everyone, pretty much every day of her life (not like it was unwarranted though ... but still!) “At least I’m not wearing TOMS knock-offs or obviously fake tats.” Norah made sure her voice carried over the din. “And I think the strip club was the other way, *ho*. Nice tube top. Was it your mum’s?”

Before the other could retaliate—or try to scratch her eyes out—Felicity cut through with an expert “Okayyy, so coat room’s over there everyone! Let’s hurry so we can swipe all the good drinks.” This was met with huge cheers, the incident with Norah already forgotten in lieu of potential extreme intoxication. “I need to talk to you ASAP,” she whispered urgently to Norah, who pouted back angrily. Trust Felicity to ruin her fun.

One of Felicity’s numerous friends accosted them before they could remove their jackets, however. “Felicity, hey!” And since Fel was ‘nice’, she slid her arm off Norah’s shoulders to sling him into a hug. “Dizzy!”

Norah took one glimpse at his dirtied Timberlands, ripped jeans and white t-shirt, and rolled her eyes. It was like the word basic was stamped all over him, including the solid gold chain dangling off his scrawny neck. “I’m going to get a drink,” she muttered. “Catch ya later, Fel.”

She ignored Felicity’s “Norah, wait!” and quickly turned around the corner of the long hallway to what she hoped was towards the kitchen. Despite the noise, Norah could still make out Dizzy’s whining, “Why’d you bring her anyway, Fel? Tonight’s my night! Plus she’s always such a bi—” *Thwack.*

Norah smiled at her best friend’s loyalty and continued her way through the apartment; anyway, it wasn’t like she seriously wanted to come, but she couldn’t just leave Felicity alone over here. Who’d take her back home and

listen to her drunken rants about the city's terrible train system? Who'd make sure she didn't fall into a canal? Norah Trevan, that's who.

And that same Norah Trevan was still navigating through the maze of sticky people strewn about, aimlessly swaying their arms to a current Top 40 hit or gyrating in a corner alone. After the last body was stepped around sideways, she finally reached the kitchen only to have the same girl from before toss her frothy drink all over Norah and her navy platform shoes.

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"Oh, it's you."

Tossing her hair back, Norah looked up to see the long-forgotten 'Ed Hardy' standing in the doorway of the washroom with vague disdain in his eyes and automatically wanted to chuck her ruined platforms at him. "Come to gloat, huh? 'Ooh look its Norah, the girl who showed me the light about my hideous shoes and now she's covered in beer, wearing Dizzy's disgustingly wet slippers, ooh she looks so pathetic ha ha *ha*."

The corner of Ed Hardy's lip went up and Norah refused to think it made his face look good. The beer probably made her eyes drunk, that's all. Through osmosis or something like that. Shut up, she was a fashion major! "OK, first of all, I don't sound like that."

She ignored him and went back to scrubbing the shoes with a crumpled up wet tissue. Thank God it wasn't her velvet pair. Now *that* would've set off the waterworks. As well as the claws.

After a good two minutes of watching her scrub forlornly at the plastic, Ed Hardy piped up "What are you doing?"

No one could be that stupid, could they? Maybe he was blind. That would explain his crimes against fashion as well as humanity.

"I'm not blind," She could practically hear the half-smirk again, "I *know* what you're doing but...well, yeah, I got curious and wanted to talk to you. About the last time we met."

Norah really had to stop speaking out loud without meaning to, this was getting to be supremely weird.

Another half-smirk could be heard from Hardy. "I don't think it's that weird."

"Oh my God, *what do you want from me?*" She couldn't help yelling, the sound ricocheting around the room, causing Ed to step back. She couldn't handle this right now, she really couldn't. It was a freaking crisis.

"N-nothing, I just thought..." Ed Hardy paused to bite his lip. Norah cursed him again. "Look, I know a fair thing or two about spilt drinks as well so..." He produced a pack of wet wipes out of his back pocket. "Ta-da."

"What. Why would you even have that?"

He beamed over the colourful packaging. "Previous experience! My last pair of tie-dyed panda-print socks met a bad turn with a pint and—" he broke into a maniacal guffaw of laughter. "I'm kidding, I'm kidding! Though not about the previous experience part. That was *bad*," he winced. "My jelly sandals were never the same after that."

For the sake of her mental health, Norah chose to ignore this and instead demanded, “How do you know my name?” And the aggression in her voice couldn’t be helped, not when she was wearing someone else’s squelchy washroom slippers, not when she smelled strongly of beer, and especially not when she was clutching her shoes as though they were her sick children (but they totally were). “We’ve only met that one time.”

“Uh, so about that,” Ed Hardy coughed uncomfortably. “You might wanna sit down for this...”

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The bathroom’s countertop wasn’t the most comfortable place to sit on but it wasn’t like Norah had much of a choice, what with Alistair “Just-call-me-AI” Hardwick commandeering the bathtub to himself.

“So lemme get this straight: *you* got the internship position at Elite.”

“Yes.”

“You. Got the internship position. At Elite. Because of your portfolio. That is mostly comprised of *slip-on shoes*.”

“Mmhmm.”

“The very same slip-ons that you’re wearing right now. This,” she gestured to his hideously-shod feet, “‘prototype’.”

“Yup.”

Norah heaved a gigantic sigh and rested her head on the wall behind her. “I’m just...so done right now. Beaten by a pair of Ed Hardy rip offs. What a way to go.”

Alistair laughed slightly into the cowl of his oversized hoodie. “Hey, that’s just the way I dress, OK. It’s not like your flat platforms are much better, y’know; you look like some angry giant on a mission half the time.”

This was met with loud silence. Very loud silence. And maybe a cricket or two.

“Too soon?”

“Are you...actually...dissing my shoes? Dissing *me*?” Norah was sure she was going into cardiac arrest; she was just so sure of it. “*You* having the gall to diss my shoes...my ‘platforms’...wait, what the hell? Do I really look like an angry giant to you?”

It looked as though it was all Alistair could do not to burst into peals of laughter. “If the shoe fits.”

“Why you little—” Norah leapt off the counter to lunge for his neck as he immediately threw up his arms, chuckling all the way. “Down girl. Heel.”

“I’ll show you heel!”

“Am I interrupting something?” Slowly, both turned their heads to face Felicity whose eyebrows were currently very interested in reaching her fringe. “What’s...happening here then...?”

Norah immediately stopped trying to actively strangle the living daylights out of the once-Ed-Hardy and sat down on the tub's rim demurely, crossing her hands across her lap. "Nothing."

"Hey, man." Alistair nodded at Felicity who returned his 'sup nod. "You didn't tell her about who got the internship?"

"Well, I was *going* to," Felicity angled her a measured look, being careful to visibly judge Norah's ruined shoes as they rested despondently in the sink. "But she ran away as Butthead #1 came up to me."

OK, so she didn't *actually* say Butthead #1, but Norah was a mature young adult and this was exactly how much she valued Felicity's other friends. "How'd you find me, Fel? My phone's on silent, couldn't hear any of my notifications."

"The girl whose shoes you insulted was bragging about how she ruined yours—" Alistair muttered "So it's not just me then?"—"so I told Dizzy to get rid of her and then went looking for you." Felicity sighed. "Why'd you always have to be so confrontational, girl? They're ugly, so what? They don't affect you."

"Um! My eyes are affected. I feel personally attacked, like, all the time." Even to Norah, this seemed a weak response. "Look, it's just me, OK? I'm basically 'wired' to find everything in need of my help, and that's why I wanna beautify everything! That's why I'm majoring in designing shoes, you *know* this." Norah couldn't help the hurt tone. As final year art students, this was a shared topic of their grievances.

It was now rapidly becoming apparent that Alistair's main role in Norah's life was to find everything she said amusing because he laughed loudly at her statement. "Dude, that's so stupid. No one's 'wired' to be so judge-y all the time. That's all on you."

Norah shot him a look of pure hatred which melted off into 'resigned'. "Look, I dunno how *not* to be such a judgmental cow, alright? It's natural to me, to judge someone's shoes before their personality, to not let anyone give me crap. At least I can say that you *clearly* suit your hideous designs that somehow won over Elite."

Felicity shook her head at Norah. "Norrie, get up. I thought this party would get your mind off things, but...it's obviously not. Let's just go get some burgers 'cause I'm friggin' starving. You too, Al."

Now *this* was something they could both agree on.

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Swallowing what was left of her burger, Norah stretched her arms out behind herself, making sure to cuff Alistair round the head for good measure. His indignant yelp was drowned out by the noisy sip she took from his milkshake and the sound of Felicity's phone sounding off with more notifications.

According to Felicity's most recent text, the trio had bolted pretty quickly from Dizzy's place—*too* quickly for his liking. Apparently it was the "absolute worst" time to leave, literally just minutes before he was going to unveil his latest masterpiece: an obviously Salvador Dali-inspired painting of himself "in bloom, in lust, and in rapture."

None of them could help but shudder as the photo of said painting flashed onscreen. *Gag.*

“So,” Alistair began after a few minutes of repulsed silence, “that’s what the party was for then.”

“I..I didn’t know he was that flexible.” Felicity looked as disturbed as Norah felt.

Letting out a few choice words, Norah continued, “Thank God we left early then. I dunno what I’d have said if I had to see that atrocity in person. Maybe call the cops and report him for visual abuse.”

“Norah!” Felicity admonished, albeit half-heartedly. “Dizz put a lot of work into that. I saw him painting every time I passed by the art gallery block. At least he was fully clothed then ...” She broke off into a murmur, obviously still shell-shocked at how physically free Dizzy chose to paint himself.

Norah stuck her tongue out in response. “Maybe he’d at least be James Franco-worthy if he put more effort into practicing his craft, or whatever, instead of spamming my Facebook newsfeed with constant status updates about how kale and kombucha are his reasons for living ‘cause they give him *‘liiiiife.’*”

Noted loudmouth Alistair, who had been quietly watching their conversation unfurl, apparently decided this was the right time to stick his ugly Ed Hardy-esque foot in. “I know I’ve only just met you properly, Norah but like ... what is wrong with you? Why do you hate everyone?”

For the second time that night, Felicity interrupted Norah’s incoming tirade with an, “Okayyy, let’s not have a catfight in the middle of the night, alright guys? The only time I’m gonna be on YouTube is either for my own uploads or when I’m receiving my Emmy for Outstanding Prosthetic Makeup; *not* when I’m trying to stop,” she gestured to the air between Norah and Alistair, “whatever this is.”

Norah huffed and put her figurative claws down. “I don’t hate everyone ...”, at Alistair’s look of disbelief, “... much.”

“So it’s not a matter of hatred, it’s more like ... your own insecurities?”

Felicity pulled up her phone and made herself scarce, muttering about going to the washroom before she became a helpless witness to either of their murders.

“Insecurities? You think I lash out at people, talk smack or whatever because I’m...insecure?” Norah hoped her voice seemed clear because her mind certainly wasn’t. She didn’t wanna credit anything to Alistair, just his awful designs, but she had to give it up to the white boy. Once his pipe dreams of being a shoe designer ended, he could try pop psychology as a viable career.

“I mean, you’re incredibly talented but I never hear you talk about your own designs. Whether they’re better or if they suck. You’re always attacking others or being unnecessarily mean about certain stuff.” Alistair plucked out a straw from their food tray and twisted it between his fingers, the most obvious sign of nervousness. “I just don’t think you need to do that when your own portfolio’s so good.”

A combination of intense blushing, speechlessness, and a lack of things to articulate wasn’t Norah’s favourite thing to be, but she couldn’t help her response to this left-field compliment. “Th-thank you? How would you even know about my portfolio, though? Did you check out my Behance? We’ve never even properly spoken...”

“I, uh, saw it linked on your school account.”

“How would you have seen—you’ve been stalking me!” Norah couldn’t help the surprised glee. If psychology didn’t work out for him, Alistair could try being a magician. He could seriously make everyone believe he’s a walking tomato based on how red his face had gotten.

“Stalking is, uh, a strong word for it. Try looking for information?” He fake-coughed before carrying on hurriedly, “When you yelled at me the first time we met for bumping into you, I actually just wanted to ask you about a collab. I didn’t know how to speak to you then ‘cause you always seemed so standoffish, so I thought I’d try the romantic comedy movie routine my sister’s always talking about. I didn’t think you’d be so, well, rude though.”

Norah watched him maul the poor defenceless straw into something unrecognisable before speaking hesitantly. “I’m sorry? I didn’t know you wanted to do a collaboration with me. I thought you were gonna yell at me for bumping into you, and then I saw your shoes and literally saw red. I was like, ‘Ed Hardy wants to yell at *me* when he’s wearing *that*? I couldn’t believe it! They were really ugly shoes.”

Alistair looked at her incredulously before breaking off into usual his jumpy laughter. Don’t tell anyone but Norah joined in and let out a few nervous giggles as well before Felicity crept back to their table.

“Well this is new. I was honestly expecting Norah to have killed you by now. You guys all OK now?”

Norah looked at Alistair before allowing a full smile to spread across her face, a smile that he returned completely. “Not yet but maybe soon? After he tells me more about the details of this collab, of course. I don’t work with just *anyone*, y’know...”

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