

BASTIAN (excerpt)

BASTIAN introduced themselves earlier as a transgender person.

They're dressed in a mix of colors and black, of whimsiness and sobriety. They talk in a quiet, firm voice. On the Cis-SCREEN, they appear as well - but dressed and styled clearly as a boy.

Cis-SCREEN: Here.

I'm here. I'm the expected one.

I'm the one you are looking at in the subway when you hear the sound of a heel you weren't ready for. You catch a glimpse from the other end of the train. What type of human is this? Why are their feet making so much noise and their voice so little? Is that a dress? Does it have breasts? How much of it is a trick?

You are looking for an explanation so badly. You need to understand what you see, what you hear. Why does what you see not match with what you hear, and why are suddenly all of your senses trying to fool you into believing something that you cannot *understand*?

And then you are just looking for this face. The expected face, the one you could recognize in the middle of all this nonsense. Here is the one thing that can succeed to comfort you at this moment: facial hair. As short as it is shaven, you can detect the unborn beard behind my makeup. You like how straight my nose looks, and how square my jaw is. And suddenly all that matters are those big, rough veins that you see running on my hands and up my arms, through my bracelets and my lace sleeves, veins as large and as blue as you hoped: those of a husband. Of a father. Of a son.

Yes, this is how you're peering at me this morning, in the subway, as if, past my dress, you were looking for tufts of hair and a pair of Calvin Klein's.

BASTIAN: I am the face you are staring at.

You've been staring at me for so long I almost want to ask you if I managed to wax my eyebrows evenly.

You watch me as if you were taking something you were entitled to. I can see that domineering look on your face, your greedy eyes eating away at my intimacy. You glow with that subtle blend of pride and shamelessness that I could someday envy. Crazy part is: I feel ashamed. I only dare to cast furtive glances over my shoulder, as if my only right is to be seen without looking back. Clinging to the handrail, I feel like a flag on a bad-weather day: at the mercy of the elements, tossed around, on display.

And I can't help but wonder: what do you see? I am so anxious to know that I discreetly jostle my way to the doors, to appreciate the horror you witness in the reflection of the shiny panels. And the thing is, I only meet that same face that I find in every mirror, and every shop window. It's me. I'm the face they're pointing at. I keep looking for the reason of their laughter and disgust; and it turns out it's me.

Cis-screen: Don't look for me. I am not there, I don't exist outside of your personal need for reassurance.

I am the simplest way you found to explain to yourself what is wrong, this morning, in the subway: a guy, in girl clothes. And that is how you violated someone's freedom to be themselves. This is how you forgot about identity in your urge to understand.

Don't try to understand, because that's what condemns me to exist in the first place. I am the mask you staple on someone's face, I am an invasive extension of your comfort zone. I impersonate the man you imagine behind my skirt.

As if clothes were the one thing keeping me from being a man. As if, if you were to remove my makeup and strip me naked with your hands the way you've been doing with your eyes, I would appear in all my maleness at last.

Boy, are you in for a disappointment.

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