

I'm Noticing You Noticing Me, So Before You Ask

I am 13 years old. It is April 29th, I am seated before an 8-foot mirror in the marble parlor of Anton's Wigs and Kurt, green eyes, mid 40's, asks if I am ready. I am fragile as the sheet of mirror carried by hand, on foot, from one end of Pike Place to the other. No Kurt, I am not ready.

Through the mirror, I see my mother.
Her eyes are stones that line each end of the Ponte Sisto in Rome, as the Tiber River, ready or not, rushes through.

My father was a paper boy when he first arrived in America, his ink-stained fingers gripping the handle of his thrift shop bike. I imagine the number of tire rotations it would take to afford a wig like mine.

The razor buzzes for only three minutes and Kurt clicks it off. Alopecia is like a slow rotting peach, eventually, the fungus will consume the last of healthy patches. If my hair was a magician, there must have been thousands of trap doors it escaped me through. The stage lights are off now.

I try to outsmart it, I stop brushing my teeth in front of the mirror. I keep my head down and pace the hallway. Maybe it'll vanish like a rabbit in the hat, maybe if I never look in the mirror again, I won't have to be what I am.

My bald head is the friend that always introduces itself first, and I am the shadow that follows. Before I even open my mouth, my baldness climbs on top of the lunch table, waving its arms, screaming DO I REMIND YOU OF THE ALIEN FROM SPLICE? LOOK AT YOUR RIGHT HAND, DO I RESEMBLE YOUR THUMB?

I am 22 now. I still chain myself to every compliment about my smooth skin, my perfectly round skull. I visit my parents' house and stand in the same bathroom. I am taller now, but still 11 steps from the sink to my nightstand.

I am still the shadow who follows and only appears when the sky has promised yellow, golden beams, but I am practicing how to brush my teeth in the mirror twice a week now. I am still the shadow, but I am practicing how to believe that I too am someone worth following.

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