

Go Piss Girl

I'm at that new coffeehouse Marshall told me to try. The one with the specialty cold brew that's the talk of the town, the belle of the debutante coffee ball, according to him, and I knew I had to try it. If nothing else, to get him to shut up about it.

"Nah, Dylan, 'cause it's actually so freaking *good*," he'd told me, stretching out the "oo" for good measure. This was his conclusion to a ride-to-work-long lecture about how he *can't believe I still drink that crap* after he caught sight of a Starbucks order in my cup holder. Quietly, I wonder how much it would take for me to shove him out the passenger-side window. But then again, I figure that would just make us both late for work.

"Ask Charly," he said then. "He'll know what I mean."

Later, when I did get around to asking Charly, to confirm whether or not Marshall was full of shit, I got my answer:

yeh it's pretty good. gotten me thru some ROUGH all-nighters...

So I caved. And you know what, the coffee was fine. Perfectly enjoyable as far as cold brew experiences go. Only now it's zipped right through my entire digestive tract like it's Formula One, and I'm once again forced to confront Barista Jillian at the counter.

"Excuse me, where are your bathrooms?" I ask her with my best *No I Am Definitely Not Actively Shitting Myself Right Now Voice*.

Barista Jillian just looks at me, confused, and all I can do is stare back for the eternity and a half it takes her to raise an unsure pointer finger over her left shoulder.

"The... men's room is that way," she says, voice lilting on the word *men*, like she's searching for some confirmation, or maybe like she's trying to convince herself.

And I get it. I'm an enigma.

That's the word Marshall uses, anyway.

"Cis people," he says, "can't handle it. It's like their brains explode. Or melt!"

It's not like I *want* to go around melting people's brains with my existence. They're just not really giving me a choice in this binary construction of reality—a "false dichotomy of the pee pee," Charly coined once, while I was halfway through mourning another trip to a public toilet, this time the one at work.

Ever since my top surgery I've found myself, more and more often, doing what Charly calls "Gender Math."

"I'm like a trans Isaac Newton!" he said once, boastful.

"Bold of you to assume Isaac Newton wasn't trans," I said, teasing. Mostly teasing. The man practically discovered the rainbow; there had to have been some queer alchemy there.

Let's see: a masculine crewneck plus a single feminine earring divided by men's-cut pants to the power of a flat chest equals...?

One confused Barista Jillian, apparently.

I decide I'm fine being an enigma for right now because right now this enigma has to take a shit, and I figure it doesn't really matter whether I rush to the Boy Toilet or Girl Toilet.

And it's not until I've locked the stall door and hunkered over the seat that I realize this is my first official time on a public men's toilet.

I'd heard, of course, how disgusting it is in men's rooms before.

"No, it's *bad*, Dylan," Marshall had said. I remember his eyes glazing over like a traumatized war vet, and his nose scrunching up like there was shit smeared on the walls and piss swimming in the vents.

This is not nearly so bad. I wonder, for a second, if I got lucky. But I don't know if *luck* and *public bathroom* really belong together that way. Still, it's not so bad. In fact, it's practically the same as every other public toilet experience I've had before.

I think of the women's rooms I've been in: sometimes pink tiles and always a row of stalls with too-short doors and sometimes tampon dispensers with a usually broken coin slot and often a Koala Kare Baby Changing Station that Marshall once said he saw a man do a line of coke off of.

"These fuckin' cokeheads," he'd said through a hearty laugh while Charly and I are hollering. "I'm telling you, they see the world in terms of flat surfaces," he holds his hand out palm-side-down, as if to illustrate his point. "Ninety-degree angles and shit."

Once I've finished my post-brew business, I'm washing my hands at the sink when a twenty-something in a baseball cap and thrifted indie bedroom pop band tee steps in, spots me, and nearly does a clean 180 pivot on his heels.

"Oh, uh, my bad," he's saying, practically halfway out the door, "I thought this was the men's!"

"It is," I say matter-of-factly, but that only serves to confuse him further.

These days, using any public bathroom makes me think of that one riddle: two doors and two guards; one tells the truth and the other only lies. What question would you ask them to find the door that leads to freedom?

Another time, after my post-credits pee at a movie theater, a blonde woman catches sight of me by the hand dryers and scowls at me.

"Hey! This is the *women's* bathroom," she says in a tone that makes me think she could have tried to sue Dollar General last week because she tripped on a stray children's toy in aisle three.

(Marshall told us that lady ultimately decided not to press charges, but not before demanding some financial compensation for her trauma.)

“I know,” I say, and I’m not sure I’m embarrassed for her or embarrassed for myself.

I hate having to choose, I think every time I have to pick a door.

And I do have to, because fortunately for the patrons of every establishment I’ve ever set foot in, I don’t have an eighth of the guts—the bladder?—that Aunt T Jackie has to “Piss On The Floor” in an act of political resistance against my bathroom woes.

Still, it’s a great song, and the bridge hits the nail right on the head:

“They see I’m transgender, they say I can’t use the women’s room

I’m gon’ pee on the floor, just like I’m using the restroom, oh!”

For me, it’s less a problem of outright rejection and more a subtle, built-in negligence, slowly eroding any semblance of confidence I’d established about who I was, or where I might belong—whether I might belong anywhere at all.

“You’ve gotta *carve* a space out for yourself,” Marshall insisted once over drinks. “Not like you got much to lose!”

“My dignity?” I said then, desperately trying to make it a joke, but Charly and Marshall knew me too well for that.

“Can’t hurt to ask,” Charly said, sincere. And then, “Just try.”

So I try. I take my first chance back at work to phone the HR office, and I’m immediately regretting it the second Cynthia picks up on the other end, voice a faux brand of chipper.

“Hey, ah, hi! So—” My voice cracks on the *hey*, and suddenly jumping out the 12th story window doesn’t sound so bad. I hate calls to HR. I hate making phone calls, period. Still, I clear my throat and try again.

“I’m a trans employee in the building, and I’ve been getting some, uh... unwanted attention, in the restrooms. I was wondering if there were any gender-neutral bathrooms in the building?”

“Ah,” says HR Cynthia on the other end of the line. “Well, I can add you to the list for security’s private bathroom on the first floor.”

“The first floor?”

“Yes,” she says, “you can ask them to unlock it whenever you need it.”

Quietly, the 12th floor window invites me closer again. *The first floor?* This woman might as well be telling me the alley is out back.

I think about HR Cynthia’s offer, about standing up from my desk, shuffling down twelve flights of stairs, finding the security desk, and prostrating myself on the marbled floors of the lobby before whatever poor sad sack happens to be on lunch break when nature calls.

“O, Grand Toilet Lord! Might I be granted permission to pee?”

I laugh a full-sized laugh into the receiver, which I guess HR Cynthia must have taken as a “yes,” because the next day, I am on that bathroom list, apparently, because as I’m entering the building, the bald security officer at the lobby waves me over with way too much enthusiasm.

“You’re the trans one, right?” he asks me, his volume betraying some sense of excitement. It could be sweet on some level, I think. But not twelve levels.

I nod in place of a *Thank you for your valiant service*, and head up for another day of Bathroom Roulette.

I think about the guards from the riddle again. One tells the truth and one lies: one for GENTLEMEN, and the other, LADIES. I am no gentleman. I am no lady. What question could I possibly ask to find the door that leads to freedom?

“Where is the door for me?”