Awkward

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SYNOPSIS

When you look, what do you see? What should you see? What can’t you see?
When you listen, what will you hear?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Cameron Pierce - male, age 22, percussionist and lyricist in band Freed the Caged
Various New Yorkers (including a violinist, a camerawoman, and a brunette)

KEY

bold = downbeat
norm = upbeat
italic = quarter note syllable, beginning on downbeat
< n > = quarter rest on n\textsuperscript{th} beat in measure
< & > = eighth rest
< a > = sixteenth rest
Time: late evening on Friday (12/29)
Place: New York, New York

(CAMERON is riding the subway. There is a backpack at his feet with a skateboard poking out from one pocket, drumsticks from another. He bobs his head to a beat no one else can hear, drumming his fingers on his thighs. Note: He doesn’t have headphones on.

He’s stuffed a hat and two gloves into the pockets of his pants, but he’s not wearing anything else to fend off cold: a short-sleeve tee, bleach-stained blue jeans with organically-acquired knee holes, ankle socks and classic Vans. His idea of appropriate date-night attire, even in December.

Other passengers are seated or standing here and there, maybe one with a book or a magazine, one with a newspaper, one merely people watching; the rest of them grip smartphones or tablets.)

(4/4 beat. 118 bpm.)

CAMERON
Clack, pit-pat, click-clack, pit-pat, goes the metal on the metal of the wheels on the track underneath my feet, hear the rhythm, feel the beat, in the sway of the train under New York streets < & >
Tap my toes, rap the seats, slap the poles around me, lose control to the beat. I don’t care what they see.
They can stare openly < & > but no one in the car gonna notice me, right?
Gazes on the screens of the phones in their hands, not a glance at a man whose jam is sweet to the sour of the city’s underground route’s screech!
< 1 > Then I feel a stare. Should I care? Do I dare glance up and look to see who’s there? < & >
Eyes study me as if I were a freak cos I’m pickin’ up a rhythm and I’m playin’ to the beat. Eyes meet: < & > my hazel with her green. < & > I feel her judgement pound my loud to silence, yet I smile fore I freeze cos I like her looks in spite of her looks cold as ice cross the isle at me. < & > Next look we share: my grin, her glare, plus a hostile stare from the guy on her right with an arm round her like...
Oh. < 2 > Right. < 4 >
Awkward. < 2 > < 3 > < 4 >
(The train slows. CAMERON hops up, slinging his backpack over one shoulder; neither skateboard nor drumstick flies out. He dons his gloves and his hat. Then he grabs his drumsticks and plays on, rapping the bars and tapping the poles and smacking the doors within his reach.

People stare: Some are irked by the noise, a few of them enough to snap at him or mutter an insult or flip the bird. Some are pleased by the show, a few of them enough to raise a smartphone and record it.

In spite of just how much attention they’ve given him during that minute there, they’d honestly never recognize him as the drummer of Freed the Caged.

Still...

When the doors open at the next stop, he is the first in the car to clamber out. Tapping his drumsticks in time with the smack of his Vans against the ground, he joins the commotion on the platform. He gets a few glances, but everyone knows that anything goes in New York, New York. With a shrug, he carries on, weaving through people in search of a stairwell.

More so than exit signs or streams of others, he follows the echoes of a violin back to street level. He drums the stairs, the railing, the wall.)

CAMERON

Listen to the song of the city round me: It’s loud, and it’s crazy, and it’s bright, and it’s pretty as a concrete jungle island beat could ever seem in between a dusk and a dawn < & >

Indigo sky aglow through the night, no need for moon and stars with electric light as blindin’ as fire to guide my wonky stride and align my eyes with a one of a kind dame: Nice face, cool name, sweet taste, no shame going on a date with a freak, < 1 > not that she would think that way of me. < & > < & > From the underground dark to the midtown bright and the crowds on the sidewalks stoppin’ at the lights then going left and right and ev’ry way all night long. < & > In the middle of the madness, I hear a calm like a freeze in the breeze on a mountain top, a peace < 4 >
ev’rything still and white as snow, the world a mile down below, a numbness in my limbs from the cold, but I don’t mind how the sound of the strings of a violin make a louder whine than the city’s din with a softness like a far off star’s first ray of light.

< 1 > Then I feel the gaze of the girl who plays, stop in place, turn and face her face < & >

Eyes arrest me as if I were a thief cos I’m pickin’ up a rhythm and I’m playin’ to the beat. Eyes clash: < & > my hazel with her black. < & > I feel her fury pound my loud to silence, yet I smile fore I freeze cos I like her looks in spite of her looks cold as ice through the night at me. < & > Next look we share: my grin, her glare, plus a hostile stare from the chick on her right with a stance by her like… Oh. < 2 > Right. < 4 > Awkward. < 2 > < 3 > < 4 >

(The lovely young lady with the violin plays on, standing near a staircase to the Herald Square Station, with the newsstand between her spot and the corner. The melody is beautiful, a rendition of Claude Debussy’s “Rêverie”.

The other young woman is perched on her right hand side, her back against the wall of the Gap; she steadies a smartphone between her hands, recording the violinist.

The occasional passerby drops a handful of coins or a crumpled bill into the open case at their feet.

CAMERON grips both drumsticks in one hand, glancing from the violinist to the smartphone to the open case, as he taps the side of his leg. Then he lowers his backpack, exchanging his drumsticks for his wallet. He also comes out with the sleeve of a sweatshirt, which flings an iPhone, a Rubik’s cube, and several ACE bandages across the sidewalk. His gaze follows the Rubik’s cube, but a glimpse of the bandages in the corner of his eye unsettles him unlike anything else; it takes him longer than a measure to recover.

He opens his wallet, grimacing, as people accidently kick another bandage. Without a final glance at the violinist, he pulls a few bills out, then a few more, and a few more, before he tosses the lot in the case and races on.

He shoves his sweatshirt deep, drops his wallet on top, zips the pocket shut, and shoulders his backpack, as he bobs and weaves, pursuing his belongings back and forth across the sidewalk: The Rubik’s cube is first. The iPhone is next.)

CAMERON

Don’t < & > stop. Don’t watch me drop to my knees and reach like a dog in between your feet. Walk on down the street with your eyes off the ground. Keep your gaze on the crowd. You can stand on my hands all you want as you pass just as long as you don’t glance down. < & > Don’t glance down. < & > Eyes. Eyes. Eyes. Eyes.

Eyes bear down, pound the beat out my brain with the painful punch of a pity-filled gaze. < & >
(The beat is drowned by the roar of the city. The din of the traffic, both vehicle and pedestrian, is amplified until its clamor is unbearable.)

CAMERON

_Eyes! Eyes! Eyes! Eyes!_

I know **what** they **see**! < & > Not a **guy** with a **beat**, but an **injured** **kid**, not a **future** **good** and **bright** and **big**, but a **past** as **bad** as **God** can **give**, one **accident**, many **scars** will **last**, and they’ll **never** see **past** what I **lost**; they’ll **see** a **mutant** in lieu of a **human**. I know the look; I’m not **stupid**. **You** < & > **don’t** < & > **see** < & > **me**! < & > < 1> **Not me**! < 4> < 1> **Never me**... < 4>

(CAMERON stuffs the last of his runaway ace bandages into his backpack then stalks toward 5th Avenue, not quite one with the crowd.

At the foot of the Empire State Building, he pauses to look up... The brunette on his heels doesn’t fully realize that he’s stopped until she walks into him.)

BRUNETTE

**Oh! Gosh.**

CAMERON

**Sorry.**

BRUNETTE

I didn’t see...

CAMERON

*(with a shrug) Could have looked.*

BRUNETTE

**Sorry?**

CAMERON

You can’t see when you don’t look.

BRUNETTE

*(with a glare, she scoffs and struts away)* **Asshole.**

CAMERON

*(beat) Awkward.*