

The Dilemma of Having Your Face Tortured

By Gina Maya

Introduction

I came out as a male-to-female transsexual this year, meaning I identify less with the gender I was born and raised with, and more with its opposite. It's a transition of many processes—administrative, cosmetic, hormonal, and social, to name a few—and it will take years; in some respects, a lifetime. Although I keep a weekly diary on my website (www.ginamaya.co.uk) on the ups and downs, I'll try to use these newsletters to shed light on the more general processes involving my transition. I'll start with the thing I want to get out of the way—the thing I've hated most: facial-hair removal.

It takes fifteen minutes and sometimes less. You rest in a dentist's chair, wearing dark goggles while a smiling young woman lasers your facial hair. For the first few months, there's only a 12-hour rash. Your jaw and mouth are blotchy, initially. With balm smothered over it, it looks like you're melting.

You walk back from the clinic along busy Princess Street, looking down. Avoiding eye-contact because more than ever you look terrible, a swollen, red, rash-covered face that's melting. You're walking so fast your calves are hurting.

You continue to go to the clinic every six weeks. The pain gets worse with each visit; your feet press against each other and you hug yourself during the cosmetician's polite conversation as she lasers your face. You've started taking taxis home, wrapping your face in a scarf like the Invisible

Man. Soon enough you come out as a transgender woman.

Soon enough, you're noticed in the street, you clearly don't pass as well you thought. Your five o'clock shadow becomes your obsession, not the breasts or the groin, those things you can cover. It's your five o'clock shadow, that's what will decide the social reaction. You shave at least once a day. You touch up your layers of foundation constantly, in disabled toilets that become a second home to you.

October 2016. Ten months have gone by, the dark bristle almost gone. The NHS calls you, they'll do it for free. But they need to know what they're dealing with, so there's one condition: come in with four days of facial hair growth on a bare, unmade face. We're sorry, was that a 'yes'?