

AS

I AM

WRITTEN BY
STEPHANIE BAST



FORMAT

8 episode

1/2 hour

Coming-of-race Comedy



A misguided journey to self love

LOGLINE

A Korean adoptee raised by an Italian family dreams of becoming the next Carmela Soprano.

But when her obsession fails, she must open the eyes she hates, to love the Asian she's refused to be.

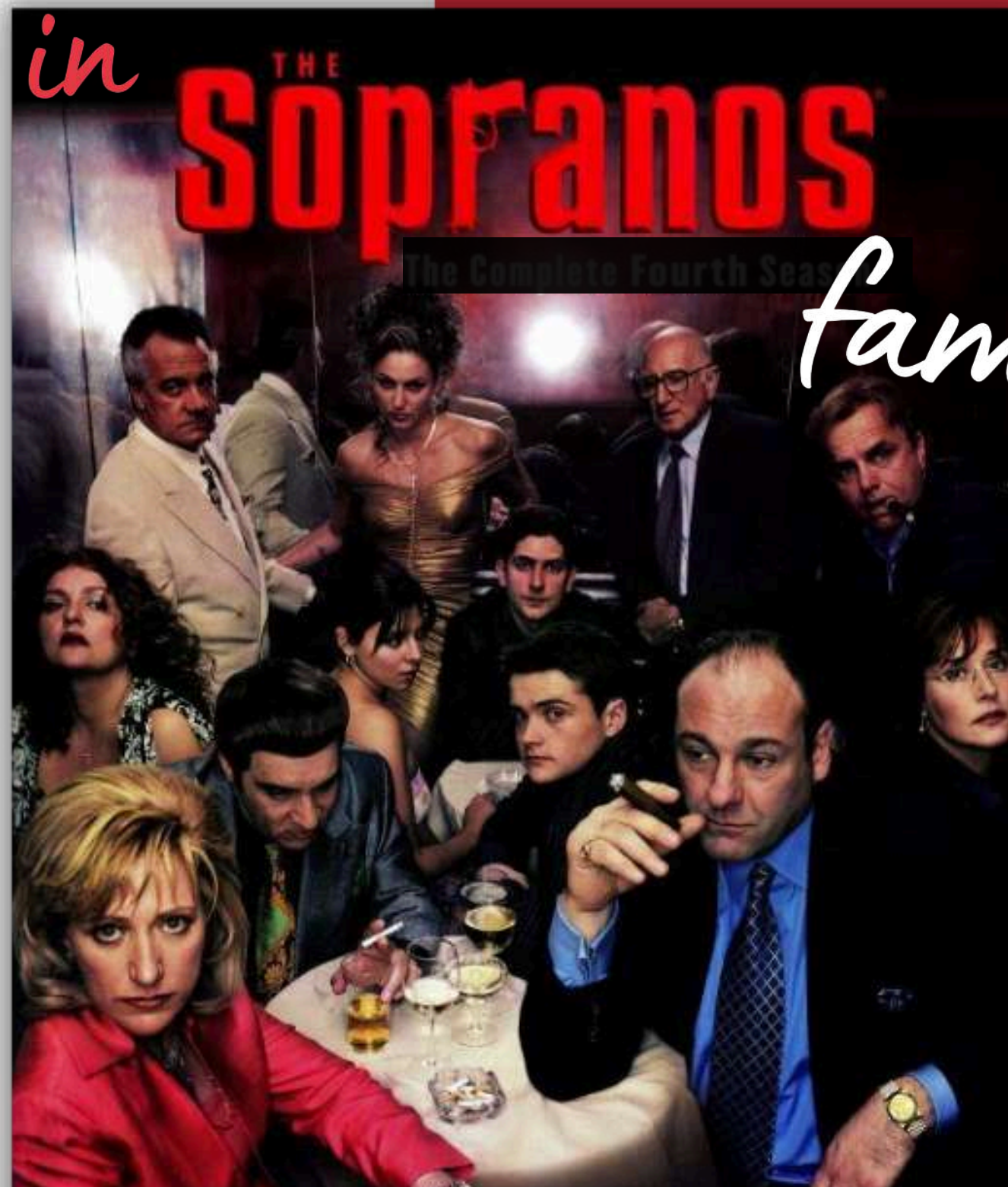


COMPS

stuck in

Asian

FLEABAG



family

where being Italian = who you are

WHY ME?

In 2020, I discovered something horrible. I was racist against Asians.

I was abandoned in Korea, adopted by an Italian mother and raised in a town so small and white, someone actually asked her, “How’re ya gonna understand her when she starts speakin’?”

Being Asian meant decades of convincing people I belong to the family I love. Being Asian labeled me with a stereotype I knew nothing about and utterly despised, creating a monster whose skin and almond eyes betrayed a lifelong, impossible quest to be Italian.

Though fiercely loved and protected, I never felt safe. I was taught to fear *the other*, knowing *the other* was me.

I started writing to heal a wound. Now I write to heal others, creating characters who think they’re not enough, desperate to prove they’re worthy of being saved.

I wrote **AS I AM** to explain the unexplainable. Adoption is both beautiful and traumatic—and one experience doesn’t lessen the other.



SYNOPSIS



A woman with bleach blonde Jersey hair stares in the mirror. Magazine cut-outs of deep-set eyes cover her own. She lifts one fake eye. Her real eye is Asian. **LUCIA** (30) Korean American, grimaces at the truth. In the mirror just above her head, a hand-written mantra: ***I LOVE MYSELF AS I AM***

Wearing dark sunglasses, Lucia sneaks in to audition for the role of Carmela Soprano in “STUGOTS! The Broadway Musical.” She blows them away and is hired on the spot. Lucia’s dream has come true - and on her 30th Birthday! But when she’s forced to remove the sunglasses that conceal her Asian eyes, they retract the offer. Lucia storms into the streets of NYC, trips and gets hit by a car.

ELVEDA and **ANGELO** rush to the hospital and find their only daughter a bloody mess: her arm in a cast, her fingers in splints. *Your face looks like gabagool!* - Elveda cries and insists Lucia comes home until she can wipe her own ass. Lucia relents - *but only until I’m better!* As they drive home through the small hunting town, people stare at Lucia like one stares at mold in a petri dish.

Her Italian family greets her with a surprise 30th birthday party! Traditional Italian music blares as everyone dances to folding tables pushed together to make one huge table covered with endless food. Elveda proudly gifts her daughter donor sperm- *but only if it’s YALE sperm!* Elveda and Angelo's three biological (au naturale) sons complain - *oh, sure, the little princess gets Yale sperm and we got a wrench set!* But **VITO**, the baby of the family until Lucia came along, throws a shit fit and leaves the party. What’s up his ass?

SYNOPSIS CONT'D



Lucia discovers the family business - Orlando's Meat & Eat Deli: *We shot it, so you don't gotta!* - is failing. No wonder Vito's a turd! She offers to help until she goes back to NY, but Vito releases decades of resentment that Lucia is the "special" one who gets everything her brothers never got - *including the dream to leave this crap town!* Lucia cries she's not special. She's different. *I don't dream of being different, Vito, I dream of being the same!*

Failing to be the American Dream, Lucia begrudgingly looks for a therapist, but when she finds a **DOCTOR MELFI**, she thanks the heavens and blows out her Carmela Soprano as Jesus prayer candle - *Amen*.

The next day, Lucia stares bitterly at the mantra on the mirror brushing her teeth. Her injured fingers flip the toothbrush out of her mouth, spraying toothpaste jizz all over the mirror. When she wipes it clean, she accidentally smears the "M" in "AM" into an "N" and she reads: **I LOVE MYSELF AS I AM**

Lucia knocks on Dr. Melfi's office door, eager to meet her. But when it opens, a handsome man is standing there! He dazzles a smile at Lucia - just above her head. He's blind. *You must be Lucia, are you Italian?* Lucia flashes back to the car accident. She didn't trip. She walked purposely in front of an oncoming car. Lucia shivers. Then smiles. *100%*.

MAIN CHARACTER



LUCIA (*Lew-CHEE-ah*) ORLANDO (30)

Korean-American adoptee who believes she's Italian. Her dream to be Carmela Soprano in "STUGOTS! The Broadway Musical" is her fast track to self love - she'll be Italian in everyone's eyes. Lucia's a fish out of water in her hometown, but worse - in her own family. She has never felt safe a day in her life, so she's become a master of disguise while impossibly striving to be The American Dream for her aggressively-loving mother. Lucia denies being Asian at every turn, even refusing rice when she secretly loves it. That's some sad shit.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

The youngest of Lucia's three brothers, **VITO** ORLANDO (33) Italian-American, is hard-working and manages the family's failing deli, hoping for the parental praise his adopted sister gets with ease. Vito feels forced to sacrifice everything to his sister, including his wife, who's also Lucia's BFF.



ELVEDA ORLANDO (70) Italian-American, is Lucia's obnoxious yet loving mother who looks like a dumpling but she'd shiv you in your sleep. A pathological liar who believes Lucia lives the American Dream and insists love heals all wounds, especially when forced. She believes nurture crushes nature and she and Lucia are 100% *Like Mother, Like Daughter*.



DR. MELFI (40s) He is everything Lucia wishes the world to be - blind. Dr. Melfi is the first person to love Lucia AS IS. Abandoned by his birth parents for his blindness, he deeply understands Lucia's trauma and sense of *other*. Whereas Lucia plays victim, he plays savior. Like everyone else in town, Dr. Melfi collects and shoots guns.



TONE/STYLE

This fast-paced serialized comedy is deceptively light with quippy zingers and family shenanigans, but will drop-kick you into a world of pain without any warning. The humor is uniquely raw and unapologetic as the writer shared most of her heart-to-heart talks with her mother while on the toilet.

WHY?

Identity and the need to belong for survival is a national crisis in our country.

Every adoptee I know feels empty or broken inside and every parent of an adoptee admits they don't know how to heal them.

I do. Start the conversation. Tell this story.

Can you love yourself *AS IS*?



Racial identity
Sibling rivalry
Nature vs. nurture
The universal need to belong
*A bonus level of pain for adoptees
The biological need to belong
No matter how loved you are

SEASON ONE

Season One will mirror *THE SOPRANOS* arc of Tony's mother trying to kill him.
In *AS I AM*, Elveda metaphorically tries to kill the Asian Lucia, so only Italian Lucia exists.

Pilot

Episode 2

Lucia tells Dr. Melfi her face is disfigured. Vito and Lucia fight like two Joe Pescis over "who's better" while splitting the deli's responsibilities.

Episode 3

Determined to be Carmela Soprano, Lucia looks into blepharoplasty - a surgery to "fix" her eyes. The Meat & Eat deli wins a bid to cater for the town's biggest (and only) festival but Vito must use his own money.

Episode 4

Elveda's rushed to the hospital. The festival is rained out, losing Vito thousands of dollars. Lucia catches Vito's wife having an affair with Vito's best friend.

orphan me



Episode 5

Elveda is diagnosed with cancer. Lucia killed her birth mom during labor, surely she's the reason her mother is dying. Vito tells his father, Angelo, he sunk the family business. Angelo replies - *pursue your dream, not ours.*

Episode 6

Vito's discovers his wife's affair. And Lucia never told him. He starts therapy, also choosing Dr. Melfi for his name.

Episode 7

Vito attempts to burn the deli down to the ground - with his best friend in it. Lucia discovers Elveda doesn't have cancer - she lied to keep her daughter home.

Episode 8

Dr. Melfi blindfolds Lucia, unlocking a suppressed memory that Elveda is the reason Lucia fears and hates Asians, therefore herself. Disgusted, she throws whatever she can to cover her reflection in the mirror. When she wipes it clean, she reads: ***I LOVE MYSELF AS I AN.***

SEASONS OVERVIEW

SEASON 2

Lucia must love herself **Asian**. Lucia calls an Asian escort service to learn what it is **TO BE Asian**. She forces romantic love on poor Benny, a Chinese-American with a strong dialect, to learn what it is **TO LOVE an Asian**. If she could love Benny, surely she can love herself.

Vito's wife runs away with his best friend (and his money). Lucia and Vito must rebuild the deli together.

All this Asian bullshit breaks Elveda's heart. And she dies.

SEASON 3

With her mother gone, Lucia's determined to know the truth about her adoption. She calls the adoption agency for her records and takes a genetic test. Lucia finds a picture of her birth mother holding a baby and a note written in Korean.

Lucia gets a phone call - I think I'm your sister.

SEASON 4

Lucia meets her biological sister. And she gets married. With a sister and future baby, Lucia's crushing her need to biologically belong and learn what it is **TO BELONG to an Asian**.

Turns out the genetic company made an error and Lucia's sister isn't related...and Lucia is diagnosed with infertility. Now she must face adopting her own child.

SERIES ENDING*

Lucia attends the dreaded Annual Korean Day Parade in NYC, takes a Korean flag...and waves it.





WE SHOT IT, SO YOU
DON'T GOTTA



WRITER BIO

Stephanie Bast

Stephanie lives in Los Angeles and is currently ISA's Story Farm Fellow, Roadmap's Diversity Fellow, studied at UCLA extension and placed as a Finalist for Austin Film Festival, Final Draft's Big Break, CineStory, PAGE and The Writers Lab winner. A Broadway and TV/Film actress in the time when presenting as Asian was a detriment, she has turned the pain of her race into a superpower.

Stephanie writes for everyone who's adopted.
She writes for everyone who hates looking in the mirror.
She writes for her children, so they may always love their eyes.

In a pinch, Stephanie can perform a reverse vasectomy.



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