

I'm an idiot.

Somehow I imagined things would get easier after the media circus died down. But they've only gotten worse. Chris and I wander around the penthouse all day trying to politely avoid one another. I don't know what to say to him-or her-or whatever the hell pronoun I'm supposed to use for my husband now. And the silence suits him just fine. He's not ready to discuss what this means for him, or for us.

I mean, look, we'd only been married five months before he disappeared. The police launched a huge search, but they didn't find squat. Eventually, I had to go through the awful ordeal of having the courts declare him legally dead. We had a funeral with an empty casket and everything.

I won't insult your intelligence and say I knew Chris was alive. That man always seemed too good to be true. I didn't have a stellar track record with relationships, so with him I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop. When Chris vanished it felt like the universe had corrected a mistake. I was never supposed to be that happy.





Now, almost three years later, he shows up looking more like a Playboy model than the big, bearded man I'd met at a craft beer festival. It took a full-on DNA test for the cops to convince me this person was my husband. Even after his hair cut - which had gotten almost as long as mine - the only trace of the old Chris was his big, beautiful brown eyes.

Eyes now full of anguish and terror.

Finally, I realized, we had to talk. The alternative was to keep walking around the apartment, slowly going insane.

I approached Chris while he watched the sun set. "Hey... um... honey... we should talk."





“Right now?”

I’ll never get used to that soft contralto voice. Not ever. Chris’s voice was deep and commanding. It had made me feel safe. This voice... This was the voice of a girl. A girl who needed to be comforted.

“Yeah,” I said. “Why don’t we talk now? That okay?”

He nodded, and we walked over to the loveseats in the living room. His old clothes were donated to Good Will except for one tank top. It’d retained his scent for years after he’d vanished, and it brought me a lot of comfort. Now he was practically swimming in it.





It was hard to even look at him.


My head realized the person sitting across from me was Chris, but all my heart could see was a stranger. And this wasn't only because of his body. Even the way he moved oozed femininity. Was this the result of hypnosis? Conditioning? I don't know. But the cognitive dissonance of seeing both a woman *and* my husband made me nauseous, like I was on a rickety, unending carnival ride.

For years, I'd prayed for Chris to come back somehow, and people had called his return a miracle.

But they were wrong. This wasn't a miracle, it was a nightmare.







We sat in silence, stealing glances like a couple of shy kids on a first date. I'd asked him to talk, but I didn't know how to start without sobbing hysterically.

Finally, Chris broke the silence. He'd always been the brave one. "Jesus, Kayla. I'm so sorry."

Why the hell should he be sorry? I was the one acting like a stone-cold bitch. "Chris—"


"I shouldn't have come back."

Tears pricked my eyes. "God, don't say that."

"I left, and I blew up your life. Then I came back, and I made it worse. Chris should've stayed dead."

His caring, selfless personality was what made me fall head over heels in love with him in the first place. Chris was so unlike any man I'd ever dated. Now, hearing those words, I truly recognized him for the first time.





I licked my lips and leaned forward. “My life needed blowing up. Without you... It wasn’t worth saving.”


“C’mon, that isn’t true.” Chris gestured around the apartment. “A fancy penthouse overlooking the city? Three years ago we could barely afford a studio apartment next to the recycling center.”

I laughed despite myself. But although my career had skyrocketed, it was only because I spent every possible moment in the office. I wasn’t passionate about my work, it simply helped me forget the smoldering crater my husband’s disappearance had left in my life.

“You should be proud of what you’ve accomplished, honey.”

I chewed the inside of my cheek, trying to psyche myself up for the question I’d wanted to ask for days “Chris... What... what did they do to you? Your body, I mean.”





His fists clenched and he stared at the floor. "How much did the doctors tell you?"

I shook my head. "Not much. Just that you'd been given hormones. Female hormones. And... and surgeries."

My husband's new, pretty face was ashen. "It's best if I show you. But can we go into the bedroom? I feel exposed out here already."

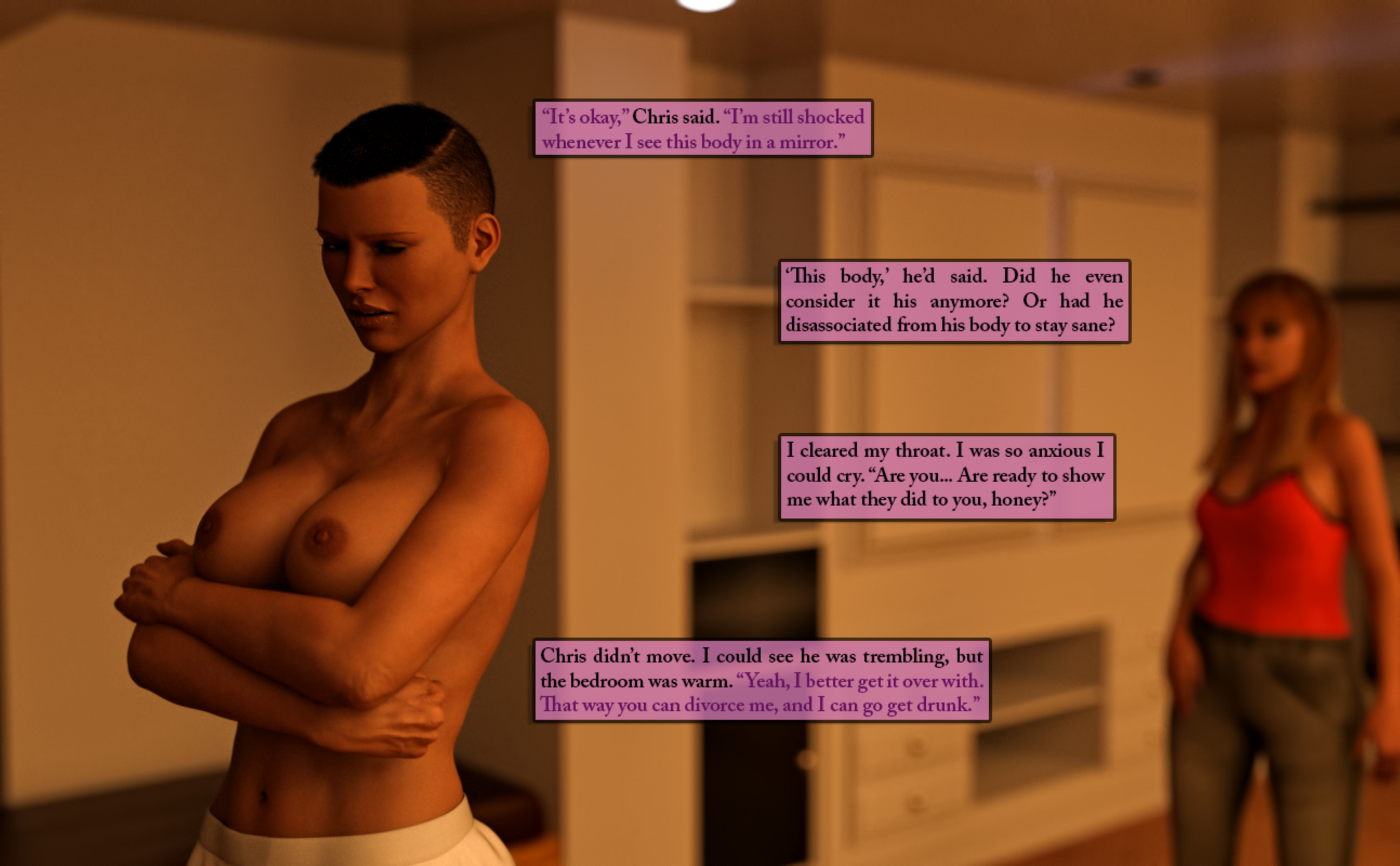


We went into the bedroom. Without another word, Chris turned his back to me and pulled off the tank top. Then he bent over to pull down the boxer shorts, and I glimpsed his breasts dangling from his chest. They were like punching bags. Jesus, he was a big girl.

“Holy shit.” I couldn’t help myself.  
“Sorry. I didn’t mean to sound... I don’t know... insensitive.”





A man with a woman's body stands in a bedroom, looking down with a somber expression. He has short, dark hair and is wearing white briefs. His arms are crossed over his chest. In the background, a woman with long brown hair, wearing a red tank top and grey pants, stands looking towards him. The room is dimly lit with warm, yellowish light.


"It's okay," Chris said. "I'm still shocked whenever I see this body in a mirror."

'This body,' he'd said. Did he even consider it his anymore? Or had he disassociated from his body to stay sane?

I cleared my throat. I was so anxious I could cry. "Are you... Are ready to show me what they did to you, honey?"

Chris didn't move. I could see he was trembling, but the bedroom was warm. "Yeah, I better get it over with. That way you can divorce me, and I can go get drunk."





“Chris!” I exclaimed. “You think I’m some shallow bitch who’d divorce you for something you can’t control?”


“I wouldn’t think you were shallow. I’d think you were smart.”

My temper flared. I’d wanted nothing more than my husband to come back for years. I would not let Chris bail on our marriage just because he was victimized and scared and ashamed. I’d help him work through all that, and I couldn’t stand to lose him all over again.

“Stop it!” I said. “I will not divorce you because you have beautiful big tits, okay?”

I’d meant it as a joke, but Chris didn’t laugh. He turned around and stepped into the light.





“It’s not the tits I’m talking about.”


My eyes roamed over his feminized body. My husband had the kind of perfect hourglass figure God doled out to maybe one in a hundred women. I wasn’t overweight, but I was pear-shaped despite countless sweaty hours in the gym.

Then I looked at his crotch. He was definitely much smaller ‘down there’ than before. That’d take getting used to, but maybe—

He shifted his legs, and I gasped. “Your... Your... I mean...”

“My balls. Yeah. They chopped ‘em off. That was the first thing they did.”





I wanted to rush over and embrace him, but I stopped myself. He looked so fragile, like if I touched him, he'd burst.

"Oh my God. Honey. I'm—"

"Disgusted?"

"Of course not!"

He was in so much pain. The torment was evident on his face. But I had no idea how to help him, or even if he wanted me to.

"How can I be your husband anymore, Kay?" A tear rolled down his smooth cheek. "I'm not even a man."