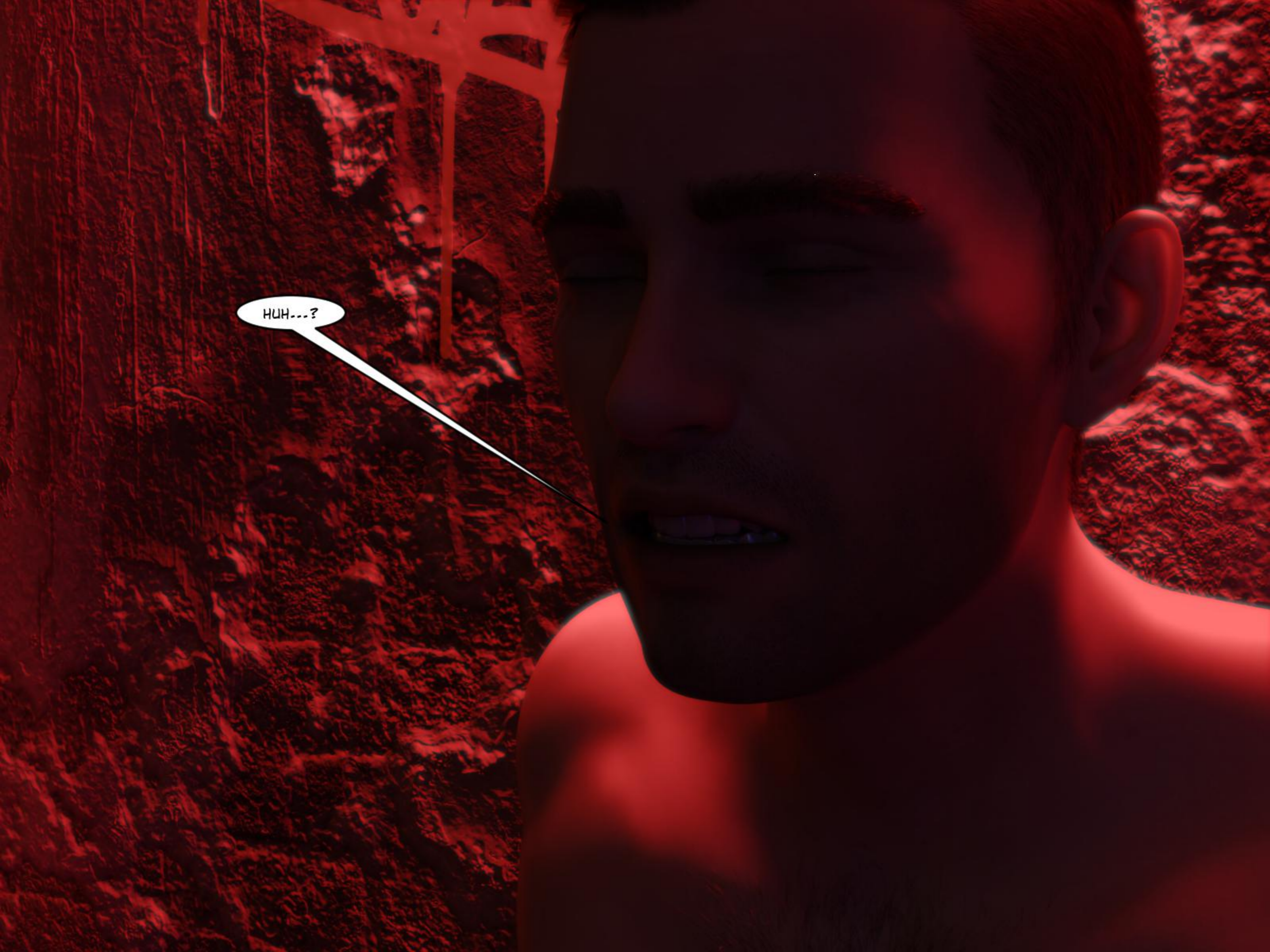


A LITTLE LATER...











HUH...?



WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?
WHERE I AM?



click
clack

A man in a dark suit is shown in profile, looking towards a door. A speech bubble points to the door with the text "YOU...!". The scene is dimly lit with a red glow.

YOU...!



WHAT ARE YOU
DOING HERE?



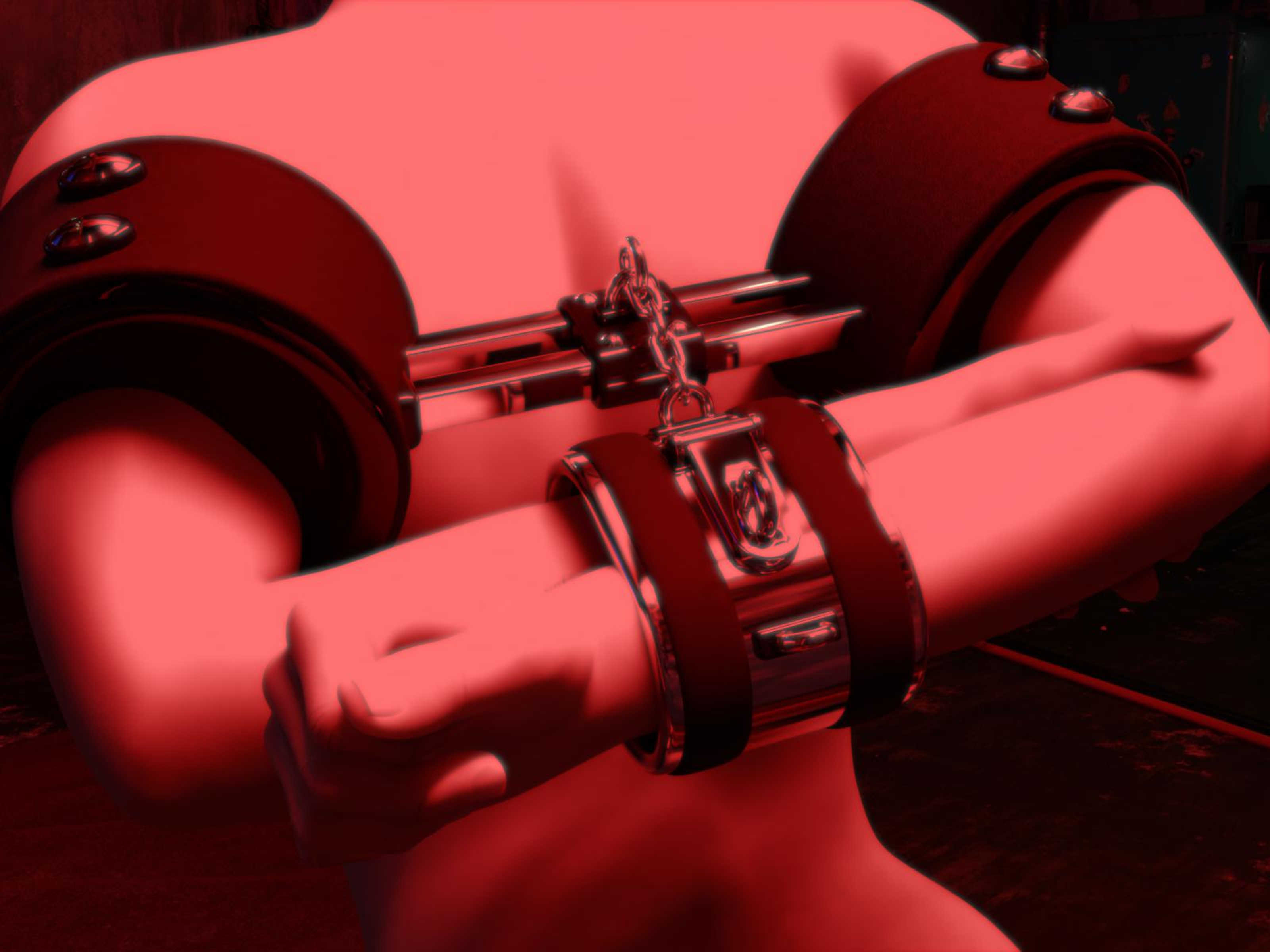
WHAT YOU THINK?

CRACK!




A 3D rendered character, possibly a man, is shown from the chest up, facing left. He has short, dark hair and is looking upwards and to the left with a slightly open mouth, as if speaking or reacting. The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a wall or a cave, with a strong red glow. A speech bubble is positioned above and to the left of the character's head, containing text.

TELL ME WHAT'S
HAPPENING RIGHT NOW!
WHY CAN'T I MOVE?





A woman in a black latex suit stands in a red-lit room, talking to a man whose hands are cuffed behind his back. The man is shirtless and has a black collar with buttons around his neck. The room has graffiti on the wall and a table with a chair in the background.

SHUT UP! YOU'RE HERE
TO BE PUNISHED, NOT
TO ASK QUESTIONS!

AHHHHH!!!

CRACK!



YAWN











Ring
Ring






OH NO, IT'S MARINA!

A close-up, 3D-rendered image of a young man with dark hair and a light beard, looking off-camera with a concerned expression. He is holding a smartphone to his ear. The background shows a window with a view of a city at dusk or dawn, with several tall apartment buildings visible. A white speech bubble with a black outline is positioned in the upper left, containing text. The lighting is soft, coming from the window, casting gentle shadows on the man's face.


LISTEN TO ME, ANDREW! SOMETHING
TERRIBLE HAPPENED. OUR SAVINGS...
ALL THE MONEY WE'VE BEEN SAVING FOR
OUR WEDDING... IT'S GONE! I DON'T KNOW
HOW BUT IT'S FUCKING GONE! WE NEED
TO CALL THE POLICE AND...

A close-up, 3D-rendered image of a man with dark hair and a light beard, shirtless, talking on a black mobile phone. He is in a shower stall with white tiled walls. A speech bubble points to his mouth, containing text. The lighting is soft and indoor.

T-THERE'S NO REASON TO CALL
THE POLICE, MARINA. THAT WAS ME.
I LOST EVERYTHING. I LOST EVERY
PENNY OF OUR MONEY!

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME?
WEREN'T YOU APHRODITE? NOW YOU'RE
TORTURING PEOPLE AS A WAY OF
SPREADING LOVE?!






APHRODITE? I DON'T THINK SO...
TONIGHT I'M POENA, THE SPIRIT OF
VENGEANCE AND PUNISHMENT.



AND WHY EXACTLY
DO I DESERVE TO
BE PUNISHED?



YOU TELL ME. ACCORDING TO YOU,
YOU WERE THE ONE WHO CREATED ME,
AFTER ALL.

A close-up, high-angle shot of a woman's face, illuminated with a strong red light. Her hair is pulled back, and she has a serious, intense expression. A white speech bubble with a black outline is positioned to the right of her face, with a tail pointing towards her mouth. The background is dark and indistinct, suggesting an interior setting with some structural elements.

AND ONE THING IS FOR SURE...
YOU CAN NO LONGER RUN AWAY
FROM YOUR PAST.







WHY? WHY ME?



I DID NOTHING TO DESERVE
SO MUCH PAIN...






WHAT A PIECE OF SHIT!



SHOW ME SOME TRUTH.
RIGHT NOW YOU WOULDN'T
CONVINCE A FIVE-YEAR-OLD!

A man with dark hair and a goatee, wearing a black t-shirt, is shown from the chest up. He has his hands behind his head and a wide-eyed, open-mouthed expression of shock or despair. The background is a brown brick wall. A white speech bubble with a black outline is positioned in the upper left corner, with a tail pointing towards the man's mouth. The text inside the speech bubble reads "EVERYTHING I'VE DONE...".


EVERYTHING I'VE DONE...



EVERYTHING IS
FUCKING RUINED!



THAT'S ENOUGH, YOUNG MAN.
THIS INTERPRETATION OF YOURS, IF WE CAN
EVEN CALL IT AN INTERPRETATION, IS THE MOST
RIDICULOUS THING I'VE EVER SEEN. YOU STILL
HAVE A LOT TO LEARN.



AND YOU REALLY DID LEARN,
DIDN'T YOU?

01
REVOLUTION



YES, YOU'VE BECOME
MR. ORLOV'S FAVORITE PUPIL.
BUT AT WHAT PRICE?




I'VE ALREADY TOLD YOU
THAT ALL I WANT IS TO
FORGET ABOUT THIS!



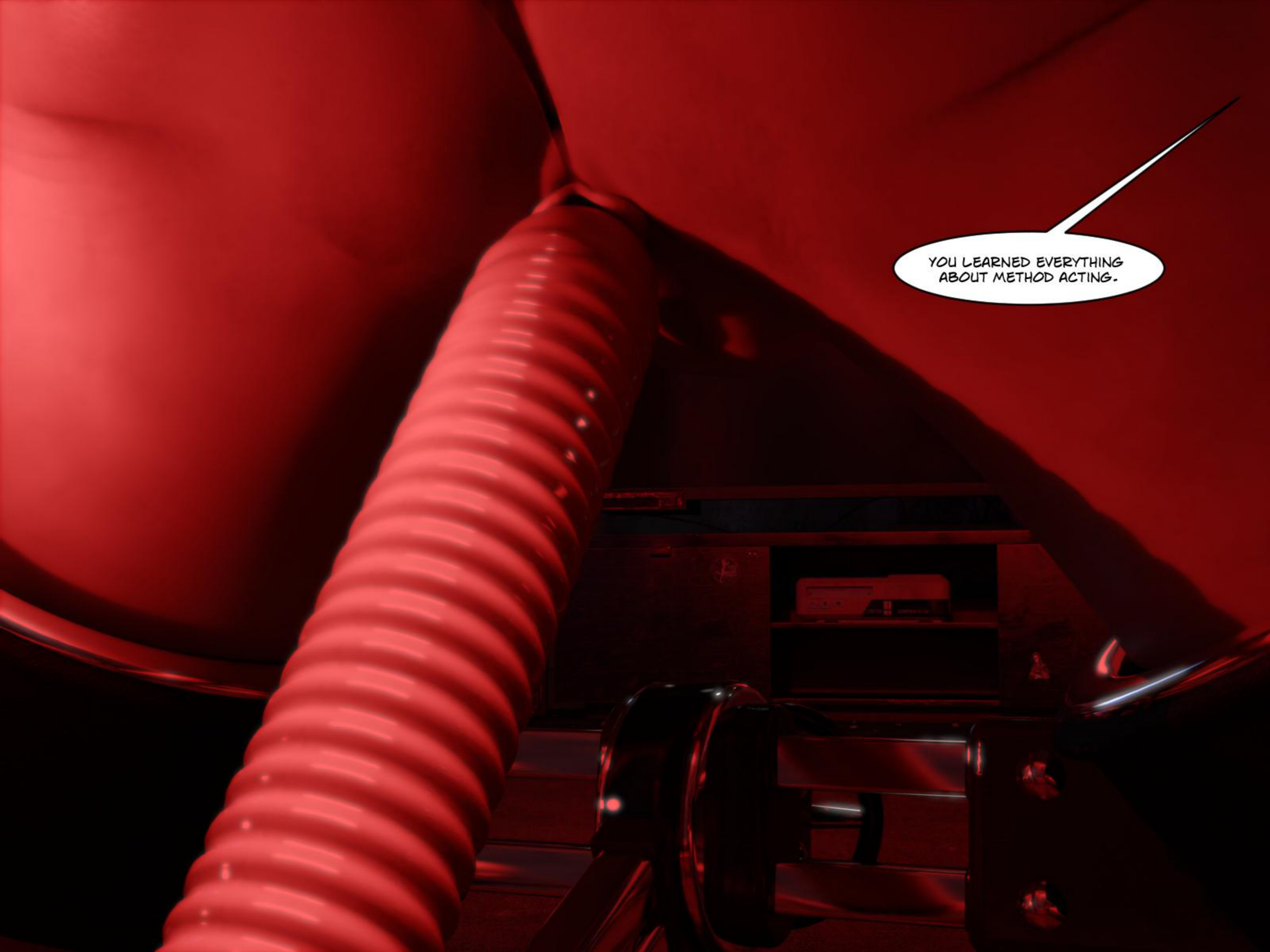
IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT.



TOO LATE INDEED...




YOU MADE MR. ORLOV PROUD.



YOU LEARNED EVERYTHING
ABOUT METHOD ACTING.




BUT IT CHANGED YOU.

A 3D rendered image of a man with short dark hair, shirtless, in a dark red, textured environment. He has a pained or distressed expression with his mouth open and eyes closed. A white speech bubble with a black outline points to his mouth, containing the text "AHHHHH!!".

AHHHHH!!



IT MADE YOU LOSE EVERYTHING.



ONLY ONE PERSON
REMAINED BY YOUR SIDE, AND YET
YOU BETRAYED HER TRUST AGAIN.
DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

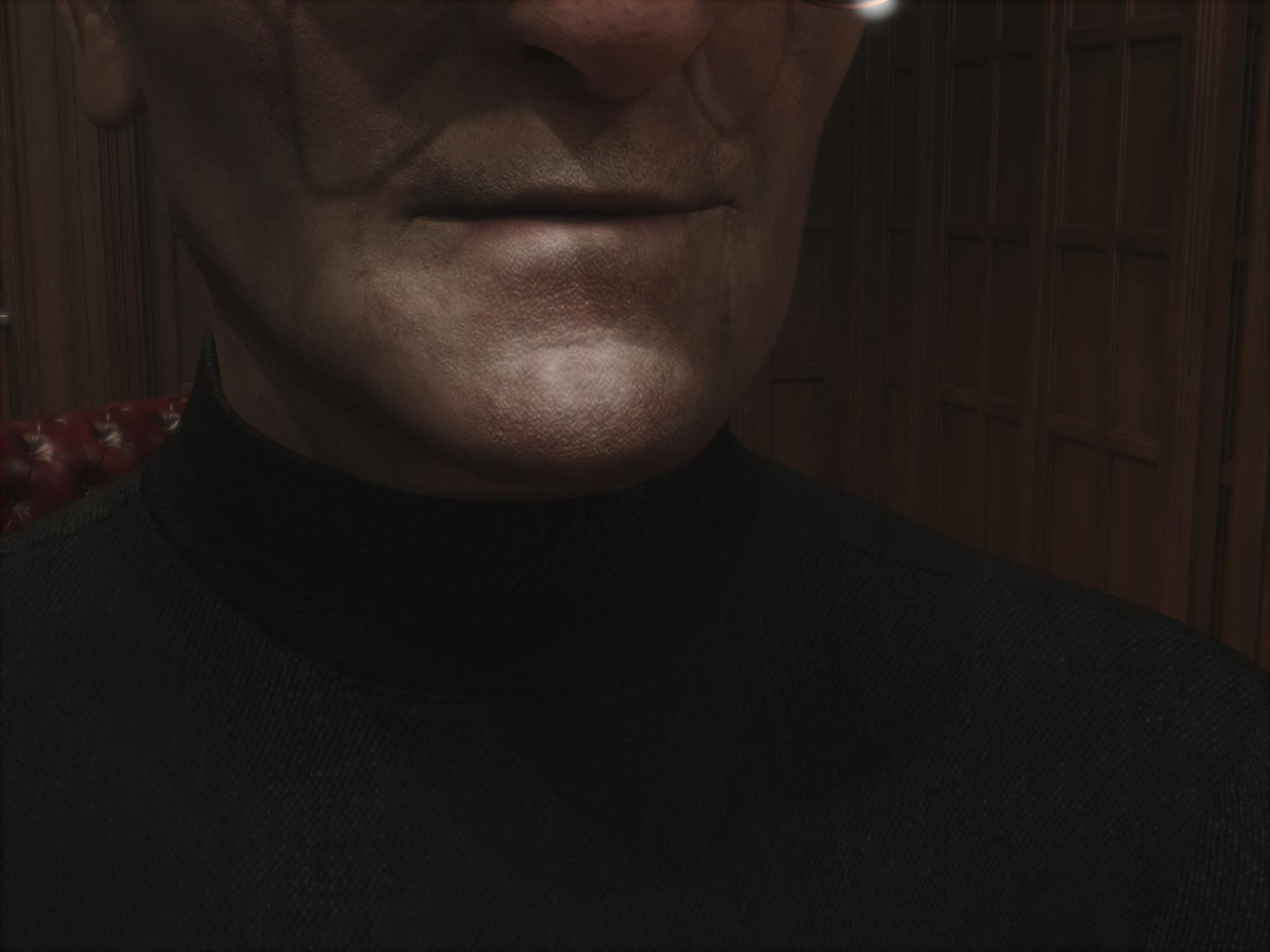
I DON'T WANT TO!



THAT'S NOT TRUE AT ALL.
REMEMBER, "YOU'VE CREATED ME
AND I'VE CREATED YOU..."










YOU'RE LATE.



LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING.
I JUST CAME HERE TO SAY THAT WHATEVER
YOU HAVE IN MIND, I'M NOT INTERESTED.
LEAVE ME ALONE!




SO YOU CAME ALL THIS WAY
JUST TO SAY YOU'RE NOT INTERESTED
IN LISTENING TO ME? THAT SOUNDS
RIDICULOUS, YOUNG MAN. SIT DOWN
AND LET'S TALK.

A man with short dark hair, wearing a dark green or grey textured sweater, is shown from the back. He is standing in a room with dark wood-paneled walls and a bookshelf filled with books. A speech bubble points to him from the right. The lighting is dim, creating a serious atmosphere.

YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES.

DRINK.



DRINK?! ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?
THAT'S HOW YOU ALMOST RUINED MY LIFE!
YOU MADE ME LIVE LIKE MY CHARACTER IN
THAT PLAY... THINK LIKE HIM, ACT LIKE HIM...
IT ALL STARTED WITH DRINKING PRETTY MUCH
ALL THE TIME... YOU SAID THIS WAS THE ONLY
WAY I COULD BECOME A GREAT ACTOR,
AND WHAT DID I GAIN FROM IT?

I SAID HORRIBLE THINGS TO PEOPLE,
I LET THEM DOWN, I MADE EVERYONE'S LIFE,
ESPECIALLY MINE, MISERABLE! IF IT WEREN'T FOR
MARINA, I DON'T THINK I'D HAVE BEEN ABLE TO GET
BACK ON TRACK AFTER THAT METHOD ACTING CRAP.
I WAS LOST. BUT YOU JUST DON'T CARE, DO YOU?
YOU KEPT PUSHING ME DEEPER AND DEEPER
INTO THE FUCKING PIT!

I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR CHEAP SENTIMENTALITY! YES, GUESS WHAT, DOING GREAT THINGS REQUIRES SACRIFICE. THAT'S THE NATURE OF ART! DO YOU THINK THIS WAS EASY FOR ANYONE BEFORE YOU? DO YOU WANT TO BE MEDITOCRE FOREVER?


LISTEN, ANDREW, I CALLED YOU HERE BECAUSE I TRULY BELIEVE IN YOUR POTENTIAL. AFTER TWENTY YEARS, I AM BACK IN THE INDUSTRY. A BIG PRODUCER APPROACHED ME TO DIRECT HIS NEW MOVIE. TWENTY YEARS OF BEING OSTRACIZED DUE TO SOFT PEOPLE WHO COULDN'T HANDLE A DIRECTOR WHO REALLY GOT THE BEST OUT OF HIS ACTORS... BUT NOT ANYMORE!



WHAT YOU SAY? ARE YOU
READY TO HIT BIG?



AND YOU DID ACCEPT
MR. ORLOV'S PROPOSAL,
DIDN'T YOU?

A 3D rendered scene with a strong red color cast. In the foreground, a man with short dark hair and a light beard is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a dark, possibly black, strap over his right shoulder. The background consists of a rough, textured wall, possibly stone or concrete, with some vertical lines suggesting a doorway or architectural structure. A speech bubble originates from the left side of the frame and points towards the textured wall. The overall lighting is dramatic, with deep shadows and bright highlights, emphasizing the textures and the man's features.

NOT ONLY THAT, BUT WHEN
HE SAID THAT THE PRODUCER NEEDED
A LOAN TO START THE PROJECT, YOU PROMPTLY
HANDED HIM ALL THE MONEY YOU HAD SAVED
WITH MARINA, WITHOUT EVEN ASKING HER
OPINION ON THE MATTER...

MEANWHILE AT THE HOSPITAL....






HUH...?




WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY CAN'T I SPEAK? FUCK, I CAN BARELY MOVE A FINGER!



HE'LL SURVIVE AFTER ALL.
DO YOU THINK THIS WILL
ACTUALLY WORK?

SHE. REMEMBER SHE'S A WOMAN NOW.
AND YES, THIS WILL WORK. I SPOKE TO
THE DOCTOR. THE PROCEDURES WILL BE
PERFORMED TONIGHT. THERE'S NO
TIME TO WASTE.



WHAT THE HELL ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?
AM I A WOMAN NOW? FUCK, I NEED TO STOP
THIS MADNESS! BUT I CAN'T TALK!
AND I'M SO SLEEPY...





CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR
SECRETS AND LIES

THE NEXT MORNING...







OH GOD....!



HEY, MOM.


WE'RE GLAD YOU
COULD COME.

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing tortoiseshell glasses, a pearl necklace, and a pink top. She is shown in profile, looking to the left. A speech bubble points to her mouth. In the background, a metal stand is visible on the left, and a white surface is on the right.

WHAT IN HEAVEN DID THE
DOCTORS DO TO JOEL?



I MEAN, HE LOOKS
SO DIFFERENT...

A close-up, low-angle shot of a man lying in a hospital bed. His face and neck are completely obscured by multiple layers of light-colored, gauzy bandages. The bandages are secured with numerous strips of white adhesive tape. The man's dark hair is visible at the top of the frame. The background shows a hospital room with a window and a white wall. A speech bubble is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

AND IT SEEMS HE
NOW HAS...



BOOBS?!




THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE WANTED
TO TALK ABOUT, MOM.



BUT WE NEED TO BE BRIEF BECAUSE IT MAY NOT
BE SAFE TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE TOPICS HERE.



ALRIGHT THEN! START EXPLAINING
WHY JOEL HAS BOOBS!

A woman with shoulder-length brown hair and a green ribbed tank top is shown from the chest up. She has a worried expression, with wide eyes and slightly parted lips. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a window and curtains visible on the right side. A speech bubble originates from her mouth, pointing towards the left.

JOEL GOT SHOT, MOM. YOU KNOW THAT.
SHOT BY THE GANGSTER WHO'S BEEN WATCHING
OUR FAMILY ON MR. TOSKA'S ORDERS!
HE NEEDS A DISGUISE.

SO YOUR PLAN IS TO DISGUISE HIM AS A WOMAN? YOU TWO ARE COMPLETELY OUT OF YOUR MINDS!

ARE WE? DO YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, REALLY THINK SO? HE'S THIN AND HAS A DELICATE FACE. WITH SOME MINOR ADJUSTMENTS, HE CAN EASILY PASS AS A WOMAN. AND WE HAVE EXPERIENCE DOING THIS KIND OF THING, RIGHT?



DID HE HAVE A SAY IN ANY OF THIS?
HAS ANYONE ASKED HIS OPINION ON
THIS CRAZY PLAN?

MR. SEFERI, AS JOEL'S UNCLE
AND LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE,
AUTHORIZED THE PROCEDURES.

A person wearing a long, flowing red dress and tan high-heeled sandals stands in a hospital room. They are looking towards a medical device on the left. A speech bubble above the device contains the text "WAIT...". The room has light-colored walls and a tiled floor. The medical device is white and has a blue screen with some text and icons. The person's feet are the main focus in the foreground.


WAIT...



IS MR. SEFERI...




JOEL'S UNCLE?




MR. SEFERI CONTACTED US DURING THE TIME YOU WERE UNCONSCIOUS, MOM. HE TOLD US EVERYTHING YOU ALREADY KNEW ABOUT HIS ISSUES WITH MR. TOSKA. BUT WE ALSO DIDN'T KNOW HE WAS JOEL'S UNCLE UNTIL LAST NIGHT, WHEN HE SHOWED UP.

BUT WHY FEMINIZE JOEL? WHY NOT ASK THE POLICE FOR PROTECTION? WHAT ABOUT THAT DETECTIVE WHO'S INVESTIGATING THE ATTEMPTED MURDER?





THE LESS THE POLICE KNOW ABOUT OUR FAMILY,
THE BETTER, RIGHT? IT WOULD BE REALLY BAD
IF THEY FOUND OUT THAT OUR DEAR MOTHER DIDN'T
EXIST UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO. MR. SEFERI SAID
HE HAS A DEAL TO PROPOSE TO THE DETECTIVE.




AND WHAT DEAL WOULD THAT BE?

JOEL MANAGED TO GATHER EVIDENCE OF MR. TOSKA'S INVOLVEMENT WITH ROAN GJOKA, THE ALBANIAN GANGSTER. THAT'S MOST LIKELY WHY THEY TRIED TO KILL HIM. NOW WE JUST NEED MR. TOSKA TO RETURN TO GREEK SOIL SO HE CAN BE ARRESTED. YOU SEE? THAT'S A WIN-WIN SITUATION. GREAT FOR US AND ALSO FOR THE DETECTIVE WHO WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE THE ARREST.




AND WHY EXACTLY WOULD MR. TOSKA
RETURN TO GREECE?



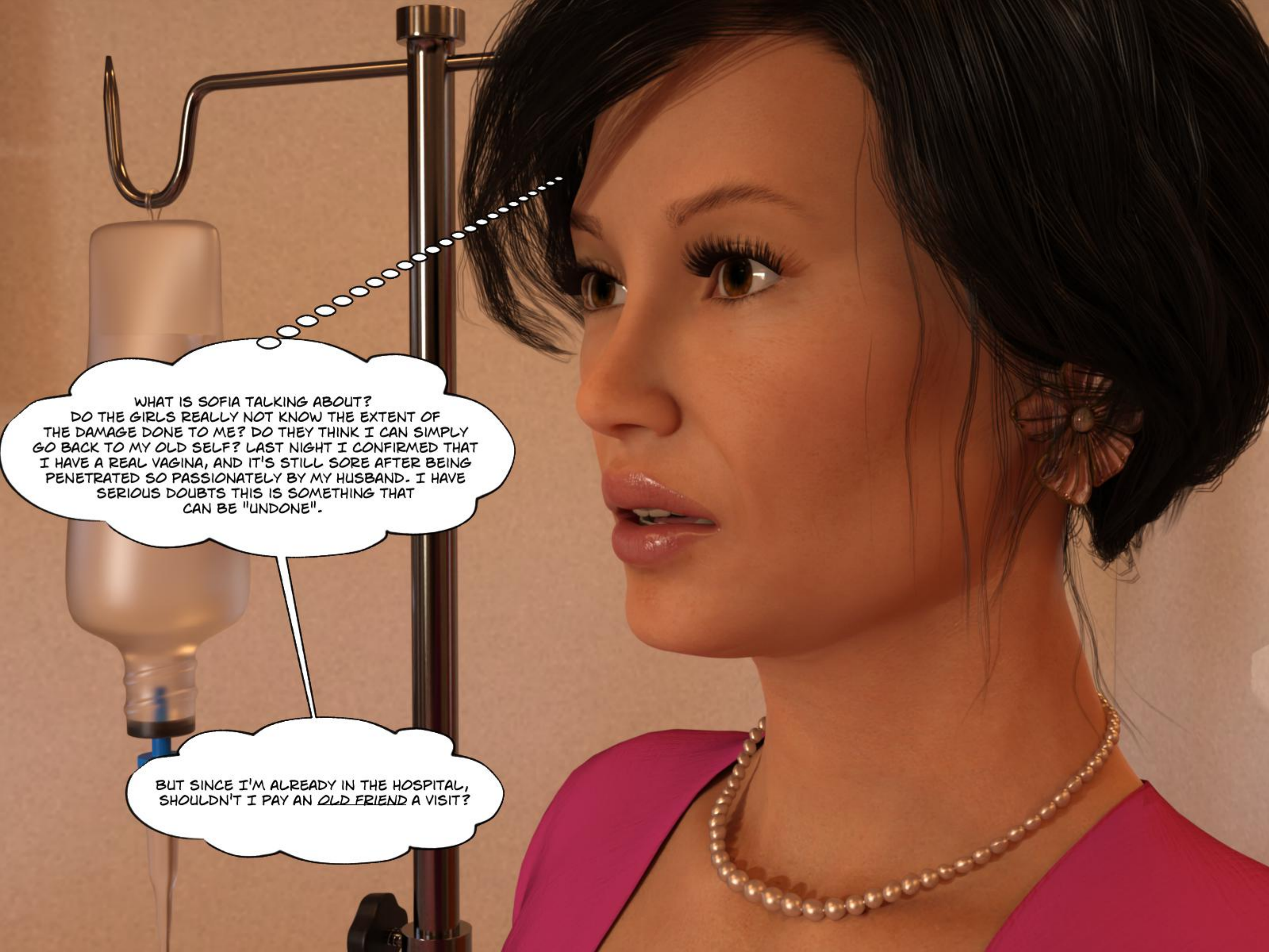


ISN'T THAT OBVIOUS? HE'LL BE BACK FOR YOU AND DAD'S VOW RENEWAL. HE MAY THINK OUR FAMILY HAS A PLAN TO STEAL HIM, BUT HE HAS NO WAY TO PROVE IT, AND HE HAS A PRE-SIGNED CONTRACT WITH DAD. HE HAS TO COME BACK.

THEN HE WILL BE ARRESTED AND OUR FAMILY WILL NO LONGER BE OBLIGATED TO FULFILL THE CONTRACT. THIS WILL BE OVER, MOM. WE'LL BE FREE.

A woman with shoulder-length brown hair and a green tank top is shown from the chest up. She has a slightly open mouth as if speaking. The background consists of a window with light-colored curtains and a bright blue sky. A speech bubble originates from her mouth and points to the right.

I KNOW YOU'RE SHOCKED ABOUT JOEL,
BUT REMEMBER THAT, JUST LIKE IN YOUR CASE,
ALL THE PROCEDURES PERFORMED ON HIM CAN
BE UNDONE. HE'LL BE FINE. BUT I WONDER...
AT THIS POINT, DO YOU WANT TO GO BACK?
DO YOU REALLY WANT TO STOP BEING
ELENA SAMARAS?


A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair, wearing a pink hospital gown and a pearl necklace. She is looking towards the left. A thought bubble originates from her head, containing text. In the background, a metal stand holds a clear plastic IV bag. The scene is set in a hospital room.

WHAT IS SOFIA TALKING ABOUT?
DO THE GIRLS REALLY NOT KNOW THE EXTENT OF
THE DAMAGE DONE TO ME? DO THEY THINK I CAN SIMPLY
GO BACK TO MY OLD SELF? LAST NIGHT I CONFIRMED THAT
I HAVE A REAL VAGINA, AND IT'S STILL SORE AFTER BEING
PENETRATED SO PASSIONATELY BY MY HUSBAND. I HAVE
SERIOUS DOUBTS THIS IS SOMETHING THAT
CAN BE "UNDONE".

BUT SINCE I'M ALREADY IN THE HOSPITAL,
SHOULDN'T I PAY AN OLD FRIEND A VISIT?



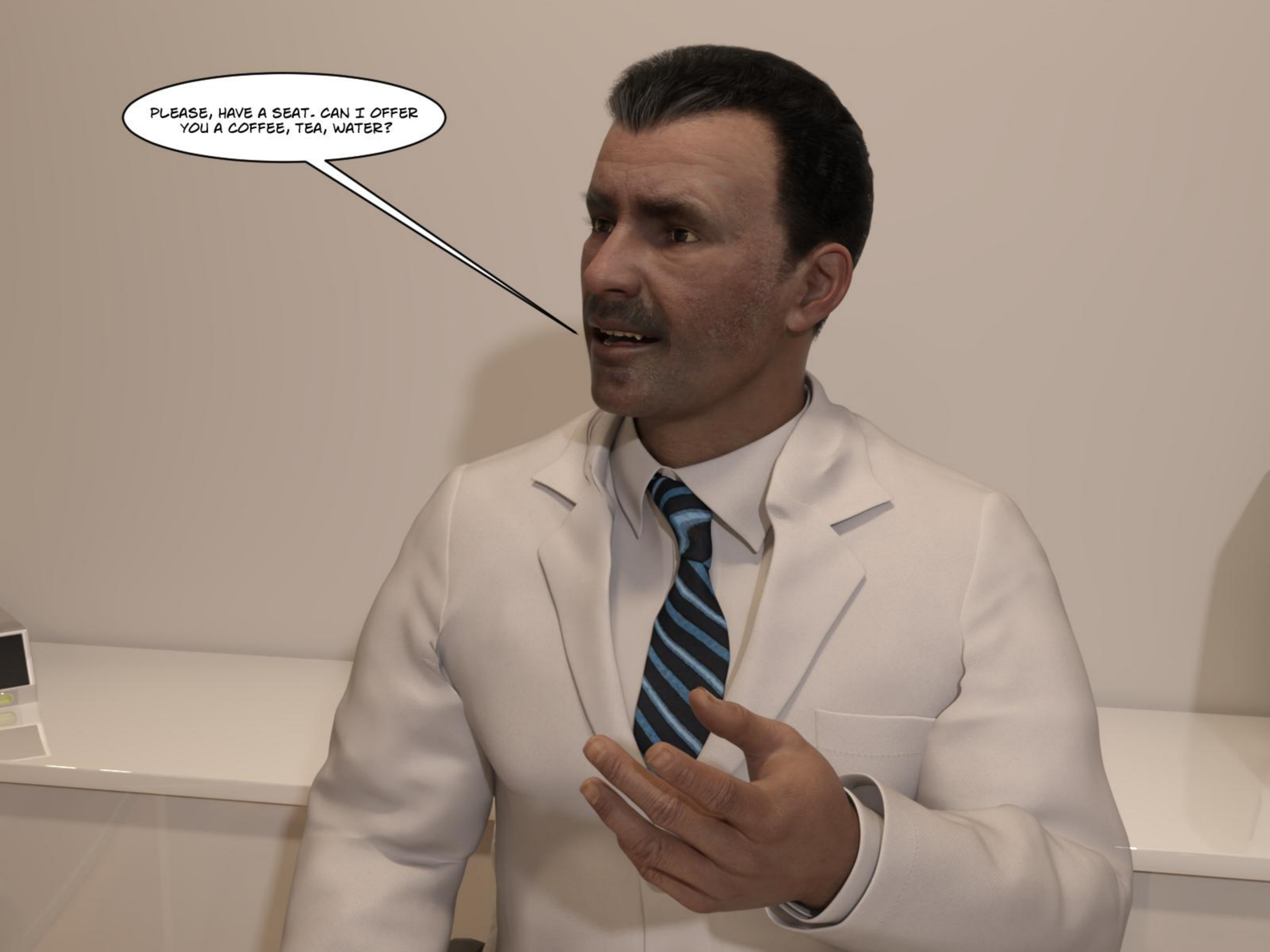





DR. GIANAKOS.

HELLO, MRS. SAMARAS!

PLEASE, HAVE A SEAT. CAN I OFFER
YOU A COFFEE, TEA, WATER?




A woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing large tortoiseshell sunglasses, a pearl necklace, and a bright pink, long-sleeved, low-cut top. She is standing in a room with a light-colored wall and a dark door with a silver doorknob visible on the right. A speech bubble originates from her mouth, containing the text: "NO, THANK YOU. I DON'T INTEND TO TAKE UP MUCH OF YOUR TIME."

NO, THANK YOU. I DON'T INTEND
TO TAKE UP MUCH OF YOUR TIME.

VERY WELL, WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU TODAY, MA'AM? I WASN'T EXPECTING TO SEE YOU UNTIL YOUR CHECK UP APPOINTMENT WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS FROM NOW.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright pink top and a pearl necklace, is shown in profile. She has a thoughtful expression. A thought bubble is connected to her head by a dotted line. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

I NEED TO CHOOSE MY WORDS VERY CAREFULLY HERE. I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT THE DOCTOR'S REAL INVOLVEMENT IN ALL OF THIS IS.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a bright pink, long-sleeved, low-cut dress and a pearl necklace, is seated at a white conference table. She is looking towards a man whose back is to the camera. The man is wearing a light-colored suit jacket. The setting appears to be a modern office or meeting room with a wooden floor and a plain wall. A speech bubble originates from the woman, containing text.

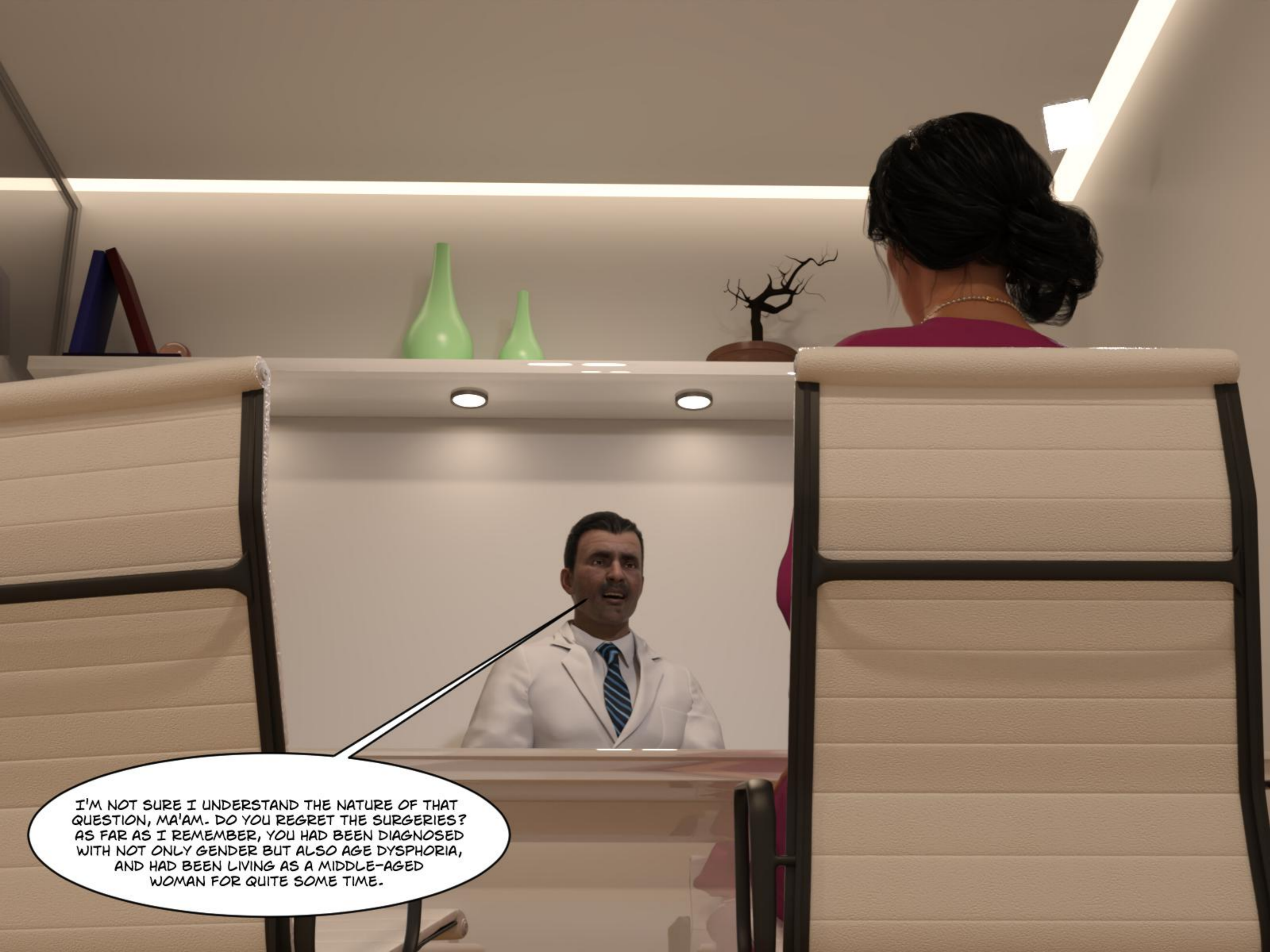
I HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT THE PROCEDURES
PERFORMED ON ME, DR. GIANAKOS.



GO AHEAD, MRS. SAMARAS.
I'M HERE TO ANSWER ALL
YOUR DOUBTS.




JUST OUT OF CURIOSITY... HOW REVERSIBLE
ARE THEY?



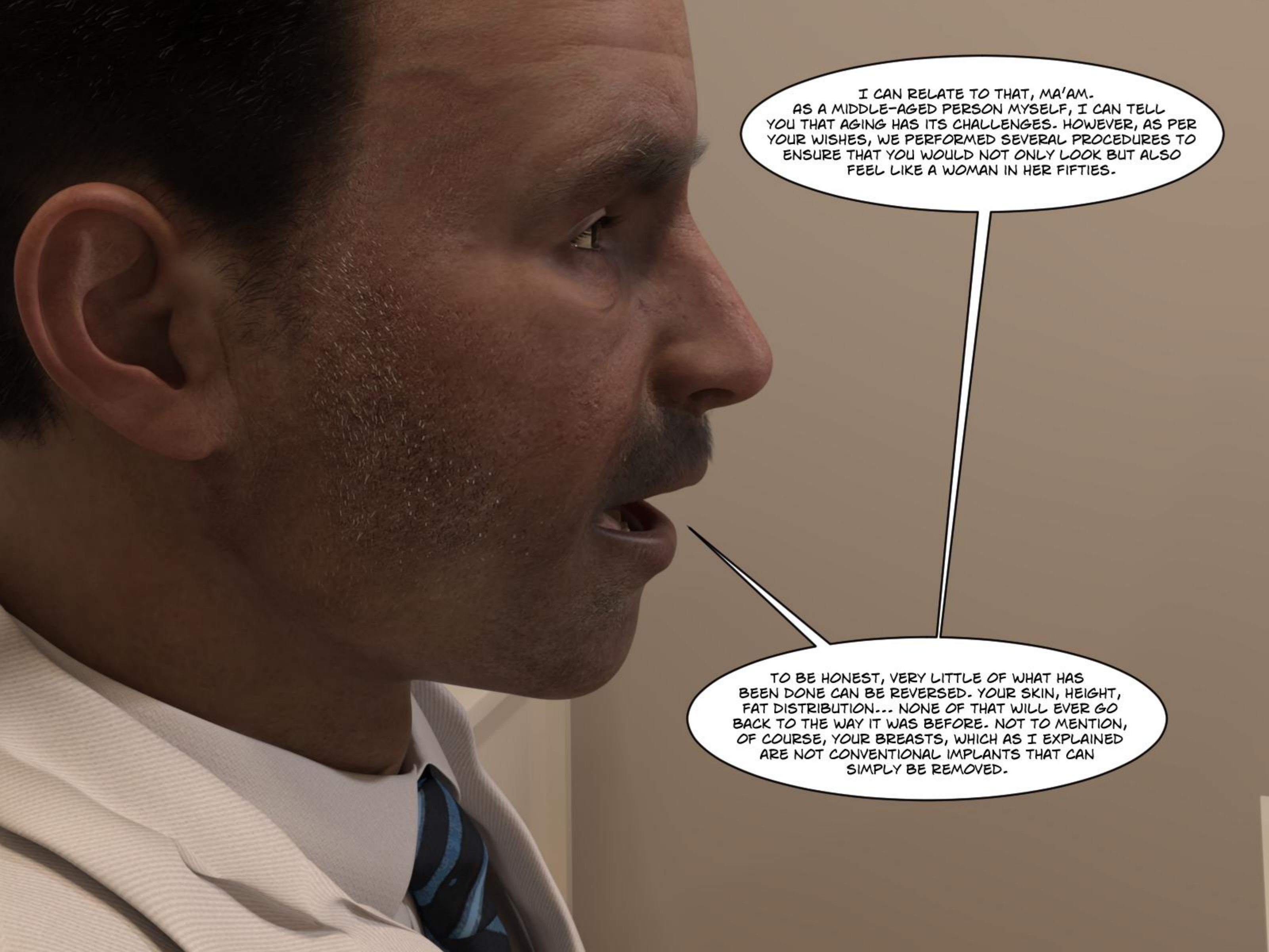
I'M NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THAT QUESTION, MA'AM. DO YOU REGRET THE SURGERIES? AS FAR AS I REMEMBER, YOU HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH NOT ONLY GENDER BUT ALSO AGE DYSPHORIA, AND HAD BEEN LIVING AS A MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN FOR QUITE SOME TIME.



YES, THAT WAS THE LIE WE MADE UP TO CONVINCE THE DOCTOR THAT I WAS TRANS. I HAD NEVER BEEN TO A PSYCHOLOGIST, NOR HAD I BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DYSPHORIA, OF COURSE. HOWEVER, I HAD NO IDEA THAT HE WOULD PERFORM SUCH RADICAL SURGERIES. AND EVEN THOUGH HE SUPPOSEDLY EXPLAINED EVERYTHING TO ME, I BARELY UNDERSTOOD AT THE TIME WHAT HE WAS SAYING.

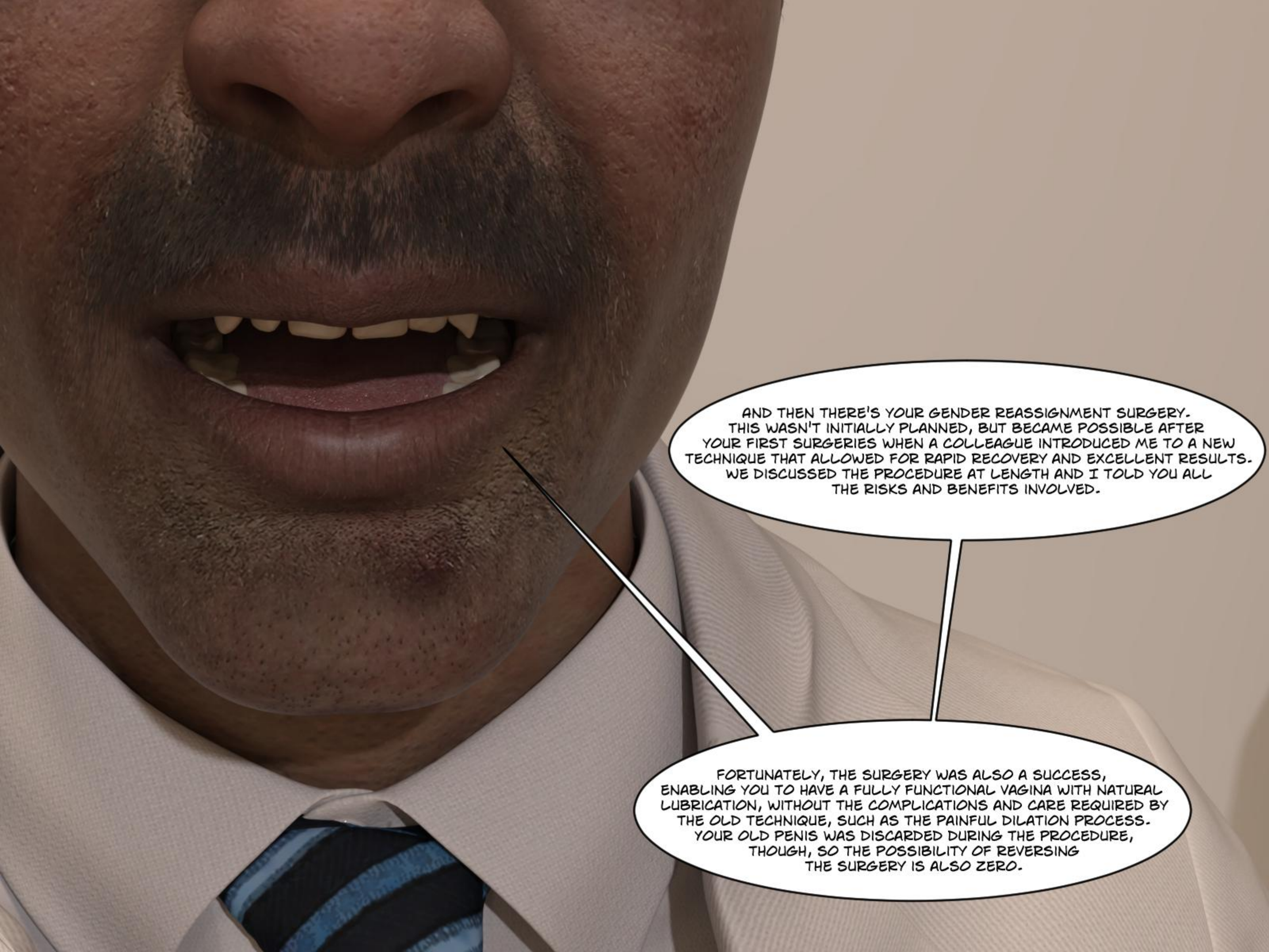
A pregnant woman with dark hair styled in a bun, wearing a pink long-sleeved dress and a pearl necklace, is sitting at a white desk. She is looking towards a computer monitor. Her right hand is raised in a gesture. A speech bubble originates from her mouth, containing text. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

OF COURSE I HAVE NO REGRETS, DOCTOR.
I'M LIVING THE LIFE I'VE ALWAYS DREAMED OF,
AFTER ALL, WITH MY LOVING FAMILY. BUT I CAN'T
DENY THAT SOME OF THE PROCEDURES DID COME
WITH CERTAIN... UNPLEASANT SIDE EFFECTS.



I CAN RELATE TO THAT, MA'AM.
AS A MIDDLE-AGED PERSON MYSELF, I CAN TELL
YOU THAT AGING HAS ITS CHALLENGES. HOWEVER, AS PER
YOUR WISHES, WE PERFORMED SEVERAL PROCEDURES TO
ENSURE THAT YOU WOULD NOT ONLY LOOK BUT ALSO
FEEL LIKE A WOMAN IN HER FIFTIES.

TO BE HONEST, VERY LITTLE OF WHAT HAS
BEEN DONE CAN BE REVERSED. YOUR SKIN, HEIGHT,
FAT DISTRIBUTION... NONE OF THAT WILL EVER GO
BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE. NOT TO MENTION,
OF COURSE, YOUR BREASTS, WHICH AS I EXPLAINED
ARE NOT CONVENTIONAL IMPLANTS THAT CAN
SIMPLY BE REMOVED.




AND THEN THERE'S YOUR GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY. THIS WASN'T INITIALLY PLANNED, BUT BECAME POSSIBLE AFTER YOUR FIRST SURGERIES WHEN A COLLEAGUE INTRODUCED ME TO A NEW TECHNIQUE THAT ALLOWED FOR RAPID RECOVERY AND EXCELLENT RESULTS. WE DISCUSSED THE PROCEDURE AT LENGTH AND I TOLD YOU ALL THE RISKS AND BENEFITS INVOLVED.

FORTUNATELY, THE SURGERY WAS ALSO A SUCCESS, ENABLING YOU TO HAVE A FULLY FUNCTIONAL VAGINA WITH NATURAL LUBRICATION, WITHOUT THE COMPLICATIONS AND CARE REQUIRED BY THE OLD TECHNIQUE, SUCH AS THE PAINFUL DILATION PROCESS. YOUR OLD PENIS WAS DISCARDED DURING THE PROCEDURE, THOUGH, SO THE POSSIBILITY OF REVERSING THE SURGERY IS ALSO ZERO.



SO THAT'S IT... UNLESS THE DOCTOR IS LYING TO ME FOR SOME REASON, THERE'S NO GOING BACK NOW. I'M STUCK AS AN OLDER WOMAN FOREVER. NEVER AGAIN WILL I BE ABLE TO BE A MAN, LET ALONE A YOUNG ONE!

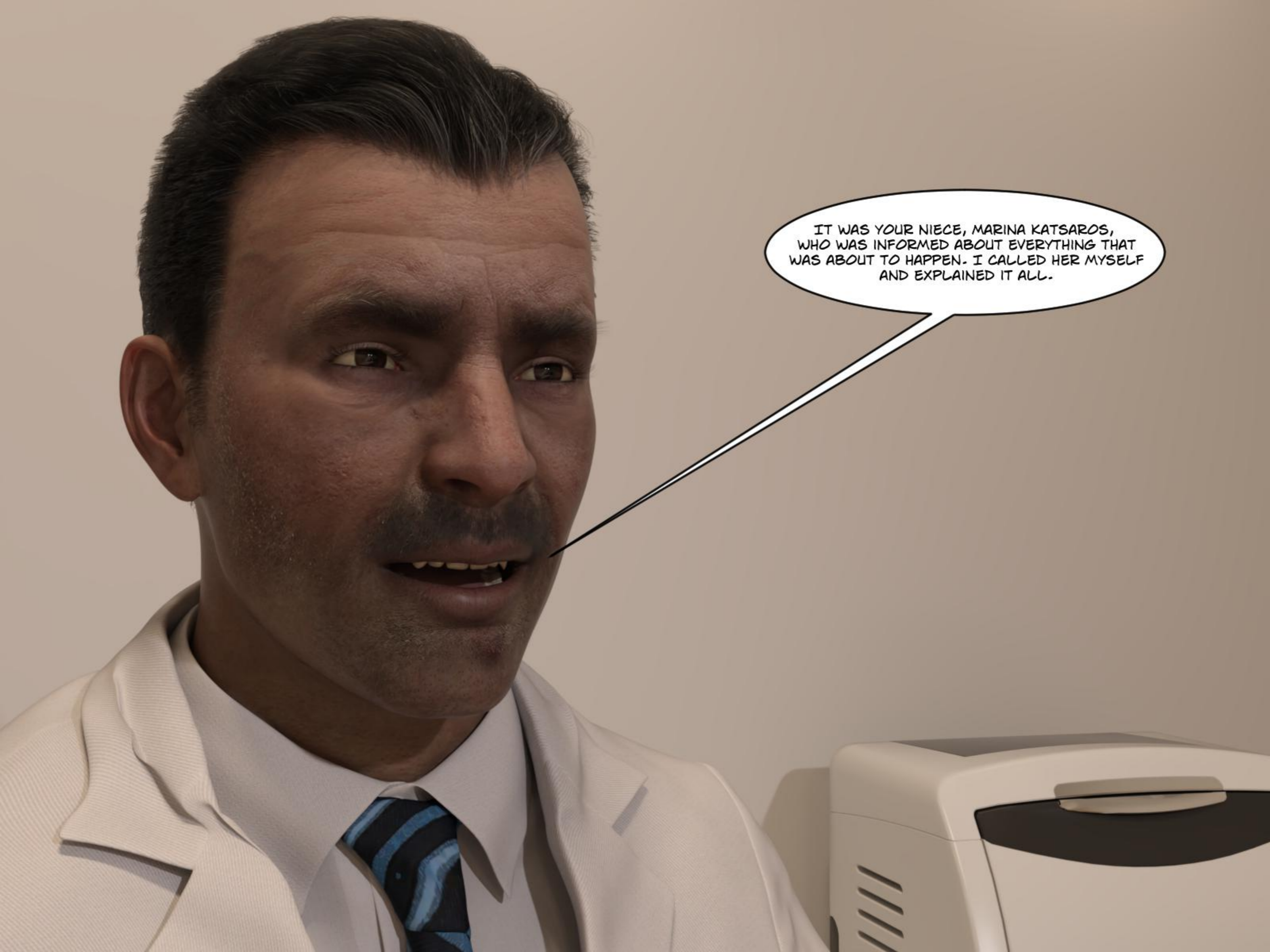
THEY EVEN PERFORMED GENDER REASSIGNMENT SURGERY ON ME, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NO MEMORY OF THE CONVERSATION THE DOCTOR MENTIONED. WHY WOULD HE PERFORM SUCH SURGERY WITHOUT MY CONSENT? WELL, HE DOESN'T SEEM LIKE SOMEONE WITH GREAT WORK ETHICS, CONSIDERING WHAT HE JUST DID TO JOEL.

A woman with dark hair styled in a bun, wearing a bright pink, long-sleeved, low-cut dress and a pearl necklace. She is looking slightly to the right with a concerned expression. A speech bubble points to her from the right. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

TELL ME DOCTOR, WAS ANYONE IN MY FAMILY INFORMED ABOUT MY PROCEDURES BEFORE THEY HAPPENED?

A white speech bubble with a black outline and a tail pointing towards the bottom right. It contains text in all caps.

OF COURSE, MRS. SAMARAS. EVEN WITH YOUR SIGNATURE AND CONSENT, I WOULDN'T PERFORM SUCH EXTENSIVE SURGERIES WITHOUT THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF A FAMILY MEMBER.



IT WAS YOUR NIECE, MARINA KATSAROS,
WHO WAS INFORMED ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT
WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. I CALLED HER MYSELF
AND EXPLAINED IT ALL.



MARINA?! SHE KNEW?