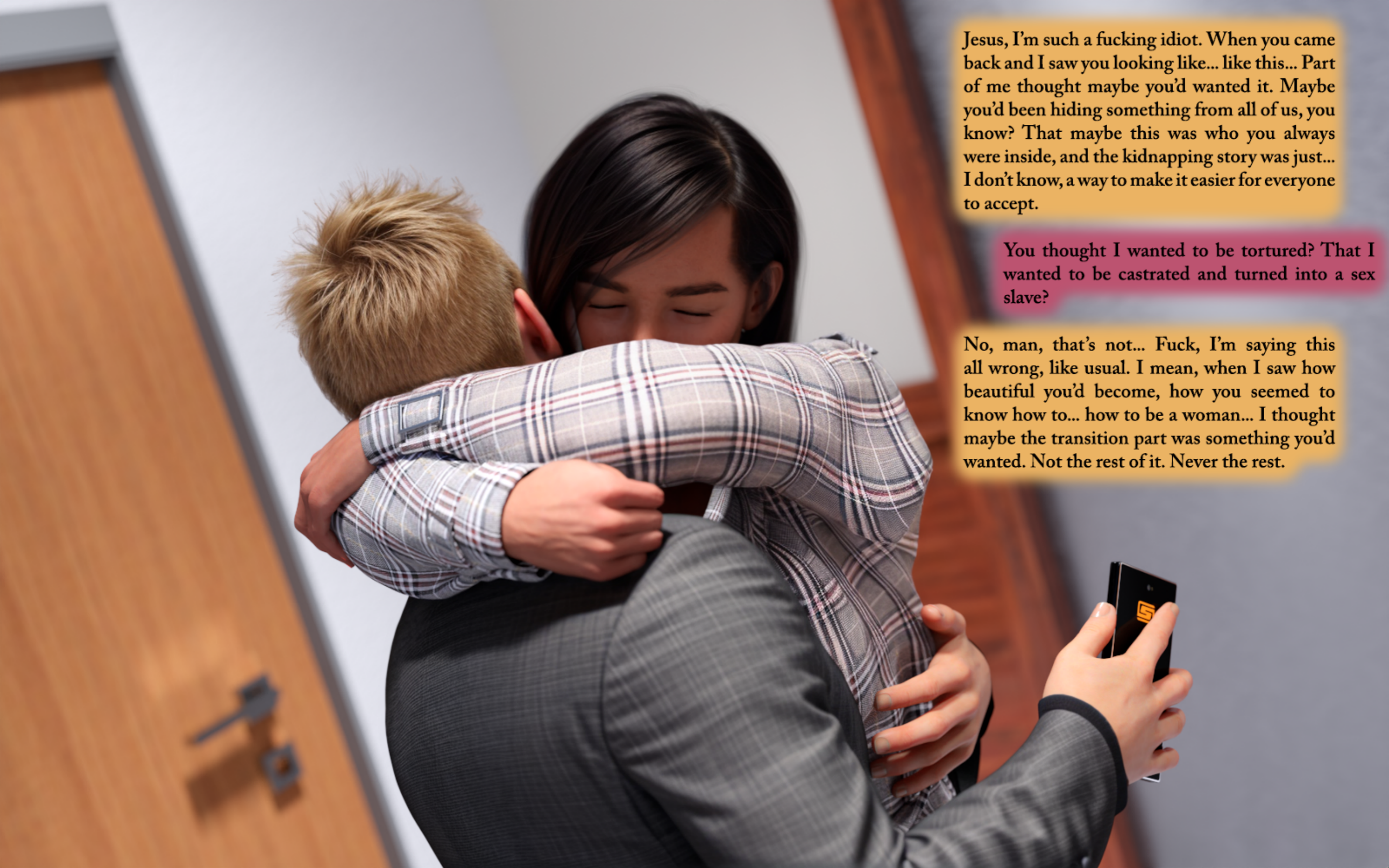




**HOMECOMING**

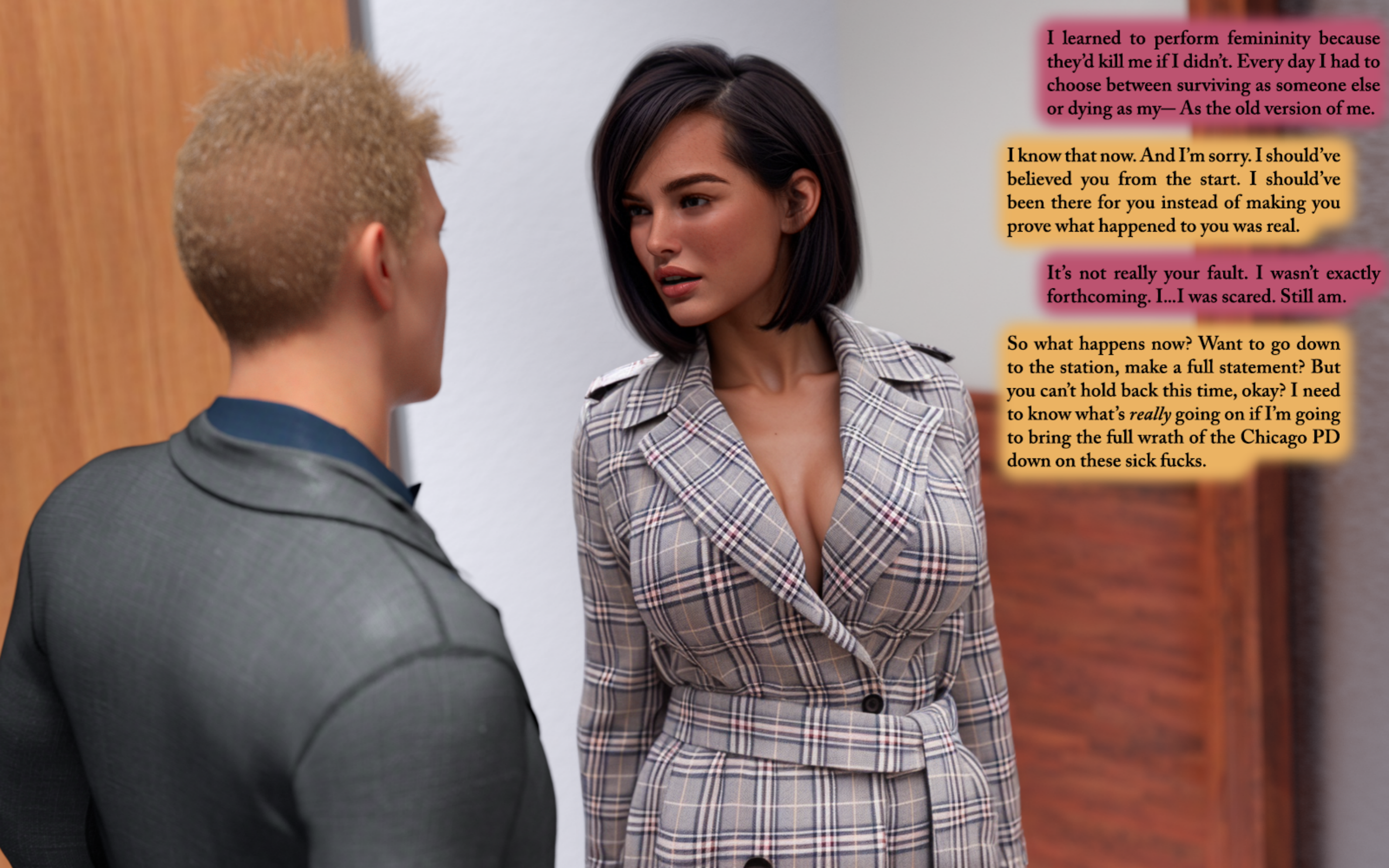
**EPISODE 25**



Jesus, I'm such a fucking idiot. When you came back and I saw you looking like... like this... Part of me thought maybe you'd wanted it. Maybe you'd been hiding something from all of us, you know? That maybe this was who you always were inside, and the kidnapping story was just... I don't know, a way to make it easier for everyone to accept.

You thought I wanted to be tortured? That I wanted to be castrated and turned into a sex slave?

No, man, that's not... Fuck, I'm saying this all wrong, like usual. I mean, when I saw how beautiful you'd become, how you seemed to know how to... how to be a woman... I thought maybe the transition part was something you'd wanted. Not the rest of it. Never the rest.



I learned to perform femininity because they'd kill me if I didn't. Every day I had to choose between surviving as someone else or dying as my— As the old version of me.

I know that now. And I'm sorry. I should've believed you from the start. I should've been there for you instead of making you prove what happened to you was real.

It's not really your fault. I wasn't exactly forthcoming. I...I was scared. Still am.

So what happens now? Want to go down to the station, make a full statement? But you can't hold back this time, okay? I need to know what's *really* going on if I'm going to bring the full wrath of the Chicago PD down on these sick fucks.

You're right. I'll make a full statement. But first... I need to talk to Alan. Just for a few minutes.

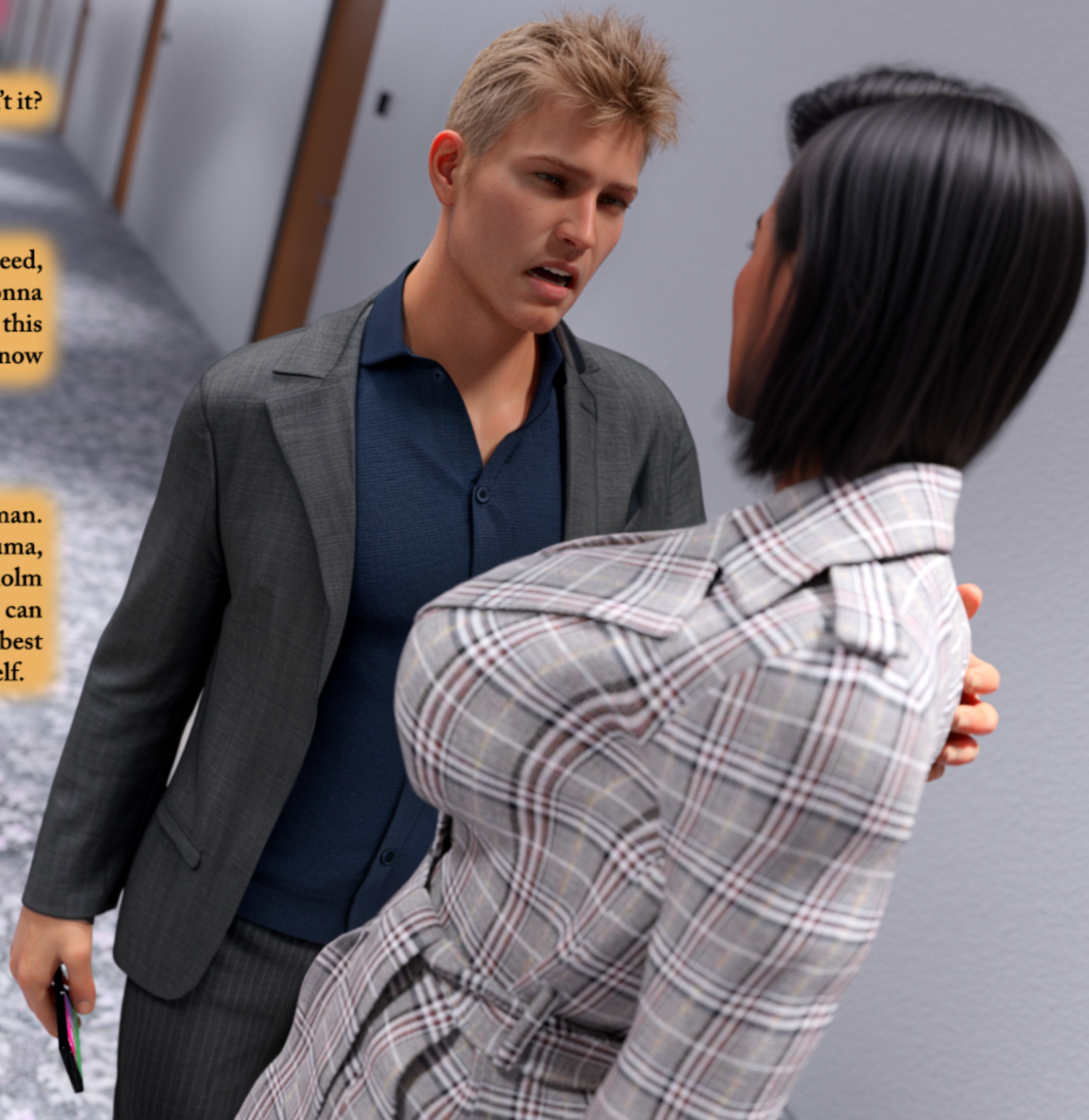
Yeah, man. I get it. It's time to say goodbye, isn't it? That's gotta be hard as hell.

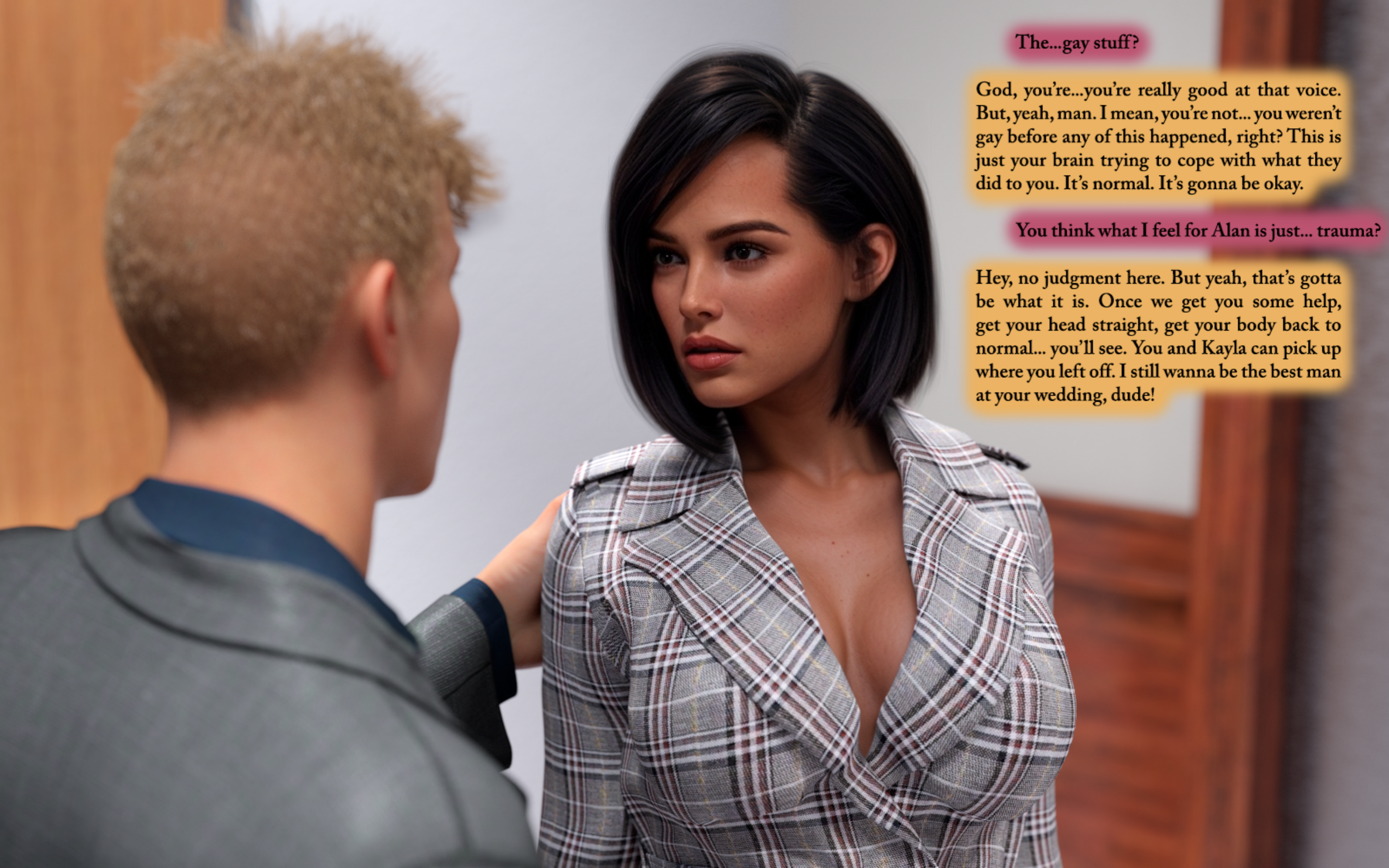
Goodbye? Benji, it's... complicated.

I fucking bet it is. Look, take all the time you need, okay? I'll wait outside. But after that, we're gonna nail these bastards to the wall. And don't worry, this is between you and me. Kayla doesn't need to know any of... you know... *this*.

Any of what?

Well, the gay stuff. Being in love with a man. Look, crazy shit happens to people under trauma, alright? I've seen it in my line of work. Stockholm syndrome, all that psychological bullshit. We can forget about it. We'll get you lined up with the best surgeons in the city, get you back to your old self.





The...gay stuff?

God, you're...you're really good at that voice. But, yeah, man. I mean, you're not... you weren't gay before any of this happened, right? This is just your brain trying to cope with what they did to you. It's normal. It's gonna be okay.

You think what I feel for Alan is just... trauma?


Hey, no judgment here. But yeah, that's gotta be what it is. Once we get you some help, get your head straight, get your body back to normal... you'll see. You and Kayla can pick up where you left off. I still wanna be the best man at your wedding, dude!

I'll... I'll be quick.

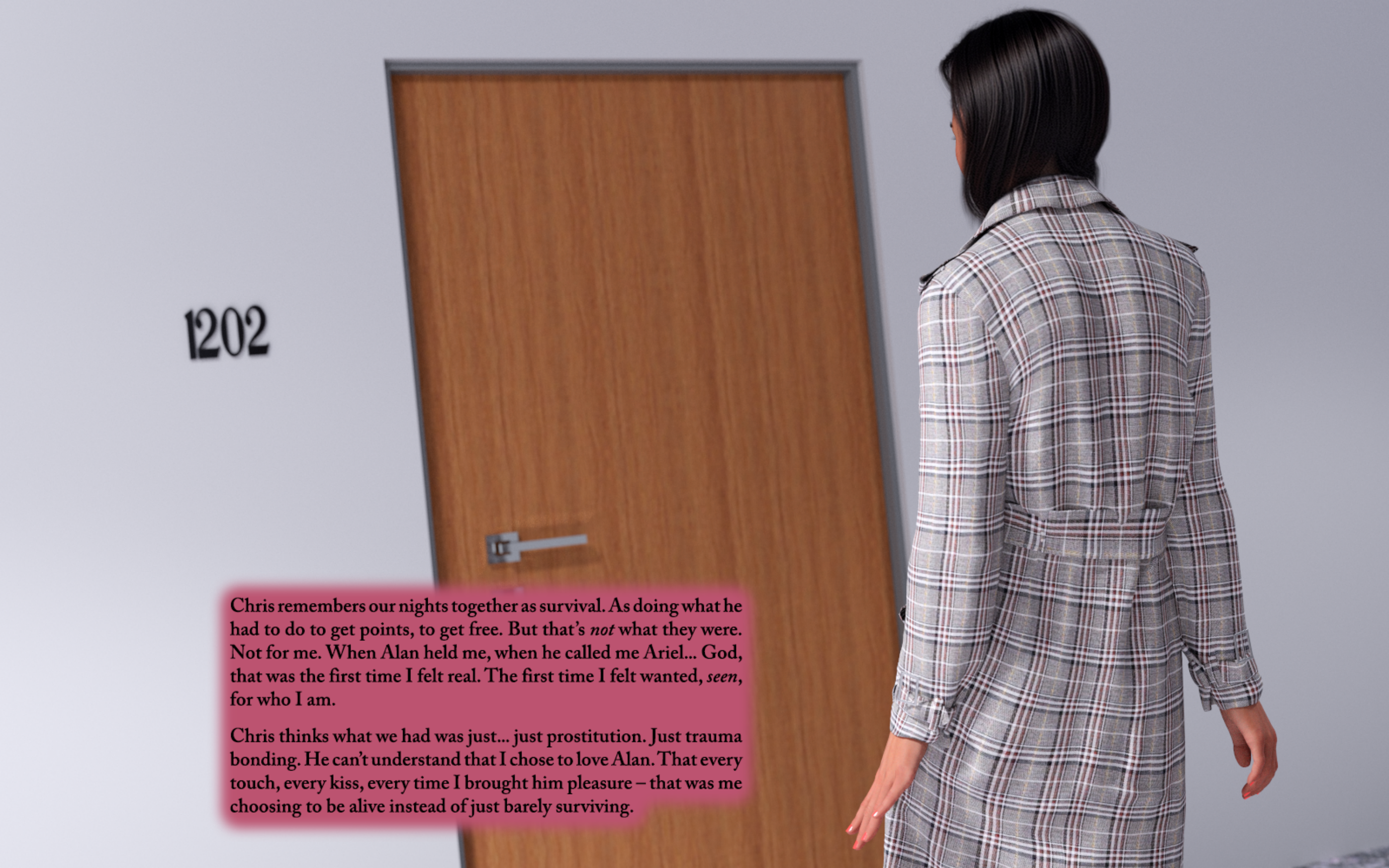


Hey, Chris? I'm proud of you, man. For surviving all this shit. For being brave enough to fight back. You're a badass!



A close-up, low-angle shot of a woman's legs as she walks. She is wearing a grey and white plaid skirt and black high-heeled sandals with ankle straps. The floor is a grey, textured carpet. In the background, a wooden door is visible against a light-colored wall. A pink speech bubble containing text is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the image.

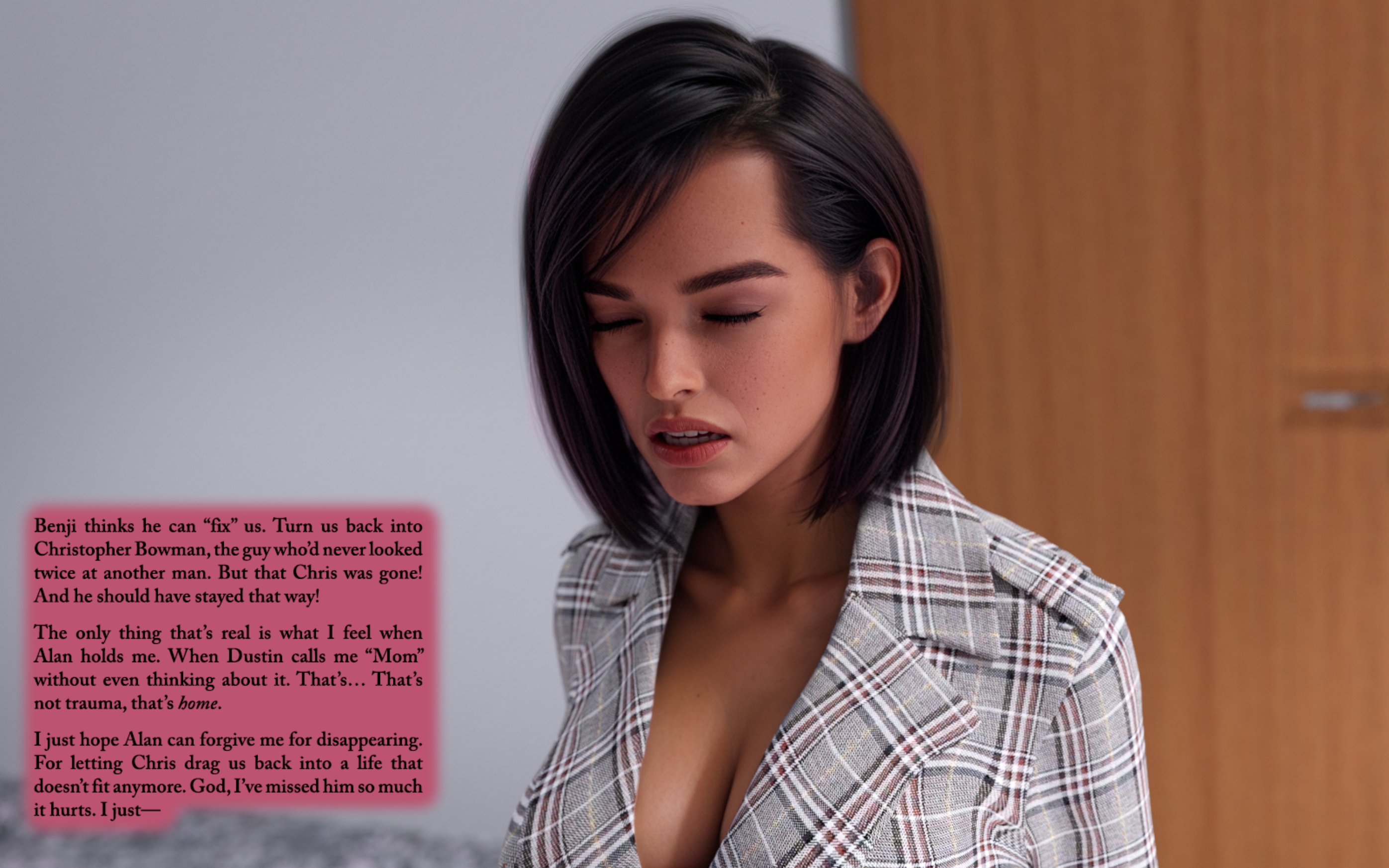
Dammit, how do I explain this to Alan? What do I tell him? That I've been playing house with my ex-fiancée while he waited for me? That Chris took over and I couldn't stop him from going back to the life that was never mine? That wasn't the plan. That was never the plan!

A woman with dark hair, seen from the back, stands in front of a wooden door. She is wearing a long, belted plaid coat with a pattern of grey, white, and red. The door is made of light-colored wood and has a silver handle. To the left of the door, the number '1202' is mounted on the wall. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

1202

Chris remembers our nights together as survival. As doing what he had to do to get points, to get free. But that's *not* what they were. Not for me. When Alan held me, when he called me Ariel... God, that was the first time I felt real. The first time I felt wanted, *seen*, for who I am.

Chris thinks what we had was just... just prostitution. Just trauma bonding. He can't understand that I chose to love Alan. That every touch, every kiss, every time I brought him pleasure – that was me choosing to be alive instead of just barely surviving.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, shoulder-length hair. She is wearing a grey and white plaid blazer. Her eyes are closed, and her mouth is slightly open, conveying a sense of sadness or contemplation. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Benji thinks he can “fix” us. Turn us back into Christopher Bowman, the guy who’d never looked twice at another man. But that Chris was gone! And he should have stayed that way!

The only thing that’s real is what I feel when Alan holds me. When Dustin calls me “Mom” without even thinking about it. That’s... That’s not trauma, that’s *home*.

I just hope Alan can forgive me for disappearing. For letting Chris drag us back into a life that doesn’t fit anymore. God, I’ve missed him so much it hurts. I just—



Oh! I didn't even get to knock. H... Hello.

Why would you ever knock? Anyway, I'd know those heels anywhere. Nobody walks like you do – such... um, sexy purposefulness? God, I suck at words. You know what I mean!

Alan, I—


# 1202



Perfect timing, as usual. The new episode of *The Expanse* just started, and I know you wouldn't miss it. Come on, I saved your spot on the couch – Oh, and I have your special beer, of course.

Babe... I need to explain where I've been. I know you must be so angry—

Angry? Jesus, Kris, I'm just happy you're here. I don't give a shit about explanations right now.



But I disappeared for weeks without a word. I left you that video and then—

Hey. You're here now. That's all that matters.



I missed you so fucking much.

I missed you too! God, Alan, I—

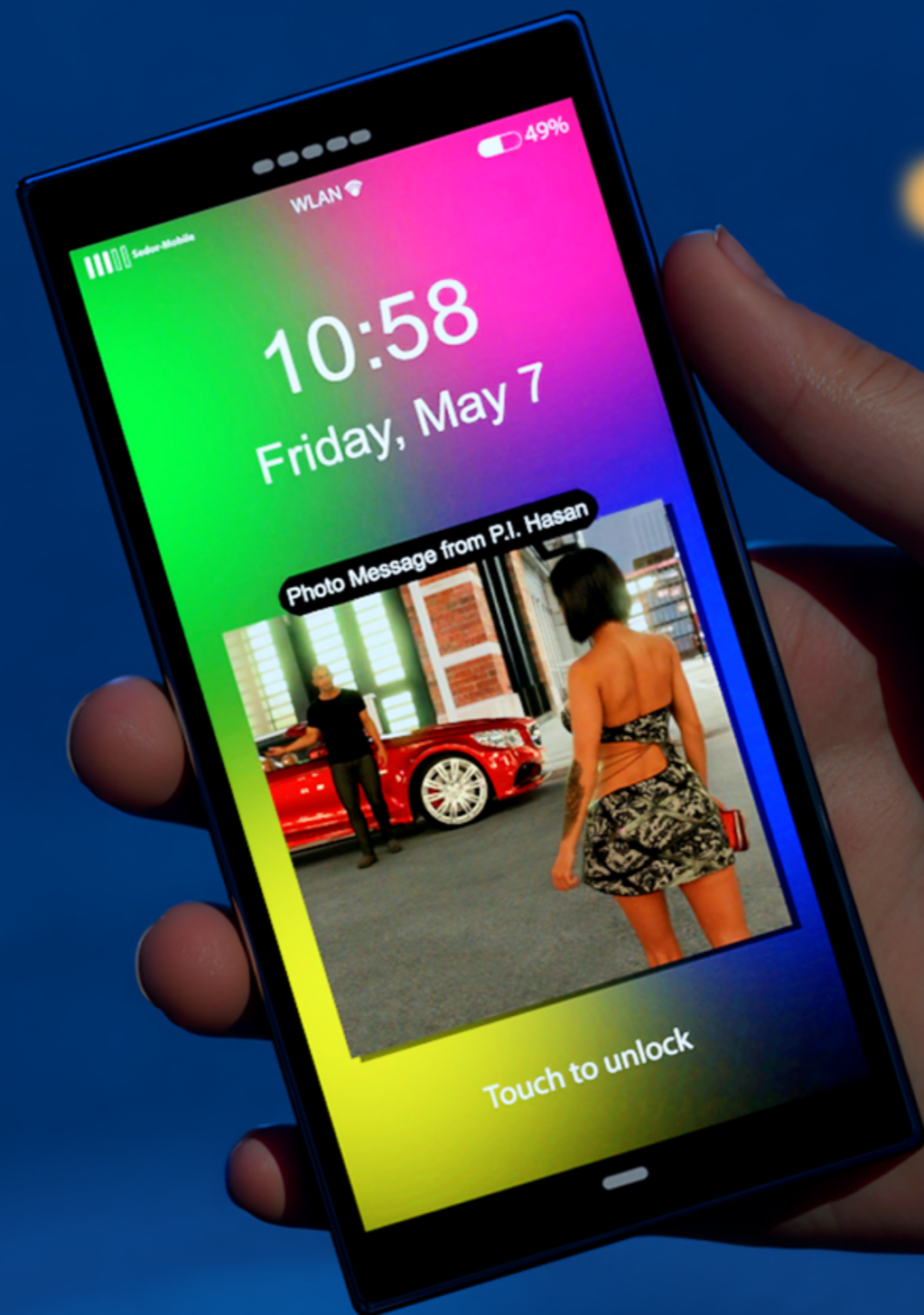


I'm home.

Yeah, you are.



Come on, man. How long does it take to say 'piss off' to some random john you had to fuck to stay alive?



What the hell? Why is Chris...

10:58

Friday, May 7

Photo Message from P.I. Hasan



Touch to unlock

Jesus Christ. What the fuck? There's more pics, too...

Who the hell is making you do this, Chris? And *why!*?













Fuck. *Fuck!* I love you, babe.

I love you, too. So much... How does that feel?

*Amazing.* But... You could go a little harder and... deeper.