

Chris stared at his reflection in the mirror and sighed sadly. The image he saw there was wrong. It had always been wrong, he now realized, but it had taken him a long time to admit it to himself. He stood there nude, exposing all the ways his body didn't match his mental image. There were so many.

He reached down and gripped himself. There was one part that offended more than the rest. It was large enough to be impossible to ignore, always making itself known when he least expected it. His grip slowly tightened as he thought about it. He could almost swear it existed just to consciously torment him with its wrongness. There were days when he just wanted to take a hacksaw to it and be rid of it forever, but he feared the results of mutilating himself. His grip tightened painfully and he made himself let go before he did real damage in his anger.

The fox turned away from the mirror. He'd lived with it long enough. Tomorrow he'd start doing something about it.

The label on the door read "Dr. Alexis Lightfoot, Body Dysphoria Therapist". Chris took a deep breath and entered. There was a pleasantly-furnished waiting room and a receptionist behind the standard pane of glass. He steeled himself and walked up to the window, cringing when he got a look at the receptionist. Why did it have to be an attractive bunny femme? She looked to be his age, even. A near perfect match... He was going to be taunted by that every time he showed up for an appointment.

The girl looked up at him with concern. "Is something wrong, sir?"

Chris shook his head. It wasn't her fault she reminded him of what he wasn't. "No, no. At least nothing immediate. I have an appointment for two o'clock."

The receptionist quickly consulted her schedule. "Mr. Sands? Yep. Go ahead and have a seat and Dr. Lightfoot will be right out."

Chris sat down, bouncing his foot with nervous energy. He couldn't believe he was actually going to admit his problem to someone else for the first time. He had to be crazy. A short scoff escaped him, drawing a moment of attention from the receptionist. He certainly was a little crazy, or else he wouldn't have reason to be there at all.

In his nervous reverie, he was slightly surprised when the doctor called his name. The fox stood quickly and walked over to her.

Dr. Lightfoot was an attractive snow leopard, somewhere in her late forties. She greeted him gently and ushered him to the office in the back. It featured comfortable modern furnishings, and lacked the stereotypical couch. She took a chair and gestured for Chris to take the other one. She got right down to business. "So, I know a little about why you're here, but how about you tell me the whole story."

Like a dam crumbling at the base, Chris did. He shared the moment he realized he wasn't happy with himself, the early signs of wanting to be different, the jealousy he felt toward those who looked the way he wished he could and the shame that went with it. He told her about his anger at his own body, and his occasional urges to forcibly hack off the parts he hated. When it was over, he sniffled, barely holding back tears. The doctor was the first other person he had ever told.

Nothing he said made her look surprised, and that comforted the fox even more than finally sharing how he felt. If nothing he said was new, then there really were other people like him out there.

Lightfoot spoke up only after he was silent for several seconds. "I see. You certainly let things build up some pressure. I take it you want to make a change?"

Chris nodded, and when he answered his voice was barely audible. "More than anything."

She sat back. "Given what you've said, I have no problem approving you for reassignment therapy."

His heart leapt.

"I assume you know there are a few steps before I send you off to surgery, though, right?"

Chris nodded again. "Of course. It couldn't be that easy."

The snow leopard laughed. "You think showing up to your friends and family suddenly looking so different would be easy?"

He cracked a smile. "I guess not."

The doctor tapped her pen on her notebook. "Exactly. So the first step is telling everyone you know how you feel. They'll find out eventually, so you might as well control the circumstances."

Chris cringed. He was pretty sure most of his friends would be accepting, but his parents were another matter. Still, it would have to happen eventually. He sighed heavily.

Chris looked nervously at his friends. They were the first two he had told, and the wait to see how they would react was horrible. It was only seconds, but it felt like hours to the fox.

Andrew, the lynx, started to speak up, but was drowned out by a shout from Darryl, a large bear never afraid to share his opinion. "What the hell, man? How could you do this?"

Chris's face fell. "What? I told you. It's how I see--"

Darryl cut him off. "Bullshit. It's 'cause you want to fuck guys, isn't it?"

The fox shook his head. "No, man. It's nothing like that. I just feel like I should have been born--"

The bear didn't care. He stood and walked away, muttering, "Fuckin' faggot."

Chris looked down at the table and tried not to cry. The slur barely even made sense, but it still hurt.

After a few moments of awkward silence, Andrew spoke again. "Look, fuck him. You do what makes you happy." He hesitated a moment. "I have to ask though, is it a sex thing? I have to say I don't really understand it."

Chris composed himself and looked up. "No, it's not related to sex at all, really. I know there are some stereotypes out there, but that's not at all the basis of my feelings."

Andrew nodded. "Ok. Are you going to get the surgery? It's a hell of a change."

The fox sighed. "Yeah, if I can. I feel like if I don't then I'll end up doing something terrible to myself."

The lynx shook his head in wonder. "Serious stuff. It's hard to believe you've been living with this for so long."

Chris shrugged. "It was kind of a slow build. I always felt a little uncomfortable with my body, but it only recently got to where I could hardly stand looking in a mirror."

Andrew reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "It's cool man, I'm not going to disown you over this. But I gotta know, how did your parents take the news?"

Chris cringed. "I'll let you know when I tell them."

His friend hissed through his teeth. "Oof. Good luck man. Aren't they big into the Church of--"

"Yeah, they are. I'm not looking forward to it." Chris shivered. "Thanks, though. It means a lot."

"No problem. Are you going to change your name?" the lynx asked.

Chris shrugged again. "Nah. The one I have will work fine unless I really feel like I need a new start."

Andrew laughed briefly. "Good to hear. I'd just end up using the wrong one all the time if you switched."

"Ah yes, your convenience is paramount in my thoughts." Chris laughed with his friend, even as his mind turned to the harder conversation ahead.

In retrospect, broaching the subject to his parents in the middle of dinner was a definite mistake. As with most times bad news arrived, his mom got quiet and his dad did most of the talking. Or yelling, rather. "How could you do this to us?"

Chris winced. Those cliched lines were cliché for a reason. Might as well give the standard response. "Dad, it's not something I'm *doing*, it's just...the way things are."

His mom looked horrified, and began quietly crying. His brother, still in high school, looked distinctly uncomfortable, and did his best to only look at his food.

The standard line left no impression on his father. "I can't believe you'd betray our values like this. People should stay the way they're made."

"What?" Chris boggled. "This is 2011, those 'traditional' values are wrong. People are equal now. There are no teams to defend."

His dad shook his head at the younger fox's foolishness. "I thought we raised you better. How can you defend those..." He grunted, unable to even say the word.

Chris tried to avoid whimpering. He knew his parents were old-fashioned, but he didn't expect the intensity of this prejudice. "It's who I am. Sometimes the outside doesn't match the inside. I just want to fix that."

His dad's greying fur seemed to turn close to the red of his youth in his anger. "You don't *fix* the way you're born. You accept it."

"I can't," he said quietly. "It's killing me."

His father's voice was cold. "Then it's good that you're going to fuck up your appearance. That way nobody will know that you used to be my son. Get out."

Chris stared at his father, trying and failing to keep tears from his eyes. "Dad, I--"

The older fox stood and slammed his hand on the table. "Out!"

Silently, Chris stood and turned away. He held his sobs until he was out of the house. By the time he got to his car, he had to wipe his eyes to see clearly enough to unlock it.

When he turned on the car, a happy, energetic song began blasting from the radio. He almost broke the dial in his haste to turn it off. He didn't need that right now. The drive back to his apartment was spent in silence, as he replayed the conversation in his mind trying to figure out if he could have prevented it from going so terribly wrong.

Nothing came to him, and he sat at home, brooding. He knew that telling his parents would be difficult, but hadn't really expected his worst case scenario to play out.

Some time later, he heard a knock at his door. He had a brief hope that his father had relented and was showing up to apologize, but he knew how unlikely that was. Talking to any of his friends didn't seem very appealing, but he couldn't bring himself to pretend not to be home. To his surprise, it was his brother at the door. "Aaron! What's up, man?"

For a moment, the younger fox was silent, then he opened his arms and hugged his brother. "I'm sorry. I feel like I should have said something, but I didn't want to get in the middle of that."

Chris hugged him back. "No way, it's my problem to deal with, not yours. I appreciate the thought though."

Aaron looked relieved. "I just wanted you to know I don't agree with them. You should be happy, whatever it takes."

Chris nodded. "Thanks. That means a lot." He paused. "You aren't going to get in trouble for being here, right?"

The younger fox shook his head. "Nah, they think I'm at a friend's place. They didn't question it much when I said I was heading out. A lot on their minds, you know."

Chris chuckled. "I guess so. Well, did you have any questions now that you don't have to shout through an argument to ask?"

Aaron shrugged. "I know a little about this kind of thing from reading on the internet, so I'm not going to ask if it's a sex thing or whatever."

The older fox laughed. "That makes you the first. Congratulations."

His brother smiled. "I believe it." He turned serious for a moment. "You know, you're kind of lucky you realized this after you moved out."

Chris raised an eyebrow, sensing something unsaid. "I guess so. Is there some deeper meaning to that comment?"

Aaron sighed. "I'm gay, Chris."

The older brother winced. "Ouch. I'm assuming mom and dad don't know?"

"God no." Aaron shook his head. "I don't think I'll be telling them until I move out. Maybe not until after college, so I can be sure they'll still help me out."

Yesterday, Chris might have said they wouldn't be cruel enough to cut him off, but after his dad's reaction at dinner, he thought differently. "It's your decision, but that might be wise."

Aaron shook his head. "Right, but it really hurts not being able to date or anything. Some of my friends are starting to suspect, but I can't tell them in case it gets back to mom and dad somehow. Maybe an out of state college will be far enough away for me to be able to do that."

Chris patted him on the shoulder. "Well, good luck. You know I'm here if you need anyone to talk to."

Aaron nodded and relaxed. "Thanks, man. It feels good just being able to tell someone."

The older brother grinned. "I found the same thing. Be strong, bro."

Chris sat on the exam table in a paper gown and nothing else. The doctor stood in front of him, performing a final examination before he took the fox back for surgery. Chris was nervous, but he knew he was in good hands. Dr. Winter, a soft-spoken lynx, had come highly recommended, called an artist as much as a doctor. In this field, that was exactly what was needed.

Their first meeting was immediately friendly, and the sessions as they discussed exactly what types of changes were possible and how Chris wanted to look in the end were themselves therapeutic. Now, the fox's leg twitched in excitement. He was finally going to be made right.

Dr. Winter finished his checkup. "Looks like you're good to go. You feel ready?"

Chris laughed nervously. "I feel like I've been ready for ages, but at the same time, not really."

The lynx chuckled. "That's about right. Let's get going, then."

Chris was led down a short hallway to the operating room, where he was instructed to position himself on the table. He did so, and soon an efficient nurse was trimming a spot of fur on his arm and inserting an IV. He took a deep breath and looked around, knowing he was seeing the world from his old body for the last time.

The nurse gently pressed him back into a reclined position, then instructed him to start counting to a hundred. He made it to eight.

He woke slowly. His mind was fuzzy with painkillers, but excitement still pierced through. Chris knew what had happened while he was out and barely suppressed the urge to jump up and look at himself. Even through the painkillers he could feel aches all over, enough that it was clear that sudden movements were a bad idea.

First, he opened his eyes. His muzzle was wrapped in gauze, hiding its shape, and a quick test revealed his jaw was wired shut, as expected. It would be several days before his facial bones were healed enough to allow movement. He rubbed his tongue along his teeth and whimpered with joy as he felt the difference in the front ones. The implants would be indistinguishable from real teeth to others, but he could tell the difference. His canines were replaced with flatter teeth, and his top front incisors would be larger than before.

He was lying on his side, the most comfortable position given the various parts of him that were healing. A certain part of him felt vastly different, or, more accurately, missing. His tail should have stretched across the bed behind him, brushing against the sheets, but all he felt from there was a vague ache. He reached back awkwardly with his hand, trailing his IV, and touched the shortened nub that remained. At the moment it was shaved and bandaged, unappealing, but after it healed it would be a short,

twitching ball of fluff, a perfect rabbit tail. The long, annoying fox tail would never taunt him again.

Chris felt his eyes water as he took stock of his other aches. His ears felt stretched and painful. They wouldn't be quite as large as proper rabbit ears, but after a few more surgeries as the skin stretched and larger implants could be used, he'd look more accurate.

The bottoms of his paws mostly itched, an artifact of the fur transplants that gave him an approximation of fuzzy bunny feet.

The door opened, admitting Dr. Winter. The lynx walked up to Chris, smiling as his eyes darted to each changed part of the former fox. "Don't try to talk, just nod. You feeling ok?"

Chris nodded.

Dr. Winter traced a finger along his ears and hummed in approval. "Not too much pain, no trouble breathing? We'll have you on the IV pain meds for a bit, at least until the facial surgery heals."

The new rabbit shook his head. He ached, but it was manageable.

The doctor smiled. "Great to hear! Just so you know, everything went well. You'll be healing for a while, but in the end I think you'll look a lot like you wanted to. Not much to see at the moment, but here you go." He picked up a small mirror from the table beside the bed and held it up to Chris.

He looked at his new face, or what he could see with bandages in the way. His muzzle was shorter, more rounded. His ears were taller and not as pointy as they used to be. Through the wrappings and swelling, he could see the shape of his new rabbit appearance. It was perfect.

Chris turned to the doctor, tears of gratitude in his eyes. He carefully leaned forward and hugged the lynx with the arm that wasn't held back by the IV. Despite his orders not to, he attempted to speak. His words were distorted, but the doctor had heard them enough times to understand him. "Thank you, thank you."