

Chapter 27

The chapter opens with the narrator flying to Oakland to visit Kris, reminiscing about a playful game they used to play with their toddler, Sam. This memory sparks an idea: could they recreate a similar dynamic with Kris, using role-play to explore emotional vulnerability? The narrator imagines a scenario where Kris confesses to a fictional affair, allowing them to enact a dramatic reconciliation. This fantasy highlights the narrator's desire for intense emotional connection and their confidence in Kris's willingness to engage in such games.

Upon arrival, the narrator notices Kris's unusual mood, marked by detachment and avoidance. Their usual rituals, like grocery shopping, feel strained, and Kris's indifference to treats or eye contact signals deeper unrest. The tension escalates when Kris admits feeling hopeless about their compatibility, citing a trivial incident involving lipstick as emblematic of larger issues. The narrator is baffled, dismissing the concern as irrational, but Kris's silence and avoidance suggest a more serious rift.

The situation reaches a breaking point when Kris suggests taking time apart, leaving the narrator stunned and desperate. In a dramatic gesture, the narrator removes a symbolic ring and storms out, hoping Kris will chase after them. When this doesn't happen, they return to Kris's cottage, only to be met with cold indifference. Kris's showered and changed appearance, along with her readiness to go out, underscores the finality of the moment, leaving the narrator reeling.

The next morning, the narrator attempts to reconcile, texting Kris with apologies and a request to reunite. Kris agrees but warns she may not be able to talk, which the narrator interprets as a positive sign. However, Kris's subsequent text—revealing she had sex with Elsa, the very role-play character the narrator had imagined—shatters any hope of reconciliation. The chapter ends with the narrator in shock, the reality of the breakup sinking in amidst the cruel irony of their earlier fantasy.