

## A Simple Question

Katy Serowka

Tom is a well dressed, tall, lean man wearing glasses and a black suit. When I walk in, he is sitting in a chair clutching at a professional-looking binder filled with paperwork and notes. He looks as if he has come to the office for a business meeting. I soon find out that he is here to get the results of a blood test he had drawn yesterday, which was ordered to measure his hormone levels.

It is not until he begins to speak and gesture with his hands that I see any hint that he is anything other than your typical, middle-aged businessman. As we look at his lab results it becomes obvious that the high doses of estrogen that we are giving him are not having the impact that they should. Tom feels great for a day or two after the estrogen injection, but it quickly wears off, and by the end of the week he is counting the days until he can give himself another. It appears that he is on so much estrogen that his sex hormone binding globulin is being massively overproduced and is binding up all of the estrogen he is being given.

There are two options for his situation: we can either lower the dose of estrogen, which Tom seems dismayed about, or he could have a bi-

lateral orchiectomy. Unfortunately, Tom's wife is not comfortable with his gender dysphoria. Tom and his wife have been happily married for many years and have two sons, one of whom has cerebral palsy. Tom admits that ever since he first told his wife about his gender dysphoria, it has made her uncomfortable to the extent that she feels compelled to change the subject every time the topic comes up.

She has been accepting of him taking hormones only if she does not see him taking them, and with the mindset that the hormones will solve the problem, and he will be happy staying in his male body. We warn Tom that he needs to find a way to speak to his wife about this new development, because a procedure such as orchiectomy is one that cannot be reversed, and one that his wife will have to visualize, perhaps making the situation much more real and difficult for her, since she wants to see Tom as nothing other than masculine. He contemplates that he will give her the house and support her for the rest of her life, and he will get an apartment so she will not have to watch him transition. Tom writes down every word that we say to him, as if writing it down will make this an easier choice: his happiness versus the happiness of the person he loves most in this world. He looks at us with tears in his eyes and says that he would give anything, take any medication, do anything if he could just make the feelings inside of him go away.

Christina, formerly known as Chris, is already sitting on the examination table when I walk into the room. At first glance you wouldn't think of Christina as anything other than a 60-something female who looks like she could be anyone's grandmother. I walk in without taking note of anything unusual, and it is not until she says, "Hello" in a deep booming voice that my brain makes the note to take a second look.

I see the distinct bone structure of a male face looking out at me from under a very realistic wig and lots of makeup. Christina is very friendly and I proceed to take her medical history and perform a physical exam. She is in perfect health and as I finish, Christina begins to tell me about her life.

She explains that she knew she was a female for as long as she could remember, but when she was younger and would tell her parents that she was actually a female, her parents would tell her that what she was feeling was wrong. She began to deny these feelings and tried to convince herself that she truly was a man. She married and had a successful, happy marriage and two beautiful, healthy sons. She did not immediately tell her wife about her gender dysphoria, but after her two sons disclosed that they were both gay, she sat down and explained to her wife the secret she had kept from everyone for so long. Her wife was extremely supportive, but Christina explained that she always had a great sex life with her wife

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and therefore did not feel the need to transition at this point in time. It was just nice to be able to share her feelings and have someone take her seriously.

When Christina was in her 50s and still living as a male, she was diagnosed with bladder cancer. The cancer had not spread and was diagnosed as a low-grade lesion, but she had to undergo numerous procedures to scrape the cancer cells from the walls of her bladder. After years of treatment for her cancer, Christina's sexual function and her sexual relationship with her wife had drastically changed. Christina and her wife made the decision together that it was time for Chris to become Christina and to live full-time as a female. Chris underwent numerous surgeries, including facial feminization, breast augmentation, and finally genital reconstruction surgery to become

Christina. At last what she had always felt on the inside matched what was on the outside. On the day that I spoke with Christina, she told me that the previous weekend she had gone to a family pool party, and her wife had surprised her with her first female swimsuit. She said it was a one piece with a skirt and that she had felt somewhat bad about how she looked in it. I laughed as I could not think of a more female thing to say and explained to her that she was definitely not the first girl to feel uncomfortable in her swimsuit.

As I continue to learn from my own relationships, I am learning what it is that I want people to see in my soul. What is it about a relationship between two people that makes it so strong that it can transcend gender when another relationship is ripped apart? What is it that exists between two people that connects

their souls, so that the human physical form no longer matters? People who love each other so deeply that they can overlook what is on the outside and what other people will think. Here are two marriages, both with children, both who overcame difficult situations in their lives, yet with two very different outcomes. My head still cannot figure out if it is communication, respect, love, or faith which allows a person to be able to look past the physical form and truly love someone for what is on the inside, but I can only hope that it is something that my heart already understands.

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