

Valentine's story

FEBRUARY 2026



Mitch was my first boyfriend. Late bloomer, I know—college. Can you believe it?

After the honeymoon glow faded, something else did, too. He became a collector of my flaws. "Bland," he'd muse, tracing my cheekbone. "Boring," he'd sigh, turning away in the dark. Our sex life became a ghost, haunting the space between us.

I have—had—blue eyes, curly blonde hair, what my mother calls a "lovely, conventional face." Not beautiful, not striking, just... lovely. Acceptable. Not bad. But under his gaze, "conventional" began to feel like a failure. Desperation is a quiet, potent fuel; I loved him, or maybe I just loved the idea of being loved by someone who'd already seen me naked. So, I started negotiating with myself.

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First, the hair. The hairdresser raised a skeptical eyebrow. Natural blondes rarely ask for this, she said. But combined with a straightening treatment, the brunette dye transformed me. The soft halo of curls I'd always had was replaced by a sleek, heavy curtain.

It wasn't me, but it was... better. Sharper. It looked less like the insecure girl I had always been and more like someone else entirely—a confident, dangerous brunette I might see in a movie.

When I got home, Mitch looked at me, really looked at me, and his slow, approving nod felt less like a compliment and more like a sacrament—a ritual blessing on my sacrifice.

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Then, the contacts. The moment the hazel discs slid over my blue irises, I gasped. The stranger in the mirror was exotic, intense, unknown. I leaned closer to the glass, and for a thrilling second, I felt like I was meeting her for the first time: a woman worth pursuing. I looked like the fascinating woman he might actually want to touch.

That night, he did touch me. His hands found my waist, his lips brushed my neck, and I felt a surge of victory so potent it nearly masked the hollow thud in my chest. This was the currency he traded in. I was learning to mint it.

The next step felt inevitable: my wardrobe.



A collection of soft cardigans and floral prints that my mother called "timeless," suddenly felt like evidence. It screamed nice girl. Safe girl. The girl you leave behind in the dark. I replaced them with sleek blacks, structured shapes, clothes that announced themselves before I ever had to open my mouth. Clothes that said I didn't need anyone—even as I was tailoring myself for the approval of one.

Tanning sessions gave me an unseasonably deep, golden-brown hue. In the pale winter light, it looked undeniably exotic—a borrowed radiance from a sun I hadn't actually seen in months. I was becoming a perfect, polished assemblage of parts he had curated.

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Our intimacy was restored. A physical validation that felt like love. My confidence began to unfurl in this strange light, entirely dependent on his reflection of me.

So when he laid the brochures on the coffee table—images of refined noses and subtly sculpted cheekbones—I didn't say no. "You have great bone structure. Imagine what a skilled artist could do with this canvas." My newfound confidence wasn't the kind that could refuse; it was the kind that was terrified of losing what it had just gained.

I told myself it was a minor touch-up. A little refinement. Like getting the ends trimmed, just a bit more off the bone.

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The bandages came off with a soft whisper of gauze, and I watched the light hit a face I had never worn before.

It wasn't a refinement of me. It was a replacement.

The structure was sharper, more dramatic—the kind of bone structure that stops conversation in an elevator. The surgeon, I later learned, had taken his artistic license from the murmured wishes Mitch had pulled him aside to share.

I looked, without a question of a doubt, a lot like Mia Khalifa. Like a porn actress.

I stared. A stranger with Middle Eastern features stared back. This wasn't a touch-up. This was an erasure.

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A breast augmentation was included as part of the same surgical plan, another line item on the path to his ideal. We had briefly mentioned it and I wasn't completely against it, so I guess he took it as a green light sign from me. When my old bras and clothes didn't fit anymore, it felt very real.

I was not a fan of my new brown orbs.

My whole body felt utterly foreign—the weight, the silhouette, the way clothing draped and pulled in places that had previously lain almost flat. They were not mine; they were his. An implant, in every sense of the word: something foreign inserted beneath the skin, masquerading as mine.

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Yet, in the whirlwind of that first month, a confusing warmth began to seep in. Mitch was enthralled. His desire was constant. I felt as desired as ever. He couldn't keep his hands off "his masterpiece," as he once whispered, a term that should have chilled me but instead, in my hunger for external validation, felt like a reward. I caught my reflection in windows and, after the initial jolt, began to see not a stranger, but a striking desired woman. There was a power in this new form, an arresting beauty I had never possessed. I started to own the glances, to feel a tentative pride in the silhouette I now had.

Eventually, though, more problems came to the surface.

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A few weeks later, we were at our usual corner table at the cafe when we had our first fight. At least, the first fight with me looking like this.

People around me always seemed to act weird and sometimes even take pics. I guess I really looked like Mia...

I was recounting the previous night. "Calling you what, baby?" Mitch said, his voice a mix of annoyance and condescension. "You are soo perfect babe!"

"It's like you're talking to someone else. To some... fantasy. Stop calling me your 'exotic slut.'" I said, my voice low but steady, a new wire of strength pulled tight inside me.

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He went very still, his warmth retreating. "I never said that." "You did. And... And stop calling me Mia when we have sex." The words felt like spitting out broken glass.

"Did you even like me in the first place?" I said, raw. "The me you first met? Or was I just... raw material?"

"I liked your potential," he said, the words quiet and precise.

Potential. The word hung in the air, and the full, grotesque picture snapped into focus. I wasn't just an abstract 'sculpture'. He hadn't been trying to create a goddess. My plastic face was now so inexpressive I couldn't fully convey my disappointment anymore.