

On a foggy November evening, in a city park somewhere in Massachusetts...

Molly - legally Monica Black - until today a senior manager at Jörgson & Sons, was fired for her newly changed look and behavior. Fresh from a party, she takes a shortcut through the park.

OHhh
MY GOSH, LIKE,
WHAT A DAY!

LIKE, SOOO UNFAIR -
FIRED? FOR REAL? UGH,
HOW RUDE.

"MRS. BLACK,
YOUR CONDUCT AND
PRESEN... UMM... TATION ARE ..."
BLAH BLAH - WHATEVER,
YOU FOSSIL.

ANYWAY,
I HAD, LIKE, THE
HOTTEST PARTY NIGHT
AT... UMM -

WAIT, THOSE
BOYS - SO CUTE - WHAT
WERE THEIR NAMES AGAIN?
LIKE, THE TWINS? OR SHINY-HAIR
GUY? UGH, BRAIN, FOCUS -
WHERE WAS I?

UMMM...
RIIIGHT?! OHhh MY
GOSH, LIKE, WHAT FOR
A PARTY!

She doesn't yet sense the hunter approaching, gliding on silent wings...

I am the hunter. Allow me to introduce myself: Alaric de Noctebrume. Once, I was a knight at the court of King Philip I of France - earning not only honor and renown, but a reputation for charm that traveled far beyond our borders.

That allure drew the hunger of an ancient evil: the vampire Sire Morcant of Vespermont, of the Nosferatu clan. It happened on a night like this - fog-choked, moon-pale -

...when a hooded figure challenged me to a duel, and I received the Kiss. Since that hour, I have been Alaric de Noctebrume, Nosferatu-born.

Seeing promise in the New World, I claimed a domain on the Atlantic coast, settling in the deep woods of Harrow's Cove, where I raised my house in secrecy.

In 1602, during one of my "Midnight Salons," a favored courtier betrayed me. I lost nearly everything. I fled to my sanctum and, grievously weakened, surrendered to safe torpor.

Only days ago—or so I believed—I still slept. I did not know the forest had vanished, replaced by a suburb. Explorers found the catacombs of my ruined estate... and a single drop of sweet nectar was enough to rouse me.

Those researchers now serve as convenient daylight ghouls, restoring my residence stone by stone. Meanwhile, I chose to slake my thirst - and encountered this curious, ever-bubbling woman. An... easy snack.

OHUUH, I'M, LIKE, ALMOST HOME 'N STUFF!

MMM4, HOT BATH... A LIL' QUALITY TIME WITH MR. BIIIIIG...

TEEHEE - SOUNDS, LIKE, SOOO PERFECT - WAIT, WHAT WAS I - OH! RUBBLES. FOCUS, MOLLY, FOCUS...

Now, if you'll excuse me?

And so the hunter of the night, Lord Alaric takes his first meal in centuries...

Ah - such nectar... though it carries a curious aftertaste.

OH - OOPSIE!

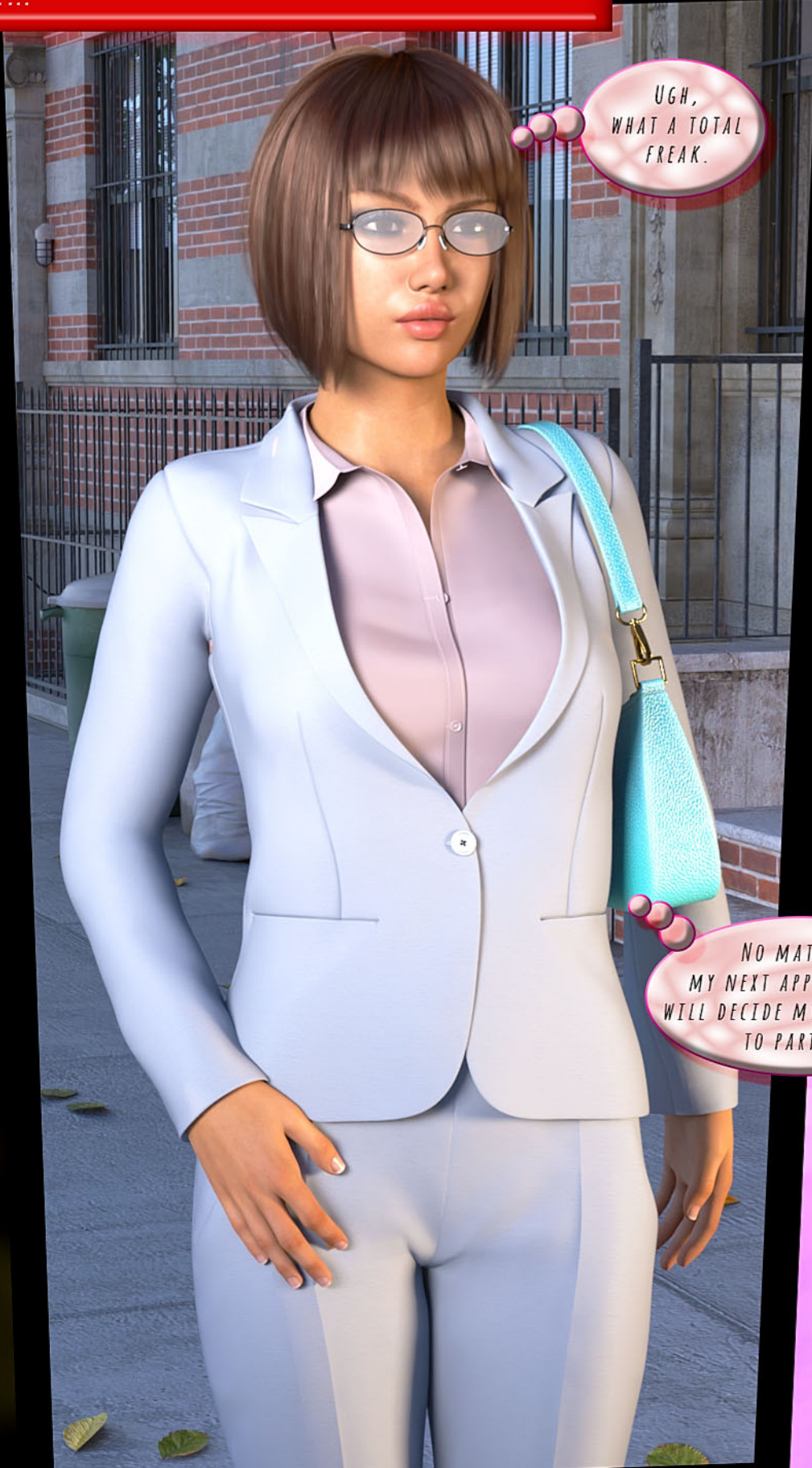
Never in my unlife have I beheld a woman thus: curves so ripe, and yet a waist so narrow.

At her years - and with such childbearing hips - by rights she ought to be beneath the couvre-chef...

WAAAAAAAAA!

...yet the blood of this fair maid, Molly, is not without its... complications.

Behold: this was Monica Black, just two days earlier. On that day, however, she insulted the wrong woman over a bus seat...



UGH,
WHAT A TOTAL
FREAK.

NO MATTER—
MY NEXT APPOINTMENT
WILL DECIDE MY PROMOTION
TO PARTNER.

...and thus Monica Black became simply Molly - a distorted reflection of her former self.



stretch

YOU
GOTTA BE
KIDDING ME...
RIGHT?

plump

...and that woman laid a curse upon her.



OH MY...
MY HEAD FEELS, LIKE,
SOOO WEIRD RIGHT
NOW...

...a curse that has now worked freely for forty-eight hours...



OHHH,
LIKE-SOOO
SHINY...

GIGGLE
GIGGLE

grow

Know this:
blood is life. Yet
it also carries...
information.



Mon Dieu...
and the moment her
blood touched my tongue,
I sensed the curse - yet
by then its workings
were already coursing
through me...

The effect came swiftly. Even as I drank her blood, the curse upon her began to weaken... and the process reversed itself.



What I did not yet realize... was that the curse had passed on to me.

These are strange times... so many impressions flooding into my mind at once.

But I must leave - the dawn rise.

...and tomorrow night, I shall begin planning my vengeance on those who once betrayed me... or their descendants.

But on that night, I remained unaware of it. That would change soon enough...

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?

I FELT LIKE... LIKE I WAS TRAPPED INSIDE MY OWN DREAM...

...FORCED TO WATCH MY MIND AND BODY TWIST OUT OF CONTROL!

CURSES EXIST? WHAT THE -

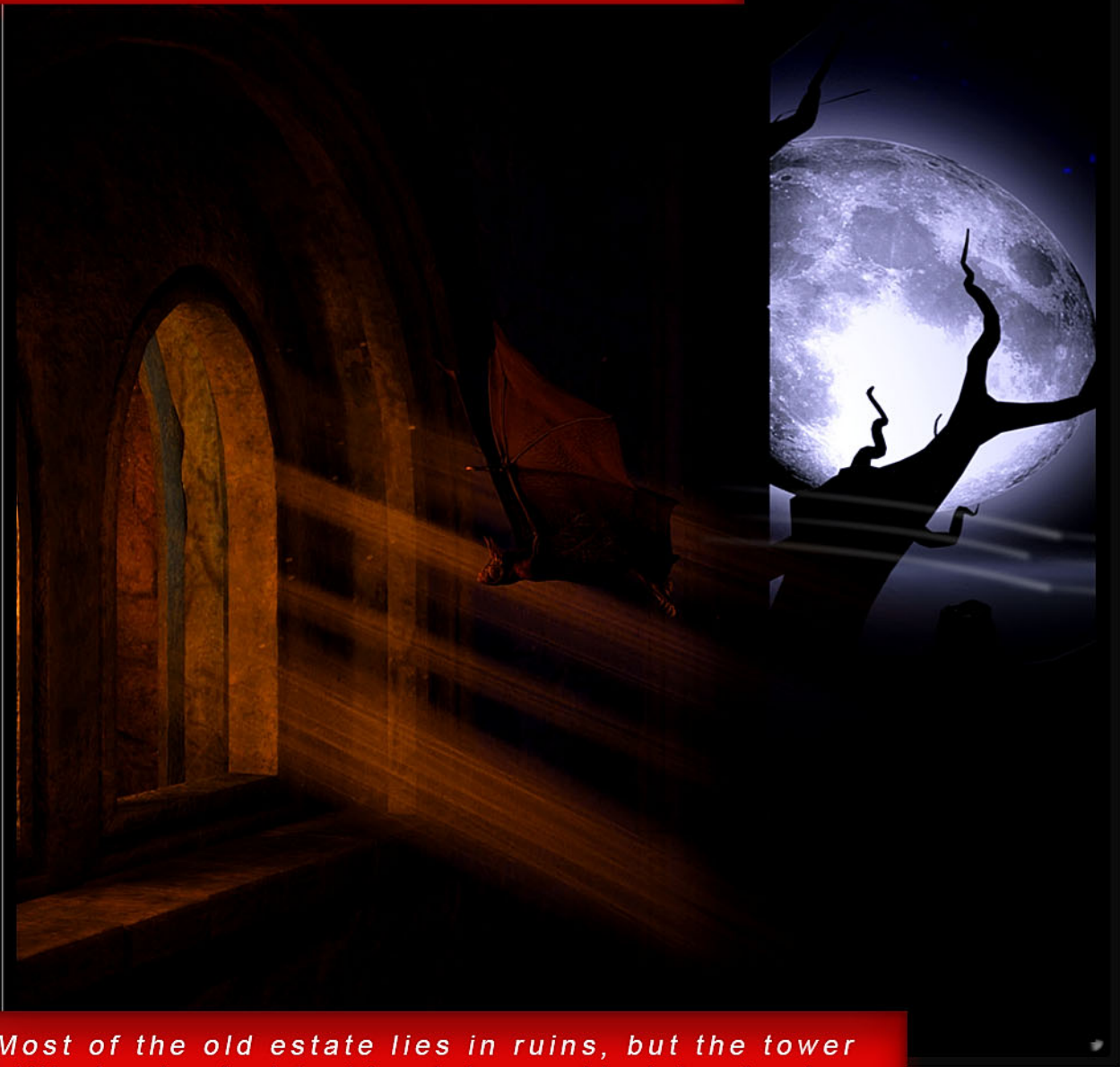
I NEED HELP. FAST.

BUT WHO THE HELL DO I EVEN TURN TO?

AND I NEED REAL CLOTHES... THESE ARE WAY TOO CLICHÉ- AND CHEAP!

I'M NOT SOME KIND OF... FLOOZY!

Every vampire keeps a sanctum - a sacred resting place known simply as a haven.



Most of the old estate lies in ruins, but the tower still stands. And inside, Johann, Alaric's ghoul, awaits his lord with a carefully prepared surprise.



Master, welcome back. Behold what we have prepared for your magnificence...

Thank you, Johann... a fine coffin on a fitting pedestal.

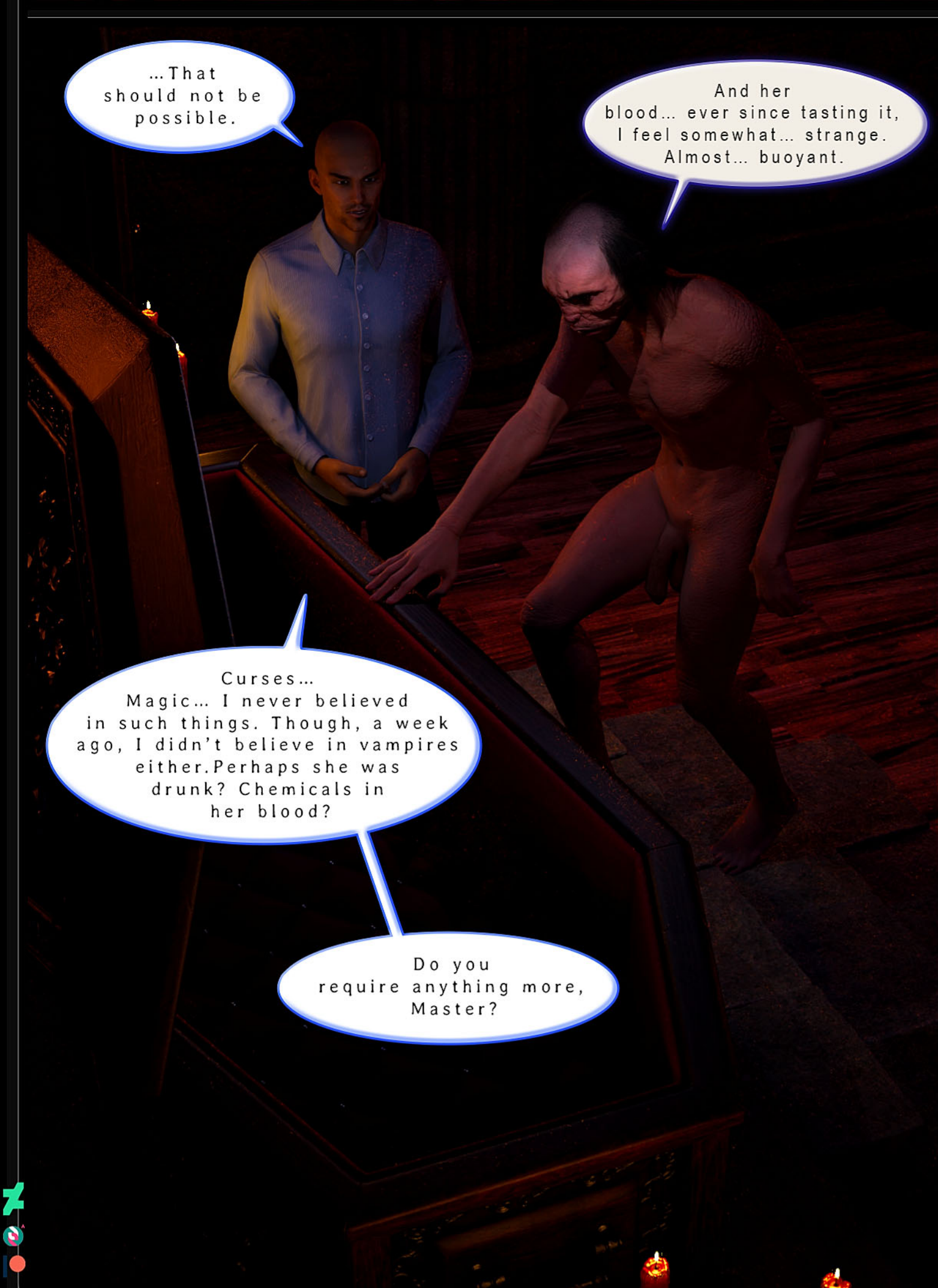
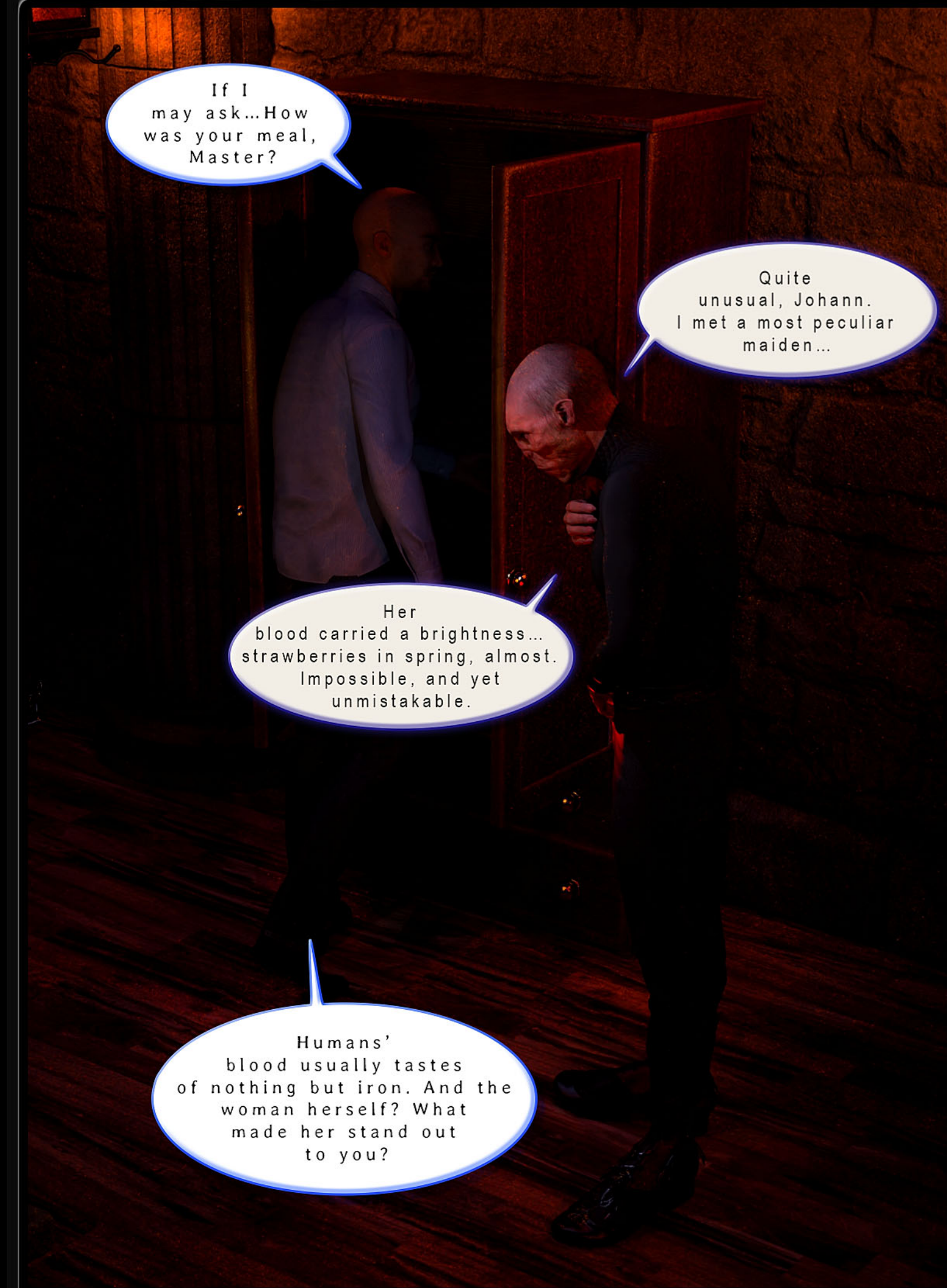
Now then, Johann - assist me in undressing.

Quickly now; dawn draws near.

Of course, Master. While the house is being restored, you may rest here in perfect safety, shielded from any intrusion.

Johann had been the lead researcher supervising a team of four archaeologists when they uncovered the decayed manor - and the vampire lying in torpor within its crypt. It was his carelessness that allowed a few drops of blood to fall upon Alaric's lips...

That was one week ago. After feeding well on the blood of the researchers, he chose to bind them as his ghouls - humans tied to the ancient vampire by his blood. For even a Nosferatu can make good use of loyal servants to watch over the day.



With the first rooster's cry - heard only faintly now in a suburb like Harrow's Cove—Lord Alaric rests safely within his coffin.

Meanwhile, Johann prepares everything for the upcoming restoration work. The ancient vampire's tale has already faded into the background... just another piece of strange small talk.

What a ridiculous story... must be some eccentric habit of ancient beings.

Still, there's more important work to do. The contractors arrive at eight, and the team needs instructions.

And we have to hide the Master's vitae bottles from any curious eyes... can't risk questions.

Hetty has a talent for decor. I'll send her to handle the interior design shopping.

We're making good progress. Another week or two, and the house should be fully restored... and we can sleep in proper beds again.

Just as Johann leaves the crypt, he's addressed by Hetty in the vaulted hallway...

Johann, the contractors just arrived. Can you show them where today's work is supposed to start?

Ah, perfect timing, Hetty. Thanks.

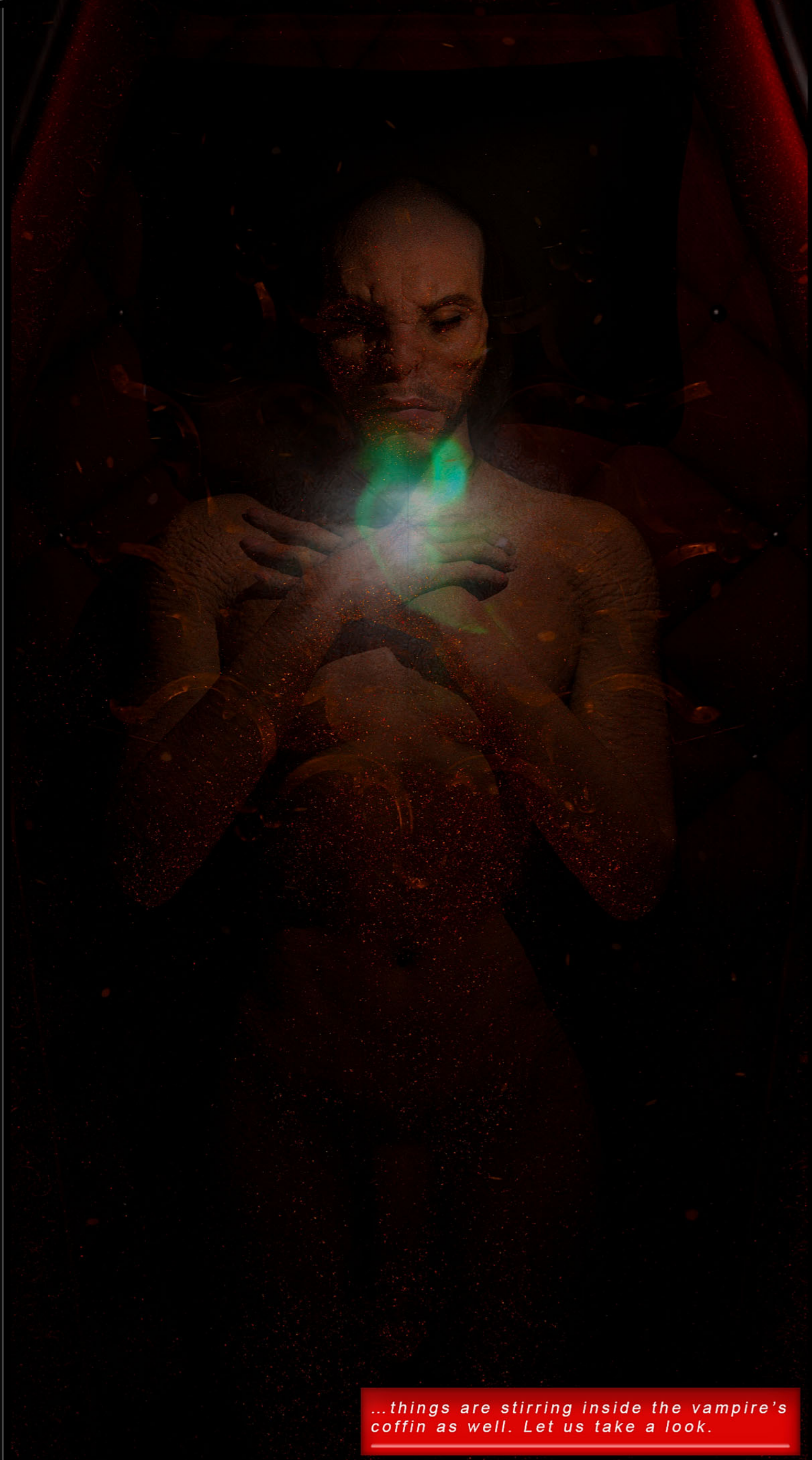
Oh - by the way. The Master and I discussed your suggestion.

And honestly, this place needs a touch more atmosphere.

He agrees. You're in charge of the décor.

I'll take care of the interior furnishings.

...and while the day moves on and everyone tends to their mundane tasks...



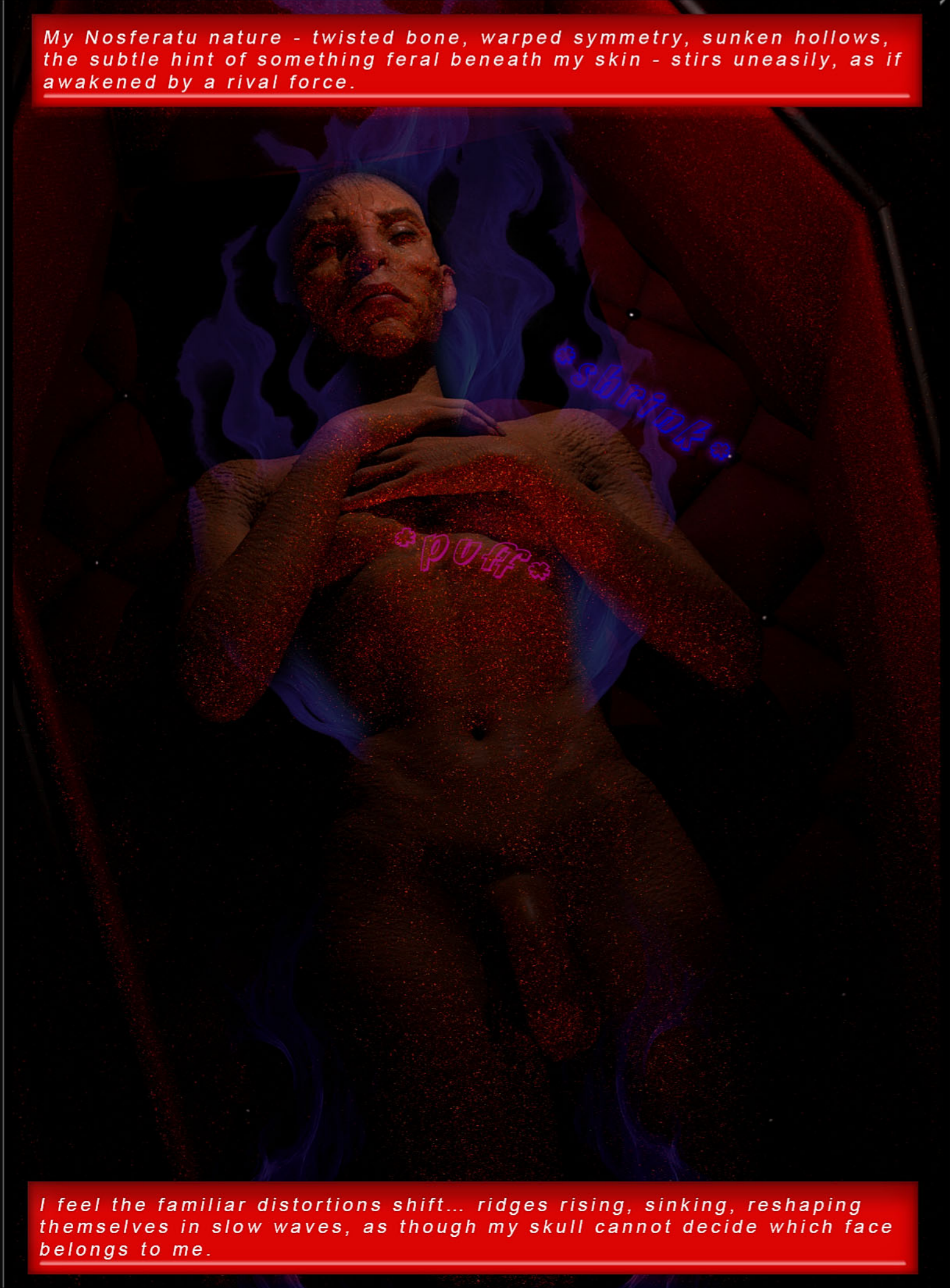
...things are stirring inside the vampire's coffin as well. Let us take a look.

The first traces of change surfaced the moment I fed on Molly's blood...



...but now, in the depth of my daylight slumber, the curse that slipped into me begins to press harder against my flesh.

My Nosferatu nature - twisted bone, warped symmetry, sunken hollows, the subtle hint of something feral beneath my skin - stirs uneasily, as if awakened by a rival force.



I feel the familiar distortions shift... ridges rising, sinking, reshaping themselves in slow waves, as though my skull cannot decide which face belongs to me.

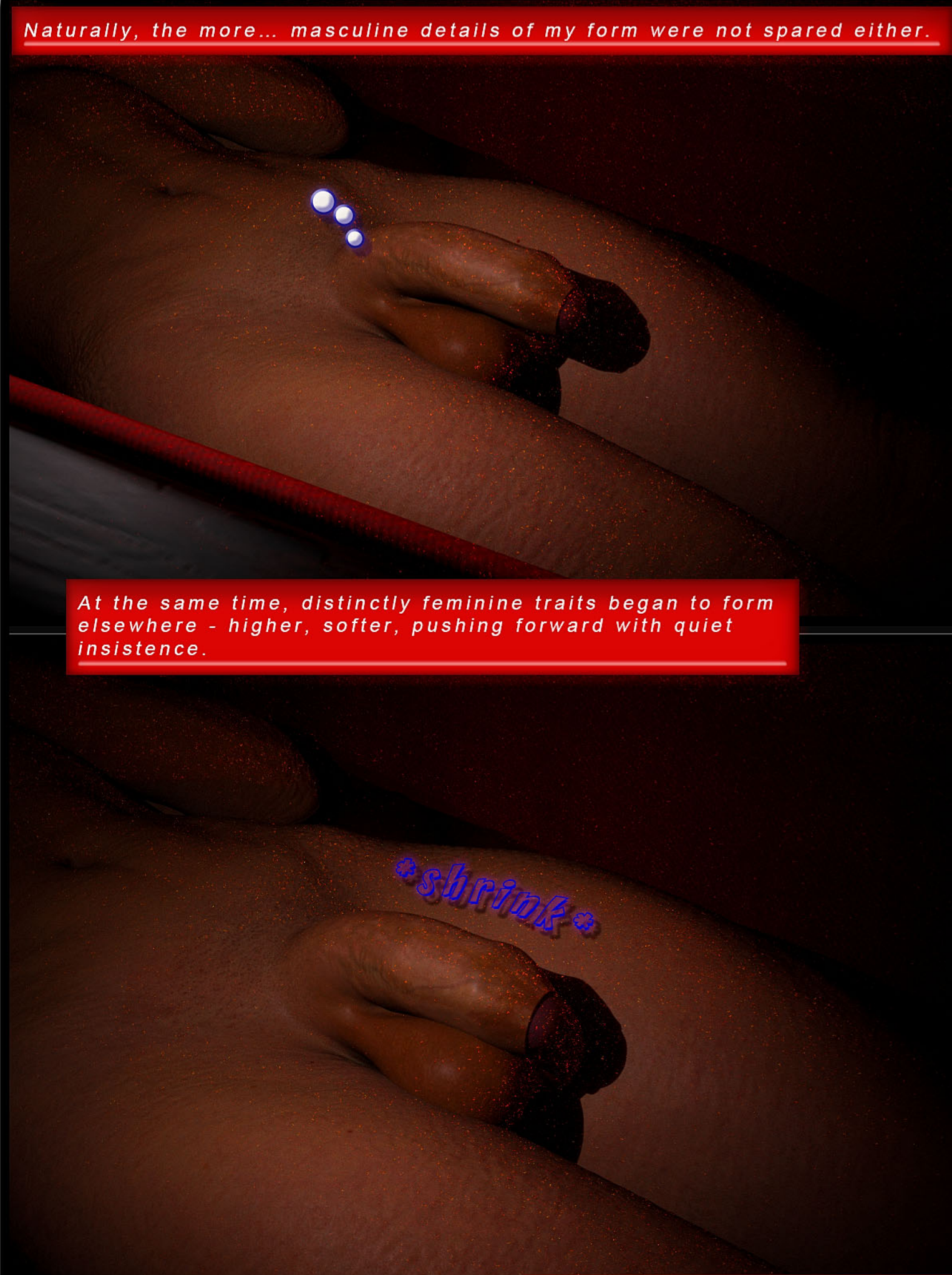
Yet instead of growing more grotesque, the curse tempers the beast.

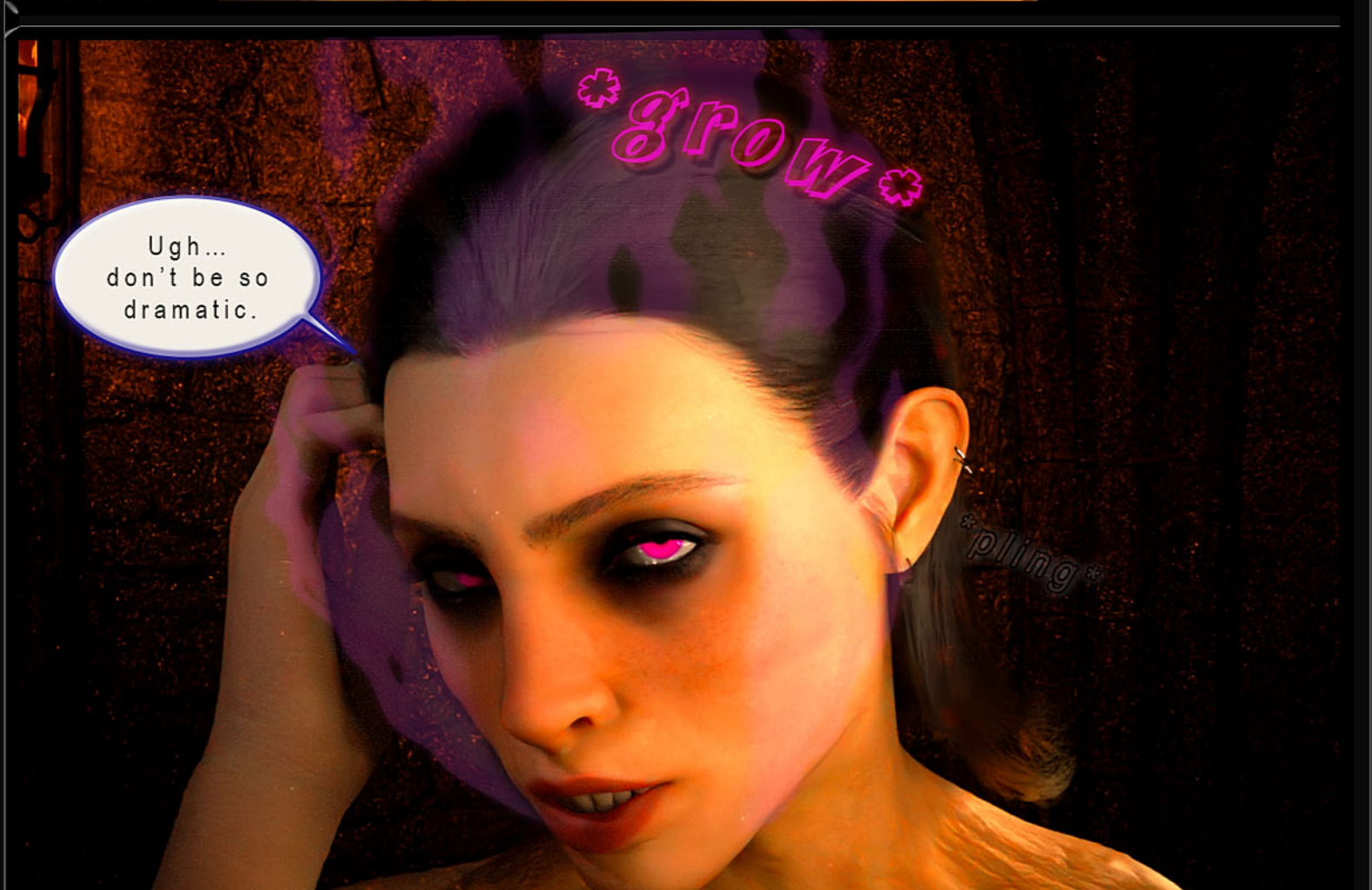
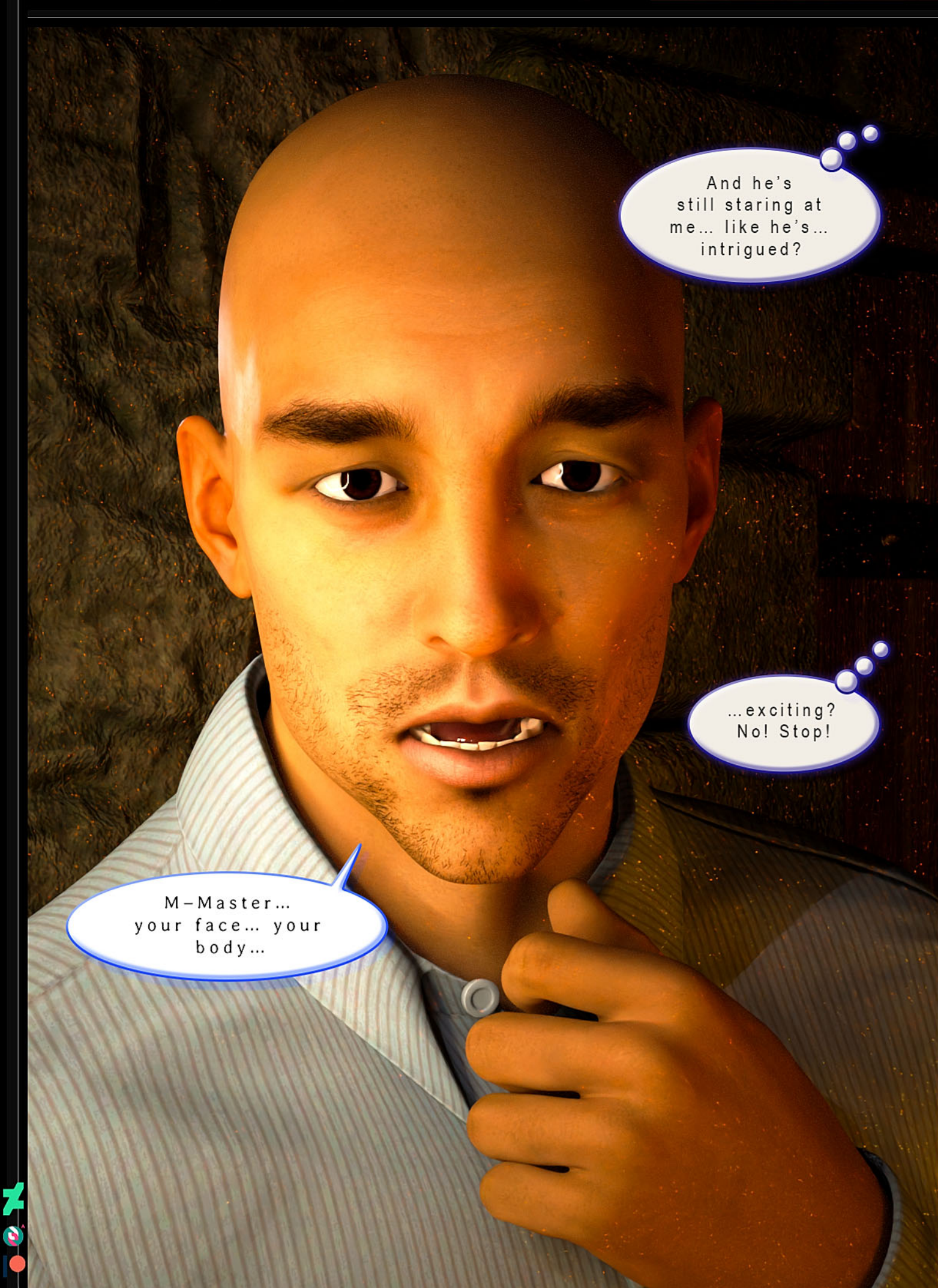


Angles soften. Asymmetry evens. The monstrous bends toward something unnervingly androgynous—neither wholly masculine nor entirely feminine, but a strange, unnatural harmony between both.

My face becomes the battleground on which clan and curse wrestle for dominance... and even in sleep, I sense that neither intends to yield.







How does one explain a transformation to a creature who casts no reflection?

Johann, ever the pragmatist... chooses the most direct method imaginable. And that is how -

Master!
This is... a budding
breast. Your
breast.

It seems
to have developed
during the day, while
you slept.

Your face
has changed as well.
The old distortions are
almost gone...

You look
nearly human
again - though...
androgynous.

I cannot
imagine that,
as a knight, you
ever looked more
like a maid than
a man.

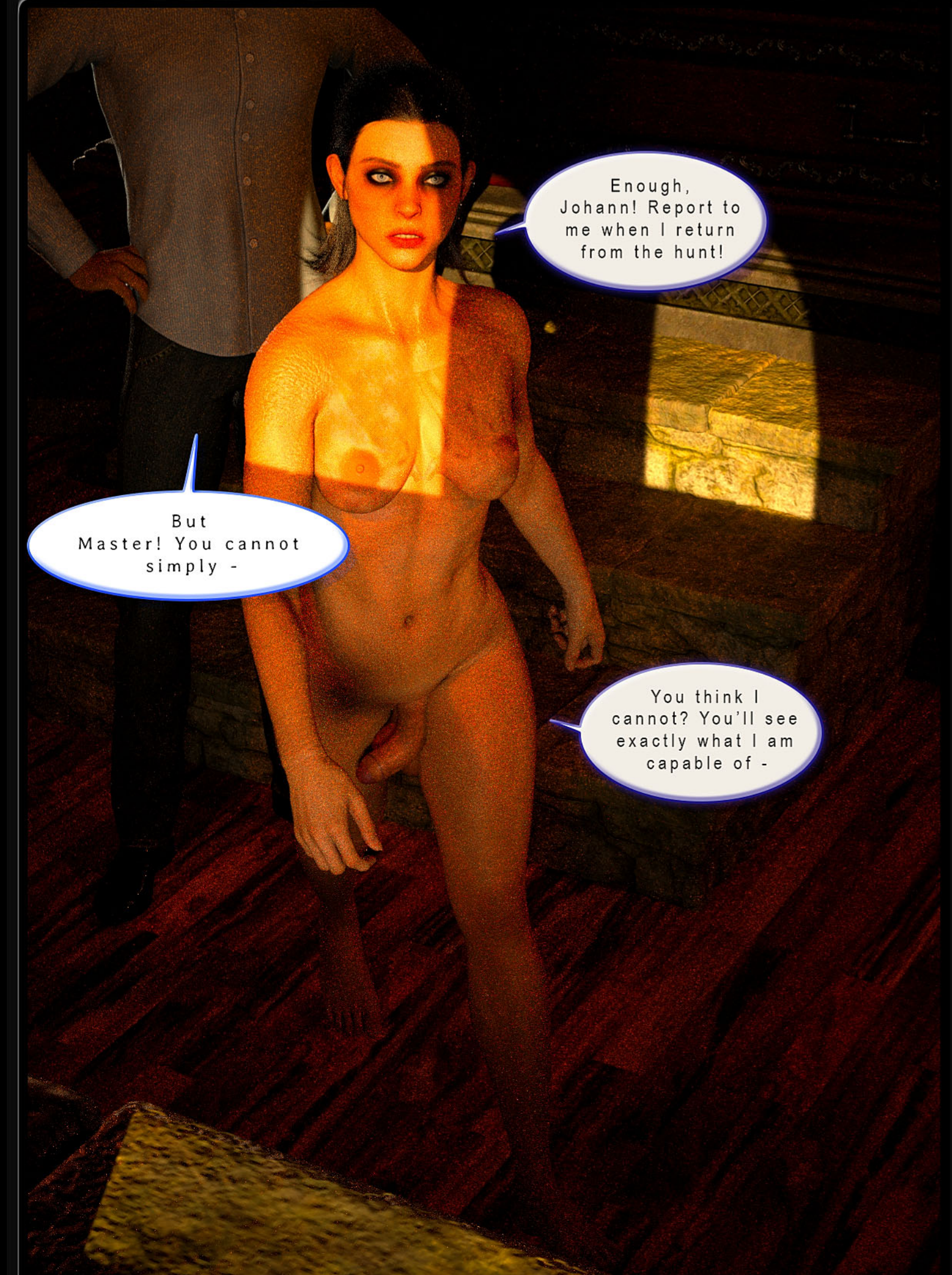
Have
you entirely lost
your mind?!

What
the -?!

EEK!

JOHANN!





Enough,
Johann! Report to
me when I return
from the hunt!

But
Master! You cannot
simply -

You think I
cannot? You'll see
exactly what I am
capable of -



- go
hunting without
clothes!

Duh!

A few hours later - just past one in the morning - I found myself perched upon a rooftop gable, surveying the neighborhood for a suitable meal... and wrestling with my own increasingly intrusive thoughts.

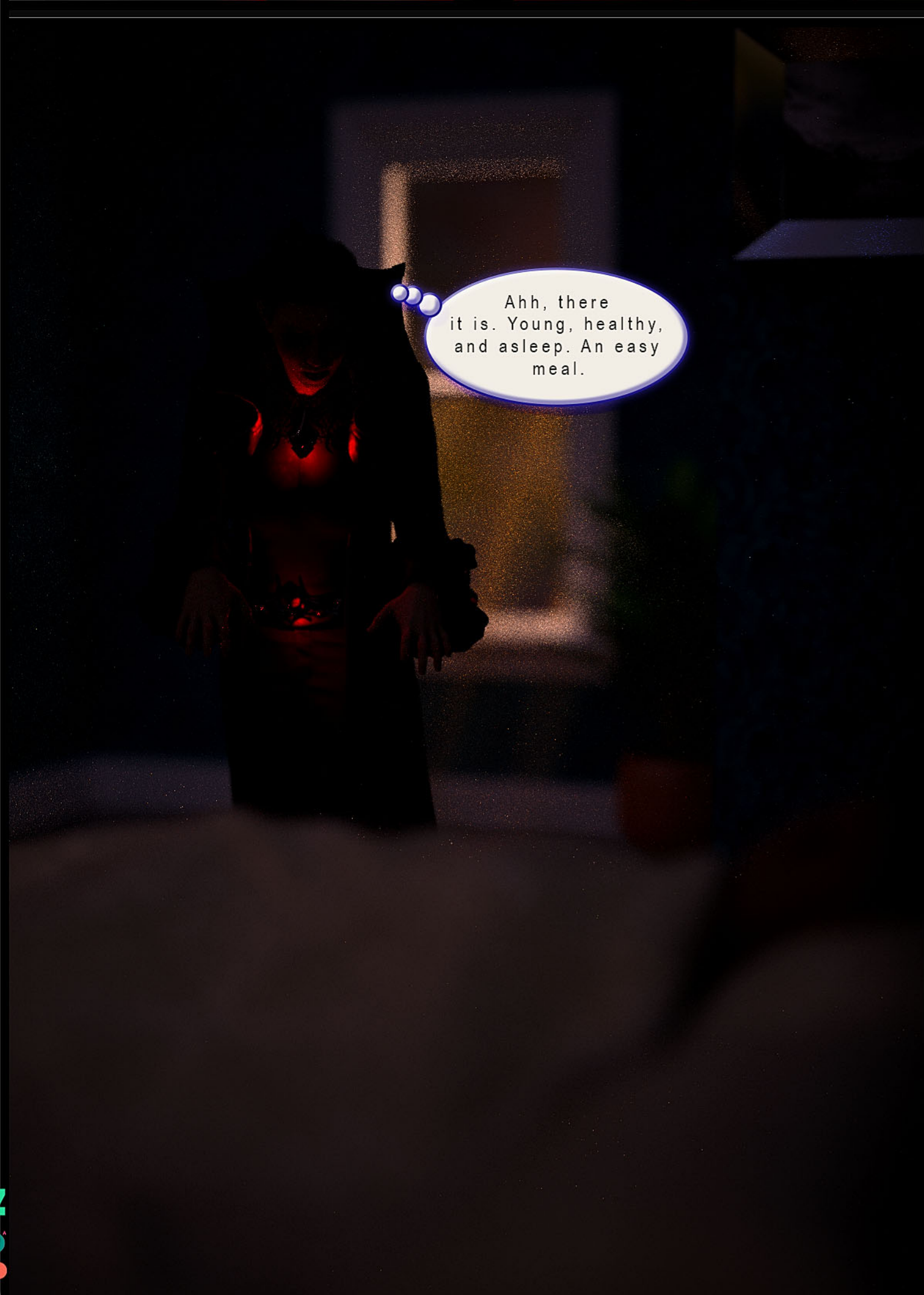


That
was... embarrassing.
But Johann was
right.

I need
a solution. That strange
curse clinging to the
woman last night...

...has now
settled onto me. I can
feel it - within me,
around me.

And my
clothes... I've never
felt them this...
heavy.



But was it truly the throat that drew me in?

...you
sweet little... even if
you're sooo tiny...

... h m m m ...
COCK!...

Normally, I would have recoiled... yet somehow
that little Cock pulled me toward it almost irresistibly...

As a Nosferatu, I am accustomed to acting from the shadows...

Such...
splendor...

Such a...
hmmmm...

...and with my appearance, that is hardly surprising.

I do not know what it is... but this cock drew me in almost magically...

Teehee...
almost there... this...
pulsing...

lick

...and it was very difficult for me to break free from it, however...

... In the moment the cock start to spit out his spunk, I managed to think normally again...

Merde!

Damn it all!

What has... gotten into me? What have I done?!

That taste is still on my tongue!

I have to... get out of here! Now!

grope

Does that surprise anyone? That salty taste - instead of the sweet blood from his neck, I was sucking on... unimaginable! And me, of all beings!

Because of the curse I shouted, of course the young man woke up...

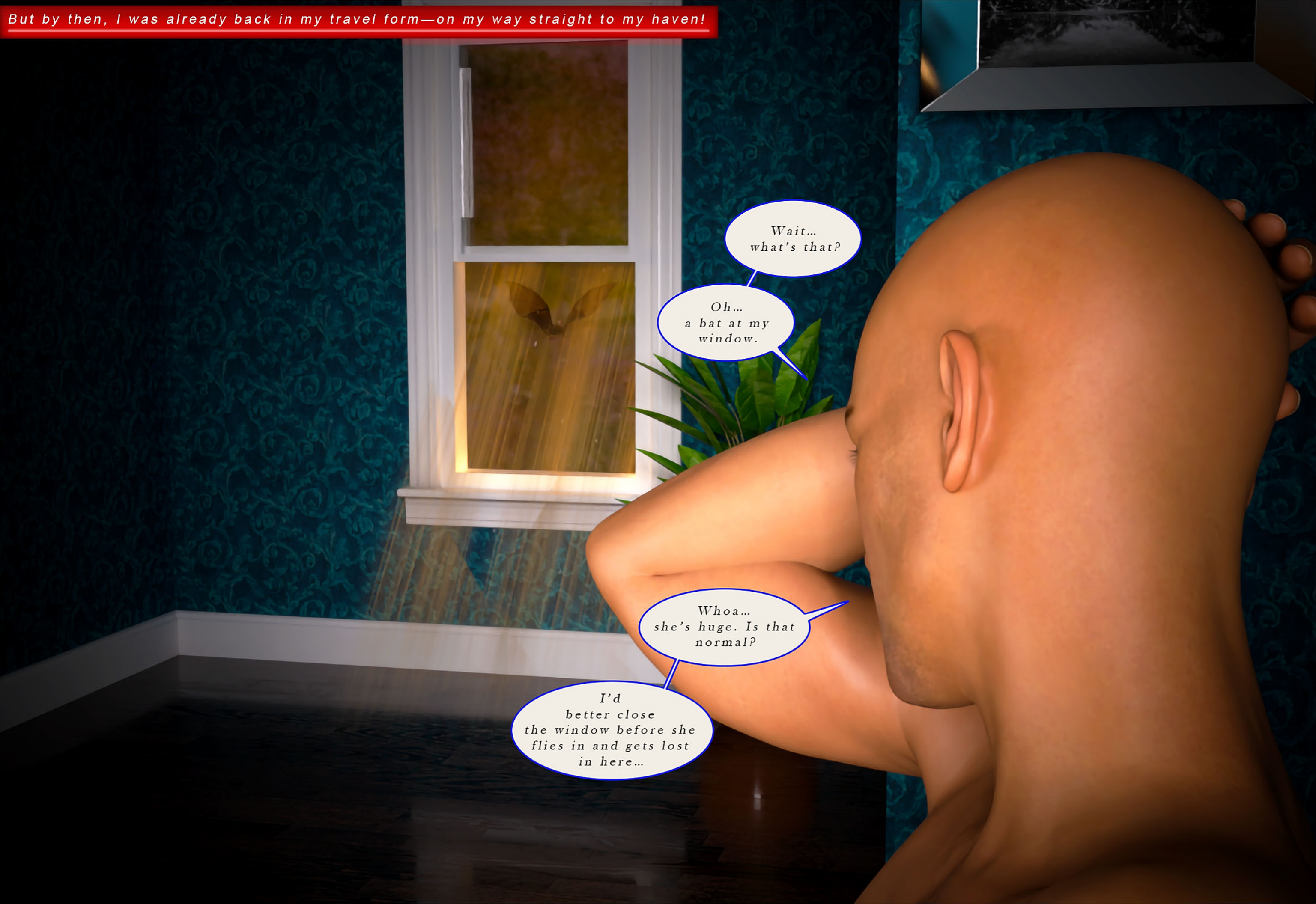


Wha—?
Who's there?

Huh?
Yawn There's... no one
here. Must've been my
imagination.

Figures... right in the
middle of the best dream
I've had in ages, and I
wake up.

But by then, I was already back in my travel form—on my way straight to my haven!



Wait...
what's that?

Oh...
a bat at my
window.

Whoa...
she's huge. Is that
normal?

I'd
better close
the window before she
flies in and gets lost
in here...

Arriving back home, Lord Alaric undresses to rest in his coffin...



I must find the source of this curse...

...though I doubt that woman still knows who cursed her.



Ma—st...

...the clearly effective curse occupies him so much that he does not notice his ghoul Johann...

...who, in turn, can hardly keep his eyes off his master's distinctly feminine shape.

ugh. seriously?

Whatever, then not. Just keep hiding in the closet, you stupid...

Oh my goodness! Look at those curves...

...his shriveled skin looks soft as velvet...

...and that figure... could he...?



Johann!
How... naughty of
you!

Don't you know
it can end fatally when you
sneak sooo silently behind a
wicked, old vampire
like that?

I could,
like, totally suck
you out, Ghul...

Do you
like what u
see, ghoul? I
hope not!

Master!
Please... forgive
me...

His manhood
is clearly... smaller! Was
the Master right about
the curse?

It... it
wasn't my intention to
stare. I saw you return
home and wanted to
assist you...

Ugh!
STOP IT!







Hetty,
do you have a
moment, or am I
disturbing
you?

*Jehann,
the book is quite exciting
right now... but what can
I do for you?*

I think
we have a problem
with...

...I don't
know how to clearly
describe it...

I believe
the Master is feeling
the consequences of
a curse.

*A curse?
You don't say - what makes you
think that?*

And one
of your areas of study
in archaeology was Ritual
Archaeology and Folk Belief
Systems - or am I
mistaken?

*Yes, you're right.
That was the reason
you wanted me on this
expedition, wasn't it?*



The Master told me yesterday that he drank the blood of a woman. He feared she had been cursed, because her blood tasted very strange.

So that's what you meant yesterday — that he's been acting strange, right?

Yes, exactly. Since yesterday he has clearly changed — physically, and in his behavior...

He's changed?

He's noticeably more feminine, his deformations have almost completely disappeared, and... he reacts like the young girls we know from college.

This all sounds rather unlikely, Johann. Have you maybe been sneaking a sip yourself?

No, Hetty, I'm completely sober. We can go to his Lordship's coffin — he rests now, and a mysterious effect has appeared on it since then.

Perhaps a circle, framed by flames? Half translucent, but somehow... materially present?

Pink, framed by blue flames.

Yes, exactly, Hetty.

In which colors?

Hmmm. I understand...

*The effect
you're describing shows up
quite often in old manuscripts from
the wandering peoples of
Eastern Europe.*

*They're often
labeled Gypsies, though
that term isn't accurate — but they
were well-known for their
legends about curses
and magic.*

*There's even
a small shop in town run
by an elderly woman from
that lineage.*

*I'll visit
her later this morning and
ask what she knows — I'll keep
Lord Alaric out of it and focus
strictly on the woman
you mentioned.*

*With
some luck, she might
offer a clue we can
actually use.*

*It would
be a shame if anything happened
to his Lordship. I've only just gotten
used to being a ghoul... especially looking
like I'm in my early twenties again instead
of sixty-six. That's a perk you
don't give up easily,
right Jehann?*

*Weren't you
supposed to retire
next month?*

Yes, please don't remind
me — though you're right, the
advantages certainly outweigh
everything else.

But whether I'd ever
want to become a vampire
of the Nosferatu clan myself...
I'm not so sure.

Good
luck, Hetty. And
thank you.

As an expert, Hetty does not hesitate for long, and less than two hours after her conversation with Johann, she enters a small shop in one of the side alleys of Harrow's Cove.





GRUMBLE

MURMUR

VELORA GLINTÉ, FORMA
DULCÉ-MENTIS LAXÉ, CARNIS
BELÉ. QUOD ILLA EST, TU ERIS
NUNC, SPLENDOR PRIMUS-
STATIM, HUNC!

ZZZZAP!

What?
Excuse me? No,
that's not what
I meant—

THERE NOW,
DEAR. NO NEED TO
THANK ME.

SO YOU WON'T
HAVE TO WAIT AS LONG AS YOUR
FRIEND, I ADDED AN INSTANT
PART AS WELL.

YOU YOUNG
PEOPLE TODAY NEVER HAVE
ANY TIME ANYMORE, DO
YOU?