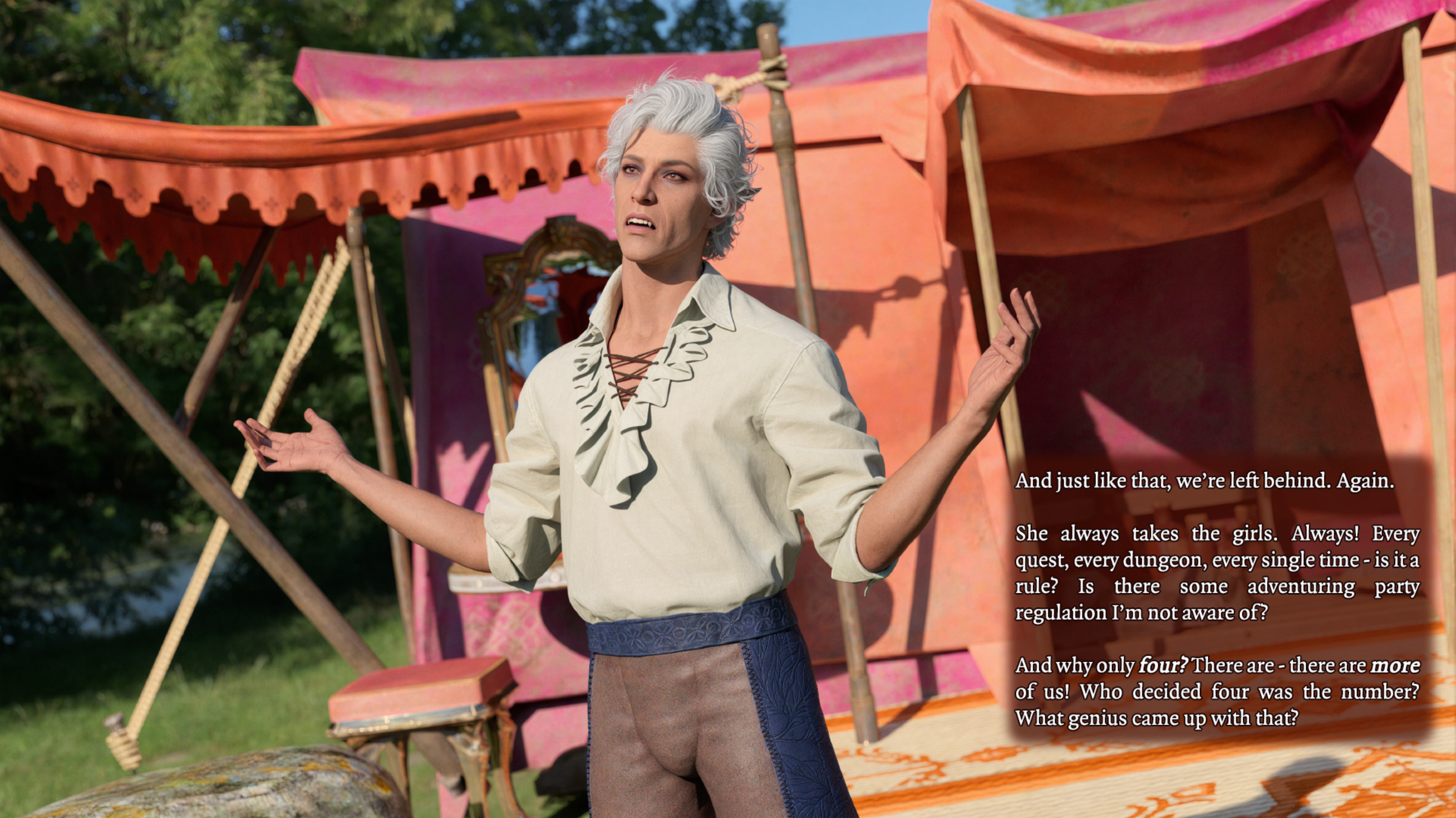
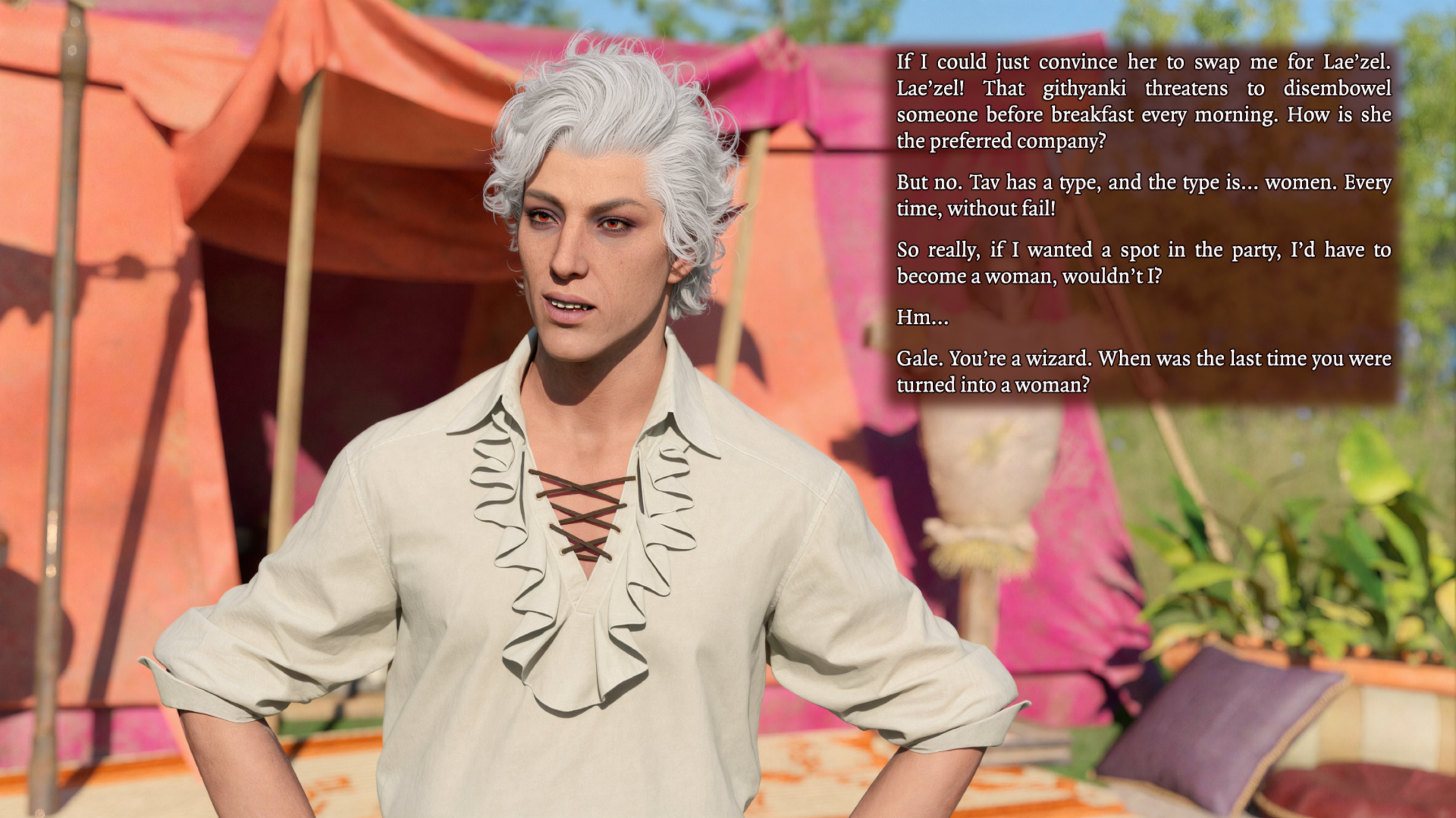

Baldur's Gate III
A Different Key
Press Start


So you're taking Shadowheart and Lae'zel and Karlach - all the girls - and I'm simply... what? Left to mind the camp?
I guess I'll spend my evenings here, lounging while you do all the hard work... It sounds *awful*.


Yes, yes - off you go. Save the grove, rescue the tieflings, be terribly heroic. Do give the goblins my regards.
Try not to have too much fun without me.


And just like that, we're left behind. Again.
She always takes the girls. Always! Every quest, every dungeon, every single time - is it a rule? Is there some adventuring party regulation I'm not aware of?
And why only ***four?*** There are - there are ***more*** of us! Who decided four was the number? What genius came up with that?

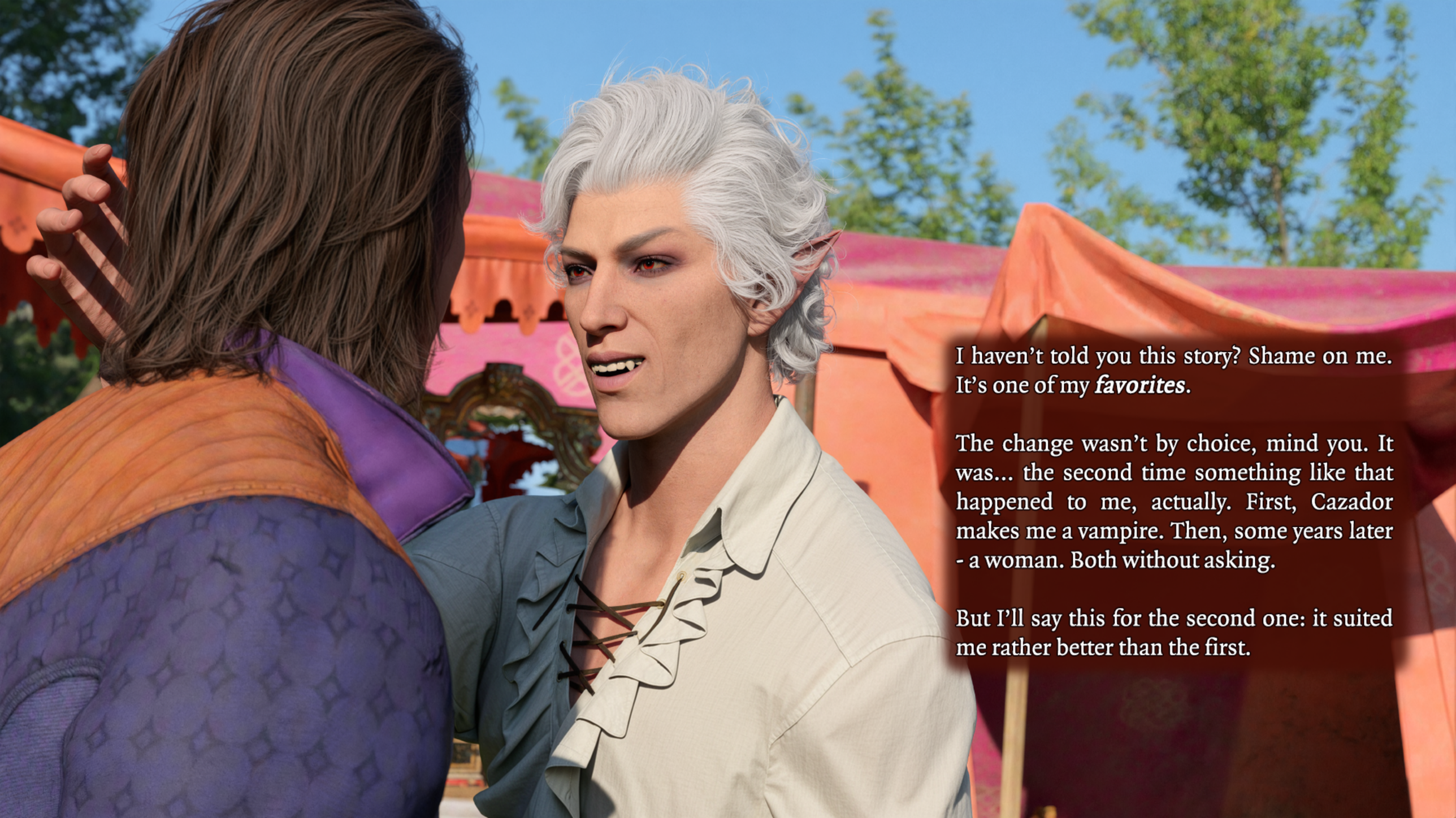

Since when do you want to go adventuring? Voluntarily throwing yourself into danger doesn't exactly seem like your... brand.
It's not about the ***danger***, Gale. It's about being left out. I was locked in a coffin for a full year and buried alive - I don't need more practice on that front.
Besides, adventuring is the only time I'm ***allowed*** to bite people. Do you know what it's like sitting around camp all evening with you lot? All those necks, just... right there? It's like being on a diet at a banquet.


If I could just convince her to swap me for Lae'zel. Lae'zel! That githyanki threatens to disembowel someone before breakfast every morning. How is she the preferred company?
But no. Tav has a type, and the type is... women. Every time, without fail!
So really, if I wanted a spot in the party, I'd have to become a woman, wouldn't I?
Hm...
Gale. You're a wizard. When was the last time you were turned into a woman?


I - *never?* What sort of question is that?
Really? Never? Not even once? I thought that was Mystra's whole thing. She turned Elminster into a woman for a *year*, from what I've heard. You'd think the goddess would have a signature move.
That was - a very specific circumstance, and I don't think it's appropriate to compare—
Maybe she just didn't like you enough.
She liked me *plenty*, thank you—
Clearly not *Elminster* plenty.


You really should try it sometime, Gale. There's nothing quite like seeing the other side. The way people speak to you changes, the way they look at you - or don't. You learn things about the world you simply cannot learn otherwise.
It changes how you move through a room, how you hold a glass, how you dance, how you speak, how you listen. Two hundred years is a long time. I'm glad haven't had to spend all of it with only one perspective.
It made me a better rogue, a better liar. A better lover, certainly.


Hold on - you've - *you* have been—?


I haven't told you this story? Shame on me. It's one of my *favorites*.
The change wasn't by choice, mind you. It was... the second time something like that happened to me, actually. First, Cazador makes me a vampire. Then, some years later - a woman. Both without asking.
But I'll say this for the second one: it suited me rather better than the first.



Cazador's summer home. Because apparently even centuries-old vampire tyrants need a holiday.

Fewer screams from the basement here. More of a... weekend-screams arrangement. Very relaxed.

It was here, on what I was told would be a restful retreat - which, with Cazador, meant only being tortured emotionally - that my master decided he hadn't ruined my life ***quite*** thoroughly enough.


I'd just finished a ***lovely*** evening with two clerics of Lathander. Delightful pair. Very devout, very earnest - it only took a little convincing that the shadows were far more fun than the light.
They always are.

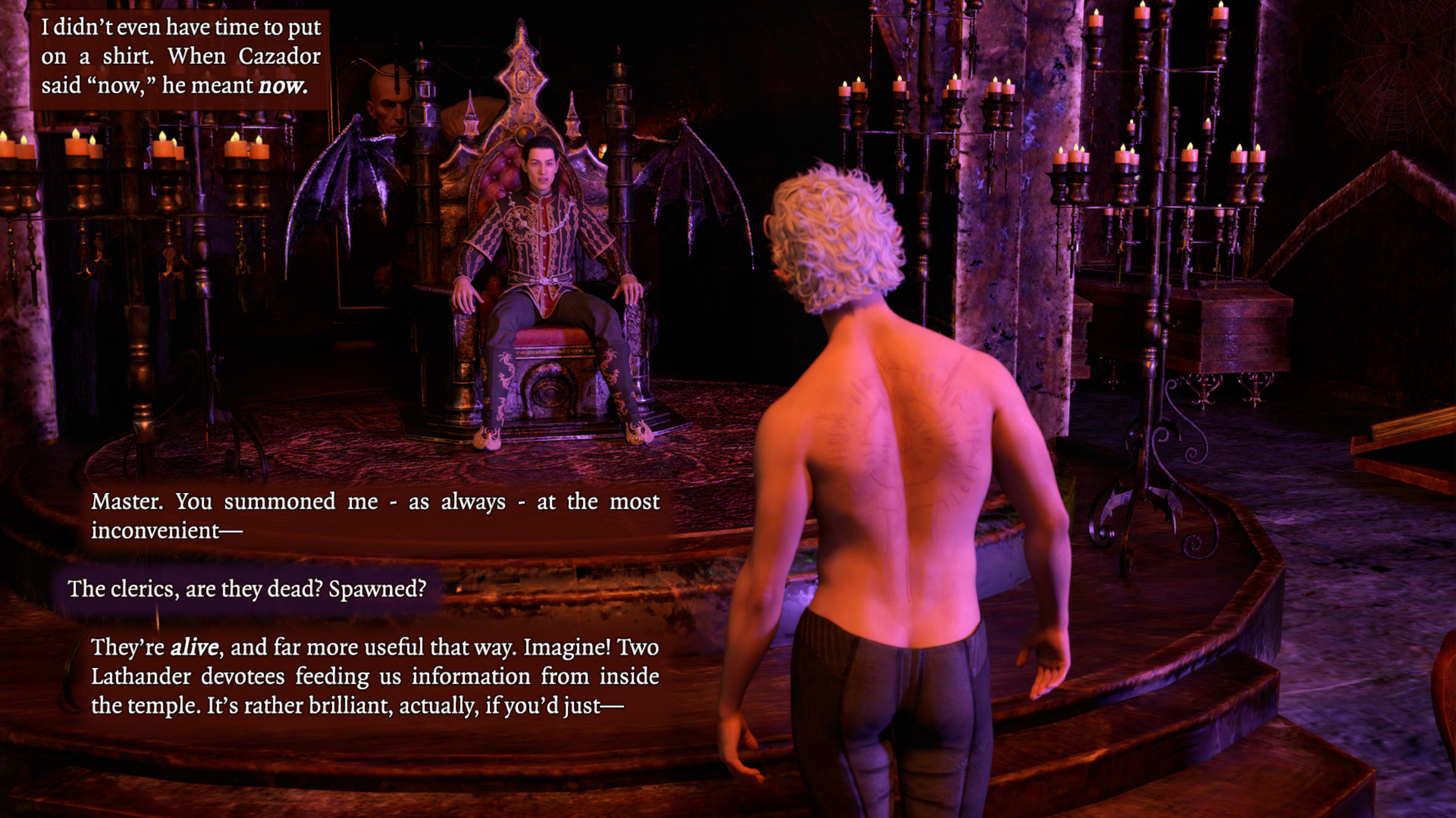


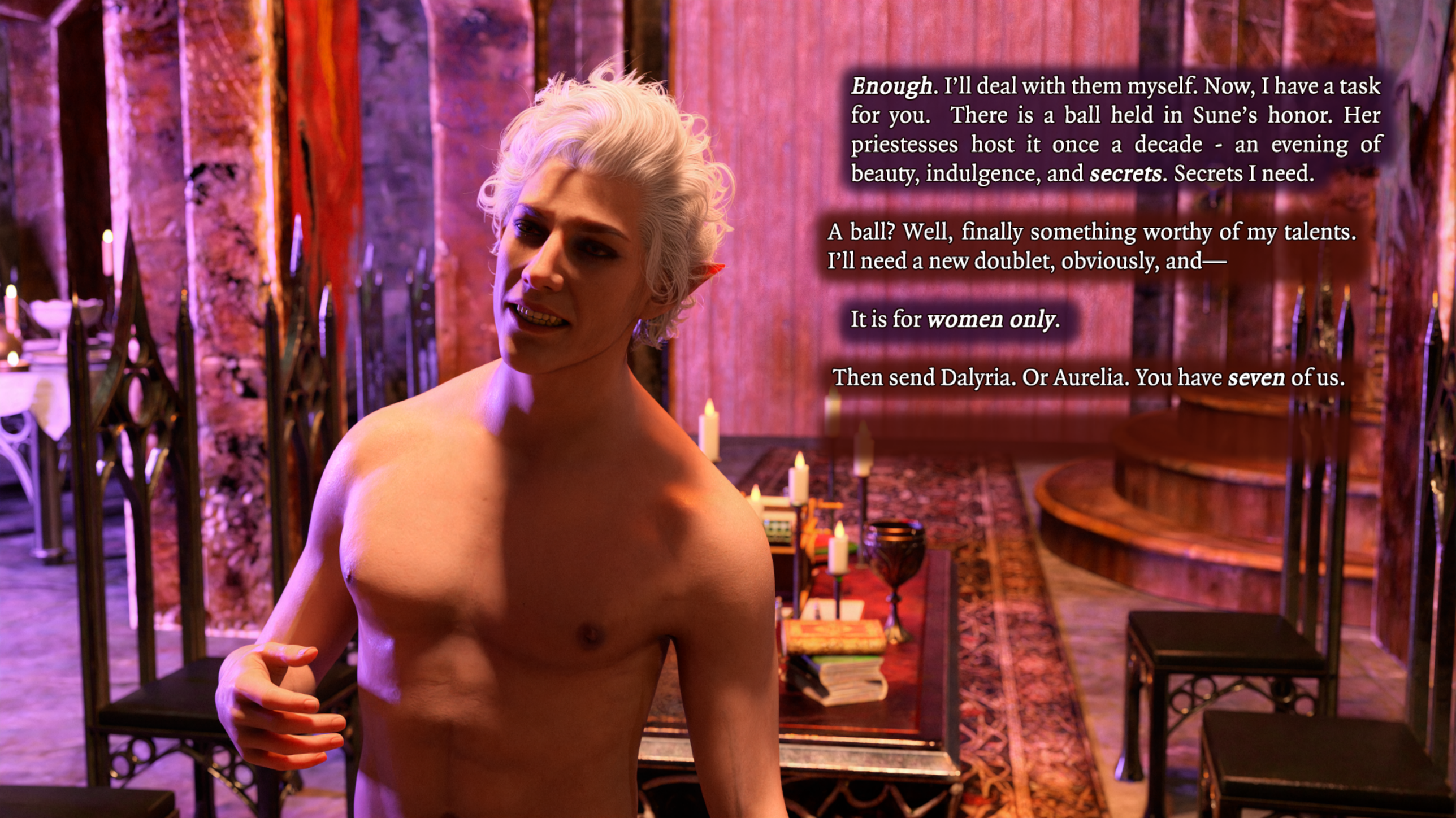
And then - that voice. In my head. Like a nail dragged across glass.

Cazador.

“Come to the throne room. Now.”

Nothing good ever followed those words. But then, nothing good ever followed any of his words.


I didn't even have time to put on a shirt. When Cazador said "now," he meant ***now.***
Master. You summoned me - as always - at the most inconvenient—
The clerics, are they dead? Spawned?
They're ***alive***, and far more useful that way. Imagine! Two Lathander devotees feeding us information from inside the temple. It's rather brilliant, actually, if you'd just—


Enough. I'll deal with them myself. Now, I have a task for you. There is a ball held in Sune's honor. Her priestesses host it once a decade - an evening of beauty, indulgence, and ***secrets***. Secrets I need.
A ball? Well, finally something worthy of my talents. I'll need a new doublet, obviously, and—
It is for ***women only***.
Then send Dalyria. Or Aurelia. You have ***seven*** of us.


I need their particular skills elsewhere. And I need ***your*** charm, which means I need you... ***altered***.

An illusion, then? I can work with an illusion.

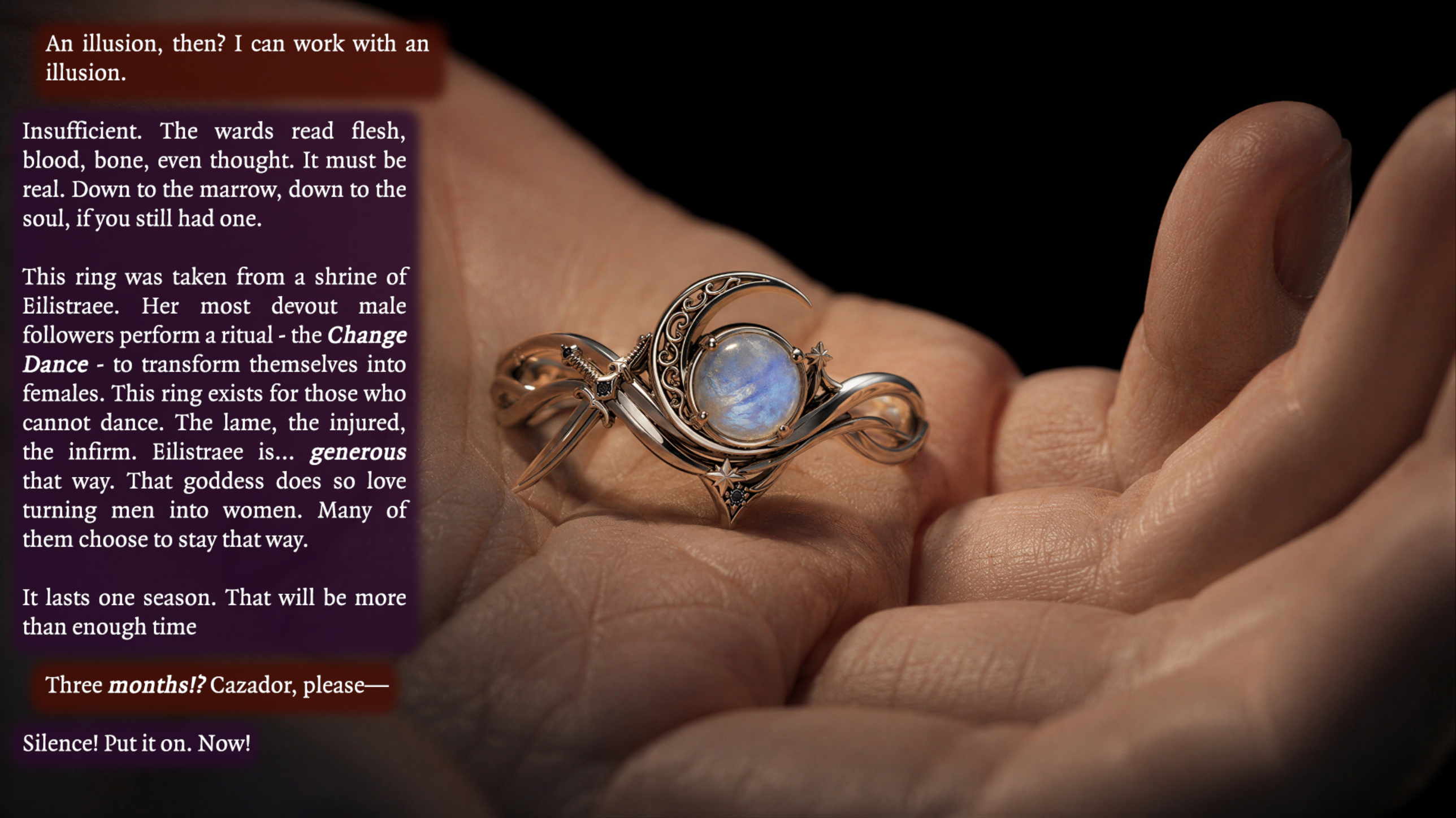
Insufficient. The wards read flesh, blood, bone, even thought. It must be real. Down to the marrow, down to the soul, if you still had one.

This ring was taken from a shrine of Eilistraee. Her most devout male followers perform a ritual - the ***Change Dance*** - to transform themselves into females. This ring exists for those who cannot dance. The lame, the injured, the infirm. Eilistraee is... ***generous*** that way. That goddess does so love turning men into women. Many of them choose to stay that way.

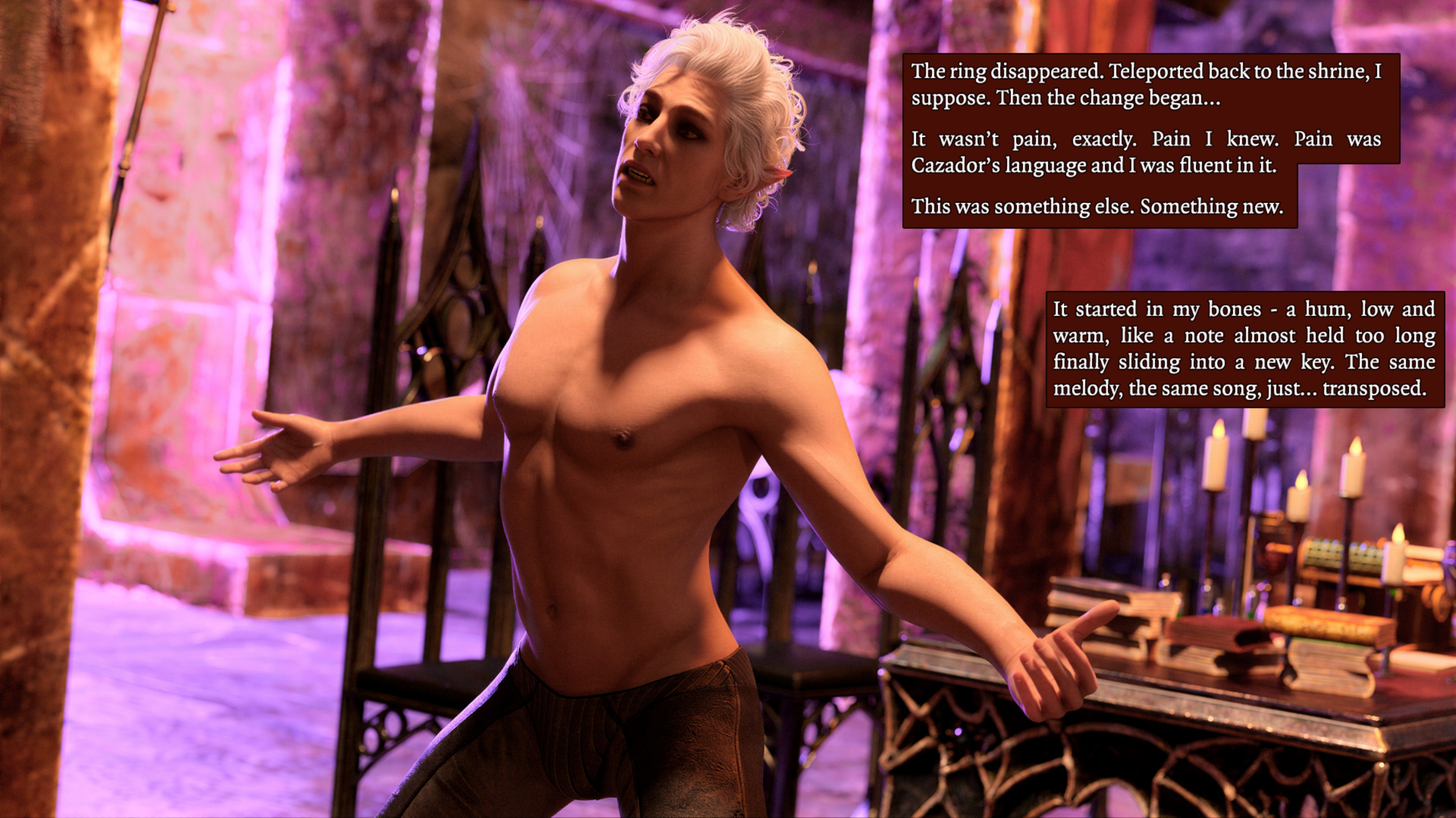
It lasts one season. That will be more than enough time

Three ***months!?*** Cazador, please—

Silence! Put it on. Now!




There was no question of refusing. There never was, with Cazador. You simply... did as you were told and hoped to survive the doing.
So I put on the ring.
And Eilistraee - well, he was right. She is ***eager***, that goddess. There was no hesitation, no preamble. The magic moved through me like it'd been waiting for the invitation. Like ***she'd*** been waiting.
It began immediately.


The ring disappeared. Teleported back to the shrine, I suppose. Then the change began...
It wasn't pain, exactly. Pain I knew. Pain was Cazador's language and I was fluent in it.
This was something else. Something new.
It started in my bones - a hum, low and warm, like a note almost held too long finally sliding into a new key. The same melody, the same song, just... transposed.


My hips ached as they widened, my shoulders drew inward, I felt my chest tighten and then ***bloom*** - there's no other word for it.



No wizard could do this. A wizard reshapes flesh like clay - crude, mechanical. No offense intended, Gale. But this was a goddess rearranging something she understood intimately. She wasn't ***changing*** me, really. It was more like... she was finding something that was already there, that had always been there, and... bringing it forward. A melody buried under all the pain, all the centuries of Cazador's noise.

And I... Gods, I really didn't think there was anything left. I thought he'd scraped me hollow.


But she found it, whatever it was. Some scrap of a soul that even a century of cruelty hadn't managed to kill. And she just... turned down the dissonance and let it sing.


My skin softened. My jaw, my hands. Every edge gentled, every line redrawn with the same pen but a lighter touch.
And underneath it all - under the strangeness and the terror and Cazador watching from his wretched throne like it was entertainment - there was a whisper. Not words, really. More like a song. A lullaby, a warmth I hadn't felt since... since before. Since before *him*.


As if Eilistraee herself were saying: ***there you are.***
I did not expect that.



And there sat Cazador. Smirking. That awful, satisfied smirk. He thought he was ***unmaking*** me, as if taking away my manhood were the cruelest thing he'd ever done.

But for the first time in decades, there was another voice in my head. Not his, not the cold, commanding snarl I'd learned to obey without thinking.

Hers.

And she was... gentle. Sweet. ***Loving***, even. Which made no sense. I was a monster. A killer! A thing that fed on the innocent and lured them to their deaths, or worse. How could any goddess look at what I was and speak to me like that?

And yet she did.

Don't give up, she said. ***Not yet, not ever. There is more to you than you've been allowed to become.***

Mere words. But I believed them. I - who believed ***nothing***, who trusted ***no one*** - believed a goddess I had never prayed to, never worshipped, never once acknowledged.

Cazador took my body from me that night, but Eilistraee gave me something back.

I just didn't understand what it was. Not yet.


Of course, the good goddess wasn't done yet with all my ***physical*** changes, either.
'Down to the marrow,' it turns out, is... ***very*** specifc. Very thorough. Eilistraee does not do things by halves.
But shall I go on? I can't tell if you're horrified or fascinated.
I - both? I think both. Mostly I'm trying to reconcile the magical theory of a divine transformation of that magnitude with - you're saying a ***ring*** did all of that? A single ring? The arcane energy required would be—
Gale. You're doing the thing where you make something extraordinary ***boring***.
Right. Sorry. Go on.