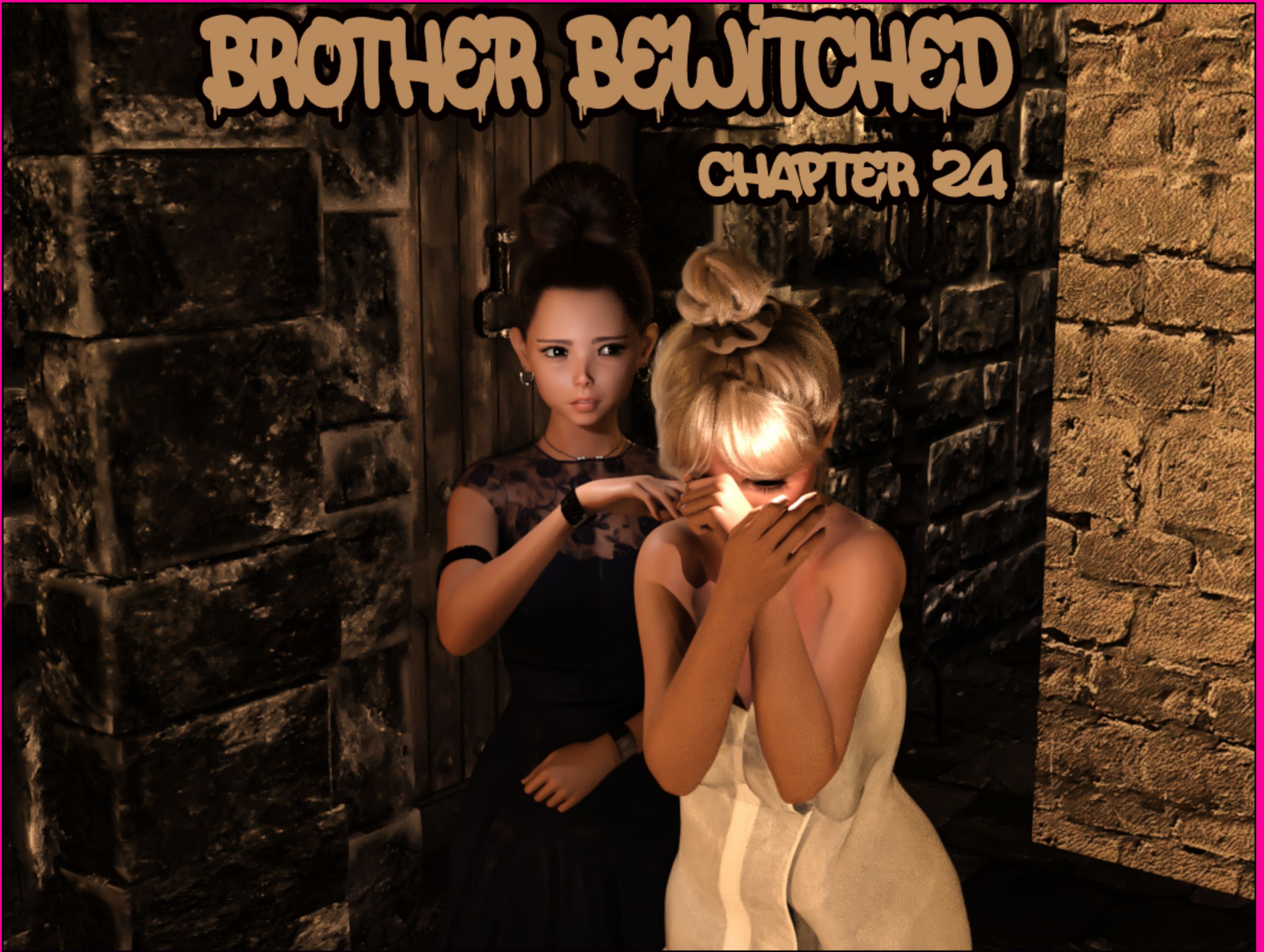


BROTHER BEWITCHED


CHAPTER 24






IT'S FREEZING
OUT HERE! GIVE ME
THE TOWEL AND
FETCH MY DRESSING
GOWN. I WILL BE
SPENDING THE DAY
IN BED,
CONVALESCING.

PARDON,
MILADY, BUT I
HAVE
INSTRUCTIONS TO
GET YOU
DRESSED TO
MEET YOUR
FIANCEE.



BUT, SURELY,
GIVEN MY---
UM---
CONDITION--
WE'LL HAVE TO
RESCHEDULE.

I HAVE MY
ORDERS, BUT YOU
CAN ASK YOUR
SISTER ABOUT IT
WHEN SHE GETS
HERE.



HOW AM I TO
MEET A MAN--
ANOTHER MAN--
MEET ANYONE WITH
ANY DIGNITY WHEN
I'M... I'M...

DANCING WITH
THE RED
QUEEN?



GIRLS DO
MANAGE. I'M
SURE YOU CAN,
TOO, UNLESS
YOU'RE TOO
DELICATE
TO--

THAT IS
QUITE
ENOUGH.
YOU'RE
DISMISSED.



I HAVE
ORDERS
FROM--

I SAID YOU
ARE
DISMISSED,
SERVANT. TALK
BACK TO ME
AGAIN, AND YOU
WILL REGRET
IT.

NEMERIA!
THANK MAXIS.



YES, MILADY.




I CAME
TO TALK
ABOUT
RUNTICK, BUT I
SAW THE
BEDDING. I
KNOW.

THE WOMAN I
WAS TO MARRY,
THE WOMAN I
LOVE. SHE
KNOWS. I HAVE
NEVER FELT SUCH
SHAME.




OH, SERREN.
IT'S NOT SO BAD,
IS IT TO--

<SOB>. IT'S
TERRIBLE. I'M--
DIRTY. UNCLEAN. I
CAN NEVER THINK
OF MYSELF AS A
MAN AGAIN.



THERE, THERE.
YOU CAN DEAL
WITH THIS JUST
AS HAVE MANY
GIRLS BEFORE
YOU.

I'M **NOT** A
GIRL. I
SHOULDN'T HAVE
TO DEAL WITH
ANY OF THIS.



WELL, YOU
DO HAVE TO
DEAL WITH IT.
KNOW THIS. YOU
HAVE MY LOVE.
YOU WILL
ALWAYS HAVE
MY LOVE.

<SIGH>






GODDESS.
YOU'RE SO
BEAUTIFUL. I
WANT TO TAKE
YOU RIGHT
NOW.

BUT,
WE NEED
TO PLAN.
PATTENIA
AND
RUNTICK.


YES? TELL
ME WHAT TO
DO.



NEMERIA,
WILL TAUNT
YOU. SHE'LL RUB
IT IN THAT YOU
HAVE HAD YOUR
MENARCHE.

I KNOW IT'S
HARD, BUT LET
HER THINK YOU
DEFEATED,
BROKEN. JUST
AS BEFORE.

UGH. YES.
YES. I HATE
IT, BUT IT
MAKES SENSE.
WHAT OF
RUNTICK?



RUNTICK IS
SCARED OF
GIRLS. SHOW
HIM YOUR
BREASTS. HE'LL
RUN FROM THE
ROOM
SCREAMING.

HA! NO. JUST
BE
FANTASTICALLY
MEAN AND SCARY.
SHOW HIM LIFE WITH
YOU WILL BE HELL.
THAT SHOULDN'T BE
HARD. YOU'RE ON
THE RAG.

HA. HA.

LATER...

MY BREASTS LOOK HUGE, AND THIS DRESS WITH THE LACE AND BOWS MAKES ME FEEL A FOOL.

SERRENIA! I RUSHED OVER AS SOON AS I HEARD THE JOYOUS NEWS! YOU'RE OFFICIALLY A WOMAN. I'M **SO** EXCITED FOR YOU.



THE PRINCE WANTS TO SCREAM, TO
ATTACK, BUT HE HEEDS NEMERIA'S
ADVICE.

GOOD MORNING.

AS IS CUSTOM, I
OFFER YOU THIS
ROSE, LITTLE
SISTER, TO
COMMEMORATE
YOUR COMING INTO
WOMANHOOD.



SERREN HIDES HIS SEETHING RAGE
BEHIND HIS PRETTIEST SMILE. HE ACTS
THE PRINCESS ONCE MORE.

I LOVE
ROSES, AND IT
SMELLS
DELIGHTFUL.
THANK YOU, DEAR
SISTER.

<GIGGLE>





OH,
AND THIS
OUTFIT YOU'VE
CHOSEN FOR ME
IS LOVELY. I'M
SURE RUNTICK
WILL BE
PLEASED.

YOU HIDE
YOUR
MENSTRUAL
AGONY BEHIND A
SWEET SMILE. GOOD
PRACTICE FOR THE
REST OF YOUR LIFE.
NOW, WHAT WAS THAT
JOKE YOU LOVED TO
TELL BACK WHEN
YOU WERE A RUDE
AND ARROGANT
MALE?




AH, YES.
WHAT'S THE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN A
DRAGON AND A
GIRL ON THE
RAG?

I CAN'T
REMEMBER THE PUNCH
LINE. IT ESCAPES ME.
TELL ME, SWEET
SISTER. YOU MUST
REMEMBER. YOU LOVED
THAT JOKE-- WHEN
YOU WERE A BOY.

"WHEN YOU WERE A BOY..." THE WORDS STING. SERREN STRUGGLES TO CONTROL HIS EMOTIONS. HE TRIES TO PLAY THE PRINCESS, BUT THE TRUTH COMES THROUGH HIS EYES AND THE HATE IN HIS VOICE.


THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DRAGON AND A GIRL ON THE RAG IS... YOU CAN KILL A DRAGON. HEH.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a gold crown and a dark, intricately patterned dress, stands in a stone-walled room. She has a slight, knowing smile. Two white speech bubbles are positioned on either side of her head. The background shows a stone wall and a dark doorway.


HILARIOUS.
HAHAHA. ONLY, YOU
DON'T SEEM TO FIND
IT QUITE AS FUNNY
NOW, DO YOU? HOW
YOU DID LOVE TO
TEASE ME ABOUT MY
STRAWBERRY DAYS,
NEVER SUSPECTING
YOU WOULD HAVE
YOUR OWN.

NOW, I CAN SEE THE
HATE IN YOUR EYES,
HEAR THE SHAME IN
YOUR VOICE. YOU MAY
DROP THE ACT,
PRINCESS. HOW DO
YOU REALLY FEEL?



HOW DO I REALLY
FEEL? DIRTY.
DISGUSTING. FOULED
WITH SHAME. IT SICKENS
ME THAT I BLEED AS
ONLY A WOMAN BLEEDS,
THAT I SUFFER WHAT
EVEN GIRLS CALL
"THE CURSE."


KEEP GOING.



YES, I HAVE HAD
MY MENARCHE. I
KNOW WITHOUT
DOUBT I AM TO LIVE A
MAIDEN'S LIFE-- A
LIFE OF QUIET
DESPAIR, WITH NO
OPPORTUNITY FOR
GLORY.

DOES IT
PLEASE YOU
TO HEAR ME
SAY IT?

YES.
YES, IT
DOES.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a gold crown and a dark, intricately patterned dress, stands in a stone castle interior. She is looking slightly to the right with a slight smile. The background shows stone walls, a blue curtain, and a stone archway.

WELL, I AM
OFF TO PLAN FOR
WAR AS KINGS DO,
AND YOUR FIANCE
WILL BE ALONG
SOON TO SWEEP
YOU OFF YOUR
FEET.

RUNTICK
LOOKS LIKE A
TOAD. I DO HOPE
YOUR BABIES TAKE
AFTER THEIR MOTHER.
FAREWELL, NINA, OR
SHOULD I SAY, THE
FUTURE LADY
RUNTICK
ANSEY?

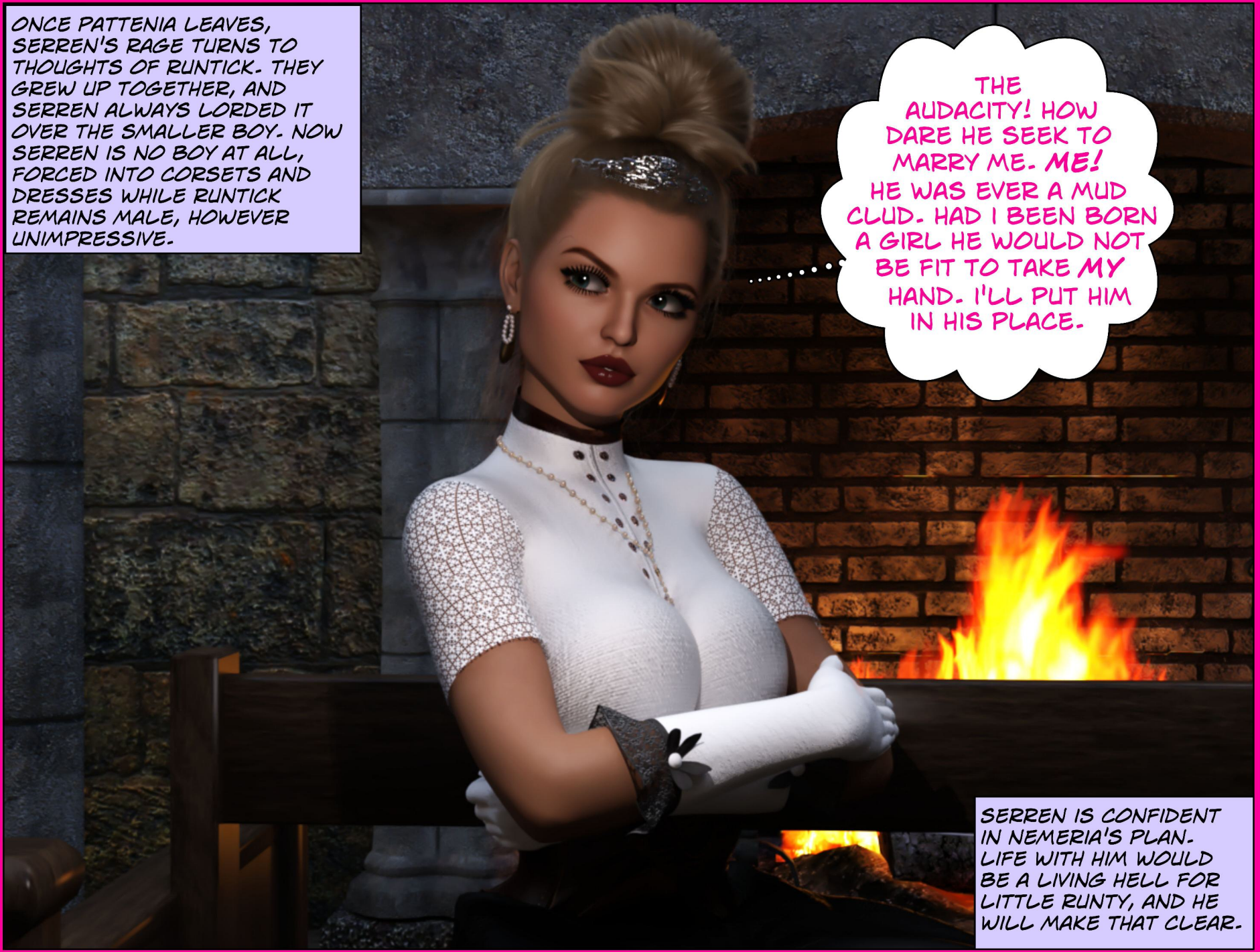


LADY
RUNTICK
ANSEY? SHE
MEANS FOR ME TO
TAKE **HIS** NAME? I
WILL KILL HER FOR
WHAT SHE'S DONE
TO ME AND WHAT
MEANS TO DO TO
ME.

ONCE PATTENIA LEAVES, SERREN'S RAGE TURNS TO THOUGHTS OF RUNTICK. THEY GREW UP TOGETHER, AND SERREN ALWAYS LORDED IT OVER THE SMALLER BOY. NOW SERREN IS NO BOY AT ALL, FORCED INTO CORSETS AND DRESSES WHILE RUNTICK REMAINS MALE, HOWEVER UNIMPRESSIVE.

THE AUDACITY! HOW DARE HE SEEK TO MARRY ME. ME! HE WAS EVER A MUD CLUD. HAD I BEEN BORN A GIRL HE WOULD NOT BE FIT TO TAKE MY HAND. I'LL PUT HIM IN HIS PLACE.

SERREN IS CONFIDENT IN NEMERIA'S PLAN. LIFE WITH HIM WOULD BE A LIVING HELL FOR LITTLE RUNTY, AND HE WILL MAKE THAT CLEAR.





TO BE CONTINUED