

Musing the Maenad

An illustrated adventure

Based on the Doricha/Nitocris Legend

Willard Thurston

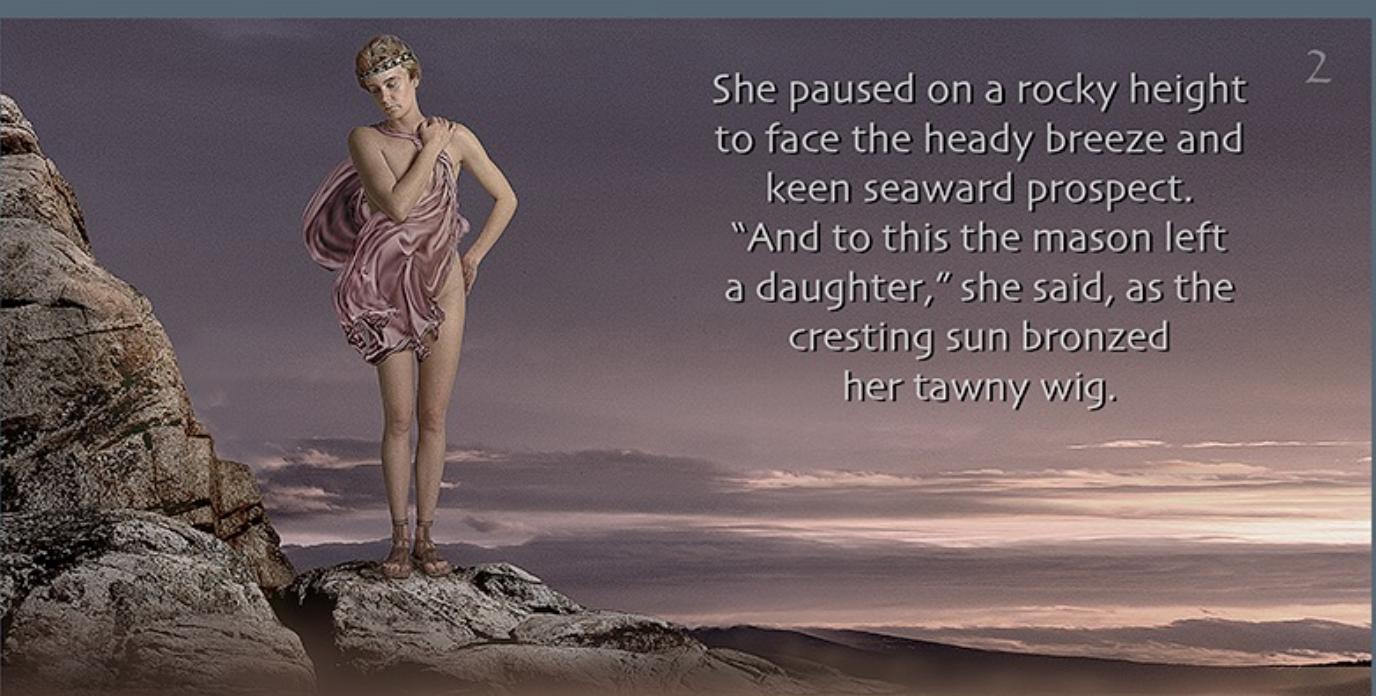


Pneuma Fables Corybant Press

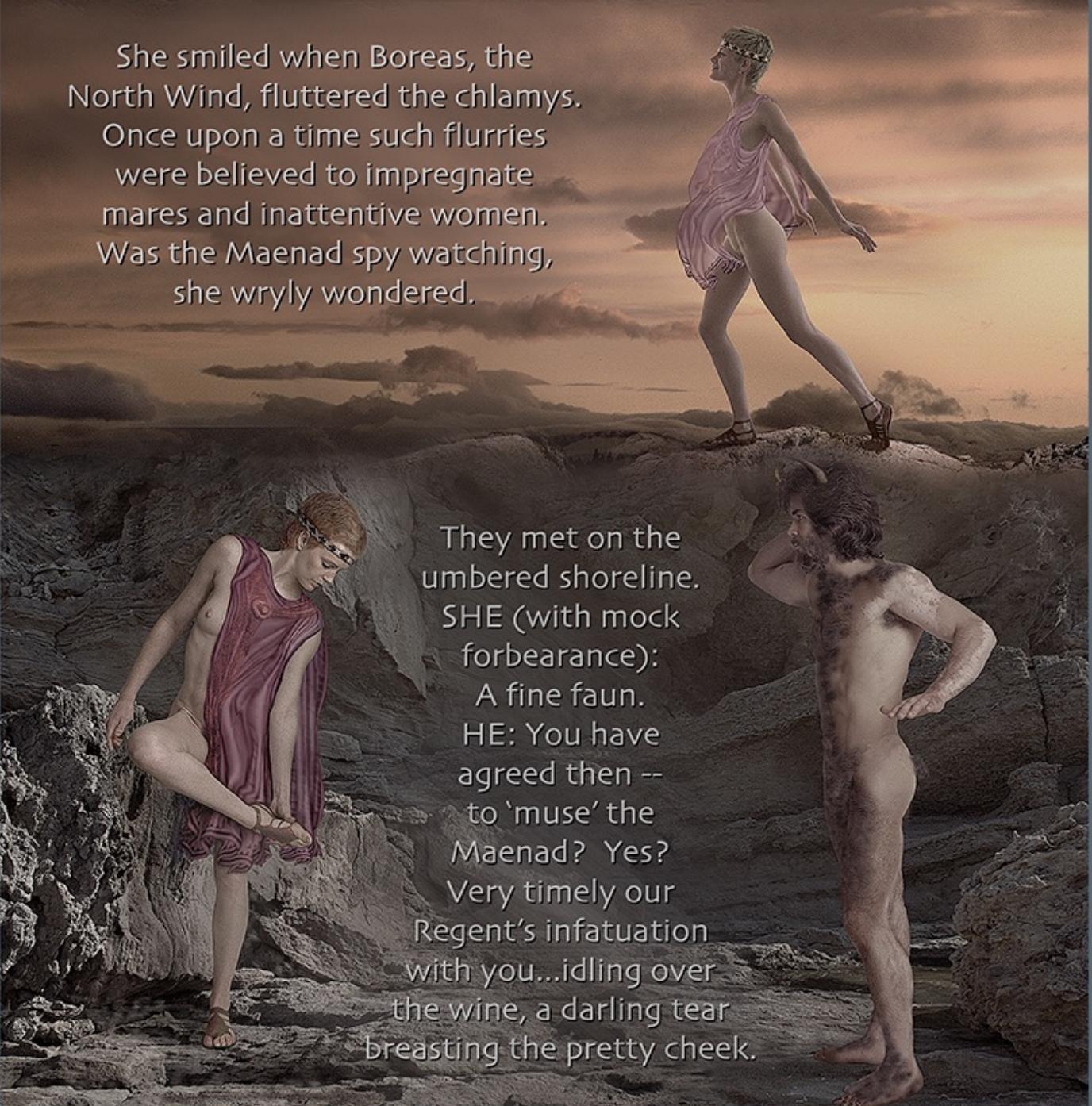
At the first blush of 'rosy fingered dawn', a time when mists still shroud and the dew embalms, a slender form clad only in a light chlamys stole along the edge of a gusty cliff. A distant observer would have seen another pretty boy hurrying home from his lover before daybreak. A nearby witness, a rare prospect at that hour, may have been amazed to find the fleet figure female, a sister or wife who ought to be indoors. Even Amazons nodded at that hour!



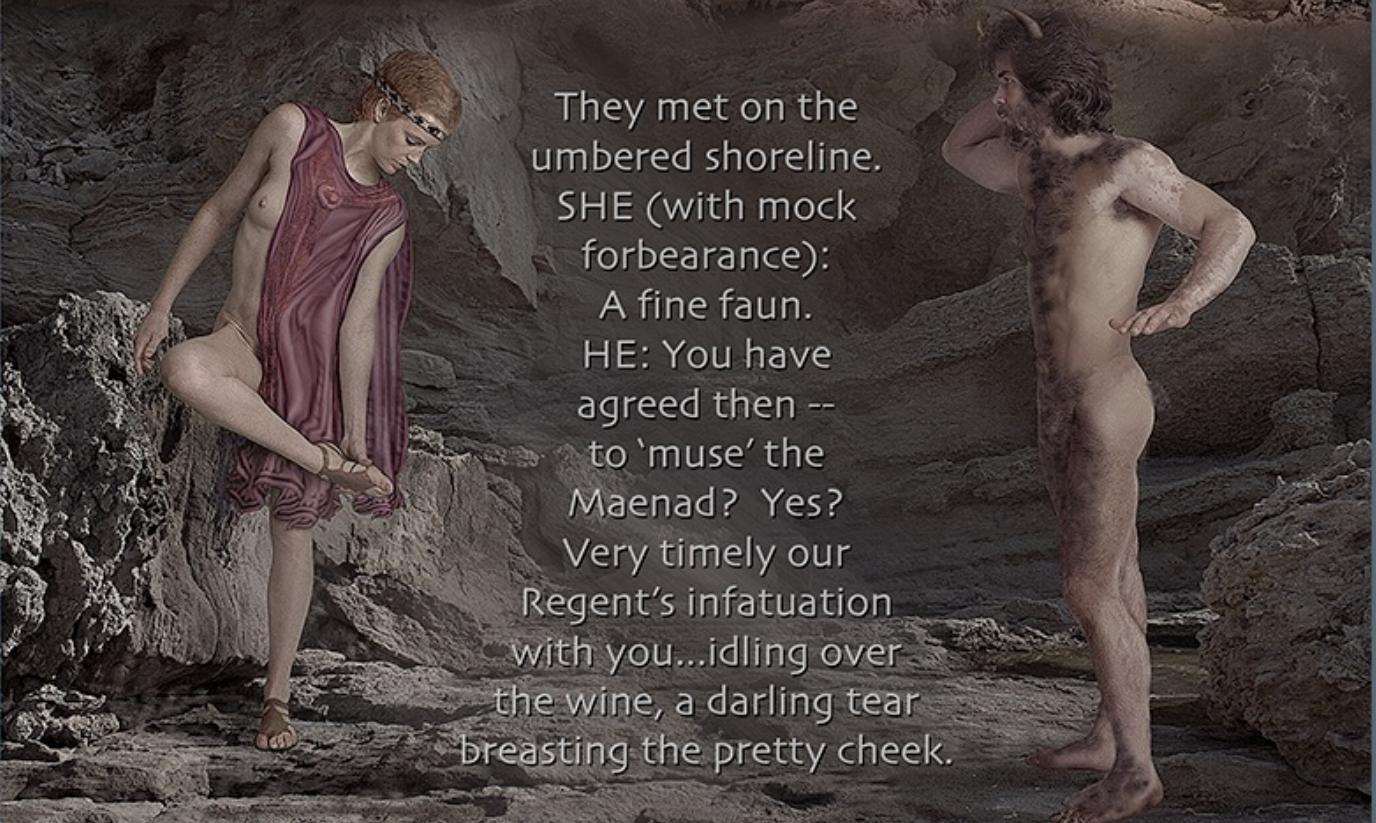
How it all began.



She paused on a rocky height
to face the heady breeze and
keen seaward prospect.
"And to this the mason left
a daughter," she said, as the
cresting sun bronzed
her tawny wig.

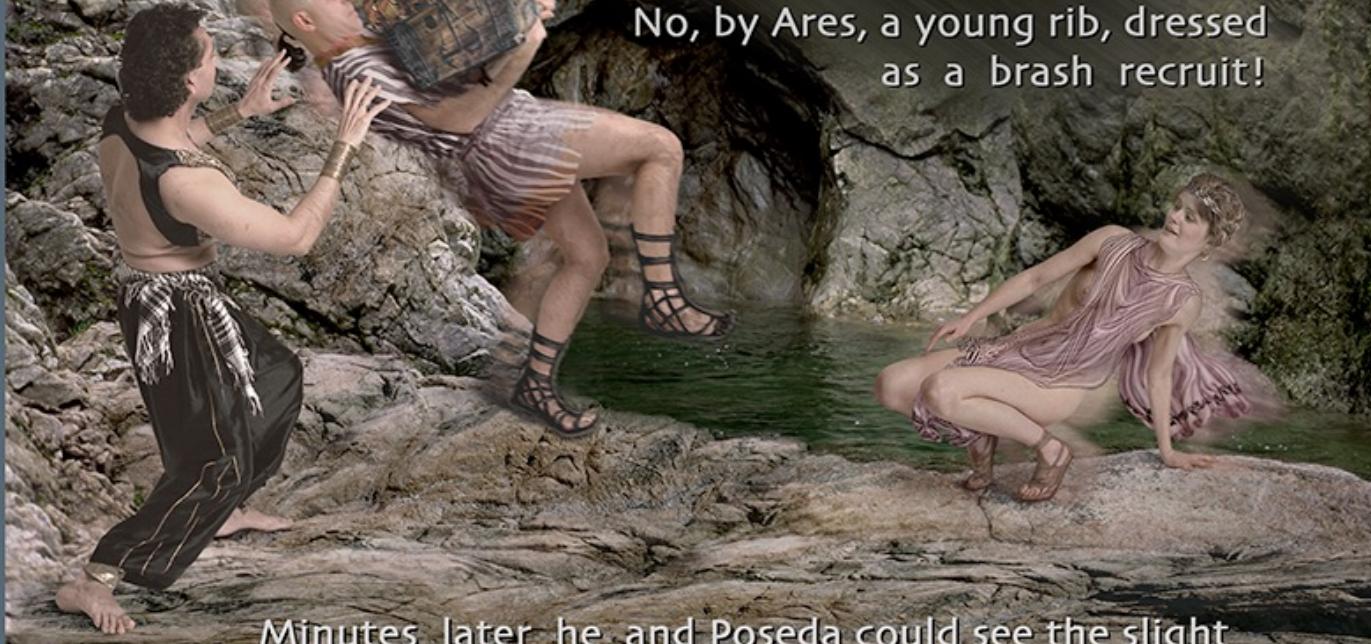


She smiled when Boreas, the
North Wind, fluttered the chlamys.
Once upon a time such flurries
were believed to impregnate
mares and inattentive women.
Was the Maenad spy watching,
she wryly wondered.

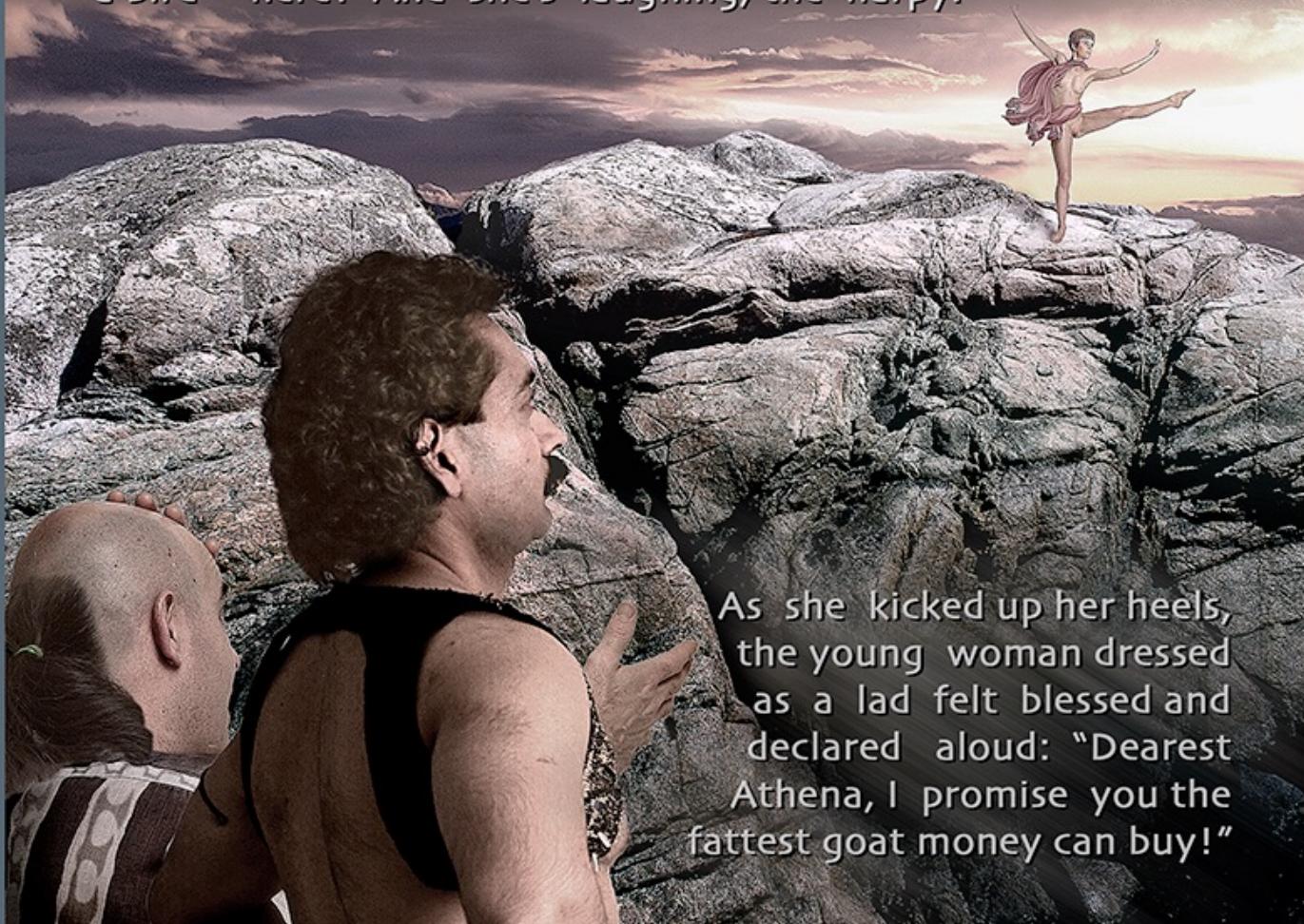


They met on the
umbered shoreline.
SHE (with mock
forbearance):
A fine faun.
HE: You have
agreed then --
to 'muse' the
Maenad? Yes?
Very timely our
Regent's infatuation
with you...idling over
the wine, a darling tear
breasting the pretty cheek.

As the pirate Typhon stashed his plunder from a raid on an Egyptian merchant vessel, the boy rushed by nearly tripping him up. Had he been alerted he may have caught the fleet lad.
No, by Ares, a young rib, dressed as a brash recruit!



Minutes later he and Poseda could see the slight figure atop the cliff performing a dance step in the style of a Corybant as the brisk wind swept the chlamys aside. Typhon was trying hard to be amused. "I don't believe it -- a bird -- here! And she's laughing, the harpy."



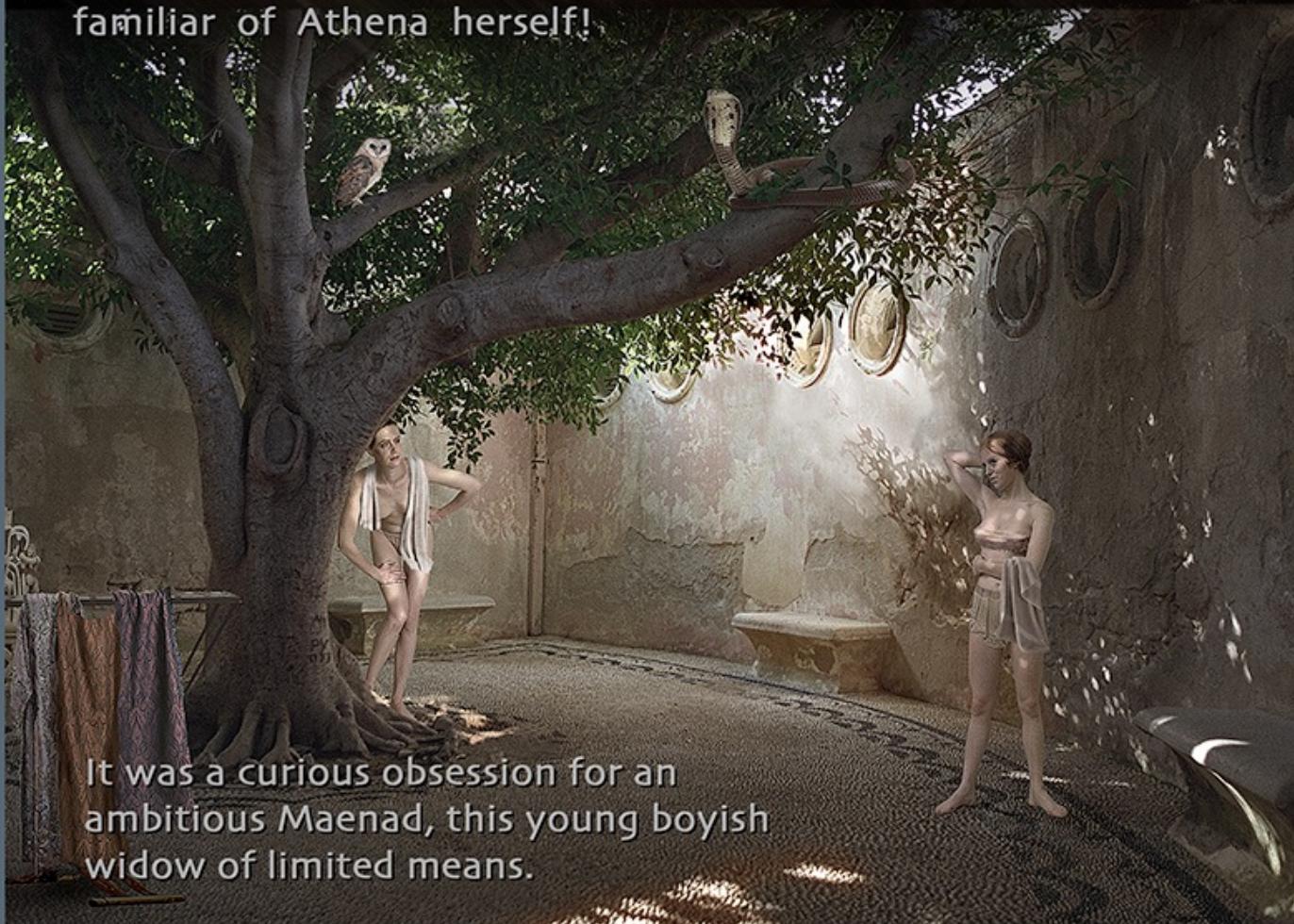
As she kicked up her heels, the young woman dressed as a lad felt blessed and declared aloud: "Dearest Athena, I promise you the fattest goat money can buy!"

The Regnant Maenad, who thought of herself as a Sovereign ruler, sat on the rooftop terrace overlooking the sheltered garden, her expression one of rapt wonder or -- aphrodisia!

Due some said to a mushroom; others, to a young widowed aristocrat by name of Zelea.

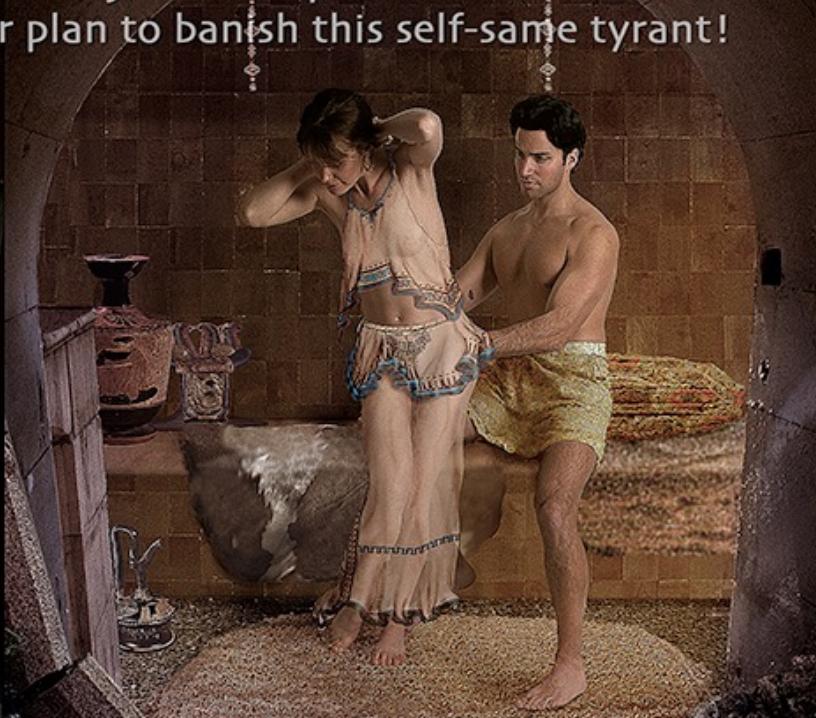
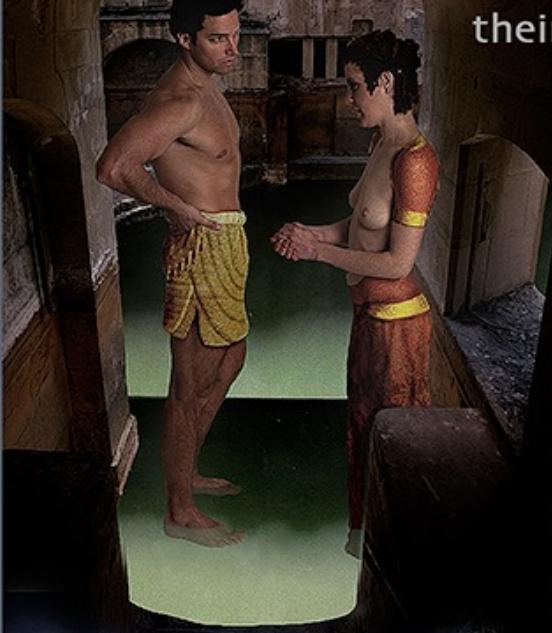


Cerbes, the Epopt, loitering on the breezeway, sensed the dicey possibility -- their flinty Maenad smitten! by the vision of the sylphlike Glaean aristo and her flame-haired maid as they stood in the sun-flecked garden after the storm, their chitons drying on a trestle. In the Yew tree a royal cobra stalked an owl, a familiar of Athena herself!



It was a curious obsession for an ambitious Maenad, this young boyish widow of limited means.

A temple spy reported a liaison between Zelea and a Theran artist, a happenstance the conspirators used to distract the jealous imperious Maenad from their plan to banish this self-same tyrant!

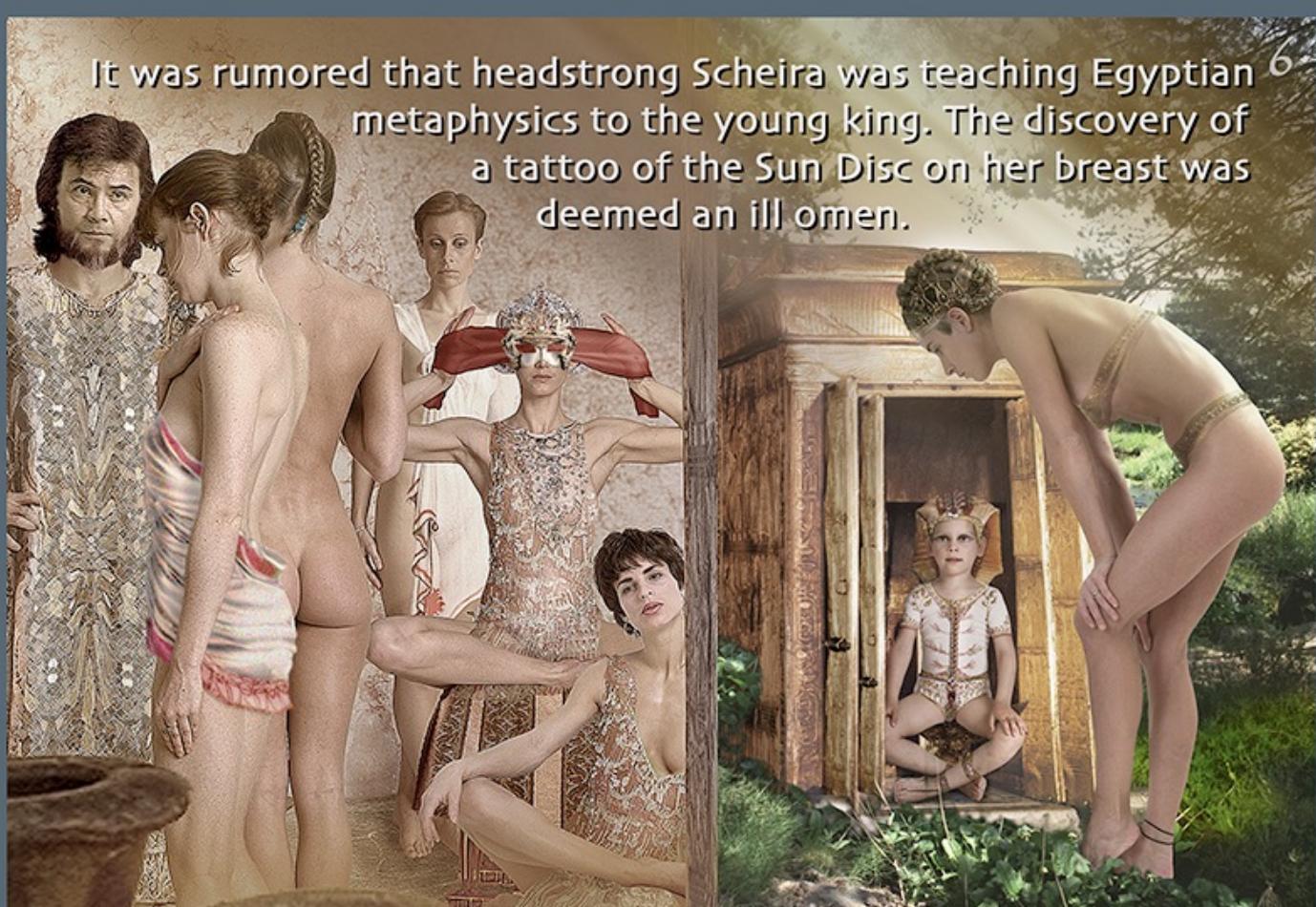


A further step was the killing of the Centaur, Semyan, whom the Maenad had used to intimidate and suborn her critics at court.



Semyan was a ravishing consort the all-embracing Zeus also became querulous with and readily agreed to see him punished.

It was rumored that headstrong Scheira was teaching Egyptian metaphysics to the young king. The discovery of a tattoo of the Sun Disc on her breast was deemed an ill omen.



The wary Regent examined each peeress, resorting to the 'layering' of the royal mask to signal suspicion. Zelea was of course fondly studied by the smitten Regen, and a statue for the Tripartite Shrine in the Labyrinth avidly commissioned.

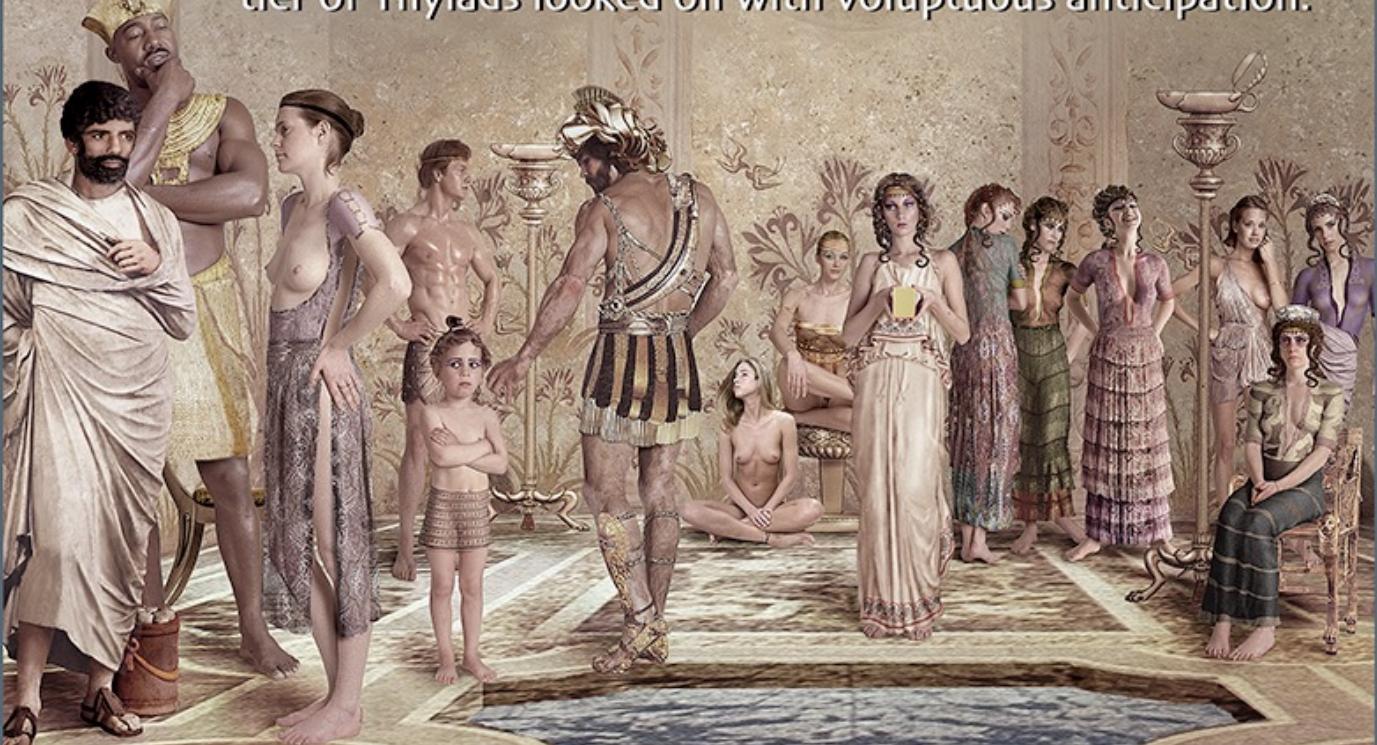




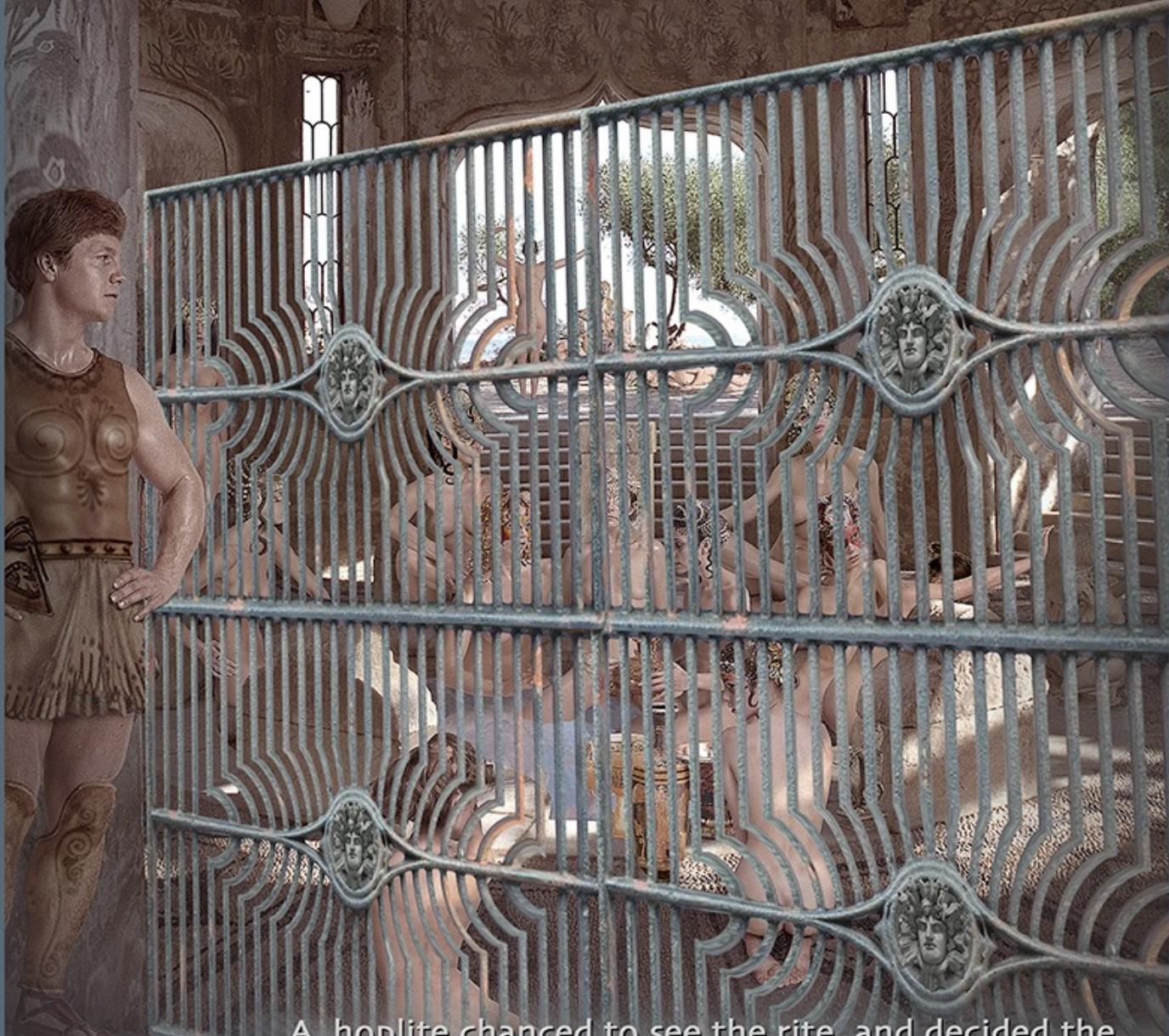
The ritual thank offerings on the mountain shrine were a daily event, the

the tyros tending the alter of the constant, timeless Rhea.

The surprise came when the genteel Glaean aristo Zelea was seen in the court's busy assembly chamber dressed as a Thyiad reader, talking with the current in-group of Elders and nobles, the added curiosity the novitiate tunic she wore that intimated the nighness of initiation -- confirming to the partisans that the Regnant Maenad was indeed smitten and planned to participate herself in the lustral segment of the initiation. In one corner a tier of Thyiads looked on with voluptuous anticipation.



As the Maenad's wanton prodigal fêtes grew in number, many citizens became upset. The rite of initiation into her troupe of Thyiads prompted the partisans to enact their plan whereby Zelea would join the gang, allow herself to be ritually pleasured by the 'nurses' of Dionysus, and so keep the Maenad captivated while plans for the coup materialized, a task Zelea took up with quiet wry amusement.



A hoplite chanced to see the rite, and decided the vexation of the partisans was not amiss; such costly, ritual dissipation could undermine the stability of the polis.

By the time of the Peregrination Rite, the peeress was now everyone's precocious child and wondrous seed cake. Scheira, the storyteller, succumbed to the trig anticipation. Never before had she seen a Potnian priestess just free the mold!

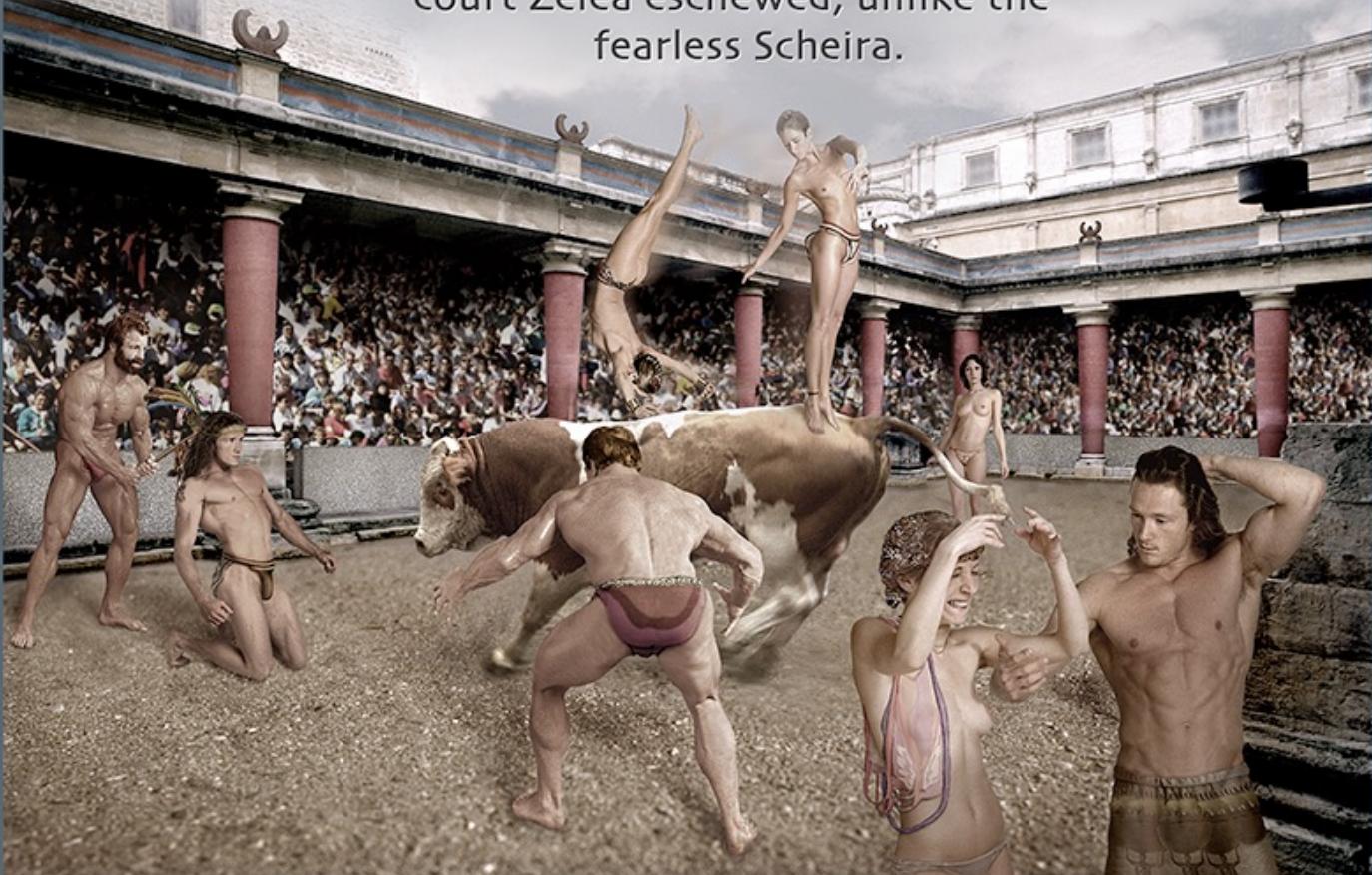


In the second dance, two Hermis affecting to be Dionysus, cued the first strains of the dithyramb as they discovered the savory fare that was pledged to a daunting goddess. Doing so they became the stolid ox, General Bull, the ogre fated to flitch the sacral cake -- a self-infatuated Dionysus conniving at the consumption of himself.

Well , it was a Labyrinth!



As a Thyiad, Zelea learned the Anaconda Rite with arms overhead in the eye-stalk pose, coached by a Mistress of the Dance, thus leaving the Regent in a state of reassured wonder and exploitable preoccupation. Only the ardors of the bull court Zelea eschewed, unlike the fearless Scheira.



A dire unexpected Omen hastened the partisans' coup!



When the human form left the splendid Night Heron, who summoned the Immortals, all Glaean offspring would be exposed and die. The Regent looked on as benumbed hetaera.

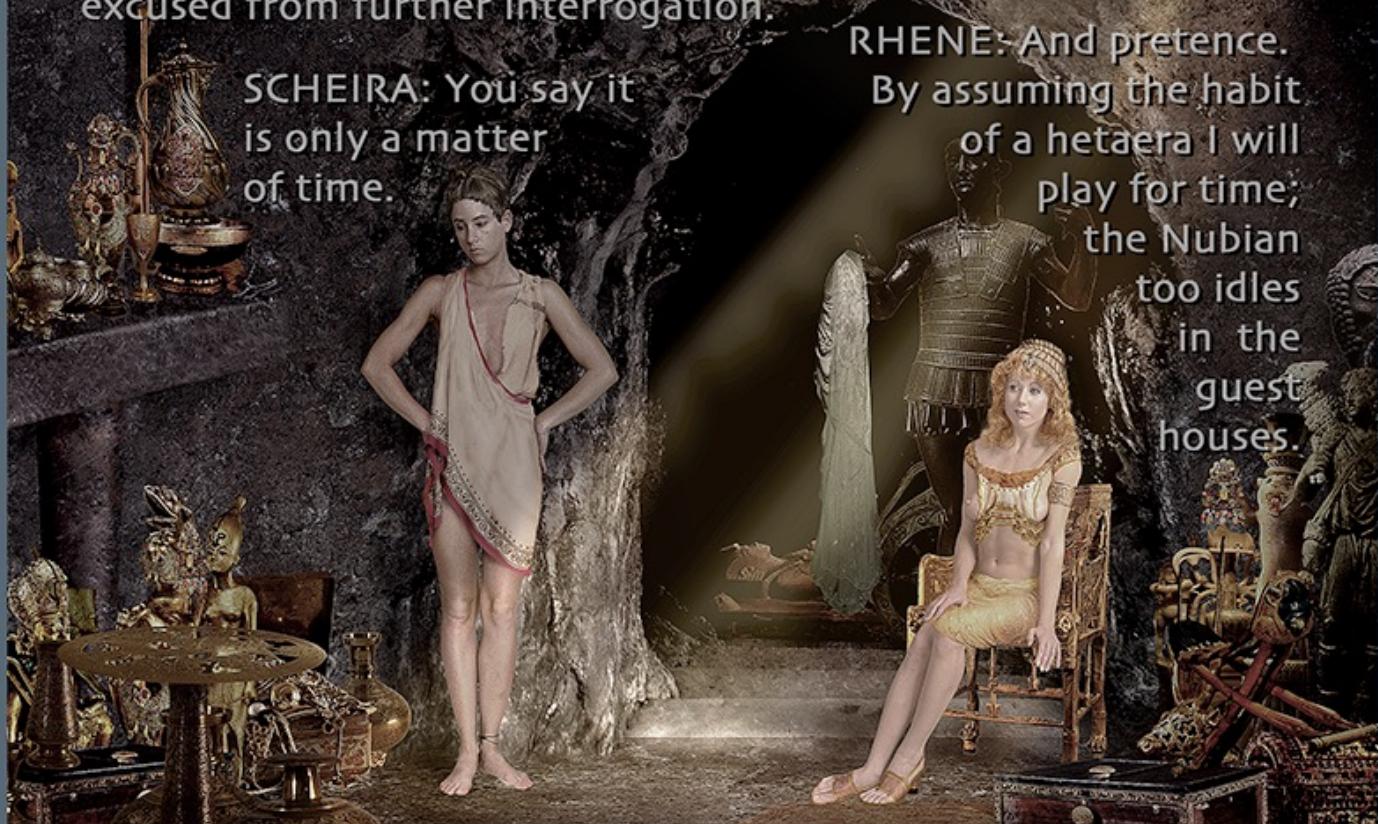
AFTER THE COUP...



The new ruler, a superstitious Egyptian-Nubian Viceroy, was obsessed with rumors of a stupendous treasure secreted in the Labyrinth. Rhene, a shrine reader, and Scheira went into hiding when the Viceroy questioned the Thyiads and Corybants about their knowledge of the Labyrinth. Only those who could hand walk through a field of upright thyrsi, Zelea being one, were excused from further interrogation.

SCHEIRA: You say it is only a matter of time.

RHENE: And pretence. By assuming the habit of a hetaera I will play for time; the Nubian too idles in the guest houses.





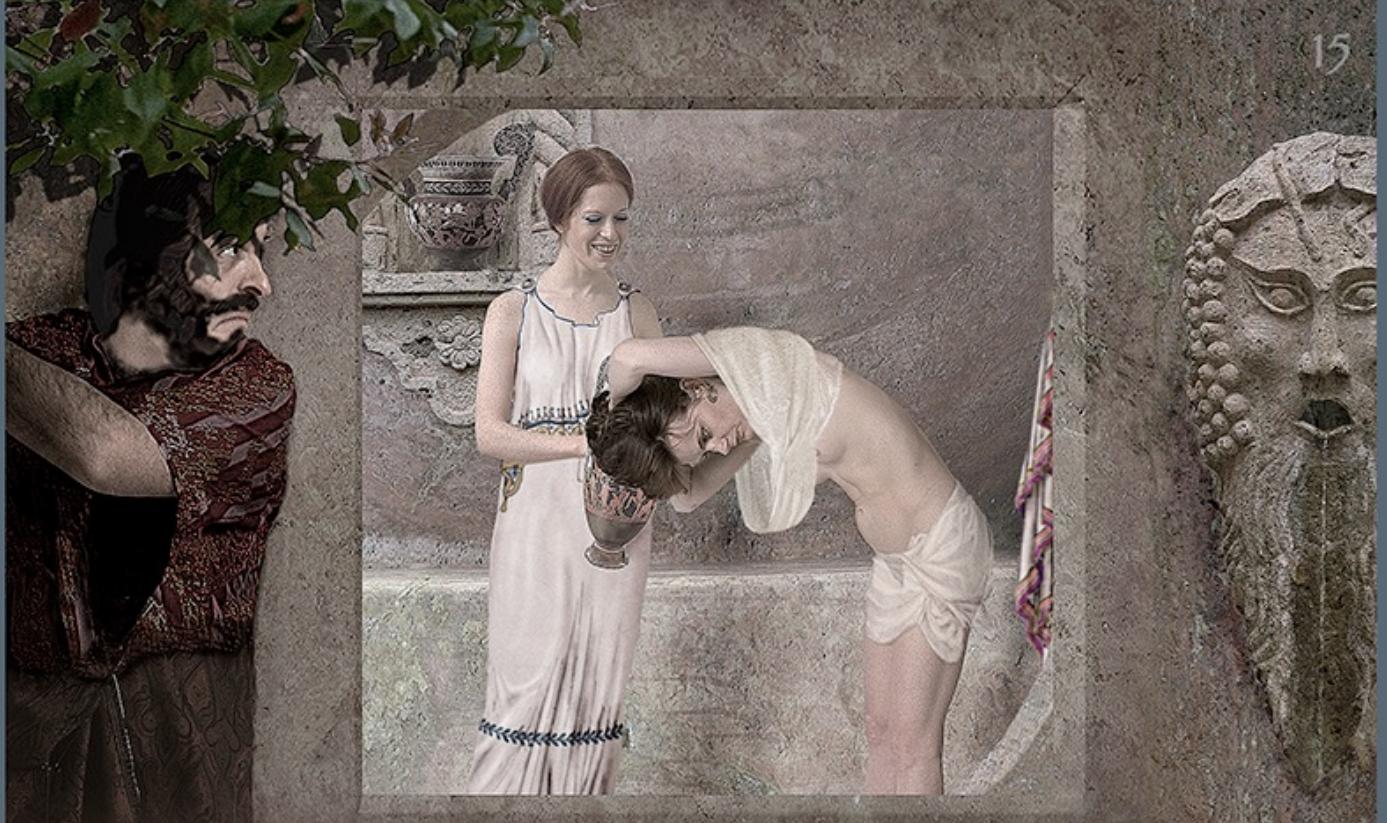
After the Regent fled the polis, activity in the bazaar became hectic, from the sale of her Palladium and household servants, to the pirate Typhon honoring Rhea's Pillar Crypt with an offering, even as he hawked his spoils in the guest houses, including a bust of Zelea commissioned by her late husband!



Because the Viceroy liked the stature of the Muse Erato, an early Glaean work, the acropolis was not despoiled. 14



A search was also begun to find the one who posed for it and the resident whose feet might fit such peerless sandals!



In due course Zelea was allowed to return to her household. A partisan spy saw her and Thera in the old fountain house, suggesting they enjoyed a freedom denied many Glaeans in the Viceroy's regime, a preferment that suggested she was not favoring the partisans now that the Regent was gone. Whereas story teller Scheira, one of the first Glaeans to face the hundreds of African scorpions -- that fronted the first of the Shardana cohorts -- barely escaped with her life.



The fleeing Scheira was abducted by a pirate and taken to Naucratis where the Viceroy had come disguised as a Kurdish slaver to sort out a rival faction there. He recognized her at a slave auction where, despite her jeopardy, she stood before him uncontrite. To her surprise he gave her a pectoral.

SHE: This is Egyptian is it not?

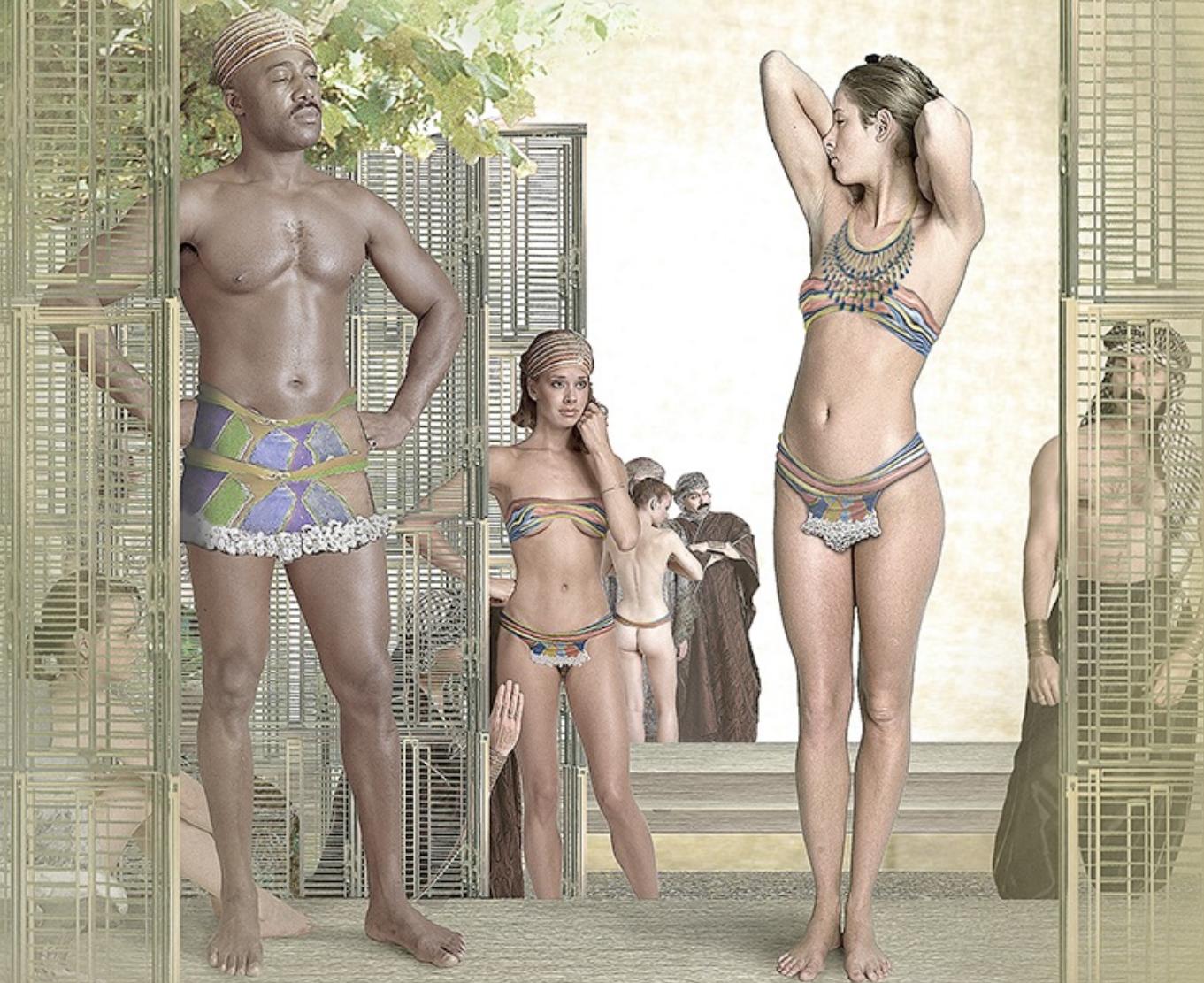
HE: You know the tale of Nitocris? Some Hellenes know her as Rhodopis, which means 'pink-fleshed'.

SHE: The story of the Eidolon and the gold sandals.

HE: The very one. You will tell it to my Vizier.

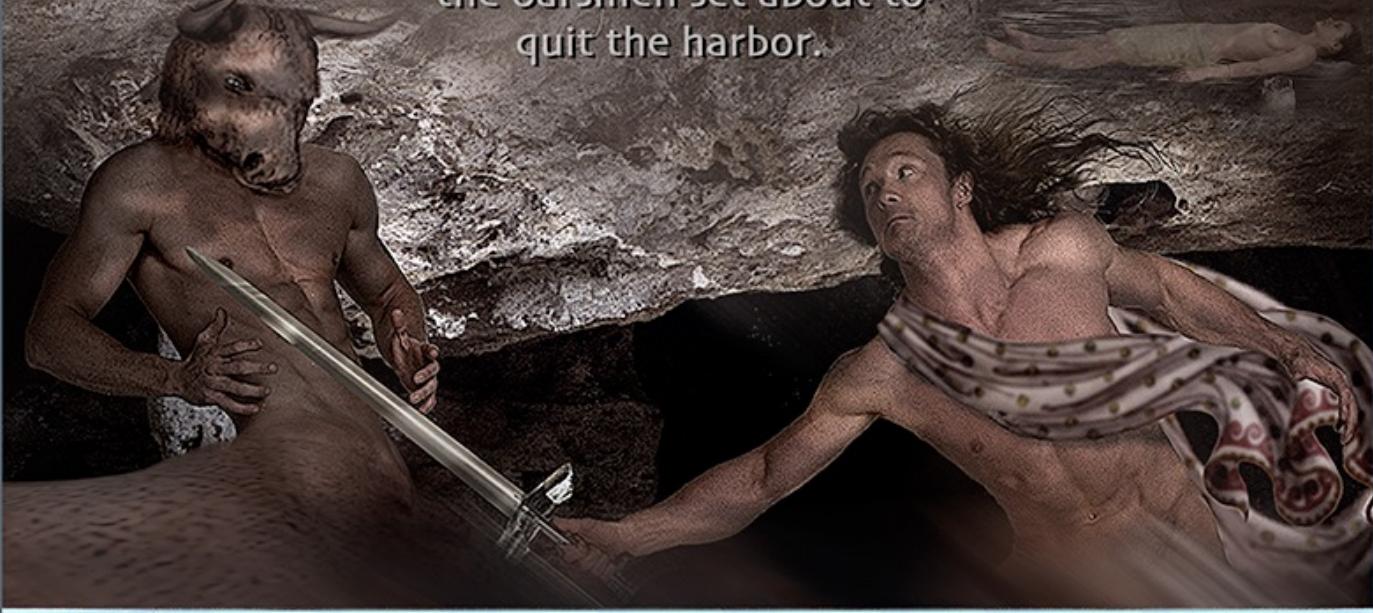
SHE: What happens then?

VICEROY: We see how good a tale bearer you are, and how well you learn new material -- from the Vizier.



SCHEIRA (to herself): Have I got a mesmerizing story to tell.
HE: You will wear the pectoral when you tell the Vizier the story. You also dance, I'm told. That too you will do.

To avoid appeasing a newly suspicious and exacting Viceroy, Zelea and Thera fled to the Labyrinth, only to be abducted by Asterius, the troubled Minotaur. Zelea fell ill, reviving when the Hero Theseus found and killed the Minotaur. At Theseus' urging she and Thera fled to Naucratis, bribing a busy sea trader to take them there. A break with her past that Zelea, let alone Thera, could scarcely imagine. Thera continued to hold out and only joined her mistress when the ship's hawsers were released and the oarsmen set about to quit the harbor.



At sea Zelea fitfully dreamt of many cavern shrines, the only means of escape -- a communion with the Goddess.

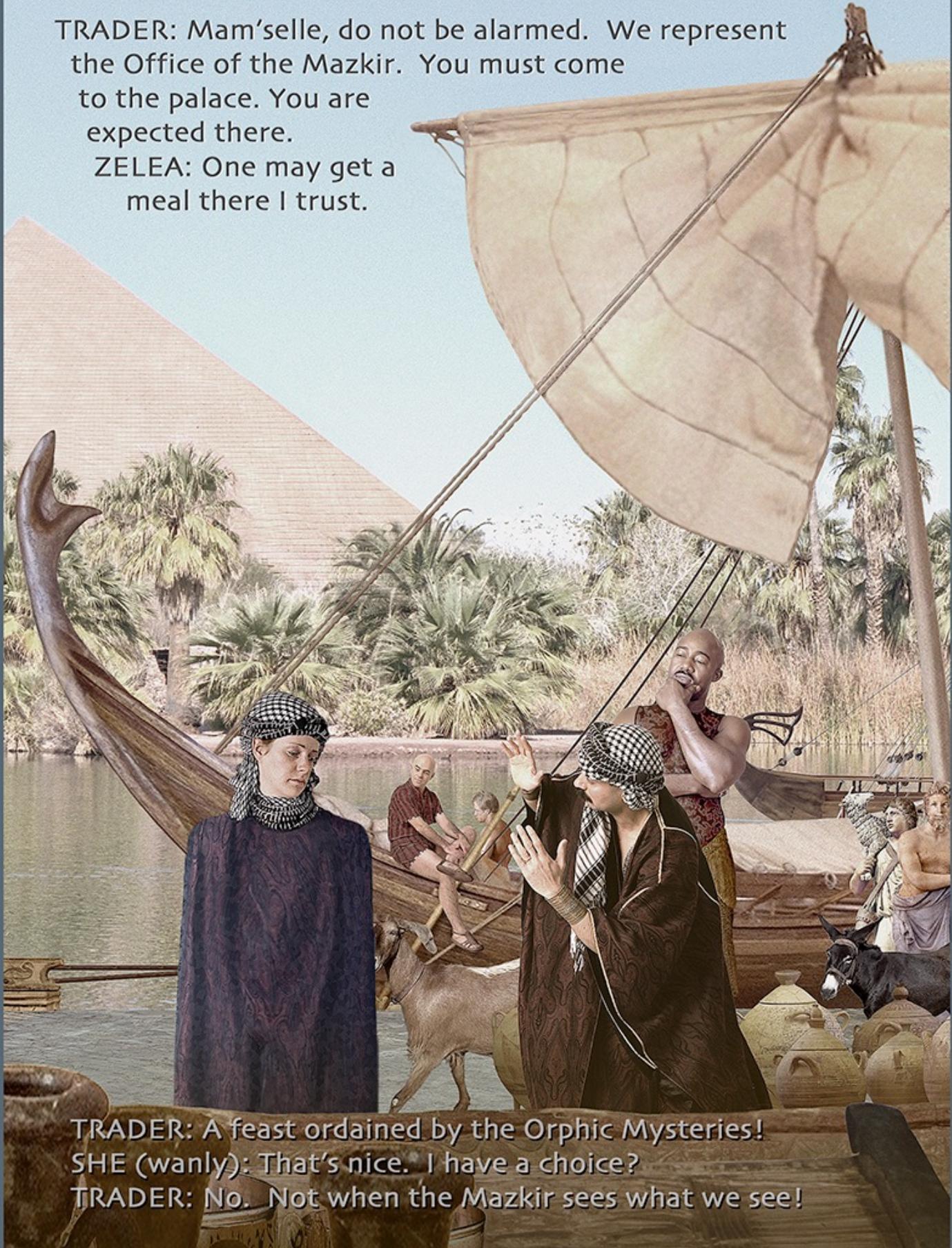


Even the spirit gates intimated the closing of the life circle, the awesome dread seal of Thanatos -- the gods fond passion tryst with mortals.

While pondering her prospects on the wharf in Naucratis, she became an object of scrutiny. A Phoenician trader was joined by a large seneschal from the Office of the Mazkir or, in the demotic, 'remembrancer'.

TRADER: Mam'selle, do not be alarmed. We represent the Office of the Mazkir. You must come to the palace. You are expected there.

ZELEA: One may get a meal there I trust.



TRADER: A feast ordained by the Orphic Mysteries!

SHE (wanly): That's nice. I have a choice?

TRADER: No. Not when the Mazkir sees what we see!

In Naucratis
two bravos
took Zelea to
a secluded
grotto to see
if she was truly
'rhodopis'. Then,
to her surprise
she was taken
before the Mazkir
himself and told
to try on a fine pair
of gold sandals.

All of the Mazkir's
attendants nodded as if
in unison: the sandals nicely

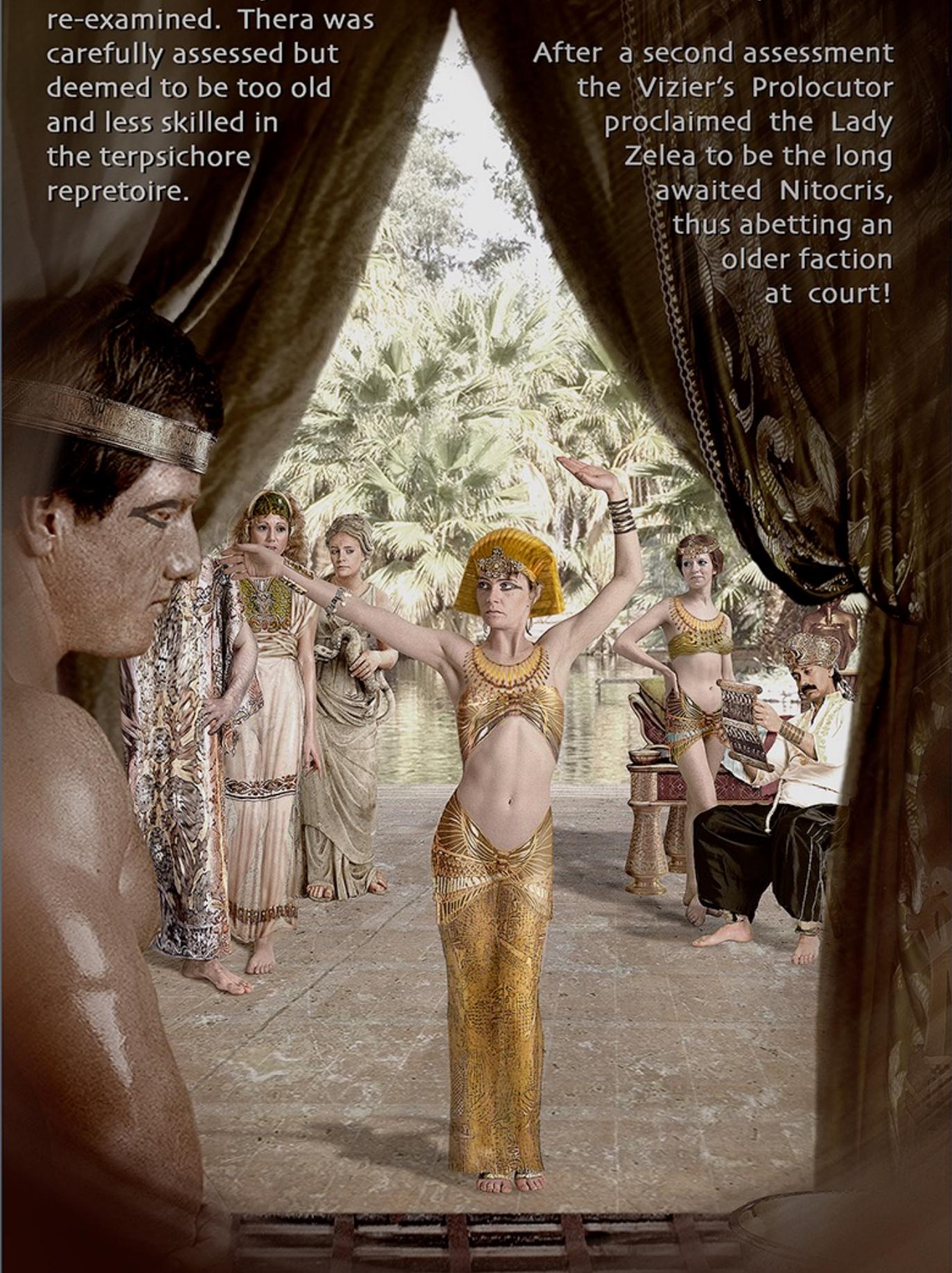
fit Zelea's feet -- a prophetic tale Scheira would tell many times.



The next day
Zelea stood near the
Prince in a queenly haik.

Then, a near disaster, a division in the court: the faction opposed to the Orphic prophesy slyly argued that the servant was the more 'rhodopis' of the two, thus abjuring the prophesy. Several seer adjudicators were called and the Sibylline text re-examined. Thera was carefully assessed but deemed to be too old and less skilled in the terpsichore repretoire.

After a second assessment the Vizier's Prolocutor proclaimed the Lady Zelea to be the long awaited Nitocris, thus abetting an older faction at court!



It was soon apparent her investiture was a ruse for a power hungry faction at court. Somedays she conjured a Glaean water park where she might recruit Perseus' pal Pegasus. But only a lame stallion materialized, hobbled by the cruel Erinnies, sent by Hera to avenge Zelea's willful 'musing' of Hera's Glaean Maenad!



Sometimes a winged revenant appeared, a sky dancer to beguile a jaded boy king: the spectre of herself in a prodigal court.

The ready escape was to imagine riding an elegant bireme into a well-tended harbour in a fine dawn mist seated on the dragon head prow in pretty Minoan court dress, a sleepy Boreas, the West Wind, slyly traipsing, searching to impregnate her, this slender upstart who might conceive the heady Achaeans putting her on their masterful prow! She sensed it was all a tall dream, but one she could not easily disengage herself from, the Gods being too amused, or 'mused' to call a halt to the tale. The problem of being 'human' -- mortal and expendable -- the reliable melodrama that all Immortals savour with great relish.

So, a story that had a beginning but no anticipated ending, stuck as she seemed to be in a wandering dragon head prow. A life too circumstantial to be freely lived.



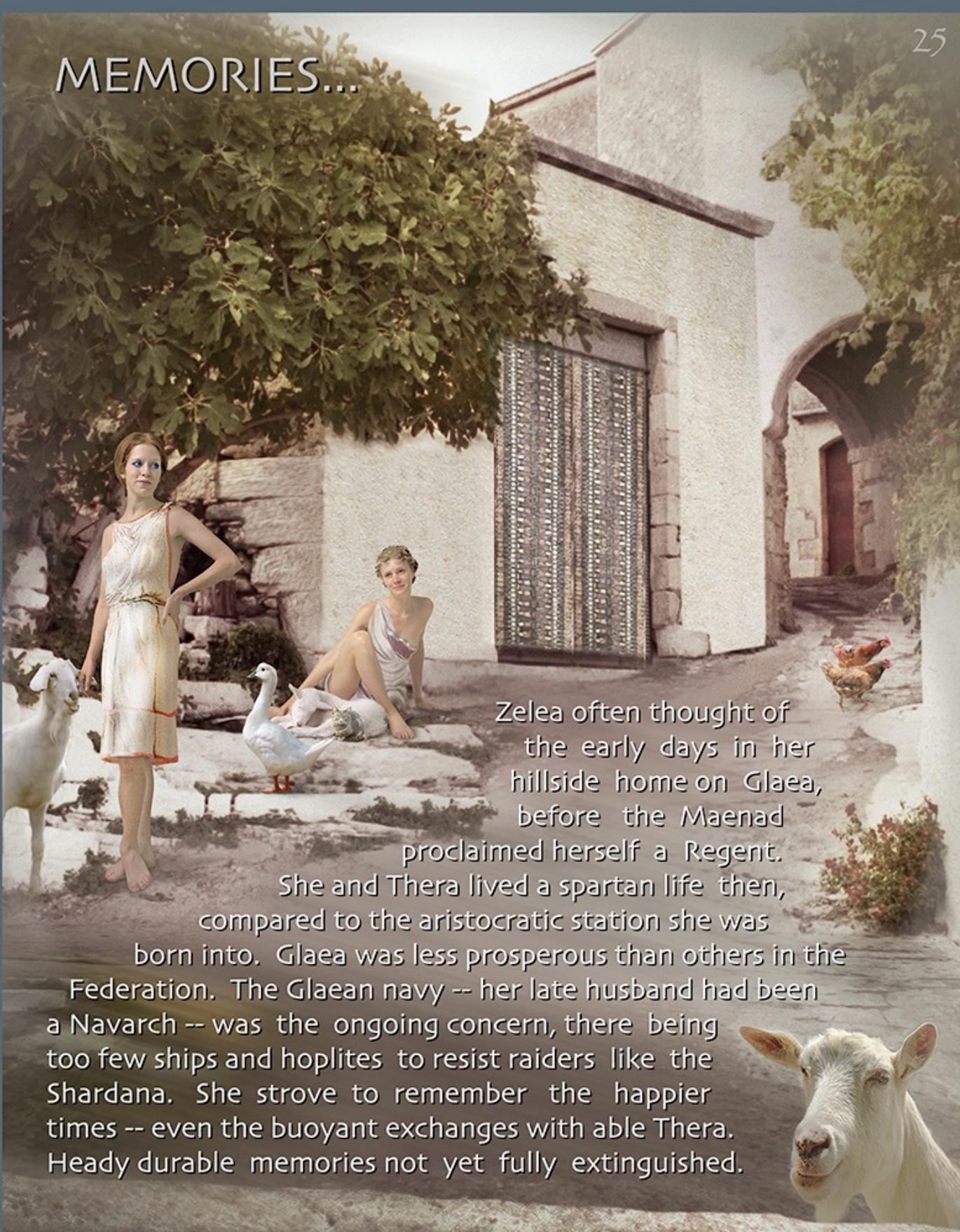
The human plight in a mythos was ever a worry, memory a gamy rapt telltale, a bawdy newsmonger. Who was it who defined one's own circumstance so, which the Fates carelessly presumed or demurely ignored -- so that a Pythia in her chic fit may invoke calamity? Was it all then ordained to 'muse' the gods?...

Scheira, the storyteller, was soon on the run, her gamey narrative too indiscreet for a later Theban court. 24



The pattern of such a 'dance' had become ridiculous, unseemly; only monsters might listen in, still apprize the wile of the gods.

MEMORIES...



Zelea often thought of the early days in her hillside home on Glaea, before the Maenad proclaimed herself a Regent.

She and Thera lived a spartan life then, compared to the aristocratic station she was born into. Glaea was less prosperous than others in the Federation. The Glaean navy -- her late husband had been a Navarch -- was the ongoing concern, there being too few ships and hoplites to resist raiders like the Shardana. She strove to remember the happier times -- even the buoyant exchanges with able Thera. Heady durable memories not yet fully extinguished.

{ZELEA: You look rather pleased with yourself this morning.
THERA: The olives are abundant this year, free of leaf spot. And we have two healthy young goats. Athena is smiling down. If we could only get rid of you know who -- without too much mayhem.
ZELEA: I'm sure the Elders are at work on a plan. Keep smiling.}



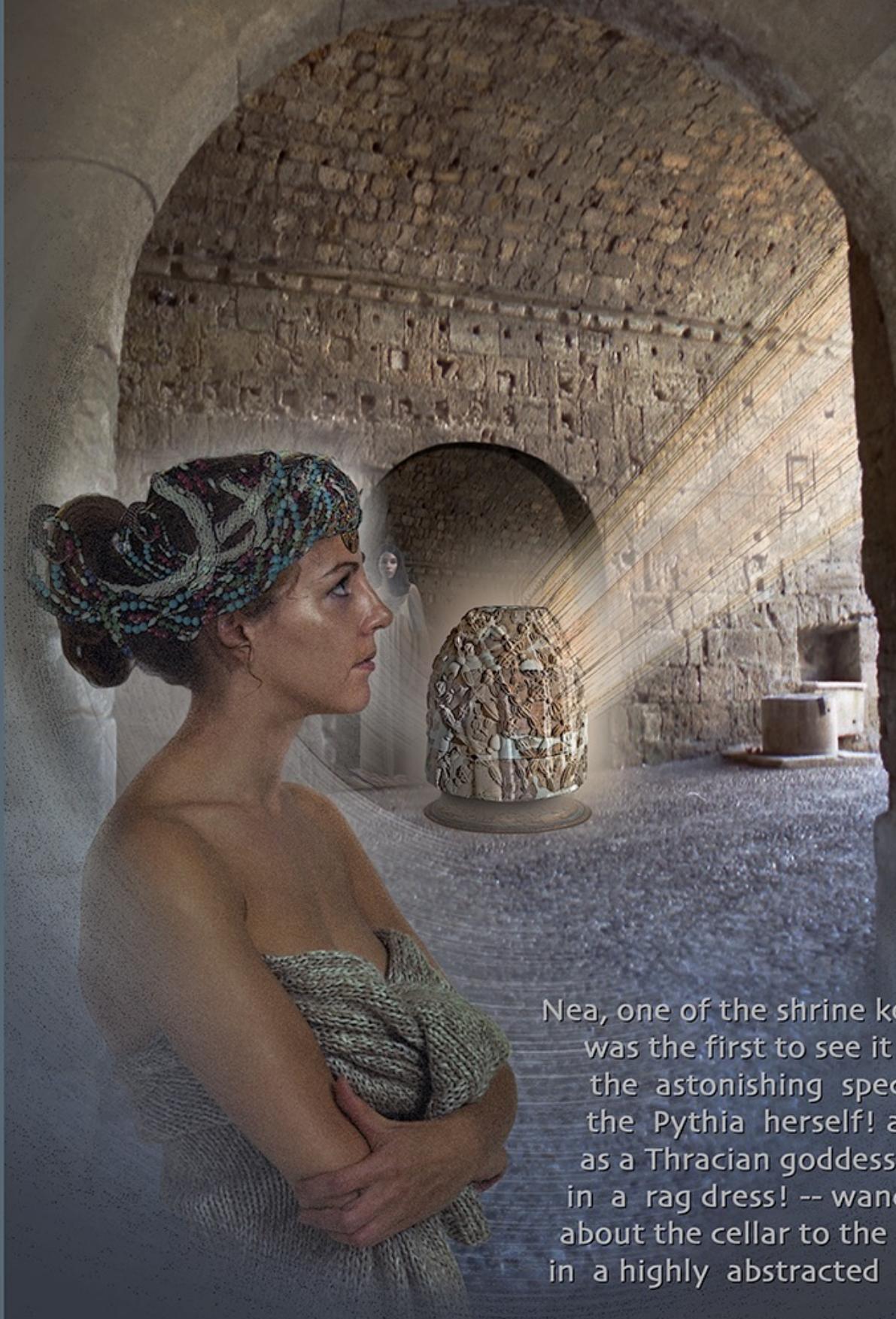
Well did she remember the Artemis Shrine and its halcyon setting,
the harbor below an irenic bay an ocean apart from the hectic
world beyond, where the gods delighted in human misfortune!





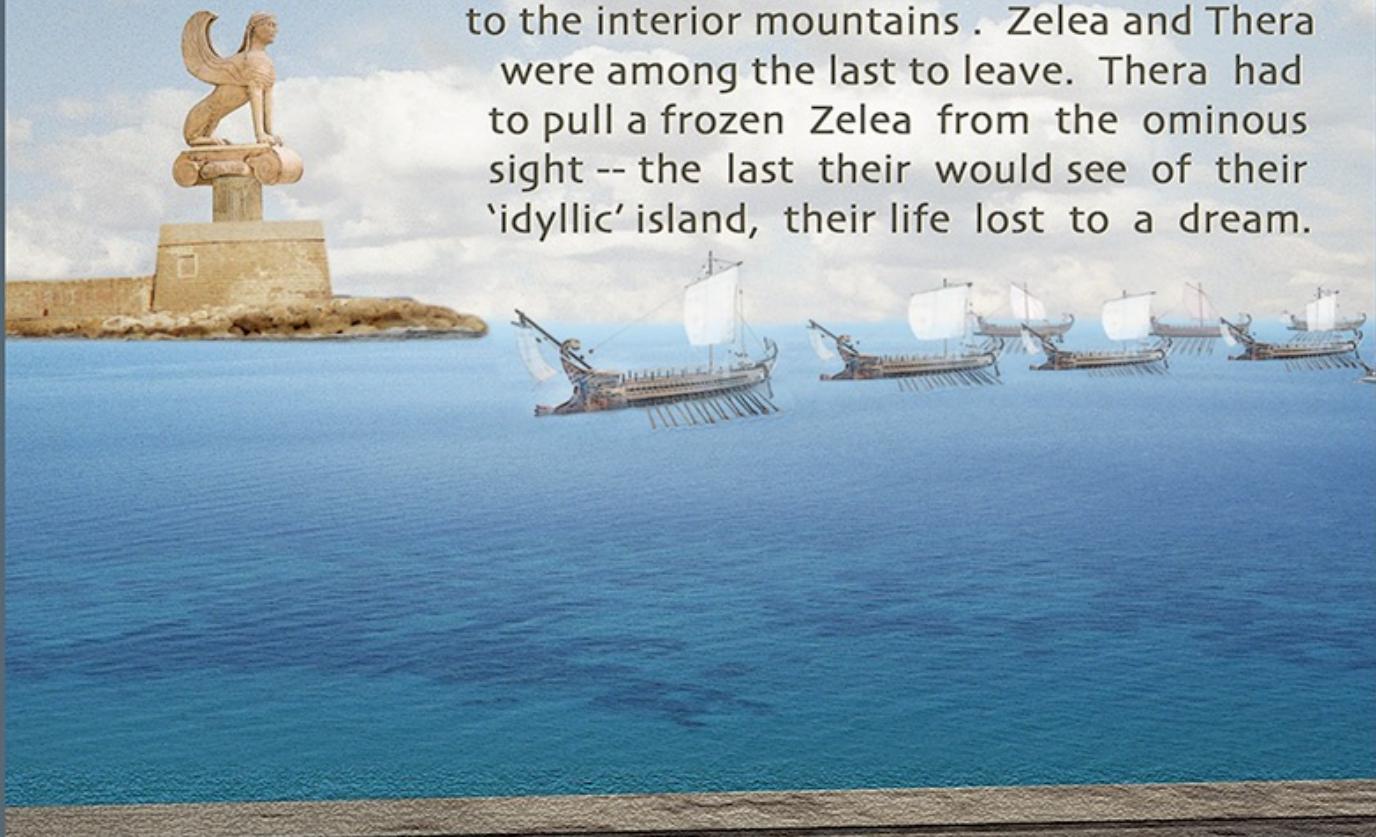
The Glaean Oracle's new Omphalos or Navel Boss was haunted by Three Fates, the initial warning of Glaea's peril, of her disfavor with Olympian Hera, the Magna Mater, for the killing of her favoured Maenad! Cunning Hera sent the Fates as beautiful women, as the 'fated' Medusa was before Athena punished her for sleeping with impudent Poseidon in one of her temples!

A further curiosity was a piercing ray of light that etched the new Navel Boss just before it was installed beneath the 'Pythia's Perch' in the reading chamber.



Nea, one of the shrine keepers was the first to see it -- and the astonishing spectre of the Pythia herself! attired as a Thracian goddess -- but in a rag dress! -- wandering about the cellar to the shrine in a highly abstracted state!

A morning mist had just cleared the day the hostile flotilla came, the ships bearing the Egyptian Shardana. The streets of Glaea were soon cleared, the residents fleeing to the interior mountains . Zelea and Thera were among the last to leave. Thera had to pull a frozen Zelea from the ominous sight -- the last their would see of their 'idyllic' island, their life lost to a dream.



And so a return to a beginning, though in a later age,
with another beguiled potentate enamored
of a pretty numinous statue, its
provenance allusive
and occult.



Though by then the Minoan/Mycenaean
widow who became an Egyptian queen was
lost to the embroidered romance of legend!.