

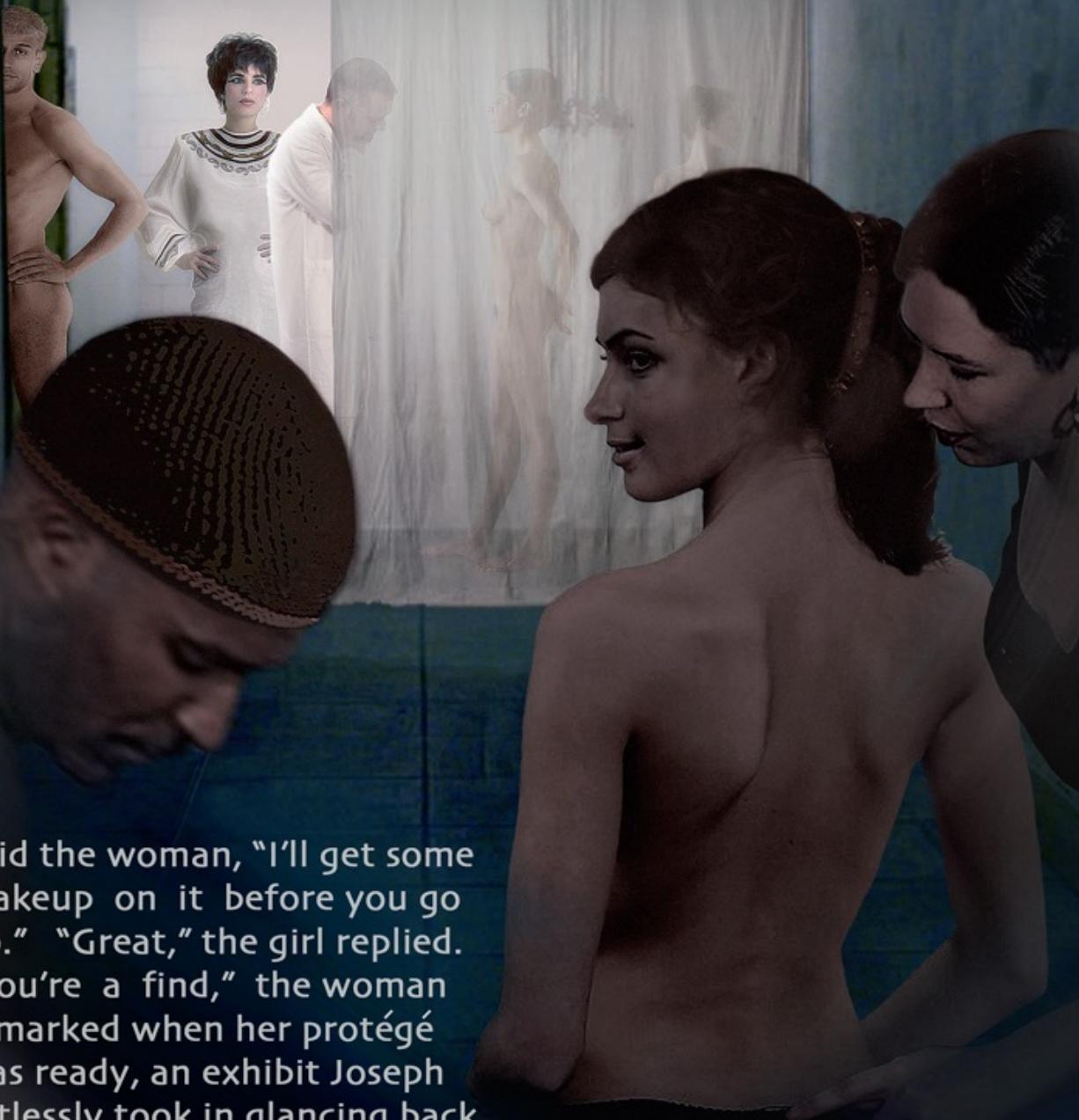
APSARA

*The
Myth
of the
Beauty
Myth*



WILLARD THURSTON

On first entering the production studio at Glow Worm Films, a BDSM den in Tarzana, California, Joseph Sall misinterpreted the instruction to the reception area and found himself in a dark hallway that ended in a bright room where the casting for a film was underway: two hopefuls stood before a man and stylish woman behind a shower curtain. In his confusion Joseph nearly ran into a girl in the shadowy light who waited her turn. An older woman noted a bruise on the girl's lower spine as she undressed and asked how sore it was. Glancing at Joseph, the girl said, "I'm fine, really." Joseph hung his head and moved off pretending indifference; he had never seen a prettier girl.



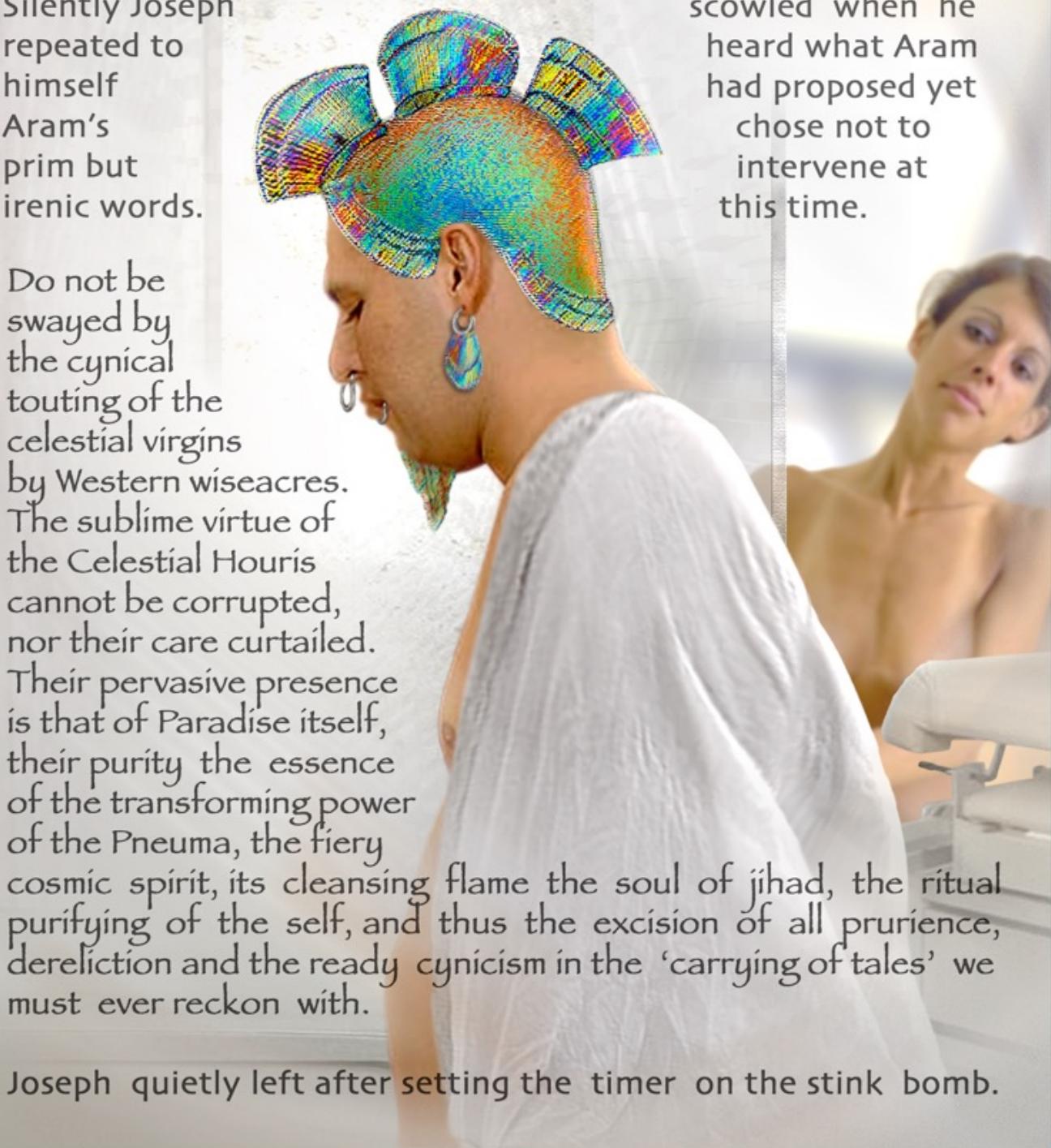
Said the woman, "I'll get some makeup on it before you go up." "Great," the girl replied. "You're a find," the woman remarked when her protégé was ready, an exhibit Joseph listlessly took in glancing back. The girl returned the look...her smile sickly he thought.

The porn actor that Joseph spied from the reception desk could also be semitic but was besotted by life in the West: strident multicolored hair (someone had boffed a peacock?), lip, nose and ear piercings, and a goatee contorted with elastic bands. What especially vexed was the pretty woman seated inside the studio. A more perfect Persian face he'd not seen. He then recalled the words of Aram Mir, their cell's new tactician who, he suspected, had his own treasured reading of the Hadith and a Salafi's disgust with sensual indulgence and cosmopolitan mannerism. He had said, more than once, that jihad was a life struggle against iniquity and acedia, not a fast tack to a feast.

Silently Joseph
repeated to
himself
Aram's
prim but
irenic words.

Do not be swayed by the cynical touting of the celestial virgins by Western wiseacres. The sublime virtue of the Celestial Houris cannot be corrupted, nor their care curtailed. Their pervasive presence is that of Paradise itself, their purity the essence of the transforming power of the Pneuma, the fiery cosmic spirit, its cleansing flame the soul of jihad, the ritual purifying of the self, and thus the excisión of all prurience, dereliction and the ready cynicism in the 'carrying of tales' we must ever reckon with.

The venerable sheikh scowled when he heard what Aram had proposed yet chose not to intervene at this time.

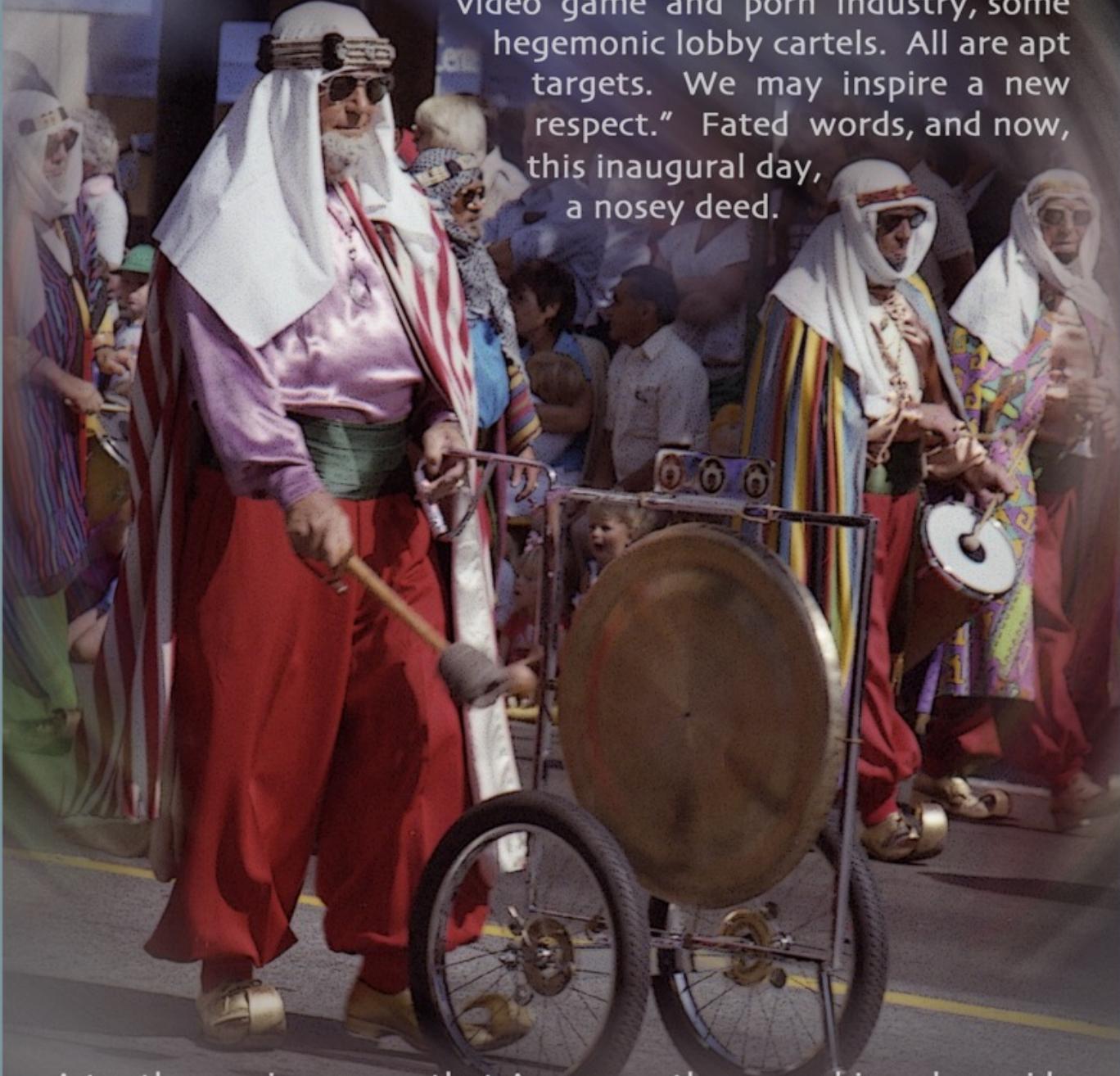


Joseph quietly left after setting the timer on the stink bomb.

The stench bombing of the film studio at Glow Worm Films was belatedly attributed to 'backfire material', there being dramatic gas complications before. At first the culprit or culprits were thought to be deranged Americans; enough there to go around. But when an obscure terrorist group called Shaheed took responsibility, the media sought explanations from security experts while convening debates about freedom being a cherished value -- in a frequently normless society that lacked consensus on what freedom embodied. Many libertarians re-minded one and all that being judgmental was in essence a trap, a fixation of right wing Neanderthals. A few career 'brown baggers' were less vexed and likely comprised an empathic constituency. A 'rye head' was quoted in a red neck bar in Clinton Indiana: "You'd think the assaholas mighta done this before and saved us connasirs a lot of piss ass tickies. Jees, the flics those deli wonders make are the shittiest around." Later that night, a boyfriend of a hooter waitress who starred in one of the flics punched the critic's porch light out but good.

When Hejaz, a Sunni Islamist, read about the bombing of Glow Worm Films, he knew that the wily

Mr. Big'n Tall Shop Ltd. Aram, their cell's leader, had prevailed, the targets approved by the mosque's Elders -- his way of dividing Americans against themselves. "Many Americans hate their topical culture nearly as much as we do. Stinking up their truant institutions may recruit us a sympathetic constituency. The derelict credit organs, the ponsy hustlers, the lurid video game and porn industry, some hegemonic lobby cartels. All are apt targets. We may inspire a new respect." Fated words, and now, this inaugural day, a nosey deed.

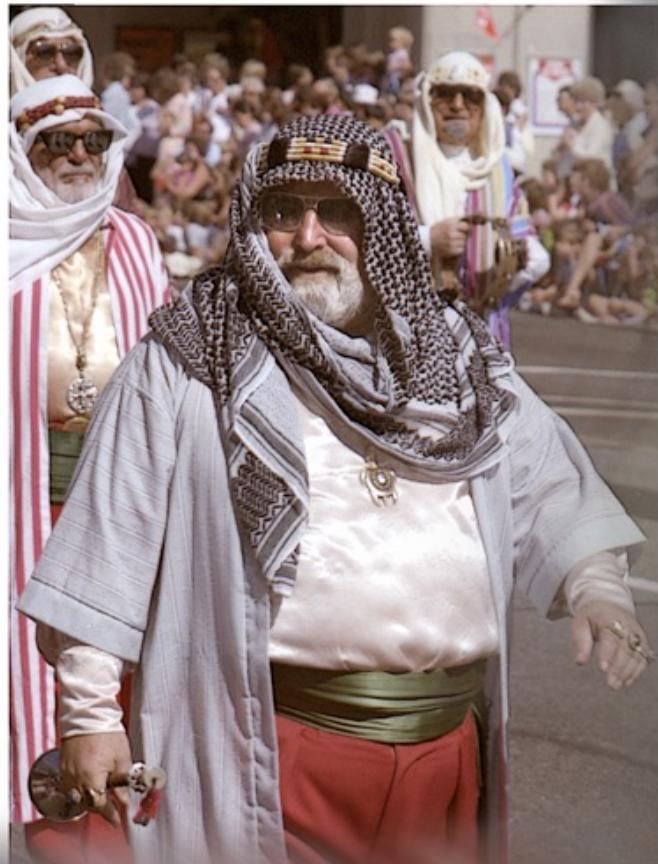


A toothsome irony was that Aram was then marching along side the Shriners -- in one of his many clown guises -- in a parade in Canada. Consorting with The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine...he another Big & Tall pantaloon.

Catherine Whyte, a newly honored journalist at the American Broadcast Network, read about the stink bombing of Glow Worm Films on an overdue holiday in Vancouver, Canada. The story was still vivid in her mind as she watched the Pacific National Exhibition Parade -- a nostalgic festivity of her youth.



This day the Shriner marchers incited a novel wonder. Western butter and egg men dressed up as Muslim potentates struck her as finely droll. The Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the the Mystic Shrine -- at home in the land of the Great Satan!



But she had more than jovial pantaloons to contend with these days. Her recent expulsion from the Russian Federation, despite her current celebrity, was becoming a nomadic adventure!

OO

FALL
PREVIEW
October 2009

Catherine
Whyte

Moscow Dynos

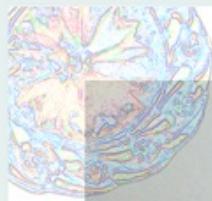
Russian
Mafiya Moguls

Raki on Raki

David Piper
RUSH LIMBAUGH
Conservative Mooner

Nancy Cole
Streams in the Desert

The picture cover of OO Magazine she sent to her
sainted mother, with a note: *Other voices, other rooms...*



@ Catherine Aglaea Whyte

ABN CSCE Bureau
Box 5579ID, Moscow
APR/Reuter Affiliate

Absit invidia
Aequitas sequitar
legem

American Broadcast Network@

Ministry of the Interior of the Russian Federation

3047 Piatagorsk Prospect, Yasenevo, Russia 30079A

August 15, 2002

Howard McLean, Secretary of Legation
The World Health Organization
Pharmacology Standards Council
New York, N.Y. 10017

Dear Mr, McLean:

It is with great regret that I must inform you of the recent expulsion of an ABN journalist, one Catherine Aglaea Whyte, who has been a guest of the Russian Federation for five years and made extensive use of her former liaison with your office to seek and acquire precept information in contravention of Section 515B Subsection 12, A and B, of the Business and Trade Practices Protocols which were so recently enacted

The gist of the letter that neyted any chance of her staying on was that she was too resourceful in finding the contract paper trail of 'Bossy' Borozov, then a secretary to a sitting member of the Duma. An unforgivable deed in the Modern CIS. But the expulsion came too late, her find too sensational to be shelved, a scoop that would put her on the cover of OO Magazine!

OO: What interested you in Russian mobster 'Bossy' Borozov? 8

WHYTE: The mutation of a KGB stalwart into a shill for Western-style capitalism.

OO: You're alluding to the business empire he assembled?

WHYTE: Empire yes. About two billion in just over five years. In part, it's said, by selling off precious metals from the former Soviet Union's industrial cities.

OO: He's now in prison, many believe, because of your exposé of his baby food scam.

WHYTE: He's in prison because he murdered a prosecutor who happened to be the protégé of a rival mob; in short, he pulled rank.

OO: Are you at all anxious for your own safety now?

WHYTE: My work merely confirmed what has now become all too apparent, such that he's shunned by his peers, who don't want more publicity right now.

OO: His brother 'Kissy' is less impetuous, is he not?

WHYTE: And from all accounts -- having a ball.

OO: Why do they call Kissy the Maenad? That's a term from ancient Greek mythology, referring to a fierce orgiastic woman who reputedly killed animals and children.

WHYTE: They say he's hard on dolts and naifs, the metaphorical equivalent, for the charitably disposed, of animals and children.

OO: An obsessive human, then.

WHYTE: No, he's a creature, clever and assured. Like his brother, I don't think his humanity gets in the way at all.

As Aram Mir waited for cautious Abdul to make a move (they played an ancient board in South Los Angeles) he recalled the story of one Catherine Whyte, an ABN reporter featured in OO Magazine who outed a food scam in Belarus. Young Catherine -- one must not be diffident here -- had ably and courageously fingered Russian crime don 'Bossy' Borozov, half brother to the more enigmatic 'Kissy', for selling nutrient scant baby formula; 'inadvertently' Bossy claimed. Aram was impressed by the courage of the journalist. A keen reminder of the protean energy in the West, freedom itself being an awesome formidable tart. You could make a mess of your life with no effort at all in Her thrall! A lure that had infected one of their own -- the goatish Ammon Farouk -- an Islamist who had slighted his calling by becoming obsessed with a dancer at London's Apsara club, a malevolent jinn he mulishly claimed. Abdul then surprised Aram with an ethereal question.

ABDUL: You ever imagine the world -- in a grain of sand?

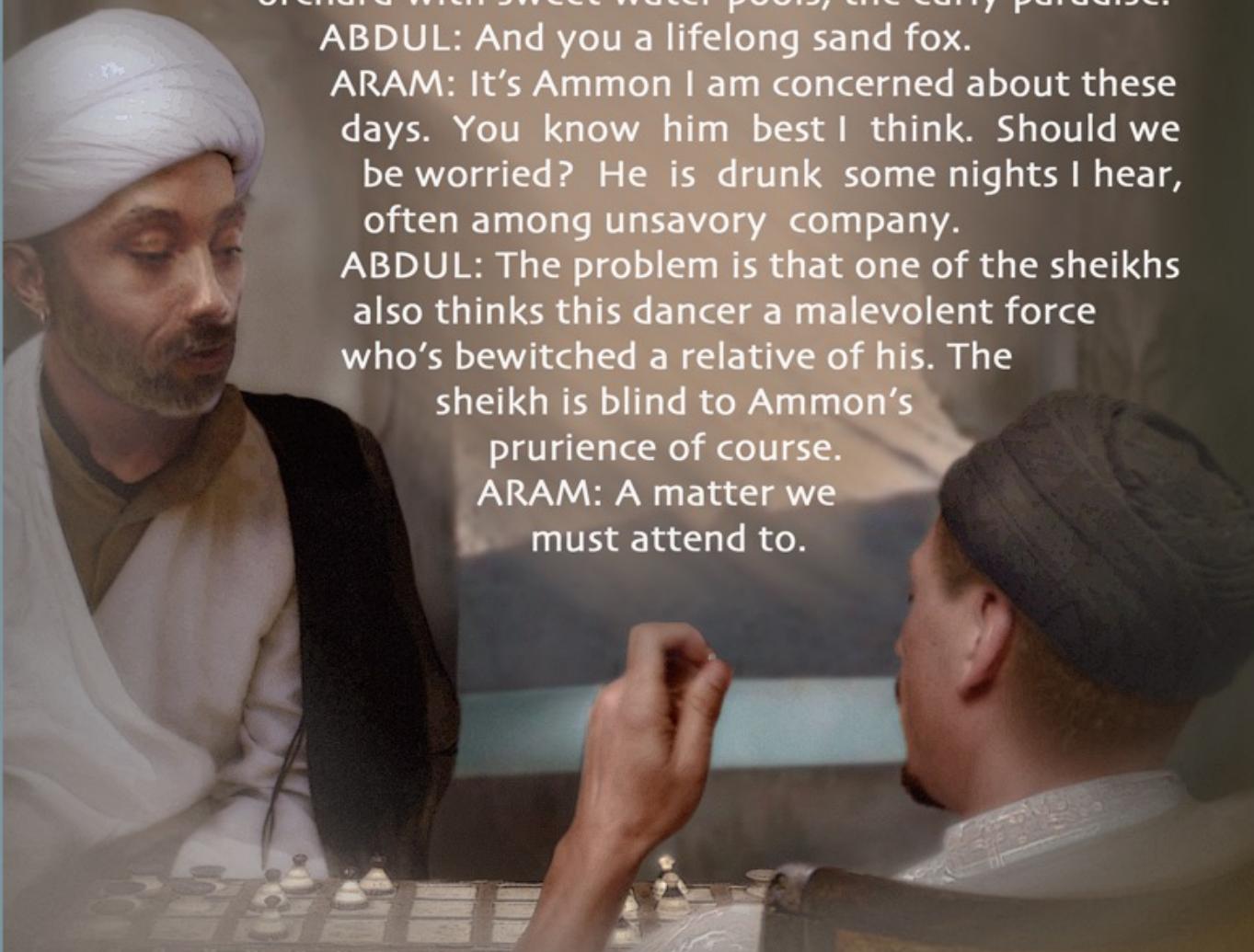
ARAM: A grain of salt, maybe; I sometimes think of an orchard with sweet water pools, the early paradise.

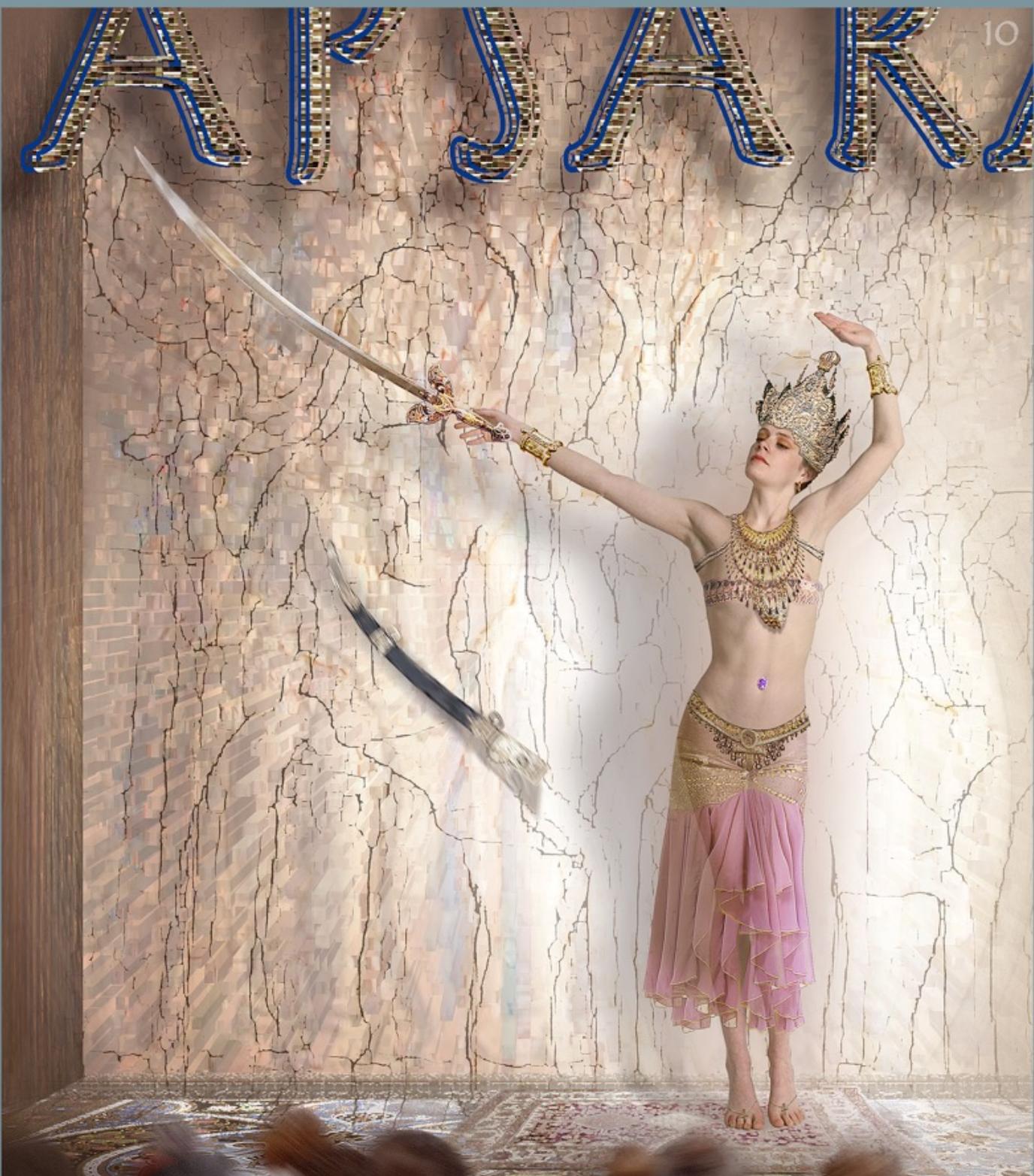
ABDUL: And you a lifelong sand fox.

ARAM: It's Ammon I am concerned about these days. You know him best I think. Should we be worried? He is drunk some nights I hear, often among unsavory company.

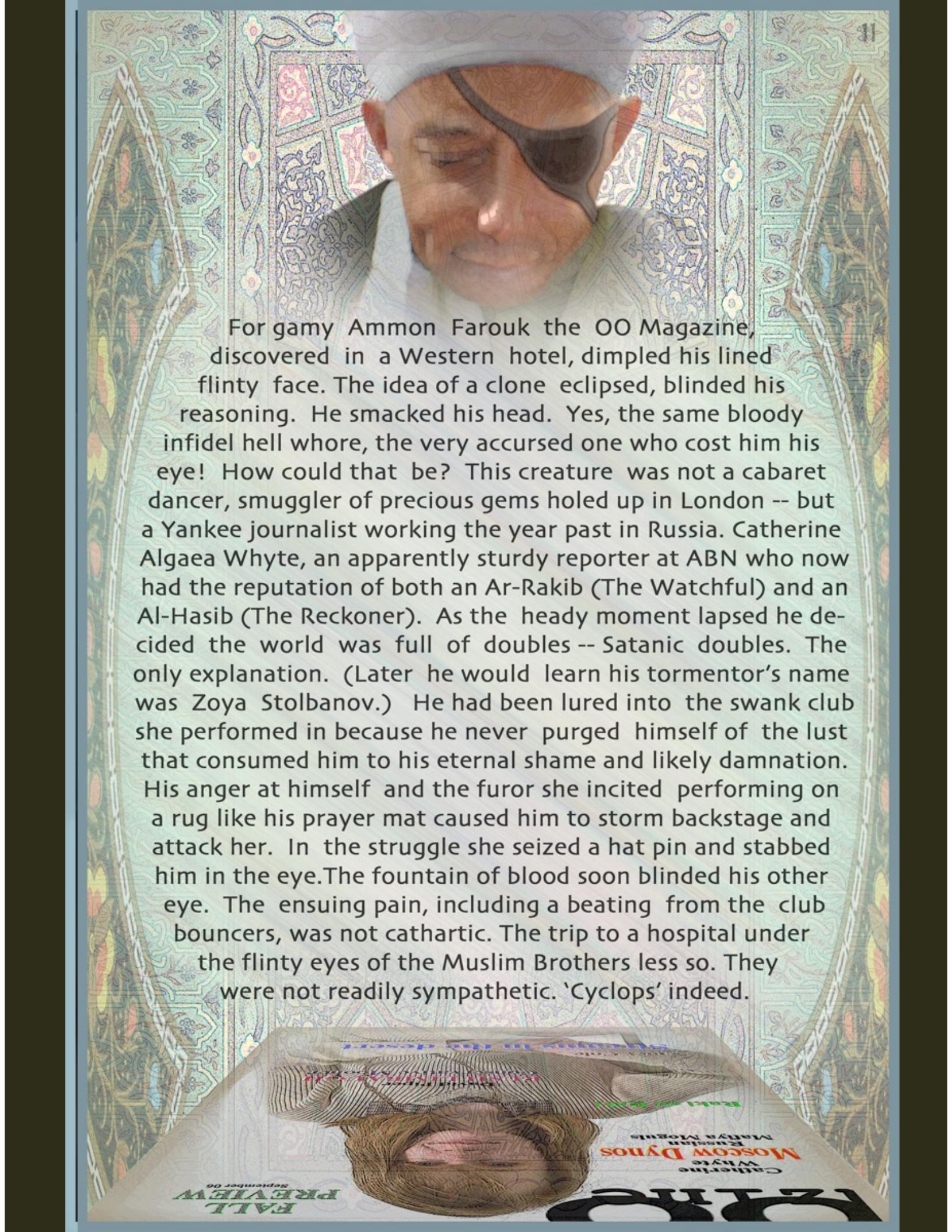
ABDUL: The problem is that one of the sheikhs also thinks this dancer a malevolent force who's bewitched a relative of his. The sheikh is blind to Ammon's prurience of course.

ARAM: A matter we must attend to.



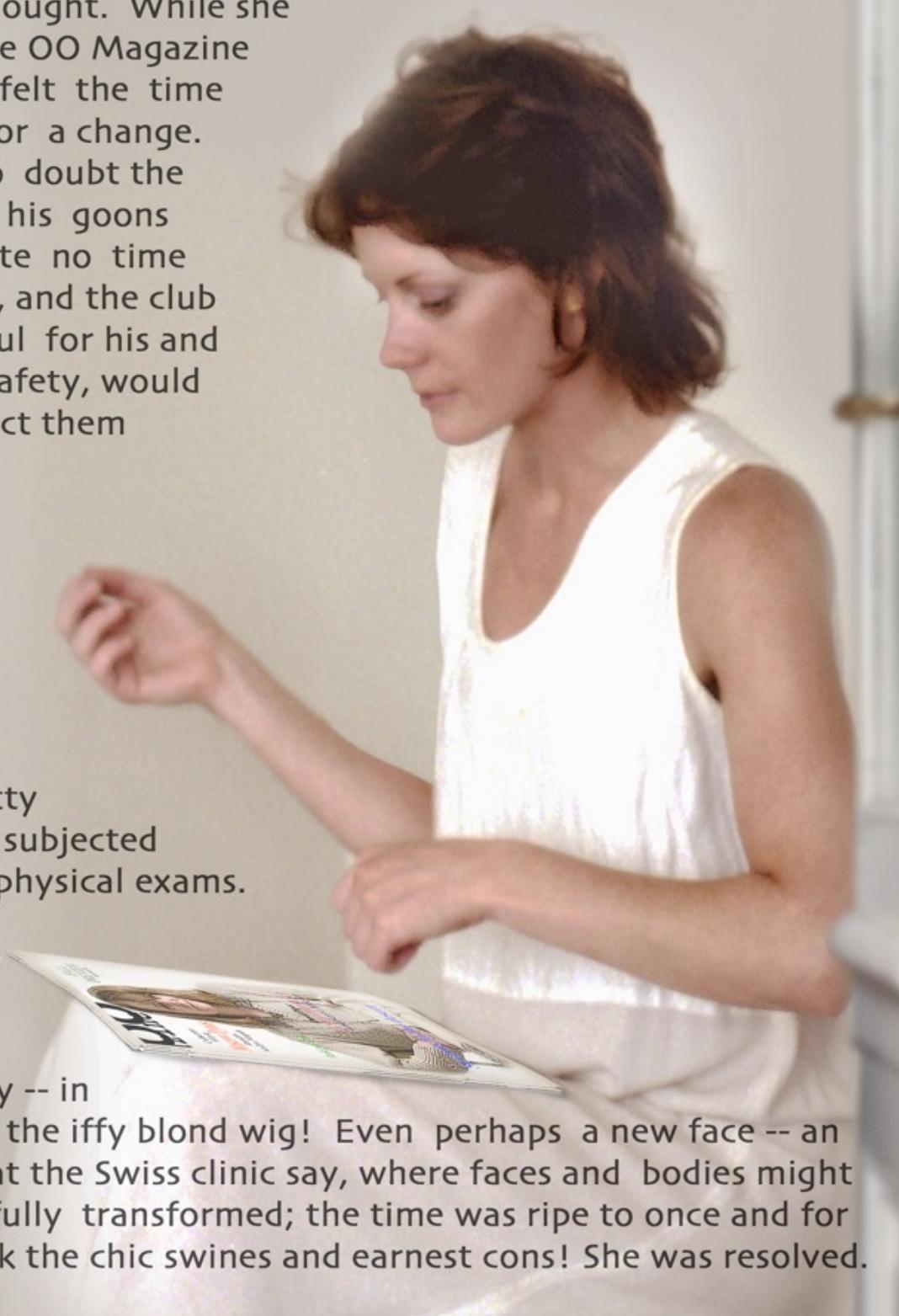


Ammon Farouk attended London's Apsara club under the name of Felix Dorfman; he had a reputation to consider. There he fell under the spell of a Devi who performed in a temple costume that kept the voyeurs diligently alert. His lust was compounded by the fact that she danced with an Arabian looking sword on a rug that resembled his prayer mat! It was then he decided to rid himself and the world of this jinn. After a cat and mouse game with the club bouncers, he found her in a wardrobe and would have strangled her had the phantom needle not appeared.



For gamy Ammon Farouk the OO Magazine, discovered in a Western hotel, dimpled his lined flinty face. The idea of a clone eclipsed, blinded his reasoning. He smacked his head. Yes, the same bloody infidel hell whore, the very accursed one who cost him his eye! How could that be? This creature was not a cabaret dancer, smuggler of precious gems holed up in London -- but a Yankee journalist working the year past in Russia. Catherine Algaea Whyte, an apparently sturdy reporter at ABN who now had the reputation of both an Ar-Rakib (The Watchful) and an Al-Hasib (The Reckoner). As the heady moment lapsed he decided the world was full of doubles -- Satanic doubles. The only explanation. (Later he would learn his tormentor's name was Zoya Stolbanov.) He had been lured into the swank club she performed in because he never purged himself of the lust that consumed him to his eternal shame and likely damnation. His anger at himself and the furor she incited performing on a rug like his prayer mat caused him to storm backstage and attack her. In the struggle she seized a hat pin and stabbed him in the eye. The fountain of blood soon blinded his other eye. The ensuing pain, including a beating from the club bouncers, was not cathartic. The trip to a hospital under the flinty eyes of the Muslim Brothers less so. They were not readily sympathetic. 'Cyclops' indeed.

Zoya Stolbanov saw the OO Magazine cover a week after the Muslim attacked her, a man she first thought a too enthusiastic admirer. Curiously, her performance the night before the assault received a standing ovation. She had not performed as expected, drawing instead on her balletic talent, to the boss's silent begrudging acceptance. Bidding on the costume, an Apsara rite, fetched a large five figure sum. The OO Magazine cover revived in her an ache to go to America. Providence had given her the hat pin she later thought. While she gazed at the OO Magazine cover, she felt the time was ripe for a change. She had no doubt the Islamist or his goons would waste no time finding her, and the club boss, fearful for his and the club's safety, would readily direct them to her. The boss was a swine; he once urged her to seek work on a 'gyno' site where pretty teens were subjected to abusive physical exams. It was time to find a new home and identity -- in addition to the iffy blond wig! Even perhaps a new face -- an alteration at the Swiss clinic say, where faces and bodies might be wonderfully transformed; the time was ripe to once and for all shuck the chic swines and earnest cons! She was resolved.





Weeks before the attack a group of 'fans' -- FSB heavies -- congratulated her on her fine performances at the Apsara but suggested she keep to the script -- don't let her dancing get too 'elitist'. She pretended flattery and requested a picture of her new 'fans', which came with the eyes blocked out by sunglasses! Days later,

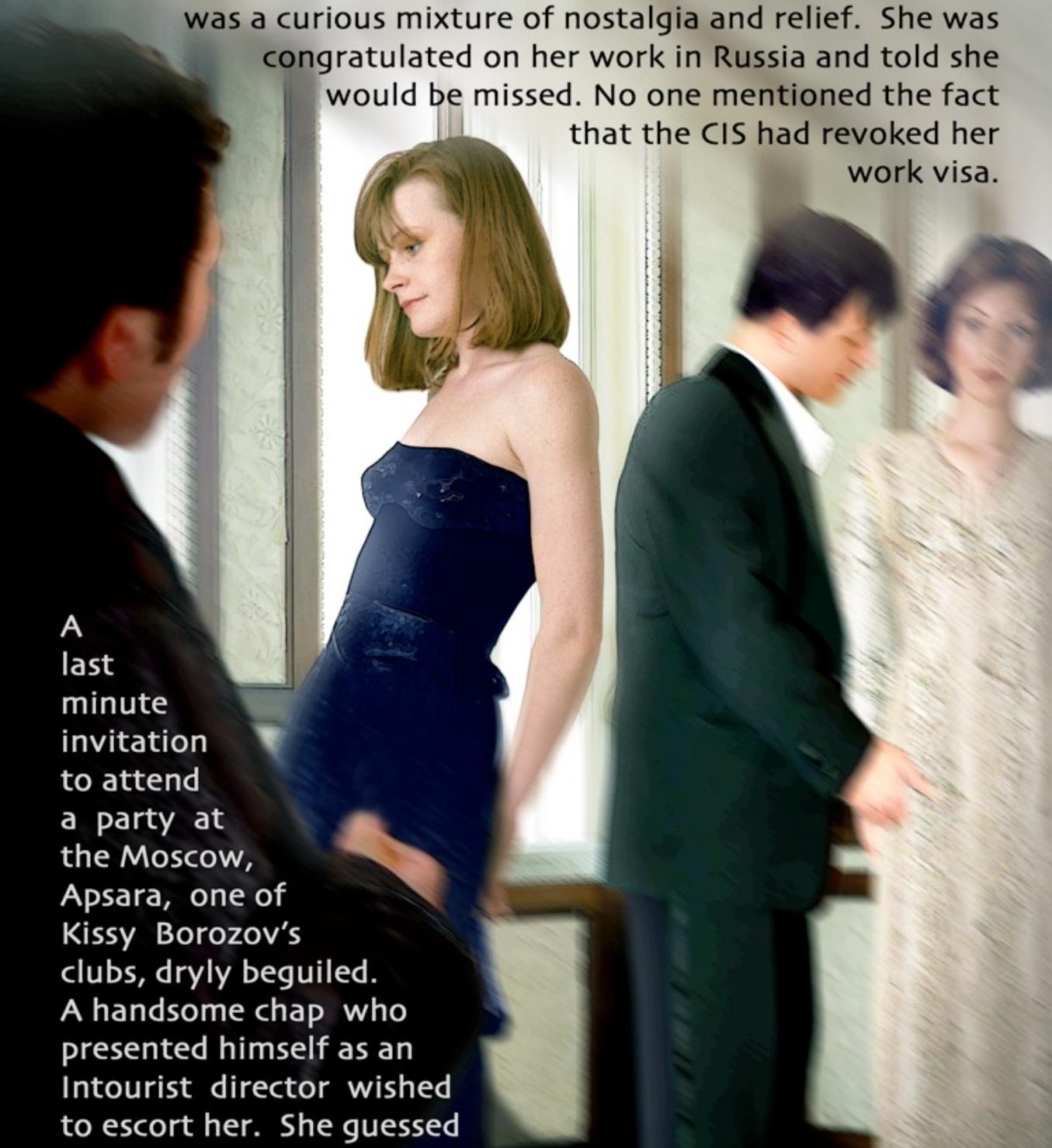
fashion photographer

Louis Führ asked to photograph her for a book he was assembling. His reputation she believed would absolve her resort to ballet maneuvers instead of the raw nautch dancing expected. When she disappeared after the attack, Führ was one of the first to be keenly questioned.

"What do you mean -- you don't know where she is now? You just photographed the cat!"



Catherine Whyte's last social evening at the American Embassy was a curious mixture of nostalgia and relief. She was congratulated on her work in Russia and told she would be missed. No one mentioned the fact that the CIS had revoked her work visa.

A photograph showing a woman with short brown hair, wearing a dark blue strapless dress, standing in a room. She is looking towards the right. In the background, there are other people, including a man in a dark suit and a woman in a light-colored dress.

A last minute invitation to attend a party at the Moscow, Apsara, one of Kissy Borozov's clubs, dryly beguiled. A handsome chap who presented himself as an Intourist director wished to escort her. She guessed him to be a Cheka sitter, which his self-absorbed manners and swank attire suggested. Several members of the embassy staff were also going, and encouraged her to join the party -- the type of entertainment she had shunned during her stay. She was told the club was the best in Moscow and featured some very pretty boys and girls. The tale of the assault in London by a vexed Muslim was then making the rounds. The dancer who was the object of the attack had disappeared, but the show in Moscow was no less memorable and invitations very scarce.



In one washroom of the Apsara the import of her current situation hit home: she was actually leaving -- had to leave -- a country she had endured a love-hate relation with for nearly five years.

It was then she noted what looked like a blood stain on the tile floor.

So. Another reckoning in this awesome Land of Long Nights?

It served to remind her of the ugly contretemps between the crazed Muslim and the Apsara dancer.

It seemed to be a recent stain.

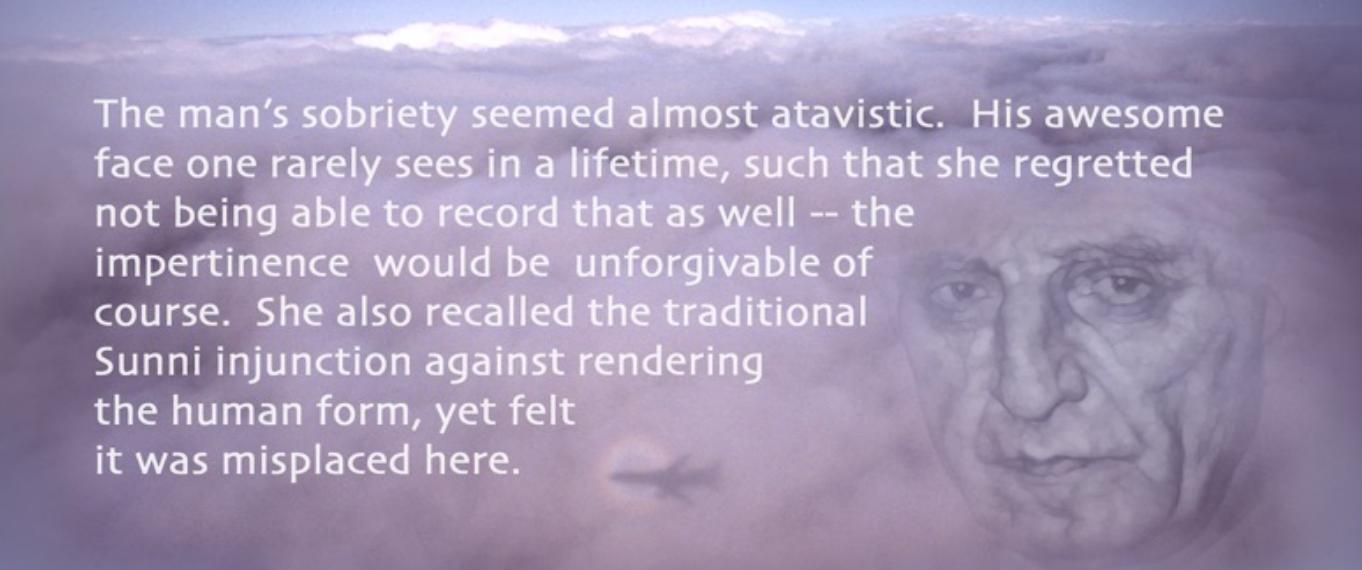
The inimical Zoya Stolbanov no longer performed at the racy clubs. Perhaps she too had ended a love-hate connection: the club's touting of both bawdiness and artistry. Catherine was amused she would have been invited to such a venue on her last night in Moscow. She knew she could be mistaken for the fabled Zoya and would have liked to meet her. It seemed this lone stain might be her one reminder of the late performer, who had so curiously (or fortuitously) disappeared. Catherine wondered if Borozov could be this sly in suggesting what fate awaited her -- wherever she might be. Zoya too had obviously taken an abrupt leave. So she believed...as she viewed the spot.

Some deeds have a long shelf life!

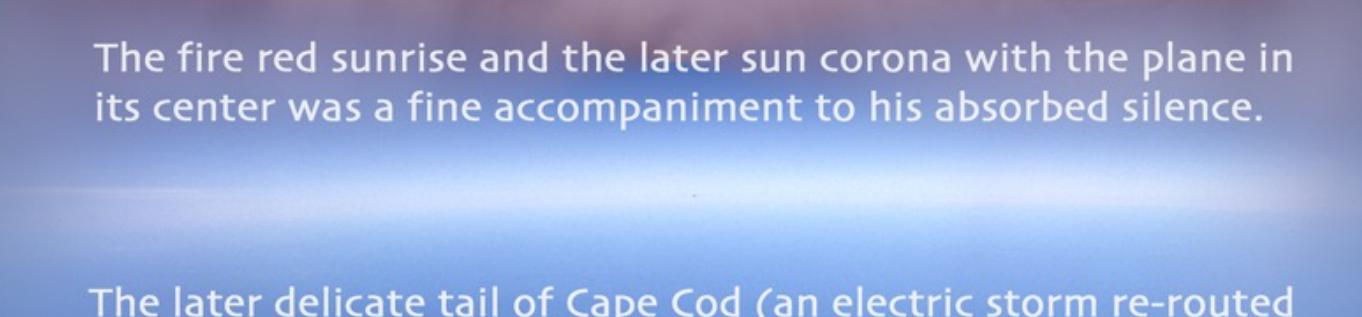
Catherine made good use of her window seat on her return trip, the pictures she took suggestive of a rebirth, a reclamation.



Her seat mate, a distinguished looking Arab, so she guessed, remained in a pensive abstracted state, only once glancing in her direction. A look she would remember for a long time. She did overhear, from a steward, that his first name was Kalid.



The man's sobriety seemed almost atavistic. His awesome face one rarely sees in a lifetime, such that she regretted not being able to record that as well -- the impertinence would be unforgivable of course. She also recalled the traditional Sunni injunction against rendering the human form, yet felt it was misplaced here.



The fire red sunrise and the later sun corona with the plane in its center was a fine accompaniment to his absorbed silence.



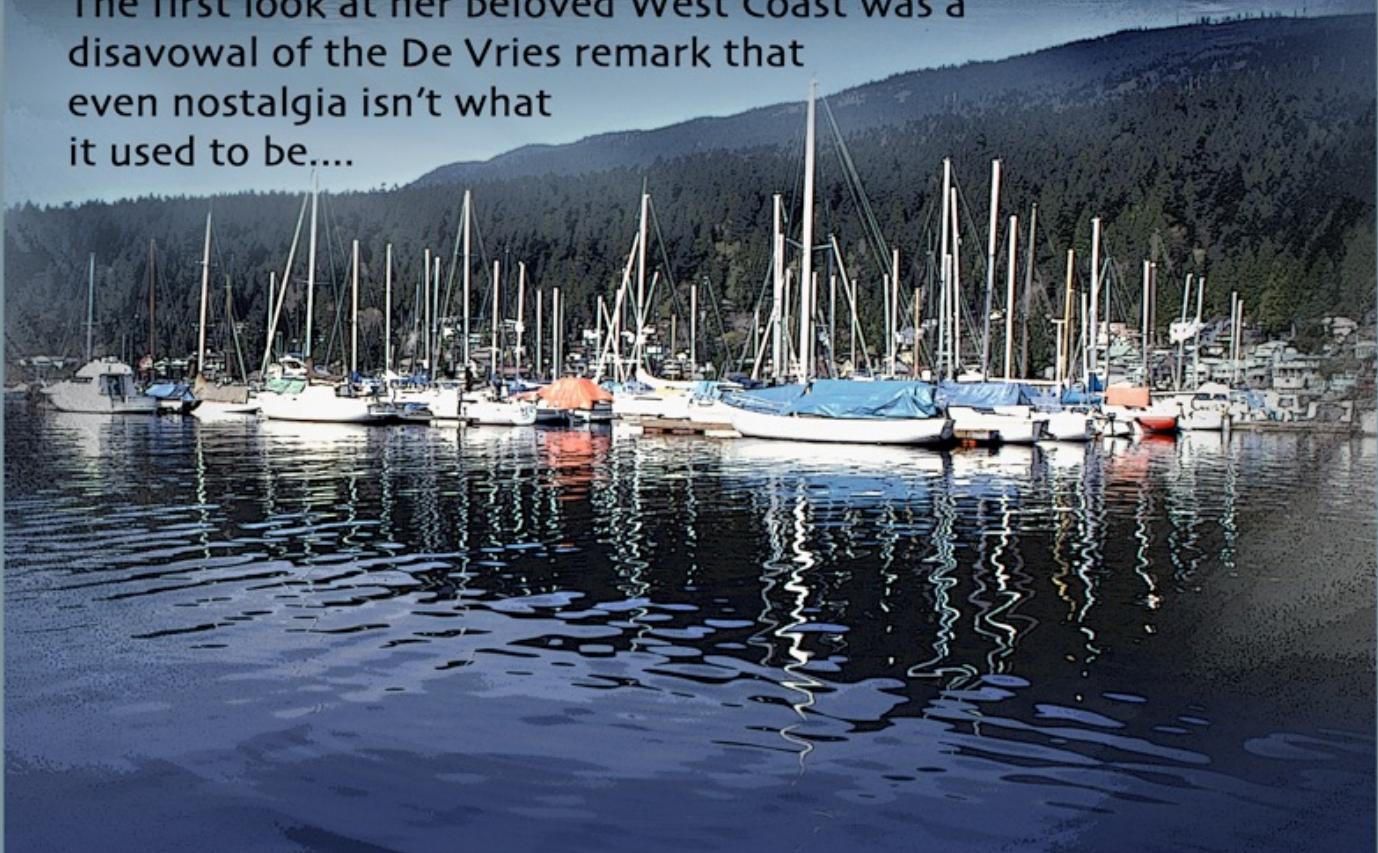
The later delicate tail of Cape Cod (an electric storm re-routed the descent) suggested that perception was often a matter of distance -- the ready eye of the beholder.



Also a dulcet reminder that she was at last 'coming home'.



The first look at her beloved West Coast was a disavowal of the De Vries remark that even nostalgia isn't what it used to be....

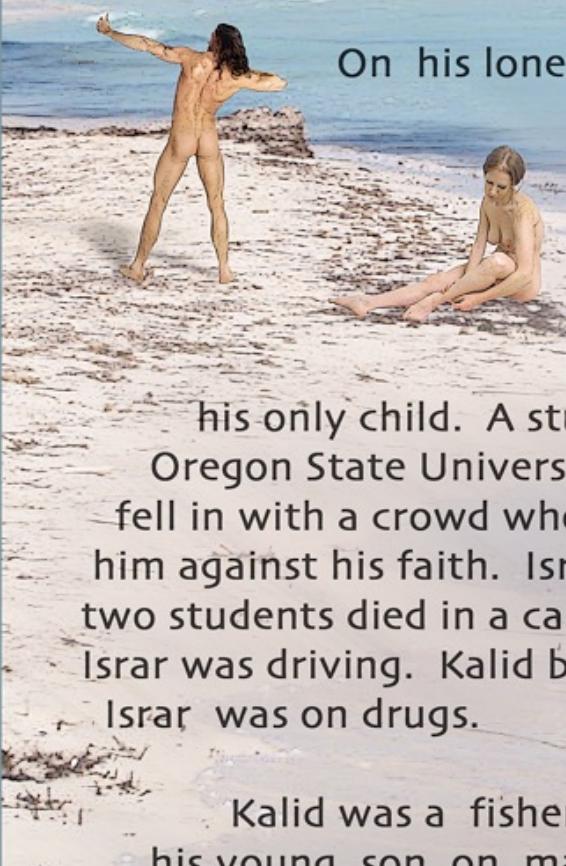




So: a vacation without stint,
a keen mind almost besotted
with the prospect.
A passerby takes pictures with her
service camera.
He fails to pick her up.

The pictures afforded no cut out (spy) potential. So she hoped. Her editor at ABN was a cozy realist: "Bossy has a lot of pending charges. I wouldn't go back though."

Catherine's well habituated caution was a curiosity in luck fraught America, this providential experiment, this benign nation with little festering history. So. A land she loved now harboring a daring gadfly, who badly wanted to wash away her anxiety in the waters off the Oregon coast -- the haunt of her youth, when 'care free'.



On his lone trip to the United States, to identify the body of his son and bring him back to Lebanon, Kalid took a look at the country that poisoned

his only child. A student at Oregon State University, Israr fell in with a crowd who turned him against his faith. Israr and two students died in a car crash; Israr was driving. Kalid believed Israr was on drugs.



Kalid was a fisherman who took his young son on many trips throughout the Mediterranean. The section of Oregon coast Israr apparently liked (from his few spare letters) turned out to be a nude beach. A young woman who likely did not see him rose, removed her suit and entered the water. He believed it was the woman who sat beside him on the plane. Slender, enticing, a jinn of desire. He was further vexed that she appeared to be a good swimmer and as pretty a youngster as he'd seen in the flesh. He found

he disliked her as much for his despondency as his anger.

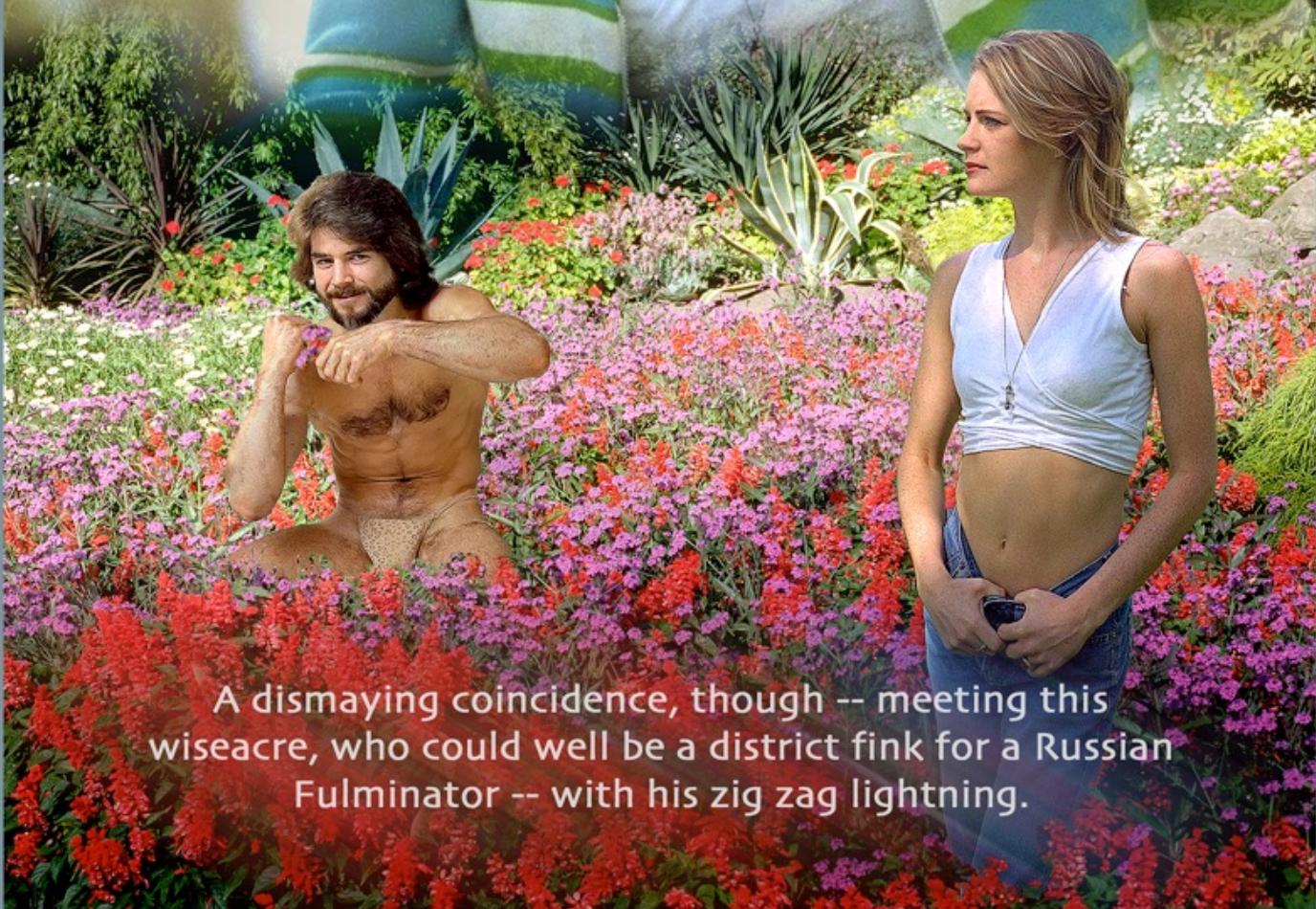
Suddenly she dived into a snow crested wave to emerge further out, a bit of flotsam idling in a trough, except for her laughter, as carefree as he might imagine. Laughter only

a Circe might vent. Once more, as of late, he found he had trouble breathing. Such a beautiful coastline; with such forsaken debris washed up on it.

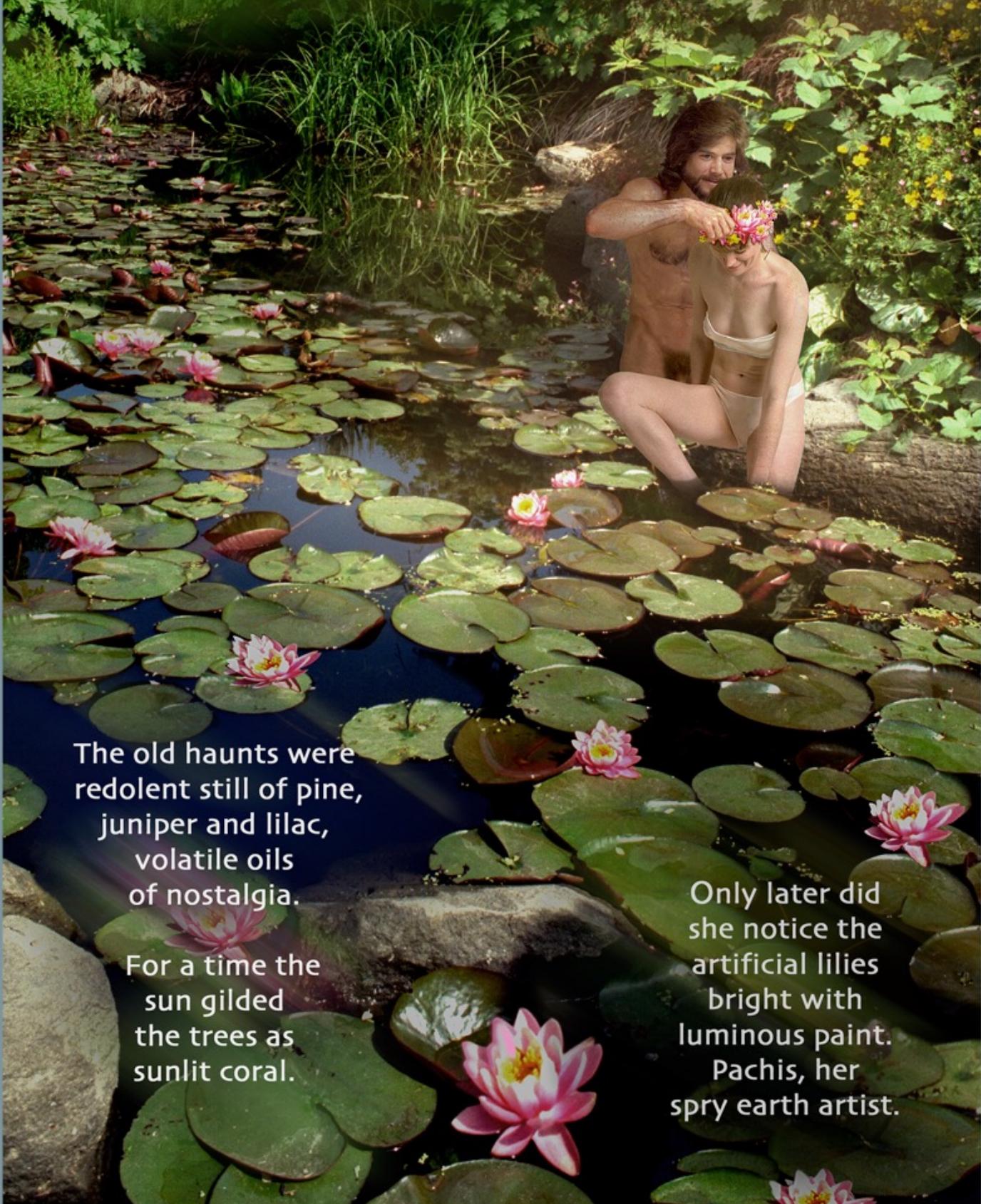


On returning to the 'rain forest', a wry discovery in this land of Nod -- a sudden encounter eye to eye with an old high school pal: practiced truant, siren wrangler and gamy friend by name of Pachis. A reminder that life continued unabated.

Pachis, she recalled, was a special kind of faun, a campy goat who might nibble lady's slippers or salvia, a naturist of the new school.



She was dressed and about to leave when he asked her to come to the lily pond. "Once our inner sanctum, yes?" His gamy anticipation vied with her laden suspicion. Was he really just a pawn she wondered? An incidentally lucky bystander as well as a promising painter? She almost didn't go. In no time he had most of her clothes off and a flower chaplet in her hair.



The old haunts were
redolent still of pine,
juniper and lilac,
volatile oils
of nostalgia.

For a time the
sun gilded
the trees as
sunlit coral.

Only later did
she notice the
artificial lilies
bright with
luminous paint.
Pachis, her
spry earth artist.

Of late Kissy Borozov was revisiting the stories of plucky females. He had long fancied the art of ancient Egypt and had a bust crafted after the Berlin Museum Nefertiti. If he thought the phrase 'having a ball' rather cheeky coming from a digger like Catherine Whyte, her intimation of 'Maenad' -- hard on 'dolts and naifs' -- struck a nerve. A smart ass in Bossy's circle invoked the name when Bossy called Kissy a 'silly hysterical cunt' -- apropos Kissy's love of fashion, the arts, Chekov and Pushin -- all pussy pursuits for the tycoons then lording it in post-Soviet Russia. Kissy the Maenad. The snickers lingered. Realpolitik. Enamoured of coercive power -- so haunting in the bust of Nefertiti, the Sun God's Best Wife. The power of insular hauteur. Did Ms. Whyte harbour the spirit of such a queen, her courage and daring? A question to ransack the imagination.

Perhaps, if she had not been
so disarmingly there...a
Lyudmila in the flesh.

*Love languished, the muse appeared,
the welter of mind saw clarity anew;
now free, to once more weave together
emotion, thought, and magic sound.*

Kissy wondered if Pushkin ever mused
how the only thing to survive the harsh
Amarna period was its sumptuous art!

Before leaving they revisited the secluded pond off the Thetis Lagoon. There she learned he had received a Fischer-Pritt grant to illustrate a book about the myth of Nitocris, a Minoan aristocrat who becomes an Egyptian queen. 23

HE: A Minoan aristo seized by a pirate sold into slavery yet kept on trucking. I need a spiffy model.

SHE: Sorry, no Minoan genes. No blue blood either.

HE: You're a great dame; have been all along.

SHE: Tell me more about this 'providential' grant.



HE: Little to tell. Applied for a grant. Got a grant.

SHE: The idea for a book came from where, whom?

HE: A tender was posted at the FP Foundation. The grant's awarded by a jury.

SHE: You actually know folks at the Foundation?

HE: Only the chap who awarded the contract.

SHE: Who has a name?

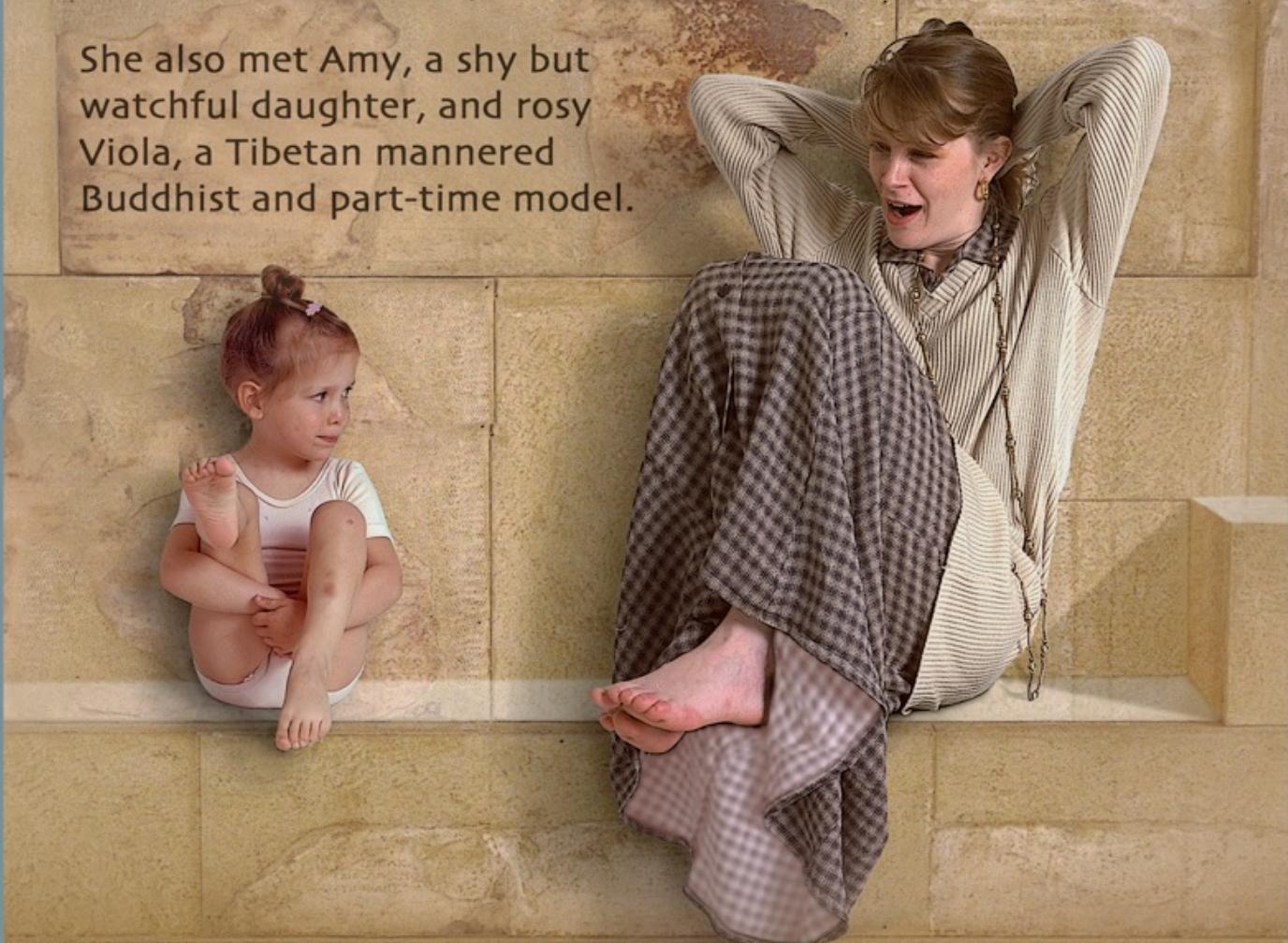
HE: -- Ganyanov, Viktor.

What she silently tried to reconcile was that the Fischer-Pritt Foundation was one of Kissy's art fronts which, in addition to several galleries and a clan of artists, included period furniture and glass blowing factories, plus cabaret show lounges called Apsaras. All Trojan horses she believed. A means to mollify limp authorities, distract the competitors. Viktor Ganyanov was an unknown. Yet she decided she dare not reveal her knowledge of this. At least not yet. The revelation would take a while to assimilate -- to what extent Pachis might be a zone player -- an art 'what is' in need of verification. "Come to my studio and see for yourself," said he. She faintly smiled. "A possibility," said she.

The next day she came to the atelier to see the new work: a series of paintings entitled *Musing the Maenad*. About what she expected, knowing the faun's predilection. Yet she was surprised by the sumptuous detail.

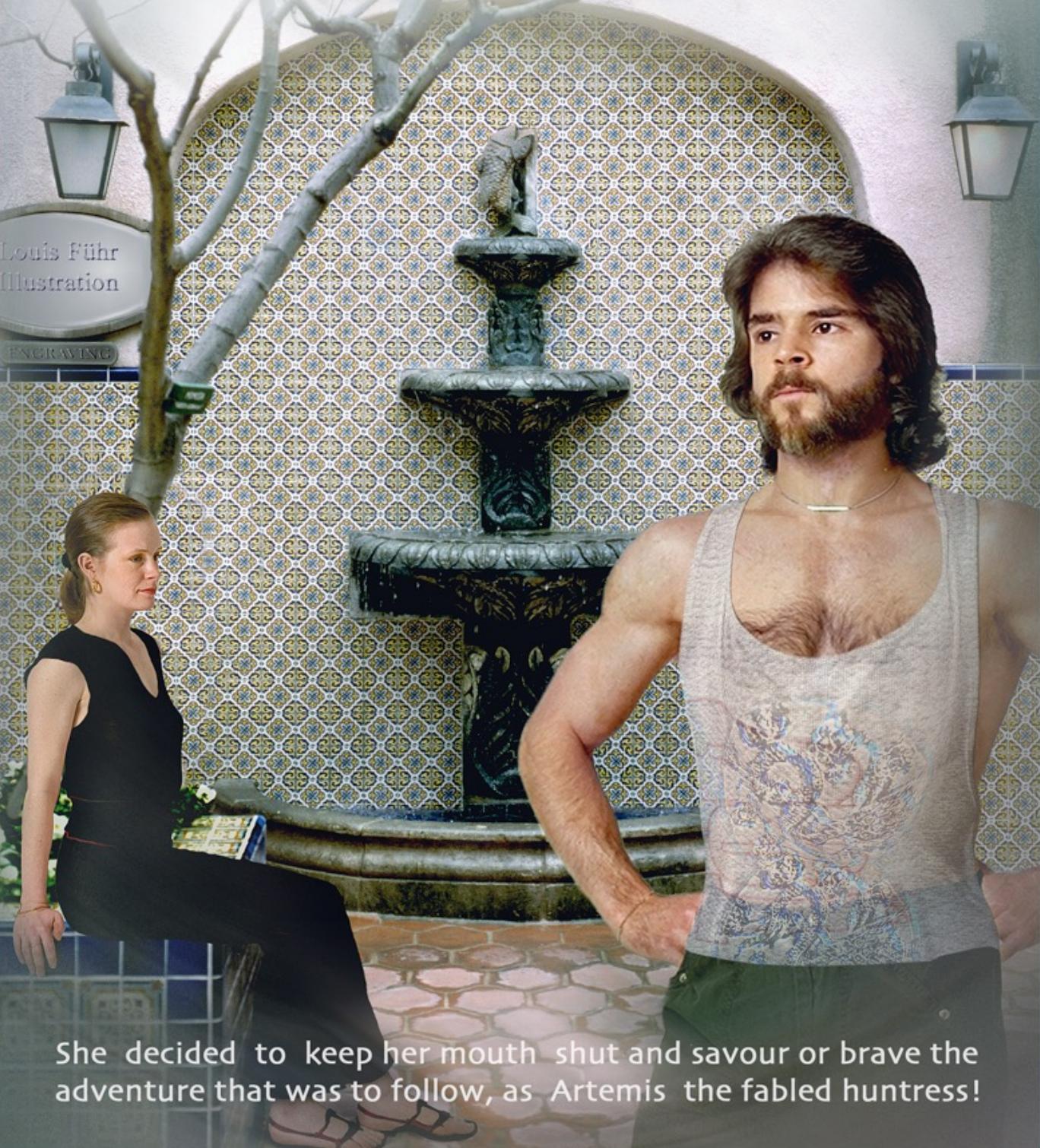


She also met Amy, a shy but watchful daughter, and rosy Viola, a Tibetan mannered Buddhist and part-time model.

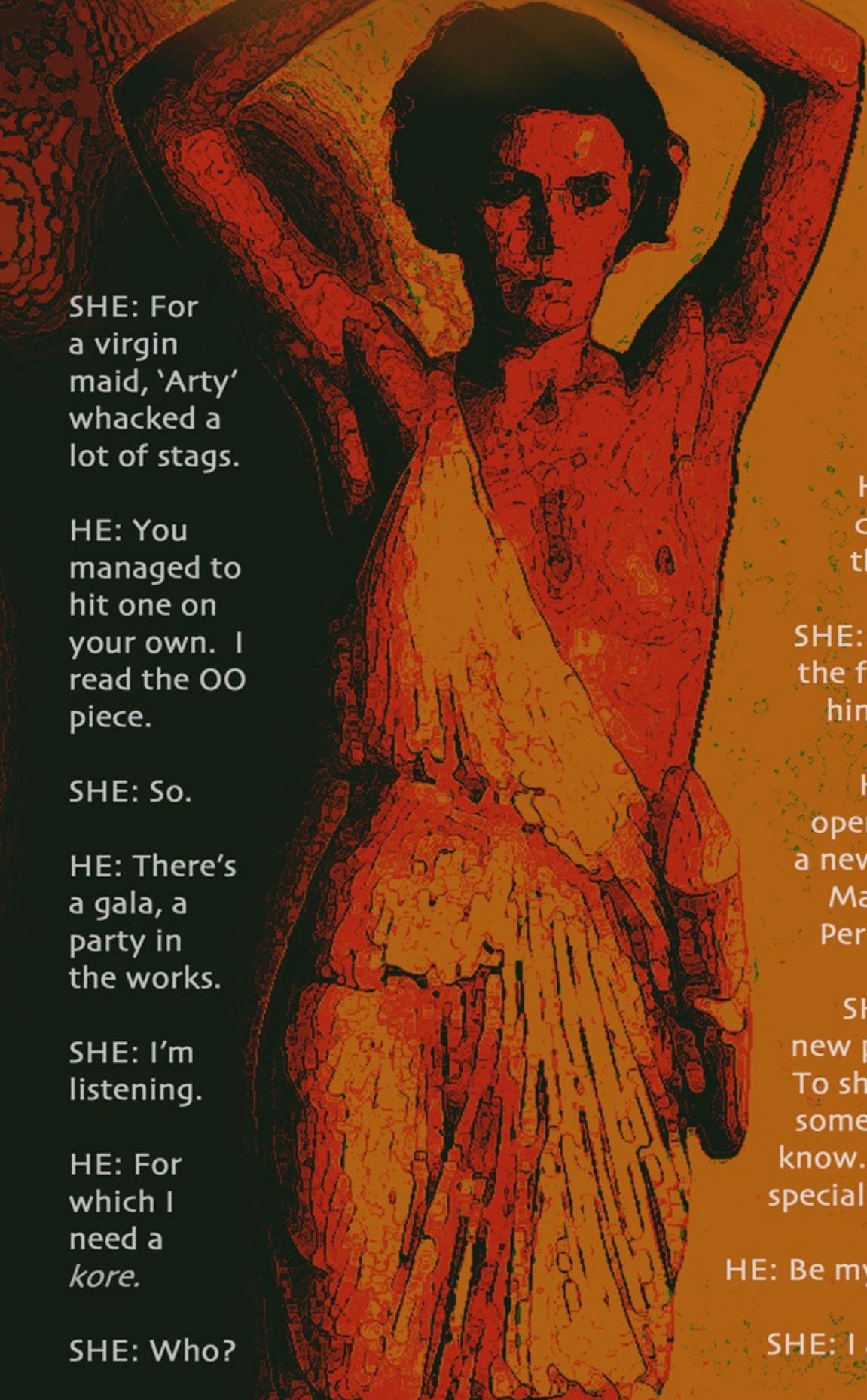


Amy did not like Viola, and promptly began aping the posture and attitude of the newcomer, who appeared amused by it all.

When Amy took her rest they talked on the patio. She sought news of the foundation and his commission, a query he curtly deflected by wanting to do a portrait of her Castellan side: how one survives a Maenad, he said. Again she decided to be duly patient. In no time he found a dress and patrician pose, then disparaged the light: "Too soft, flat for a catbird." He added, with a wink, "But not a mythic beauty, a Diana á la biche, or an Artemis, an Artemis, yes." She joined in by asking, "Why the name, Louis Führ -- on the shingle behind?" "I share a studio sometimes," he said wanly, adding, "Artemis --bloody obvious!"



Again a costume was fetched and a sketch briskly begun -- in a Greek red clay mode -- her curiosity feeding complaint: she might ask some pointed questions looking like a venerable tart.



SHE: For
a virgin
maid, 'Arty'
whacked a
lot of stags.

HE: You
managed to
hit one on
your own. I
read the OO
piece.

SHE: So.

HE: There's
a gala, a
party in
the works.

SHE: I'm
listening.

HE: For
which I
need a
kore.

SHE: Who?

HE: A
sylph.

SHE: A
dime a
dozen.

HE: You
can look
the part.

SHE: What's
the fête you
hinted at?

HE: The
opening of
a new salon:
Mannered
Period Art.

SHE: The
new patron?
To showcase
someone we
know...I get a
special invite?

HE: Be my guest.

SHE: I accept.

She insisted on having a peek, saying, "Artemis would not hang back, neglect a special hind." He managed a patient smile. Mythological smarts -- not his metier.

SHE: Pachis, love, how fly -- Artemis as a nautch dancer! A quiver but no arrows or bow. How will she ever bump off a Maenad, exactly?...

HE: Just what snotty old Ambrosia wondered. (He had no idea who Ambrosia was but was desperate.)

SHE: The nymph who owned a liquor store?

HE: It worked out nicely in the past.

SHE: Poor old past it snotty.



Still, the beauty of the work gave her pause. Kissy Borozov funding such art didn't fit her image of the Calydonian Boar, a beast in one Artemis' adventure, not unlike the younger Borozov who, like the Boar, despoiled his country with great feral voraciousness.

Bossy's message from prison was blunt. Felik, the older of the Vyak twins, sought Kissy out at his Egyptian styled dacha. The encounter left Kissy awash, struggling to avoid being sea sick.

FELIK: No mistake. B. wants the Whyte bird waxed.

KISSY: Well, for all intents and purposes...

FELIK: 'Intents'? She's a bad act. Curtains. ASAP.

KISSY: Well now, a demise will set the press alight, an accident may leave her more time to write. The options are limited given B.'s 'liquorice' laundry'.

FELIK: It's been 'suggested' you do something with the artist she's living with. He's got an FP grant and she's keen to learn what's happening state-side -- we know this from a secretary at ABN.

Reputation, remember, is her ace. We can deal with that. Bug the guy's place, get some racy photos and mask her into Senator Chuckie Warren's hot tub with his tarts. She'll be stiffed at kosher ABN. She's leaned on Warren for a while to reveal his dealings here with Gazprom. B. likes the idea. It's a good start.

KISSY: A tall order; she's no dunce.

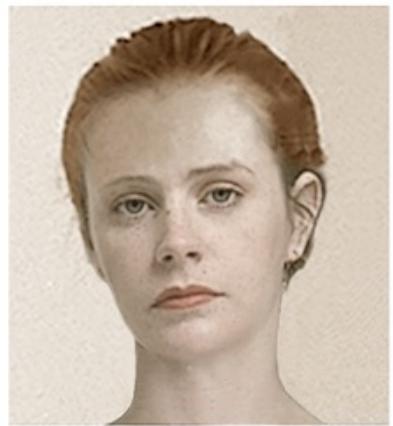
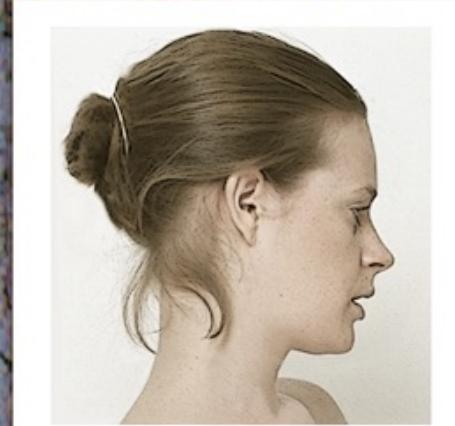
FELIK: You are known for finesse.

When Felik left, Kissy made himself a very stiff drink. The fact was the 'Whyte bird' was a paragon for him, who fleshed out the Delphic dictum of 'nothing in excess', a rarity given the age's excessive illusions. Well, he had his work cut out for him. He would be 'playing a long hand' as the Brits say: allotting the finesse. Though he guessed withholding the FP grant was B.'s ace in the hole.





B.'s 'behest' was a face off. It was the mug shots of Ms. Whyte taken at a border post that cued Kissy's ardor and imagination. Such a profile he had seen before. Yes, the Akrotiri painting -- the very one! The Minoan age had a special place in his regard of civilization and able women in particular, given the confident outgoing way they were depicted in Minoan art. The idea of a gracile bull vaulter, likely an aristocrat, cued both wonder and awe. And now the suggestion of an atavistic double! He decided he must add to his collection of Bronze Age *kores*. The effort may amuse the 'bird' herself and, for a while, keep the barking dogs at bay. The more he considered the idea the more he believed affection the animus of intuition and exemplary art.



And so the connoisseur got to work planning, commissioning a maquette for a mural, stitching the prototype canvas himself.

Cocktails at the new Borozov salon with: Elana, a friend of one of Bossy's capos, Viola, ever bemused, and Cody, a blond comer, one of the showcase docents. Elana and Cody were both Egyptofiles, having spent a former life on the Nile and waxed nostalgic on the chair Cody sat on. Catherine listened in a bemused silence, trying to assess Bossy from this talkative moll. In general, the collection was a further surprise, in that she couldn't imagine a dealer marketing such wares without a cozy agreement with the museums they came from, or the atelier they were fabricated in. But Elana remained the object or *objet* of interest. The more Catherine listened, the more she honed her dislike of the Borozovs and their repugnant ilk.



The vintage chair, in particular, she could barely wait for David Willardson, the crusty Paleomena curator, to pronounce on.

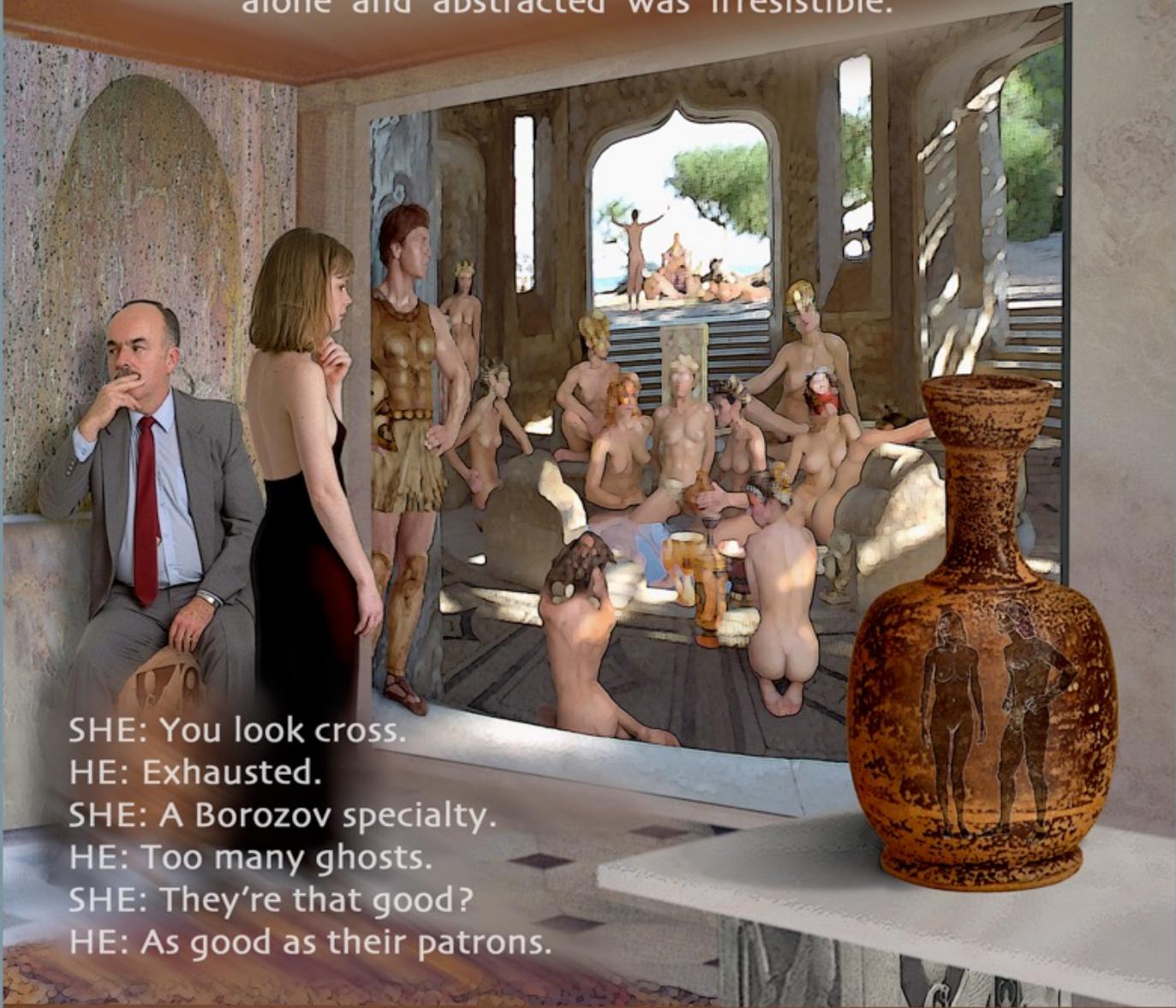
In the main gallery the discovery of the large daunting mural incited initial disbelief and belated astonishment. Its intimation of her own profile teased as it baffled. Was she simply too mindful these idled days, preoccupied with artifice, intrigue?



The extravagance of the mural only added to her surprise. It featured a Minoan girl or 'kore', a facsimile of herself, her face card profile at least, who came ready made, for neither Pachis nor Louis Führ had anything to do with this show piece, which was in point of fact based on a wall painting at Akrotiri, an archaeological site in the Aegean Sea. The confusion mauled. Kissy Borozov a patron of antiquity art? A few smiling couples in the audience gave her a genial heads up acknowledgement.

The discovery of the Paleomena expert David Willardson alone and abstracted was irresistible.

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SHE: You look cross.

HE: Exhausted.

SHE: A Borozov specialty.

HE: Too many ghosts.

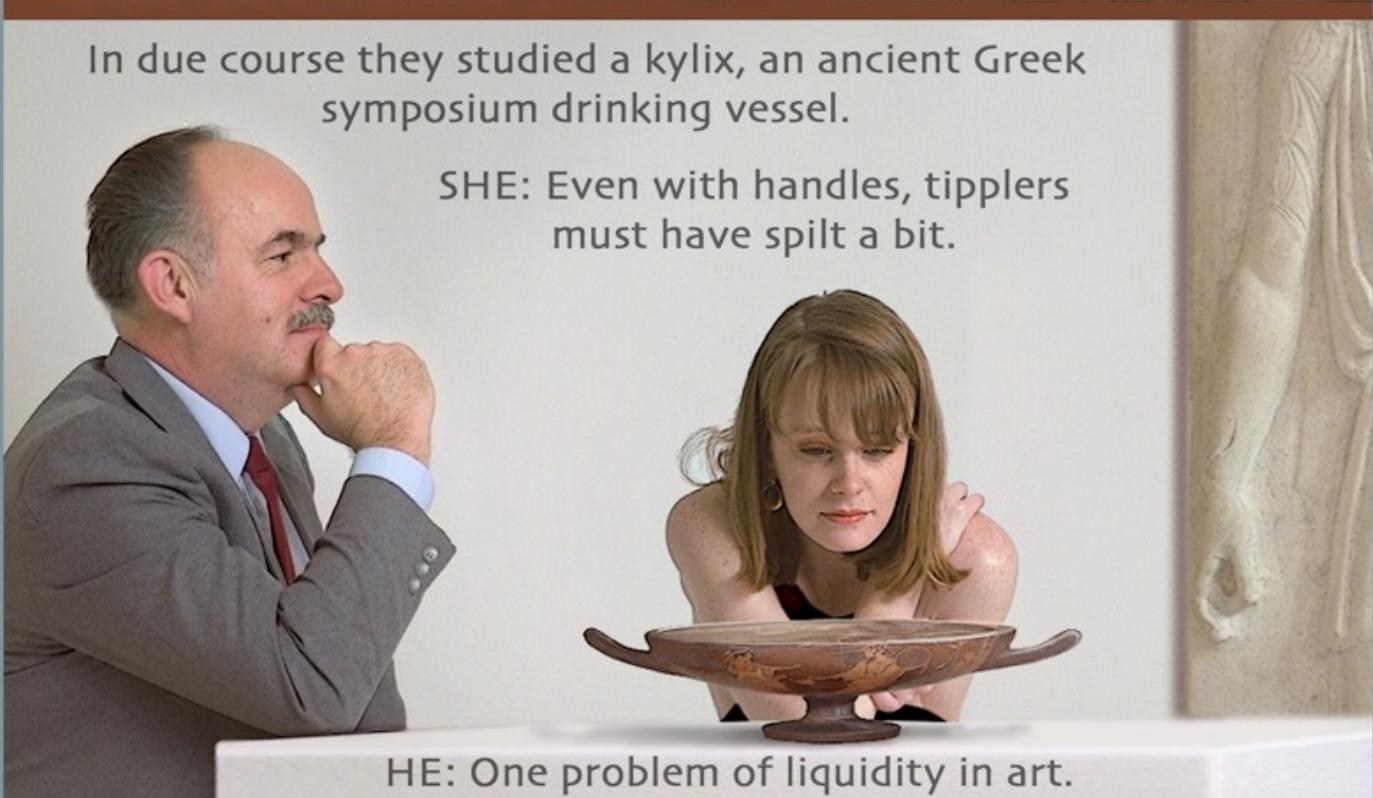
SHE: They're that good?

HE: As good as their patrons.



In due course they studied a kylix, an ancient Greek symposium drinking vessel.

SHE: Even with handles, tipplers must have spilt a bit.



HE: One problem of liquidity in art.

The fact that savvy Willardson might be uncertain about many of the pedigrees meant someone, likely Kissy, had struck gold; the earnestness of one docent tended to bear this out. She still could not believe that a Borozov would patronize such indigenous antiquity. What could a buccaneer realize from the venture?



Said one earnest docent, "The piece, please note, is early Fifth Century, assembled entirely from fragments. We wanted it encased at first, but decided it had to breathe. Amazing, no?"

The more she saw the more Willardson's words registered. Some of the 'ghost' masterworks would be held back -- the better perhaps to test the well-cobbled fakes. So she guessed. But why she might be an inordinate centerpiece here struck her finely droll. A Borozov presenting her as a presumptuous fake?

Willardson was not a crusader however...another of life's misfortunes she sometimes thought, like now.

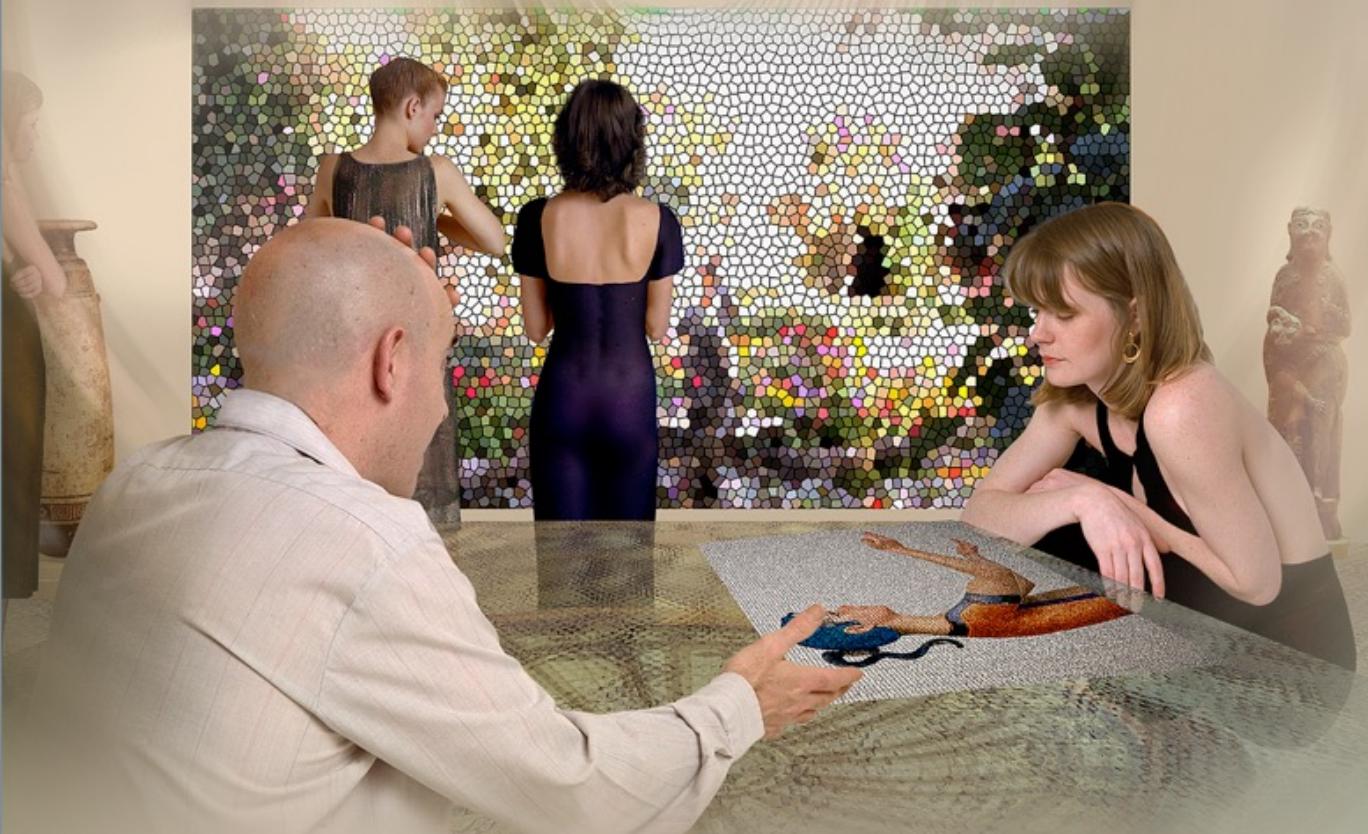
35

SHE: You've said the Hermitage is a Phoenix.

HE: But not a Nemesis. Nor an Erinnyes -- the angry one.



Before leaving she had a last look at the slick poster.



DOCENT: So help me, it's you. An incarnation!

WHYTE: A face card profile. More card than face I think.

If she chose to be wryly amused, she nevertheless invited the ABN art guru to see the antecedent, trusting he must find it slick and ahistoric, and thus underwrite her suspicion that she was being toyed with -- a quirk, often sadistic, of the elder Borozov.



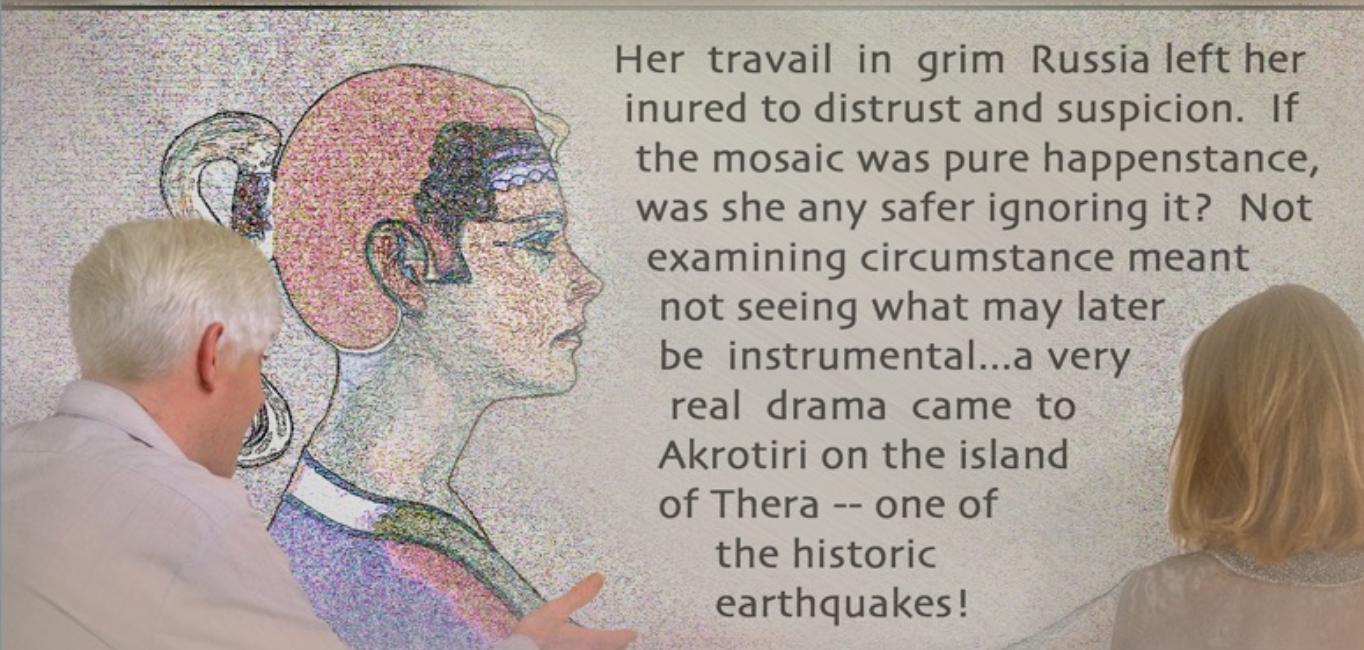
Pronounced the guru:

"I understand it's a pointillist tracing from the original mosaic. The archaeologist transcriber has added some lines, but overall the delineation seems adroit. For the period. You're not an Immortal are you?..."

An Immortal in the gun site of a Borozov was a fine joke. Sadly savored only by herself.



Her travail in grim Russia left her inured to distrust and suspicion. If the mosaic was pure happenstance, was she any safer ignoring it? Not examining circumstance meant not seeing what may later be instrumental...a very real drama came to Akrotiri on the island of Thera -- one of the historic earthquakes!



That night she stood inside her stippled shower door to reflect herself in the opposite mirror as a Bronze Age icon, the glass surface of the door close to the texture of the mosaic. The reedy question -- Who would sponsor such a work? -- continued to wryly baffle and provoke.

The likelihood of a Borozov actually funding such a work seemed itself mythological!

What indeed would a sharpie like Kissy Borozov achieve by a such a 'riddling' venture?

Kissy, the enigmatic 'other', she had no truck with; it was grim Bossy she had fingered. Yet neither brother could she imagine bothering with an art riddle kitschy as this. The remuneration would be unflatteringly modest, the celebrity iffy, problematic.

Cornering her fitful boss the next day she made what she believed to be an irresistible pitch:

SHE: Given Borozov's impetuosity, the salon may be a good place to start. No less than David Willardson sensed a retrospective look to some of the period stuff.

HE: Retrospective, hmmm.

SHE: He used the word 'ghosts', which usually means saleable -- liquid -- forgeries of arcane and/or poorly documented masterworks. It's a neat tactic: float the bogey's first.

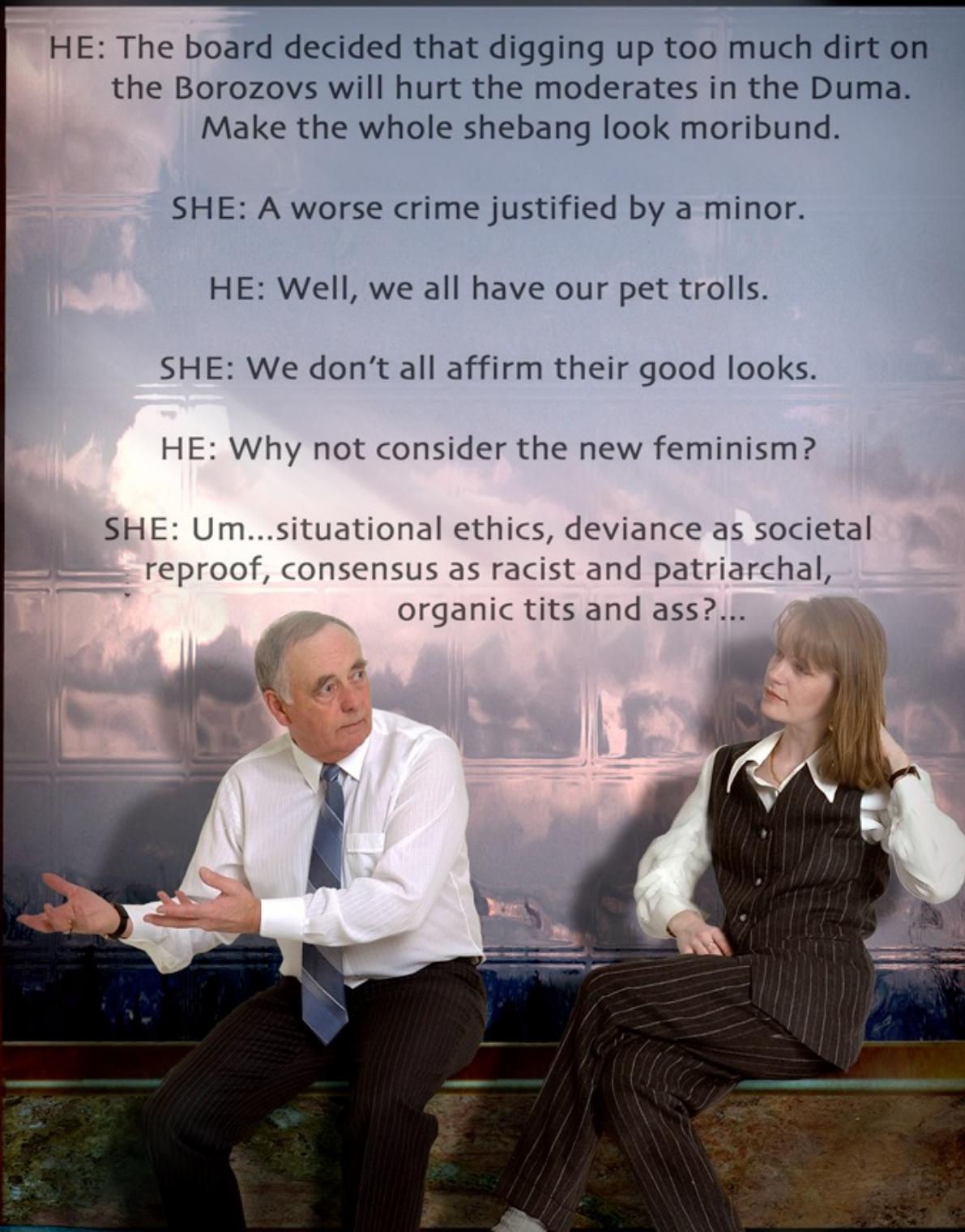
HE: Yes, I'm sure.

SHE: I'll need a couple of sleepers and maybe an outside sec....

But like many adepts, she sometimes underestimated the opacity of her boss. Even her best smile failed to work. Not for the first time she sensed the deep-seated discord, the 'lurking', preordained rebuke of untimely innovation.



A late meeting with her piker boss, Darin the Deplorable, headlined his speciality: When in doubt try servility.



HE: The board decided that digging up too much dirt on the Borozovs will hurt the moderates in the Duma. Make the whole shebang look moribund.

SHE: A worse crime justified by a minor.

HE: Well, we all have our pet trolls.

SHE: We don't all affirm their good looks.

HE: Why not consider the new feminism?

SHE: Um...situational ethics, deviance as societal reproof, consensus as racist and patriarchal, organic tits and ass?...

HE: Within reason.

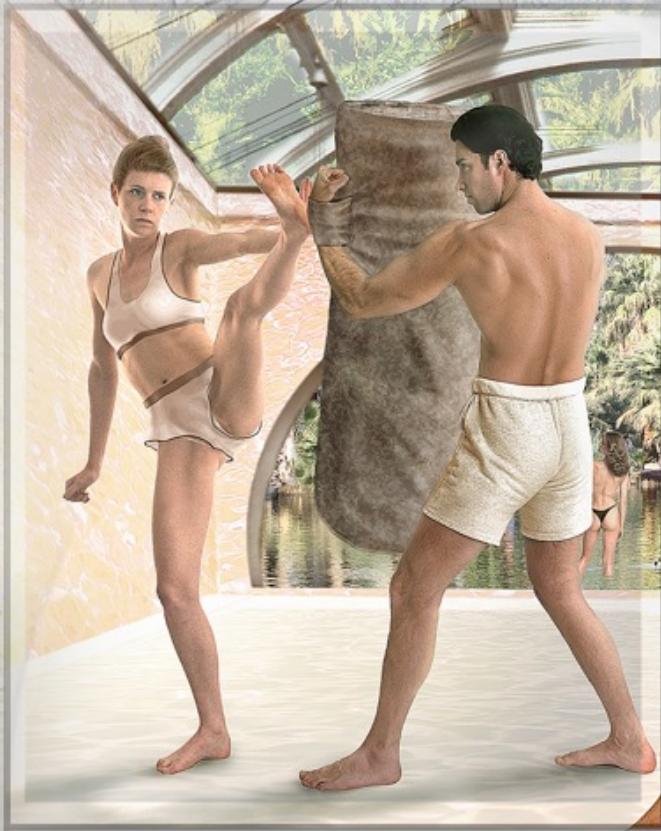
SHE: Reason as a limited company.

HE: Well yes -- as a matter of fact.

SHE (to herself): My Arkansas Lizard. A Thinker with piles.

HE (to himself): Women. What the devil do they want?

The Ritual of Anger Management -- when the Big Boss Sucks: 40
With pet Michael in tow she labored to 'clobber the bastard' in
a sun bright, 'al-fresco' (oxygen rich) martial arts gymnasium.



HE: This boss of yours is a real piece of work, eh?

SHE: Counter change.
Which you make by making strange. Like so!

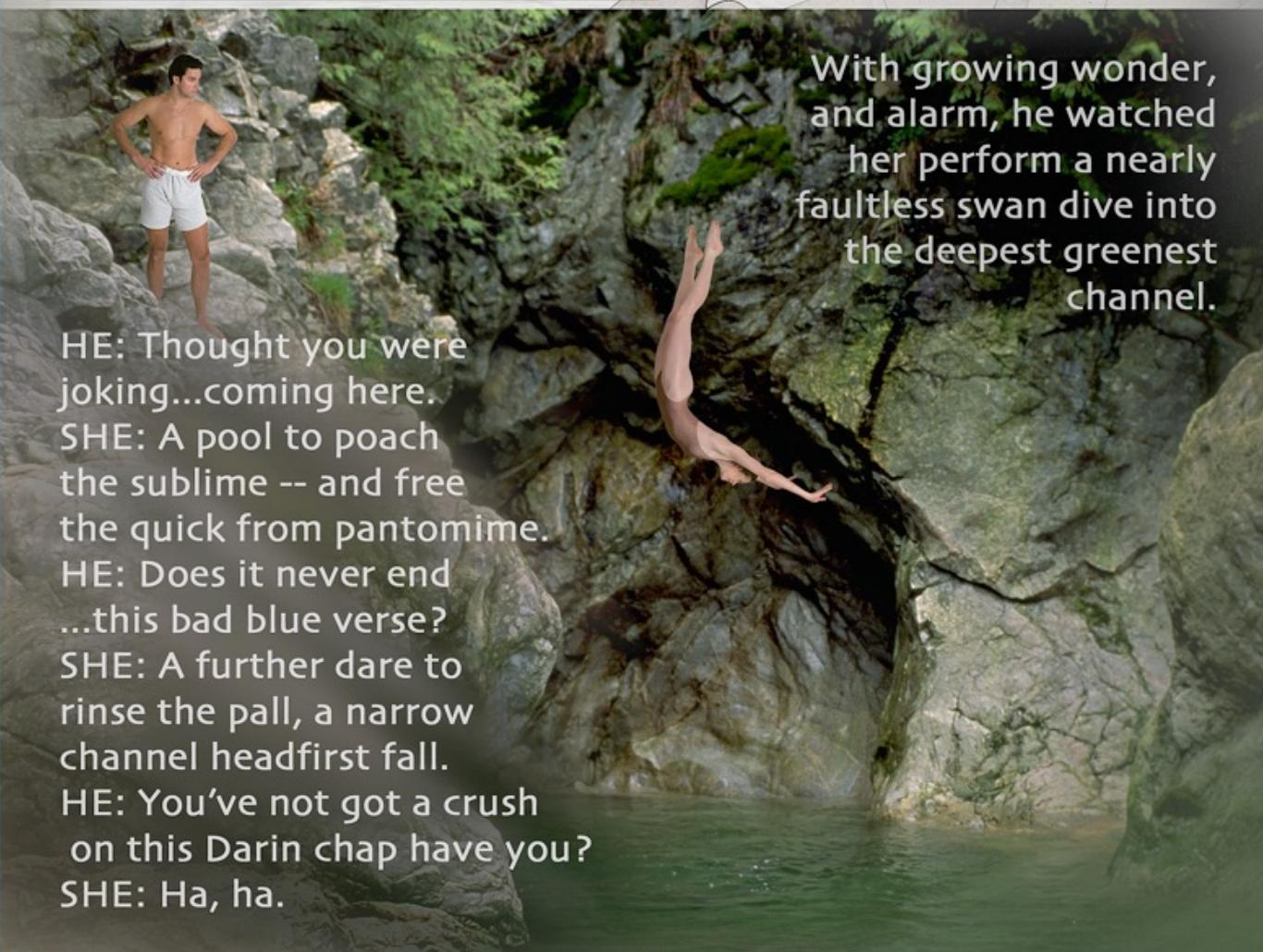
HE: Whoa Boudicca, that blow was a haymaker.

SHE: Just hold it up, Merlin.
HE: We're close here to indecent assault.

SHE: Not close enough.
HE: What's with the swim suit in your carryall?

SHE: The canyon beckons.
HE: Swimming? Today?

SHE: Seeing into the abyss.



HE: Thought you were joking...coming here.

SHE: A pool to poach the sublime -- and free the quick from pantomime.

HE: Does it never end ...this bad blue verse?

SHE: A further dare to rinse the pall, a narrow channel headfirst fall.

HE: You've not got a crush on this Darin chap have you?

SHE: Ha, ha.

With growing wonder,
and alarm, he watched her perform a nearly faultless swan dive into the deepest greenest channel.

He balked when she headed up the inner channel to what was called the trail race, a path by a steep narrow waterfall.

SHE: Won't take long. You'll sleep like a preemie.

HE: It's pushing suppertime.

SHE: We'll spy on the dollyvarden.

HE: The sun is glorious.

SHE: So be a manatee.

HE: Oh gawd.

Later, above the trail race:

HE: Satisfied?

SHE: It's peaceful.

HE: Well, the 'burghers' have split haven't they.

SHE: You don't want to climb the waterfall.

HE: Not really.

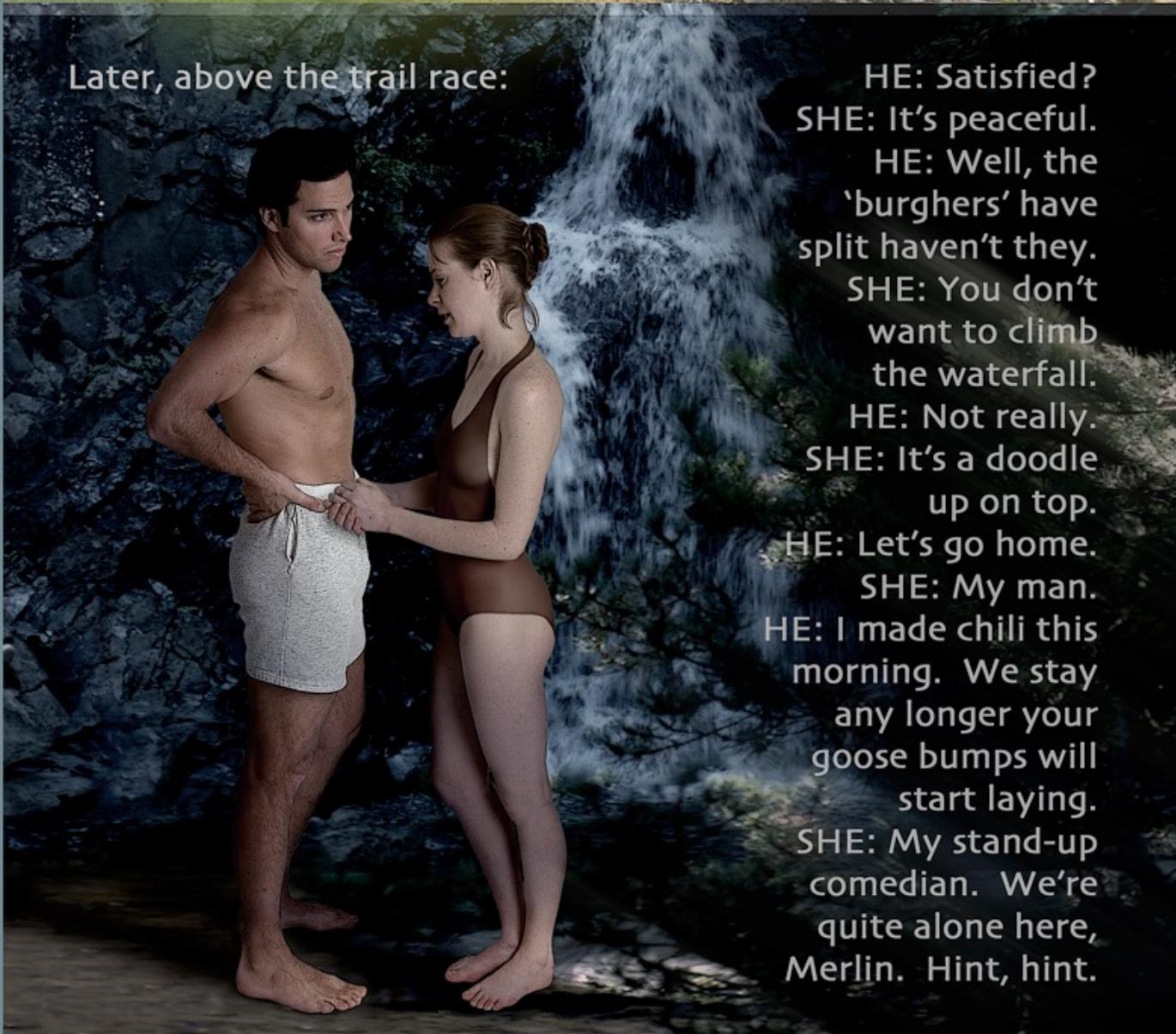
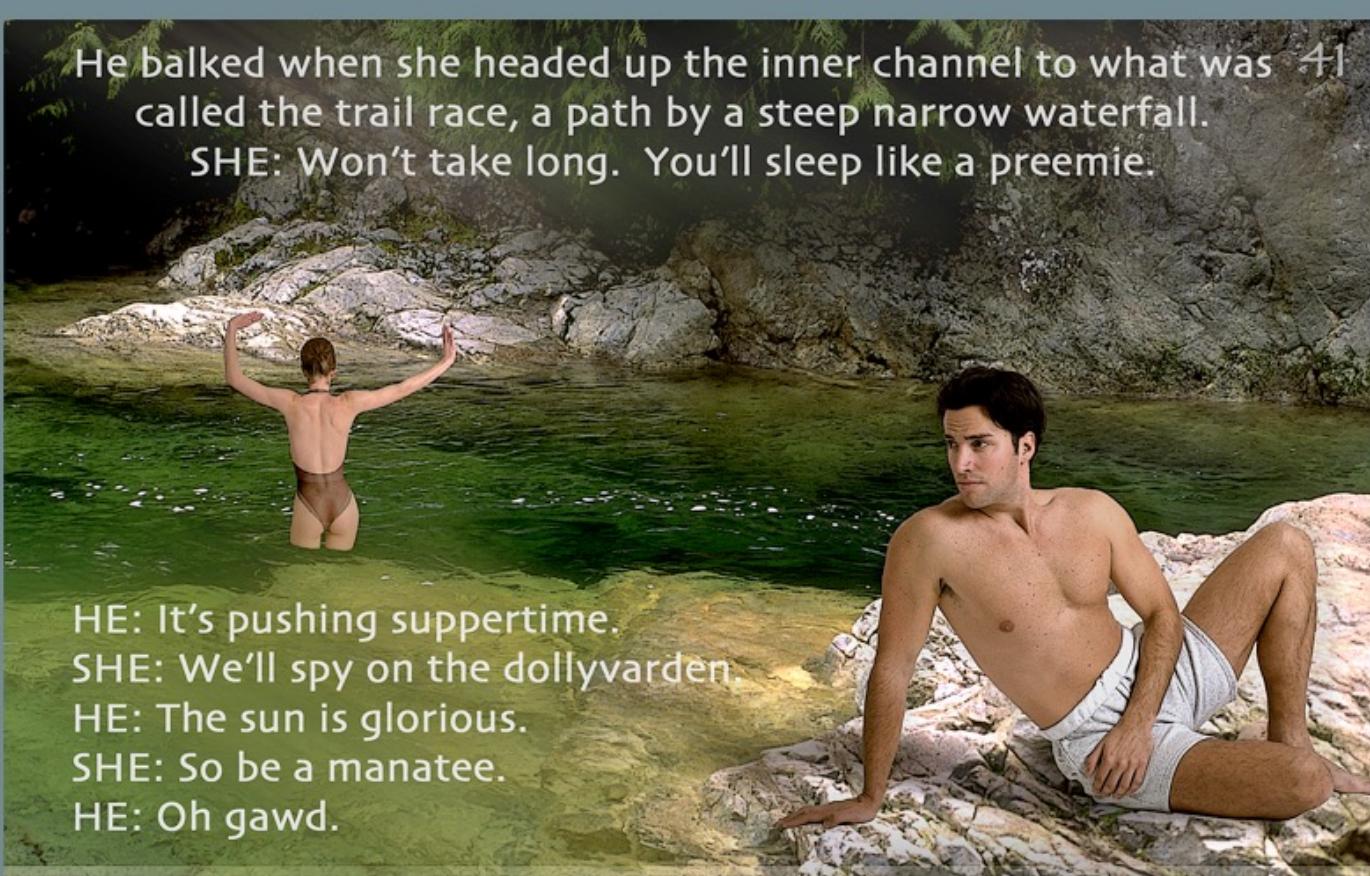
SHE: It's a doodle up on top.

HE: Let's go home.

SHE: My man.

HE: I made chili this morning. We stay any longer your goose bumps will start laying.

SHE: My stand-up comedian. We're quite alone here, Merlin. Hint, hint.



The following day few words, several mous, and a curious wistfulness summoned by an old scrapbook, her elfin self ensconced on a divan in her sitting room which overlooked a park. He could not recall seeing her so bemused or desirable.

SHE: Let's go back to Greece.

HE: Darin's on hold is he?

SHE: I want to discover Hebe.

HE: Who's that?

SHE: A nymph with keys to a special wine cellar.

HE: Where?

SHE: The Dodacanese.

HE: It's rather late.

SHE: Not for the raki.

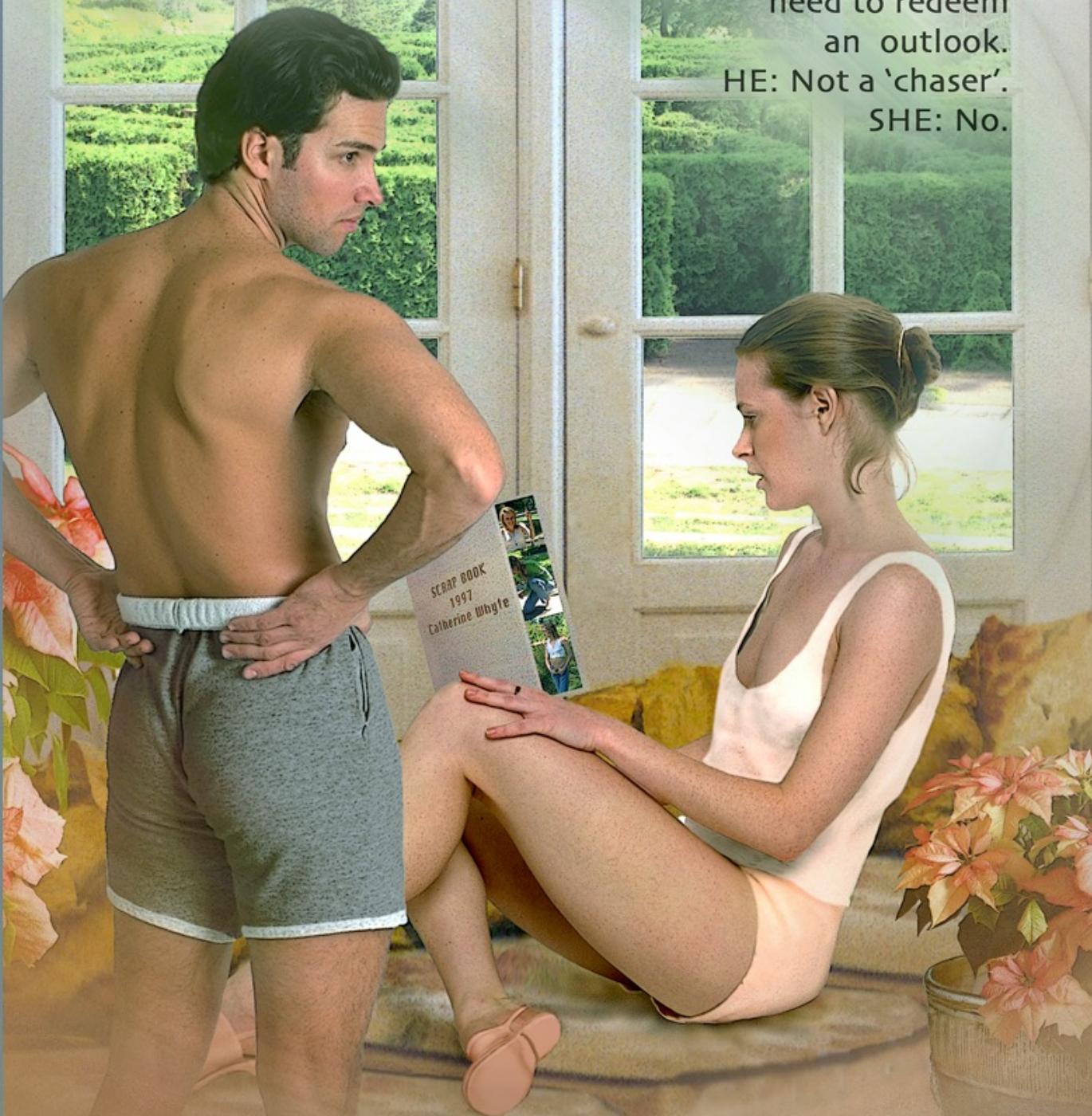
HE: That's another 'cordiale' is it?

(She'd been talking a lot about Kissy.)

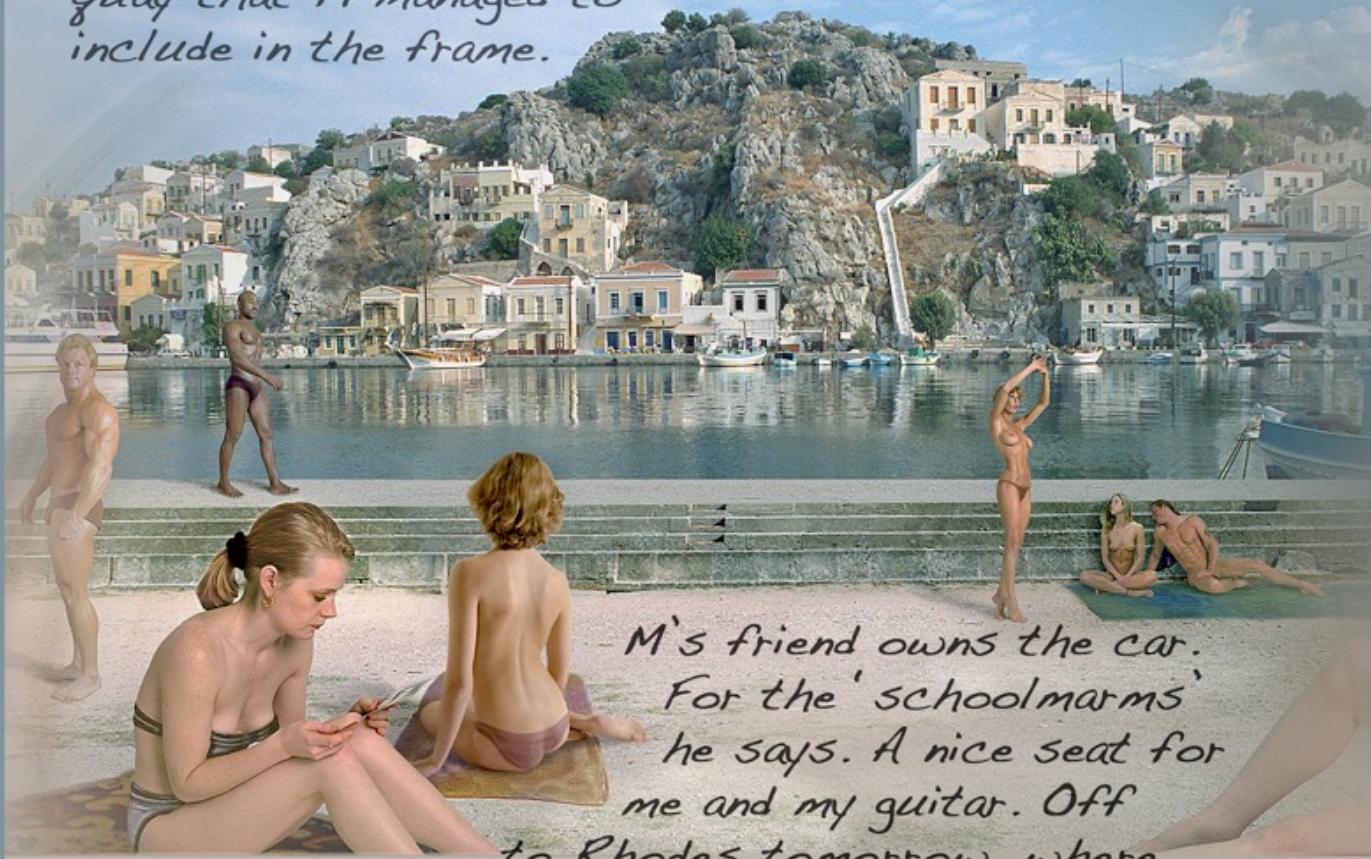
SHE: It's a special drink; what you need to redeem an outlook.

HE: Not a 'chaser'.

SHE: No.



Dear Mom, I'm basking on a balmy beach, not quite 43 naked -- meaning I'm free, for a time, of ABN if not situational ethics, vide the trio of jayhawks near the quay that M managed to include in the frame.



M's friend owns the car.
For the 'schoolmarm's'
he says. A nice seat for
me and my guitar. Off
to Rhodes tomorrow, where

the cats are many and free! In Faliraki M plans to enter the wet T-shirt contest, while I resume my study of raki, the strong sweet cordial. Copacetic if not compos. Do take your medicine. Love, Cath



The next day as she examined a lintel shard on the coast shingle who should suddenly materialize but her ubiquitous Pan, revivifying the many exacting suspicions. 44



Supposedly he had come from a Faliraki happy hour -- in horns and tail. A brick short of a load, he was incoherent at first, yet before passing out managed to leave a distinct flea in her ear, words that rather belied a crapulous state. "I've come to Rhodes to sculpt a rarefied Venus, Borovoz trade edition; come see for yourself, some place in the Castle of the Grand Masters."

SHE: My word -- an antiquity museum;
you've attained mythic status.

HE: There's this garden patch
off behind somewhere....



A facetious story she thought -- were a devious Borozov not involved. The import of both events -- Pachis' arrival here and this 'rarefied Venus' -- put her back in the thick of it, all shore leave ended. A rock and a hard place; some holiday, some escape.

On her return a prowler! Barely was she in the suite, moving 45 the window shutter, when the man slipped by, his manner for a Borozov goon oddly hesitant. He glanced in the partly opened window but without focus or apparent intent, his concentration fixed on the matching suite next door. As far as she knew the the suite had been vacated that very day. She would go outside when he left to reassure herself she could not have been glimpsed in the darkish light of the interior. She would question Michael about his Faliraki day. Had he seen anyone in a striped black & white shirt and jeans.



She was quite sure the man was the docent who touted the amphora in Kissy's new salon! When the brute left she took stock, but was only half relieved to find nothing out of place or missing -- such being the involution of trade craft. To not know what the antagonist knew was to rely too heavily on the chorus -- one of Willardson's late 'daffodils'. Her precocious wizenheimer.

That night they turned off all the lights before settling down in the garden to keep watch. But no one returned. A little owl (once an idol sacred to Athena) kept them company with its peculiar cuckoo imitation.

HE: You said the prowler looked confused.

SHE: He kept glancing back, as if to confirm the suite.

HE: Would they be that curious, concerned?

SHE: Try to imagine Pachis, stinko, finding me on his own.

HE: A planned 'coincidence'? Isn't that pretty thick?

SHE: He's at work on something.

HE: And they want your approval.

SHE: Before you snort let's see what the damned thing is?

HE: That sounds desperate.

SHE: Take note. So let's not get too comfortable.

HE: *Mein madchen ohne uniform.*

SHE: Michael...we did agree.

HE: I didn't.

SHE: Tough.

In the garden of the Grand Masters...a further gamy surprise and canny spectacle, a story book beauty being converted into stone, well, a light Parian marble, featuring...



...Pachis silently, imperviously at work.

A trip to the library to copy an art plate and confirm a recollection:
The Kneeling Woman of the
Baluba -- Pachis' sculptural
theft, and Borozov's what?
A 'trade edition' Pachis said.
Meaning what -- derivative,
banal, indecent? What would
a Borozov find of interest
in such a campy
exercise?

Words, symbols,
culture itself
upstaged by
nimble raw
hard bods?
'Beauty is
Nature's
brag and
must be
shown.'
Yet she
couldn't
remember
where the
phrase fit
in Milton's
busy life:
Paradise
Lost...or
Regained.



The meeting venues for Bossy's dealings with his brother became more and more hole-in-the-corner as the suspicions mushroomed.

AGENT: B. wants to know what the hell is going on with all this swank art stuff. What's it got to do with anything.

KISSY: If you refer to the Marine Venus, the work was commissioned by Felix Muerner, the head of the Bern Clinic.

(The mention of Dr. Felix Zveno Muerner, head of the posh beauty clinic in Bern -- genetic marking and reconstructive surgery -- brought an uneasy silence to the room. The clinic was a regular buyer of human eggs and foetal tissue that one of Bossy's partners provided from a private clinic in Montecito, California. A lucrative business growing exponentially.)

AGENT: So this Führ cat -- a carver too? For crissake he's supposed to get pictures of the bird delicto or something. Jees, his art stuff is exhibish all over the place. She's not gonna be 'winged' with that.

KISSY: He's talented, yes, and has some early successes. Which may prove advantageous. Her trust of his ability is likely growing. The flat and studio will soon be bugged. Modern computers can accomplish a lot 'after the fact' of course.

AGENT: Jees I hope so; B's getting bloody antsy.

(Kissy was amused by the agent's and hence, Bossy's dismay. Führ's 'minimal abstract' style was appealing in figurative art but would not engage an erotomaniac. However, the prospect of seeing the artist's inspiration rawly in the flesh would challenge his seemly finesse.)

The revelation of the 'Bowl Ladies' signaled the end
of the much anticipated holiday.

HE: You've ruled out coincidence?

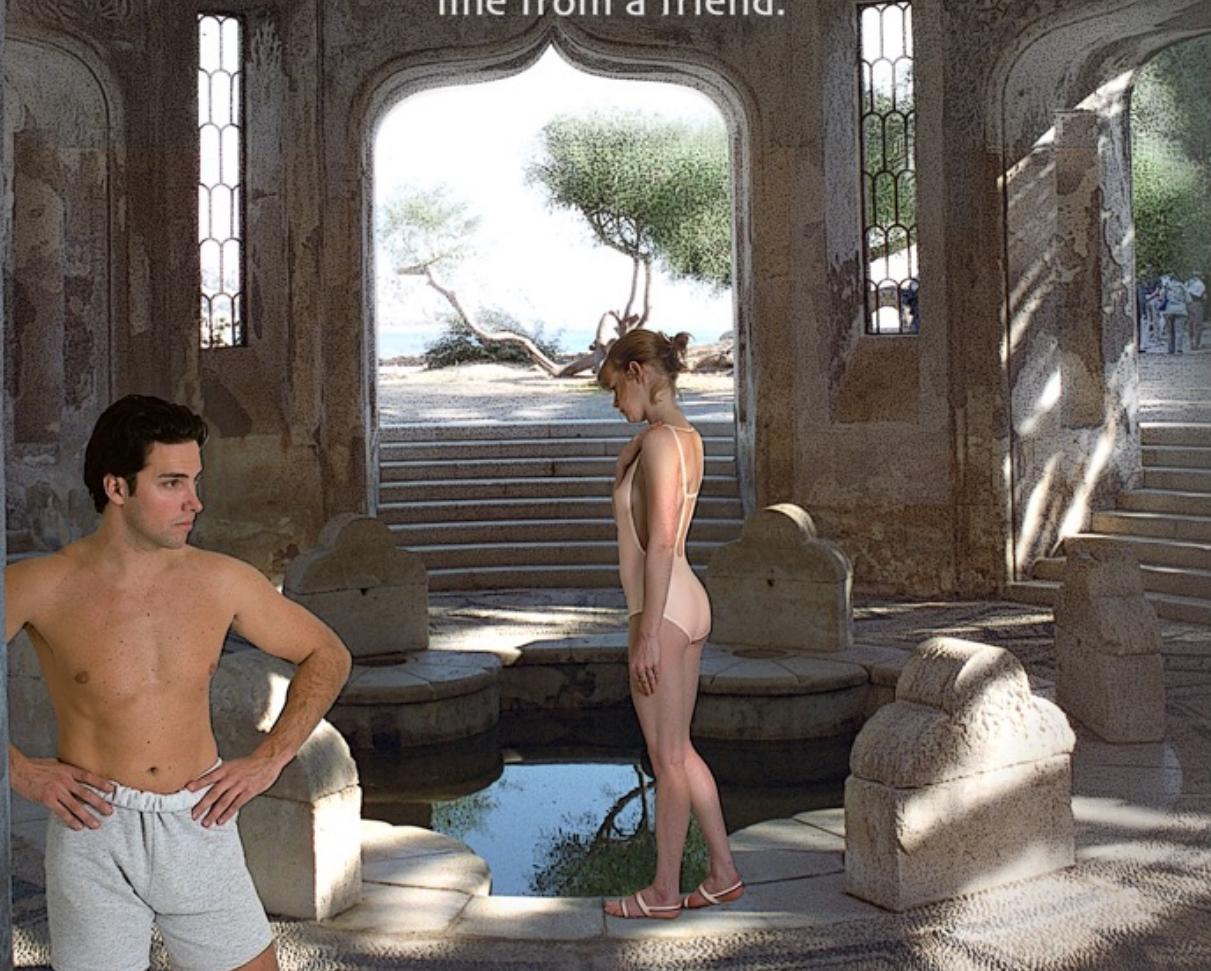
SHE: The poses are identical, the trance-like
mood, the water vessels.

HE: Is it worth getting that vexed about?

SHE: The skin trade that hunky dory for you?

HE: Maybe Kissy B. fancies Western art?

SHE: He's touting an esthetic bias; beauty is not
skin deep, as many folk are discovering. Structure
matters, articulation, shape. The svelte
form 'sells the grazing ticket' -- a
line from a friend.



HE: Too grand for me. I
wonder what went on here?

SHE: It's the setting for one of Pachis' paintings.

HE: The pagan stuff.

SHE: An initiation rite. For gamy Hellenes.



HE: Kissy a 'beauty pedlar'?

SHE: What blue-eyed fascist isn't?

'Triumph of the Will' is live parian marble. A vision the West has taken up -- salubrity and beauty for all.

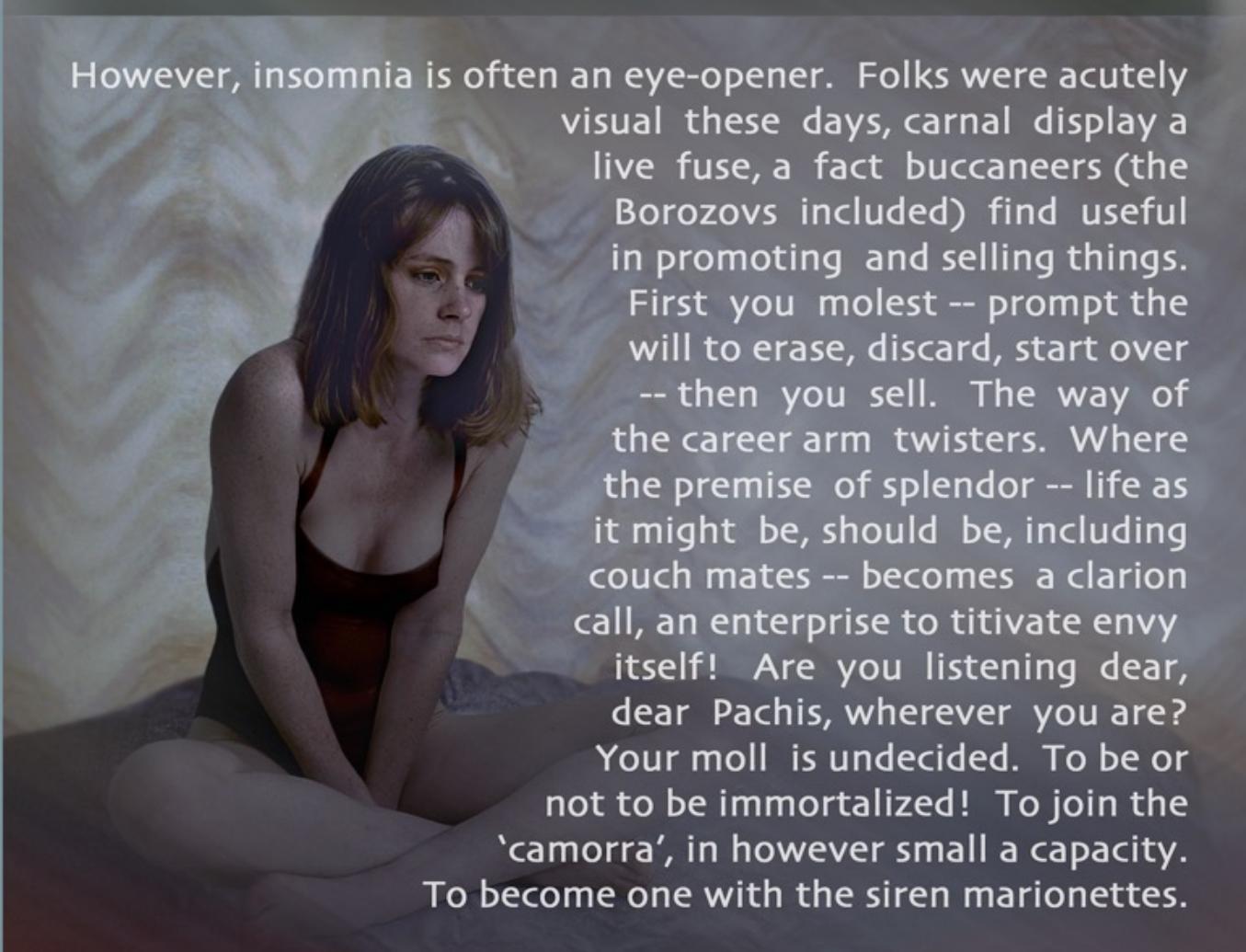


Confirmed at the salon showing of Pachis'
late work: beauty as nude Attic-Atlantis splendour -- concinnity!

So. About all she could conclude
was that her old school pal
was in thrall to a chic
pirate; her busy 'fawn'
beholden to a clever
shylock who wanted a
pretty pound of flesh.
A fascist's dream: beauty
for 'all seasons'. The
triumph of a super
duper 'eidolon'
-- a live Isolde.

And busy Pachis⁵¹
wanted to cast
her as a 'kore'
in this posh
pageant...an
invite which
likely hid a
sly ruse.

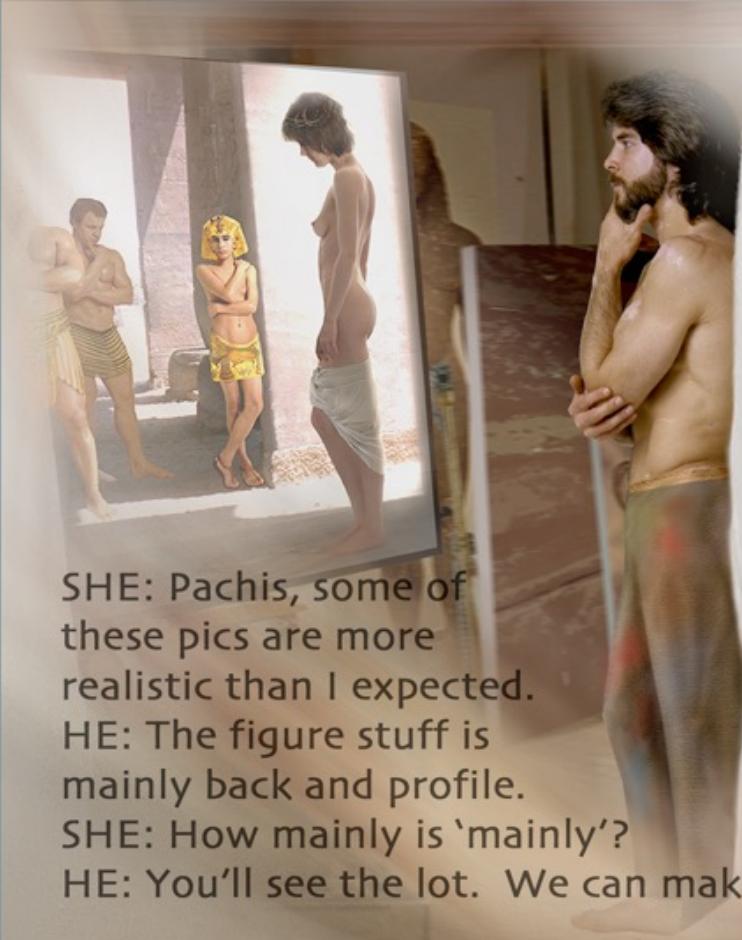
However, insomnia is often an eye-opener. Folks were acutely visual these days, carnal display a live fuse, a fact buccaneers (the Borozovs included) find useful in promoting and selling things. First you molest -- prompt the will to erase, discard, start over -- then you sell. The way of the career arm twisters. Where the premise of splendor -- life as it might be, should be, including couch mates -- becomes a clarion call, an enterprise to titivate envy itself! Are you listening dear, dear Pachis, wherever you are? Your moll is undecided. To be or not to be immortalized! To join the 'camorra', in however small a capacity. To become one with the siren marionettes.



The encounter with Pachis complicated her return to the West for he remained her lone lead to learn what Kissy might be up to on this continent.; that meant getting cozy with the 'artiste' --posing and 'posing'. But the likelihood of a Borozov looking on -- if her painter was a shill and had his studio bugged-- gave her the creeps. She was not a prude, but being a prurient item on the the internet was not a media endorsement.

The other question was Pachis' own regard of her: did he see any singularity useful for his work, or was he merely 'in hock'? Digital images from a covert plant was an albatross. Celebrity put you in the picture then 'framed' the result. The face in her pier glass was heedful. Soon she put some makeup on, closed the curtains, to look at herself nude, as she would be in some of Pachis work. No Hustler potential she decided, but a media collector's stamp for sure.



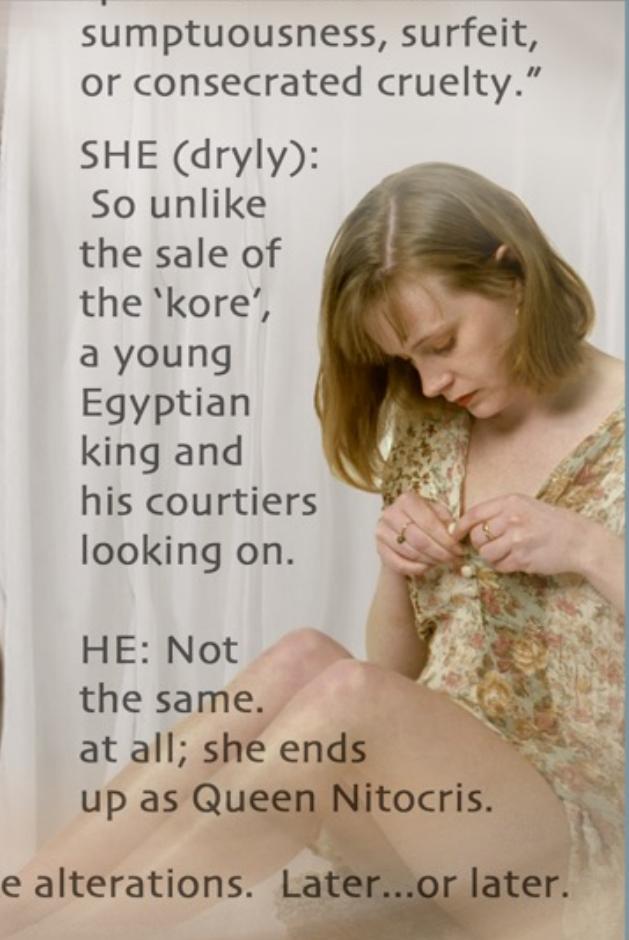
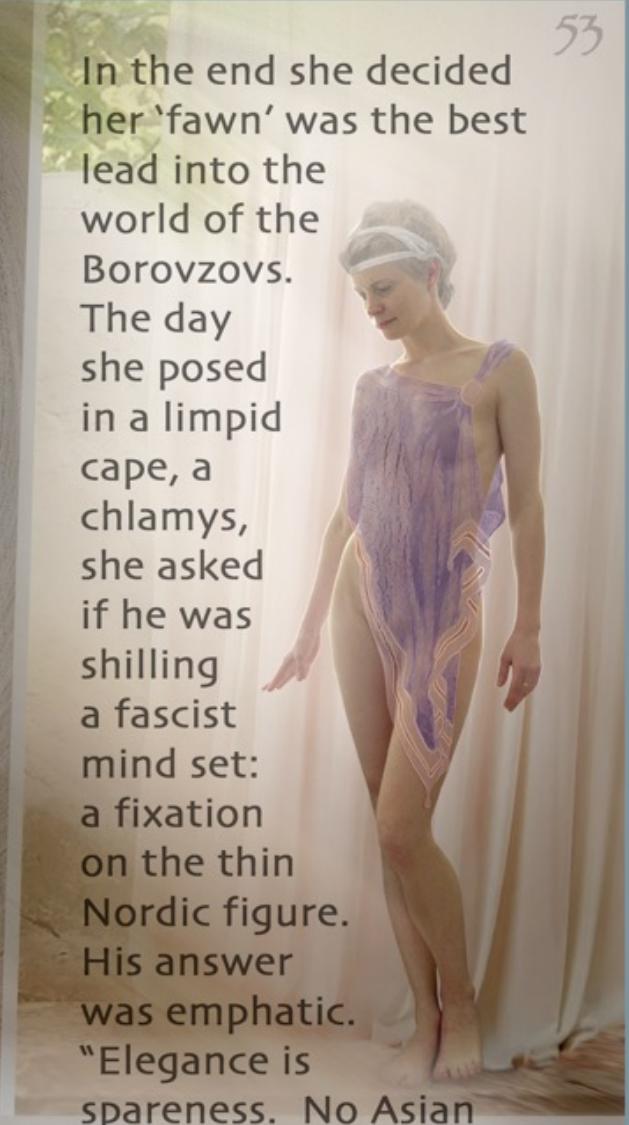


SHE: Pachis, some of these pics are more realistic than I expected.
HE: The figure stuff is mainly back and profile.
SHE: How mainly is 'mainly'?
HE: You'll see the lot. We can make alterations. Later...or later.

In the end she decided her 'fawn' was the best lead into the world of the Borovzovs. The day she posed in a limpid cape, a chlamys, she asked if he was shilling a fascist mind set: a fixation on the thin Nordic figure. His answer was emphatic. "Elegance is spareness. No Asian sumptuousness, surfeit, or consecrated cruelty."

SHE (dryly):
So unlike the sale of the 'kore', a young Egyptian king and his courtiers looking on.

HE: Not the same. at all; she ends up as Queen Nitocris.



The amour was a plus, and his claim of being an artist free of obligation to a tycoon unyielding. (She finally frankly asked.) For now, his talent must suffice.



54

One rare watercolor, which he placed on the wall by the day bed after she had asked about Kissy, was a wry diversion. The work was done one day when her demure must have shown, for he saw her gazing soberly into a mirror; likely the first day in the atelier...the 'dress rehearsal.'



SHE: That sketch was a surprise -- me looking at me.
HE: My Echo... musing herself.
SHE: When did you begin it?
HE: Amy had a cold a while back. Her daily hacking suggested to me a primordial Echo.
SHE: You have a gift for conning explanations.
HE: Nonsense. No trick to it!

The chance discovery, in a side bay of the studio, of a painting entitled 'The Sale', severed her compact with Pachis. It was another picture of herself as the Minoan being exhibited at the Akhenaten Court. What needled was the hugger mugger -- she had never seen the painting, and her recognition of two faces, both lobbyists in the Russian Duma! Pachis was nonchalant.
HE: It's an older outside order. Some guy from the foundation.
SHE: The gents in the painting -- friends of the pal?
HE: What do you mean?
SHE: If you have to ask you may be luckier than you think. This is not a happy find, Pachis. I'm leaving.
HE: Oh for crissake. It's only a painting.



The taunt, though clever, was plain: the problem journalistic 'queen' an odalisque! She feared there were more pictures, less nuanced. A 'feed lot' sale of herself 'auctioned' on the internet!

The invitation to meet with Bossy came as a surprise. The 'prison' was a stripped down dacha once owned by a Baltic importer. The walls Kissy presumed were both shell and snoop proof. The larger of the rooms contained: a wide screen television, which Bossy watched nonstop, two period chairs, some thick sound-proofing rugs, and Bossy's current secretary, one-armed Sergei, who rather monopolized the conversation.

SERGEI: We understand your use of the front end stuff. That Egyptian court thing was clever but not really 'net worth', as they say. We'll get better pics from the bugs Shaheed will put in place. We lean on the artist if things don't improve. Chuckie Warren's hot tub is the asset here. A late tub companion was a very young house intern. Put Whyte in with such jail bait and she'll be a pariah, especially at kosher ABN, for a long while. Gregori, our net guru, has another idea. Where you come in. The video B.'s watching features a new Enfilade model Karen Guk. A stunner and accomplished inveigler. A lesbian liaison with a clever Russian mole will likely finish Whyte at old true blue ABN.



We plan to have able Karen meet Whyte on her new arty farty beat -- the fashion shows she'll report on and a new spa and egg donor facility we've got one of Pachis' models to introduce her to, where Karen will be a donor. A smart use of photos can imply a liaison. You'll see that couturier Antoine Plombiers is introduced to Whyte. Karen will be a model at his shows and initiate a come on -- a nice fortuity and lead for a Borozov obsessed journalist, is it not?...

The discovery of the 'stray' painting opened a wound that would not heal. She was angry, in the Erinnyes sense.

The realization that Pachis was a lost cause as far as explicating Kissy Borozov's deeds on this continent meant she would have to do some smart reconnoitering on her own. A pal at Paramount gave up a swish wig, exclaiming over a ready smile: "It does wonders too for the cash flow. If I stick to a diet I've scads to spend at Mondain or the Birdcage." Well, the wig was a start, for a descent into Hell. If Kissy Borozov was to be her Nemesis, as Michael intimated, best to be read not seen. Come on girl, show us your trip and boat...your dead man's hand. The spa Viola patronized might be the place for a trial run, also a stab at the 'she-

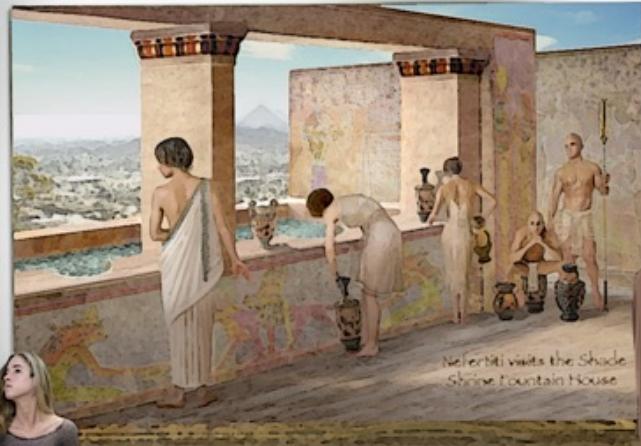
stuff' she had to cover, given her failed duel with Darin the Deplorable. She wanted to smash something, as they did in the dramatic flics, but decided energy in the West was an endangered commodity and sought her Longmorn instead. What particularly vexed was the canny charm

of Pachis' art. That Kissy B. might be the progenitor of such work nettled, meaning she likely missed something. A dismal prospect. She finally told Pachis she needed some time out. He seemed disappointed but not as irked as she expected. And he had many sketched outlines to 'flesh out' his work with -- a prospect that also concerned, for she suspected he had a second 'contract'. She was nearly certain his flat and studio weren't bugged but now had to reconsider. The prospect made her sick. Pachis may indeed be only a dupe but her trust in him had collapsed, his environs were now a peril.

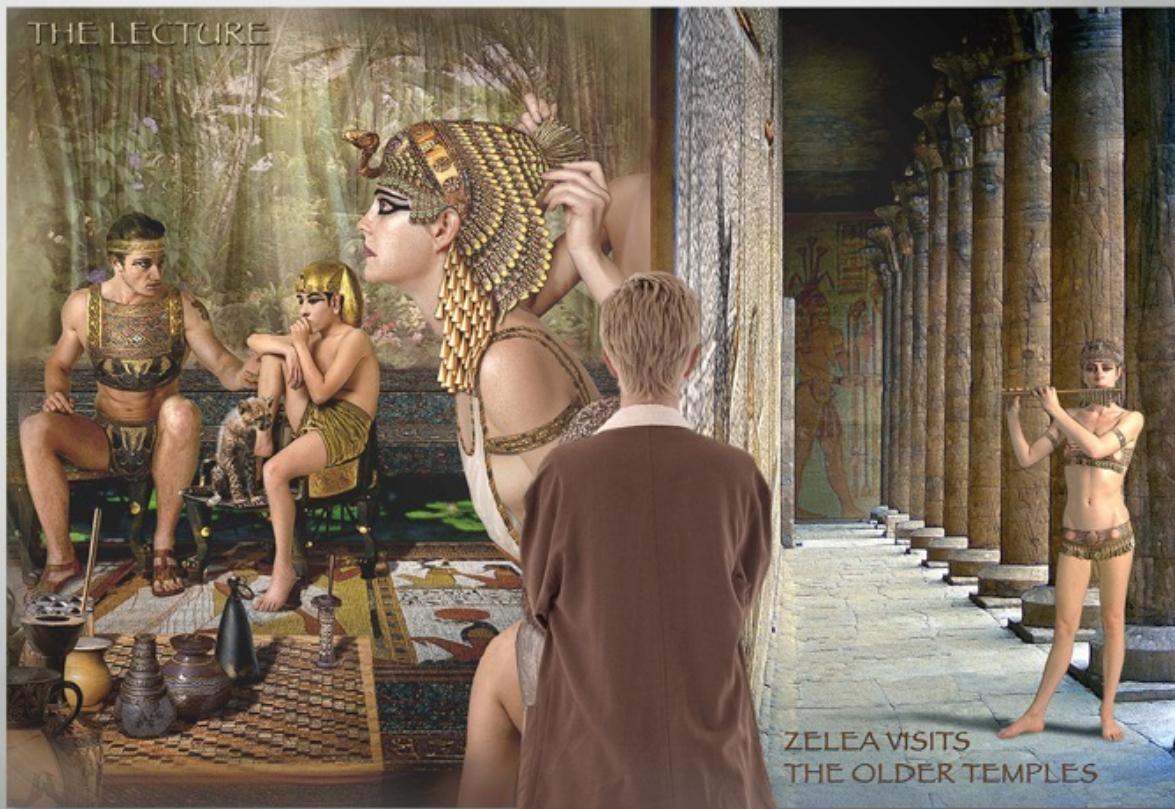


On first viewing Pachis' heady collection at the new gallery:

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If her new look imparted anonymity...
the paintings she hadn't seen did not. Pachis' fated
Minoan gal bore a canny likeness, yet she could not recall
posing for any of these elaborate pictures. The likelihood of a
second model seemed feasible. A further curiosity was the name
of the artist, Louis Führ, the name on the plaque in Pachis' patio!



The realism also dismayed. Which further pegged 'her' presence!

Viola's intro to her spa began with Old Boney, a skull left in the 59 solarium by an original patron. A terse note was written on an elastoplast tape.



The skull became the 'in' joke -- the spa's freedom from male scrutiny (the skull was reputed to belong to the patron's tomcat husband) -- the nudist conceit a partisan option.

- = Who's your friend?
- = She's a pal of Stanley Leatherby.
- = The artist? She's cute.
- = She's on a 'sabbatical'.
- = Another layoff?
- = An 'idyll', she says.
- = That's cool.



An idyll that ebbed when she learned about the college kids who had contracted to sell their eggs to the spa's fertility clinic.

STUDENT: Akin to bad PMS for \$65,000 plus.

WHYTE: That much.

STUDENT: For some upper tier candidates.

WHYTE: So not all.

STUDENT: Several here today maybe.

WHYTE: Is being nude that much of a help?

STUDENT: Who knows. On Tuesday some buyers can visit the solarium.

WHYTE: A WYSIWYG gene pool.

STUDENT: The 'cockeye' joke.

WHYTE: Not guaranteed though -- what you see being what you get.

STUDENT: It's a start.



Karen, an arts major, had a prospect that day, following a diving and gymnastic display, and demurely awaited an interview.

C: Would a desperate parent be so fastidious? So obdurate?

K: Why not? Rich folk do as they like.

C: Many couples once looked to adopt.

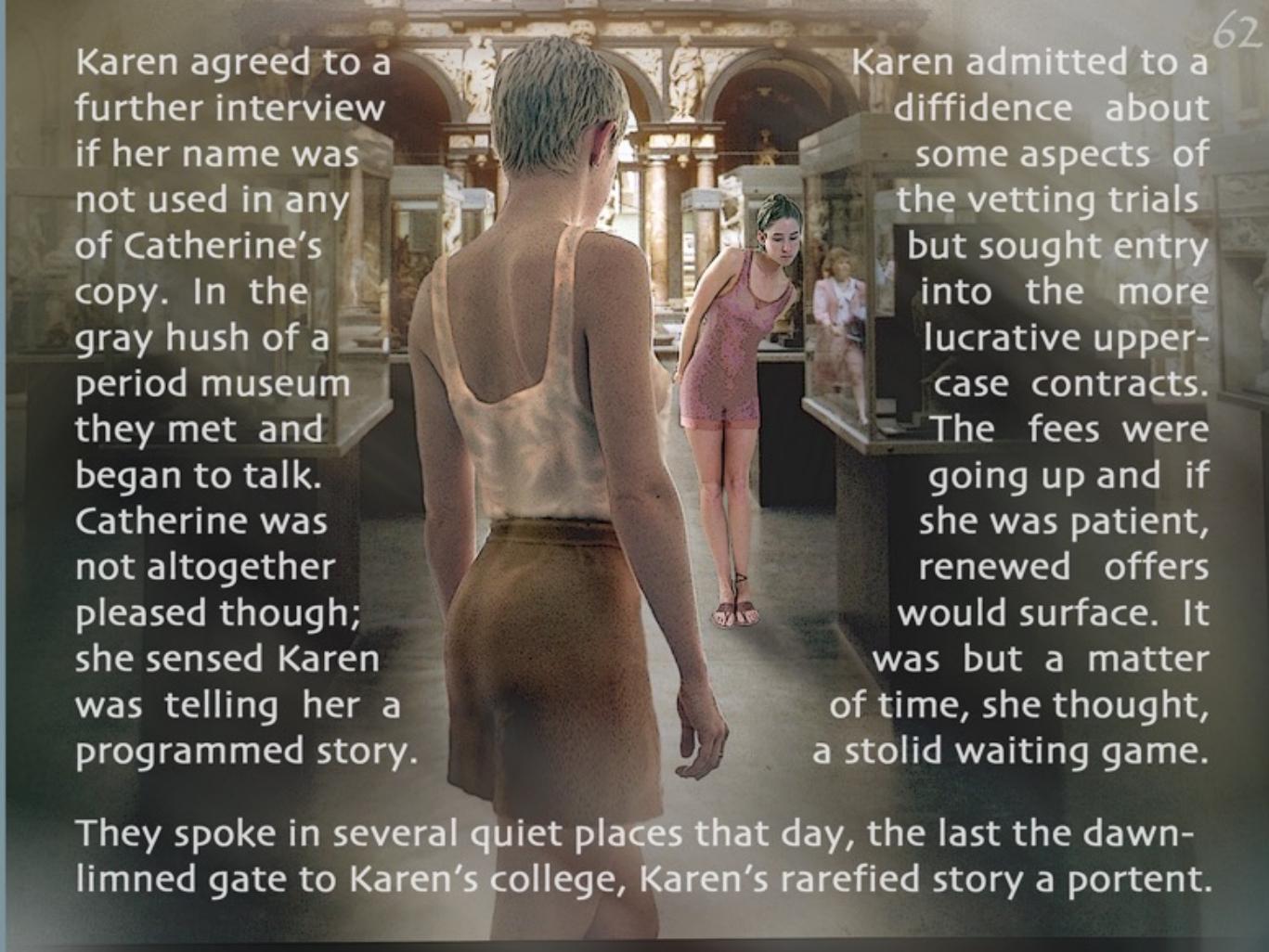
K: That 'many' wouldn't be here though.

C: May I see you afterward?

K: I'm not sure;

you're a
journalist
right?





Karen agreed to a further interview if her name was not used in any of Catherine's copy. In the gray hush of a period museum they met and began to talk. Catherine was not altogether pleased though; she sensed Karen was telling her a programmed story.

Karen admitted to a difference about some aspects of the vetting trials but sought entry into the more lucrative upper-case contracts. The fees were going up and if she was patient, renewed offers would surface. It was but a matter of time, she thought, a stolid waiting game.

They spoke in several quiet places that day, the last the dawn-limned gate to Karen's college, Karen's rarefied story a portent.



When at last lithe Karen turned in, her words lingered as a modern sale of indulgences. Repeating them in her own mind only added to Catherine's dismay.

C: You mentioned a lot of tests.

K: You're told up front -- a SAT and physical with lab, stress, balance and fluency tests, and music test for perfect pitch.

C: You never meet the buyers?

K: They can see you through a faux mirror, like in the pool, except it's private.

C: I detect a smile.

K: Some ask to see you nude. An elective.

C: You don't think that's out of line?

K: Some brokers bank on perfection.

C: There is such a thing?

K: You never checked out a gal's 'brown eyes'?

C: Not often. So. Any other 'optionals'?

K: They try to spot drug-liable types.

C: You think that's possible?

K: Supposed to be indicative. The cerebral receptor templates for addiction we all carry, they say. In sex you're supposed to elicit your own catalytic index.

C: Sounds specious, put on.

K: You'd have to be an endocrinologist to follow it.

Does it matter?

C: So what's sampled?

K: Blood, cerebrospinal fluid.

C: During sex?

K: They give you a massage.

C: Who's they?

K: A couple of nurses. Two Vestals. Well, nothing's sacred any more, right?...

C: It's not the sacred I'm trying to understand. Sorry. It's a world I only had an inkling of. You don't have any reservations?

K: It's about what the matron explained. I can use the money.

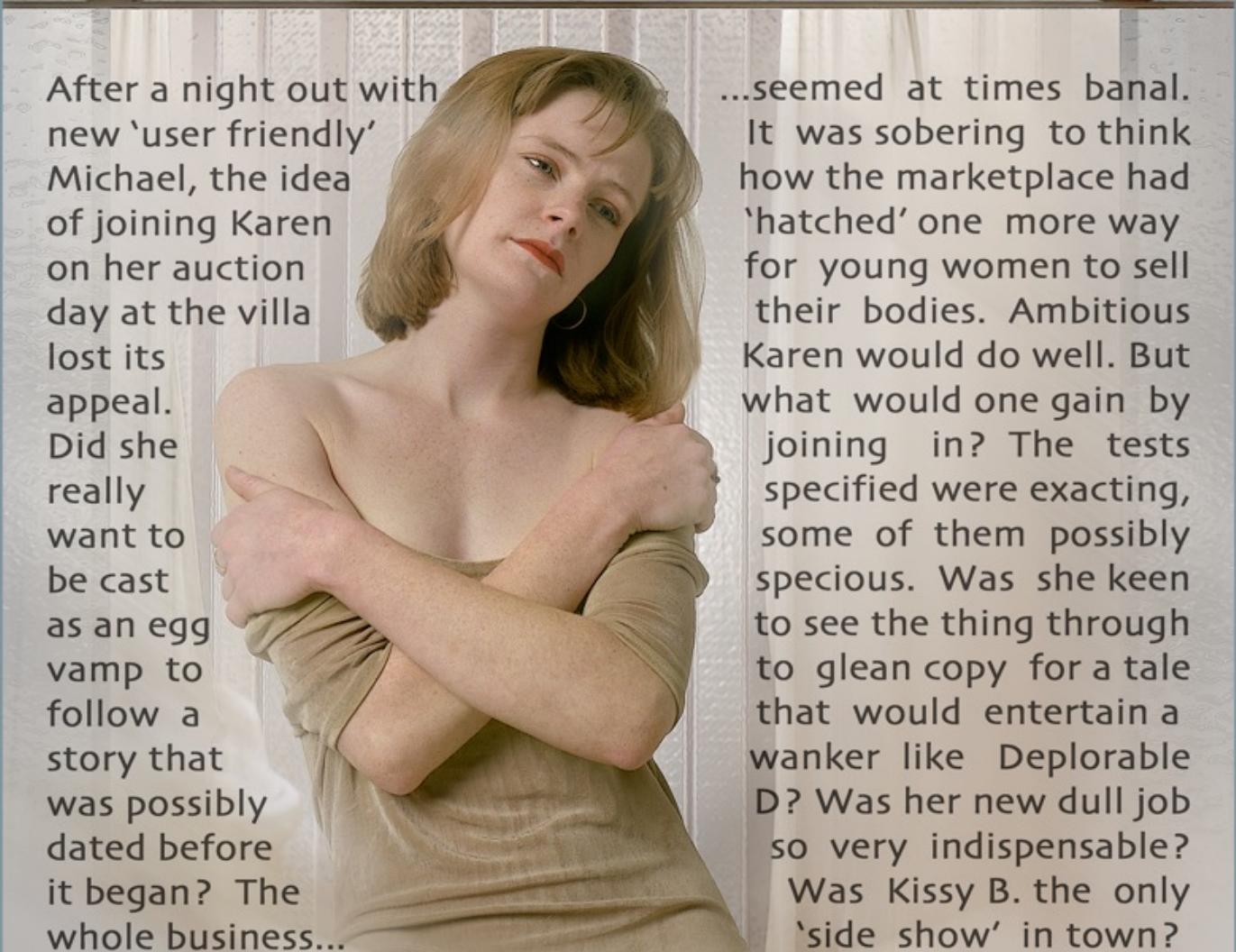
C: May I learn the outcome?

K: You like to hang around?

Two days later an e-mail from Karen upped the ante: 'A new tie-in.
I'm on the library terrace early, say 8 AM.'
A meeting that went thus:



C: You went for an interview-- to this villa in -- Montecito?
K: One broker says I ought to attend an auction. I stand to draw a bigger fee. Plus an advance. He's also interested in you. Saw you at the spa. He'll look us up in the Japanese garden. You wanted a complete picture. Here's Looking at you.



After a night out with new 'user friendly' Michael, the idea of joining Karen on her auction day at the villa lost its appeal. Did she really want to be cast as an egg vamp to follow a story that was possibly dated before it began? The whole business...

...seemed at times banal. It was sobering to think how the marketplace had 'hatched' one more way for young women to sell their bodies. Ambitious Karen would do well. But what would one gain by joining in? The tests specified were exacting, some of them possibly specious. Was she keen to see the thing through to glean copy for a tale that would entertain a wanker like Deplorable D? Was her new dull job so very indispensable? Was Kissy B. the only 'side show' in town?

A last minute decision to go brought her into the lush villa garden. Which was indeed a kind of Eden. The tale of a revised Genesis was recalled. Said the raconteur: If two Asians had been in Eden they might have eaten the Snake instead and all would be well. Something inside her said that being here was not efficacious though, that the snake still resided somewhere. On seeing the stone staircase that led to the tea house she again hesitated. The physical peril in the CIS was at times immutable; violence might come from any quarter. But here the jeopardy seemed elusive as ticks in the grass. The 'mites' of worry and mayhem.

Karen would be on the steps, as was agreed -- the gamy Karen, a beauty for all occasions. 'Beauty is Nature's brag, and must be shown....' (Slogging with Milton was not entirely in vain.) So was she in or out? In this seductive isle of time. She had returned to the West looking for a change of scenery and the freedom from surveillance and obdurate pursuit.



The likelihood that she could become an 'objet' in such a setting -- a thing to be stared or gawked at, appraised, evaluated -- was a fine irony. Like Genesis, this was a garden you might well be expelled from if you did not measure up. She laughed again, softly. Humour in Eden was an apostasy. What may be forgiven was not an issue for jesuitical debate. She sensed she was immersed in a comic book, half tones all.

Her first view of the Montecito villa was from the steps leading to the Tea House . They were to meet on the walkway below. The discovery of a nude Karen sunning herself on the steps was a gamy shock.

K: I came early. The sun's too nice to pass up.

Rather choosy about tan lines.

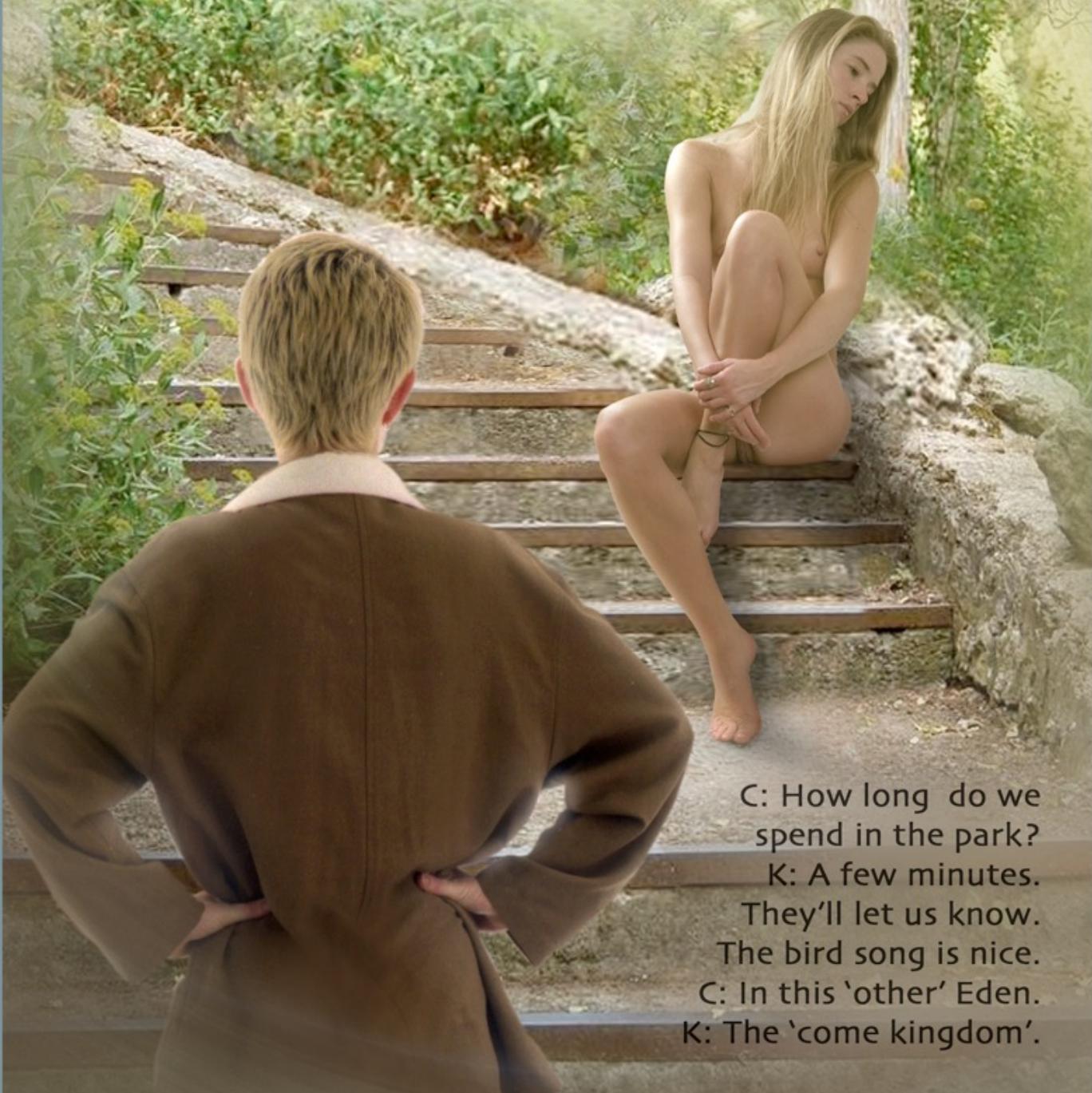
C (smiling): Not what I expected.

K: Another minute and we'll go up.

C: You said swim suits in the park.

K: I've a carryall behind the stone rail.

The Tea House is ours for
the afternoon.



C: How long do we spend in the park?

K: A few minutes.

They'll let us know.

The bird song is nice.

C: In this 'other' Eden.

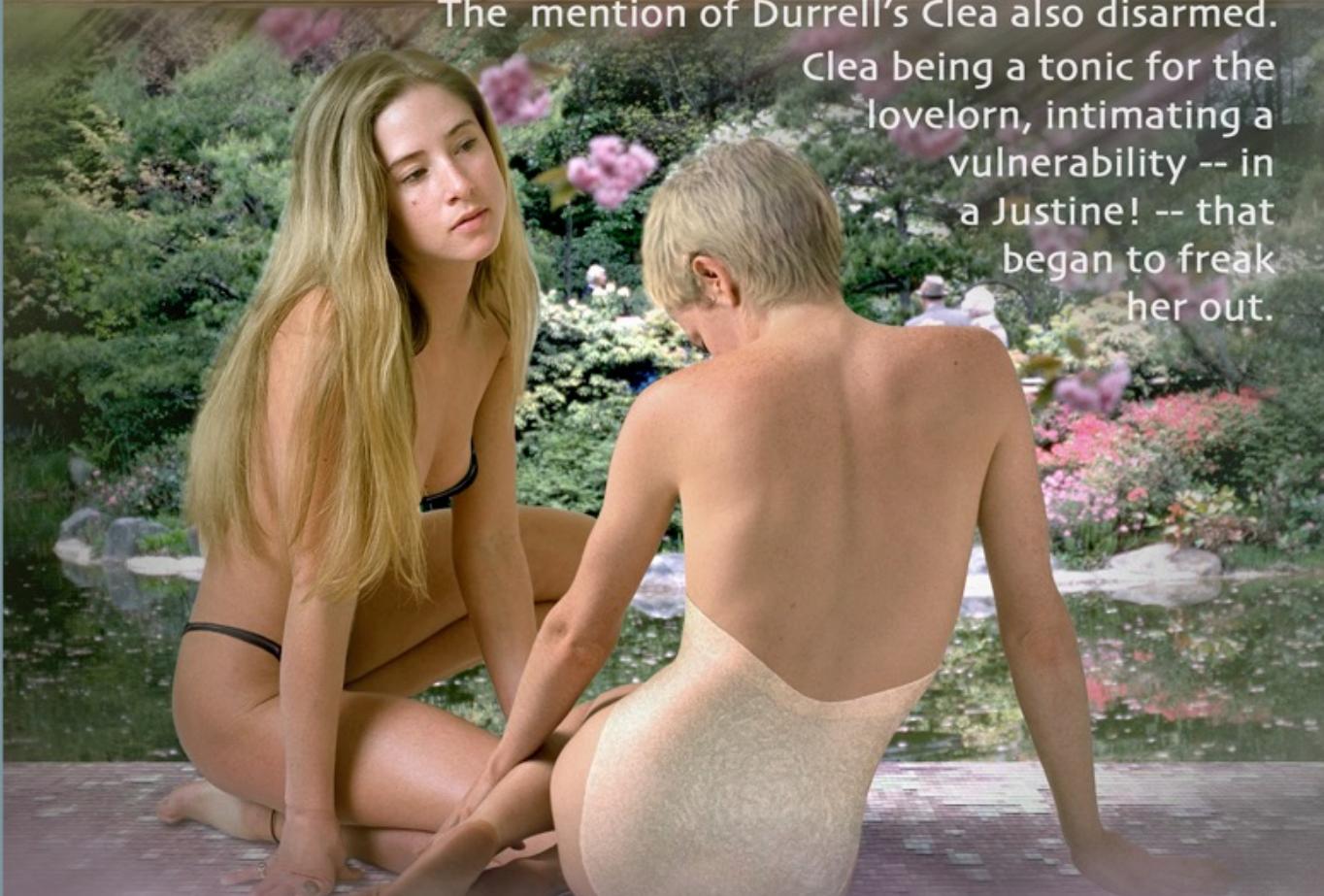
K: The 'come kingdom'.

In the tea house Karen's easy exhibitionism became a further taunt, her egret eyes rarely leaving her silent companion . An attention Catherine hadn't expected and must have looked restive for Karen produced a 'stirrup cup' of anisette with a winsome smile, her unexpectedly pithy words enhancing the come on. "A nice genteel swim suit. You are what they hype: smart, fair, thin. I wish I had a second bikini. For my Clea -- who paces the ambiguities..."



What disconcerted Catherine was her apprehension of the lean rarefied beauty, a novel experience that daunted as it teased. The mention of Durrell's Clea also disarmed.

Clea being a tonic for the lovelorn, intimating a vulnerability -- in a Justine! -- that began to freak her out.



They stayed in the garden the recommended time, answered a few questions, Karen's gaze rarely leaving her chary companion.

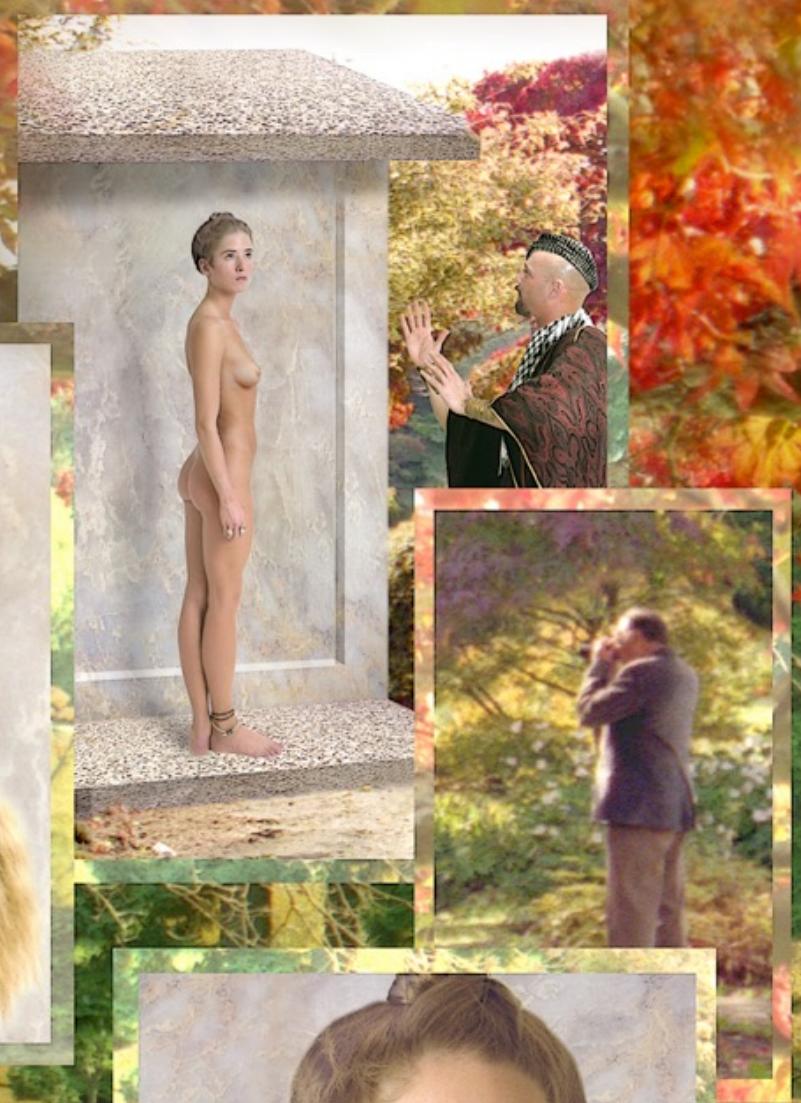
Before leaving they were asked to stand nude for a minute by by the Sol Shrine. Karen took up the request with her usual ready nonchalance while Catherine held back. "It's not what I anticipated," she explained, her snit with Pachis rankling still: posing nude was not then a diversion. "They take their time," Karen said, the imputation being that one might reconsider. "Your coming was nice," she added. "One tee'd up plus." Catherine smiled. "You look great," was her lone banal comment as Karen waited on a mossy rock outside the tea house. "They're here," she said at last, "Our cyclops. Here's seeing 'me.' Wish you were here." Catherine's own 'partiality' for this

Artemis was a discovery that scrambled her sense of self and the beings of her own mythology. The nub of the novel craving quite eluded her then, as if the garden was itself a player, a magnetic oasis that 'stranded' beings sought relief in...such was Catherine's lame intimation. Karen's fine silk hair was a wonder, as was her oddly thin voice, so given to aphoristic

words. The assurance too was a marvel, as notable nude as clothed. A belated desire to 'engage' this eidolon was becoming debilitating, a yearning with no nostalgic antecedent. She was at sea here. A recessive gene...newly activated? The gracile nude form, so conspicuous, so disarming, so telling...!



Standing alone against the pale marble, sleek Karen presented 69 a vision heedful Catherine felt culpable taking in, her new alien fascination numbing in its acuity, an absorption that delayed her spotting the furtive intruder with his bulky East German Praktika camera -- a curiosity that seemed to have but a lone explanation: Kissy was seeing both the forest and the trees. So unlike the Eastern broker who saw only the stark graven form, placing finally a jeweled bracelet about an ankle.



The same Eastern broker asked Karen to put her hair up and apply makeup, a request that incited a rare moue. On returning to the Tea House Karen wryly embraced her 'cousin', saying again, "The 'come kingdom'." The following kiss was magic for a head up Catherine, the ensuing interlude in that quiet bower a revelation: two pretty serpents with sleek arms and legs recasting Eden....



The afternoon proved to be a take on The Afternoon of a Faun (Debussy's idyll) except that the Fauns here were Glen Nymphs, one leading her companion to a leafy bower, where she 'discovered' a period lute, a fact as arresting as the trip to the bower itself. "A hymn to the brokers," Karen said, her roan tan seamless as the chords she played.

A beauty who knew her worth and prided daring.

For a time Catherine lay in the magic cell.
They had much to extoll, not the least
being that Karen had received an
offer -- an adulatory offer!



The rich scents sweetened the contractual stipulations.

CATHERINE: Any qualms about going off to Bern?

KAREN: For 90 thou and a layoff in Grindelwald?

CATHERINE: Giving a child of yourself to a Mideast broker?

KAREN: One more poor rich brat?



THE SENSATIONAL LIGHT TABLE OFFERINGS.

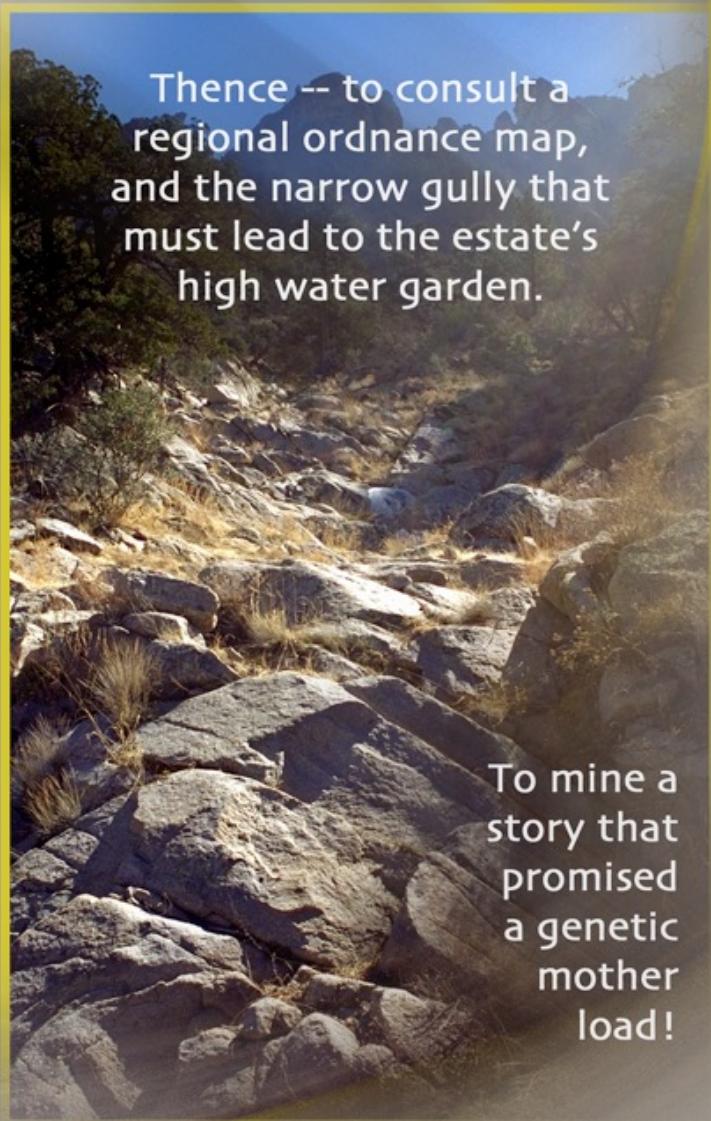
Kissy's disappointment with the success of the Guk creature in seducing his Lyudmila was partly compensated by the wondrous photographs that 'documented' the tryst -- one of which he did a wood cut of, then had it copied and enlarged -- to occupy a select spot in his study, side by side a photograph of Catherine that was done early in her stay with Leatherby when the fun was still unarticled: he painted a cubist swim suit on her and fondly photographed it.

Mirror mirror standing tall, who's the vainest of them all?
The chick with an egg (Karen), the buyer
with scratch (possibly a Borozov), or
the gadfly in an Ungaro teddy (me)?
Her visit with Karen at the villa was
a dual tumult. The estate itself was
was owned by a new emigré from
Riga (she had done some digging),
a 'retired' KGB major (Directorate
S: 'illegals') who could well be a
sleeper for a goon like Borozov.
She had to know more. For her-
self and her esteem. So: *a bon
chat bon rat*, in your airy cloister.
She and Karen parted on a musky
promise, which paled before the
edgy, trying adventure to come.

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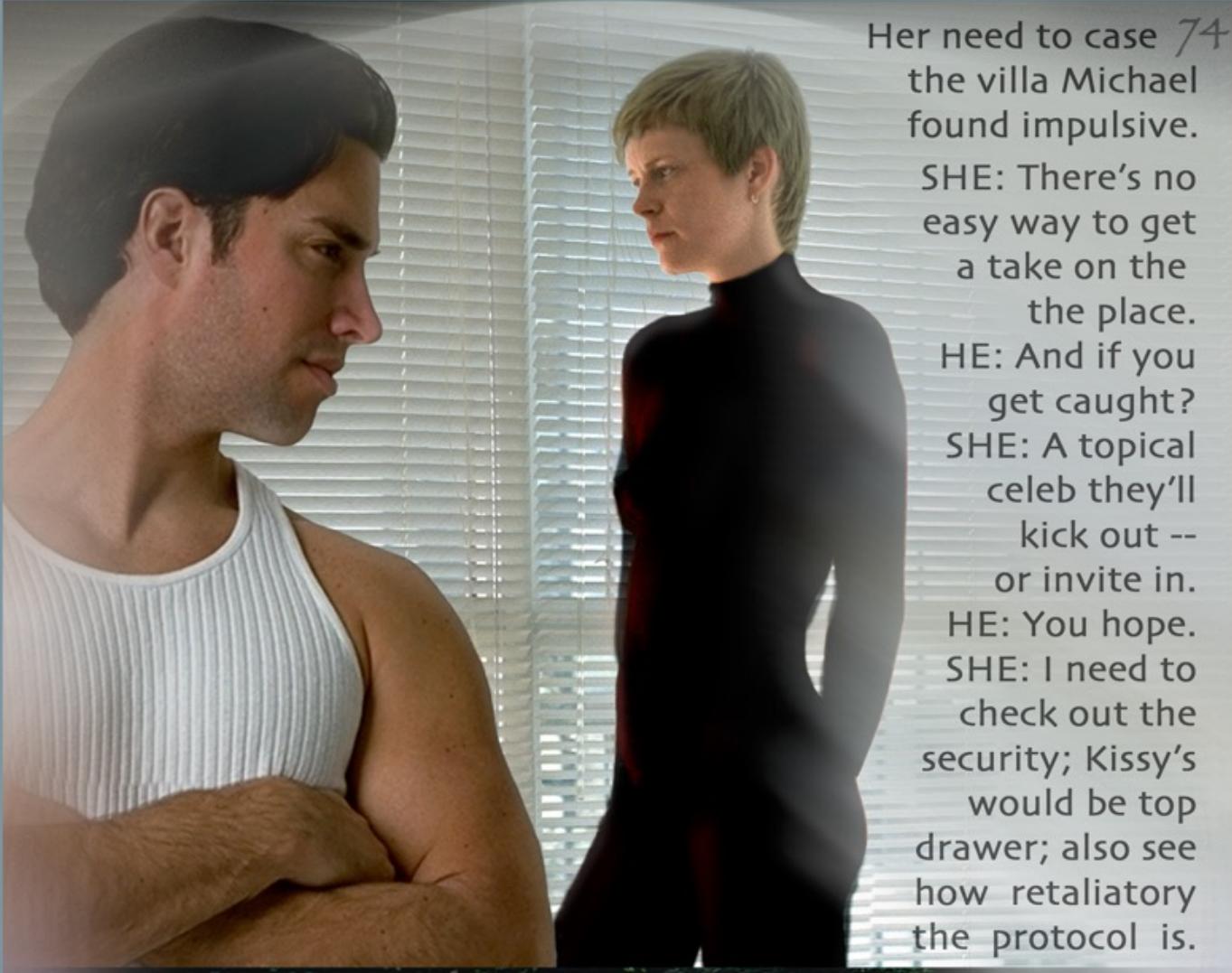
Thence -- to consult a
regional ordnance map,
and the narrow gully that
must lead to the estate's
high water garden.



To mine a
story that
promised
a genetic
mother
load!



The discovery astonished and cautioned; the
the waterfall began at the water garden of the villa, an
imposing edifice, where one might walk in on a dare.
Looking back at her ascent, the curiosity became an entreaty.



Her need to case 74

the villa Michael
found impulsive.

SHE: There's no
easy way to get
a take on the
the place.

HE: And if you
get caught?

SHE: A topical
celeb they'll
kick out --
or invite in.

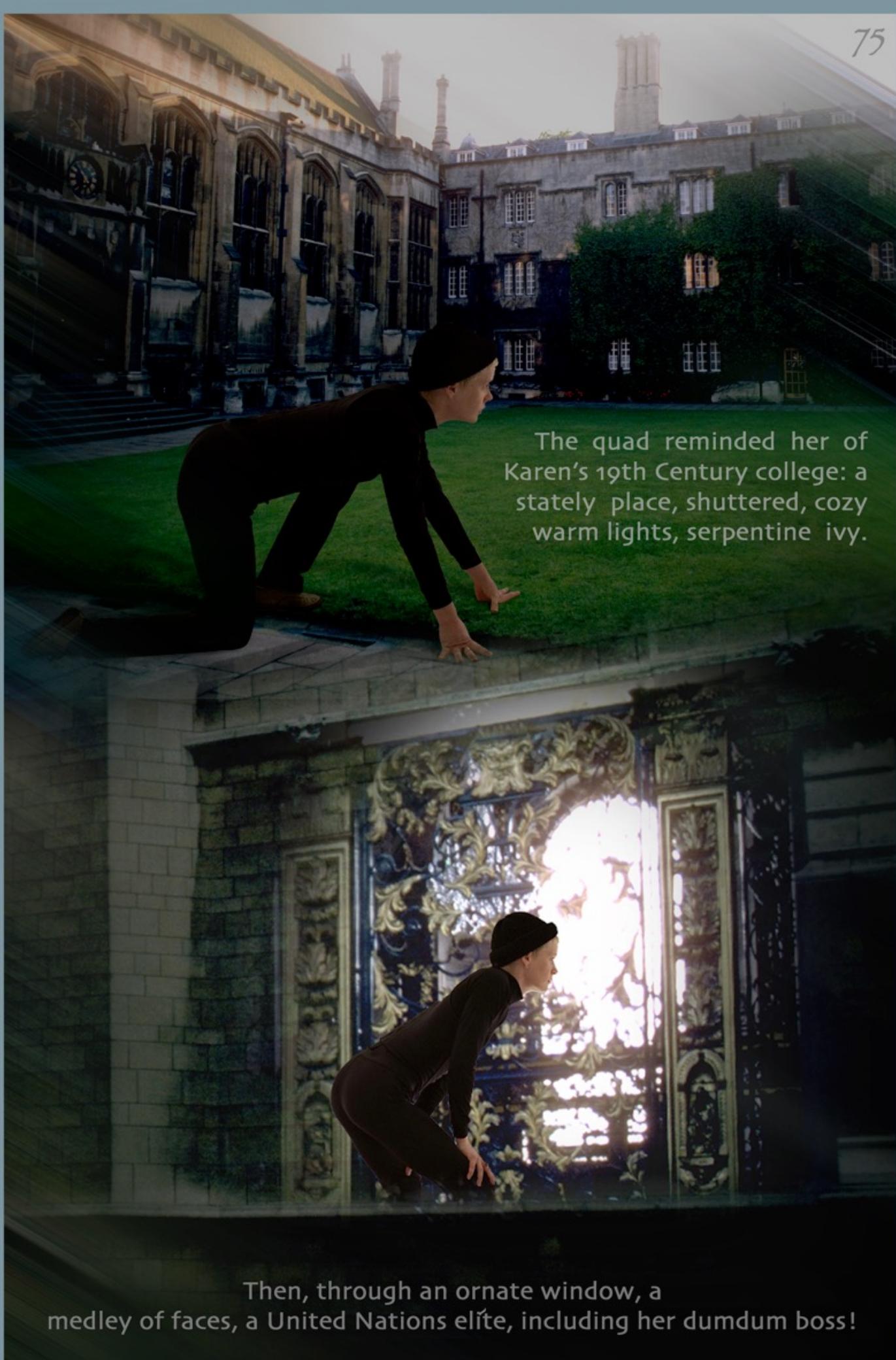
HE: You hope.

SHE: I need to
check out the
security; Kissy's
would be top
drawer; also see
how retaliatory
the protocol is.



As insurance she registered her 'call'
with her lawyer, and his old and
trusted private investigator.

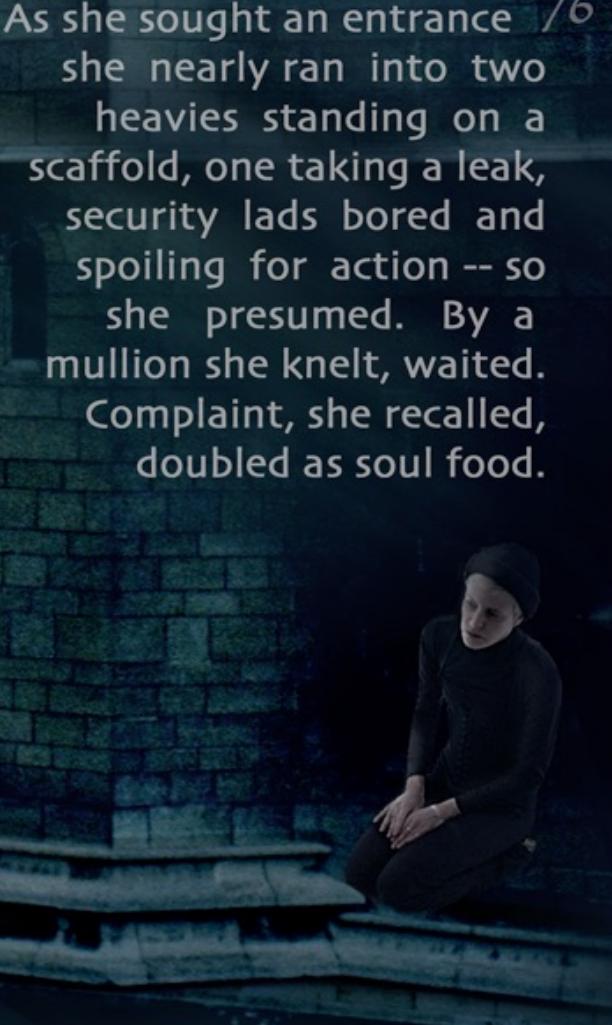
The sun took a while descending. Her dark suit helped in the hedgerows. As the clinic staff left for the day her ease of entry at least seemed ordained. Providence would decide!



The quad reminded her of Karen's 19th Century college: a stately place, shuttered, cozy warm lights, serpentine ivy.

Then, through an ornate window, a medley of faces, a United Nations élite, including her dum dum boss!

As she sought an entrance 76
she nearly ran into two
heavies standing on a
scaffold, one taking a leak,
security lads bored and
spoiling for action -- so
she presumed. By a
mullion she knelt, waited.
Complaint, she recalled,
doubled as soul food.

- 
- 
- = Man I had to piss.
 - = You watched the film?
 - = Yeah, kept waiting for somethin' to happen.
 - = Fat chance.
 - = That statutory lay kick boxes like Bruce Lee.
 - = Pitiful.
 - = I mean, how spooked is the thing going to get, man?
 - = God, I can taste it tonight.



Then a fleet shadow, a move curtailed as it began, the large figure swift and sure binding an arm -- her 'veridical' arm?

HE: Think you ought to pay your respects before rushing off.

SHE: Okay, okay!

HE: We get so few callers after hours.

SHE: Not a problem.

HE: Sure hope so.

They took her Olympus, hat, wig,
turtleneck and boots then left her in a cellar
with a goon who reminded her of Deplorable D.
As peculiar was an Arab chap who emerged from the
shadows to stare at her -- a face she may have seen at
the villa. She was the first to break the silence.

SHE: A keen eye for the ladies, have we?

HE: Ladies, yes.

SHE: Ribs, legs or babbling brooks?

HE: Every nuance, of the subtle and heraldic.

SHE: Wasted here, surely.



HE: If your skin is as good through-out, you may do very well.

SHE: Before or after they kick me out?

HE: I hardly think you wish to be 'expelled'. The matron would not wish it. Especially the matron, I think.

SHE: The matron a dear friend?

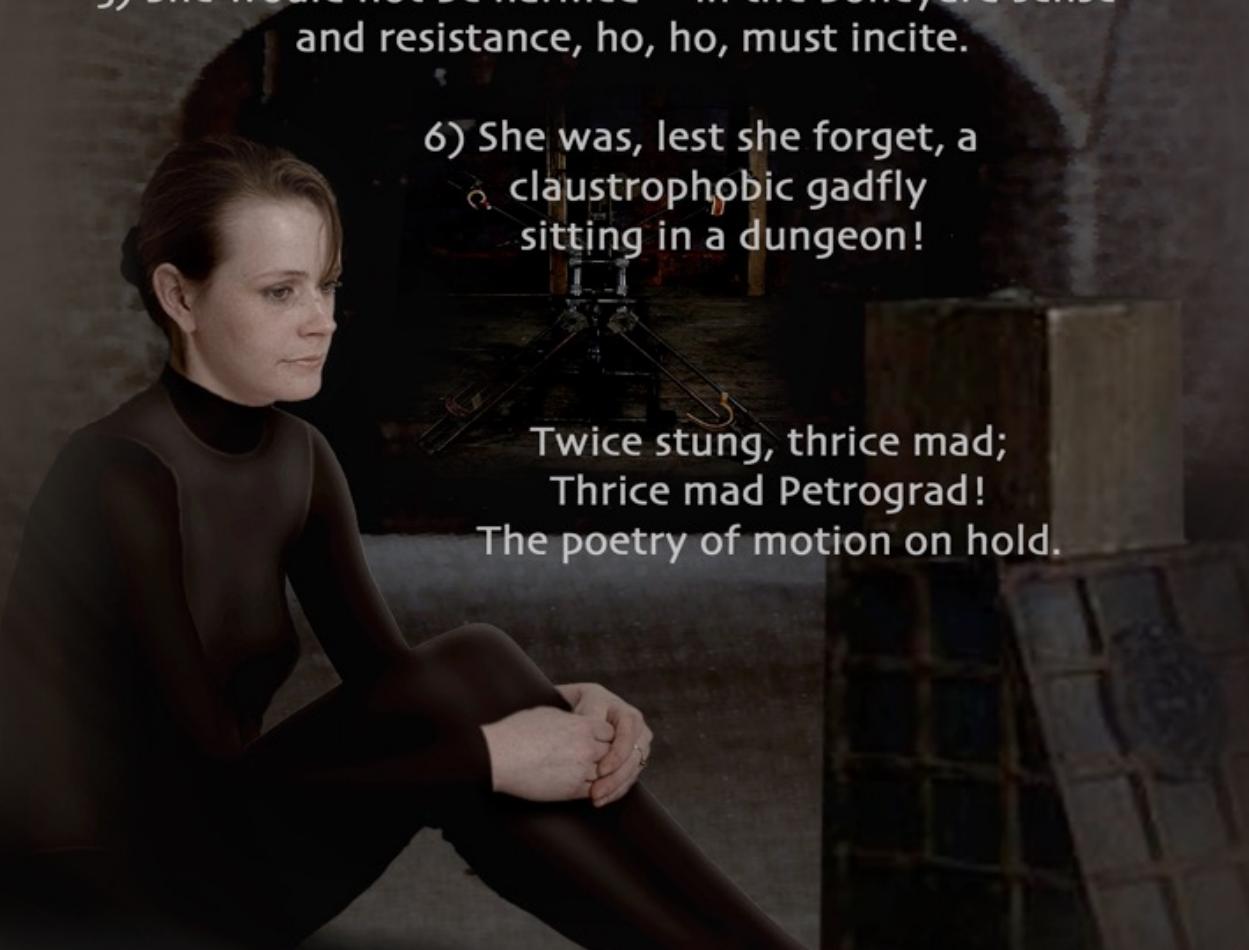
HE: We must see. They have a protocol about such visitations. I must admit to some confusion myself why 'you' would come here. I feel certain we shall meet again. *A bientôt.*

When the Arab left the eerie quiet dragged on. The prospect of the villa being a dual enterprise, a front for a legation annex, now seemed likely, for it did have the trappings of a former residency. The head wolverine would be sniffing the bare facts about now:

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- 1) She was a journalist guilty of trespass.
- 2) If charged ABN must suspend her.
- 3) Kissy prided himself as wit not mug; for now the house wolverine bided his time.
- 4) She would be booked, according to regulations, (searched, warned) then kicked out.
- 5) She would not be harmed -- in the boneyard sense -- and resistance, ho, ho, must incite.
- 6) She was, lest she forget, a claustrophobic gadfly sitting in a dungeon!

Twice stung, thrice mad;
Thrice mad Petrograd!
The poetry of motion on hold.



The other curiosity was the room itself, some of the materiel in the back suggestive of mining trusses, shoring, tool cases; then she wasn't sure. Some pieces, she decided, had a spare sinister look -- what you might find in a KGB punishment cell!

Then, in a bright bog, a dicey demand: security clearance tout court: put on the robe, loose hair, nothing under, all clothes to the yard bull by the door, the house authority on lingerie. What to do? The 'demand' she believed illicit but ached to see what really went on here, rash as that might be. HE: You got nice stuff; a store hereabouts? (The yard bull was paying attention.) SHE: -- From A friend. HE: He's one round dude.



An exam table cued a smile.

CATHERINE: Please note:
I'm here under duress.

MATRON: Relax, dear.
We just sit and talk.

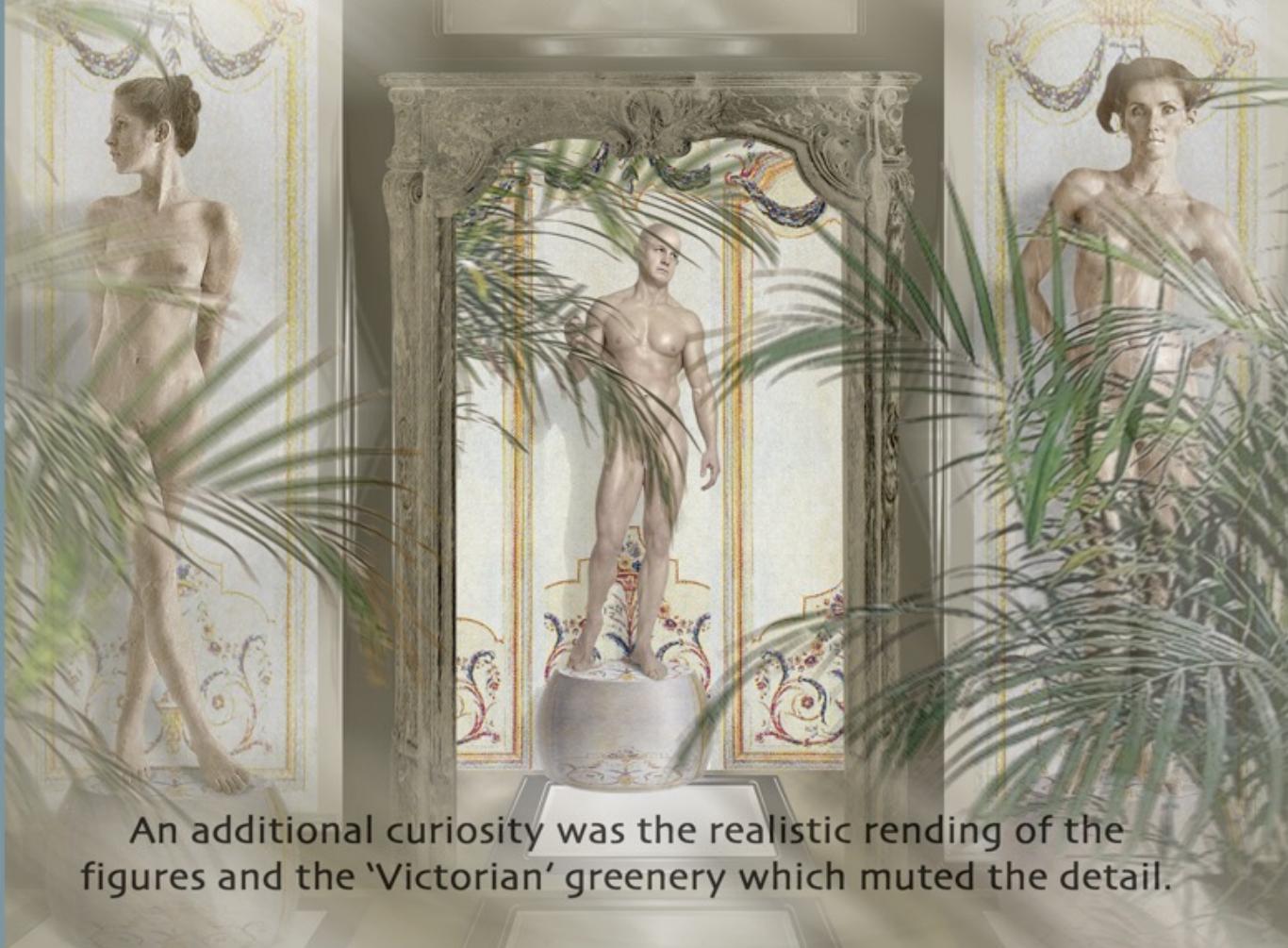


MATRON: The security folk must go through the motions. We do get some mischievous snoops. But you're obviously not one of them. When the proctor comes with your things you can leave. Though coming as you did did 'toot our tooter'. Celebrities rarely take such interest, love.

Despite her relief, Catherine rather regretted that her plan to balk at an exam was foiled: she would not now learn just how retaliatory the outfit might be, and what may transpire in this upscale cloister, this putative gene bank. A riddle that warped even her dismay: she still believed the place full of a dark past, and now sly furtive activities.

The exam thus turned out to be a ploy Grace acknowledged, a means to cow a mischievous snoop. "We get some angry kids from time to time. One brat tried to add a cyan dye to the pool water. One of the sore rejects. Some egos you would not believe. The local constabulary helps out with the obnoxious prowlers. So, let's sit and enjoy; the proctor won't be long. All's well; we've done due caution." The explanation stuck Catherine as canny bunk, but her curiosity was then implacable. She asked what the assembly she saw had to do with the clinic. "An overseer seminar, to review the new clinic's mandate. I must say we are curious why you came here; you don't fit a donor profile." Catherine smiled. "I met a chic candidate. Wanted to see for myself. Unobtrusively."

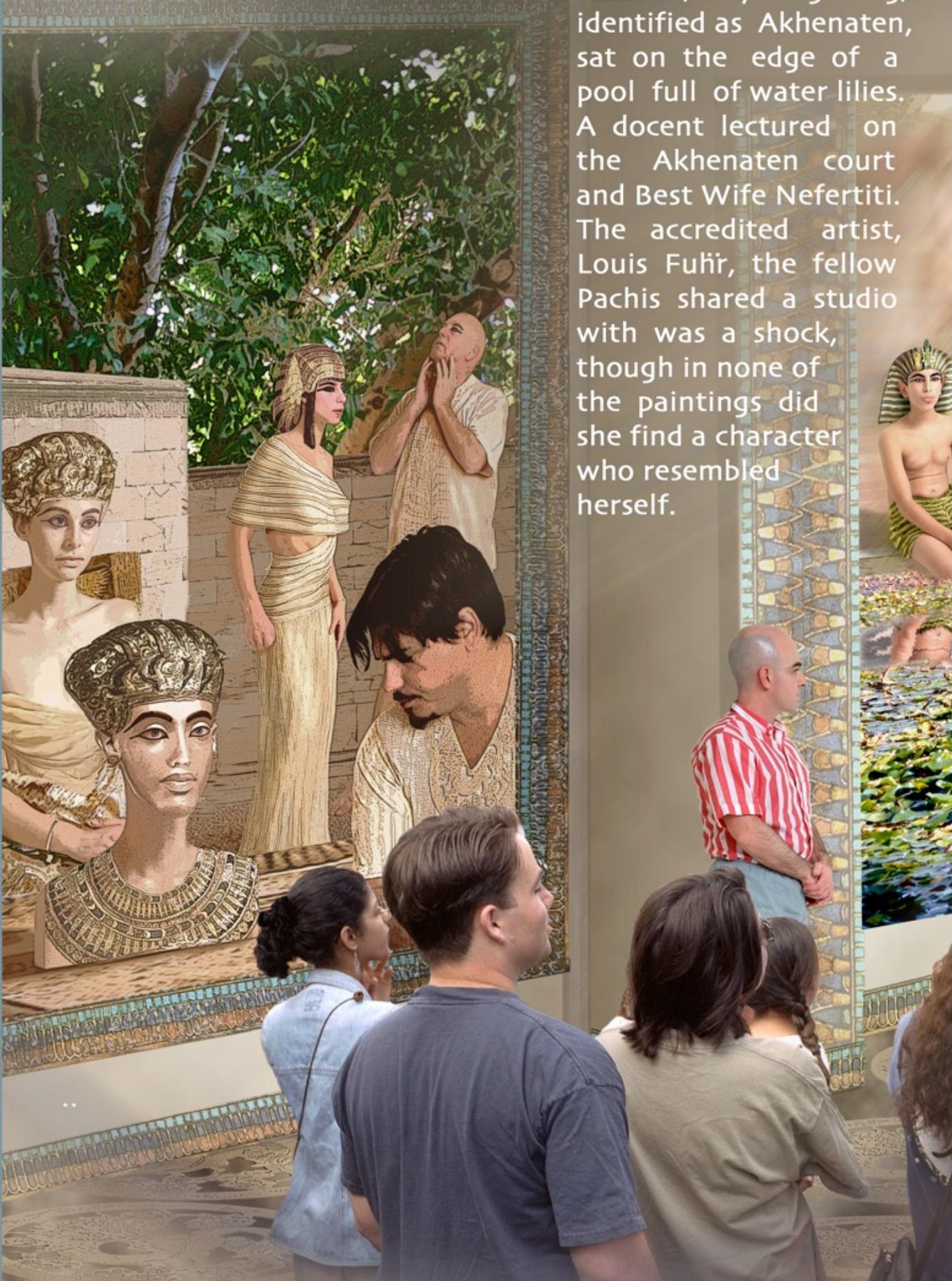
On leaving, Grace pointed to a hallway that would lead to the main entrance. The villa had many rooms and many corridors. One long hallway was lined with sculptures of idealized women and men -- identified as renderings of possible idyllic genetic matches that included exemplary SAT scores for each example.



An additional curiosity was the realistic rendering of the figures and the 'Victorian' greenery which muted the detail.

A further surprise along one corridor was a gallery of mural sized Egyptian paintings. In one of these, the figure identified as the sculptor Tuthmosis sat beside one of his creations. In

another, a young King, identified as Akhenaten, sat on the edge of a pool full of water lilies. A docent lectured on the Akhenaten court and Best Wife Nefertiti. The accredited artist, Louis Fuhr, the fellow Pachis shared a studio with was a shock, though in none of the paintings did she find a character who resembled herself.



Further along the hallway an opening to a companionway revealed a vista that first confused, then beset. Two forms in cowled gowns stood by an entrance to a gym. Inside a pretty woman, nicely dressed, sat on a chair making eye contact with the nearest of the hooded figures. The woman looked amused and resembled a person at the new Borozov gallery -- the one called Cody. The hooded men lent an oddly sinister look to the scene, not the least for handling materiel like the items in the ominous cellar.



Indeed the puzzles seemed endless in this odd place!



A further eye-opening discovery along the same dim corridor was a faintly lit picture of an acrobat who could well be Karen Guk. The scene itself posed a conundrum, in that the putative Karen seemed to be juggling a carved wooden head before a Middle-Eastern audience! Karen's attire suggested a period Egyptian setting, as did the look of her audience. An ancient decorative motif lined the stage she performed on. The find added to the sense of wonder and dismay in this rarefied world.

A second corridor passed an open doorway. A partly drawn curtain revealed a costumed girl in a room with at least three observers. The shock was the girl's resemblance to the dancer who figured in the London Apsara melee, now being examined for a recent ankle injury, the conversation within just audible.

EXAMINER: The patella and condyle seem okay; the Achilles and peroneus will need rest and physio -- a week or more. That movement hurt a bit, yes?...



GIRL: A not nice 'bit'.
(Catherine noted a Slavic intonation to the voice.)

WOMAN: The yank's hot tub is the cause of all this;
She's hung over most days.

EXAMINER: I saw the fall;
amazing it's only a sprain.

A forth attendant, wearing a whimsical smile suddenly closed the curtain without seeing a curious Catherine.

The mysteries abounded. The costume suggested the girl came directly from a performance. And the words -- what hot tub? Seamy Senator Warren's treasured 'work space'? And did the girl not speak in a Slavic accent? Whew! She could not recall being so puzzled by inadvertent particulars.

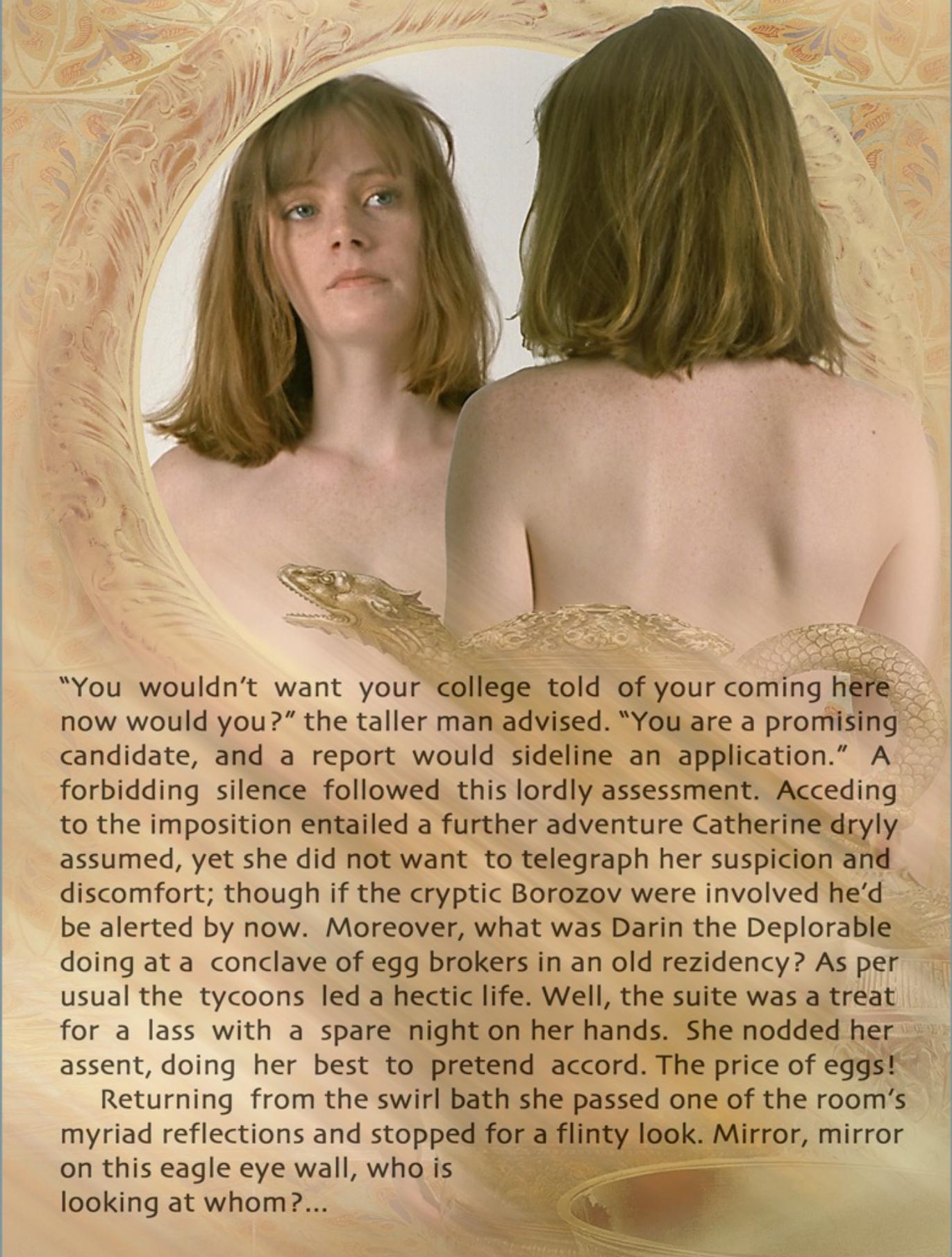
The recommended hallway led to a spiny of light from a doorway one had pass through to continue.



Two lads stood just inside, one holding what might well be a truncheon. She was about to turn around when they came forward with stony smiles and a disturbing proposal -- to stay the night!

The surreal aspect continued when the gents 'urged' her to stay the night. She was shown a lovely Edwardian suite. If she was registered as a guest, they explained, the security detail would not have to file a report.

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"You wouldn't want your college told of your coming here now would you?" the taller man advised. "You are a promising candidate, and a report would sideline an application." A forbidding silence followed this lordly assessment. Acceding to the imposition entailed a further adventure Catherine dryly assumed, yet she did not want to telegraph her suspicion and discomfort; though if the cryptic Borozov were involved he'd be alerted by now. Moreover, what was Darin the Deplorable doing at a conclave of egg brokers in an old rezidency? As per usual the tycoons led a hectic life. Well, the suite was a treat for a lass with a spare night on her hands. She nodded her assent, doing her best to pretend accord. The price of eggs!

Returning from the swirl bath she passed one of the room's myriad reflections and stopped for a flinty look. Mirror, mirror on this eagle eye wall, who is looking at whom?...

The bedroom overlooked a Stygian pond, its glass windows heavily glazed, the coverlet big as a scarf (though it proved to be heated), the bedside light lacking a switch. Cooperate! Red Magoo can't see in the dark! The irony, if such there was, was that she had slept in far more eerie places in the outskirts of Moscow. She opted here for an eye shade shade , and an evening as uneventful as the zoo setting might permit. Some wag in the GRU christened the GRU headquarters at Yasenevo The Aquarium. So. 'Welcome to the Aquarium' she lipsticked on the bathroom mirror -- which she suspected to be a two-way mirror -- and wondered how long the comment would remain unedited. One of Kissy's bravos might be entertained. Humour was an analgesic in Holy Rodina! Though the discovery of a light switch on the coverlet dimmed the catcalls, a switch she elected to leave on.



She noted her lipstick comment remained the next morning, while the day bed in an adjoining room presented an electric shock: a set of her work clothes was primly laid out, replacing the clothes she came in. Too obviously they paid a visit to her walk-up, reminding one and all they went where they listeth. As if to rub it in they sent the style-mad Elana to draw a bath and fix her hair, a daily breakfast rite, Elana claimed, a wile best to indulge. Hot poop was the siren's special bag.

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ELANA: You do phiz in a chino.
The General is a mensch and
likes one dress for breaky.
You could use some sun. I
use Enfilade sun blocks to
cut down the free radicals.

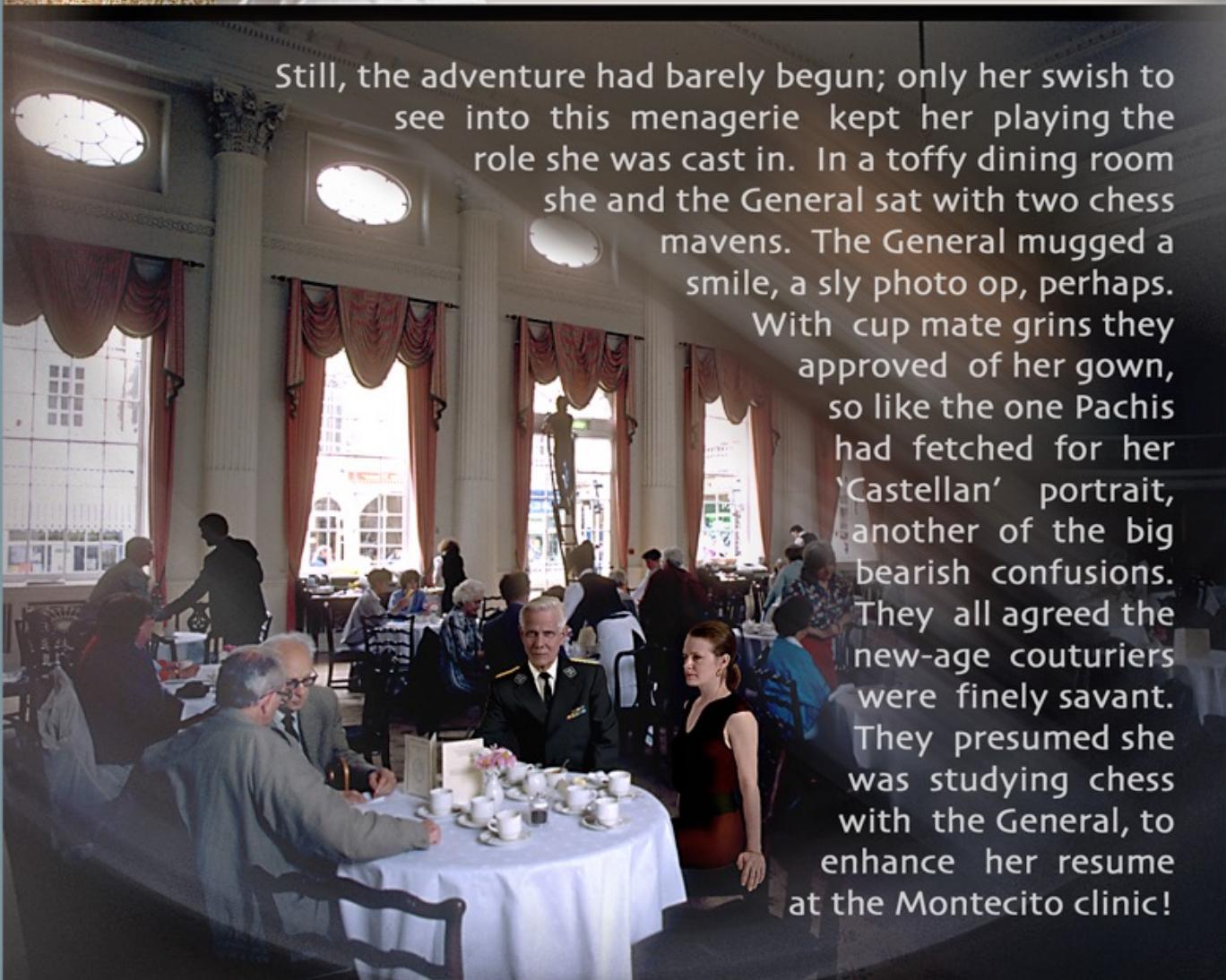
WHYTE: Free radicals.
The envy of us all.

ELANA: Ha, ha. They
warned me about you.

WHYTE: Who's this
mensch General?

ELANA: He speaks to all
our favoured guests.

When she took her leave, Elana left behind a costume suitable for 'dining with the General.' A droll Hobson's choice in that all else was again filched. "They'll iron those rags of yours," she explained. So: again stark in a bright room, a body possibly spied on. Bossy as a likely voyeur was not a puzzle: thugs ogled their birds. But her...here?



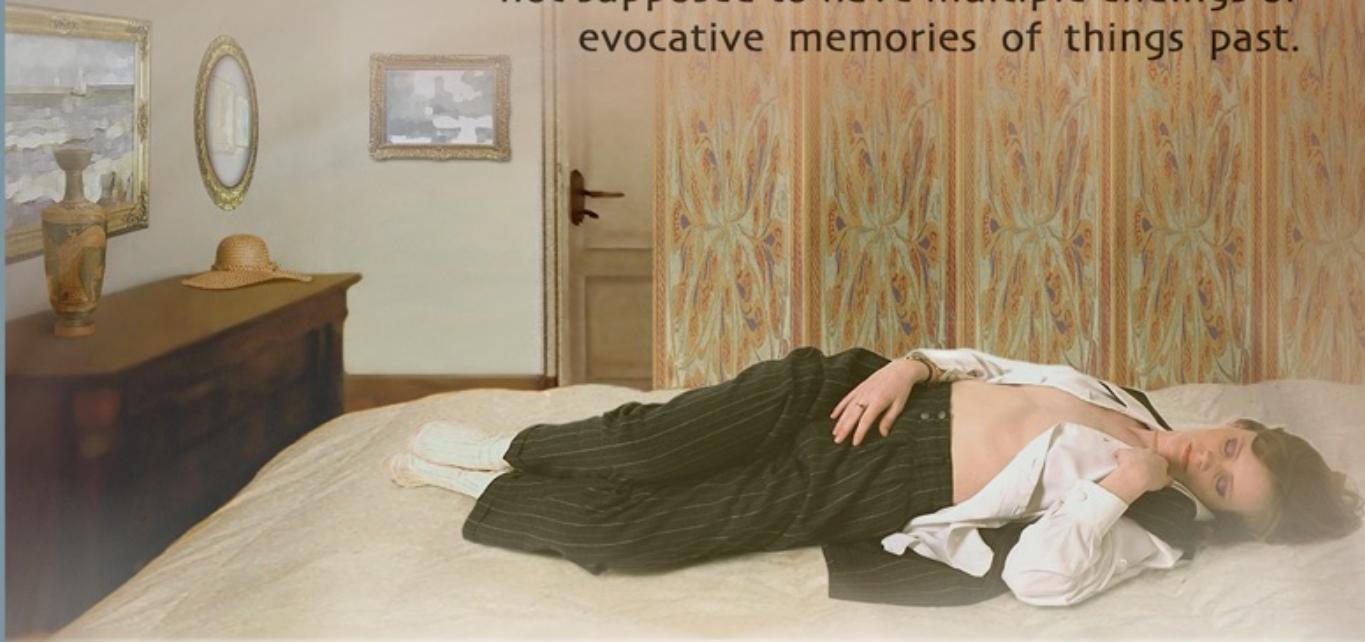
Still, the adventure had barely begun; only her swish to see into this menagerie kept her playing the role she was cast in. In a toffy dining room she and the General sat with two chess mavens. The General mugged a smile, a sly photo op, perhaps. With cup mate grins they approved of her gown, so like the one Pachis had fetched for her 'Castellan' portrait, another of the big bearish confusions. They all agreed the new-age couturiers were finely savant. They presumed she was studying chess with the General, to enhance her resume at the Montecito clinic!



Breakfast over she was free to go...a development that surprised but not impede.

On returning to her room she was determined to undo all of Elana's banal handiwork...just as the dizziness and nausea hit. Soon she crouched by the wardrobe while the scene faded into darkness. Dining with the General had been a limited success.

Awakening in a new quiet room the disorientation loomed. As she began to mull the forensic minutia her confusion morphed into a seismic dismay. If she was dreaming, the verisimilitude was hair raising. Dreams were not supposed to have multiple endings or evocative memories of things past.



In an adjoining sun room before a cheval glass -- a further unsettling reckoning as the key probabilities intruded.



- 1) A strong sedative had likely laced her coffee.
- 2) The photo op with the stiff laconic General may have a louche sequel; she had not dressed herself so, nor applied such makeup, nor ever used a soap she fulsomely reeked of now.
- 3) Evidence of a sex liaison must muddy her coming.
- 4) A record of her stay 'framed' a viable threat.
- 5) A note by the bed said a limo would come at noon.
- 6) The mirrored face looked bathetic and inescapable.
- 7) So. Round One: Whyte.
Round Two: Borozov & Company.

The Morning After the Missing Night Before...was revisited at home, ensconced in her own think tank, where the idea of assault lingered as an example of the lone tree falling in the primeval forest...no one about to confirm its fall.

90



By the following day she had all but snapped out of it, and began by calling the scapegrace himself. He would espouse ignorance of course, but his readiness to discuss the matter and tone of voice could answer a query in her own mind. "Pachis, love, I need an info package, from a friendly brown nose."



He grunted and rang off: so he was in hock, poor lamb, and might not talk to 'strangers'! Stay clear of her for 72 hours she imagined someone saying.

Then, via her secretary, a tear sheet from Quidnunc, a tuxedo tabloid, with a quip: "You have a twin! Or you've been on a real bender. Daphne says this Coren Wiley was seen in Viola's spa!

Boraz, as known, has beguiled by art for as he can remember, and saw his' figure resource since he had saged as a adapt his vision of the ns and the portals who e the early ie opening on further an excuse project to on, and in y of 1997, ued Pachis drawings e felt were e telling of o b illi

It was obvious the editors had made a mistake, unless she really did have a double, a likelihood not to be slighted at that stage. The setting was a benefit ball for the Los Angeles City Ballet, an organization sponsored by some board members at ABN. The curiosity was the date. That year she spent inside the new Commonwealth of Independent States. Precariously -- inside.



@ Quidnunc Review 1998

James Lattmann

Who she?
The traditionalist painter, best known with model Coren Wiley, at the opening of his latest collection entitled, we kid

call arrived, the voice
anonymous the
words cryptic.
Chary Pachis
had put out.

VOICE: Come alone to the Cayuse tomorrow at 2 PM, sit in the middle and don't look back of you. No wig, no concealing clothing. Keep your eyes forward. Someone will cue you with an open palm waved in front. Don't be clever. This is a one time offer. It is imperative you come by yourself.

(The Cayuse:
a rocky rise
by a lone
sunny
beach,
a nudie
haunt,
a spot
she'd
never
seen nor
tested for
sound bytes!)



She almost didn't go; crap shoots she tried to avoid. Luckily the wait was short.

STRANGER: The caves up top: stand on the uppermost footpath, no questions, eyes forward. Leave your clothes. A bikini's OK if you're a bluenose.

93

On the upper designated footpath a figure slipped in behind her, the voice -- likely Czech she thought -- brisk and urgent. She imagined some sort of vetting, but debated the command to remove her bikini and let her hair down...then decided the concession may help 'define' him!

HE: Keep looking forward. It's the selvedge I want to see. The digital honer you used on B.'s secretary was set in the lining of a valise. The OT wizards were impressed. It's sheltered here; we can't be seen from below.

SHE (sullenly): What Do-You-Do in the wintertime?...

HE: Go skiing.

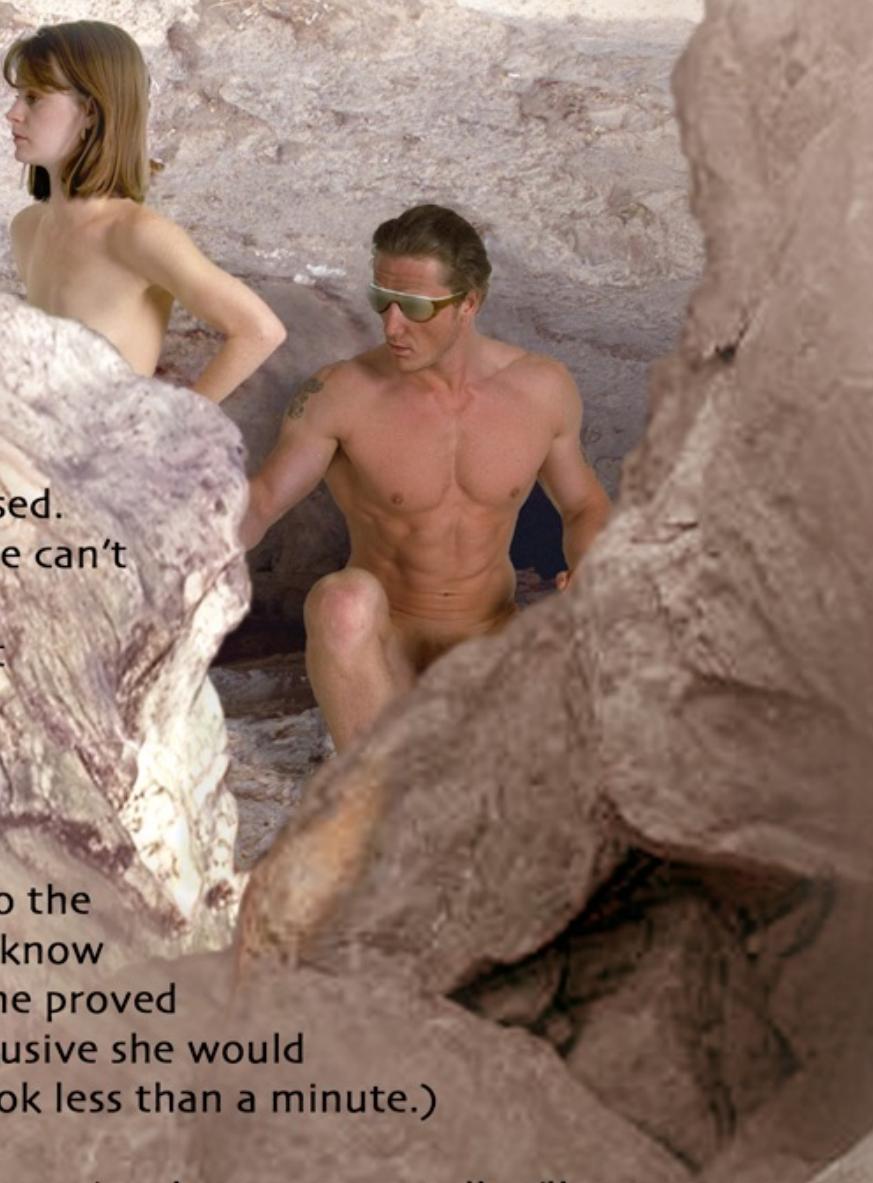
(She was reassured to the extent he seemed to know what to look for. If he proved to be gratuitously abusive she would leave. The vetting took less than a minute.)

HE (satisfied): Today you're clean; we can talk. I'll see you at the lookout scarp above. Same rules apply. There's a hollow there where you can sit down in.

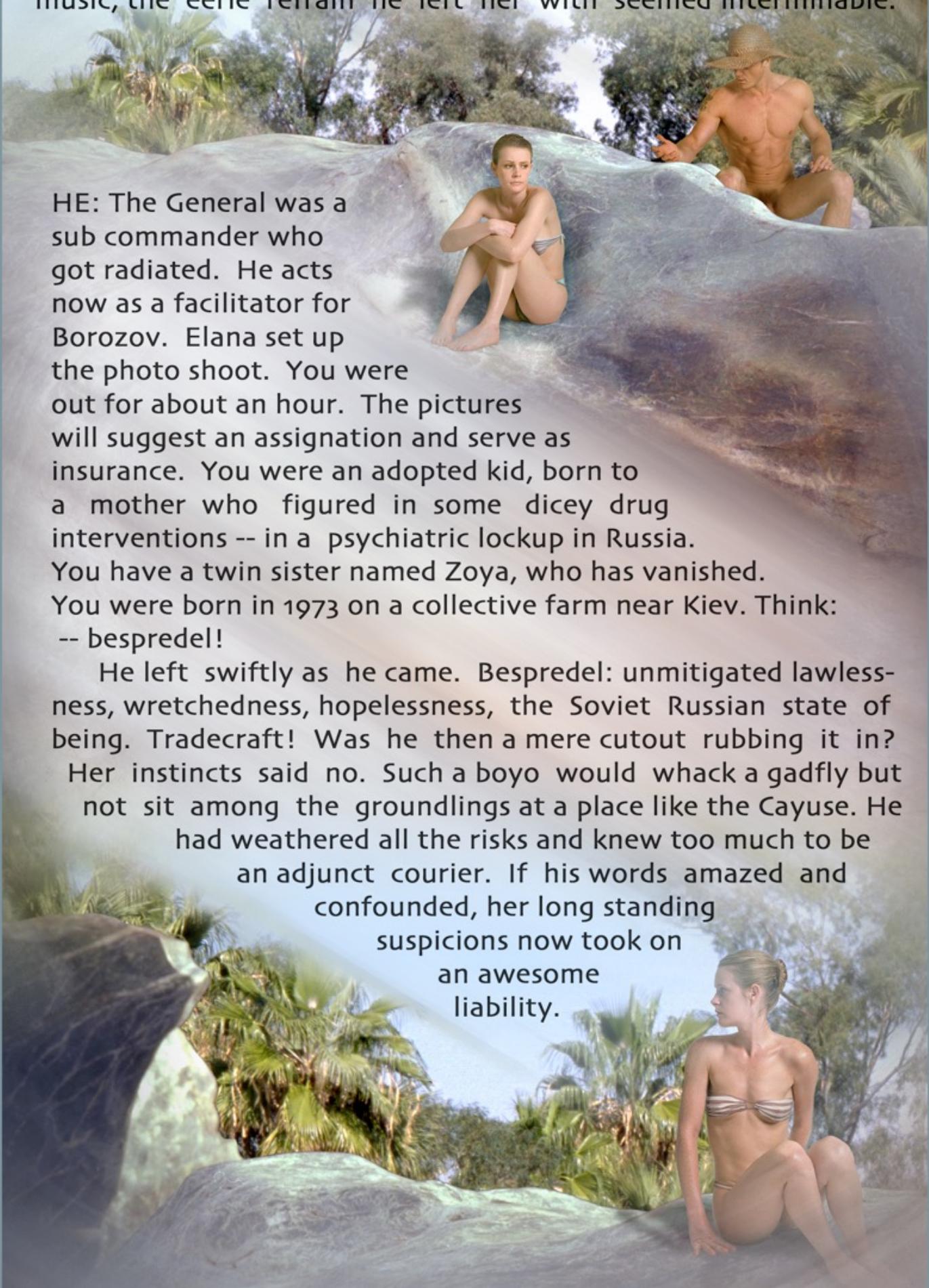
SHE: I'm not keen on going where you can't be seen.

HE: It's a good spot for private words. If you won't come, fine, but you'll miss a tale you know nothing about. It involves your early life in and out of the former Soviet Union. A story for alters and firesides, as the poet says. There is no danger in the telling of it, but the recognition of its validity will change your current outlook. And maybe your life.

SHE: What could you possibly know of my 'current outlook'? HE: I know the story you don't. It's a killer. See you shortly.



Later she would think of it as 'the end of the beginning', his 94 words haunting as they were confounding. Like 'minimalist' music, the eerie refrain he left her with seemed interminable.

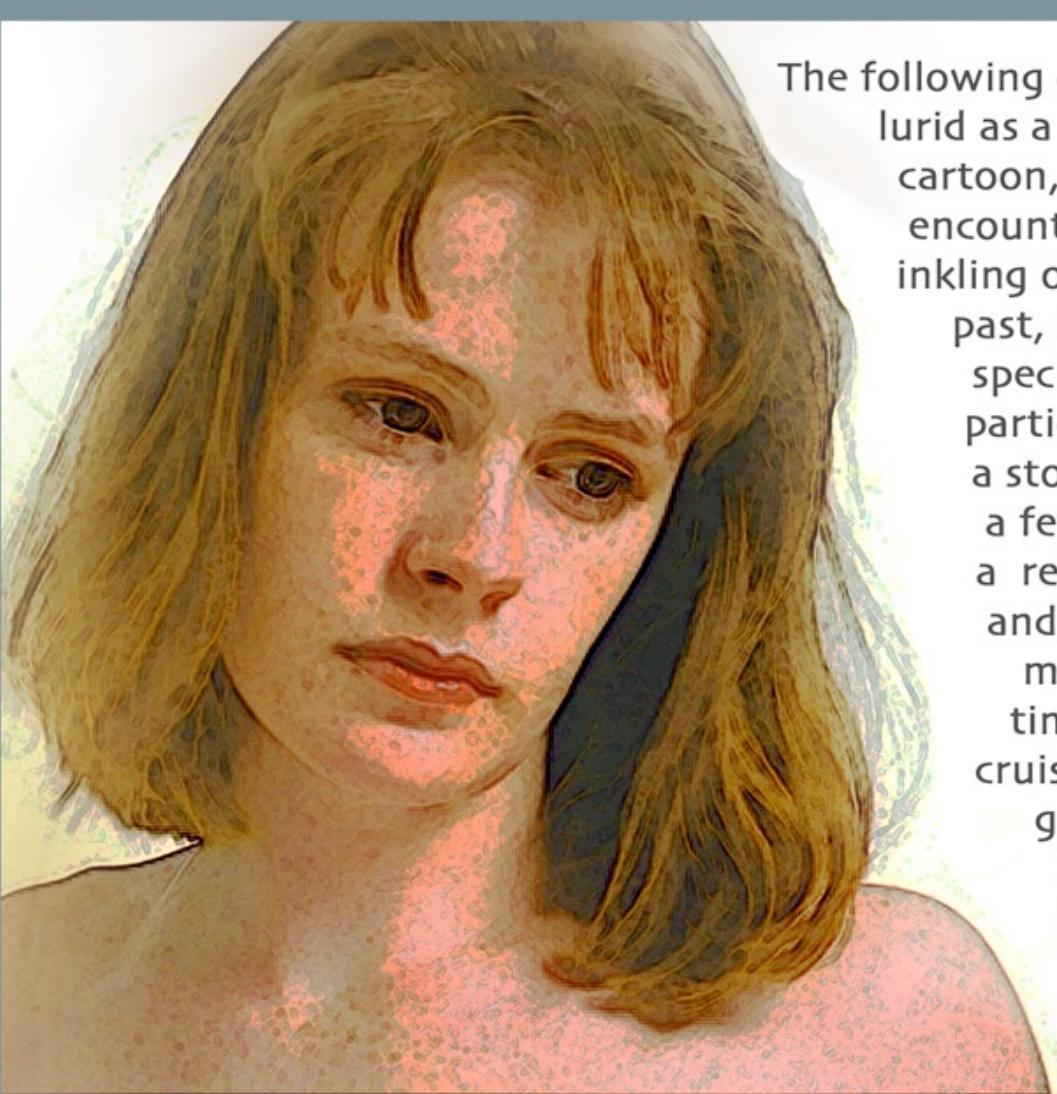


HE: The General was a sub commander who got radiated. He acts now as a facilitator for Borozov. Elana set up the photo shoot. You were out for about an hour. The pictures will suggest an assignation and serve as insurance. You were an adopted kid, born to a mother who figured in some dicey drug interventions -- in a psychiatric lockup in Russia. You have a twin sister named Zoya, who has vanished. You were born in 1973 on a collective farm near Kiev. Think: -- bespredel!

He left swiftly as he came. Bespredel: unmitigated lawlessness, wretchedness, hopelessness, the Soviet Russian state of being. Tradecraft! Was he then a mere cutout rubbing it in?

Her instincts said no. Such a boyo would whack a gadfly but not sit among the groundlings at a place like the Cayuse. He had weathered all the risks and knew too much to be an adjunct courier. If his words amazed and confounded, her long standing suspicions now took on an awesome liability.

The following day seemed lurid as a sensational cartoon, the Cayuse encounter a fateful inkling of memories past, such as her special school, a particular nurse, a stoic 'mother', a few lapses of a reliably vivid and meticulous memory, the time on a rare cruise when she got high as a kite only to wake up in a swank clinic...



Meeting her boss in his Hill's retreat to tell him of Kissy's gambit in egg marketeering was like informing a famous steward the oysters were off.

HE: Well, until he initiates, say, a derivative's swindle here, we must be fair and patient. As I've said before, deprecating a frangible enterprise is imprudent and partisan -- to say nothing of the sensationalism we do make every effort to nix.

She didn't confront him with his being at the villa, nor disclose her own adventure there.



Her first assignment as the Life Force Guru, her in-house handle at ABN, was to attend a fashion show rehearsal of Anton Plombiers' summer collection, where she found busy Karen modeling a pastiche of her own face!



The quirky dress label, Bopożow, was coined by the Paris based house of Enfilade, one of Kissy's late leveraged acquisitions!

In the bright dressing room area, Karen's egret eyes were alert to one and all, the spell she exerted all but ineffable, the haunt of a chimera.



C: Tony frock that -- all faces.

K: Glad you could come.

C: Any more surprises?

K: Some. I'm free afterward.

Catherine smiled.

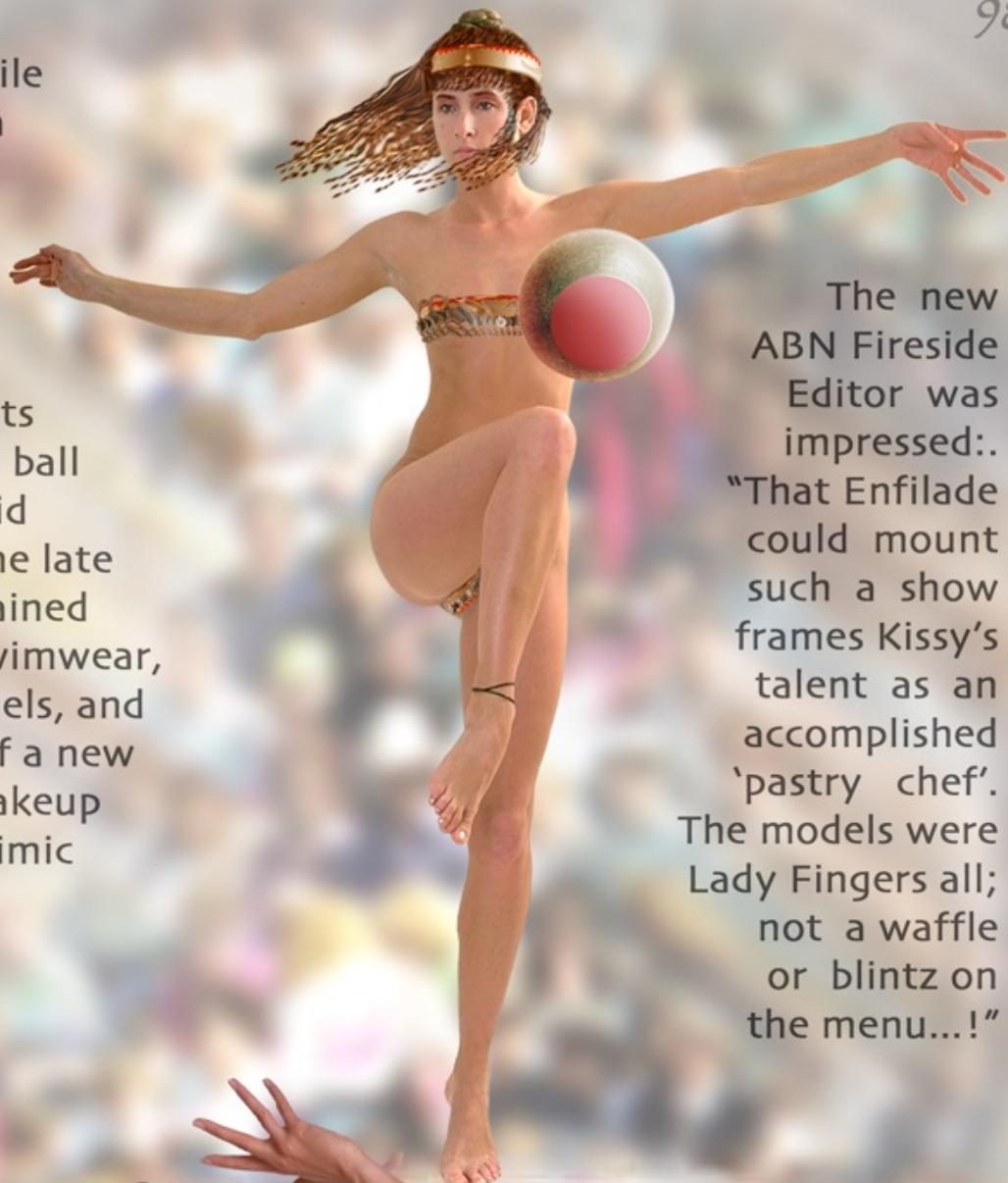
The thought of Kissy B. using this eidolon was more than she bargained for, her own curiosity, given Michael's philandering, an ongoing endurance test. In the land of freedom and promise.

The highlight of the show, beside the appearance of Karen herself, was a set of gowns that seemed to be spun from the finest Steuben glass.



Said ABN's fashion editor about Karen: A cool cuke in the new borscht belt trade, wrapped in the finest saran silk.

On an open plaza, the agile Karen, now a Peri out of out of a campy Ali Baba, performed rhythmic feats with a magic ball before an avid audience. The late show entertained with vivid swimwear, intrepid models, and the 'debut' of a new theatrical makeup applied to mimic the colorful swimsuits.



The new ABN Fireside Editor was impressed: "That Enfilade could mount such a show frames Kissy's talent as an accomplished 'pastry chef'. The models were Lady Fingers all; not a waffle or blintz on the menu...!"

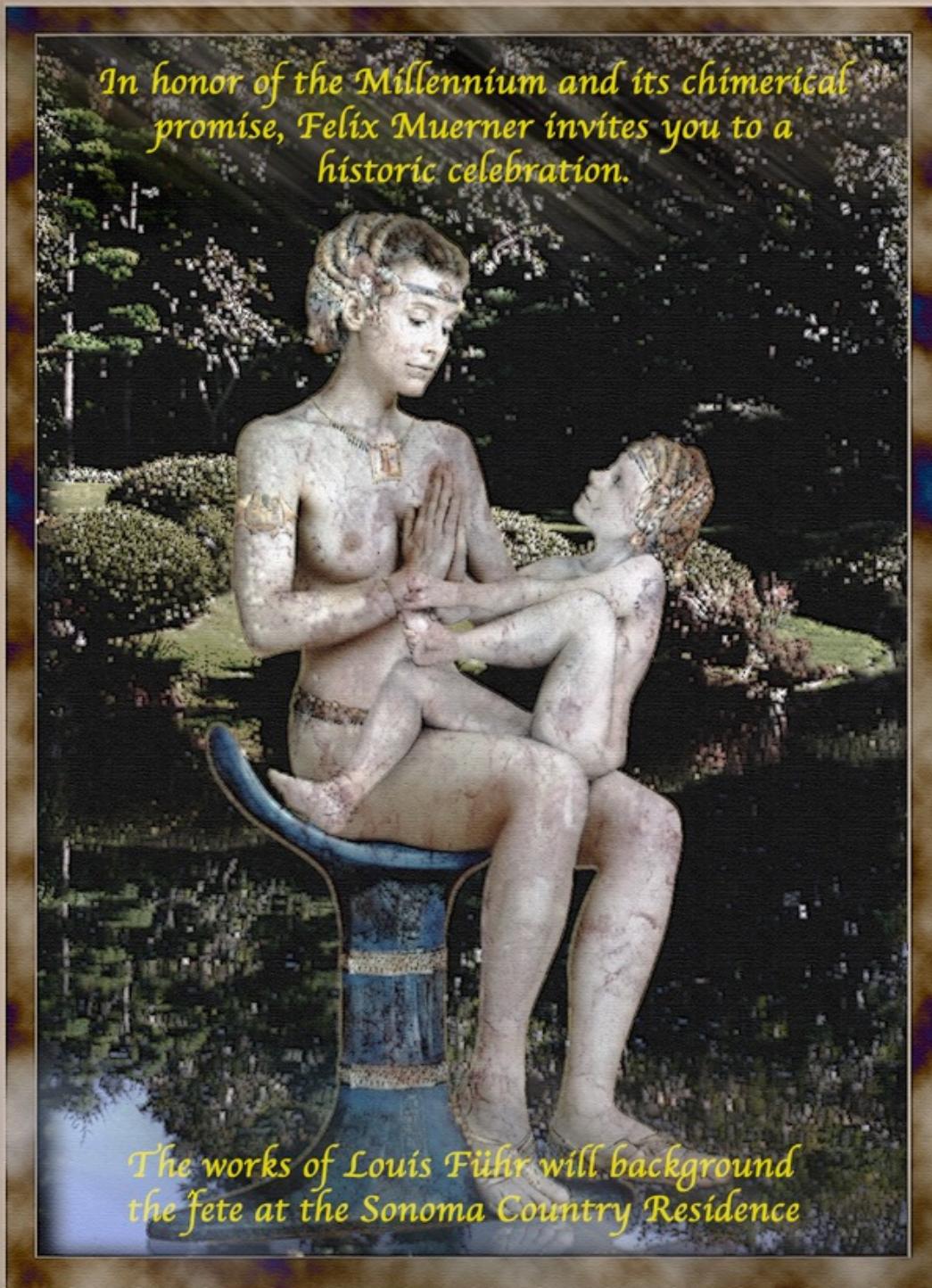


The parcel from David Willardson came out of the blue, and
promised to lighten the horizon despite the
the whimsy of the covering letter.

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Dear Catherine,

Apropos your interest in Russian arts and crafts, a new publishing house, roughly attached to historic events, is promoting a book you may find topical. I send you my advance copy. The publisher is Felix Muerner, the new European head of Paleomena. I also enclose an invitation to his Millennium party. DW



In opening the toffy book, she was surprised to find a gamy fable of Minoan Crete, one performer a near match of her own factual self. The tale was set in the sudden calamitous end of the art rich Bronze Age. In mythical terms, the period saw the first tears in veil of epiphany, i.e. the advent of a new monstrosity humans could not transpose (as they could with the veil in place). Not unlike the advent of modern genetics that fixes the idiosyncratic soma -- nature dealing us the 'self' cartoon one cannot 'rub out'. None of the images could she remember posing for. It seemed her double, if such there was, led a busy life. Some cartoon!

Musing the Maenad



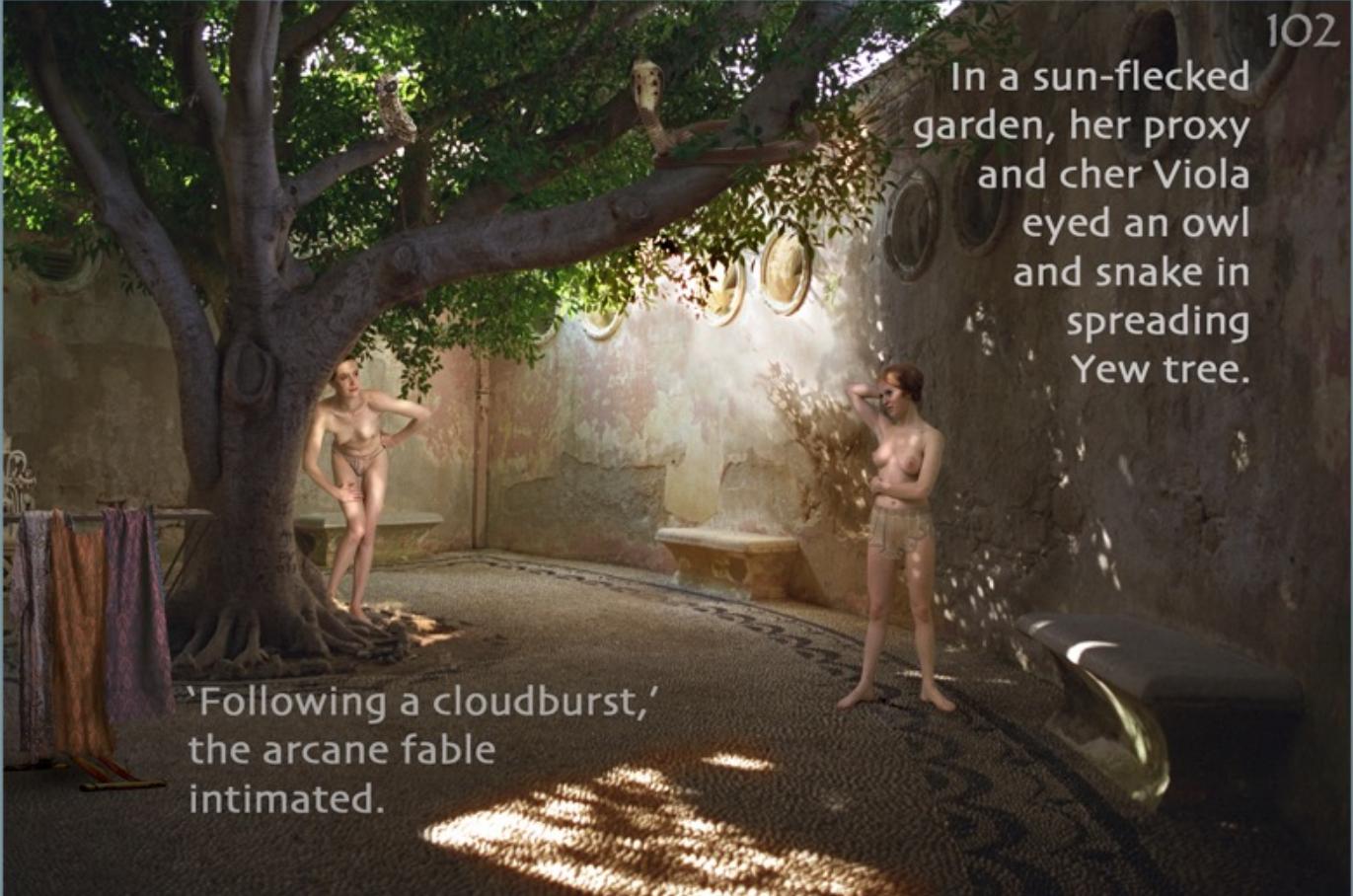
Text and pictures: Louis Führ

If dear Pachis (or Führ) were art world 'sleepers', Catherine was rawly awake with what she imagined an Olympian size headache.



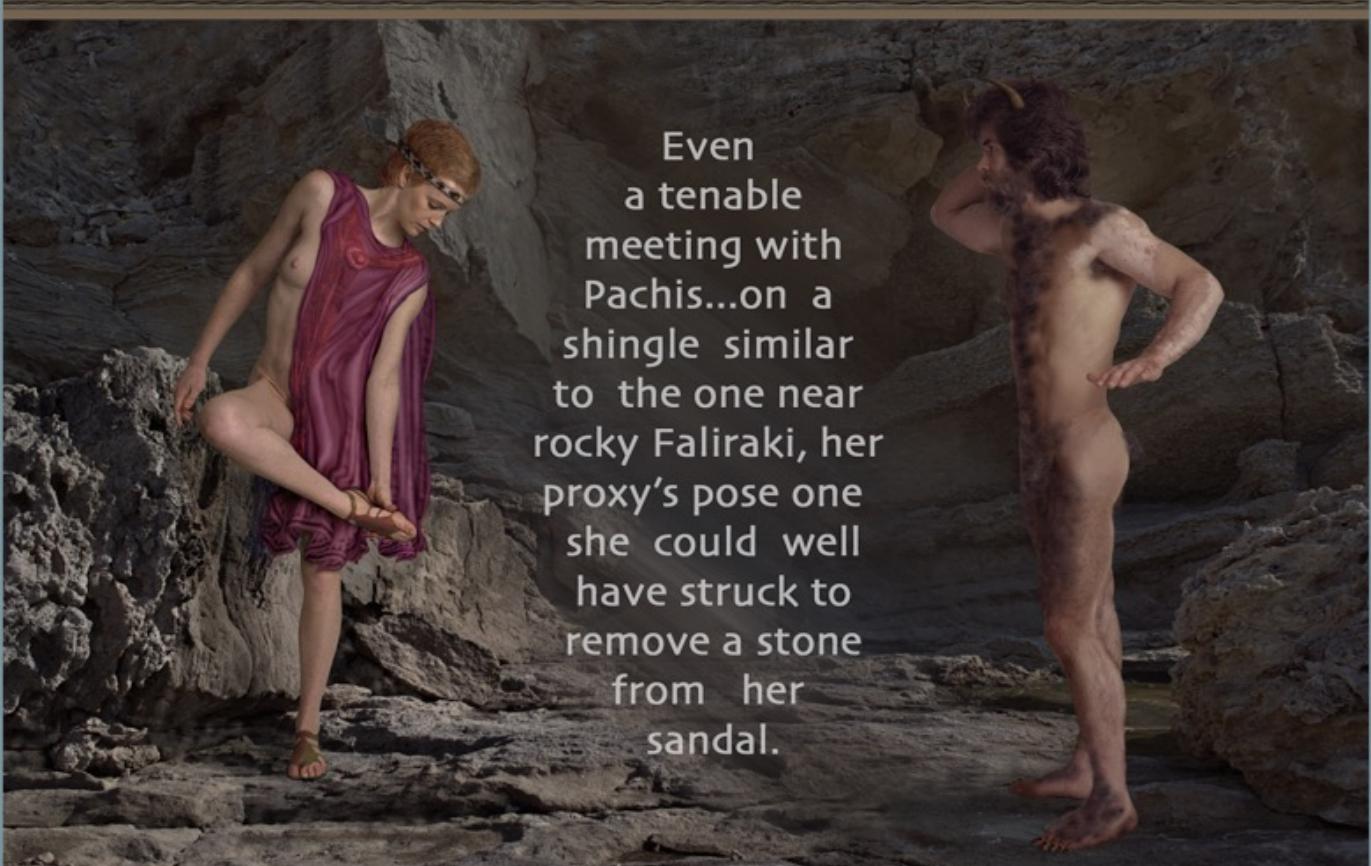
Unlike the offerings in the salon, the book showcased a realism that was troubling. More and more she wondered at the primacy of Pachis' memory, and how the renderings here materialized. The droll prospect of a raffish double amused less and less.

In a sun-flecked garden, her proxy and cher Viola eyed an owl and snake in spreading Yew tree.



'Following a cloudburst,'
the arcane fable
intimated.

If the settings captivated, the presence of her 'double' transfixed. Under a similar tree in the antic spa of Kallithea, near Old Rhodes Town, had she watched a snake stalk an owl. Michael would remember, but doubt her claim of 'immaculate confusion'.



Even
a tenable
meeting with
Pachis...on a
shingle similar
to the one near
rocky Faliraki, her
proxy's pose one
she could well
have struck to
remove a stone
from her
sandal.

Muerner's Millennium fête was held in his castle estate, which ¹⁰³ nestled in lush secured parkland, the villa itself surrounded by a lively moat full of silver fingerlings. Catherine and Willardson met and talked on a discreet inner terrace about the pictures in the curious book *Musing the Maenad*.

SHE: You think the pics extraordinary then.

HE: Yes, even discounting their provenance.

SHE: You don't believe in phantoms.

HE: Well, Kissy Borozov fashions many masques.

SHE: But what would he hope to gain?

HE (after a pause): There is a rumour, from our foreign desk, of a Russian lass who sold a vintage ikon from the Kremlin Armory, the museum there, to a buyer in Bern, Switzerland.

SHE: This is pertinent, I trust.

HE: One of my assayers in Berlin, who learned of the sale, thinks she stayed at the Hotel Kreuz for a time. A desk clerk, a nephew of my friend, told him she looked very much like the girl in *Musing the Maenad*; he was fascinated with a copy he saw in my friend's study.

SHE: Another gal with my face-card look.

HE: A Russian team has been 'making enquiries', my friend assures me. One assaulted the manager, and is now in metropolitan police custody. A warning, I should think.

SHE: And Swiss-Russian relations have taken a dive I presume.

HE: Russian security goons cast a wide net. A caution.

SHE: Happy days.

The Borozov/Muerner connection was up for grabs in the ballroom, as stories of Kissy's adventures made the rounds. To underline the point, a testy Michael almost got into a scrap with a

security guard she had encountered before at the egg spa! Dear buff Michael was all too keen to 'bury the bastard'...reminding her that guilt served to keep the party pertinent; keep the whimsy on hold.



The evening finale was a spirited dance troupe excerpting parts of Swan Lake, La Peri and Giselle, the dancers wearing identical face masks and little else. "In deference to the academies they likely attended," said a newly captivated Michael. "It's a swan song," was her prompt rejoinder. Though such paragons were a kind of aberration for her then, as if the Muerner Millennium was indeed imminent.

More and more her dim hoary past began to speak volumes.



If female complicity with the cosmetic and beauty barons was 105 one aspect of her new job that daunted amusement, the commentary in the latest OO Magazine proved irresistible, given her interest then in the experience of 'lustral bathing'.

Bopoζow

The new beauty spa boasts an electrolyte bath that convenes the sauna-birching cycle. Top Bopoζow model Karen Guk tingues for salubrity.



On her way to the caldarium a range fed beauty briefly spoke to a newly head up Catherine:



B: I've a friend with info you may be looking for.

C: A lot of it about.

B: Sit in the Finnish bath, keep looking in front and don't converse. Lap a towel when you are ready to converse.

C: With a spy who's what -- come in form the cold?

B: I'm sure you'll get on.

C: God let's hope so.

B: Yes, let's. See you.

In the designated steam room pale forms mingled as Karen's cool voice addressed from behind. "On the left side they tend to leave you alone." 106



The articed left side, the Amy she-male sanctum, the statuesque Karen then approached, a side darker than the rest, yet clear, nearly free the shrouds of steam: a fulsome heady moment Catherine could not disown.

With the ease of a matador Karen shed their sable toweling, leaving them as inmates, pledged, pressed as tyros, privacy assured. Deeds to confess, affirm, the egg scalper a painterly soul in transit.



Words lost as dew worms, perspiration pearled; that Karen might be a shill for a Borozov manoeuvre was apt...if baleful and unanticipated. Her identification of Felix Muerner! as a patron to the egg clinic alerted, as did her espousal of its mod necessity. "Splendor makes the zero-sum game, yes?" That the Cayuse might still be deemed a lead-word drop also teased, as did the finger tracing a newly budded breast.

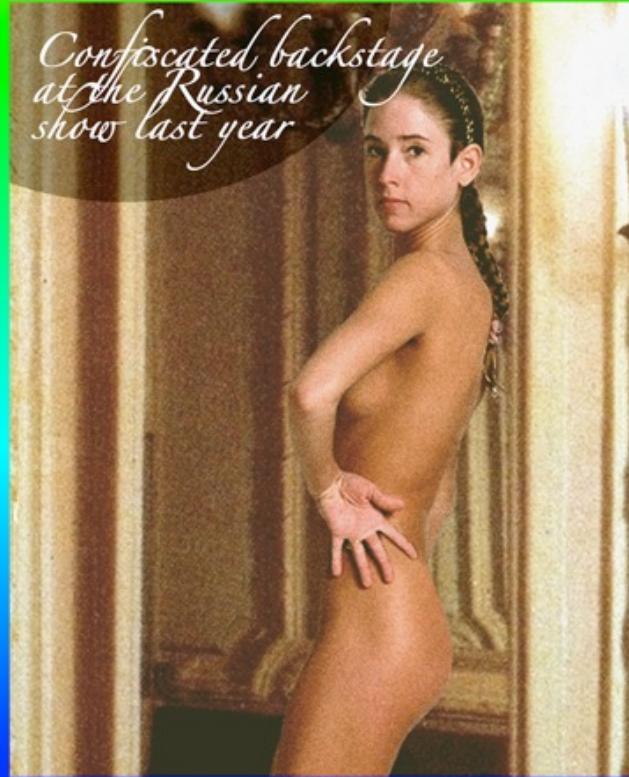
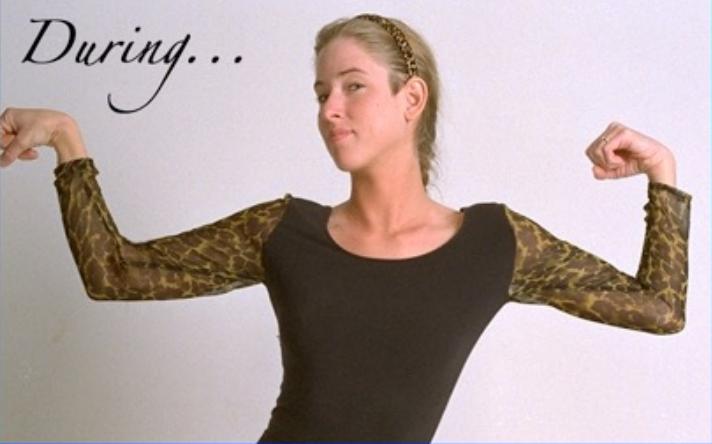
For ABN's 'C.' a blithe weekend, no makeup... 107

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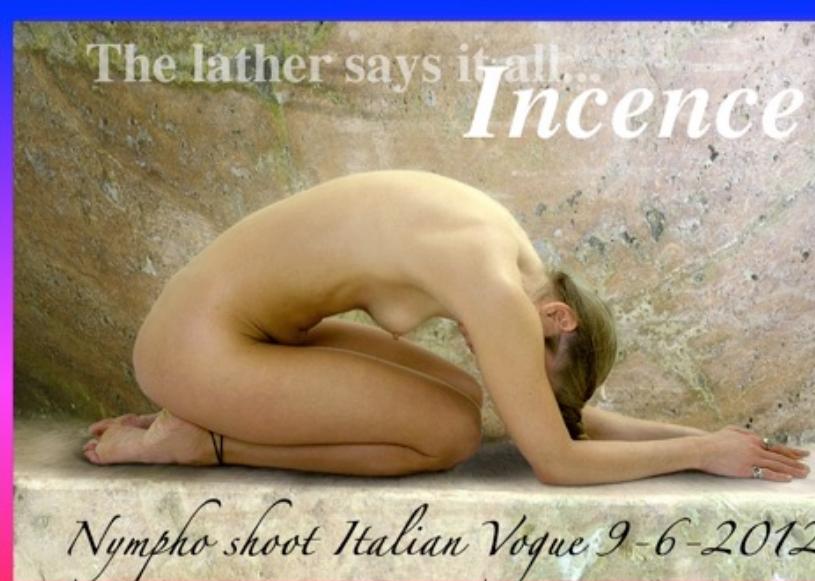
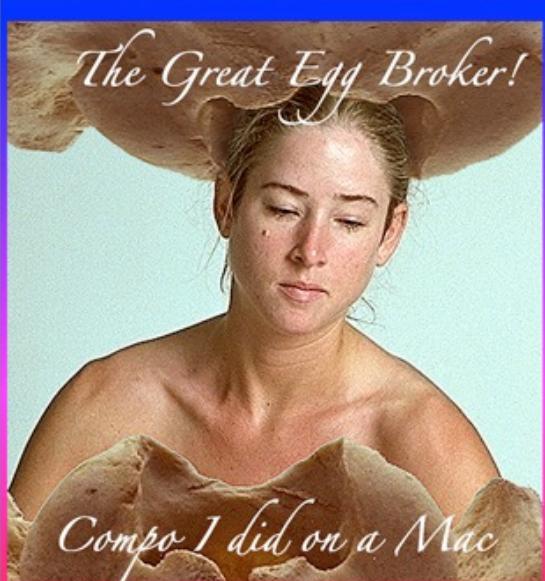


Bit part in the special
Oasis

During...



Confiscated backstage
at the Russian
show last year



The scrapbook problem was not the select pictures Karen gave her, but the photographs she took of their numinous weekend!

Recollecting the interval with Karen charged the sleepless nights, revealing a side of her nature she thought inchoate if not nonexistent. How ironic this discovery should frame the other 'revelation', as she thought of it, the life she had no inkling of whatever until her meeting at the Cayuse. But now a few memories demanded admission: the fine accelerated school she was sent to, her dear 'putative' mother who, before remarrying, may have been recruited by just such a research organ as Muerner's toffy Bern Clinic. Life for her 'daughter' began in earnest at the model school which challenged, charmed and framed the happiest period of Catherine's youth, each student deemed a 'special case'. The identity of the 'soloist', Catherine's putative twin and, via Willardson's dealer friend, possibly Russian as well, made for a rapt 'unveiling'!

The intrusive fact was that she may have been under some kind of scrutiny all her life; a 'test case' under periodic review. And now the enigmatic Karen seemed as fantastical, surreal!



If she could accept the reality of her early 'escape' from the U.S.S.R. and adoption by an exemplary parent in the U.S.A., her liaison with Karen, a likely Borozov plant, seemed an encore 'abduction'. Her career could be on the line with fastidious ABN.

She thought of it all as being 'adopted' twice: appropriated by a German materialist, and 'purloined' by a chic lesbian sensualist: bodies prized and touted, a revelation of life. She thought then of the jagged siding to the headwater pool she and Michael visited, the cliff above a risky diving challenge, their understanding that diving from such a height was hazardous yet confirmational: proof of being adroit and alive!

Now an eddied vista of 'things past' loomed like the cavern she and Michael once plunged into, often headfirst, to experience a tingling, sobering, reorienting cold, which now revisited itself, to wit: that she did not look like either of her now putative parents, less her sweet devoted mother. Even now a name, Coren Wiley, a lame fabrication perhaps -- improvised from past 'bespredel' in Holy Rodina -- needled. If the need to learn more was enticing, the unknown Charybdis that churned before her was frightening as it was oddly mesmerizing.



Then from Deplorable D. a terse voice mail summons: A matter of some importance. Noon today suits me best. D.



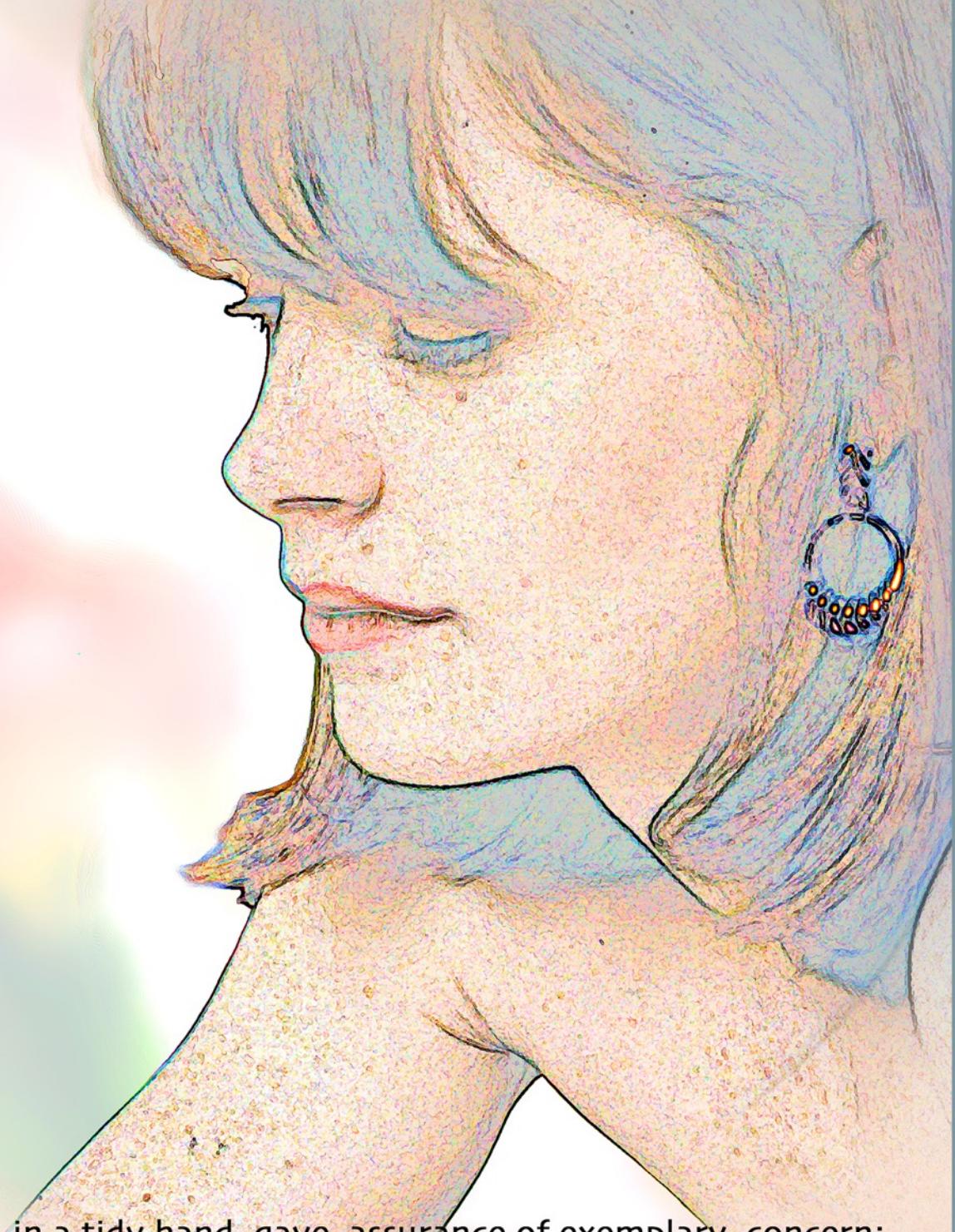
The executive lads were departing the screening room, their voices just audible, their faces a mosaic behind the glass doors.

The adjoining study was empty -- but for a set of photos laid out on an edit table, an oddly pretty muster given its provenance in Karen's art nouveau maisonette, the set a distinct reminder that vodka and gin are a M.A.D. duo. The optic cell used had been well concealed. That wily Karen might be a stinger-treeshaker crossed her mind but not tempered her esprit. Next door the thin, high-pitched voice of D.D. droned on: "Think of slavery in Africa; like kinky sex it's always obtained, but it's not something you lay on a mixed oversight committee. Words are sometimes a waste of time. The deed here says it all. With a goddam Russian for petesake!"



So. Feeling in all its nakedness. She was not a Messalina, though married to ABN -- to Caesar! -- whose wife must beggar suspicion. Trade craft! Cameras were so wily as news makers, in her wish for words alone, by, of, and for, themselves; to be read or heard, not glimpsed, tarted, show-cased.....

111



A note, in a tidy hand, gave assurance of exemplary concern:
The board may suspend with a year's salary if the Russians file for trespass. I will of course try to keep the portable pension intact.

D.



Sunlight in a neighbourhood park was lush that day. She spent the afternoon carpe diem, the gin on hold.

112

After a time a form emerged from the greenery, a pug, an ample being that seemed ordained, a special goad for sober alkies.

Not for a long while had someone got under her skin so. In trying to ignore him she backed

herself into a hollow tree, where he softly stated, "The Cayuse has more storytellers than butterflies; one may be on the ridge tomorrow, 2 PM, pretty if a trifle nerdy.

We do require able versatile talent. Our benefit is that Kissy is not Bossy; our major dilemma is that Kissy is no Bossy." Words that defied understanding she believed.

On leaving he left her with a sturdy taunt: "You'll

recall what too many Germans said about Nazi rhetoric: 'You do not eat a meal as hot as it's cooked.' A sad modern homily."

Returning to the Cayuse was a little like itching a no-see-um bite: disbelief goading obsession. She sunned this time time on the parapet in an old slack get up that might not alert a security nit. The instruction came from a gal seated back of her whom she had somehow missed: "Two gents by the change lean-to at the top will be waiting. Stand outside the slopping stone wall and face south. Keep your arms at your sides at all times. When you are ready stand contrapossto -- with your weight on your left leg; the wait will be short."

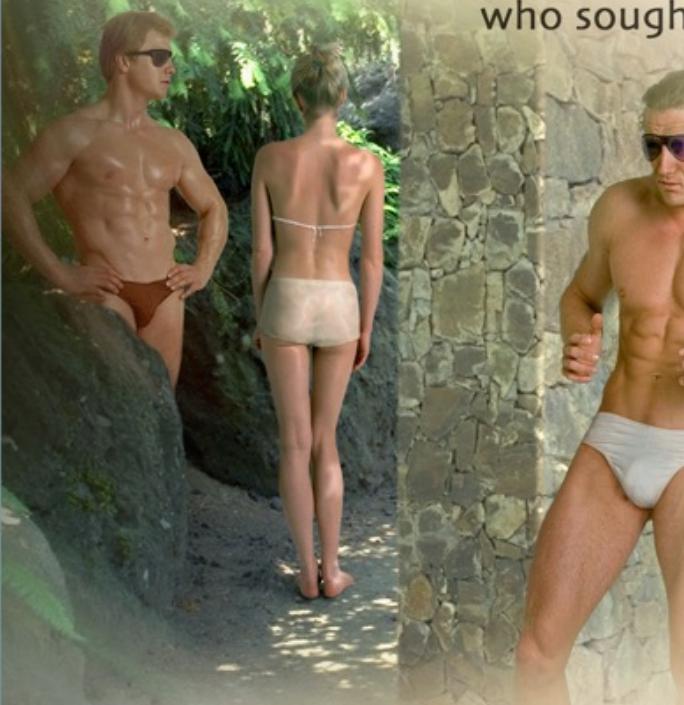


Two head-up gents materialized in corbeau shades, their words febrile as their bods. Would she help in finding a bio- engineer who disappeared in Minsk? In return they would provide her information on Muerner's clinic in Bern and the brokers who sought embryos and foetal tissue for clients in Europe. "It's a

mouthful," was all she could find to say just as something set the gents on edge. The one behind began swearing in a hectic lisp, prompting both figures to curtly leave.

At the parapet many of the sunbathers had also left. Her own anxiety was acute, and she left swiftly and inconspicuously as she

could. While leaving she was sure she could hear a feral cry in the neighboring hills -- near the parking lot, she thought.



The press copy in a local rag was curiously brief Catherine thought. The pictured shower stall was one she passed on her way to the lean-to and her meeting with the two goons.

UNKNOWN MAN FOUND DEAD IN CAYUSE SHOWER STALL

An as yet unidentified male visitor to the Cayuse Hills last Saturday afternoon was found unconscious in one of the lower parking lot shower stalls. The County Sheriff's Office will only confirm that the man was likely in his mid-thirties, well built and found collapsed holding his head. A loud scream was reported shortly before the body was discovered. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the Maryhill Sisters of Mercy Hospital. Foul play has not been ruled out said Sheriff Tod Burns. "It's an unusual incident, but one I won't elaborate on until an autopsy is done, the victim is identified, and the known kin notified. It's a busy area so we think someone must have witnessed something unusual. We trust and hope that person or persons will come forward soon."

Two days later Catherine read with much interest an update:

ISLAMIST CELL TAKES CREDIT FOR KILLING

An Islamist assailant has taken credit for the killing

of John Mayo, a conservative activist in the Maryhill district of Los Angeles. Mr. Mayo recently appeared on an ABN special on racial profiling where he claimed that "all non-Muslims were routinely discriminated against in all Muslim countries and that most Muslims believed the mandate of jihad justification for this." He concluded by saying that "hubris and oppression help sustain Islam" and that most Muslims were "grossly ignorant of the fact that the very accords of the social contract that attracted them to this country - consensus and democracy - are sustained only by people who prize the freedom of the individual!" The ruckus this caused ended the meeting. He shouted above the mêlée that "the very disturbance thoughtful words can provoke is proof of hubris and intolerance. Freedom of speech is under attack in the West!" He fled the meeting shortly thereafter.

Given how the extraneous murder limned her own perplexity, she needed a seemly tête-a-tête and phoned David Willardson. He suggested they meet at the gallery that exhibited Pachis' Marine Venus. "Some new stuff there I'm obliged to see." In the foyer she perched upon an unused pedestal with a condolent smile. Willardson happily took her in with a sideways glance.

HE: You look very civilized.

And want to converse.

SHE: Yes. Very much.

HE: And I need a duck; upstairs is a quiet old-fashioned belvedere.

SHE: You've read about the recent grisly murder?

HE: We live in fervent alien times. A truism.

You worried about your investments?

SHE: I'm nearly broke. Really.

HE: Yes I heard. Maybe for the best, all things considered.

SHE: Could depend on your words.

HE: Lord I hope not.

SHE: You always were an escape artist.

HE: Dearest Rosalind it's the daily grind. As for John Mayo he was an estimable romantic; put democracy on an tallish pedestal...

SHE: He paid dearly for it.

HE: Not an alien priority, operative functional democracy.

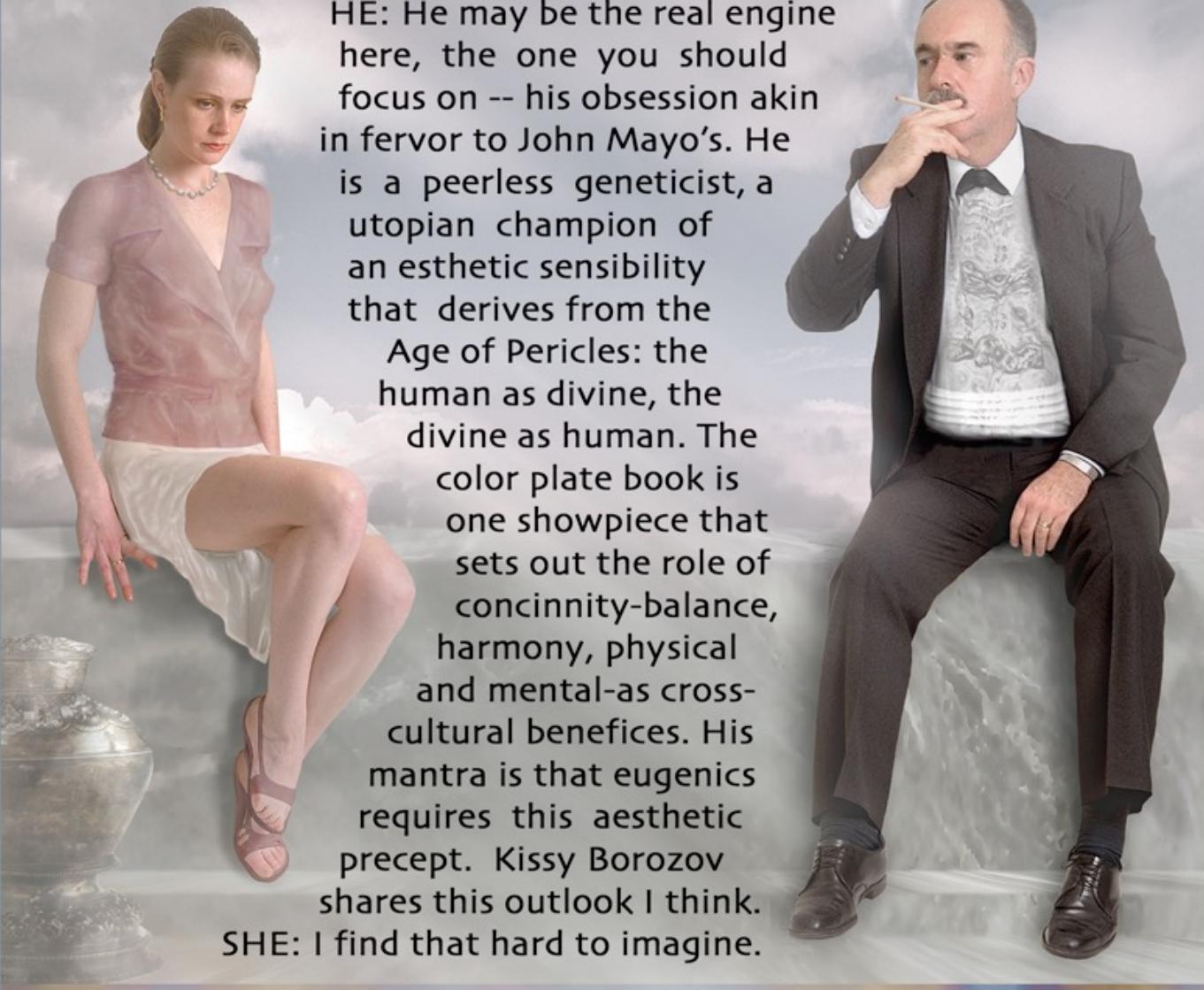


The balcony to the belvedere had recently weathered a gale, the air about alive and sweet. Here they talked about ideologues, John Mayo's resolve the match of Felix Muerner's even Kissy Borozov's.

SHE: I know little about Felix Muerner.

HE: He may be the real engine here, the one you should focus on -- his obsession akin in fervor to John Mayo's. He is a peerless geneticist, a utopian champion of an esthetic sensibility that derives from the Age of Pericles: the human as divine, the divine as human. The color plate book is one showpiece that sets out the role of concinnity-balance, harmony, physical and mental-as cross-cultural benefices. His mantra is that eugenics requires this aesthetic precept. Kissy Borozov shares this outlook I think.

SHE: I find that hard to imagine.



That night Catherine fetched Michael for a candid comparison with the colour plate babe.



HE: Same eyes, lips, nose. Face.

SHE: What else?

HE: Belly, chest, freckles.

SHE: A twin.

HE: Her legs may be better.

SHE: It's the angle.

HE: They're longer.

SHE: Not by much.



Then -- a call from Willardson 117
to confront some images
that would provoke both
disbelief and dismay.
Her first response was
silence then, after a nod,
“A nice double whammy,
to flesh out the season, yes?”

HE: A friend sent them, suing for an urbane opinion; all from Muerner's Bern clinic. They're called genetic ectypes: computer simulated genetic transformations.

SHE: The Cayuse chap -- in two bodies. And a babe. Who may look like someone we know.

HE: Apparently these are possible anatomical configurations Muerner's team has worked on two geonomes. I take it, from your expression that they come as a surprise.

SHE: So what does the friend say about the ‘improvements’?

HE: That such enhancements are maybe credible, to the extent that culture and personality acclaim them -- find the ‘cartoon’ aspect of humanity humiliating.

SHE: Please be assured. I had no knowledge of these pics.

HE: It may be time you met Aram.

SHE: Who the heck is Aram?

HE: A busy mystic. Who bears for you an important grudge. I also have a letter that is pertinent to this day's unfolding.

What made the computer renderings piquant were the photos in the accompanying letter, which David finally fetched with an apology for the delay, then read aloud. 118

David,

The enclosed snapshots are part of a file on a border guard, one Viktor Nikolaevich Stolbunov, opened by the KGB after a disorderly conduct citation. The frames show two daughters (we think): Zoya Stolbunov (four images) and a half-sister Anastasia Kniáznin (one image, top left). Who took the pictures and when is unclear. Victor Nikolaevich is cited as having molested one or more of the girls. Some images of Zoya may come from an earlier set and she, I think, is the likely twin.

I can confirm that the mother, Yevgenia Stolbunov, 'entered' a classified Soviet drug program in the Seventies. Some time later she gave birth to twins. The presumption is that the drugs she was given may have affected the genetic makeup of the twins. One of Muerner's paramount interests by the way.

The father ended his days in a psychiatric institution but not before getting one twin out of the country. The late imputation is he sold the babe to an adoption agency. (My guess is he had some help.) Sadly, the trail ends here; all the girls' records have been expunged from the available archives.

Most cordially,
age quad agis,

Alex



Her initial meeting with the cryptic Aram was not promising. Willardson had given her an address she went to with nearly the same reluctance she sought the maven at the Cayuse. She was directed to a man in a fanciful costume sitting on a large flat cushion in the arcade of a mosque. He ignored her at first, his initial words gratuitously arcane, what one might expect from a wary Muslim. Calmly she explained David's reason for seeking him out.

HE: The news hen wants to learn the riddle of the egg.

SHE: That too, yes, please.

HE: David Abercrombie sends me the Maid of Orleans.

SHE: No voices or visions though.

HE: What can you want? It's a nice day. For rose buds.

SHE (stoically): David said you may have some insight into the exploits of an international group that buys and sells ideoplasms, i.e. eggs and sperm -- with extraordinary genes. The new eugenics.

HE: David is an optimist.

SHE: Agreed.

HE (belatedly): You help me catch a terrorist... then maybe we unmask some utopians and, in so doing, flesh out a very enigmatic 'double' of yours!



In a princely villa not far from the mosque, Aram began with a bewildering tale -- of an enigmatic 'double'. Her double!

HE: The Jinn she's called in the trade, a dancer who performs, or did, at the London Apsara, one of a chain of private clubs. An Egyptian cleric, the busy terrorist we wish to retire, is especially covetous of her. On a holiday in London he went backstage at her club and tried to rape her, losing an eye in the assault. You may appreciate the fact that our terrorist is a

sexual gourmand, and a seller of foetal tissue to the Bern Clinic, to the proteges of Felix Muerner, the very one. David said you wished to follow the many threads. A Chimaera this double of yours. I will show you a picture presently. Now we look at some of her rare possessions, like this

gilded mirror, and some of the costumes she left behind in her haste to flee the Apsara. If this information is new you must be especially cautious now: the cleric, pray note, is a cutout for Bossy Borozov throughout the Middle East.

SHE: You're not making this up I presume.

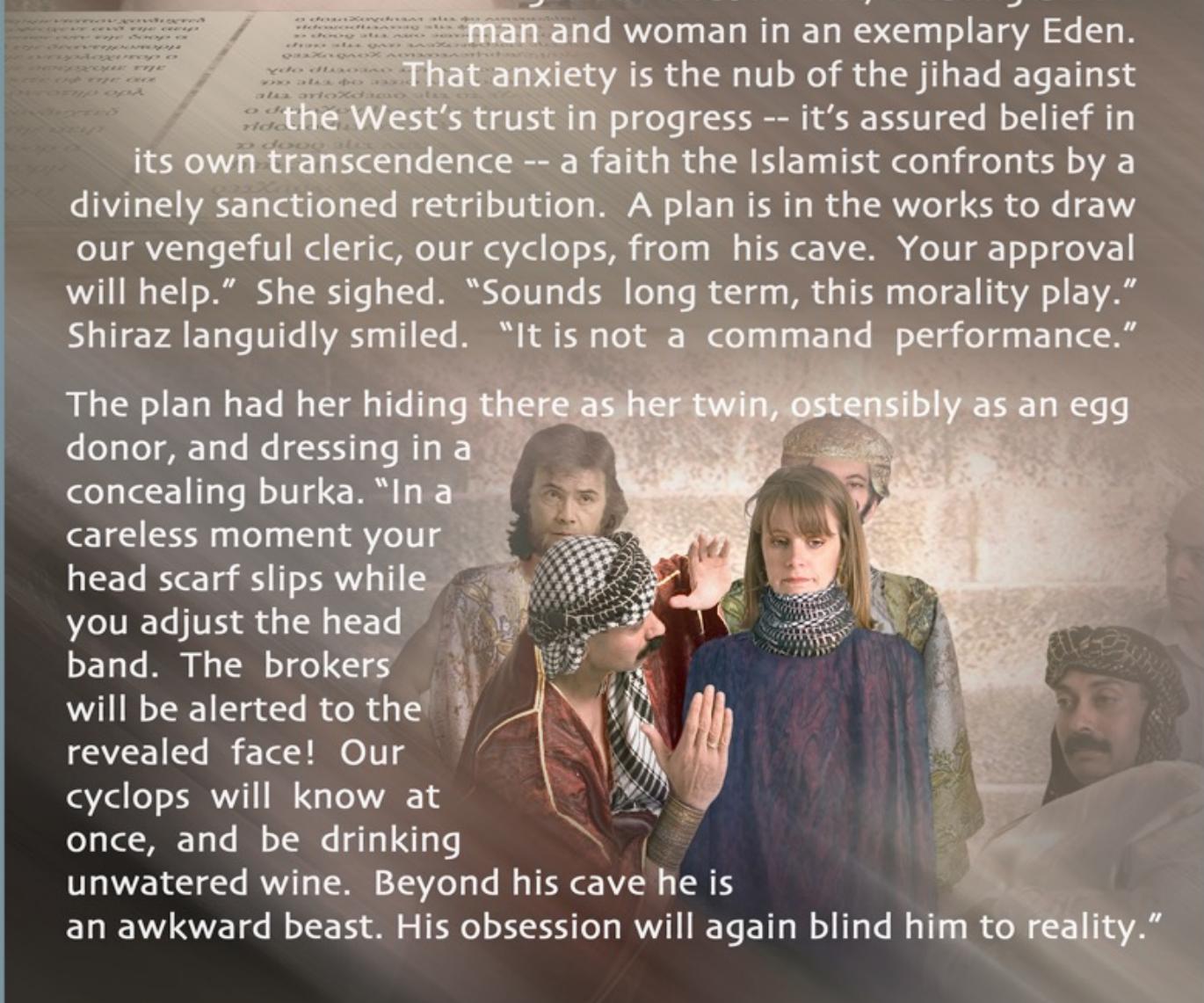
HE: It is known in the field. Though David would know little of the details, though it was percipient of him sending you to me...I think so...yes.



Her intro to the realm Aram and his cohorts inhabited, now complected by her own plight as an endangered twin, was augmented by an unexpected but pithy manuscript that exalted in a presumption of genetic change and the rich promise of Hayekian capitalism! Shiraz placed it before her with a rare smile after giving her a T-shirt imprinted with a poster from a club her twin had performed in. "It's not required reading, but it explains in part the Islamist's distrust and hatred of the West, which is engendered by the idea that man on his own might best God's creation by eliciting a better genetic endowment, creating a new man and woman in an exemplary Eden.

That anxiety is the nub of the jihad against the West's trust in progress -- it's assured belief in its own transcendence -- a faith the Islamist confronts by a divinely sanctioned retribution. A plan is in the works to draw our vengeful cleric, our cyclops, from his cave. Your approval will help." She sighed. "Sounds long term, this morality play." Shiraz languidly smiled. "It is not a command performance."

The plan had her hiding there as her twin, ostensibly as an egg donor, and dressing in a concealing burka. "In a careless moment your head scarf slips while you adjust the head band. The brokers will be alerted to the revealed face! Our cyclops will know at once, and be drinking unwatered wine. Beyond his cave he is an awkward beast. His obsession will again blind him to reality."



It was Aram's 'Upscale Fire Sale', as she thought of it, that set the stage for her 'coming out performance' -- waiting her cue to vent annoyance with the head scarf. On show many items Kissy had flaunted at his salon -- now exhibited for a second time it seemed. Also new beguiling works, including a gold bust that caused a stir among the buyers! It was a bright lucid day -- a fine setting for a denouement! She was told that two buyers were the terrorist's proxies, and her identity would be swiftly reported to their patron...while the auction continued.



In the bulky attire she hovered about the brokerage, an unsung item of speculation, amused that so many buyers dressed alike, sporting even the moustache Aram cultivated (he was obviously concerned for his safety and dressed some of his bodyguards accordingly). The bidding on the bust was brisk and protracted.

The prospect of sorting out the missing chapters in her life kept Catherine participating in Aram's ruse. The evening following the Burka business, they sat and talked on a garden terrace, Aram in his usual nonchalant slouch, his Magnum handgun and two iPhones secreted in deep pockets in his satin cape.

SHE: You said my double could be staying here.

HE: Given the jihadi reckoners looking for her she would seek out a safe harbour. Feasibly, she could seek out a safe harbour. Feasibly, she could be here. We are registered with Hostelling International.

SHE: So a rifle sharpie pics her off.

HE: No, the requital must be a hands on killing.

SHE: Oh happy days. Please explain again in detail.

HE: One of our female agents will wear a mask devised from images of your double. It is this agent, as Corin Wiley, the terrorist will abduct. He will be killed in the attempt. We have infiltrated his cell. We await the timing of the abduction. He will be found soon after dead in a brothel, a simulated stroke. An execution will be staged for the jihadi bloggers. The Fatwa will be fulfilled. Ann our sentinel captain will go over the detail with you.

SHE: And I'm to be this Corin Wiley, hiding out here. Sounds risky.

HE: It is up to you to decide if you want to see the matter through. We will see you come to no harm. When it is over you'll be free to seek out your double and your past! SHE: That is the unbridled hope. No pun intended.

It was the coming of Cody, a docent at the Borozov gallery, that added a footnote. Cody needed cash, applied to the spa, staying the while at Aram's hostel. They spoke in the garden.

CATH: It's Cody, isn't it? You're still working at the gallery?

CODY: Off and on. Elana doesn't much like having me around.

(Catherine did not mention that she also thought she saw Cody at the Montecito villa, in the room near the two hoodies.)

CODY: One broker at the spa turned out to be a film director. Edgy stuff, his films. He propositioned some girls including me. The spa's director got mad and revoked his visiting privileges -- disappointing some of the wannabees I expect.

CATH: That egg clinic metes out some heavy expectations.

CODY: He has clients that pay well. He owns the villa next door and now resorts to a telescope. So say the tabbies. 'The peek freak' somebody said.

CATH: The peep-hole pappa.

CODY: Ha, ha. That's good.

You one of the jaybirds?

CATH: Probably not. Still unsure if I'm in or out.

CODY: You'll do well.

This guy likes pixies.

Pays top dollar, better even than the spa.

CATH: I take it you're on the preferred list.

CODY: No law says you can't be an egg 'ho'. The brokers 'lay' the rules; the spa's director gets balled every day of the week.

CATH: It seems a fantasy concoction this new mania for vital physical perfection.

CODY: No closing day in sight, love.



In the outer loggia, an older section of the villa, Catherine was encouraged to get some sun as long as she stayed within the arcade portals. So Shiraz advised a head-up Catherine.

HE: Your twin is not given to modesty. Appearing with the others in the arcade will suggest a wish to find a broker.

SHE (looking about): I may not be a match of my sibling -- a possibility surely.

HE: The differences are negligible from the available pictures.

SHE (belatedly): But these arcade portals are wide open.

HE: Two sentinel captains guard the Southern section, and have agreed to blend in. Remember our cyclops plans an abduction.

Impossible here.



Catherine was amused to learn that the guards' thick towels were kevlar vests and their firearms within easy reach but out of sight of a snoop beyond the arcade.

It was her impatience with the ruse and her endangered state that prompted her to carry on. Her life had been arduous before, even perilous, but never as starkly contingent.

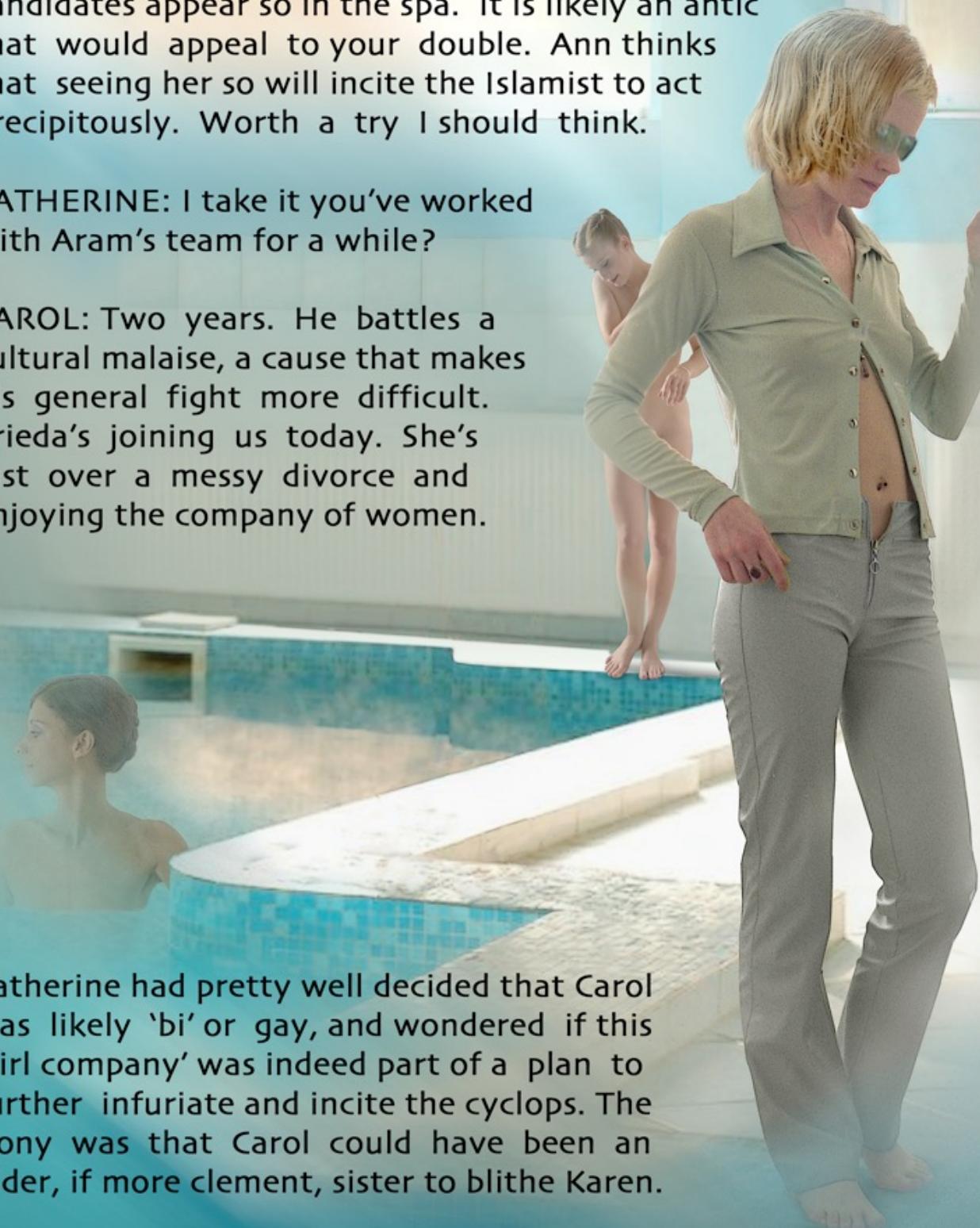
A section of the pool became a second venue that could be seen from the adjacent villa. The quiet presence of two nude female agents intimated that Ann's gambit was evolving. Two of these entered the pool with Catherine. One of whom, Carol, was not loath to talk.

CATHERINE: You must find this a little precious.

CAROL: I think it's pretty well worked out. Some of the candidates appear so in the spa. It is likely an antic that would appeal to your double. Ann thinks that seeing her so will incite the Islamist to act precipitously. Worth a try I should think.

CATHERINE: I take it you've worked with Aram's team for a while?

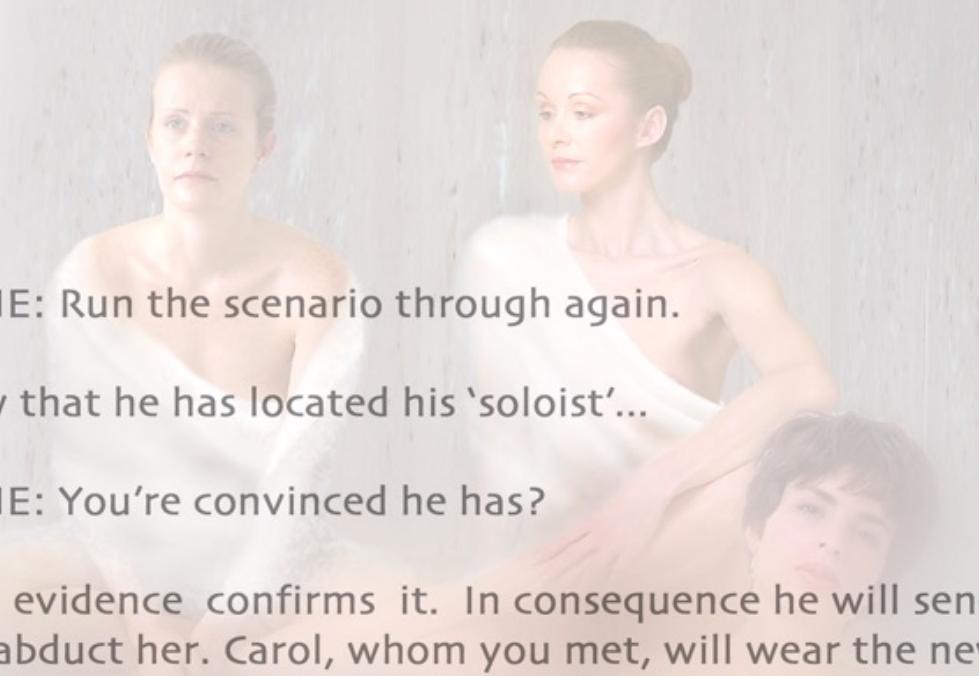
CAROL: Two years. He battles a cultural malaise, a cause that makes his general fight more difficult. Frieda's joining us today. She's just over a messy divorce and enjoying the company of women.



Catherine had pretty well decided that Carol was likely 'bi' or gay, and wondered if this 'girl company' was indeed part of a plan to further infuriate and incite the cyclops. The irony was that Carol could have been an older, if more clement, sister to blithe Karen.

It was left to Ann, Aram's sentinel captain, to update the dense and involuted drama, which she did one night in a sauna reserved for the 'radiclub', the designated shadowy agents. 127

ANN: Let me preface my words by saying you can leave at any time; but you may find events from now on interesting. The cleric we're interested in has surfaced. He's applied for a Fatwa -- specifically an abduction and execution. We want to delay his stay as long as we can to identify his key jihadi accomplices. To neutralize the cell's players not just a wild card.



CATHERINE: Run the scenario through again.

ANN: Now that he has located his 'soloist'...

CATHERINE: You're convinced he has?

ANN: Our evidence confirms it. In consequence he will send a team to abduct her. Carol, whom you met, will wear the new face mask. We've already infiltrated his team. He will be found dead in a brothel -- a nice touch -- and the execution of his jinn -- Carol as Corin Wily -- adroitly restaged. We have a cast of players, most in face masks...their videos are often quite hazy.

CATHERINE: It seems unavoidably risky.

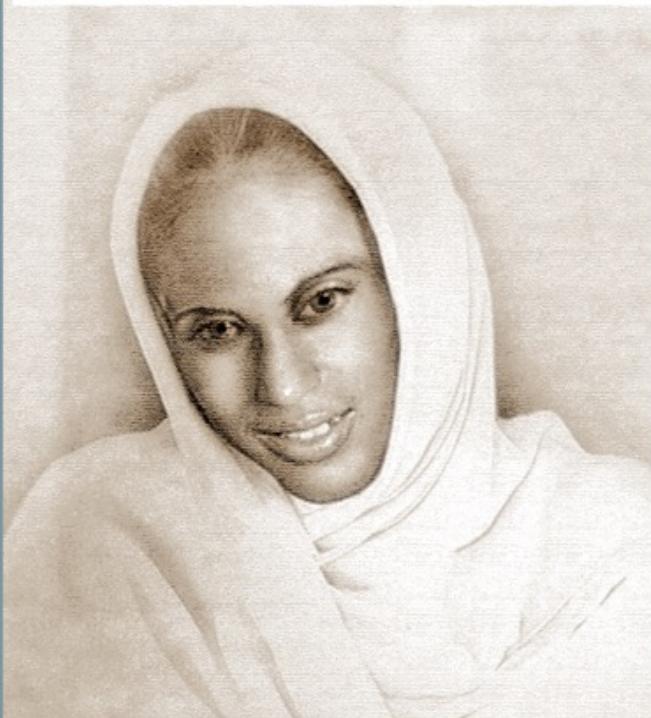
ANN: Not at all. Corin's death will nullify the fatwa.

CATHERINE: I trust Carol will be alive and hale after.

ANN: Assuredly so. It's been well planned. The publicity about his death and the apprehension of his key players will be a new embarrassment for his ulama. He was already a persona non grata, our English educated Ammon Farouk.

At this time, while Felix Zveno Muerner was assessing his record of Catherine Whyte, he was also mindful of another drama that dramatized the consequences of physical allure. 128

The story surfaced after the death of Ammon Farouk, the obsessed jihadi who was recently found dead in a brothel, the victim of a putative stroke, circumstances the media was extracting which, if believed, put his death but a week after the lurid execution of the pretty dancer who cost him his eye. The victim, Corin Wily, a little known alias of Zoya Stolbanov -- Catherine's twin! -- remained very much alive however, due in part to another fine ruse of Aram Mir's. But it was Ammon's trim step-daughter, Dilsat, that so recently snared Muerner's attention. Dilsat, in England to study nursing, met photographer Louis Führ, who took some beguiling pictures of her. It was these pictures Eve Kielice, Muerner's associate, found on a website, which added a new being to Muerner's file on the singularly blessed -- an inventory he had spent a lifetime assembling. The pictures Muerner had of Ammon and his wife Atiyaah suggested a traditional Muslim couple who must have blanched at seeing a family member on a sensational website. It was an open question whether Ammon's satyriasis changed Atiyaah's regard of the youngster, for Ammon must have been a trial to live with. The spare details of his life the media dared publish suggested as much.



*Louis Führ**Louis Führ**Louis Führ**Louis Führ*

In fact Muerner was
was grateful Führ too
had been enamoured
of the splendid Dilsat.

Louis Führ*Louis Führ**Louis Führ**Louis Führ**Louis Führ*

A page from the Italian Vogue was sent to Ammon with
a terse note someone had written in the margin.

130



The 'performing' uncle Aram's team recruited to identify the ¹³¹
'remains' of Corin Wiley
haplessly ran
into none
other than
Catherine's
troll boss.
Deplorable
D., in the
morgue,
who saw
the story
in the press
and came to
savor the choice
details, an exchange
Catherine overheard
from her morgue gurney.

DD: One must duly
stomach reality in
our often gritty
profession but this
this is very sad: Ms.
Wiley resembled a
journalist who
filed at ABN
a while back.
UNCLE: She
always was a
restless kid.
DD: We in the
media may not slight
the details, but we endeavor
to be succinct and unassuming.



Alece Amelie Corin Wiley RIP

death of promising dancer

recent favorite subject
fashion photographer
his Führ, Corin was a
nored to be a protégé
matic Kissy Borozov,
o once was quoted as
g that Corin's dancing
er was 'providential'.
nfortunately, it is also
ored that Corin traded
assical ballet slippers
e in a Russian mafya
where she trafficked
cious gems and ikons,
ompromised members
ussian Duma selected
brother Bossy, before
was himself convicted
lement, extortion and
er. It is not known if
would have survived

An orphan who
up in the stre
she auditioned at
age for the Kodai
Dance Troupe and
taken on as a stu
trainee. She spe
brief time in her
teens as a cabaret
dancer in Baku an
Marseilles, latter
performing at the
celebrated Apsara
Moscow and Mar
clubs designed by
Kissy Borozov, w
of whimsy has be
trademark in show
entertainment. If
racy, the audience
clubs have been fo

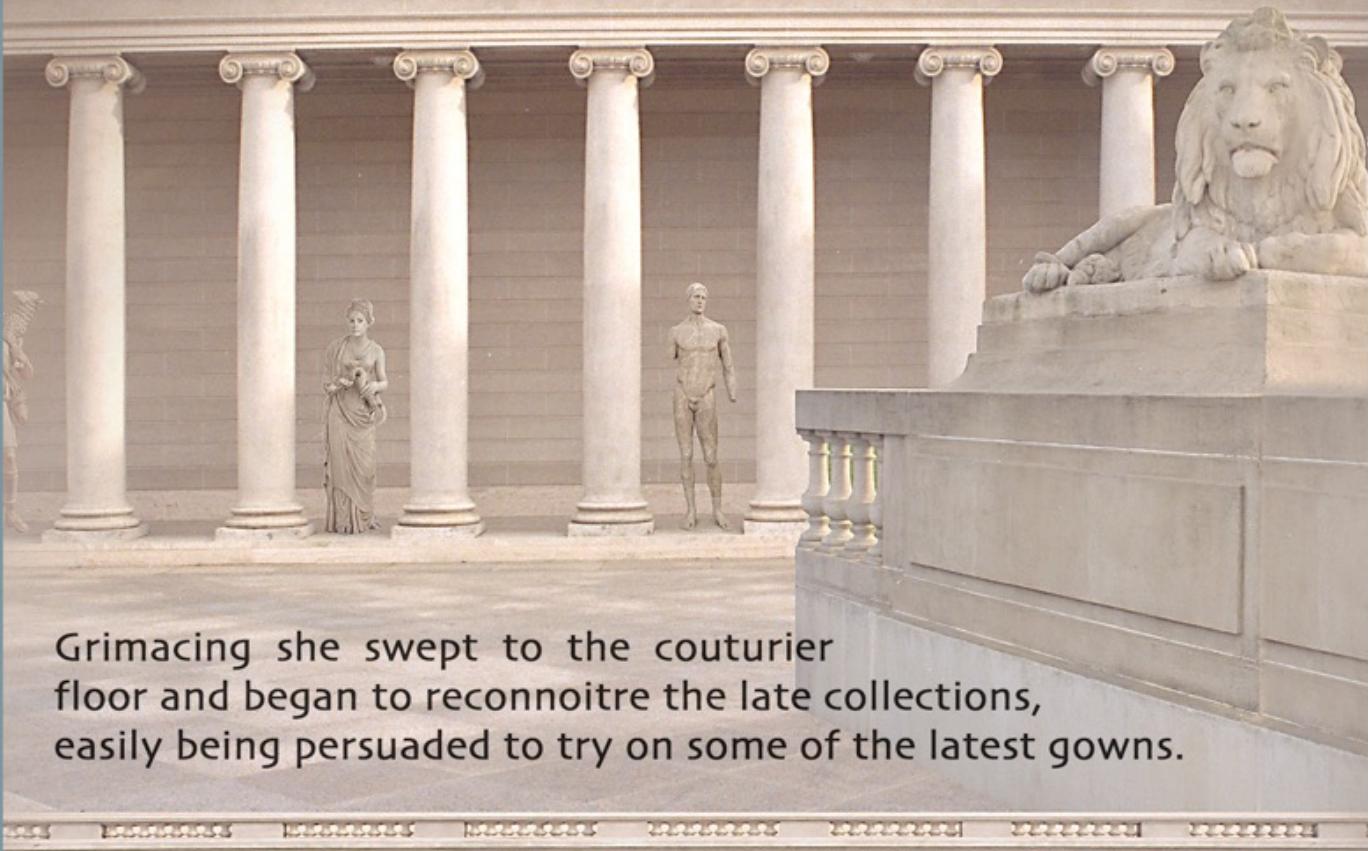


While living through her brief period as a 'stiff', Catherine reminded herself that survival was a floating crap game! Her experience to encapsulate the surreal was her brief time in the morgue secreted in a body bag with a medi-air cylinder. The police matron and examiner's staff were discreet in moving her about. The plan seemed in fact air tight -- no pun intended. She was assured everything had gone according to plan. She had not 'lost her head' and would be happily 'at large' soon.

When the protracted 'melodrama' ended -- Ammon sent to paradise and the fatwa fulfilled -- Catherine decided to start her new unarticled life 'as herself' with a holiday -- in some distant land. Aram had several times urged her to visit a modern Muslim country. She thus booked a flight to Ankara, to slip-stream behind the keen bustling tourists -- a fortnight sabbatical she thought -- a time to make up her mind about the wisdom of re-visiting Arams's rarefied company, including prodigal Felix Muerner. Thus bemused and often distracted, another tourist in love with the Exotic East, while cognizant of the Tales of Arabian Nights, where deeds that fascinated and intrigued also perturbed. Oddly, time itself seemed to lapse, as if being freed from a threat she no longer existed.



On her first day trip in Istanbul, a graven surprise: a 'period' Borozov boutique! A bored lion sat on a plinth by the entrance.



Grimacing she swept to the couturier floor and began to reconnoitre the late collections, easily being persuaded to try on some of the latest gowns.



Before the
'cyclorama' mirrors she
discovered herself in several
mod rags, and was diverted by a
replica of the Knossos shrine that
housed the fall-winter collection.



Then, on her third day, a preternatural shock: a phantom -- her credible doppelgänger! -- stood opposite on a rooftop terrace waving then smiling to someone in her own hotel. The gesture seemed free of guile, the antic of a gregarious soul high-fiving a recognized kindred traveller...so it appeared. The large room behind the phantom was ablaze with light but empty of both furniture and people; sheer curtains on a back corner fluttered in a playful breeze. The rest of the hotel windows on that side were entirely in darkness. She thought of waving back but decided it not yet prudent to do so. Instead she stealthily took several pics with her digital camera before the phantom left and the suite reverted to darkness. In her tiny kitchen she made a cropped inkjet print that confirmed her sighting: a dead ringer of herself fully alive had just stood across from her in the vast Byzantine megalopolis where she had hoped to finalize the game plan of her own future career. No telling name was listed among the hotel guests, nor a single person for that matter who invoked a ready player in this round of non-trivial pursuit. She rather regretted not waving back at the time, but decided, again, she was not the twin to surface at this time.

There was a Reina club near by, owned then by Kissy Borozov! She decided to see it herself -- the journeying Russian foot pint.

The next day, with her morning tray, a gilt invitation to the 136
the Burnam Wood Theatre in the Reina club, making her stay at
at the Bilkent Hotel less private than she thought, hoped -- but
another happenstance that amazed and confounded.



**Antoine Plombiers requests
your presence at the preview
of his Fall Winter Collection.**

So: a nubile menagerie...suggesting but another variant
of Kissy's Apsara. Yet only a terrorist bombing would keep
her away. Yet she needed an excuse. So: 'Ad vitam aut culpam'
(for life or till a fault) i.e. till some misconduct be proved!

The entertainments Catherine encountered in her one night at Myndos Club proved to be exceptional.

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Plombiers costumed stage shows were amazing as they were elegant.



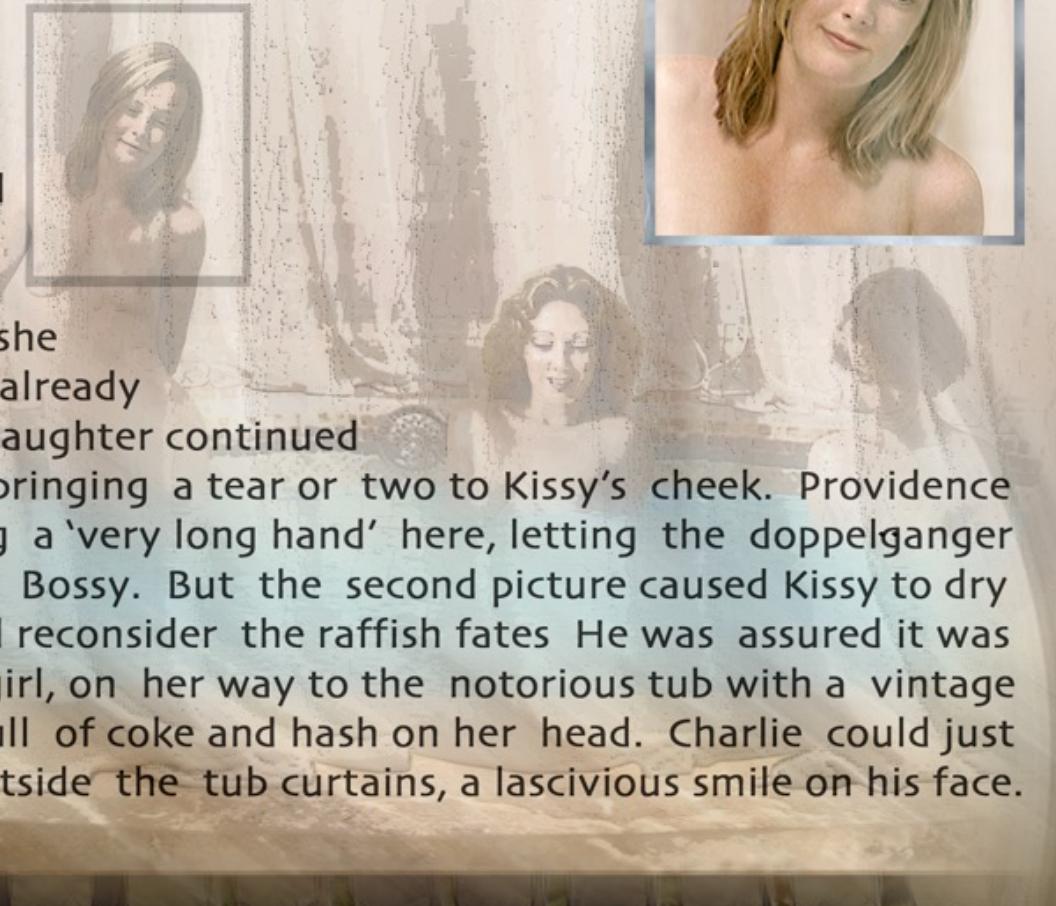
What took her breath away was the group of Tefnut musicians from the extravagant Amarna period: hieratic anthems played on vintage instruments in a realistic stage setting. Imagining Kissy an Egyptophile amazed as it teased.



It was the discovery of a woman the canny match of plucky Catherine Whyte -- in Charlie Warrens's hot tub! -- that incited a rare spate of laughter in Kissy Borozov. An enhanced frame all but cinched the matter: Sergei could hardly put Whyte 'in' the tub for she was plainly already there! The laughter continued unabated, bringing a tear or two to Kissy's cheek. Providence was playing a 'very long hand' here, letting the doppelganger loose. Poor Bossy. But the second picture caused Kissy to dry his eyes and reconsider the raffish fates He was assured it was the same girl, on her way to the notorious tub with a vintage amphora full of coke and hash on her head. Charlie could just be seen outside the tub curtains, a lascivious smile on his face.



This second pic was another reminder for Kissy that ardor was never an urbane affair. That love was ever at the beck and call of prehensile lust, so notorious for 'perturbing' romance!



A morning mist from the lake that edged Charlie's property seemed to Kissy but a steamy vapor from the tub's wild life the night before. Then, to his surprise, the same engaging lass emerged on the lake terrace, glass in hand, a thin wrap about her waist. Herbert Marcuse's gamy idea of 'libidinous' toil came to mind, for if the business purportedly conducted in the notorious tub was as crucial and momentous as rumor put it, the fixed variable was aptly 'fleshed out' here. Lucky Charlie.

139



If Kissy was enamoured, he knew Sergei was likely gnashing his dentures, the plan to use the tub to implicate the nasty Whyte bird now a mare's nest. In boning up on the new player, one Zoya Stolbanov, Kissy was surprised she had not been noticed before. A lead rhythmic gymnast in her young days, a folk and cabaret dancer later on, friend of a late tough proconsular official, also a lucky smuggler, with many stayed indictments.

What neither Kissy or Sergei imagined was the third set of eyes also looking at pictures of Charlie's hot tub. Dr. Felix Muerner was as perhaps less amazed, but no less animated in his flinty pursuit and recognition of all future, manifest genetic eidolons!

Muerner's amusement at Zoya's exploits served to remind him of exemplary form, in particular the well articulated skeleton that exhibited the tenets of elegance: economy, symmetry, balance: concinnity. He was always pleased to find a young client who sought remedial treatment that lent itself to esthetic intervention as well. One such person had recently come to the clinic complaining of a problem with her knees, a growing weakness with frequent muscular pain; it was all too apparent the cartilage in both knees was displaced, due to genetic traits that would worsen over time. Also, the calf muscles displayed neuritic neuritic atrophy. She was shown examples of how each leg could look after knee surgery and robust physiotherapy. She was moved to tears. Avery Muth, the clinic gene mapper was keen to get a tissue sample to add to his growing gene inventory.

AVERY: She's a likeable kid -- and quite appealing, her anxiety actually an advisement.

MUERNER: The question of the seductive 'trigger' may be germane here.

AVERY: Perfection as too 'insular'?

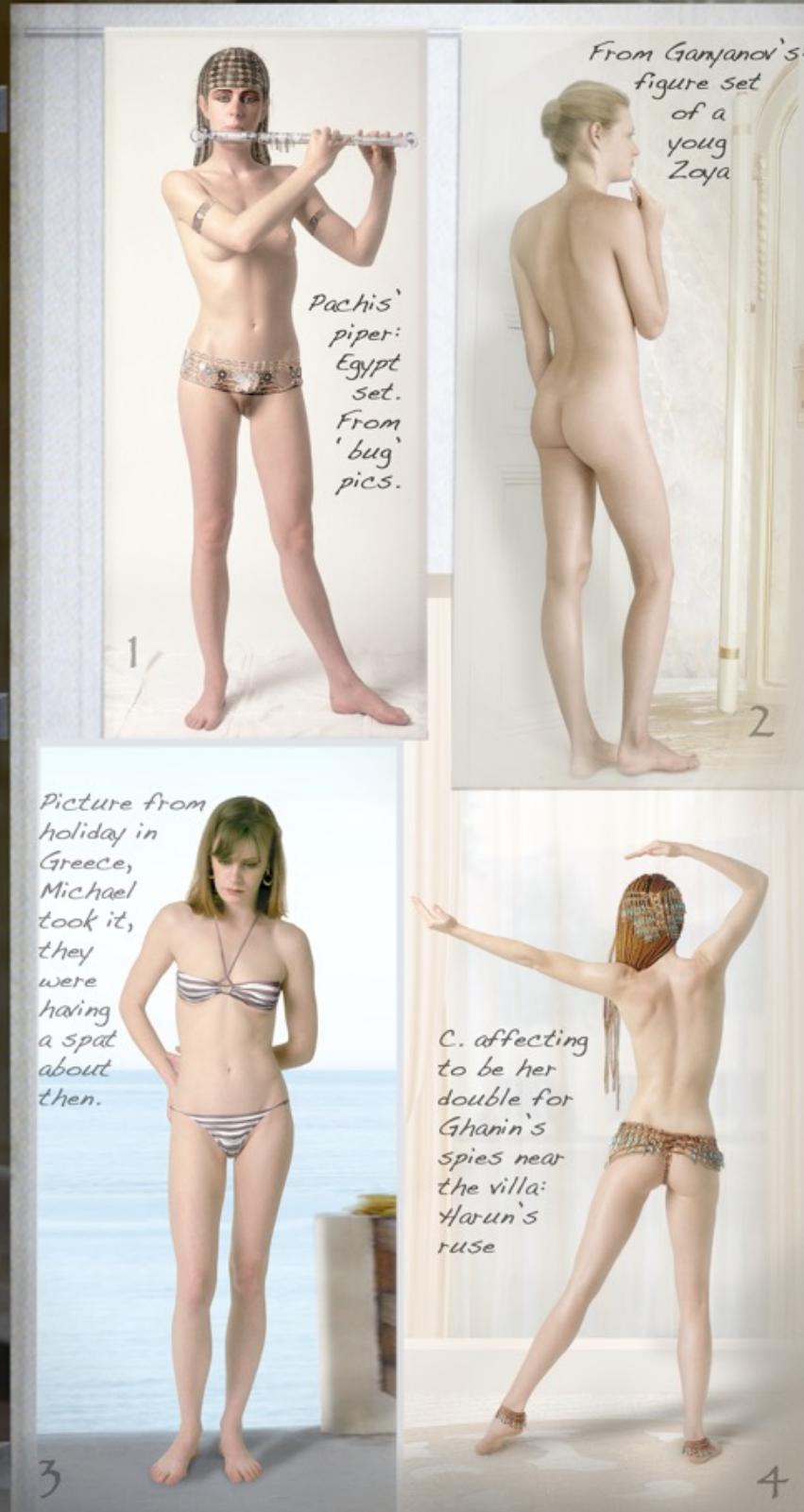
MUENER: 'The' enigma.



It was ever a worry to utopian Muerner that his love of splendor might weaken the mating instincts of his anticipated paragons.

Indeed, Muerner was just then reviewing a set of pictures that helped with his concept of concinnity. The well articulated skeleton Providence had given Zoya and Catherine came close to his ideal paradigm. He made a note to his gene mapper, Avery Muth, to sequence all the skeletal and muscular chains when Catherine agreed to an assessment at the clinic. Because the twin's Marxist Finnish 'refusenik' mother had been given a regimen of potent drugs, he had the twins examined at regular intervals. Only Catherine was covertly assessed, mainly through her doctor's blood tests and X-rays. One day he would tell them all, but wanted his double blind study in place before that candid talk!

Of the pictures in his collection before him now, all but one of Catherine, he liked especially No.4 which was taken in the old villa with Aram's connivance, a ruse that proved most successful in duly rousing and routing Ammon! Glimpsing Catherine as Zoya must have appeared in the Apsara, set the stage for the dynamic denouement!



To rally the pertinent facts, Catherine elected to write an update letter to her sweet and by now perplexed mom. If the terrorist threat had lapsed, the complex matter of the new 'eugenics' reminded her that progress was a canny huckster.

142

Dearest Mom,

I know by now that Ann has explained to you the necessity of the adventure I've undertaken. In due course the full story will be told; for the time being, however, you must be discreet. Trust me.

Some assignments are a kind of rebirth. Well, the gestation period here has been hangdog, to say the least. When I assisted in the rout of a single terrorist, I discovered a large, daring netherworld. My special dilemma is to dispassionately tell the convoluted story, in short: How to can a can of worms? Please bear with me.

If genetic engineering is still arcane the able and determined practitioners are committed Gnostics. I find myself facing one such cabal, which performs wonders (miracles for some) on a daily basis. Such miracles, however, have a wunderkinder bias which may not serve a 'human' population that well in the long run. The fixed variable, it seems, comes from advertising, which claims to demonstrate that Aryan genes sell more products than bon-Aryan, if bonny capitalism may not be crimped.

So say the beauty-babe brokers, who conjure a realm of designer zygotes poised to rescind the gift of life! If fanatics have a habit of self-destructing, that prospect seems on hold for the time being.

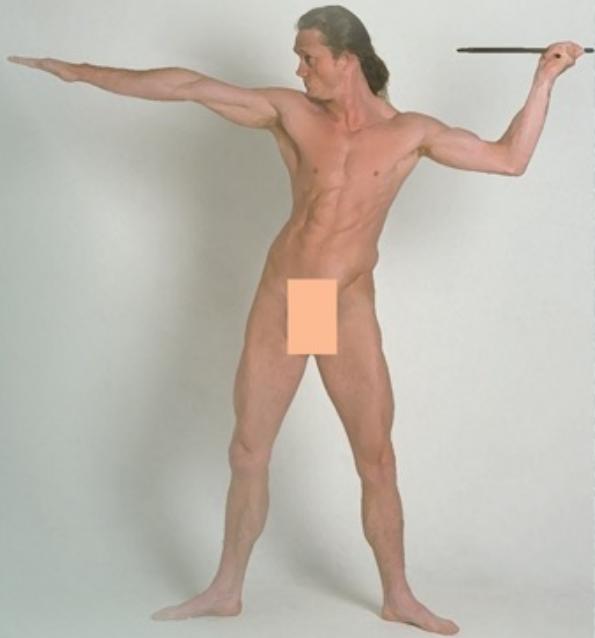
Think of you often; do take your medicine! When this is over you and I will compare notes on a very long holiday.

Love and a super hug,
Cath

How often may one wake up in an odd room, confront a daunting imposition, and not field a demur or two? The problematic note was slipped, under her door as she slept, the words in it provocative as the pictures that accompanied it -- very like the set patient Willardson had shown her a month before. Only here the male apparition was shown in two distinct somas, two peach squares hiding the mystical parts.

The unctuous note read, in a deft and fluent script:

For the layman the weaker, less flexible knee may not arrest, nor, the dippy elbow cartilage or short tibia/fibula, but to one such as yourself, the many differences may be noted before finding for the plaintiff genes. Semyan, the luckier of the Zeus incarnations awaits you by the pool. FM



For all the precious hype, the initials served to enervate.

As anticipated, the chap by the pool was none other than the 144 Cayuse maven. He introduced himself as Semyan and wanted a private setting for telling words. She regarded him in silence, his presence here a spectre from the surreal tale she could not shed. Swiftly he sought out a secluded grotto off the cabana. His earnestness she decided wasn't feigned, and found herself wryly engaged by his concern that she now all. Felix Muerner, it turned out, figured in both their lives, and used Aram as a tutor in things Muslim -- his modern cultural Erinnyes, the angry one!

HE: We both were early subjects for Muerner. 'Lagan,' he says --sea trophies.



SHE: That's good: cast off goods attached to a buoy. So.

HE: To recap: your real mother was a Marxist Finn who spent time in a psychiatric lockup where she was given experimental drugs. She was apparently pregnant at the time and had twins. Muerner was recruited by the Red Army after the fall of Berlin and worked for a time in the same clinic. He badly wanted one of the the twins removed from her harsh setting -- to better assess the effects of the drugs. Seems callous, I know. It's time you met some people and perhaps reconsidered your future plans.

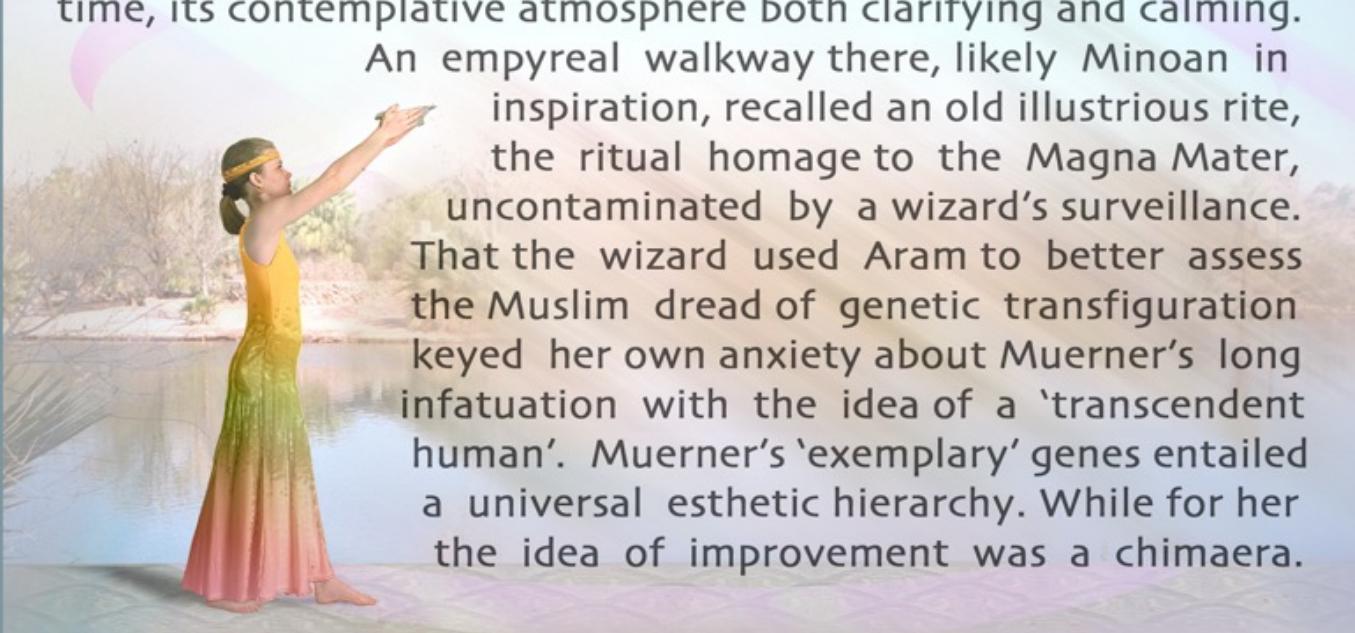
SHE: Why would I have been kept ignorant of these facts?

HE: It was Muerner's 'double blind' test: he wanted to know what effect the drugs your mother was given had on your general health and genetic makeup -- in a salutary setting -- the good home he arranged for you in America. Apparently being aware of such interventions can skew the result. And he did not want to slight your relation with your new mom.

She told Semyan she needed time to consider. She didn't tell him she had some emotional wounds to attend to that rather defied empathic treatment. She actually visited an ashram for a time, its contemplative atmosphere both clarifying and calming.¹⁴⁵

An empyreal walkway there, likely Minoan in inspiration, recalled an old illustrious rite, the ritual homage to the Magna Mater, uncontaminated by a wizard's surveillance.

That the wizard used Aram to better assess the Muslim dread of genetic transfiguration keyed her own anxiety about Muerner's long infatuation with the idea of a 'transcendent human'. Muerner's 'exemplary' genes entailed a universal esthetic hierarchy. While for her the idea of improvement was a chimaera.



'Improvement too, the idol of the age, is fed with many a victim.' When 'sweeping up the ashram' lost its cachet, she opted for regression to a laser shrine (a nightclub) where the collision frequency and momentum transfer was one-hundred per-cent!

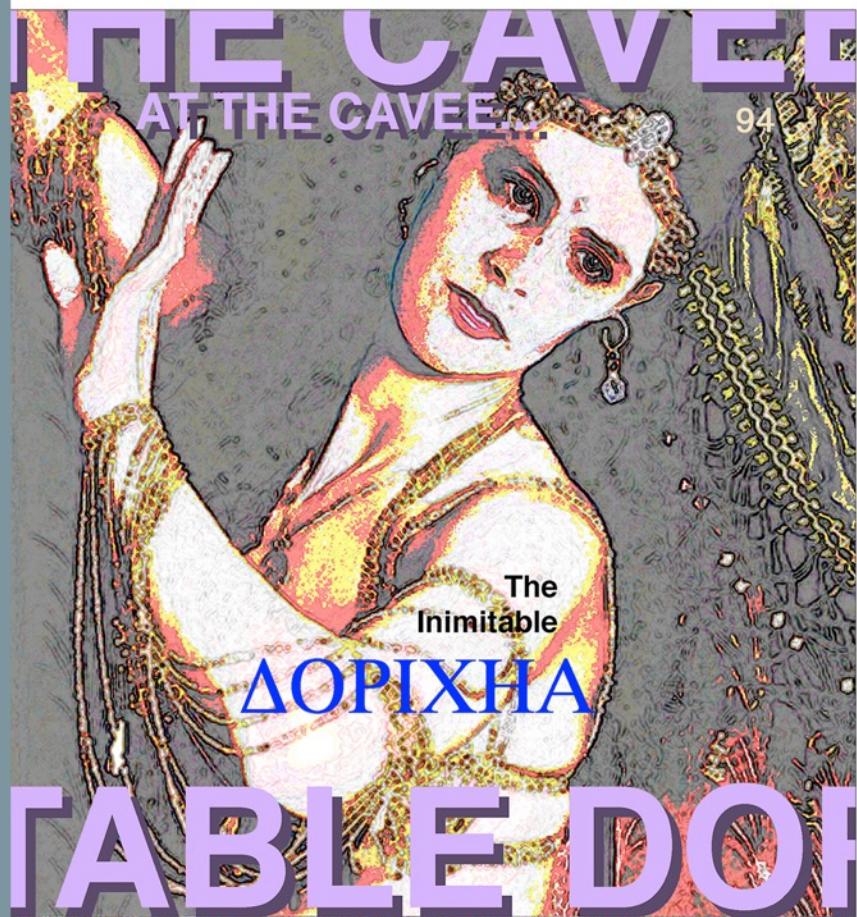


That she may have danced with a lad who doubled as a pug, Borozov division, rallied a smile. 'Mildly eclectic' Willardson might have called it. Had the guy acted more like Michael on a reflective day, or Karen on a blithe day, she might have been tempted to enjoy a night out. But as he didn't, or couldn't, she returned to her hotel laden with philosophical engagement!



TITANIA
The Glenn Maiden the Gnomes Play
with Five Nights a Week!
Only at the
APSARA

146

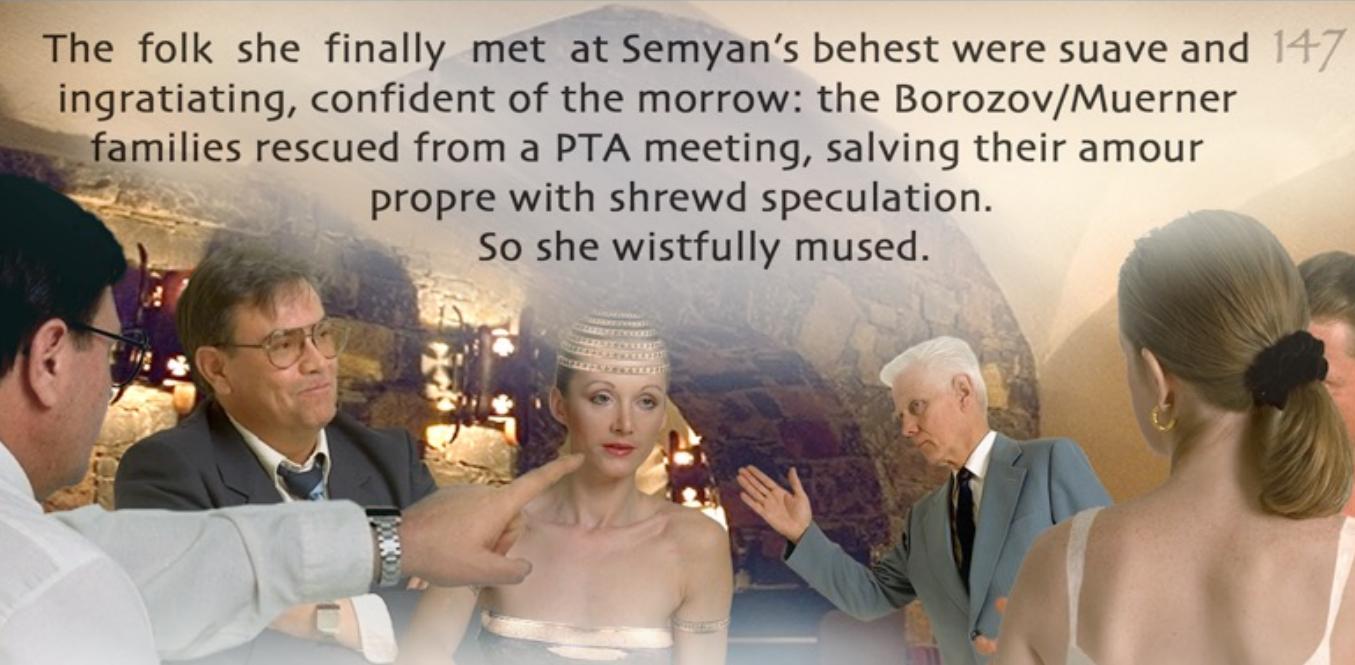


It was a packet of pictures Semyan gave her that moved her Decision Day forward. There were more he said, but the others had not yet been verified. An uncle had apparently taken the pictures of the mother and Zoya.

The folk she finally met at Semyan's behest were suave and ingratiating, confident of the morrow: the Borozov/Muerner families rescued from a PTA meeting, salving their amour propre with shrewd speculation.

So she wistfully mused.

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Ann flashed a grimace as Semyan and the Vyhnak twins, Peter and Lev, old familiars, argued the merits of a Euro -- a conversation designed to lull and reassure. If life in the USSR had been exigent, you at least fathomed the bathos; absurdity was not a seduction.

After showing her a guest suite the General hunkered down to recapitulate some exchanges, unaware she badly wanted to go to bed. On her own!

HE: We are not a camorra and do not ply the media. We do carefully vet our experts. You read the manifesto: a natural order will arise over time. Science and ecology will admit none other, a point Muerner holds dear. The genetic horizon is taking shape. It is a spectacular vista, steeply hierarchal as any Cabana des Diablerets. SHE: Power often corrupts.



HE: Especially when it fails to understand its power base. Genetic elegance soon stymies the fakirs.

SHE: No more joking?

HE: The story you write one day will be incomplete without a mnemonic chronicle.

We all have liable antecedents, but yours today has a serendipitous aspect few share.

SHE: Well let's sleep on it.

HE: Yes, I talk a lot. Have a good night.

Left in a limbo that weekend, to join or to leave, her morning exercises attracted the General and his homilies: 148
There is no short cut to maturity; the truth only 'lies' in the middle; spread aids, rid the world of lovelorners (all the 'perverts'); and, unlimited variation is no variation at all.
SHE: Food for thought, but not maybe pilates.

HE: You are right, I rather persist. An old life habit.

SHE: So full of 'life'.

HE: Yes. Life!

With some effort she resisted telling him to go pee up a hawser.

If the mavens talked in riddles Semyan, the lad with the legend who haunted the Cayuse, was the resident Dionysus. Sovereign of all that is moist, he relieved one of dry demand decisions -- like whether or not she should flee for her sanity and life. Less a conqueror than an hallucination, his presumption was canny as his come on, a force to 'perturb the purlieus'. String theory he called it, giddy lyre practice.

Like the General, he descended during the quiescent moments.

Still, her hours with buff Semyan took on a life of their own,¹⁴⁹ both instructive and entertaining. 'On the rocks,' he called her distrust of the Muerner clinic and its research wing -- a remark spawned one evening on the edge of a ravine very near the Cayuse where they first met. He taught her to walk on her hands -- beginning on a slight back slope. They talked then as collegial orphans -- mutually satisfied they were 'synonyms'.

SHE: I still wonder why a professional like Muerner would so routinely patronize a tout like Kissy Borozov. It seems bizarre.

HE: He gets genetic material difficult to get elsewhere.

SHE: Is the find then so efficacious?

HE: You don't know the scientist.

SHE: The fanatic I ought to trust.

HE: You could find out a lot about yourself, in good company. You're one of Muerner's major studies.

SHE: A large order that -- knowing the gritty details about oneself.

HE: A genetic blueprint you won't get elsewhere. I doubt he'll suggest any fine tuning; you're pretty trig as you are. Though they might get you to sign off on brown bag gin.

SHE: All I need -- no consolation. Tell me again about the spinal assay.

HE: In deep memory search, the worry is the spinal chord may short circuit the cerebral cortex via the well conditioned response. A mere layman's explanation.

SHE: Which they find how, tell me again. In your idiosyncratic layman's language.

HE: After indexing the targeted cerebrospinal cells, they monitor specified cortex responses to discrete sensory images, and so gauge the reinforcement. The belief is that some images

define esthetic norms. What pleases our senses, our eyes in particular, is not deemed stochastic nor purely cultural. In short beauty, splendor -- the liberal's 'tripe' -- may be universals.

SHE: Still think it's all hooey. No slight of your words intended.

On other evenings they explored the Cayuse canyon, coming ¹⁵⁰ to delight in the beauty of its ancient rocks. One evening the eyes of a coyote peered down at them, a furtive regard that Semyan took an imaginary bead on. The animal followed them for a time, as if quizzical about such venturesome creatures.

SHE: Is he reconnoitering because we were 'parallel parked'?

HE: 'She' might, given the pheromones we've likely given off.

SHE: Speak for yourself, nosegay. Will she howl?

HE: Only in heat. And she probably isn't, this late.

SHE: Just curious then? Wondering about things like 'local presenting' cells and the lab brats counting them?

HE: Receptor cells are the 'local' co-simulators.

SHE: Tell me the story again, slowly and quietly.

HE: Once the brain stake is prime specific, the change in the co-simulator cells that define the received symbol, emends the external image; as the mind logs the novel view, the receptors mark or 'oblade' it. The word Muerner uses.

SHE: You've making this up as you go.

HE: Were memory so indulgent.

SHE: And the Anschauung? The view from the 'terrace'.

He: Well, one has a choice: to know or merely be. The Bible suggests knowledge, as in self-consciousness, may be rankly invidious and thus bestial in consequence. Yet we want to find for ourselves, as this nosey coyote seems to confirm by its curiosity. What she smells, as you dryly construe it, may in fact be the puzzle of the rutting ambergris, or whatever it is we've left on the shingle.

SHE: Ambergris...a sperm whale's insides?

HE: You were sweating a while.

SHE: On a fine warm night.

HE: Bright moon, full arms.

SHE: I think our blether has put her off humans for a time.

HE: She's sensed her pack has found another interest. I think.

SHE: Not hard to imagine. Ambergris. My prone comedian.

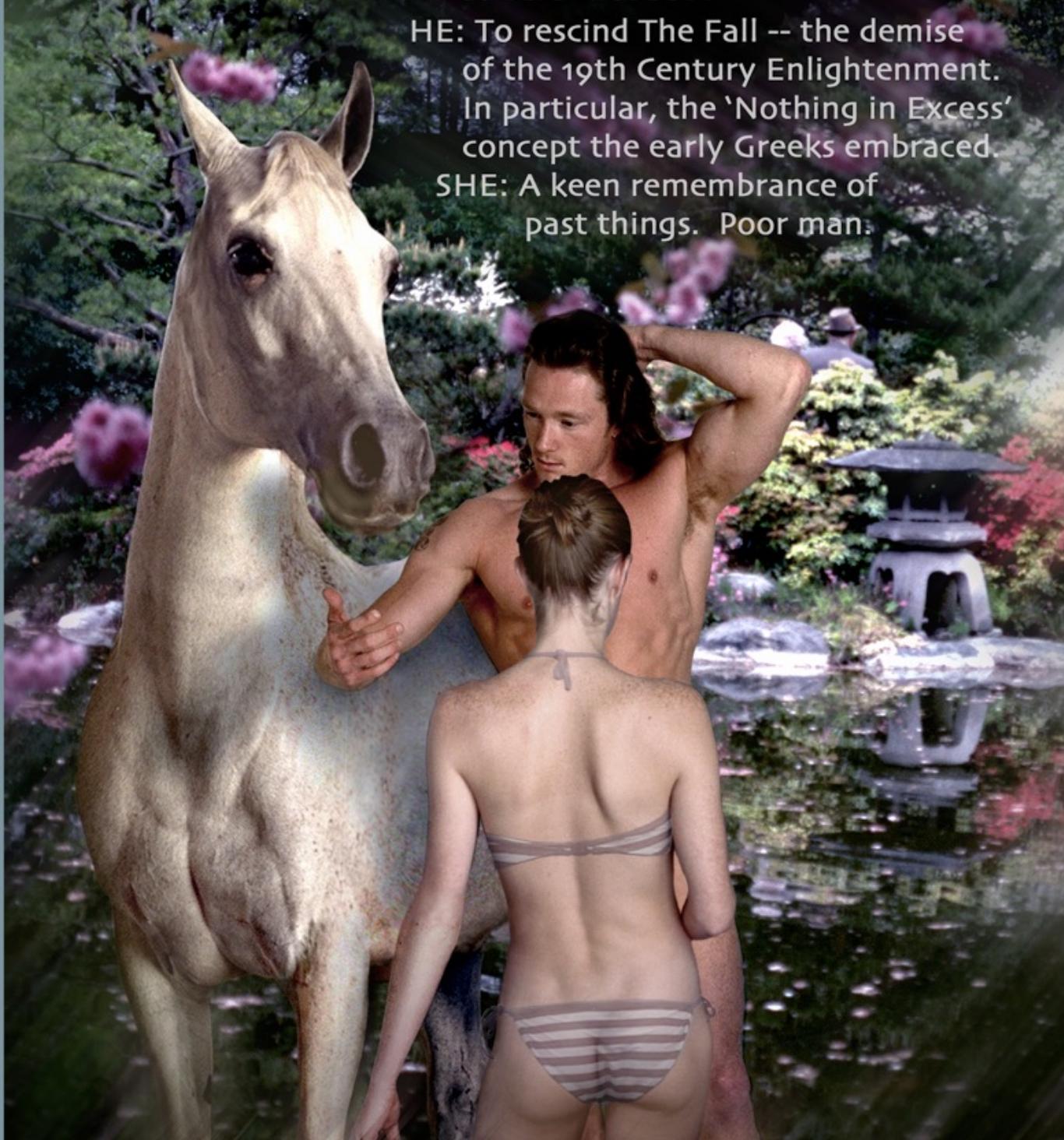
Her liaison with Semyan soon led to a private gate into the 151
water garden, a walking steed completing the sylphic triad.
Two children in an Eden, fully aware of the anachronism,
yet caught up in the thrall of being fully alive.

HE: Rumor has it that Muerner began his crusade because of
a drummer, a rock hopeful on the block. He could not
believe America that dissolute. 'The ubiquitous libido
beat that vulgarizes, trivializes all occasions.' Angry
words to marshal a peerless beginning,
with emphasis added.

SHE: You said 'crusade'.

HE: To rescind The Fall -- the demise
of the 19th Century Enlightenment.
In particular, the 'Nothing in Excess'
concept the early Greeks embraced.

SHE: A keen remembrance of
past things. Poor man.





A foot to addle a fakir, he said,
as they rested in the warm overflow from
the water garden's thermal spring. She laughed
at the remark and thought: that is what he is, a fakir,
a wonder worker if not a busy swindler softening her up...
for Magus Muerner to cast her lot. The idea had intruded
before -- she an albatross, earnestly borne in the froggie pond.
Later, in the intimate dark of the grotto, he noted the change.

HE: You're tired, bored...bothered?

SHE: Mostly if not entirely my fault.

HE: You dislike innkeeper jokes?

SHE: I've always been a sucker
for capable yet pensive heros.

HE: Been there; no one home.

SHE: Tomorrow I think I must
make a Gordian decision.

HE: 'Have to', 'Gordian'?

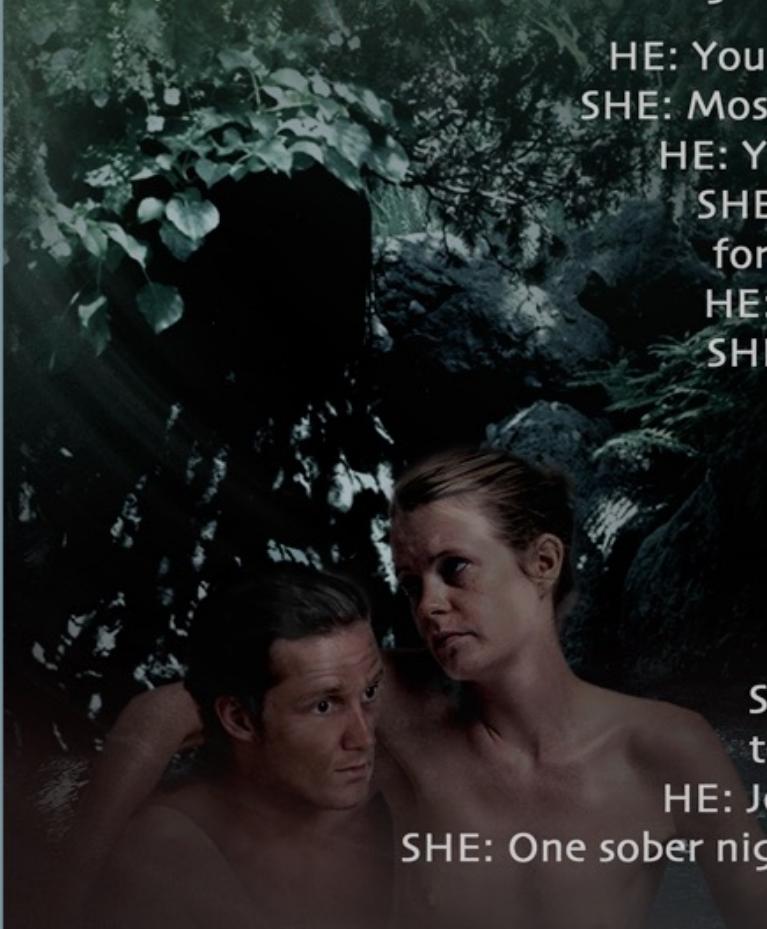
SHE: A dilemma lost on all
immortals and daemons.

HE: So I'm just a mythical
bo -- an ersatz Hermes.

SHE: You are either a gifted
teaser or very well coached.

HE: Jesus, that sounds heretical.

SHE: One sober night in what, five? Not bad.



To help resolve her indecision (to grin and 'bare' it, or flee) she 153 asked Shiraz to show her one of the donor auditions. His early description of a 'gene market' seemed surreal in the abstract. As tutorial he took her to a male audition, where they sat back-to-back behind a lattice 'confessional', as she called it.

SHE: Do enlighten me. Take your time.

HE: The brokers here are looking for strength, poise, fluency in archery and use of the cut-thrust sword, the Griffzungenschwert.

SHE: That's a great help.

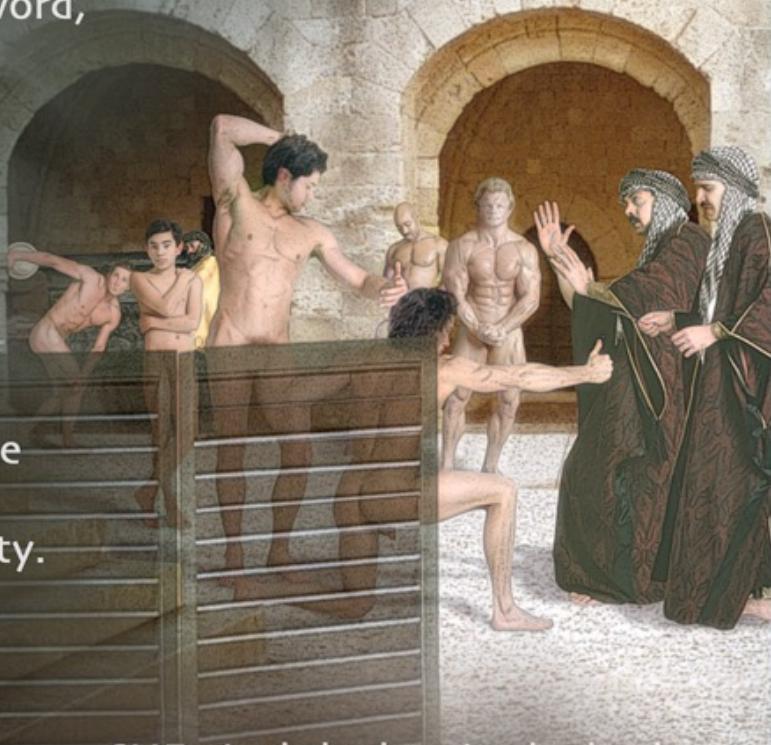
HE: Some assayers find it telling, an atavistic trait.

SHE: The lads can count all their fingers and toes?

HE: The SAT entry scores are well above the average.

SHE: Why do so many of the assayers dress like you?

HE: They treasure anonymity.



SHE: And the boy in the back?

HE: Likely a simple contract sale.

A private houseboy, perhaps.

SHE: Perhaps. Is the manhandling a long-standing rite of the trade?

HE: A beauty contest for seasoned horse traders. With deep pockets.

SHE: I keep wondering about the possibility of my twin coming here.

HE: Her reputed gems and icons may fetch a good price on the grey market here. She would find a ready buyer for her eggs as well, should she find it expedient.

SHE: And you think a fugitive would behave so?

HE: She may stash the nicked items for a time, given the FSB boyos charged to find and recover their masters' booty.



The arrival of the contract set the stage for a declaration of intent. She was irked Muerner would not see her until she signed on: the clinic wanted assurance she would not begin a civil action against its 'oversight', as it was called, of her physical and affective health, a sober reminder that the periodic assessments were thorough. A Muerner lawyer filled in some missing details.

THE CONTRACT



SHE: Do go over the genesis of my program once more.
HE: Your mother was used by a team of Soviet medics who sought the creation of a new man, *Homo Sovieticus*, work abetted by captured Nazi doctors after the war. A cousin of Muerner's was part of this team, but believed the Soviet plan flawed and sought by stealth to get a twin of one mother who figured in the experiments out of the country.

The decision was partly pragmatic: he wanted to know how one twin got on in a different setting. Your refusenik mother was given a regimen of drugs before the twins were conceived, the outcome of a rape we believe. What your twin was subjected to and how she has fared makes the ongoing study of you both crucial to understand the long term effects of the drugs. You can assist us by setting out an accurate chronicle of your life and health, as you know it, in the paper or book you will soon write. As you now know, you had an older half sister by another father before your dissident mother was forced into the program. Sadly, her fate and whereabouts remain a mystery.

On her clinic tour Catherine overheard an edgy exchange that she hoped to take up with Muerner himself. A young woman who wanted her breasts enhanced was miffed when her request was 'invalidated' -- the word used by the clinic's assessment officer. The surgeon she pressed for a second opinion was not much help, being limited in his work by the clinic's precepts.

GIRL: This is so grody. So hard ass. You'll remove my tattoos, fix my bladder infection, but -- holy hannah -- run away like mice when I want bigger tits.

NURSE: The comments from the arbiters are emphatic. And it's rare for them to take up such matters. I quote from the final report: 'This youngster is a remarkably pretty individual, from almost any perspective, and her request is Pickwickian and thus beyond consideration.' 'Pickwickian', by the way, means 'foolish'. From the horses's mouth.

GIRL: Some horse. That's probably how they see women -- brood mares for race horses. Nobody asks the mare how she feels.

DOCTOR: It's never been routine practice for the clinic. Enlargement is as much fad as a patented betterment.

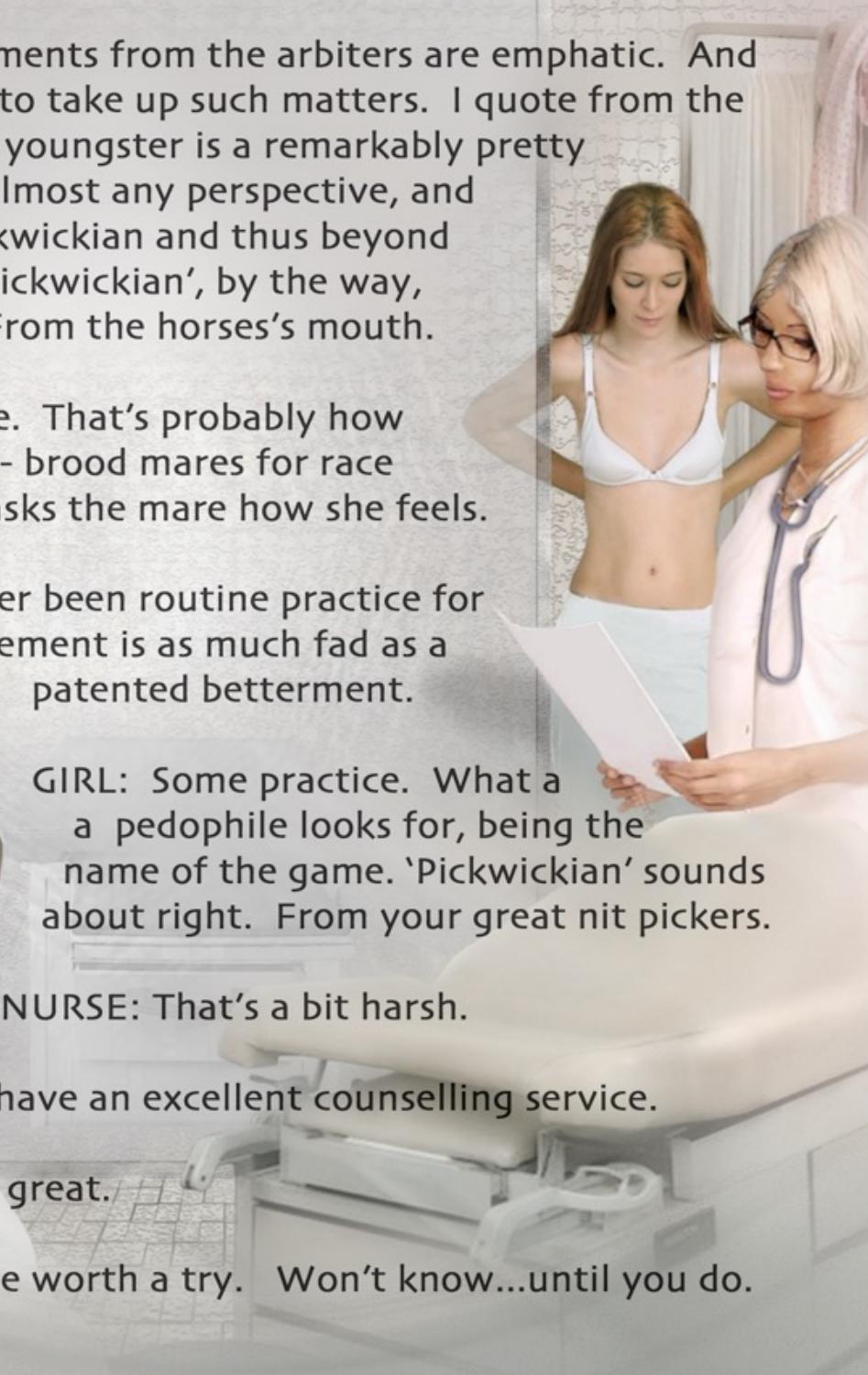
GIRL: Some practice. What a pedophile looks for, being the name of the game. 'Pickwickian' sounds about right. From your great nit pickers.

NURSE: That's a bit harsh.

DOCTOR: We do have an excellent counselling service.

GIRL: Great. Just great.

NURSE: It's maybe worth a try. Won't know...until you do.



She did meet a candidate who was being assessed much as she was, though for far different reasons. He had killed a young woman in a particularly sadistic manner and seemed amused that he might be an object of intensive study. She briefly encountered him in a section of the clinic that took MRI scans. He awaited an appointment and was attended by two guards, neither of whom she saw when he candidly glanced at her and asked if she had screwed Muerner yet. The query surprised and irked. She was told by one guard to ignore him, but she was not one to shy away from an intimidating conversation. She also found it odd that he should be passing through a hallway which bypassed a window where a young woman underwent a physical exam. (She was later told it was an image the examiners wanted planted in his mind before the scan and follow-up testing.) In answer to his ugly question she said:

SHE: You haven't perhaps met Eve, his esteemed friend and colleague.

HE: Just one more calculating bird.

She knew Eve had been in a Nazi camp during the war, where she first met Muerner. Their story of survival and escape was one of the clinic's sagas: which Muerner tried to downplay.

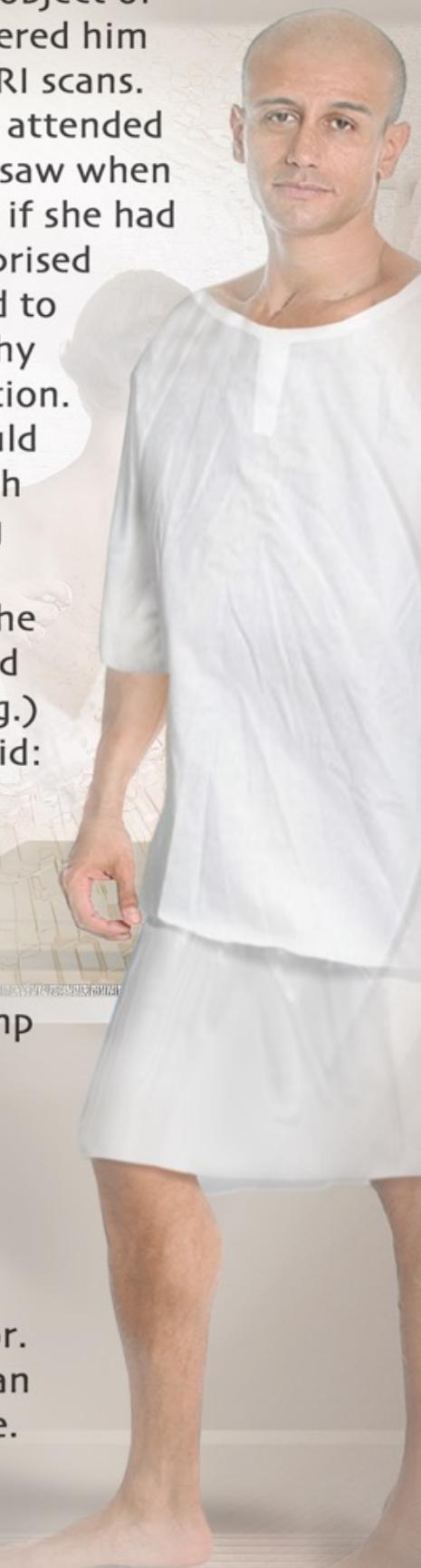
SHE: Eve would find that a droll assessment, I'm sure. She is a survivor. Of a past that very few humans can appreciate: the cruel undeserved fate.

HE: You get around a bit don't you?

SHE: Freedom is a great pimp.

HE: Ha, ha. ha. Take a good

look lady: you won't see this sweetheart again in your lifetime.



The story about Kissy's arrival in Canada dismayed Catherine. She assumed the worst -- a new network in the making. The surprise was the fact that he seemed to welcome the publicity!



Gennadi 'Kissy' Borozov

often, and planned to open a gallery devoted to Bronze Age artifacts from collections around the world. The gallery would also showcase artists whose work has been inspired by Eighteenth Dynasty 'Amarna' art work.

But the story was over before it really began. Catherine assumed he was murdered, a deed that would ever after remain shrouded.

RUSSIAN UNDERWORLD FIGURE FOUND DEAD

Konstantin Borozov, who sought landed immigrant status in Canada, was found dead in a hotel suite in Toronto this weekend. Initial reports from metropolitan police indicate that he may have taken his own life, though a private investigator told the Star that the possibility of foul play had not been ruled out. A Russian Proconsul denies this likelihood, saying that the 'artistic maven' had been depressed, and had sought psychiatric help before his untimely demise. His funeral will be held in Moscow. He will be buried in the Chekov cemetery in St. Petersburg.

The added curiosity for Catherine was that Bossy remained in prison, a fact that meant a new unknown player had likely taken over the syndicate. At least its day-to-day maneuvers.

The rumor of Konstantin Borozov taking up residence in a suburb of Etobicoke was confirmed Friday when he was seen in a restaurant near the airport. Brother of the notorious Boris Ivanovich, he has always maintained a low profile, and is felt to be a marginal player in the crime family his brother is believed to be the head of. A keen Egyptophile, Konstantin, known as 'Kissy' is said to have an art collection that rivals the Late Bronze Age objets in the British Museum in London. He told reporter Carol Off that he always liked Canada, and intended to fund a new department of Slavic studies at the University of Toronto. He hoped to visit here

It was a time when sleep itself seemed articed, futed. The question of progress had always been a buzzword in her daily vigils and struggles. She doubted humans would ever survive a life free of aging, exaction, longing, loss. The exceedingly well off were often the preternaturally bored. The well favored physically among these often the most discontented. Christ was perhaps deliberately vague about the nature of paradise. Many rooms he said. Many. Not unlike the Lubyanka. Humans did have a keen sense of Hell: the red hot coal on the back of the hand. Pain, the great leveler. And what about the awful resentment out there at the awesome inequity of it all, an accumulated resentment dense as a black hole she sometimes thought. How would the lucky fare in such a reckoning? So. What to do? With Muerner, the master maven wanting to continue to document and vivify her truck with Providence. It seemed a vortex was drawing

her off her discrete edge,
where she took up little
space and need. The
testing Muerner wanted
to do would be
comprehensive

and entail (if
she joined in)
a presumption
of empathy for
the philosophy
of the clinic,
the 'nothing
in excess'

Willardson
esteemed in
in his guise

as patient
observer. She

felt there was
a show-off
aspect to the
clinic's mandate,

that implicated either her audacity or the will to see, to know.

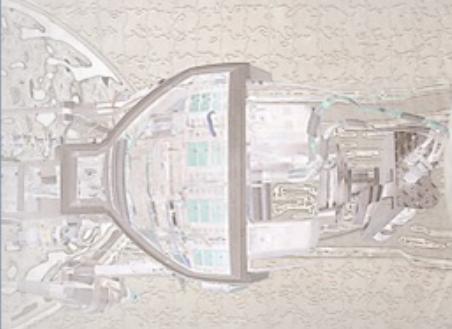


She was
promised a
meeting with
Muerner but
only after
the testing
was done.

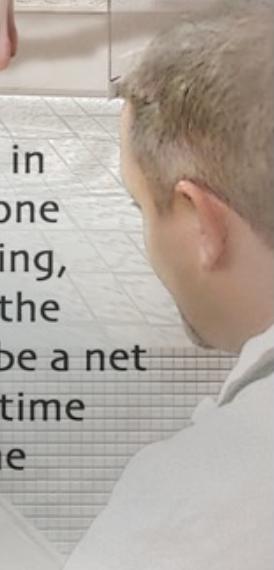
She was told
he would be
in a better
position to
answer some
of her hard
questions.

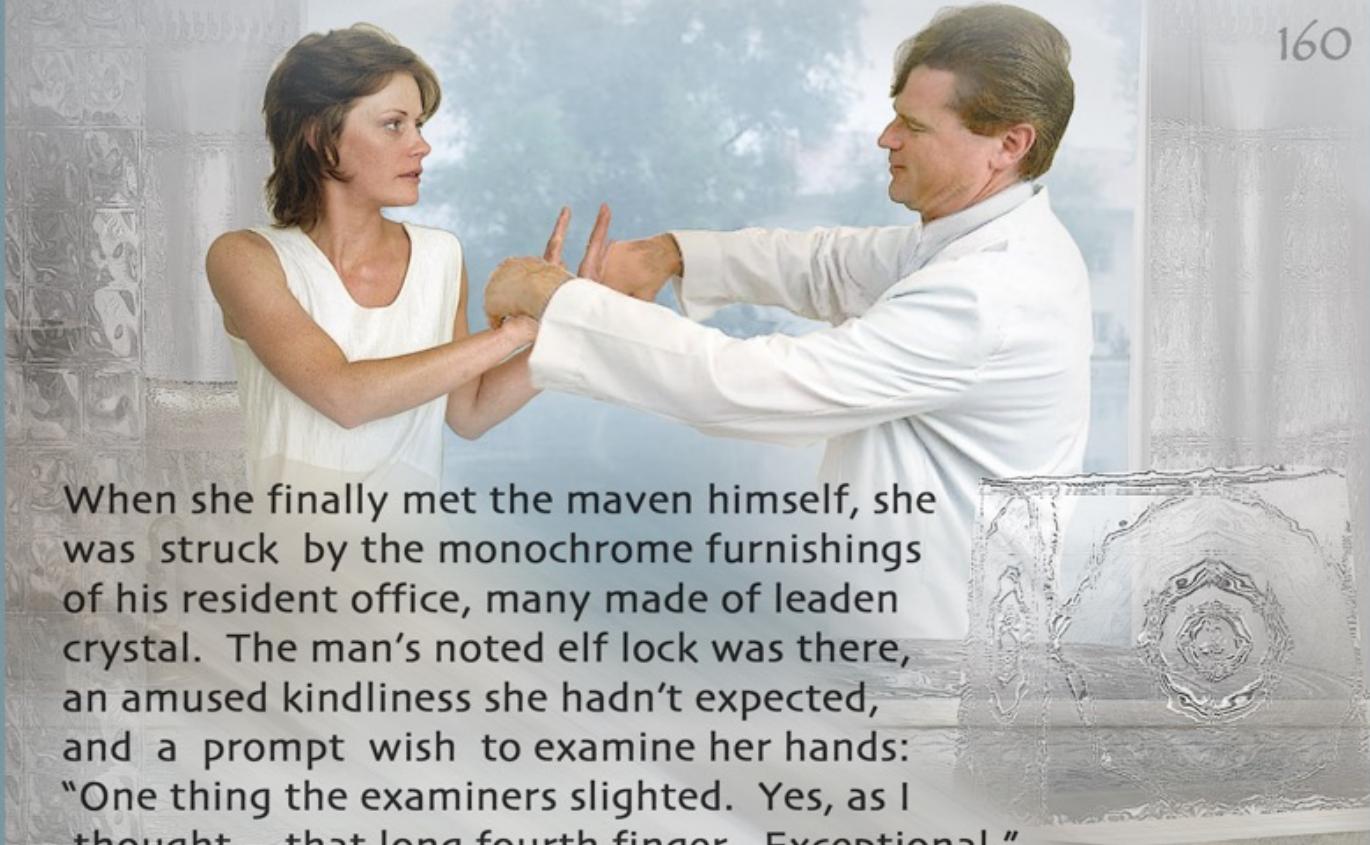
The further
delay seemed
but one more
'add on', but
the dealing
was underway
and leaving
now was not
in the cards.

Catherine agreed as much to the special assessments because she had to see what was being done in the state-of-the-art section of the clinic. Muerner's adulatory regard of her as a 'perfected ectye' she would take with a grain of salt, though the more she learned of the man the less her sarcasm obtained. The first scans were done in a 'byte' network gown that helped define the architecture of the thoracic organs. "Try to think of a scanner parsing the structure as well as the time viability or the health of individual cells, the one adducing the other," the assigned technician said. "Some scanner," she said. "Yes, it is quite a beast."



The technician who set the parameters for her scan was an alert, engaging talker. "You've done this more than once, yes?" she dryly asked. "Many times, though rarely for statistical exemplars like you." "I trust I'll live to tell the tale." "The radiant energy is no worse than your average cell phone. Muerner's input was in devising the means to record the articulation and tone factors co-actively. Generalizations aren't reassuring, all things considered. It's a much debated issue -- the reprogramming of genes -- but the end results will be a net benefit in due course. We must be discreet for the time being. When one understands the possibilities the work takes on a new importance and acceptance."





When she finally met the maven himself, she was struck by the monochrome furnishings of his resident office, many made of leaden crystal. The man's noted elf lock was there, an amused kindliness she hadn't expected, and a prompt wish to examine her hands: "One thing the examiners slighted. Yes, as I thought -- that long fourth finger. Exceptional."



"It's worth special mention is it?" she asked. She was amused that such a tiny anomaly might be significant. "Yes indeed," he answered. "The presence of a genetic code for it is almost mythological, but here it is, yes, a find that will, in due course allow us to facilitate the independence of the third and fourth fingers when they no longer apportion fewer fascia, which will make for a more versatile hand and limb. We must get you into our tissue formulator very soon."

"So. You want me to lend a hand," she said as he admired her finger. "Yes -- a bird in the hand --yes." As usual, the equipment seemed, wondrous, necromantic even. The last of the intrusions, she was assured.

She was also surprised to find him so young looking. "A child prodigy," she was told, who completed his doctorate at Heidelberg at fifteen, barely sixteen when the war ended.

The second call she made when her sojourn with Muerner et al ended was to her old mentor David Willardson (the first call was to her anxious mother). A new wig 'fronted' the makeover.

CATH: Hi. Yes, the 'sabbatical' is over. What? No, a book. About recent things. An editor at Knopf is listening. Yes. A very modern epos. The revival of eugenics. Margaret? No, I haven't been in touch with her for ages. As far as I know she's in Rio on a swim shoot. Or was. What's the latest?

DAVID: Überhaupt Führ has surfaced again. Some recent works are on tour. At the Kunsthalle no less. And a Margaret Burke figures in several of them.

CATH: Good lord. Margaret and the general. Small world.

DAVID: There's more. A Russian lass we know, one Zoya Stolbanov, has had a face lift. One of Muerner's surgeons flew to Marseilles to do the work. No longer a 'twin' I'm told. A new legend too. This is confidential information, of course, and I don't wish to be identified as the source of it.

CATH: Of course. And many thanks. I'll see you at the gallery?

DAVID: Only Attila himself will thwart a visit.

CATH: Any chance of meeting my new 'improved product' birth twin?

DAVID: A likelihood I would readily give odds on. Indeed.



animated conversation
with a debonairly
gesticulating
Willardson.

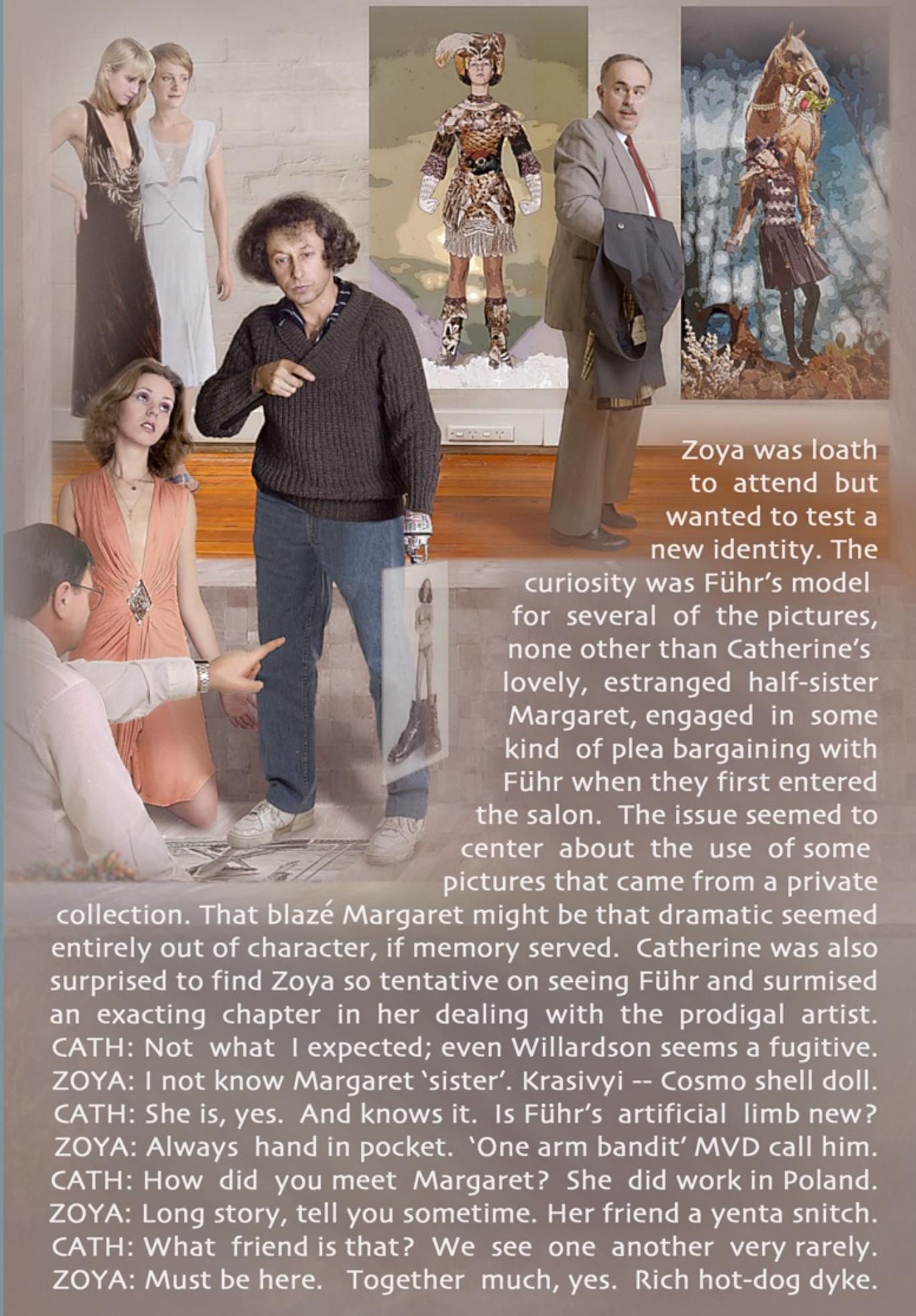
So at last:
'the twin'
in a new
aspect. A
new chapter
in the ongoing
saga, their
Russian
past no
longer a
missing portfolio.



The memory would linger always: the
inaugural face-to-face sighting of
Zoya, renamed now 'Yevgenia' (her
face recast by a Muerner surgeon)
perched on a spare
pedestal
by a
Marine
Venus
(so unlike
Pachis'
modern
banal
nude).



A frank impenitent face, wary, pretty in a trendy sense. Perhaps
seeing herself as she once looked rekindled incendiary times.



The presence of half-sister Margaret was surprising as the appearance of Führ himself. Margaret's late fashion agent and regular companion, the extravagant Madame Albicias, had a rather tipsy Margaret in tow, and greeted Catherine and Zoya (Margaret was still ignorant of Zoya's identity) with her usual fail-safe smile. She idly fondled a lock of Margaret's hair the while. If the presumption was that Margaret was not gay, the use of an influential

agent was a

benefice

that few

models

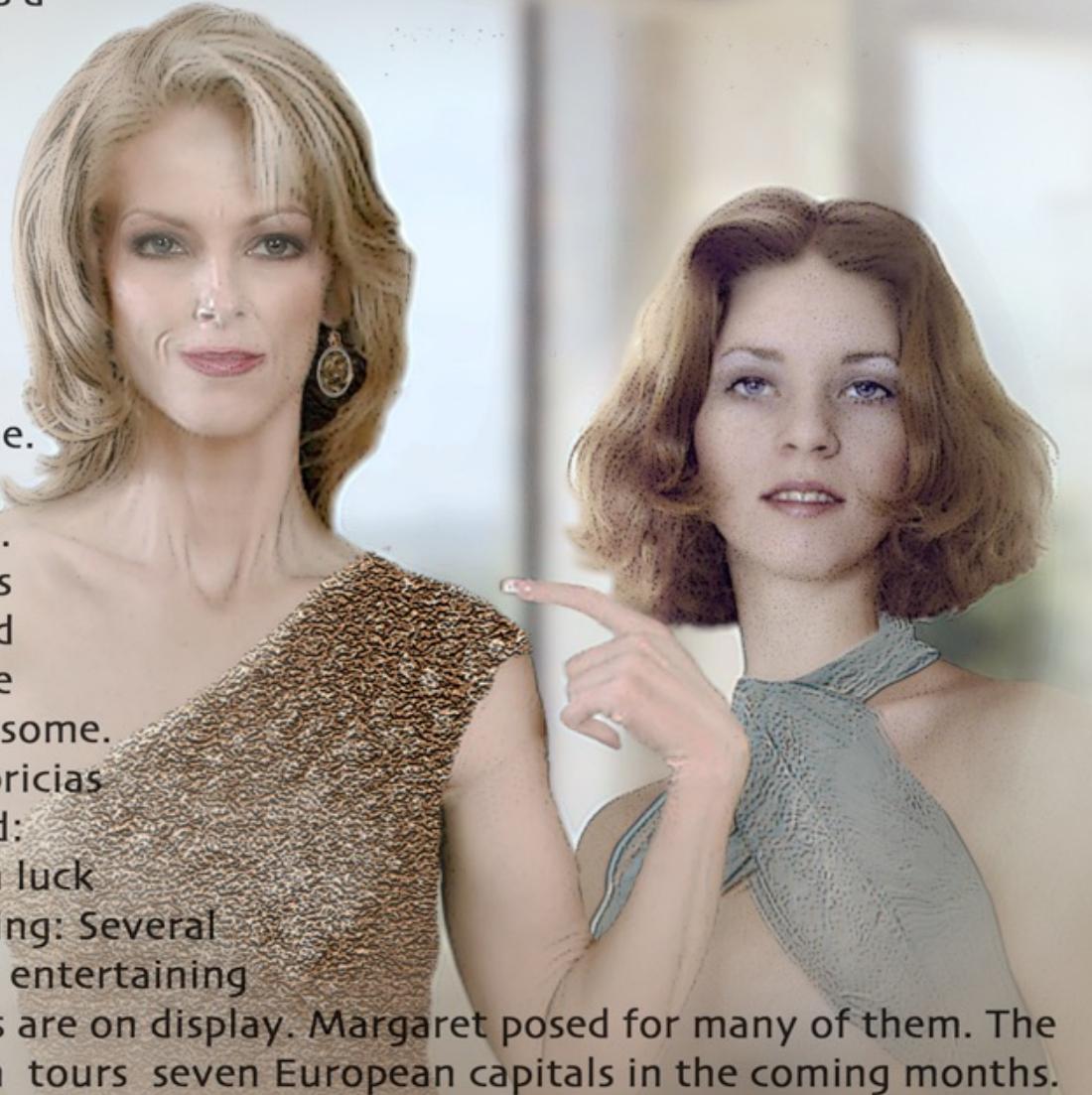
slighted.

"I'm so pleased to meet you at last," Mme. Albicias remarked.

The intros proceeded apace, the smiles fulsome. Mme. Albicias continued:

"You're in luck this evening: Several of Louis's entertaining

montages are on display. Margaret posed for many of them. The collection tours seven European capitals in the coming months. Do pay particular attention to the 'Endangered Species' print, and 'Horsepower'." Said a wryly amused Margaret, "I trust my sister is no longer in hock to ABN." She looked in turn at Zoya with a bemused smile. Said Catherine, "Not in hock, no." She decided Margaret was sufficiently pie-eyed to contort or slight personal matters. "You have a very attractive friend," Mme. Albicias said, her tone of voice sufficiently solicitous to prompt Margaret to lid her eyes. "A copywriter I met in Kiev," Catherine said. "Very good at her job.". "Pristine copy," Margaret said.



In Catherine's top of the hill condo their new life was duly explored. Yes, Zoya said, they had an older half sister. She was called Anastasiya, and left home when Zoya was about eight. Zoya had not seen her since. She simply vanished.

CATH: You've no idea what happened?

ZOYA: I tell you GRU recruit her -- you believe me?

CATH: Of course. If that's what you think happened.

ZOYA: The guy who often visit not a boyfriend. I get info one day from reliable source. Not surprise. 'Zia very bright.'

CATH: A close or necessary friend then -- this source?

ZOYA: No names please. Best for all...for now.

CATH: Is he, or she, still a friend?

ZOYA: No comment please. This apartment is great place. Sun! Special gift. I live here for while, yes?

CATH: Of course. As long as you like. I told you I may have to move though. I've got a couple of prospects, but they don't pay as well as my last job.

ZOYA: Russian 'bear hug'. Never same after. I stay brief time. After week I have big picture in mind. Maybe film. Plombiers making film. Soon casting. I go for big laugh.

CATH: That will be interesting. I hope it works out. You must let me know. I'm also curious if you met either Borozov?

ZOYA: Kissy ran Apsaras. Brother big swine. Schitzo. Kissy ghost. Apsara nice place...mostly. Tell you one day.

CATH: Tell me about Kissy. He's one B. I may have misjudged.

ZOYA: Style geek. Music, art mama. Poet. 'Maenad' they call him: hysterical cunt. Not happy. Die in Canada.

CATH: Did you ever meet him?

ZOYA: You don't meet 'ghost'. Rumor he shy but okay.

CATH: How okay?

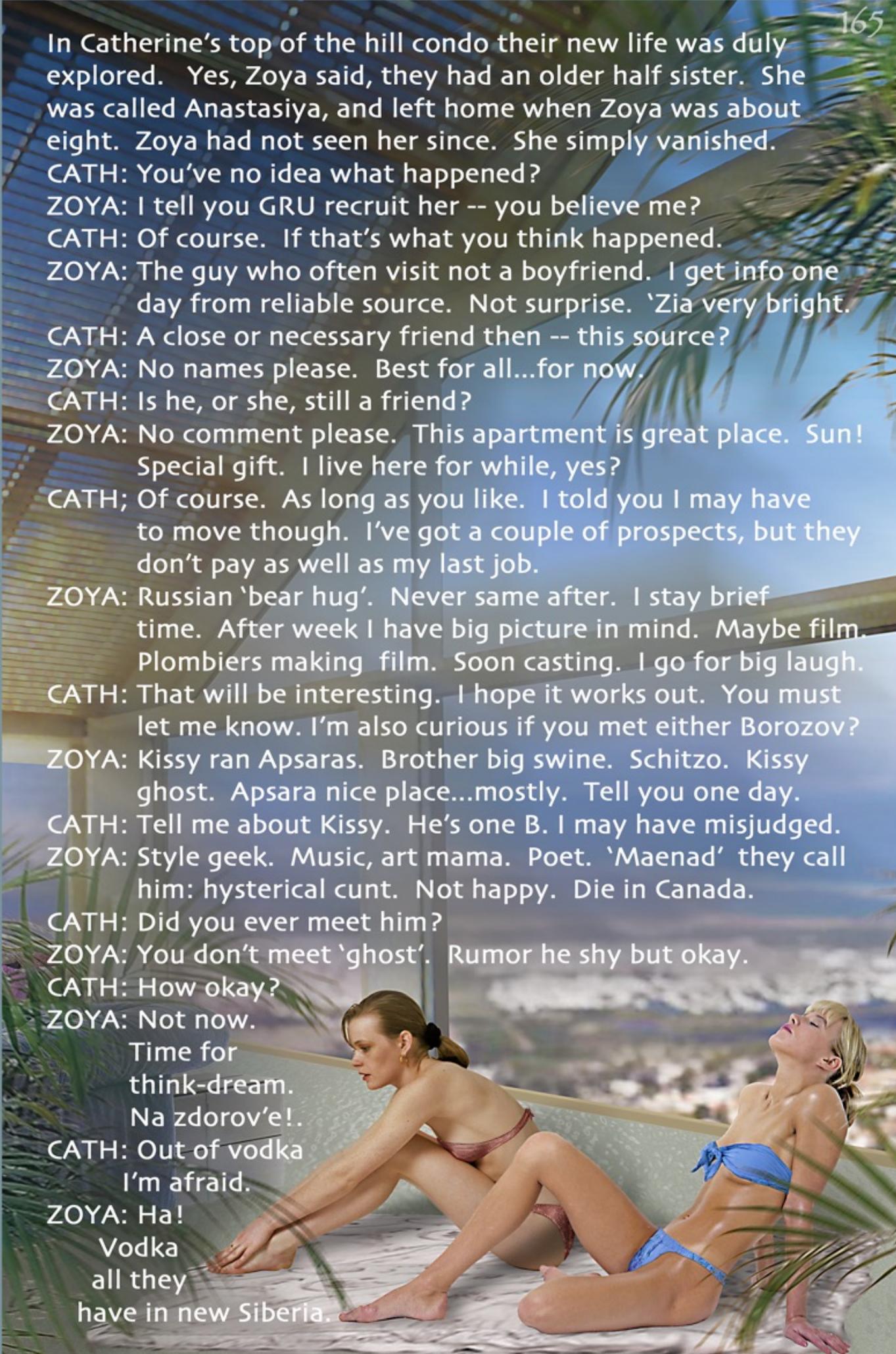
ZOYA: Not now.

Time for
think-dream.
Na zdror'e!.

CATH: Out of vodka
I'm afraid.

ZOYA: Ha!

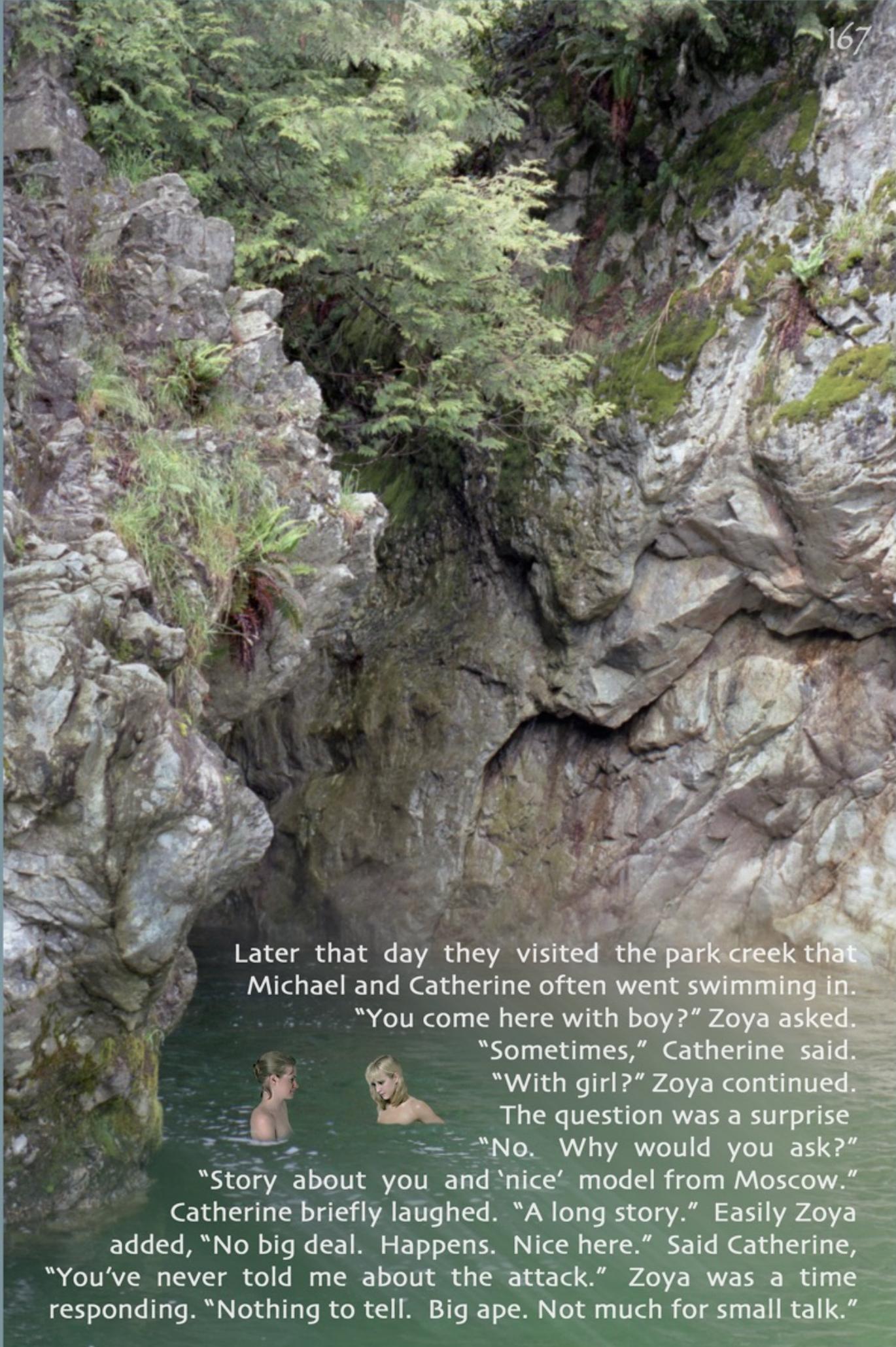
Vodka
all they
have in new Siberia.



They visited several of Catherine's favorite haunts, finding in one an unexpected bird. Catherine mentioned a news story about a family of storks that had escaped an aviary in San Diego. "Nice metaphor for me," Zoya answered. "Out of coop." For a time they studied the bird, who seemed to share with them a rarefied curiosity...



The same day they went to a secluded spot in the sun bright desert. Suddenly venting mutual laughter they stripped to the skin to look at one another with renewed wonder -- and readily decide they were indeed a match, the only oddities Zoya's tan and new face "Ruskie doubleheaders," Zoya said with a dry smile.



Later that day they visited the park creek that Michael and Catherine often went swimming in.

"You come here with boy?" Zoya asked.

"Sometimes," Catherine said.

"With girl?" Zoya continued.

The question was a surprise

"No. Why would you ask?"

"Story about you and 'nice' model from Moscow."

Catherine briefly laughed. "A long story." Easily Zoya added, "No big deal. Happens. Nice here." Said Catherine, "You've never told me about the attack." Zoya was a time responding. "Nothing to tell. Big ape. Not much for small talk."

Plombiers wish to make a 'fashion film' about Saint Joan set 168
the stage for Zoya's acting debut. If she was initially flattered,
the proposed film proved to be both
gaudy and lurid. The armor she
would wear was beautifully
crafted but translucent.



Said the prodigal Plombiers: "You'll be seen as a luminous vision -- an Ester, Judith, Deborah." The 'creative' team devoted a lot of time to the auto-da-fé, especially the parting of the flames to show-case the burnt figure (to assure the executioners that the apostate had not escaped and was in fact a woman; an airbrush artist would render Zoya as the charred figure). Zoya wanted a body double for the scene. Plombiers wanted the 'real thing'. Said he, "The look will be stark, galvanizing after seeing you in armor then paraded at the trial." In one scene of the trial she would appear half naked.



The campy artist thought the idea 'awesome'. Zoya had perhaps dealt with the precious Plombiers once too often, his storybook artifacts -- the sword and flying carpet -- had prompted the attack. She didn't need this dump -- she had never appeared so before -- and promptly decided to split.

Zoya sought a time alone after quitting the film. When she told Plombiers she was leaving, he looked as if he'd fallen prey to a bad joke. Incredulity can foil understanding. She simply didn't like the film, she said. It's historic, he said. And unique! The opportunity of a lifetime! She must have smiled for he mumbled something about contract -- not yet signed, she duly reminded him, a fact he was apparently ignorant of, so wrapped up was in his grand film. It was the first time her new identity freed her from a 'losing hand', her gamy past no more a curse. Her cache of gems would keep her flush for a season at least. She had one more heist to make, and rented a cottage near Solana Beach to stash it. The 'objet' intrigued and was likely worth a bundle with the gems in the head dress. The day Catherine visited the house she was surprised to find a jewelled marble bust she may have seen before -- at Shiraz' 'fire sale'! Zoya only belatedly understood her twin's rare, diffident expression.

ZOYA: I forget -- you never see 'Zia. Half sister. Bust Like her. CATH: A friend showed me some photos recently, one was said

to be of Anastasiya. How in the world did you find it?

ZOYA (sarcastic): 'Find'? How you think I 'find'? Go to fucking lousy MVD? CATH (smiling): It's quite lovely. And does evoke the face I was shown. She vanished early on I understand.

ZOYA: She leave when I am, maybe, eleven. CATH: A fine puzzle.

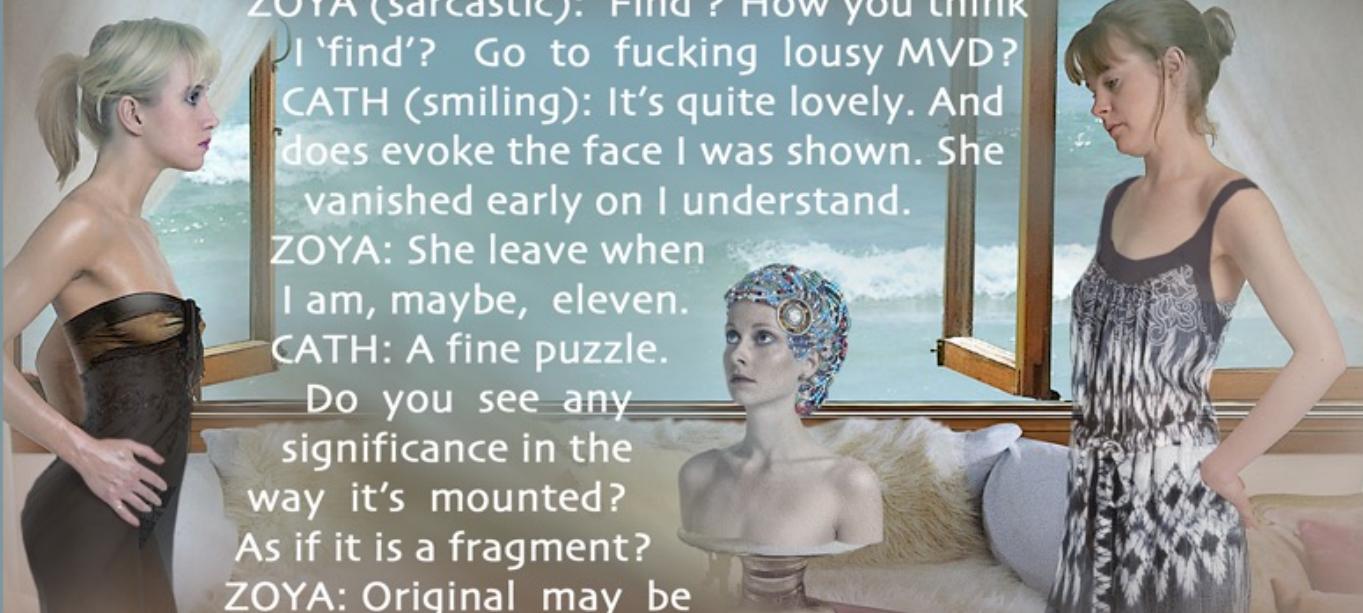
Do you see any significance in the way it's mounted?
As if it is a fragment?

ZOYA: Original may be statue, this left over top. Maybe from maquette even.

CATH: The craftsmanship hints at a flush patron somewhere.

ZOYA: We find 'us'. Maybe we find her? You think, yes?

CATH: Very worth a try. A story just waiting to be told.



She had all but reconciled herself to the 'alluvial flow' of her life when the unstamped package arrived in her mother's mail box, addressed simply 'To Catherine'. Believing it to be a bomb sent by one of Bossy's agents, she had it checked out by police. When it proved to be both bomb and poison free she opened it to find a book of stories and plays by Anton Chekov -- an old first edition! As she leafed through the book, her anxiety unrelenting, a folded note slipped out from the fly leaf -- a letter ostensibly written by Kissy Borozov!

At first she imagined it some kind of joke, but after reading it several times, decided she had indeed overlooked a chapter in her own story. Kissy had died in Toronto -- likely murdered she thought now, given the sly life he apparently led in Russia. The revelation defied the odds: her enemy's brother a secret paramour! Right out of Tolstoy she thought. Though whether it would rank as tragedy she would be a while deciding. It was almost too bizarre to be true, yet the words in the note rather defied sarcasm. She couldn't even remember what he looked like. Not a twin, of course.

No, not a twin.



It was the only posthumous billet-doux she had received -- thus far. A fact that must be taken under advisement.



Dear Catherine,

Etobicoke, Canada, June 2010

I have some hope that providence will place this note into your hand without stipulation. The person I entrusted the Chekov book to, the fly leaf of which houses this missive, is discreet but must remain anonymous. My options were limited at this time. As you may now know.

I will have of course no way of knowing whether you receive the book, let alone this epilogue. But only Armageddon would have prevented me from writing it -- a late undertaking in an ugly and protracted life. It was composed in Canada. My late and too brief domicile. I had at one time entertained the lovely if tenuous notion of actually meeting you...and now must content myself with these pallid words.

The Chekov book is somewhat dog eared, as the English say. Indeed, my finger prints are on every page. Prints that will never be compared to my set on file with the Cheka. Please be assured I tried to keep Bossy's minders preoccupied as long as I could. 'The Sale' worked for a time. The mural gave me a 'time out'. Not long enough of course. There is another matter. The security officer at the terminal you departed St. Petersburg from is now being questioned. I tell you this not to solicit kudos but to point out how fate deals with stolid minds. The guard owed me a favor and was to allow a Finn a boarding pass. He was distracted with a thorny luggage issue and thought you were the Finn. He is in no trouble but your swift leave taking is now under review. Providentially, I won't be around to 'fill in the blanks'.

The one solace is that Bossy's reputation is now so bathetic, so soiled, that he may spend the rest of his life in prison. And with me out of the way, his enemies -- and yours by proxy -- can now stand down. Even Alik has left. It was your courage and resource in disclosing one of his scams that revived in me a nostalgia about trust and the gift of grace. The Beast in the Beauty and Beast is a fine parody.

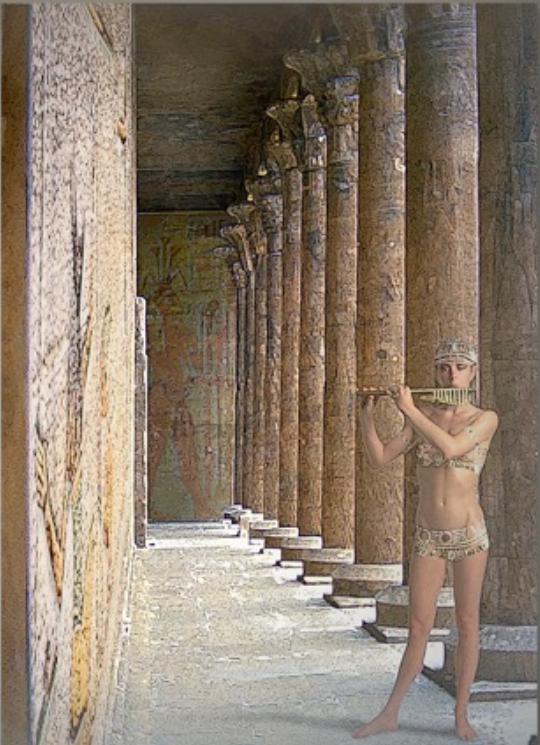
I hope you meet your twin one day. Free of all contingency. I wish you well, and will leave it to Chekov to plead my case. Please think of me sometimes with an attitude more wry than sardonic.

Ever after,
Konstantin

The photos Catherine took in the gallery she would return 172 to again and again, a reminder of 'beauty's brag' and how Führ's talent could well be complicit with Pachis' illustrations.



The Egyptian images in the collection intimated that the picture entitled 'The Sale', which had irked her so, was almost certainly a collaboration, but not perhaps as derogatory as she imagined.



Führ indulged some whimsy in the series, yet his fondness for both Margaret and Zoya was not in doubt. The suspicion that Kissy had likely compared notes added to the ongoing wonder!



Of Catherine's scrapbook prints from the Führ collection the one nude of Margaret seemed the most telling. Entitled Terror, the Human Form Divine (a quote from William Blake) it rather summed up her own regard of human beauty, and hence the conundrum of Muerner and the Bern Clinic. She doubted Margaret had been more awesomely depicted. She could hear Führ's own comment: Bones matter. Bones.