

Musing the Maenad

An illustrated adventure

Based on the Doricha/Nitocris Legend

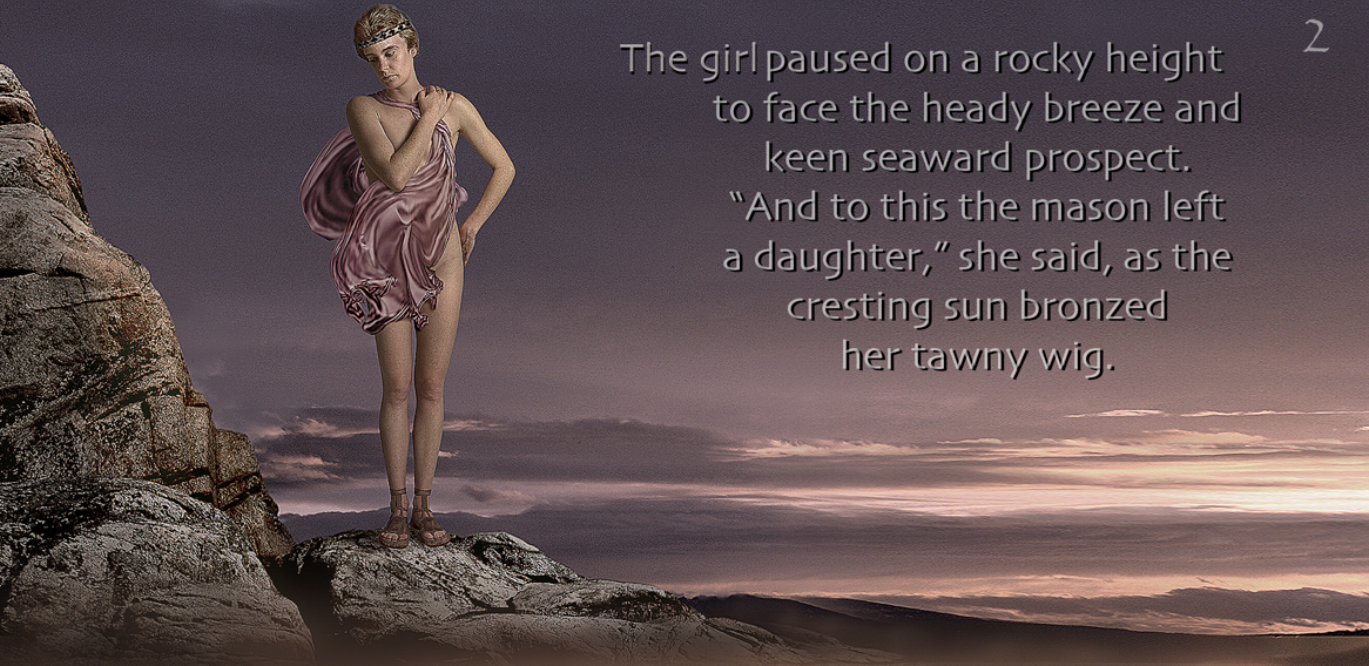
Willard Thurston



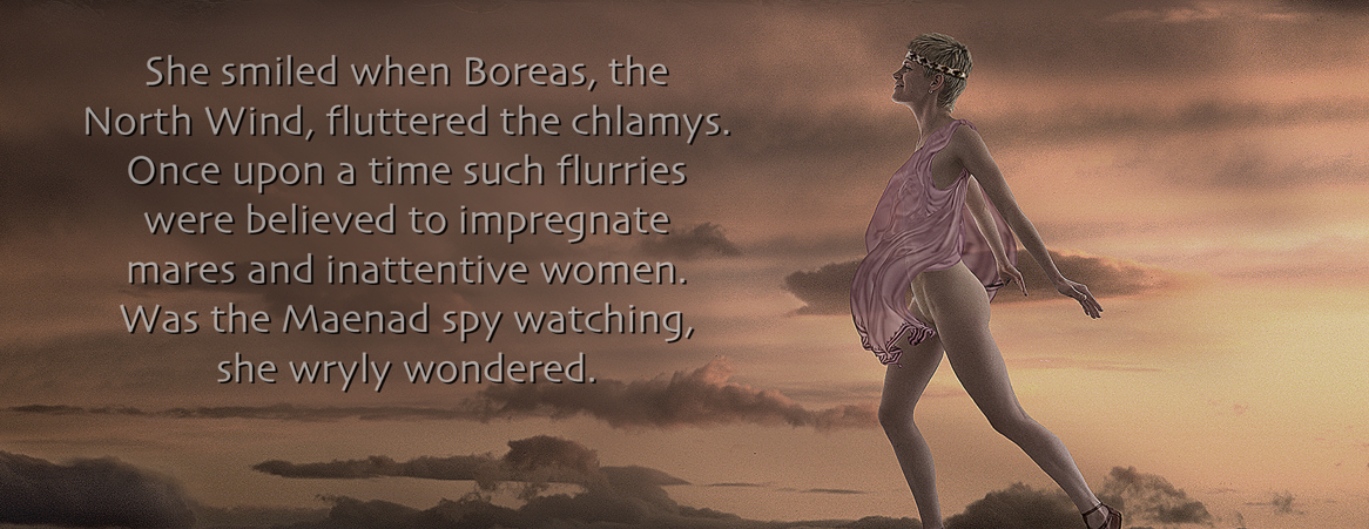
At the first blush of 'rosy fingered dawn', a time when mists still shroud and the dew embalms, a slender form clad only in a light chlamys stole along the edge of a gusty cliff. A distant observer would have seen another pretty boy hurrying home from his lover before daybreak. A nearby witness, a rare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



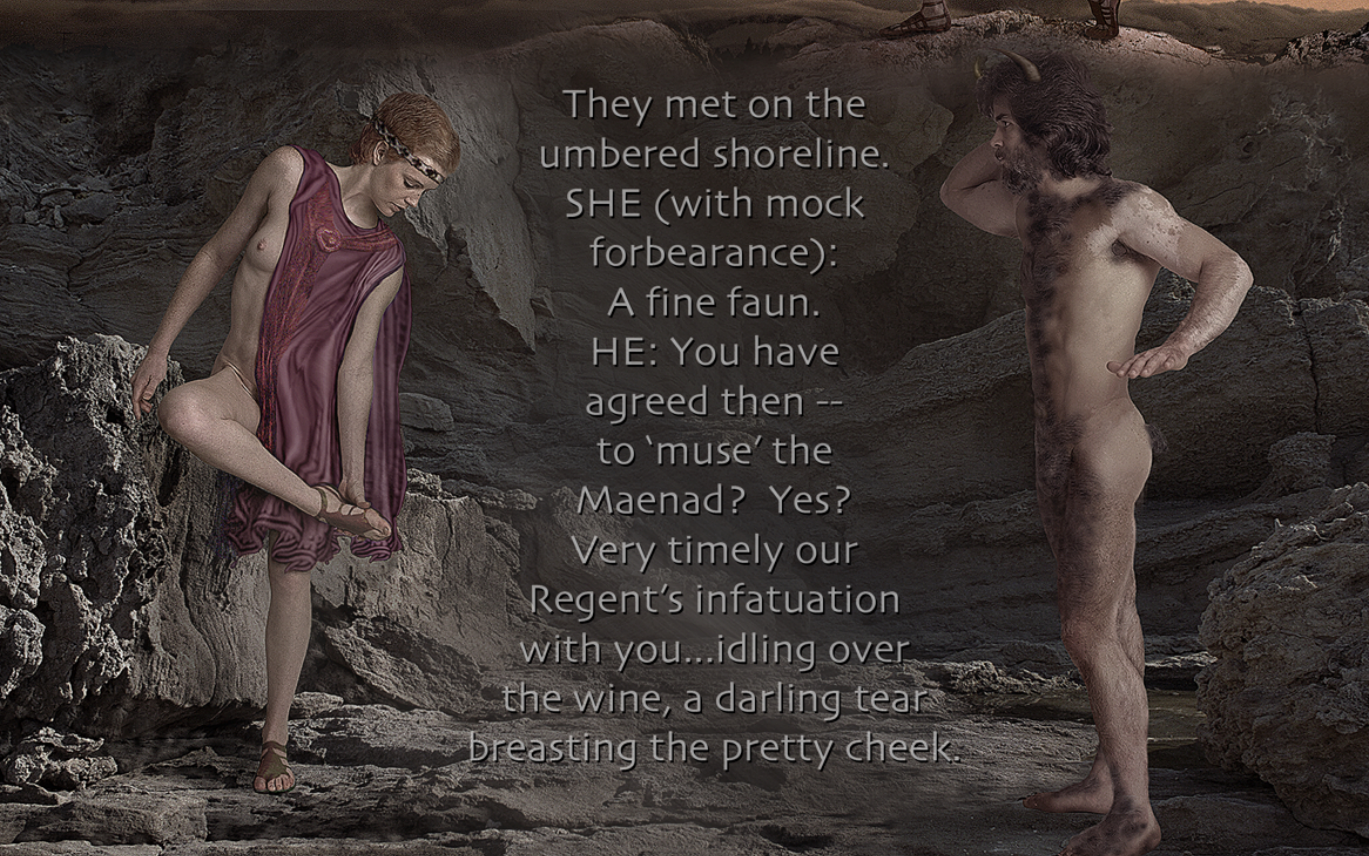
How it all began.

A woman with a golden headband and a pink chlamys stands on a rocky cliff. She is looking down and adjusting her garment. The background shows a sunset over a landscape with mountains and a body of water.

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

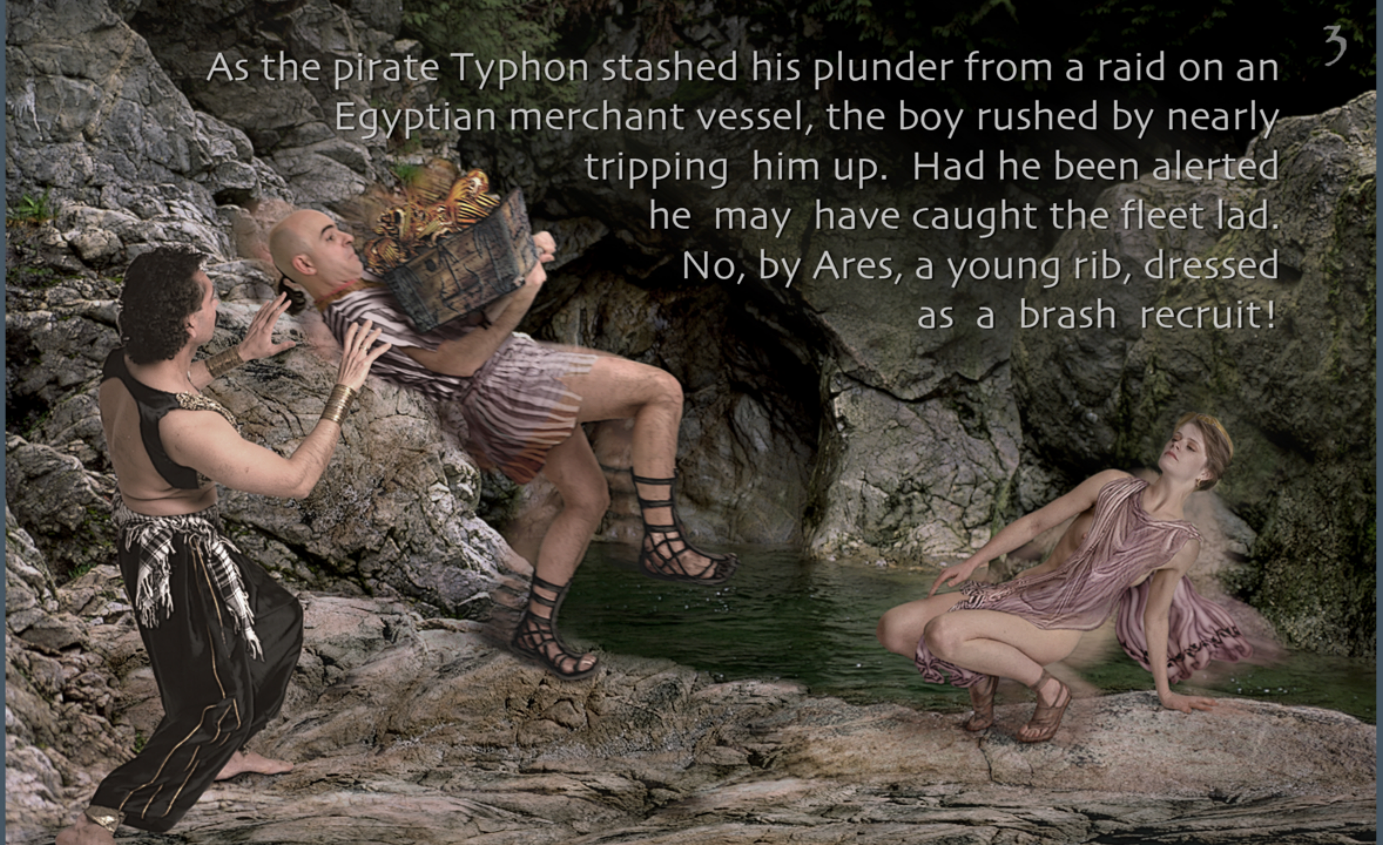
A woman in a pink chlamys and golden headband walks along the edge of a rocky cliff. She is looking towards the sunset. The sky is filled with soft, golden light.

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

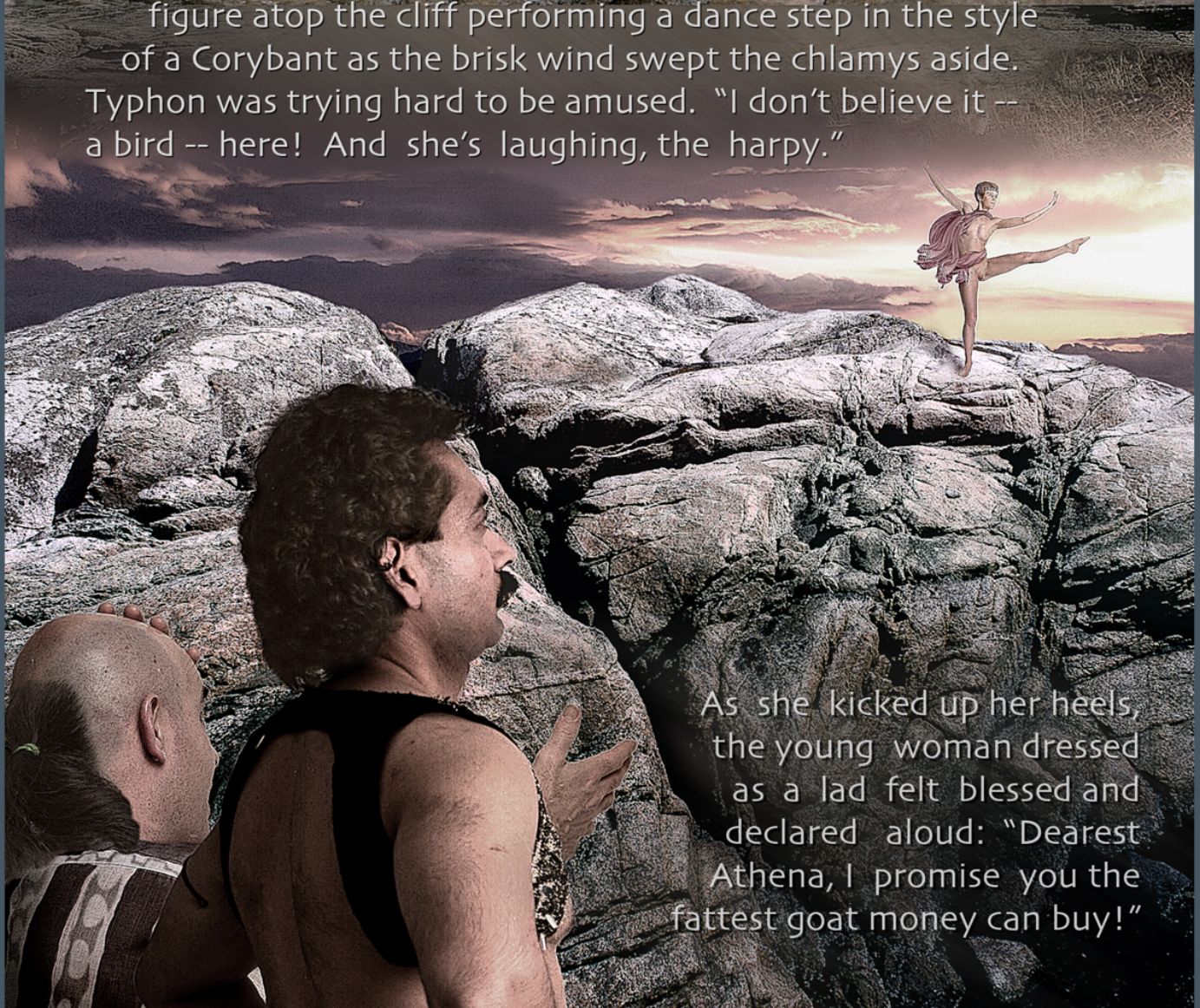
A woman in a pink chlamys and golden headband is on the left, looking down at her foot. On the right, a muscular, hairy faun with horns stands looking at her. They are on a rocky cliff.

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

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



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

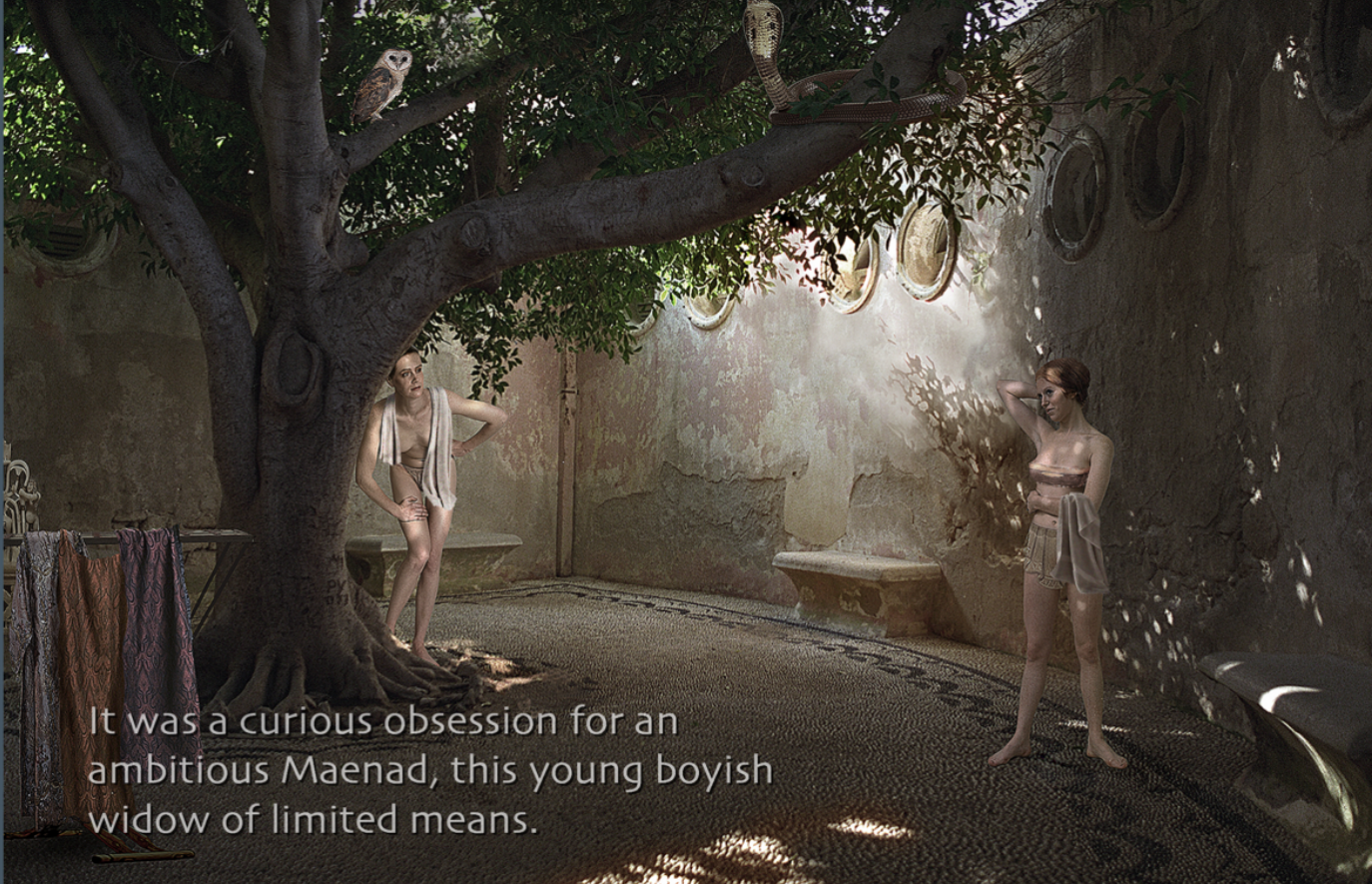


As she kicked up her heels, the young woman dressed as a lad felt blessed and declared aloud: "Dearest Athena, I promise you the fattest goat money can buy!"

The Regnant Maenad, who aspired to be the Sovereign Glaean ruler, sat on the Palace rooftop overlooking the Palace's lovely garden, her expression one of rapt wonder -- due some said to a particular mushroom; others, to a young widowed aristocrat by name of Zelea!



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



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

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



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



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

It was rumored that storyteller Scheira included Egyptian myths in her stories to Glaean children, stories the Regent did not approve of, but was cautioned when she learned how favored some of the tales were with many Glaean nobles!



The wary Regent questioned many aristos, affecting 'neutrality' with a royal shawl as face mask, for she did not want to intimate her favored chic Zelea, who she had commissioned a statue of to honor the Tripartite Shrine in the Labyrinth. Hence she accepted that Scheira liked the tales she told not the lands of their origin.





The ritual thank offerings on the mountain shrine were a daily event at the alter of the constant, timeless Rhea.

The surprise came when the genteel Glaean aristo Zelea was seen in the court's assembly chamber dressed as a Thyiad initiate, talking with the current in-group of Elders and nobles. By consenting to be installed as a tyro in the sect, the partisans believed she could indeed distract the smitten Regnant Maenad long enough to complete plans for her overthrow. In one corner a tier of Thyiads looked on with voluptuous anticipation.

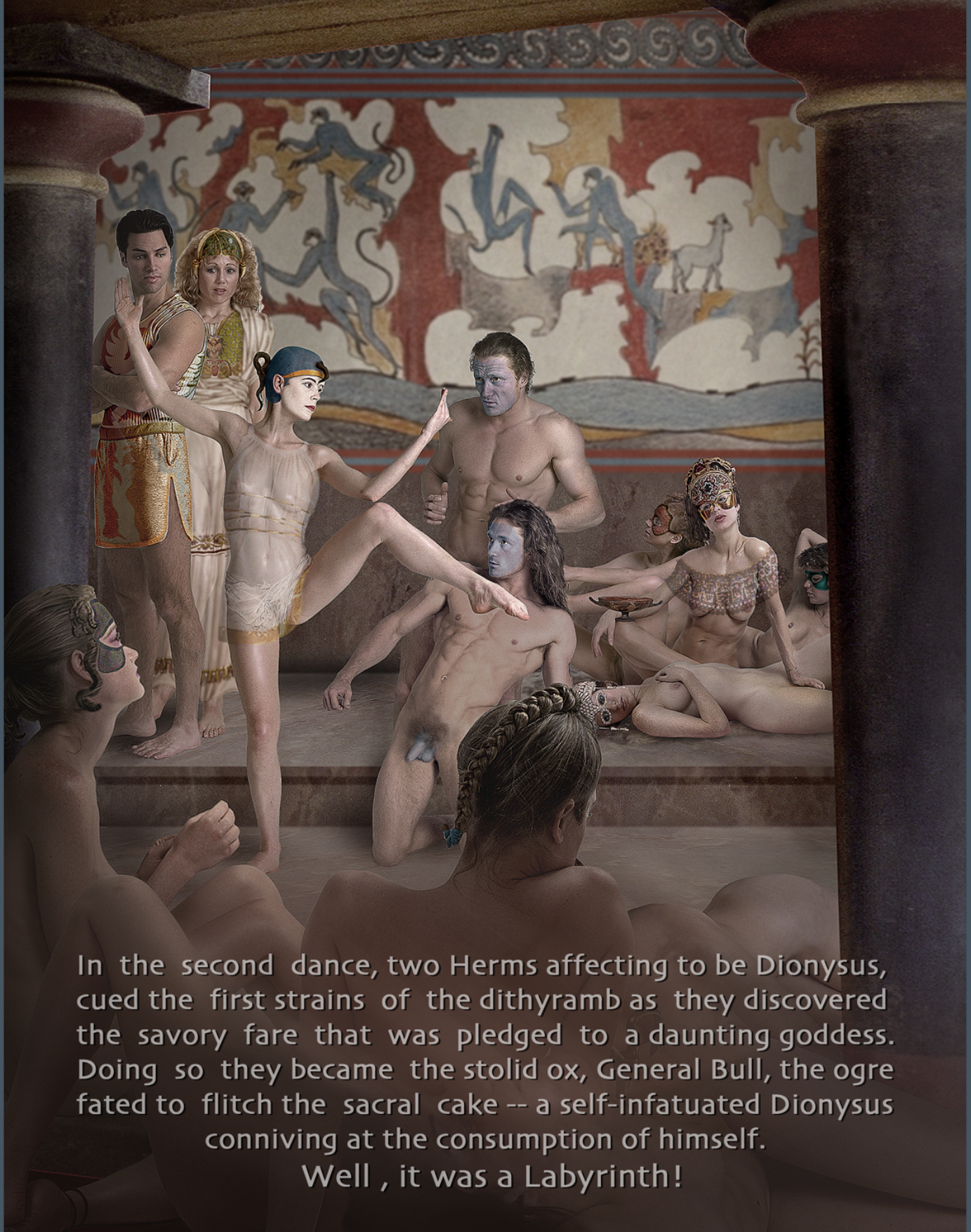


As the Maenad's wanton prodigal fêtes grew in number, many citizens became upset. The rite of initiation into her troupe of Thyiads prompted the partisans to enact their plan whereby Zelea would join the gang, allow herself to be ritually pleased by the 'nurses' of Dionysus, and so keep the Maenad captivated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



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

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



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



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



A dire unexpected Omen foiled the partisans' coup -- the ominous arrival of a changed Night Heron!



When the human form 'left' the protective Night Heron, all Glaeans must prepare for an alien invasion, all hands on deck, so to speak, including the friends of the Regent, who then feared the Regent might be a heedless wanton after all.



A morning mist lifted the day the ominous flotilla came, ships bearing Egyptian Shardana. The Streets of Glaea soon cleared, the residents fleeing to the mountains. Zelea and Thera were among the last to leave, the last to descry their idyllic island.





The new ruler, a hale husky Egyptian-Nubian Viceroy, knew of the sensual Maenad Regent and readily purged her wanton followers. Only those Glaean aristos who could handwalk through a field of sharp upright thyrsi -- Zelea being one -- were to be trusted by a ruler who believed only the discretely able might be useful. When he began investigating the necromantic Labyrinth, vigilant Rhene and cagey Scheira took note.

SCHEIRA: You fear his knowledge of the Labyrinth mysteries may prompt more distrust, suspicion, censure.

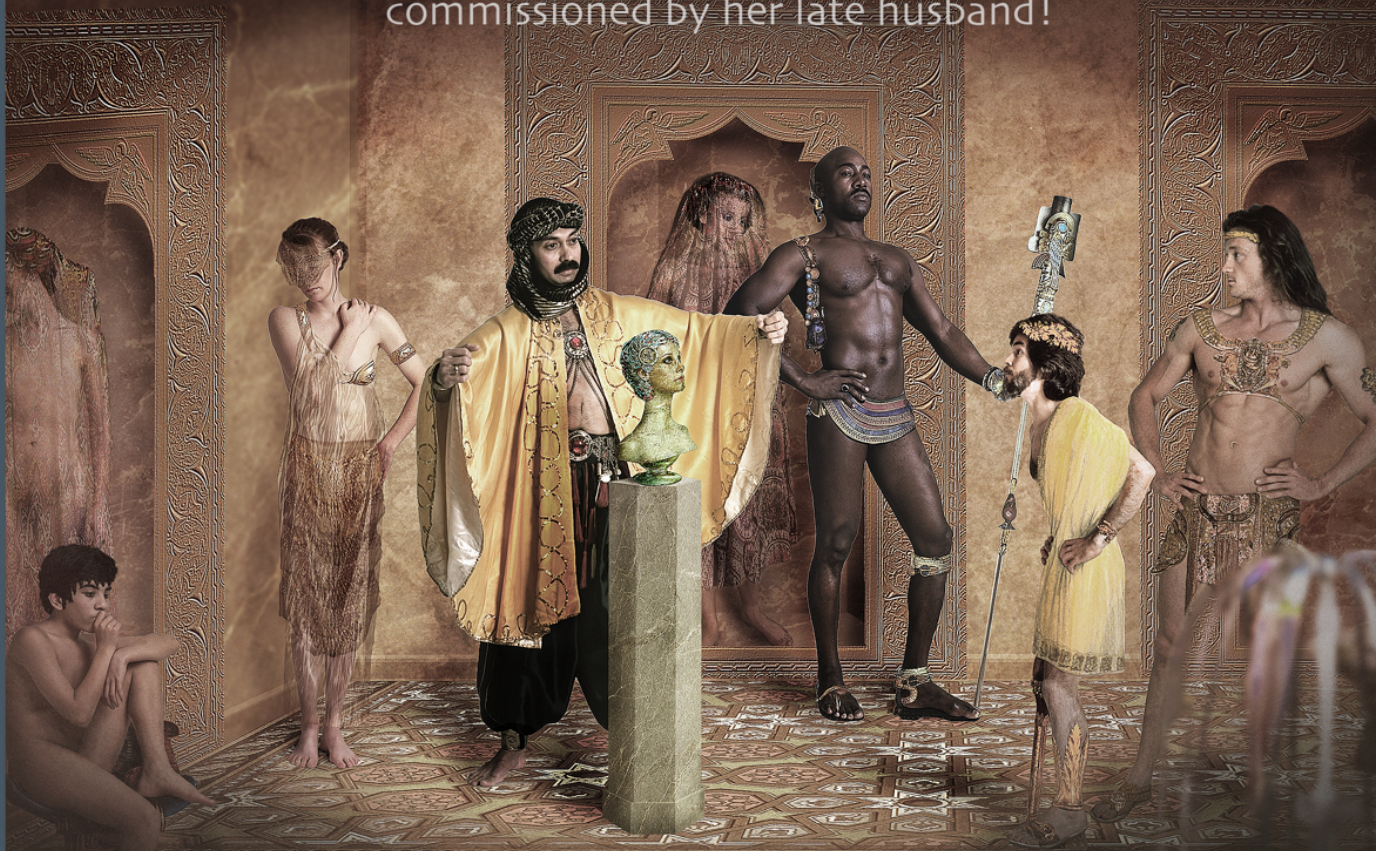


RHENE: We best be discreet, keep our words simple. **It** can provoke fraught ideas harmful for us.





After the demise of the Regent, the polis was soon again alive, from the sale of the Regent's Palladium, to the pirate Typhon honoring Thea's Pillar Crypt with an offering, while hawking his spoils in the guest houses, including a bust of Zelea commissioned by her late husband!



Because the Viceroy liked the statue of Erato, an early Glaean work, the Acropolis was left intact. An old but fond idea held that the waif Erato held was said to be the fabled Nitocris, who looked a little like the uncanny Zelea!



Erato's gold sandals also prompted speculation about a future wearer, one fable anticipated a future Egyptian Queen wearing such sandals!



In due course Zelea was allowed to return to her household, suggesting she enjoyed a freedom denied many Glaeans in the Viceroy's regime, a preferment that suggested she and the few remaining Regent's partisans had parted company. Whereas story teller Scheira had been one of the first Glaeans to face the scores of African scorpions that fronted the initial wave of Shardana soldiers --and barely escaped with her life.



The attractive Schiera was abducted by a pirate and taken to Naucratis where the Viceroy had come disguised as a Kurdis slaver to sort out a rival faction there. He recognized her at a slave auction, bought her, and gave her a splendid pectoral.

SCHEIRA: This is Egyptian is it not?

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

SCHEIRA: The story of Erato's child and the gold sandals.

VICEROY: The very one. You will tell it to some court elders.

SCHEIRA: What happens then?


VICEROY: We seen how good a tale bearer you are, and how well you learn new material.



To avoid being questioned about the Labyrinth by a newly archy inquisitive Viceroy, Zelea and Thera fled to an obscure corner of it, only to be abducted by the ever watchful Minotaur. Zelea fell ill, reviving when Hero Theseus found and slew the Minotaur. At Theseus's urging she and Thera fled to Naucratis, bribing a sea trader to take them there. A break with the past that Zelea and Thera had trouble accepting. Indeed Thera only joined her mistress when the ships's hawsers were released and the orsmen set about to quit the harbor.



At sea Zelea visited several island shrines, one means of escape -- in a new unknown world.



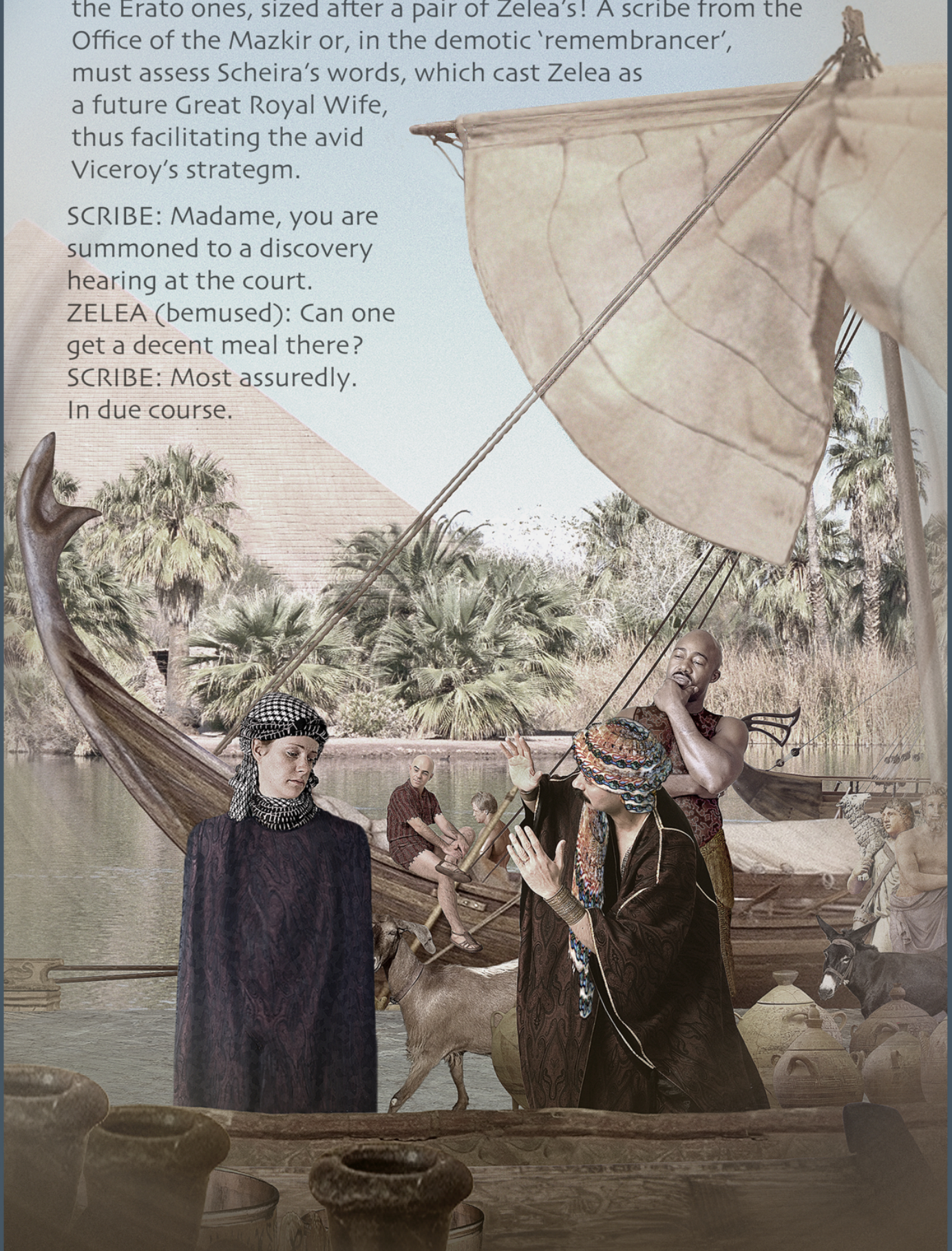
Yet even the spirit gates in some shrines intimated the closing of a life circle, the aweome dread seal of Thanatos on one -- another heartless tease of mortals by the Gods.

While pondering her prospects on the wharf in Naucratis, Zelea did not see the Viceroy, still in his 'slaver' guise, who planned to exploit the story of Nitocris -- ineffable Scheira's telling of it would sway many listeners. He'd slyly fashioned some gold sandals matching the Erato ones, sized after a pair of Zelea's! A scribe from the Office of the Mazkir or, in the demotic 'remembrancer', must assess Scheira's words, which cast Zelea as a future Great Royal Wife, thus facilitating the avid Viceroy's strategm.

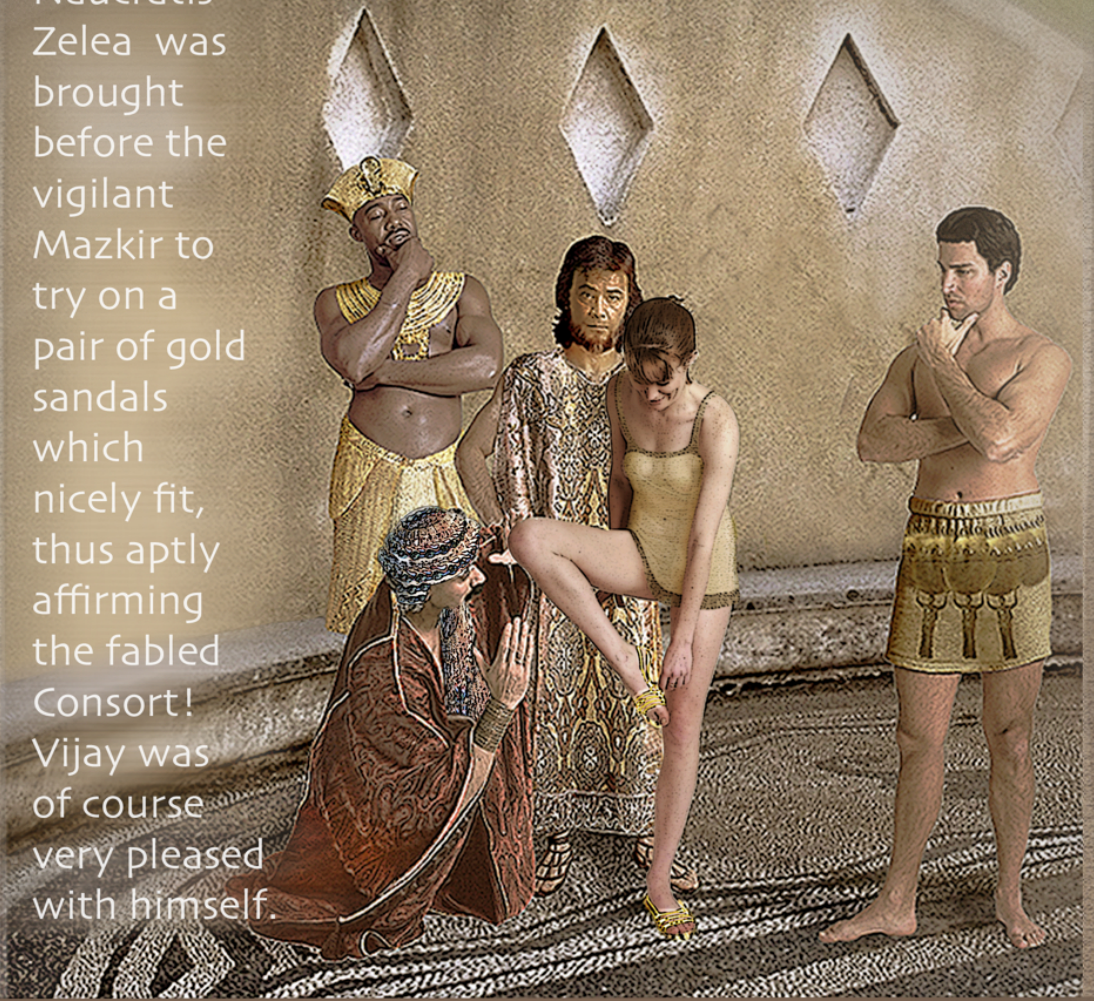
SCRIBE: Madame, you are summoned to a discovery hearing at the court.

ZELEA (bemused): Can one get a decent meal there?

SCRIBE: Most assuredly.
In due course.



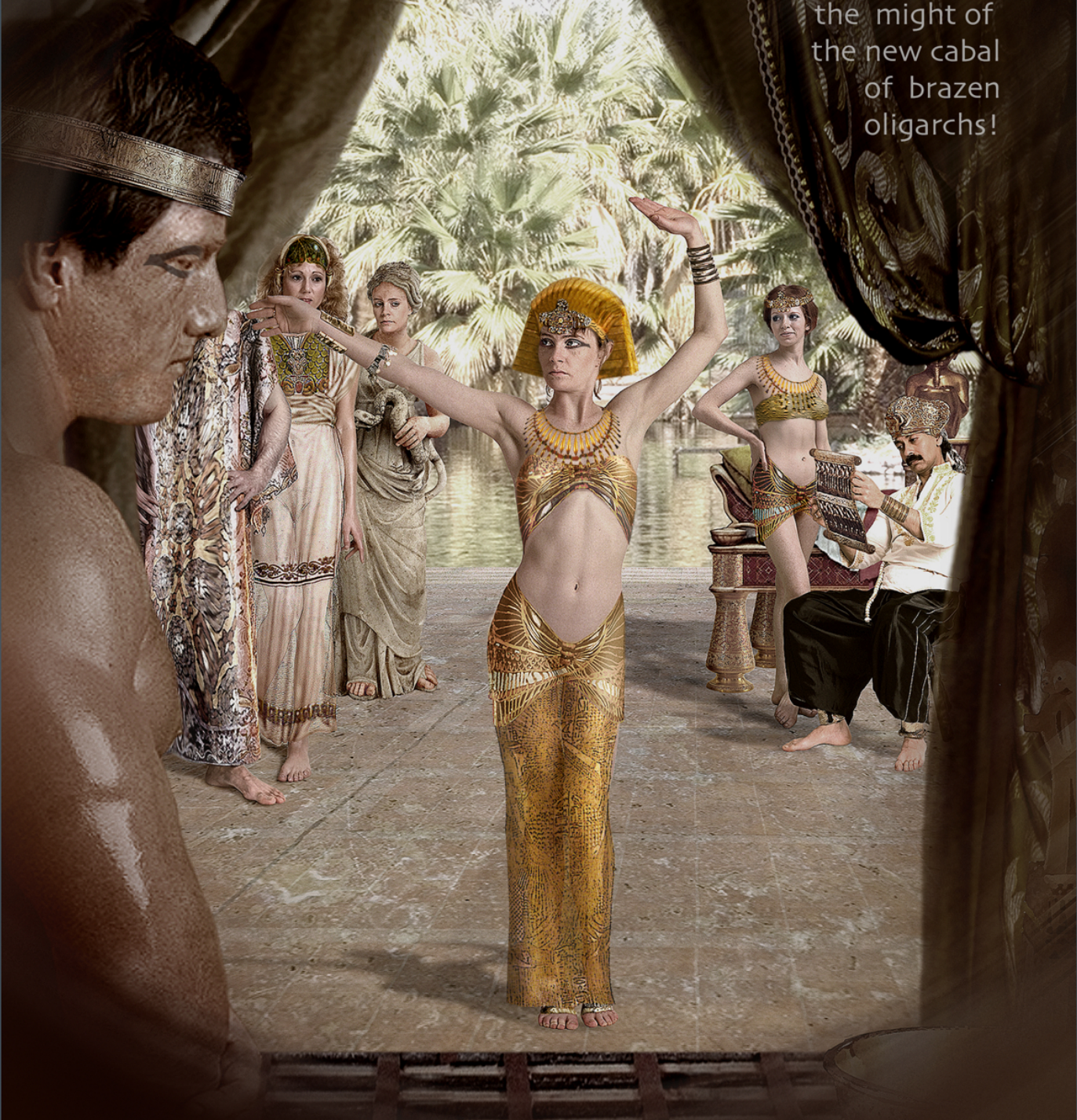
In bustling Naucratis Zelea was brought before the vigilant Mazkir to try on a pair of gold sandals which nicely fit, thus aptly affirming the fabled Consort! Vijay was of course very pleased with himself.



The very next day Zelea stood by the the young Prince in a Queenly hiak.

Then, a fresh division in the court: the faction opposed to Scheira's Orphic prophecy slyly argued that Thera was the more 'rhodopis' of the two, thus doubting the prophecy. Several adjudicators reviewed Scheira's Sibylline text. Thera was finally deemed to be too old and less familiar with the dance repertoire the Prince favored. It was then obvious the new coterie of oligarchs ran the court.

After a second assessment, the Vizier's Prolocutor proclaimed the Lady Zelea to be the duly awaited Nitocris, upstaging the late Best Wife, who yielded to the might of the new cabal of brazen oligarchs!



It was soon apparent her investiture was but a transient ruse to allow a power hungry faction time to assert their hegemony. Somedays Zelea conjured a Glaean water park where she might recruit Perseus's escape pal Pegasus. But only a lame stallion materialized, hobbled by the cruel Erinnyes, sent by Hera to avenge Zelea's willful 'musing' and thus the dire distraction of Hera's Glean Maenad!



One day a ghostly Artemis figure briefly appeared in the near distance, as if preparing to shoot one of her fated arrows at a select prey.

Zelea sometimes imagined riding an elegant bireme into a well-tended harbour, a slender upstart who might conceive the heady Achaeans putting her on their masterful prow! Being human, often credulous, and thus gullible, was the incomparable melodrama all Immortals savor with some relish, their own immortality tedious at times. So, a tale that had a beginning but no anticipated ending, imagining as she had, wandering a wide Ocean on a dragon head prow. A life too chancy, hectic to be freely lived, allowing a Pythia, in her heady fit, to invoke calamity. Was it all so ordained to muse the bored gods?...

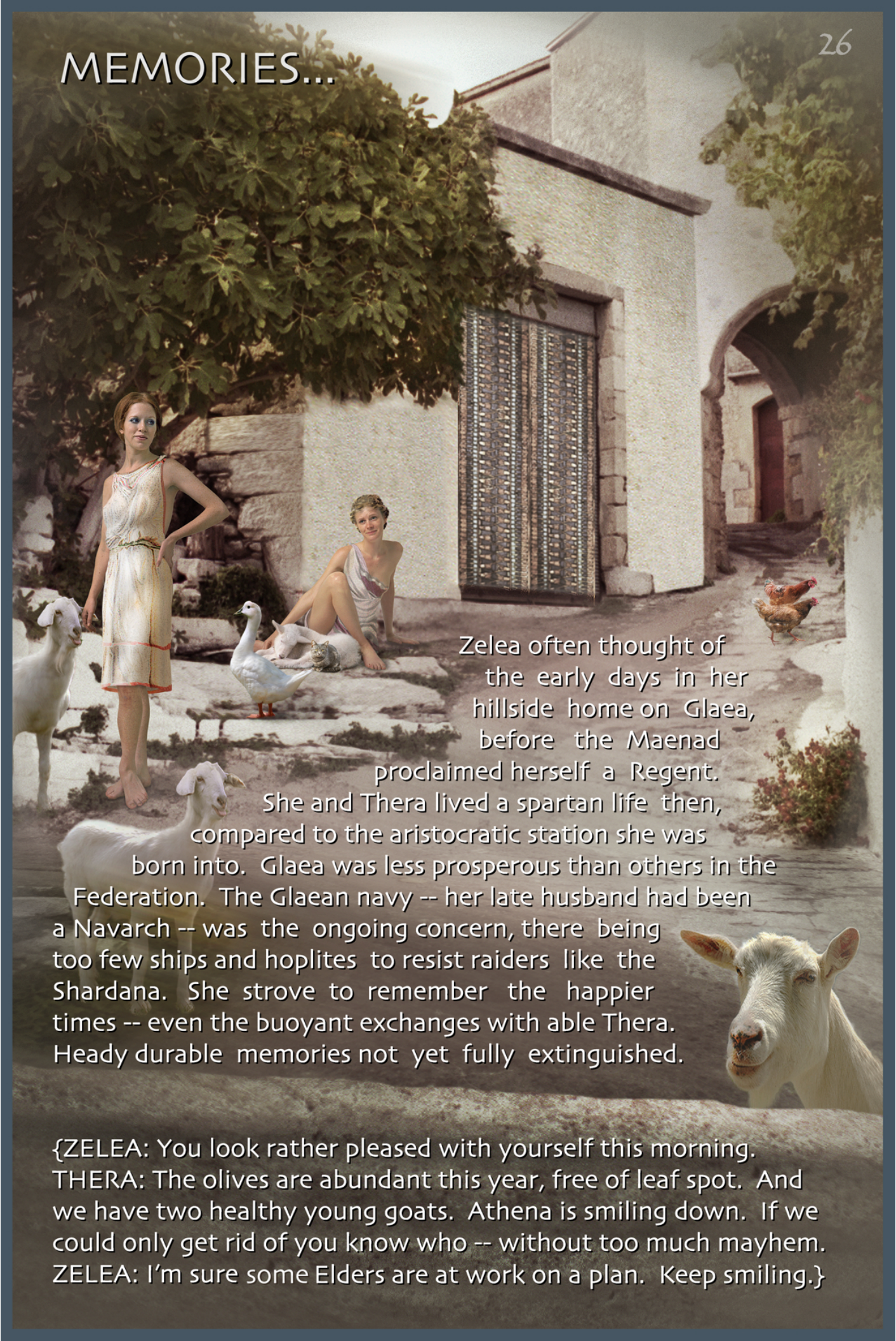


Scheira, the storyteller, was soon 'unbidden', her sensational chronicles often too dicey for a 'proper' Naucratis court.



The advent of the new queen had ushered in a gamy time for a staid court unprepared to deal with a newly assertive oligarchy. Only monsters might listen in, abide the brazen deeds of the gods.

MEMORIES...



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

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

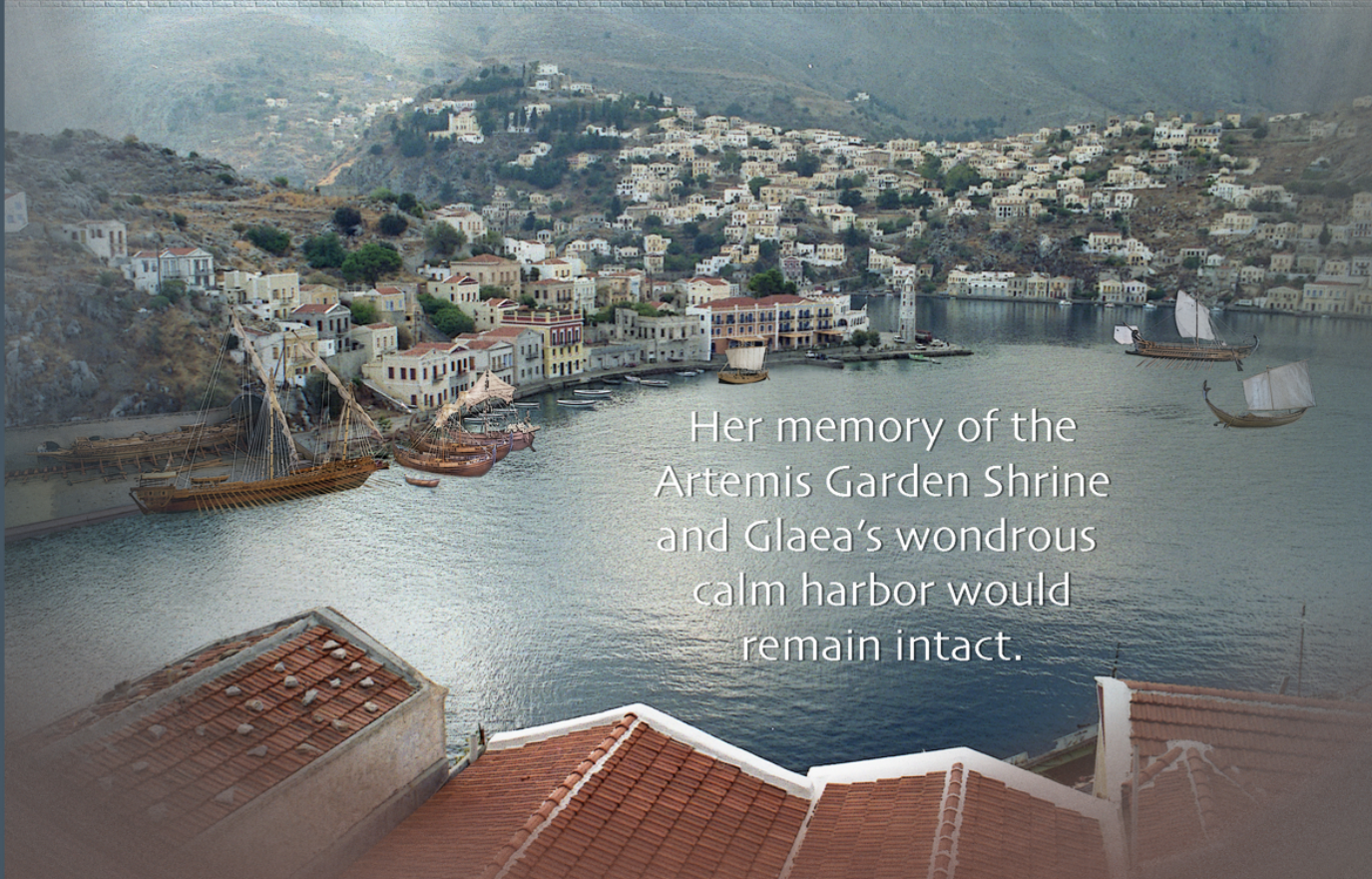
{ZELEA: You look rather pleased with yourself this morning.

THERA: The olives are abundant this year, free of leaf spot. And we have two healthy young goats. Athena is smiling down. If we could only get rid of you know who -- without too much mayhem.

ZELEA: I'm sure some Elders are at work on a plan. Keep smiling.}



Zelea soon realized the god's guardianship of Glaea had lapsed. Her only explanation, an Olympian had withdrawn His or Her favor!



Her memory of the Artemis Garden Shrine and Glaea's wondrous calm harbor would remain intact.



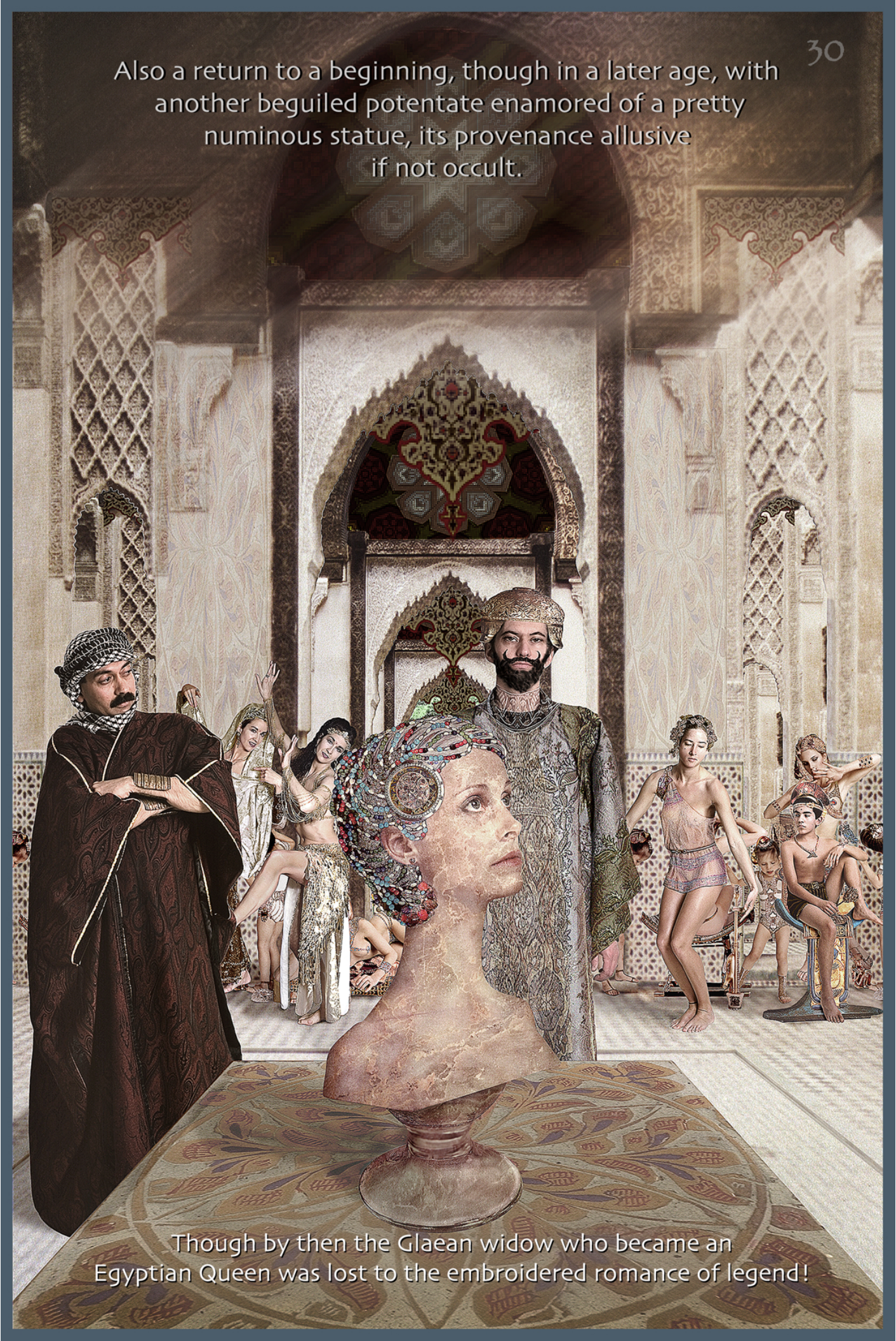
The Glaean Oracle's Omphalos, or Navel Boss, was visited by Three Fates, the initial warning of Glaea's peril, of Magna Mater's, Olympian Hera's, disapproval of the Glaean court's late disesteem of her favorite Maenad! The Fates came as beautiful women, as Medusa was before being punished for sleeping with salty Poseidon in one of Hera's temples.

A measure of the disfavor was a piercing ray of light that etched the new Navel Boss just before it was installed beneath the Pythia's reading chamber



Nea, an early shrine keeper, was the first to see it -- an astonishing spectre of the Pythia herself in a highly abstracted state wearing a soiled rag dress, intimating a further waning of Glaean fortune.

Also a return to a beginning, though in a later age, with another beguiled potentate enamored of a pretty numinous statue, its provenance allusive if not occult.

A composite image featuring a bust of the Egyptian Queen Nefertiti in the foreground, resting on a patterned rug. The background is a richly decorated interior with intricate Islamic architectural details, including arches and lattice work. Several figures in historical attire are present: a man in a dark, patterned robe and turban on the left; a man in a patterned robe and turban standing behind the bust; and several women in ornate, shimmering dresses. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating a sense of depth and historical atmosphere.

Though by then the Glaean widow who became an Egyptian Queen was lost to the embroidered romance of legend!