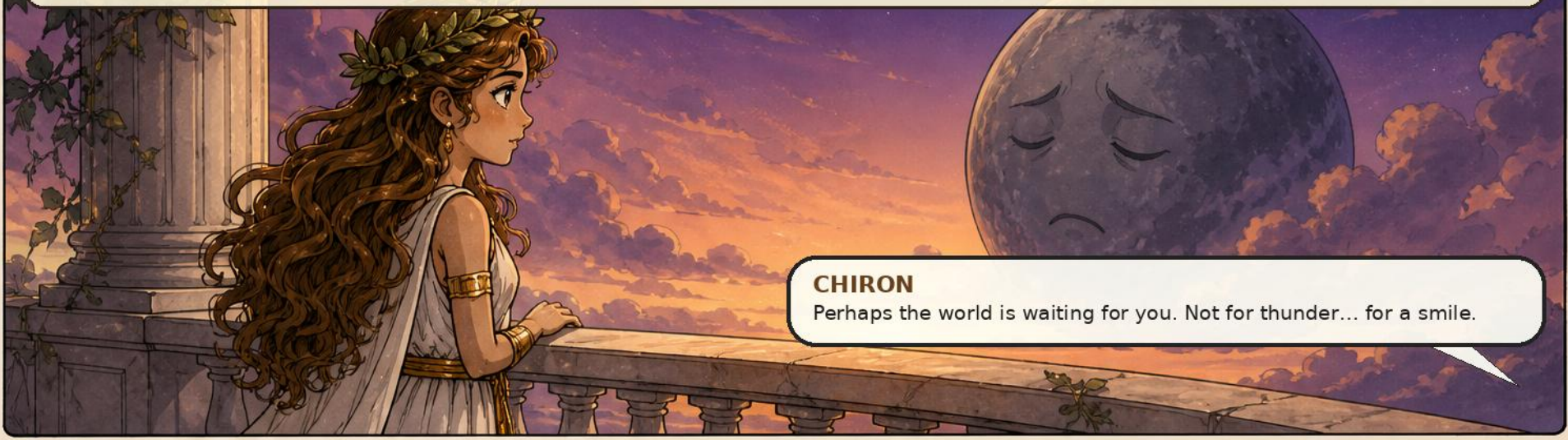


THE SMILE OF A CHILD

A mythic comic story



On Olympus, one place at the table remained empty. Helena looked at Earth, where the smile seemed to have vanished.

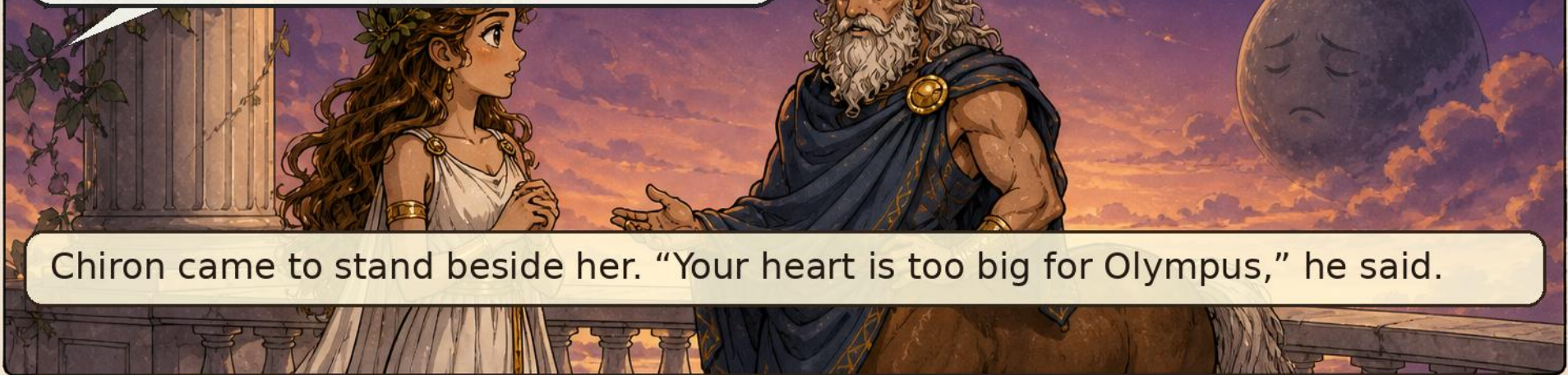


CHIRON

Perhaps the world is waiting for you. Not for thunder... for a smile.

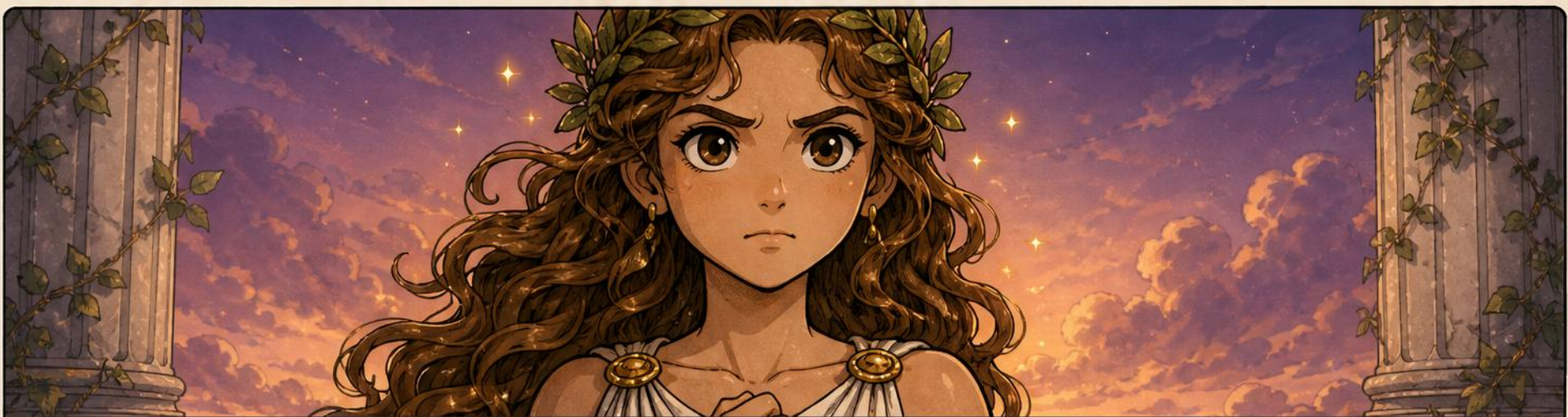
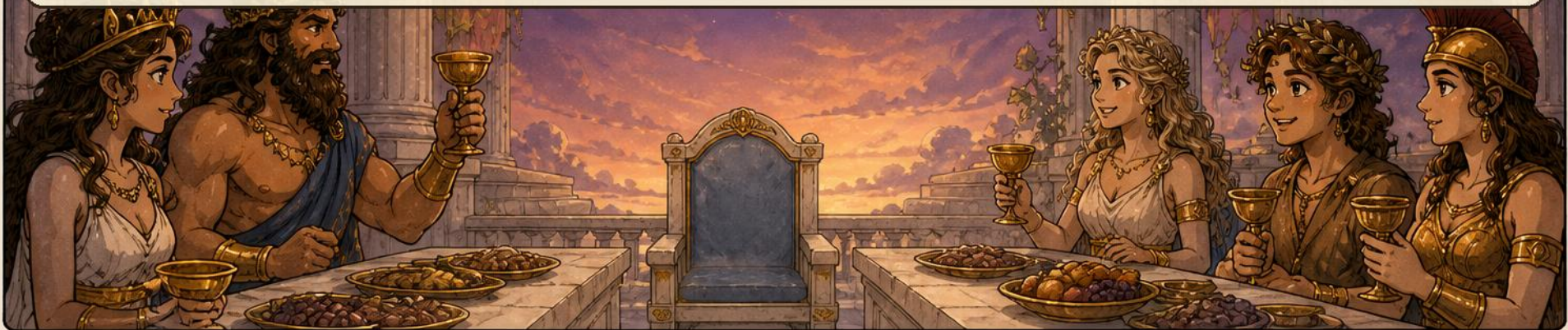
HELENA

Then I will go.



Chiron came to stand beside her. "Your heart is too big for Olympus," he said.

"The people, animals and rivers are alive... but they no longer laugh."

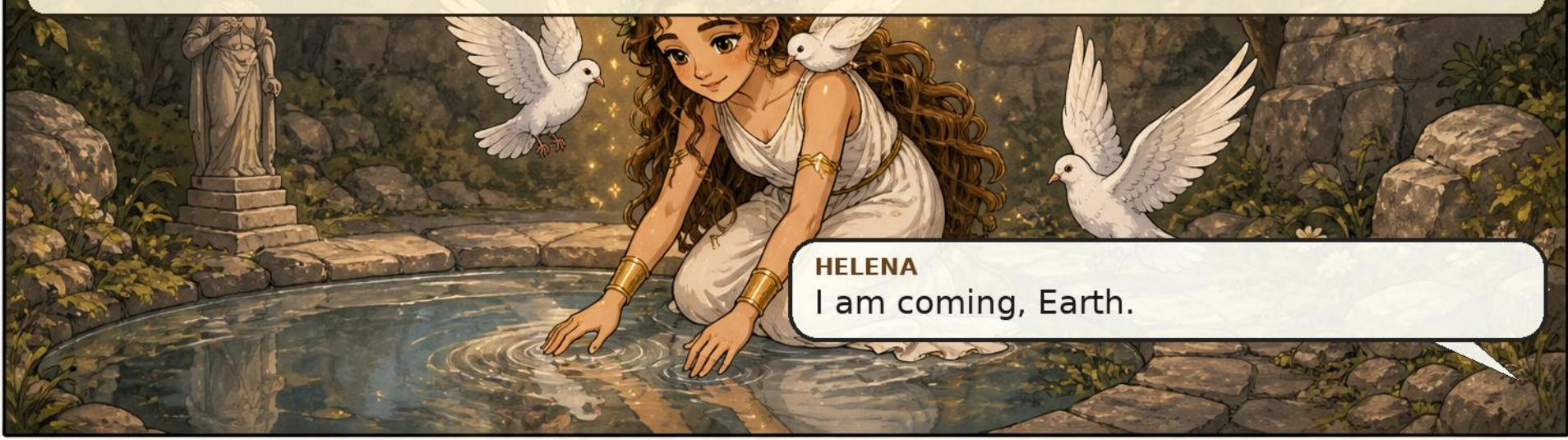


Helena felt a tiny sun in her chest. She knew what she had to do.

A path of stars opened above the clouds.



2 THE DESCENT
At the sacred spring, Helena asked for a sign.



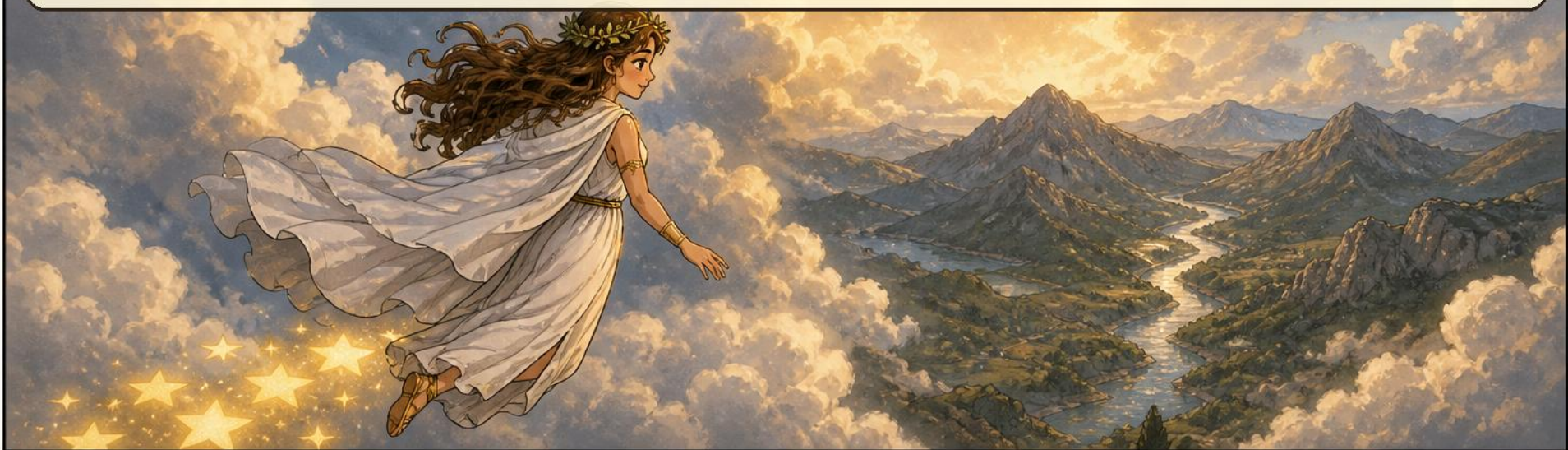
HELENA
I am coming, Earth.

HELENA
Stay close to me, little friends.



"If I share my love, perhaps I can bring back a little light."

Three doves landed on her shoulders. Their gentle cooing gave her courage.



She put on her white cloak and placed her bare feet on the star path.

Below lay a village of gray stone, silent as mist.



3 ELENi
In the village, doors were locked and windows were shut.

HELENA

What a beautiful name.

ELENI

My doll is also called Eleni... but she is broken.

On a doorstep sat a girl with a broken wooden doll.

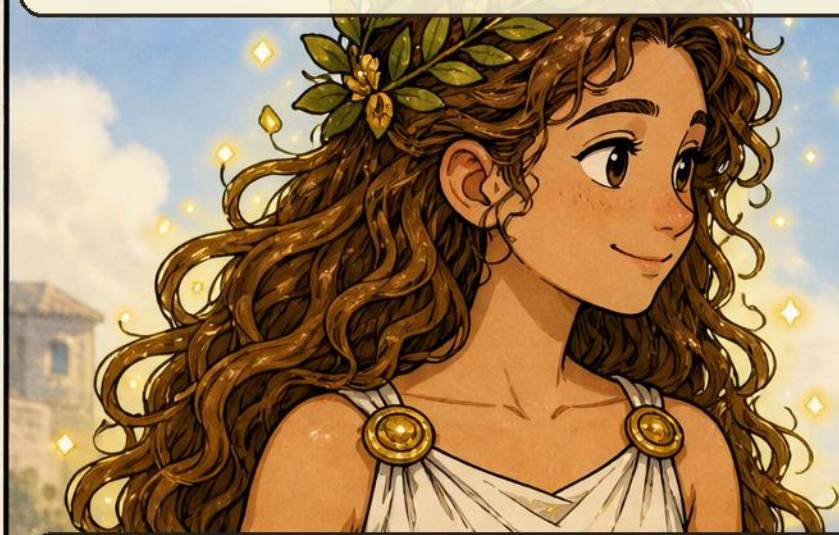
Helena knelt down. "What is your name?" she asked softly.

The girl looked up. "Eleni."

An old man stopped. He recognized something he had not felt in a long time.

THE FIRST SPARK

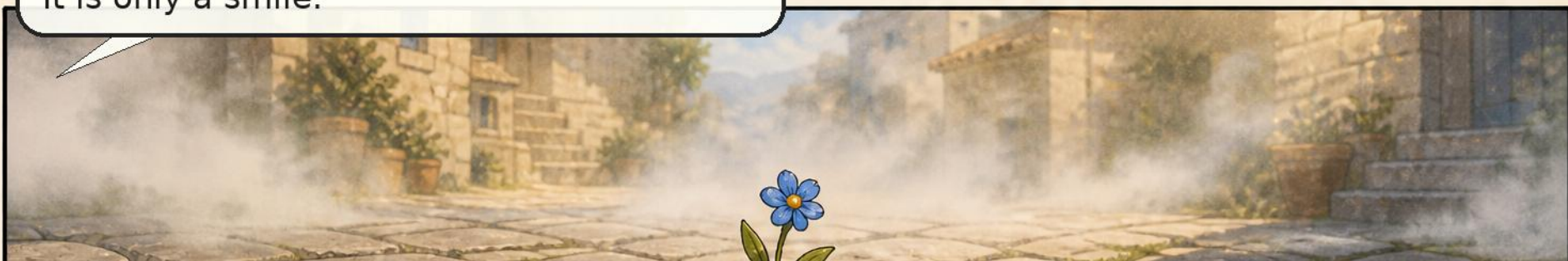
Helena smiled. Not grandly or forcefully. Simply and gently.



ELENI
It is only a smile.



OUDE MAN
I... I had forgotten what that felt like.



A tiny light switched on inside Eleni's chest.

A blue flower burst through the stones.

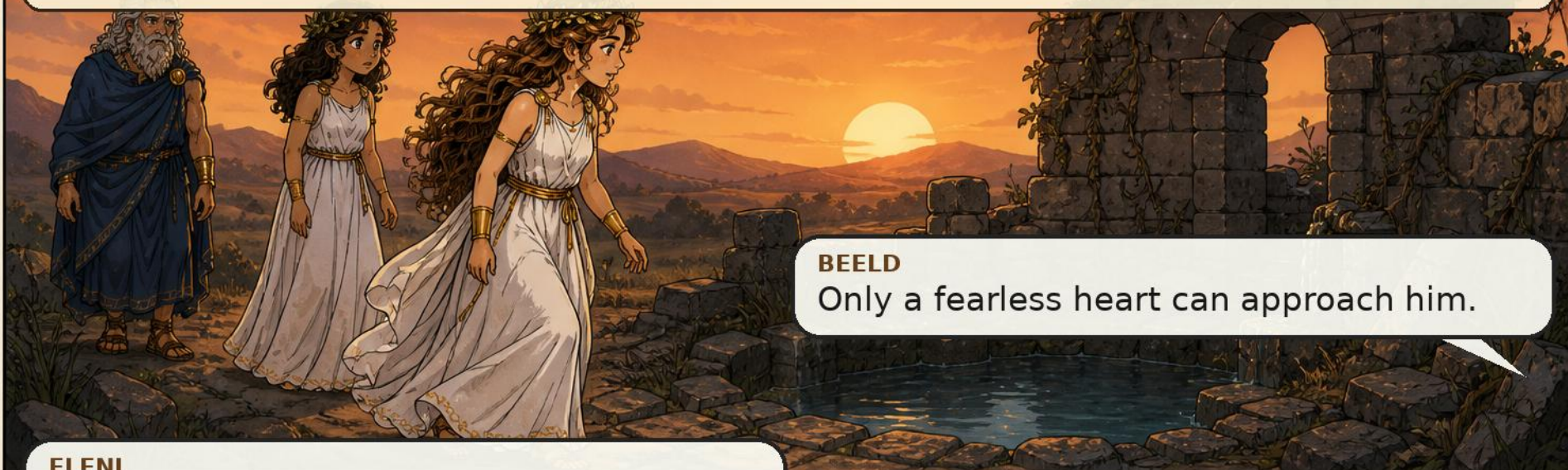


Even the old dog stood up straight again.

Everywhere, people cautiously began greeting one another.



At an abandoned spring stood a statue of a winged lion.

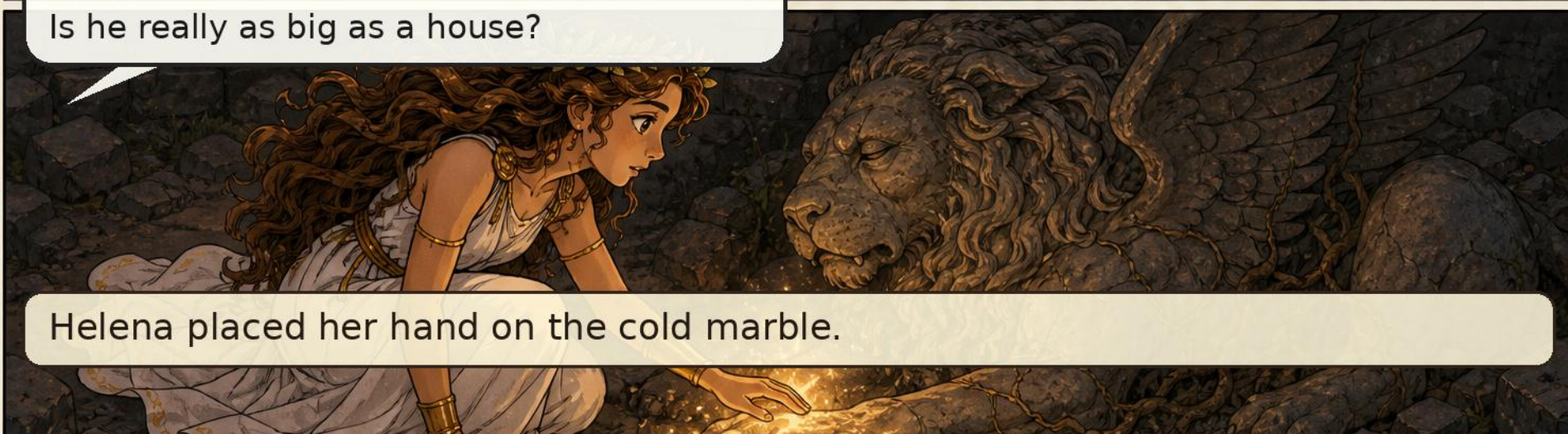


BEELD

Only a fearless heart can approach him.

ELENI

Is he really as big as a house?



Helena placed her hand on the cold marble.

The statue began to glow.



"At the heart of the world stands the Tree of Sorrow."

"But first you must pass three gates. The first is guarded by Cerberus."



The next morning, Helena set out with her three doves.



ELENI

Take me with you! I want the world to be beautiful again too!

THERON

I heard your smile in the wind.



Eleni ran after her, clutching the wooden doll tightly.

They crossed silver rivers and listened to whispering trees.



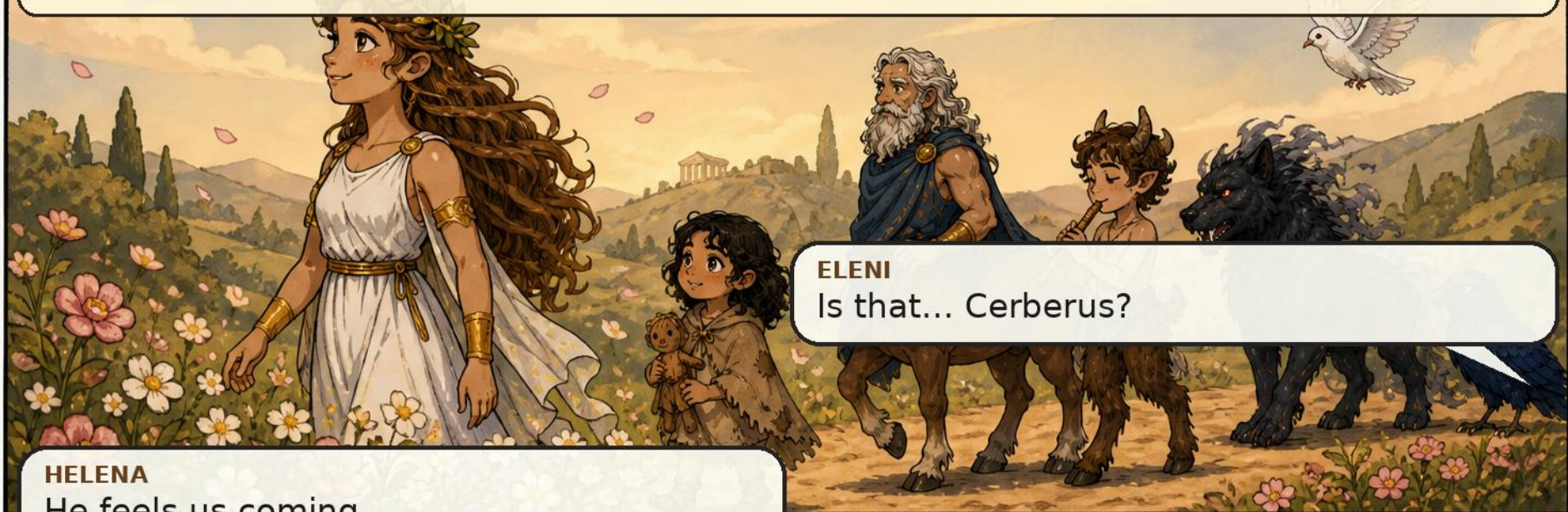
Nymphs showed them the way through the forest.



In a misty valley they met Theron, a faun with a flute.



7 THE OMEN
Where Helena walked, flowers bloomed. Where she laughed, clouds disappeared.



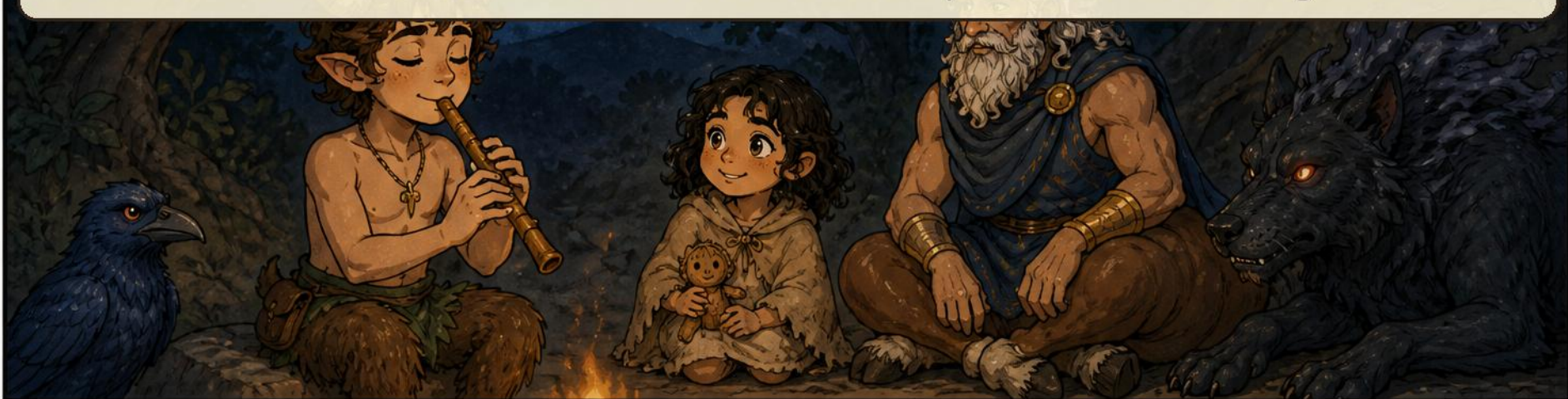
ELENI
Is that... Cerberus?

HELENA
He feels us coming.



Every evening, Eleni practiced her smile.

Theron told them that Cerberus had once been a protector of secret gardens.



On the fifth night, the ground trembled.

Far away, three pairs of eyes glowed red.



THE GATE OF SHADOWS
The path led through the Valley of Echoes.



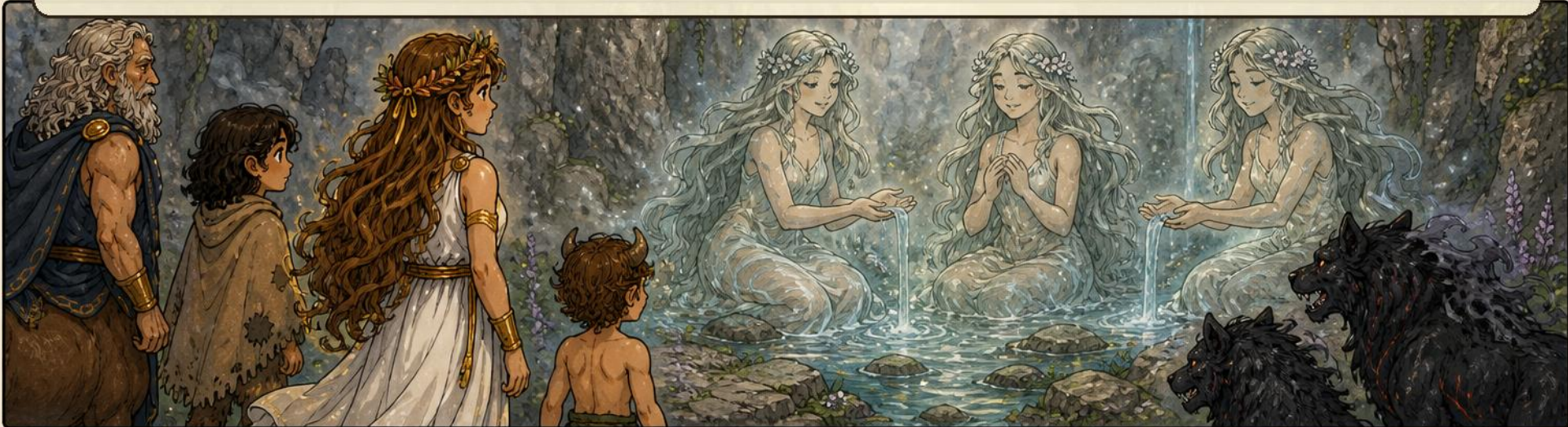
NIMFEN
Not everything is as it seems.

THERON
Speak softly. The valley is listening.



Whispers tried to confuse their thoughts.

Helena sent a beam of light across the rocks.

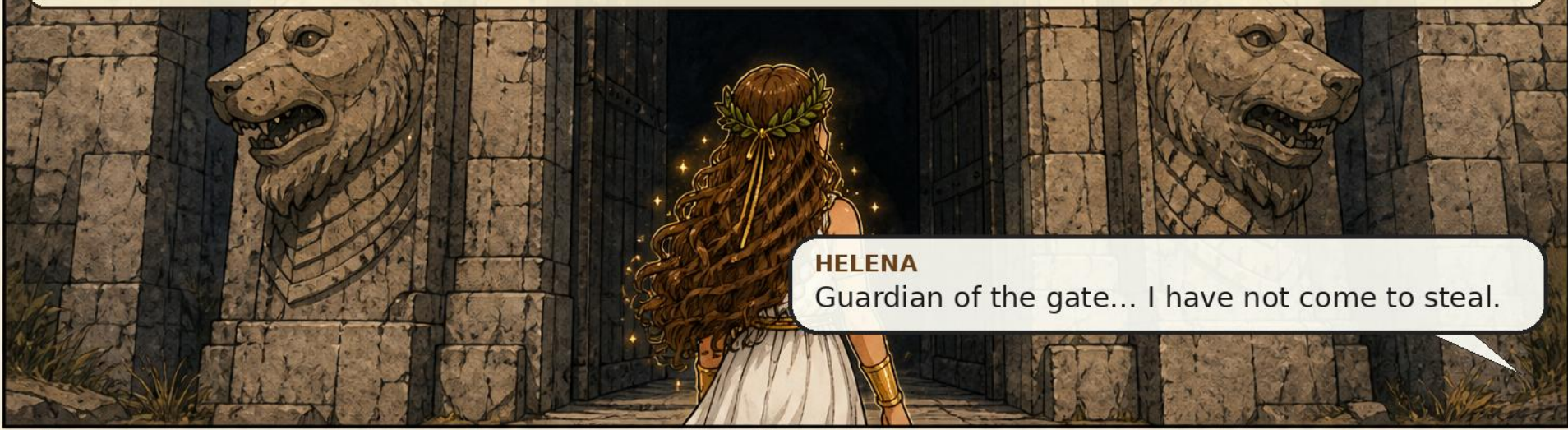


Three nymphs made a path of silver stones.

At the end stood a ruined gate carved with dog heads.



9 CERBERUS
Helena placed her hand on the stone. The air began to growl.



HELENA

Guardian of the gate... I have not come to steal.

HELENA

I have come to heal.

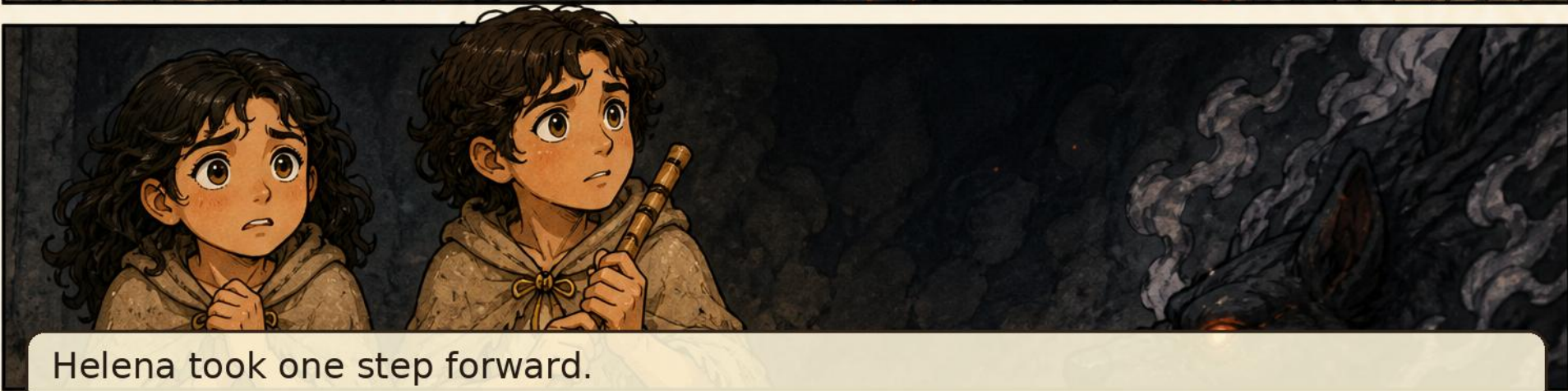


Cerberus stepped from the darkness: as tall as a tower.

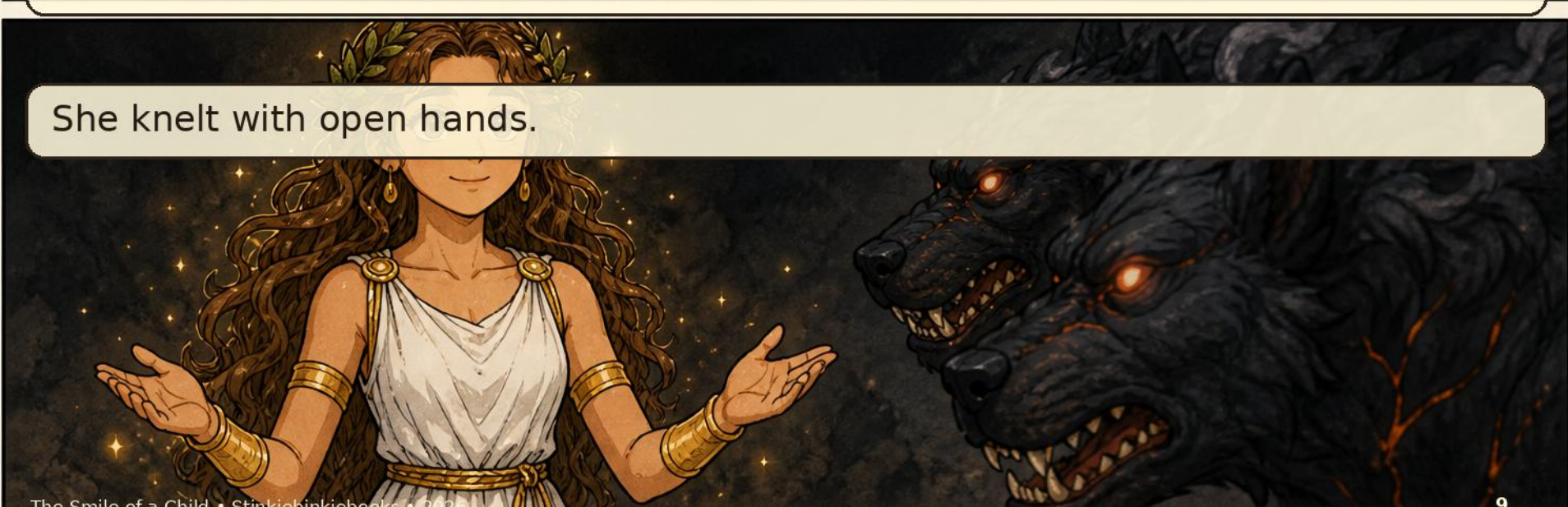
Eleni's knees trembled. Theron gripped his flute.



Helena took one step forward.



She knelt with open hands.



TO STRONGER THAN FEAR

Cerberus sniffed. His three heads looked in different directions.



ELENI
I am not afraid of you.

THERON
Love knows the way home.



"Not a monster," Helena whispered. "A guardian."

Eleni took one step forward.

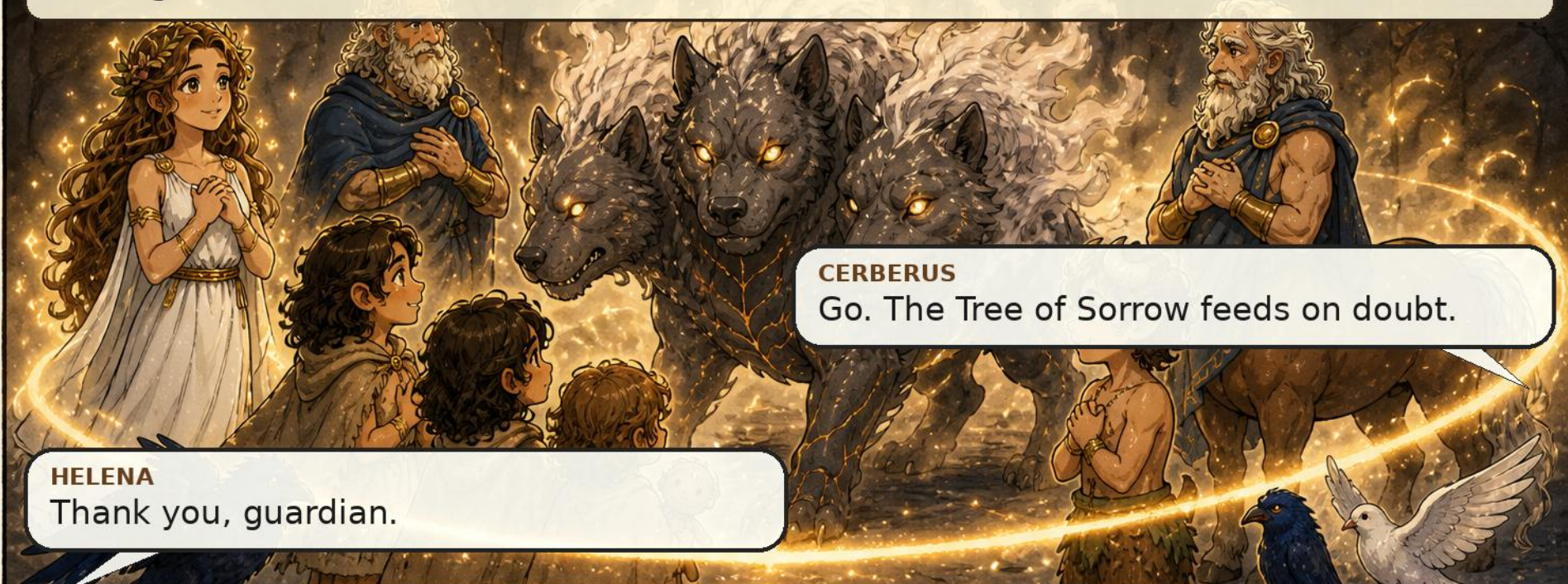


Theron played the song his mother used to sing.

Memories of love became a circle of light.



THE GATE OPENS
The light touched Cerberus's middle head.

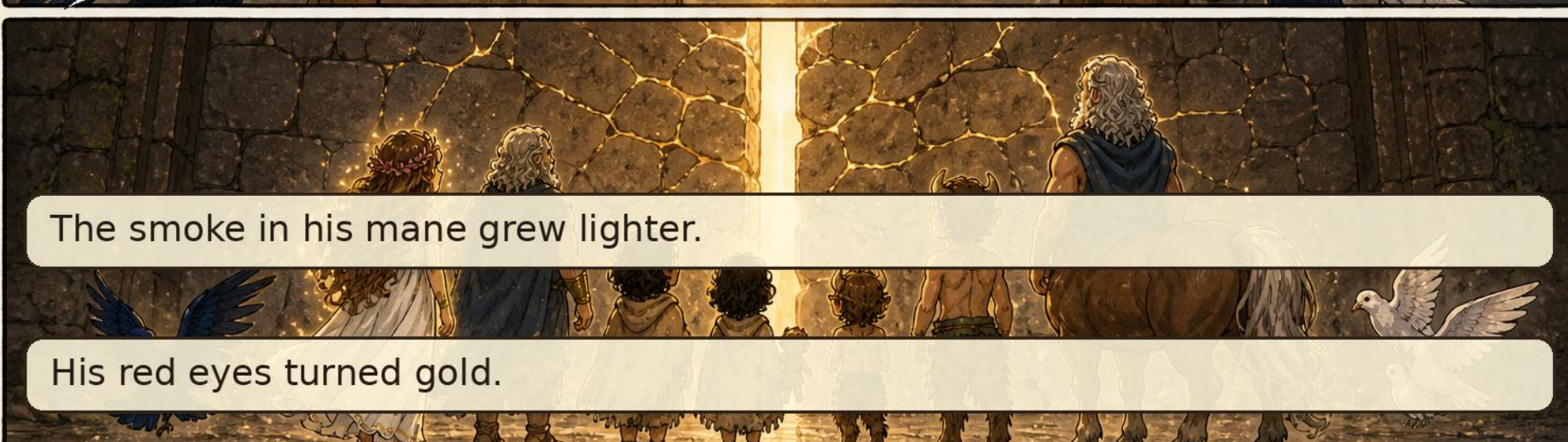


CERBERUS

Go. The Tree of Sorrow feeds on doubt.

HELENA

Thank you, guardian.



The smoke in his mane grew lighter.

His red eyes turned gold.



Slowly, he stepped aside.



The stone gate tore open onto a path of obsidian.

Beyond the gate lay a forest with silver leaves.



ASTERION
I am Asterion. Cerberus sent me.

ELENI
Then we are no longer alone.



Beside a marble fountain, a bird as large as a fox landed.

His feathers were sapphire blue and his eyes burned like fire.



Where his feathers fell, flowers of light grew.

In the distance, a dark light pulsed.



THE TREE OF SORROW

The tree towered above them. Its roots looked like veins.

HELENA

Sorrow does not always disappear...

ELENI

But we can carry it together.

Gray memories hung from its branches.

Helena placed her hand on the bark and saw the village.

Eleni placed her hand on top of Helena's.

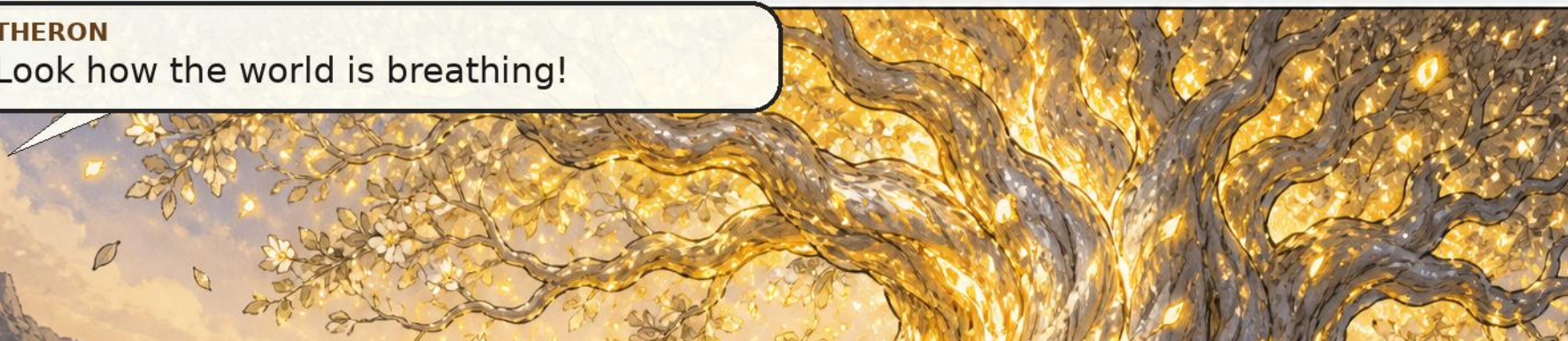
Among the withered leaves, one golden leaf appeared.

14 THE TREE OF HOPE
Eleni held up the golden leaf.

A young woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a white classical-style dress with gold jewelry, holds up a glowing golden leaf. In the background, a large, gnarled tree with dark, leafless branches stands against a sunset sky.

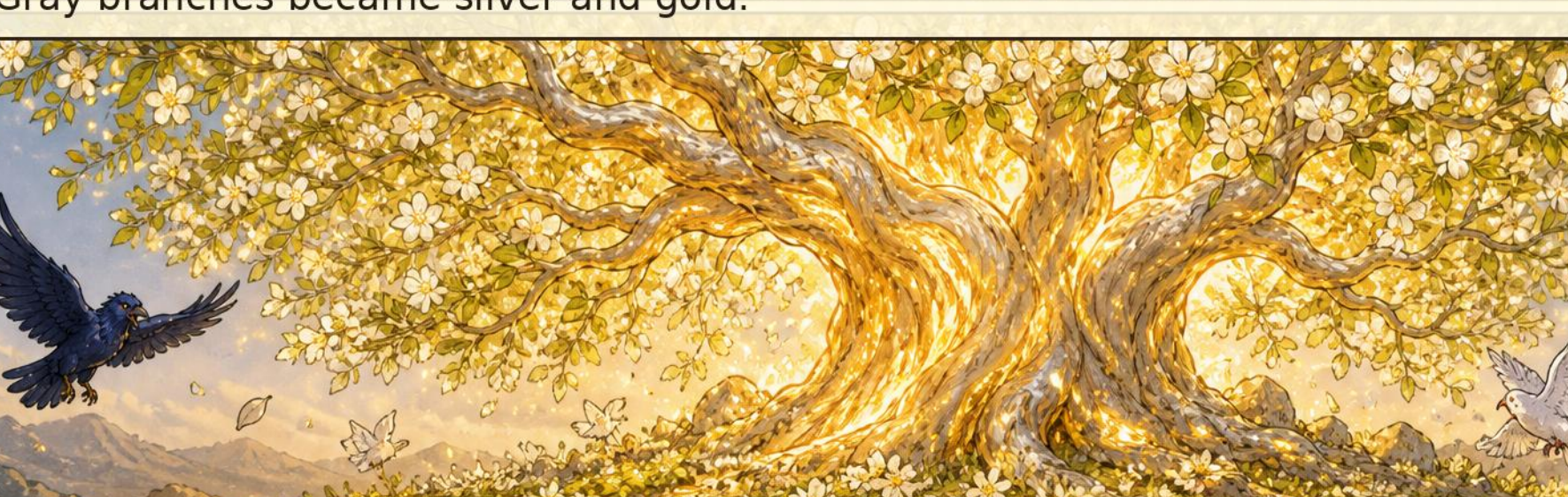
ASTERION
The seed of change has been planted.

THERON
Look how the world is breathing!

The large tree from the previous panel is now filled with a warm, golden light that flows through its thick, gnarled trunk and branches. The scene is set against a sunset background.

Warm light flowed through the roots.

Gray branches became silver and gold.

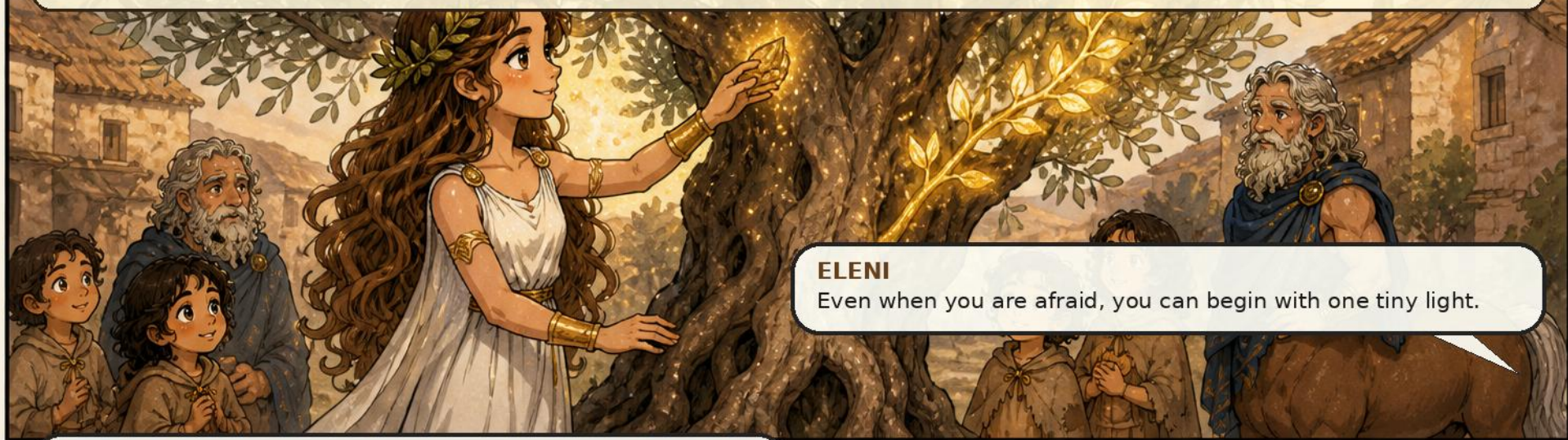
The tree is now in full bloom with many small white flowers. Several blue birds and white doves are flying around the tree, which is still glowing with golden light.

Flowers and birds filled the tree.

A group of people, including a woman in a white dress, children in brown cloaks, and a man on a brown horse, are walking away from the tree towards a village in the distance. A blue bird is also visible.

Asterion led them back to the village.

15 A DOOR TO LOVE
In the village, Eleni touched the golden leaf to the olive tree.



ELENI

Even when you are afraid, you can begin with one tiny light.

HELENA

And that little light can travel farther than you think.

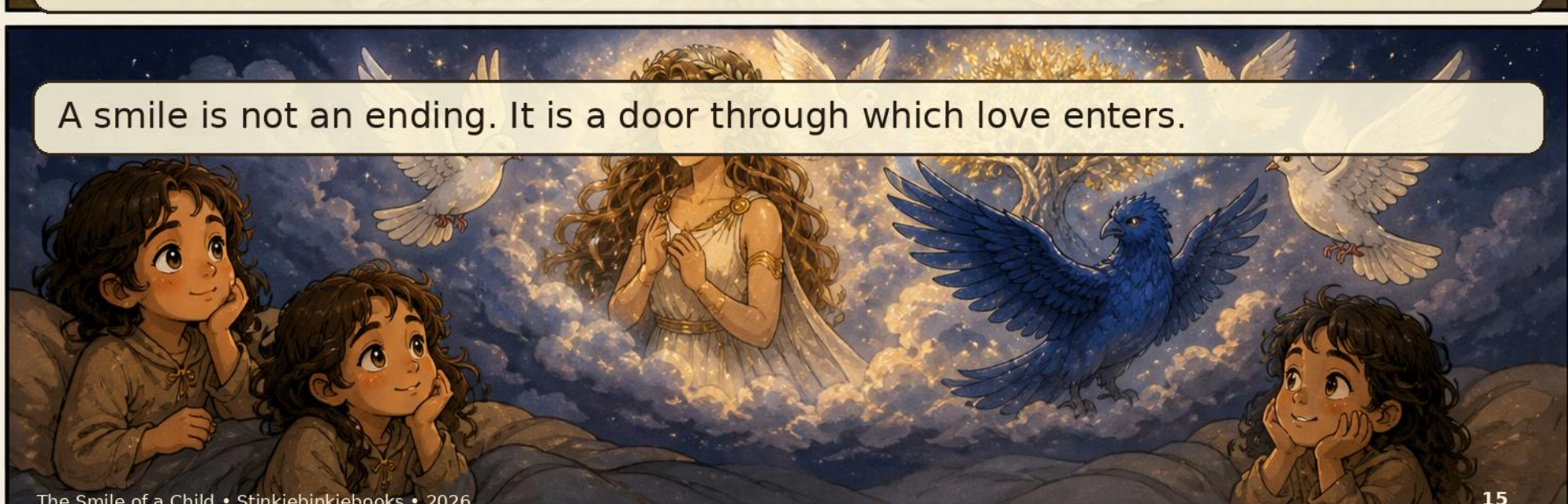


A golden branch grew from the bark.

People gathered to share stories and help one another.



Asterion rose toward the stars. His feathers became flowers of light.



A smile is not an ending. It is a door through which love enters.