

BEVERLY JACKSON

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## THE GODDESS

SHE BOARDED IN ATHENS—carrying a tattered bag, head erect, nose tilted high, wearing oversized sunglasses. Nobody offered to assist her. She was dressed simply, in blue jeans, but her demeanor was like Callas or Jackie O, like a goddess. Milos untied a hawser, caught my eye and winked. I shrugged and spit tobacco over the side. Who did she think she was?

Our little freighter was a work ship with meager accommodations, not a luxury liner for American lady tourists. But the owner, old Pappas, needing cash for repairs, put ads in the newspapers. Pappas said it would draw struggling students who couldn't afford the big ships—but what do Americans know of struggle?

Women at sea bring bad luck, and a woman among real men makes trouble. The crew wiped their sweaty faces with their shirts, and hung over the rails, smoked and leered, whistled and slapped at their cocks like monkeys. We Greeks love women of all types; big women, like my Cleo, or this peacock—it is in our blood.

We left port under a white sun—white as the walls of Crete, our destination. The heat danced on the decks as we set to our duties. When she next appeared, it was on the Captain's deck below, her long pale body clad in a tiny pink swimsuit. Her hair was piled on her head, like the pin-up taped to the engine room wall. My mates and I, hosing and sweeping debris, craned our necks to view her over the apron rail.

Dimitri started a bawdy song but the heavy blasts of the fire hoses drowned out the lyrics. Water dripped off the decks, and the goddess peered up at us, her arm crooked over her forehead, shading her eyes. She looked directly at me, and I flexed my bronzed chest for her benefit, holding my broom over my head like Apollo.

She gestured, fanning herself with her fingers, or waving. She was trying to tell me something. I leaned over the rail. "What is it?" I belatedly. But she shrugged and smiled and pointed at me with her index finger and fanned herself, trying to communicate. Tourists never speak Greek and expect everything. Her white smile flashed in the sunlight, and her creamy little tits rounded above the pink bra. I fell under her spell. My wife Cleo popped into my head and then dissolved like phlegm in the ship's wake. I could have done this goddess on the spot, split her open like a melon with my broomstick without a thought. My blood convulsed, and I leaned over the rail, beckoning her forward, waving her closer.

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My mates gathered about, yelping like dogs, deck duty forgotten. The afternoon heat seared my back. She moved toward me, smiling, gesturing. But then she abruptly turned to Milos who was holding a hose, and began her pantomime of waggly fingers and seductive smiles. To Milos! That old fool who grinned with broken black teeth.

**T**HEN IT HIT ME. It wasn't me she wanted. It wasn't Milos either. She only wanted water. She was hot in her pale soft American skin under our Aegean sun and wanted us to water her like a potted plant, to sprinkle her with a garden hose, like personal servants. The stupid bitch had no idea what she was asking for.

I grabbed the hose from Milos and lifted the heavy canvas of it over the rail, pointing the big nozzle down at her. She nodded and smiled excitedly, yes, yes, that was it. I turned the head, releasing the flood, which immediately knocked her off her feet, and threw her to the deck in an avalanche of cold water. She gasped as I moved the nozzle over her, pinning her to the surface. Then I aimed for her pouty little breasts, and the pink bra lifted off her in a whoosh and slid across the deck like a fish. The men went wild, cheering and applauding. They dragged more hoses now, lifted them to the rail. The woman screamed, as I

propelled the nozzle down her belly to her crotch. Her white skin blotched red, and she hugged her breasts, her face contorted with fear and pain. In my anger I yelled 'Cry, you tramp, you cock teaser.' The bottom of the bikini ripped easily under the deluge and spun on the crest of a fountain of water before it, too, sped across the wood and off the side.

Her naked body rollicked now from one side to another as the hoses hit her from different angles. Her face was buried in her hands to avoid drowning in the drench that smacked her with such force that she careened across the deck like a disjointed marionette.

**S**HE GAVE UP ALL FIGHT, and rolled. Not a goddess but a scrawny chicken. One by one the hoses went off, and a hush fell over the ship. The men turned away, in silence.

Milos coughed and offered a cigarette, but didn't look at me directly. I shook my head. The distant shore smell of guano still hung in the hot air. Under the blazing sky, all you could hear was soft sobs and the purr of the diesel engines.

"Give me the keys to the linen locker," I whispered to him. I could see Cleo in my mind. She always knew the thing to do.