

## **Blessed by Poseidon by Russell Sacks**

I sat across from the Fig Cafe in Siena waiting, looking about and resting after my shift. The churchyard and the adjacent cemetery crowded with cypress trees and tombs, was calming to look at. The stillness, so rare these days, was magnificent. How pleasant it was to sit and let the mind roam, like staring out of a train window.

My eyes settled on a straw-coloured mausoleum, I could make out, *Illegitimi non carborundum*. Yes, life is no picnic. I wondered who had been buried there and why they chose those words.

Her gait caught my eye. She walked with such rhythm and ease. It was uplifting to witness. As she approached, I stared at her - legs, hips, abdomen, shoulders, head, arms moving in perfect harmony.

When our eyes met, she smiled and my heart thumped.

My day had begun very early, just after midnight, when she had gently shoved me out of bed.

In the navy, I had learned to get out of bed slowly, to sit up and place both feet on the floor by rote, to inhale through the nose and slowly exhale through the mouth, to wriggle the toes, to stare into the darkness, listen, sniff the air, wait a few moments, murmur a prayer of thanks and some requests to Poseidon, our protector.

Light from the kitchen lamp cut into the large room that we lived in. It had a high bed with its very expensive horsehair mattress from Sweden, and a wooden table with two chairs. The bed cost us a small fortune but it was well worth every krona. The shutters were ajar allowing the night air to filter into the attic room.

As I dressed, she cursed me, telling me to be more silent. I stared at her tranquil face, full of beauty, strength and brilliance. She hissed more curses, urging me to get going. She knew that I was deeply in love with her and that it always saddened me to leave her.

I knew that Poseidon had blessed me with love and that life was fragile, so I stood still, in solemn departure, blessing the god of the sea for all I had.

My bakery shift began at 1 a.m. Lateness was not tolerated. The local cafes opened before dawn and began serving as the sky turned from black to blue. Their customers demanded a caffè from the hissing machines and a fresh panini or a cornetto with crema pasticceria. So arriving late at the bakery was a grave transgression. The consequences would disrupt people's routine and cause them angst beyond belief.

I bent over the bed and kissed her fingertips, then touched them to my forehead. She giggled at my ritual and whispered, "See you at eight in the square for a caffè."

I had to remind her that because of the biannual horse race - the Palio di Siena - we could not meet in the square that morning and would have to meet at the Fig Cafe instead for our caffè and chat about her Noble Prize in chemistry.

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