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The Golden Goddess

by Adelaide B. Shaw

A young woman, perhaps 25, 26 years old, wearing a form fitting, strapless gold lamé dress, with a matching filmy scarf of gold silk draped across her shoulders, walked—no, not walked—the maitre de who led her to table #7, upon which a Reserved sign had been placed, walked—she glided, floated, slipping through the tables like syrup flowing across an unbalanced surface, unhurried, confident as if she knew all along where she was headed, as if that table, that same table, had been reserved for her before.

Needless to say all diners, upon first glimpse of that gold lamé dress, seen either peripherally or full on, ceased eating, talking, drinking, or thinking, to gaze with: curiosity—perhaps someone of importance had just entered; admiration—she was at least five feet eight inches tall, not more than 125 pounds with curves and indentations in all the right places, had auburn hair done in a complicated upsweep hairdo, a fine straight nose, eyes set wide apart, a full mouth, high cheekbones and small ears, a swan's neck (as the old phrase goes) a straight posture, the posture of someone born with good bone structure and who had acquired no bad slouching habits; and curiosity, perhaps foremost in the minds of the diners—who was she and why was she at Lena's wearing a full length evening dress at 7:00 p.m. on a Wednesday night? Lena's, although a better restaurant than many, was not so upscale as to require, or even aspire to, evening attire. And, lastly, why was she alone?

"Must be waiting for someone," a matronly woman with iron-gray hair at table #9 said to her husband.

"Ummmm..." he replied without looking up from his Provençal shrimp.

"Funny, though. There's no place setting on the table. Just a bouquet of flowers."

"Ummmm..." her husband said again.

"Will you look at her?" An attractive blond woman on the right side of 40 at table #10 remarked to no one in particular. "What a dress."

"Pretty fancy, even for Lena's," her husband, also on the right side of 40, said as he looked with apparent approval.

"Wow!" Their son, a boy of about 15, didn't just look, he stared, his eyes fixed on her every step, his expression one of wonder and desire, a desire so suddenly arisen he would have been embarrassed to admit it even to himself.

"Close your mouth and stop staring." His mother gave him a sharp jab with her index finger on his shoulder.

"She's like a goddess, a golden goddess," he said as he reluctantly returned to his pasta bolognese.

The boy's father smiled, an indulgent smile that only a father can bestow

upon a 15 year old boy, a smile which said, "Yeah, yeah. I'm with you."

"Those flowers are roses, peachy orange roses," the iron-haired woman at table #9 continued, "while our table, in fact, all the other tables, just have just a couple of ...What are these anyway? Daisies?"

"Black-eyes Susan," her husband said. "I was thinking of planting some next year."

"Ummm..." the woman mumbled between bites of her lemon chicken. "She must be someone special."

A waiter approached table #7 carrying on a silver tray a glass of white wine and a white napkin. After setting down the wine he snapped the napkin open and handed it to the Golden Goddess who nodded. She took a sip of wine and nodded in approval.

All the women at table #5 who had been trying, simultaneously, to eat and watch the going's on at table #7 gave up eating and turned their full attention again to watching.

"She must have asked the maitre de for it before she sat down," one of them suggested.

The five women at table #5 (a coincidence the women would have found remarkable had they been aware of the table number) were having a "Girls' Night Out," although strictly speaking, none was a girl anymore, but a woman in her mid to late forties, not yet matronly as the woman at table #9, but not as young as the mother of the teenage boy. Coiffed, manicured, and dressed to impress each other, this group of girls met at Lena's every couple of months to let off steam, to belly-ache, to grouse, to unwind, and to brag, mostly about their wonderful children before they proceeded to complain about them for being and acting like children.

"Did you notice," one of the girls asked, "that the waiter didn't leave a menu. Isn't she going to order?"

"Well, if she does order, I'd recommend the special. These crab cakes are really crisp-tender. Wish I could make mine like this." This was spoken by the girl had her back to table #7. It was fortunate that she was seated in this chair, as she alone was more interested in her food than the Golden Goddess.

A sudden commotion at the entrance caused all heads to turn in that direction. Was it someone the Goddess was expecting? No. Not much interest there. Two senior gentlemen, one stooped, wearing a hearing aid and bald, the other, less senior by about 20 years, with a straight back, but equally bald, were conferring with the maitre de.

"Can I get a burger here?" the more senior gentlemen asked in a loud voice which most hard of hearing people adopt, forgetting that their listeners can hear perfectly well.

"Dad, you can get pasta here. Or soup. Come on."

“Hey! Hello there, young lady.”

The Golden Goddess nodded and smiled, a smile which radiated good will, not just simple indulgence or politeness to a stranger, but genuine good will.

“Come on, Dad. For God’s sake, don’t make a spectacle of yourself.”

“Just being friendly, for crying out loud. Maybe we can buy her a drink.”

“No, Dad,”

“In my day, a girl alone at a bar...We bought her a drink.”

“This isn’t a bar, and she’s probably waiting for someone.”

“Well, get me a drink. A large scotch. Neat.”

Once seated at table # 1, in the back, near the kitchen door, Dad and son settled down to study the menu.

“That old guy’s funny,” the teenage boy said. “Wonder if she’d smile at me if I went over to say hello.”

“Don’t you dare,” his mother said. Her voice had assumed the steely commanding tone she used when she expected an argument. To emphasize her displeasure at the suggestion, she gave the boy another jab on his shoulder.

“Ouch! I didn’t say I would go. Just said I was wondering.”

“Well, wonder all you like, but don’t move.”

“Doesn’t she ever move?” One of the girls at table # 5 asked, as she adjusted and readjusted the napkin on her lap. “Doesn’t she even fidget or squirm?”

“She’s composed.”

“She’s too regal to fidget.”

“She’s actually embalmed.”

Snickering and suppressed giggles went around the table.

“I don’t think anyone else is coming,” the iron-haired matron at table #9 said.

“Ummm...” her husband murmured as he perused the desert menu.

“How about the chocolate mousse cake?”

“I’ll bet she never eats cake. She couldn’t, not with that figure. If she gained an ounce it would show in that dress. Who is she, I wonder.”

“Well? Do you want desert or not?”

The matron pursed her lips, her eyes still at table #7. She mumbled a couple of “Ummms.”

“I say, let’s get a couple of rich, gooey deserts and share,” one of the girls at table #5 suggested.

“Not me,” said another. “Too many calories.”

“Come on. Indulge yourself. Besides, I don’t want to leave just yet. Anyway, you’d have to go on a starvation diet to look like that.” She nodded her head toward table #7.

“Yeah, right, and a spend a whole year’s salary for the dress and the diamonds.”

“Do you suppose the necklace and earrings are real or just rhinestone?”

“Oh, I’ll bet they’re real.”

All five looked again and decided the jewels were real and that they would share the chocolate mousse cake and the tiramisu.

“O.K.,” the iron-haired matron said after her husband already placed his order. “I’ll have the same.”

There was movement at table #7. The Golden Goddess opened a small purse in matching gold lamé and removed what appeared to be several folded bills. Without upsetting the vase of roses she slipped the bills underneath, leaving just a corner visible. Rising silently she then repeated her glide through the tables toward the entrance. As if on cue, all diners checked their watches. Eight o’clock. One hour exactly she had sat there sipping one glass of wine. The maitre de met her at the entrance, held open the door and escorted her to a silver Bentley waiting at the curb. He took her hand briefly, kissed it, said a few words for which he received a nod and a smile, helped the Goddess into the car, closed the door and returned to Lena’s to resume his duties.

Table #10, which was by the window, had the best view, and the boy, between bites of chocolate chip ice cream, reported all he saw to his parents in a louder than normal voice, as if he knew all the other diners would be just as interested.

“Some kind of ritual, I bet,” one of the girls said. “You know, some anniversary of something important or terrible. The love of her life died tragically and this is the anniversary of his death or when they first met or when they married.”

“Hah! You’re such a romantic. I’ll bet it’s just a joke. She was hired by Lena’s to liven up the place which is pretty dead on a Wednesday night. We all stayed and had desert. So did the other tables. Would we have stayed so long without the added attraction? It’s only now that she’s gone that the others are leaving.”

“Spoil sport. And speaking of sports. My guys should be coming home from

the game by now. It's time I get home."

"Right. It's time we all get home. Waiter...check please."

Adelaide B. Shaw lives in Millbrook, NY with her husband. She has three children and six grandchildren. Her stories have been published in several literary journals, including *By-Line*, *The Country and Abroad*, *Bartleby Snopes*, *Loch Raven Review*, *American Literary Review*, *The Writers' Journal*, *SNReview*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Cyclamens and Swords*, and *Storyteller*. Adelaide also writes children's fiction and haiku and other Japanese poetic forms, such as tanka, haibun, and photo haiga and has been published widely. Her award winning collection of haiku, *An Unknown Road* is available at www.modernenglishtankapress.com. Examples of her poetry may be seen at www.adelaide-whitepetals.blogspot.com/.

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