

THE BATHER

His conscience could not bear it till the end of time. It was like an intense light that made him a chronically insomniac.

According to the locals, the story could well have happened like this:

In his later years, in a moment of acute personal crisis, he hired a young woman he had met on the street to serve as a model for him. She, fearful of the strength of his gaze, accepted, but only for one day. The next morning they went to the beach. When they arrived, he told her to take off her clothes and dive into the Atlantic, while he, from different positions, drew sketches and more sketches. After a sumptuous meal, they went up to the studio to resume work. In the evening, he asked her to stay for another week, but she, seeing herself in the mirror all smeared with paint, refused and, after his stubborn insistence, she left without being paid as agreed. Never in his life had a woman refused him. Wounded in his pride, he condemned her to fight forever against the raging ocean.

For more than forty years he watched this unequal combat with rapt attention. The young woman's black eyes gazed defiantly at the great waves and her powerful arms were firmly thrust into the watery bowels, but the ocean would not give up and continued to whip her tormented body again and again. One night, from across the room, Jacqueline momentarily abandoned her usual thoughtful attitude and gave him permission to release the girl of her cruel fate. So he took her on his lap and deposited her in the gentle waters of the Mediterranean. She, under the moon's wake, watched him warily until the gentle waves carried her out to sea. Satisfied, he breathed deeply and, closing his eyes, returned to the museum.

It is said that since then, on nights with a full moon, whispers and footsteps have been heard by the seaside promenade. There are those who claim to have seen Jacqueline, on those same nights, disguised as a sphinx, relentlessly watching, from the top of the lighthouse, the self-portrait of her beloved painter.

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