

The Goddess

by [Reeve Chudd](#) (October 2024)



Axis Bold as Love (George Yepes, 2000)

In the late summer of 1971, Ron Chester met the most stunningly beautiful woman he'd ever seen in person. He, along with his Sigma Gamma fraternity brothers Mark Leary, Geoff Barton and Jackie Kassner, returned to the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia a week before the beginning of their junior year. Why arrive so early? Because they had all been appointed as ushers and groomsmen for the wedding of their frat brother, Thomas Jeffrey Fisher ("T.J.") to his bride-to-be, Jill Romano, at the luxurious Delamar Harbor hotel on the water at Greenwich Harbor, Connecticut (thanks to the wealth of Jill's parents, who owned a multitude of apartment buildings, automobile dealerships and other legitimate enterprises, among others).

The four brothers were able to rent tuxedos at Goldbloom Rentals in nearby Seneca Falls in preparation for their performance, and in the afternoon on the day prior to the wedding day they took the subway-surface car together to the 30th Street train station in Philadelphia to travel to Greenwich. There was, however, a slight detour in their journey: they would have a two-hour layover at Penn Station in Manhattan before the next train to Stamford Station, next to Greenwich, and the drinking age in New York at that time was 18.

Thanks to Mark's familiarity with that certain section of lower Manhattan (he lived in Union City, New Jersey, just across the George Washington Bridge over the Hudson River), the foursome navigated a short walk to The Celtic Rail, an Irish Pub, and settled into a booth with a pitcher of Kilkeny Irish Red. They missed the 6:00 pm train and the 8:00 pm train, and finally, Ron, who had limited his intake to mere buzzed results cajoled his more significantly lubricated cohorts that they had to catch the last one at 10:00. They

settled into the empty train car and immediately fell asleep for the 80-minute ride.

Ron was the first to awaken as the train slowed to Stamford Station. He jostled Geoff to awaken him, almost yelling, "Geoff, we're at the border and the police wanna see your passport." Poor Geoff, still in his inebriated befuddlement, rose quickly and frantically checked his pockets, much to the entertainment of the other brothers. Unfortunately, when they disembarked from the train, the station was completely devoid of humanity.

What were they to do at 11:20 pm on a Friday evening? There were no taxi cabs or other transportation awaiting them. At Jackie's suggestion, they used the nearby payphone to call the only person they knew in the vicinity, namely T.J. Yes, they called the groom late in the evening before his wedding morning, and their loyal frat brother grudgingly drove from his luxury hotel to retrieve his sotted wedding party to the nearby Howard Johnson's so that he could pour his brothers into the two rooms his fiancée's parents had graciously provided. They almost didn't recognize T.J., who had cut his long hair and shaved his face for the occasion.

The next morning, the foursome arose with consequent hangovers and hastily dressed in their tuxedos before being picked up by Jill's younger brother, Gino, who chauffeured the group to the wedding venue. Gino, a good-natured teenager, guided them to the room for the ceremony, where Jill's older brother, Joe, greeted them with a sneer (apparently, T.J. had reported their late evening arrival) and instructed them about the seating arrangement protocol for their usher duties and then their line-up order and processional and recessional activities.

While Jill was a devout Catholic, T.J. was raised as a Methodist, and so the ceremony was not a mass or a church wedding, although an old priest, "Father Quinn," who had married Jill's parents and her brother Joe, presided over the

ceremony. We later learned that, in order to have Father Quinn perform the marriage, T.J. had to swear an oath that the children of their union would be raised Catholic.

Although Geoff (possibly still under the influence) forgot which side to seat the friends of the bride and which side for the groom's invitees, reversing their positioning, the ceremony went splendidly, and Jill looked vibrant as a bride. The reception was in an opulently decorated golden ballroom next door, with not one, but two wedding photographers snapping shots nonstop.

Having completed their duties, the relieved foursome gathered their seating cards and proceeded to their assigned table. Two elder couples sat with them (T.J.'s uncles and aunts from Chicago), along with two female cousins of Jill. One of the cousins, Zita Romano, had long, silken near-black tresses, a perfect olive complexion and green eyes. She had a movie-star body and a model's face, enough to make each of the seated brothers drool. She was possibly in her mid-twenties, and she apparently had no male escort. This seemingly flawless beauty wore a sleeveless, powder blue gown, accentuating her soft shoulders and slender arms. In a word, she was breath-taking; in another, heart-stopping.

Even though each of the foursome had the self-assessed realization that this vision was clearly "out of his league," each of them magnetically began engaging her in conversation, sadly to the exclusion of the others at the table. In fact, when she excused herself to go greet the newlyweds, each of the brothers began, almost in a competitive, alliterative effort, to complement her appearance in her absence.

"A paradigm of pulchritude," started Ron. "Yes, an enrapturing enchantress," replied Geoff. "Tantalizing temptress," chimed Mark, and Jackie completed the assessment with "Our sublime siren." Jackie added, "I thought Sophia Loren was an incredible Italian beauty; but she can't hold a candle to

Zita."

In a clear demonstration of fellowship, Ron broke wooden matches from a box on the table into several uneven pieces and hid all but the edges in his fist. He instructed each of his brethren to draw straws, with the longest chosen to receive the first request to dance with Zita when she returned, and she graciously allowed each of them to get close to her beauty in step with the music; however, Ron was the luckiest of the four, in that he was granted the only slow dance with her. *Now I am certain*, thought Ron with his hand on the small of her back, *there really is a God!*"

After the last of them enjoyed her favor on the dance floor, and the newlywed couple had their solo dance, followed by Jill's father's dance with his daughter, the meal service began, and all of the guests returned to their assigned table, all except Zita, who had disappointingly disappeared.

The reception continued with the usual speeches by the parents of the newlywed's, the best man (T.J.'s older brother, Ralph) and Jill's brother's Joe and Gino. The four from Sigma Gamma paid only slight interest in the words of the speakers, keeping their laser-focused, rotating gaze in the search for the return of their beautiful queen. After the speakers finished, the cake was introduced and sliced, and then the bride threw her bouquet, all without the appearance of Zita.

Finally, Ron felt a slight elbow jab to his right ribcage from Mark, and Jackie felt Geoff's hand on his shoulder, all directed to move their collective gaze upon the opening of the nearby elevator at the rear of the ballroom. Exiting the lift was Zita, with her dress top not fully raised, her beautiful long hair just a scintilla disheveled and even her lipstick ever-so-noticeably smudged, next to one of the wedding photographers, who also presented somewhat mussed. The couple exchanged furtive glances before departing from the elevator in opposite directions.

With mixed emotions, shock from the departure from dreams of virginal purity and envy with the unparalleled experience we imagined for the unworthy wedding photographer, the four brothers of Sigma Gamma sighed in unison as they collectively realized their fantasy had been cut short.

In later years, at reunions, the same brothers recounted their attendance of the wedding, and while they'd forgotten the name of the woman who had captured their hearts and minds, they simply reveled in their almost otherworldly encounter with "The Goddess."

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Reeve Chudd is a retired tax attorney living in Carmel, Indiana. He always wanted to be a writer, but also wanted to eat regularly. Instead of creating soporific legal documents, he hopes now to retain readers' attention with worthwhile prose. If he's unsuccessful, there's always coffee.

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