

THE DEEP-SEATED FEAR OF ARIANA JACK



GLENN SUDE CLARK, JR.

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GLENN SLADE CLARK, JR.

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This short story is also available in Kindle e-book and paperback formats.

THIS WAS PARADISE. ARIANA JACK RELAXED,
for the first time in what seemed like ages, as
she stretched out on her towel and soaked up
the sun. All around her, people were simply enjoying life,
diving into the community pond, enjoying food, drink, and

good company. Children were laughing, young couples were flirting. Ariana was home.

But how had she gotten here? Wasn't she supposed to be somewhere else?

It didn't matter. She needed this.

The blaring siren of the emergency beacon abruptly stole Ariana from her reverie. She sat up, removed her sun glasses, wiped the sweat from her brow, her head darting from side to side, her eyes flashing over all of her surroundings, alert like a warrior on the battlefield.

Nothing was amiss.

The crowd began to slip back into their frivolous occupations. It was probably another test. A false alarm. Nothing to fear.

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The alarm stopped just as suddenly as it had begun, but this time it did not give way to silence. Instead, the shrill siren was replaced by a voice coming over the public alert system in panic. “This is not a test. Repeat. This is not a test! The worst has come to pass. They’re here. They are coming for us all. And there is *nothing* we can do to stop them. We knew this day would come. Prepare yourselves. Everything is going to change. Repeat. This is not a test.”

The voice droned on listlessly, without any sense of hope.

Panicked, Ariana jumped to her feet, her swimwear the only armor she had. How *bad* she gotten here anyway?

There was no time. She looked to the sky, and she saw them.

A shadow crossed over the people on the ground, as the invading swarm locked them in their sights.

“Babies!” a man cried out in terror. “The babies have found us! Our lives are over! Run! Everybody run for the hills!”

The terrible giggling of the flying babies filled the air, as they chortled and squealed with delight. They began to open fire, fierce red laser beams blazing forth from their eyes and mouths, striking people down where they stood, ending all of their selfish plans forever.

Ariana grabbed a trash can lid and deflected the blasts of a group that flew low to take her out. “Over my dead body, you little ...” A crippling pain overtook her.

The babies stared at her, giggled, and flew off as though they had succeeded.

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Filled with an unholy dread, Ariana looked down at her now massively pregnant belly. She felt it kick. “No! No! This can’t be happening!”

Her water broke, and Ariana Jack, Ariana the Fearless, cried out in terror.

Ariana awoke, still screaming, as a tendril was pulled from her nose. She remembered. She wasn’t back home at the community pond. She was in deep space, a prisoner aboard the pirate vessel of Prince Montalbán V, more commonly known as Red Eye the Merciless. She found herself looking into his legendary eyes; one organic, the other a glowing red cybernetic.

Her enemy spoke, as his robotic first mate finished removing its appendage from Ariana's nostril and switched off the image that had been projected from her mind onto the wall, "So, Ariana the Fearless, the pirate who cannot be made to flinch, is afraid of ... babies." He scoffed, amused and disgusted all at once. "That is a stupid fear."

Still under the effect of the robot's probe, Ariana insisted, "No, you don't get it! I can't have a baby right now! I'm a lifer! I can't get tied down by anything. Not ever! And ... I *really* don't want to be tied down with Captain Fizzmo. It was just for fun. It's shallow. I don't even know how it started. He's just so ... virile and *attractive*. But he's not father material. Not even close. And he's half Akadian; he has gills, scales in odd places ... and that—"

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Red Eye finished for her, a note of admiration in his voice, “That magnificent red crest upon his head. Yes. Akadians are beautiful creatures.”

“But I don’t know how much of that would pass on to my child. What do I do with a kid who has gills?”

“Listen to me, Ariana Jack,” Red Eye said. “Your fear is of no use to me, unless everyone aboard Fizzmo’s ship also fears to have his child. You, however, fear nothing else and would make an excellent addition to my crew. I can offer you many things. We have the star chart, leading to the Treasure Moons.”

“We have a copy,” she answered smugly.

“That explains so much.” He sighed. “Well, we have benefits.”

“We have a union.”

Red Eye stood, going pale with horror. “What kind of space pirate allows his crew to unionize?”

The robot at his side spoke then. “Captain Red Eye, the enemy ship is closing in.”

The captain nodded. “Very well then, Phobos. Kill her.”

Louder, he said to all within earshot, “Battle stations.”

News of her ship coming after her helped bring Ariana back to herself. Absently, she had been working the locks that bound her to her chair, and now she was free. She jumped up, snapped the nearest pirate’s neck, took his gun, and shot the robot directly in the chest. She fought her way to the escape pods, hitting Captain Red Eye in the shoulder with a hasty shot meant for his head.

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At last, she escaped, drifting into space between the two ships, and she knew she would soon be home, with her crew. But, just like her relationship with Captain Fizzmo, the deep-seated fear of Ariana Jack was going nowhere.

A relaxing day at the community pond turns into a nightmare, as Ariana Jack comes face to face with the only thing in the universe she truly fears. Jarred by the unexpected confrontation, Ariana must take control of her mind in order to remember her purpose and find her way back to safety.

Glenn Slade Clark, Jr. is the author of six books and numerous works of short fiction. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

www.GlennSladeClarkJr.com

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