FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

**The Sailor's Wife**
Helen Benedict
Zoland Books
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By transporting a nineteen-year-old Floridian in 1975 to the hard life of a Greek island, Benedict has found a potential metaphor for feminist awakening. Joyce is swept away from the supermarket and her staid American Family by a Greek Adonis. Once on island, her husband Nikos resumes his trade as a merchant marine, leaving Joyce for months at a time to farm with her aging in-laws. Despite their harsh ways, these new parents give Joyce a sense of purpose she has never known.

Benedict's strength is in her complex characterization of this supporting cast. Demetria reigns matriarchal, superstitious, and bigoted. Her cowed husband is a keen observer of his community who rises to defend his beliefs. Through their biographies, the reader learns the history of modern Greece from the perspective of its people.

At times the book is more romance novel than political and social commentary. Joyce's lovers are all ravishing, and their intimate scenes are ironically the stuff of conventional supermarket page-turners. Multiple betrayal moves the plot. In an attempt to characterize Joyce's originally simple mind, the writing suffers from an overabundance of inaccurate simile: an airplane as a metal tube, a family looking "dull and gray like a washed out photograph text next to a shock of bright balloons," a former life "brushed away like sand from a knee."

To it's credit, the book describes life on this imaginary island with sinuous detail. The market reeks of fragrant vegetables, garlic, and butchered meats; the air in the bakeshop is floured; the rock ledges grate on Joyce's feet. The reader feels cramped in the family's home, stuffed into church, and free, by contrast, on a mountainside.

Joyce's eventual appreciation for her old blue jeans and her desire to "look a man in the eye" are ultimately believable in this oppressive climate. As an outsider on the inside, Joyce comes to understand the challenges of feminine life: "Not one of them had ever had a choice about what to do with her life, about how to spend each hour of the day. Not one of them was

free even now to walk the streets by herself, to hop a bike and go somewhere she had never seen. Joyce had grown up with freedom, but what had she done with it?”

The symbolic conclusion of the book may be too open-ended for those who have read it for its romantic value, but ultimately this ending may bring the reader around to Benedict’s metaphor.

*Jo-Ann Graziano*