



UNDERS
TORY

2012

understory

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Understory is an annual publication sponsored by the Department of English at the University of Alaska Anchorage. The journal showcases literary and artistic works by undergraduates, provides students with practical experience in producing a literary magazine, and fosters relationships between graduate and undergraduate students and faculty.

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Understory thanks the University of Alaska Anchorage English and Art Departments and Garry Mealor, who donated \$50 for this year's Cover Award, as well as Club Council and the UAA Concert Board for funding.

Root Words

Understory's roots dig back to 1986, where a small creative arts journal titled *Inklings* began in the Anchorage Community College. Since then, the process of this journal's production has evolved in many ways. *Understory 2012* was in danger of going unpublished until many UAA students volunteered their time and support. Volunteer commitment to the preservation of such an important creative outlet to UAA students made this journal possible. It fills us with such gratification and happiness to see undergraduates, graduates, and faculty working together across disciplines to produce a creative work.

Understory received a multitude of submissions this year, over 160 individual works of art, poetry, and prose. Such numbers always prove that *Understory* remains a valuable and important part of an undergraduate's time here at UAA.

Though all submissions this year stood out in some way, a few shone through as achievements of mastery. We wish to acknowledge and thank Caitlin Smith, whose work "Lantern Head" won the *Understory* Cover Award and Shelley Giraldo, whose piece, "Leda" won the Turnagain Arts Award.

We would like to acknowledge the life and death of Hayden Carruth (1921 - 2008). In 1998, Hayden Carruth donated his poem "Springtime, 1998" to *Inklings* as "a gesture of thanks" to the community. This began the long tradition of the Hayden Carruth Award, an annual poetry prize given to one student featured in the journal.

This year, the Hayden Carruth Award goes to Quoc Duong for his poem "Writer's Complex." We also wish to acknowledge Cheyenne Morse, whose short story "Gypsy Glass" received the *Understory* Literary Award.

We wish to apologize to UAA alumni John Kendall, whose story "Son of a Thousand Fathers" was sadly missed in *Understory 2011*. This year, we have featured his story at the closing of this issue.

We want to thank all the volunteers who sacrificed their mornings, afternoons, and evenings to help assemble *Understory 2012*. This journal would not exist without their dedication.

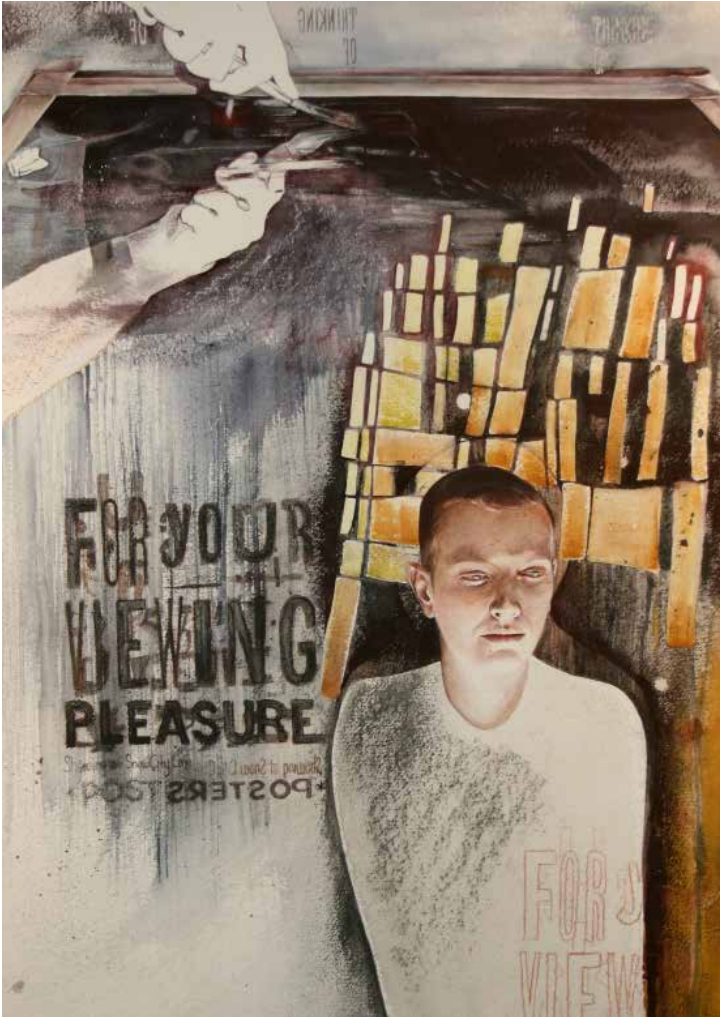
— The Editors

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SHELLEY GIRALDO



PRINTMAKER

WATERCOLOR AND CHARCOAL

GYPSE GLASS: UNDERSTORY LITERARY AWARD WINNER
BY CHEYENNE MORSE

Harold squeezed his illicit collection of coins in his fist. The coins had been Edward Hill's lunch money only a few hours ago, until Harold buried his fist in Ed's stomach and twisted his arm until he handed the money over. Harold had been kicked out of school for the day but this was hardly the first time. He had good reason. He wanted to get Elsie something special. She loved those tiny suckers that tasted like root beer the local drug store carried. He picked up a bag of them, as many as he could buy, and went to the park.

Elsie waited for him at their usual meeting place. She was always there first, something that flummoxed him. He even showed up twenty minutes early one time just because he wanted to beat her there. She had been there, just as she was now, loose t-shirt, jeans rolled up just past her knees, white tennis shoes and no socks. He hadn't known what to do then; he had never known anyone who would bother to get there early just to see him. He probably would have stood there for the whole afternoon, watching her swing her legs beneath the park bench, if she hadn't seen him and beckoned him over.

She was sick, really sick. She had lost all her hair. It had something to do with her medicine. Harold didn't know how something that was supposed to make you better would make all your hair fall out. She tried to explain it to him once but he hadn't understood. He hadn't thought she really understood either. She didn't wear a wig or a hat or anything though, which Harold thought was pretty cool. She looked tired and small today. She was smaller than everyone in their sixth grade class but he had never thought of her as frail until now. She slouched down in the park bench, her head lolling back. She could have almost been sleeping if her feet hadn't been swinging gently beneath the bench. Elsie heard him approach and waved to him.

He sat down next to her and put the bag down on the bench between them. The sun was bright and hot and the bench had soaked up a lot of heat. It felt good on Harold's sore muscles. He slouched down more in

the seat so the back of the bench lay across his shoulders. He smiled over at her and she smiled back.

“What’s this?” she asked, peeking in the bag. “These are my favorite! How did you remember?”

“I just remembered is all.”

“You shouldn’t have. I don’t want you wasting all your allowance on me.”

“Don’t worry about it. Dad gave me a little extra this week because I cleaned out the garage. Just take them.” He couldn’t look at her while he lied to her. He looked down and picked splinters out of the wooden bench.

“Thank you,” she said. He shrugged and she unwrapped one and tucked it in the corner of her mouth.

“I think I’ll join you,” he said, unrolling his shirt sleeve to reveal a cigarette and a mostly used pack of matches. He put the cigarette between his lips and peeled a match out of the pack.

“Can I light it for you?” She held out her hand and he gave her the matches, she always lit his cigarettes. She struck one with an expert wrist motion that Harold admired. He had tried to do it himself, just like his dad did, just like Elsie, but he could never quite get it right. His stomach flipped over as she leaned in to light it. He sat back hurriedly. He puffed a short drag on it and was proud that it didn’t make him choke anymore. He sat back and blew the smoke away from her.

“Never smoke these things Elsie. They’ll give you cancer.” She burst out laughing, like she did every time he said it, like it would never get old.

“I’m not worried about that. An old gypsy woman looked into her crystal ball and told me my fortune a couple years ago. She said I’m going to die in a car crash so I’m not worried about cigarettes.” She chuckled to herself about that until it dissolved into a coughing fit. He leaned toward her, concerned, but she waved him back.

“I’m fine. My throat is just dry.”

“Oh okay.” He took another drag. He watched her out of the corner of his eye. Harold didn’t like how pale she looked. It almost seemed like

she would crumble and fall away if he didn't keep a close watch on her. Elsie kicked off her tennis shoes and pulled her knees up so she could rest her chin on them. Her bare feet rested on the hot wood of the bench.

"Don't you wish we could go everywhere bare foot? It makes me feel closer to everything. I spend all this time indoors surrounded by white. White walls. White sheets. Out here it's green and blue and orange. It's all alive." She scooted forward on the bench so that her toes could tangle in the grass. "I wish I could bury my legs in the ground and just grow and grow."

"Like a flower?" Harold felt a little silly saying something like that but he was pretty sure you were supposed to say things like that to girls.

"Until winter anyway. Then nothing grows anymore. Everything dies," she said.

"The trees don't die. They just kind of sleep."

She didn't respond to that. They sat together in silence. He stubbed out his cigarette and laid his head back. Harold watched the clouds move slowly across the sky. He'd wink first one eye then another and then do a long slow blink to see how far the clouds could travel before he opened his eyes. He turned to say something to Elsie but he stopped when he saw her. Her eyes were closed again; she was slumped against the seat. He sat up with a start.

"Elsie... Hey Elsie!" She opened her eyes slowly and smiled at him. He relaxed a little.

"What is it Harold?"

"Um I was just thinking that I have a couple extra pennies, we could throw them over the bridge and make a wish." She nodded sleepily and stood slowly. He waited near her in case she needed help but she was alright.

Elsie put her shoes back on and they strolled over to the bridge. The sun was hot on his skin but it felt nice along with the breeze. They leaned up against the railing, balanced on the lowest rung so they could reach over the top easily. He handed her one of the pennies he had left and they closed their eyes for a second to make the wish stick really good. Harold wished for the same thing he always wished for. Then they flung the

pennies as hard as they could into the quiet rush of the stream below. The two coins glistened in the sunlight briefly before plunking into the water.

“I bet you get your wish,” Harold said.

“I hope so. I hope your’s comes true too, but I don’t know what good wishing can do now.” She looked down at the water.

“It’s going to be fine. What did your parents say? I bet they said it’s going to be okay, right? Those military doctors are supposed to be real good.” Harold said, not sure whether he was trying to reassure her or himself. He frowned down at the water.

“They don’t like to say anything about it anymore.”

“Do you really believe in gypsies and all that? Do you think she’s right? I think you have lots of time.”

“A little bit I think. But I don’t think there really is magic or anything. I think it’s the glass. You can see the future in all glass.”

Harold followed her gaze down to the ground next to the creek. There was a smashed glass bottle along the bank. Its ragged edges were glinting in the sun. He looked away from it, uncertain what to say.

“Will you come to my funeral? I don’t want to be alone.”

“Hey don’t say that.” He stopped when he saw the tears. She wasn’t sobbing, there wasn’t any of the high-pitched whining he heard from other girls in their class; these were big silent tears he had no idea how to deal with.

“Hey. Hey! Look, of course I’ll be at your funeral. I’m probably the idiot who is driving the car. I’ll be driving us somewhere and it will be raining or it will be icy and I’ll be doing something stupid. We’ll flip or hit a tree and then boom!” He clapped his hands together loudly. He started talking faster, trying to push words in faster than she could cry. There will be body parts everywhere. And all that glass will be so shattered it won’t say anything any more. It’ll be as dead as us.”

“You.” She sniffed and wiped some of the tears off her face. “You don’t die in the car crash. I do. The old gypsy woman said so.”

“They never tell you the whole story, just little bits. Anyway, that means we got a couple years at least, ‘cause I’m sure not going to die in a car crash until I’m old enough to drive, so that’s sixteen. Unless you

want to go for a joy ride. I bet we could steal a car easy. Or I could take my dad's car keys off him when he gets drunk." His wind breaker rustled as he folded his arms.

"I don't think so. Why don't we hold off for a little while? Anyway, you can't come to my funeral if you're dead too," she said.

"Sure I can. It'll be such a bad crash that we'll be in a million pieces. We'll be scattered all over the road. They won't be able to gather all the pieces, they won't even know which bits are you and which bits are me."

"That's gross." She smiled when she said it.

"They'll just hold a little ceremony on the side of the road. I'll be there for yours; you'll be there for mine," he said as he smiled back at her.

"You're weird."

"You're the one who believes in gypsy fortunes," he said.

"What if we move away? Dad says new orders are coming in soon." Her smile faded and she started to look distant already. He grabbed her shoulder and gave it a squeeze.

"I'll run away. I go wherever you are. I'll even behave myself in class so I can take notes if you're out sick. Though why on earth you think we ought to waste what time we got left in school is beyond me." He rolled his eyes theatrically and she laughed out loud.

"Thanks for that. I needed it."

"I mean it. Don't you doubt it for a second." The sun was darkened by the clouds above and it made them both look up at the sky.

"I should get home. If mom has tried to check on me she is probably freaking out by now."

"Did you sneak out?" He was incredulous. "I'm a bad influence on you."

She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him goodbye. Something she had never done before. He stood completely still for a moment and then patted her back gently and stepped away.

"Should I walk you home or something? Are you feeling up to getting back?"

"Thanks but I should be okay." She waved goodbye and turned away,

the small white paper bag gripped firmly in one hand. He stood there until she was out of sight and then he went back to the bridge and watched the glass shine in the waning light.



HAGIOS PAGE 6

LINO PRINT

WRITER'S COMPLEX: HAYDEN CARRUTH AWARD WINNER
BY QUOC DUONG

I remember reading a story you wrote,
the one that was filled with your writer's voice.
The one that had your hair in the pages
and your eyes and your lips and your nose.

It was charming and witty
but mostly,
it was filled with your writer's voice.
That voice that you use
when you're in the same room
as your mother.
When your words become
soft like your lips
and cute like your nose
but behind your eyes
I know
that's not what you mean.

And I wondered:
if only your character were as nicely composed
so that it perfectly matched your words,
then maybe,
our conversations wouldn't be forced.

ROBIN FARMER



A FEW OF HER THINGS

WATERCOLOR

JULIE RYCHETNIK



CONTEMPLATION

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

HEART
BY MICHELLE MAGLY

Anna Morgan stared down at the grass, brown eyes fixed on the small, green blades. Unlike the lawn's erect posture, her short, choppy hair hung limp in the dewy morning air. She stood off the main path to an old, stone building. People saw her standing alone and approached her throughout the morning. They muttered things like, "I'm so sorry," and, "You look so much like Sadie." She felt the hands squeeze her shoulder through the dense fabric of her black dress-suit. She did not respond, but stood wrapped in her silence like a shield against the sympathizers.

Condolences washed over her, words like waves beating against an unmovable surface. She heard the roar but not the meaning. The world moved around her, retreated from her, only to surge back up in unbridled emotion. She clutched the fragile ceramic jar to her chest like a ward. She shuffled her shoes against the grass, ripping the ends out with the point of her toes. The service would end soon and she did not want to be inside. The building had smelled of mold and death. It was easier out here.

Her father, a pale man, took her arm when he was done. "Are you ready?" he asked. Something was broken in his voice, the sound slipping. It had started earlier that week, every morning his voice turned down a decibel lower. She remembered how boisterously he used to speak, even when the doctors told him his wife's heart was failing. He had turned to her mother and said, "Must have handled it too roughly." He even winked at her. "I promise to treat it like a gentleman from now on." That was their joke, that they had traded hearts.

Anna stepped from the grass with her father, her glossy black shoes flecked with green. She looked to her right, to her father's vacant arm, and was shocked to see it unaccompanied. Then she felt the weight of the urn pressed against her breast once more.

"Did you see the picture?" he asked. He held an old photograph that had sat next to the urn during the service, right next to the larger portrait of her mother. She had tried to avoid looking at it all morning. It was

from five years ago; she was fourteen and her mother still looked healthy and full. The two laughed in the picture, mouths open, similar black hair sticking out at odd ends. Their olive skin tone made her father stand out starkly with his pale complexion. He had kept his hair in a wispy, feeble comb-over that he long since abandoned in reality. He inherited his facial features from the Old West: a sharp jaw line, furrowed brow; he looked just like the cowboys in the movies.

Anna shook her head and he pocketed the picture carefully. He looked tired in contrast to it, his eyes now red with shadows standing out prominently underneath. “We’ll head to the coast then,” he said.

Anna held the urn carefully as her father drove. The ceramic felt so small in her lap. It held her mother too easily. She resented the ashes, in a way. She had not wanted her mother’s body burned. Burning her seemed so final. The body was utterly destroyed. It was what her mother wanted though, a final wish.

Living so close to the ocean made it easy to find a scenic stop high up on the cliffs. They parked and stepped from the vehicle. Anna heard the sea roaring and churning far below as they walked out of the parking lot. She could smell the salty spray on the winds. They hiked off the beaten path, away from the shelter of the trees. The wind picked up quickly, chilling them. It gusted harder than she had ever felt the wind blow. She felt as if it would fling her into the sea at any moment. Her face went numb and her father’s cheeks became a chilled blue.

“We’ll head out to a good spot and wait for the winds to shift!” he yelled against the roar. The gale’s force screamed in her ears, stealing her voice. Death howled in these winds. His hands clawed and scraped at her mother’s urn that Anna held so tightly. The ashes were his prize and he grew impatient. Even in the final moments her mother had battled death fiercely. In the end, her heart gave out, the physical muscle, not the romantic ideal. Death ripped her mother’s life from her father’s grasp. She had not even screamed. Her heartbeat had scaled down on a decrescendo until it thumped one last time. Now death wanted the rest.

They eventually reached a spot away from coast visitors and park rangers. Her father took the urn and stepped down to the very edge where

sea foam and spray leapt up in defiance of gravity. He muttered a few words, none that she could hear, and reached a hand into the urn. As the wind blew out across the sea, he released her ashes, letting them fly westward so that her soul might reach the ancient resting grounds of her ancestors. Her ashes scattered across the Pacific. Some settled down into the flotsam, some seemed to blow away forever. Anna lost sight of the particles no matter how hard she stared.

Her father stumbled away from the edge and they went home. He tucked the urn away on the low-leveled, red-brick mantle along with his pictures of her, including the one from the funeral. They did not talk about her mother after that. They stared at the urn or a picture and exchanged a glance, but never words. Speaking of her mother became a taboo, one that established itself ruthlessly between them. When she lay alone at night she felt the silence scratch in her throat. Sometimes she battered it with swallowed sobs; other times she cleared her throat against it. Her mother was gone and her father seemed content to let himself slip away with her.

One day while Anna dusted the mantle she found herself brave enough to look inside the urn. She stood on the tips of her toes as she dusted around a photo and looked down past the rim. She saw a small pinch of ashes left. The silence, now a wall, pressed down on her until she asked her father, "Why did you keep some?"

He sat at the kitchen table, newspaper unfolded in front of him. He looked at her almost like he used to and said, "That's your mother's heart in there, which she always promised was mine forever."

Anna heard the grief inside the words, the warbling of his tone. She saw it in his eyes when he spoke, the spirit half-empty out of them, dead with her mother. But the silence was gone. She swallowed against the swell in her throat and no longer felt the scratching. Finally, they could speak.

SHELLEY GIRALDO



LEDA: TURNAGAIN ARTS AWARD WINNER
WATERCOLOR AND CONTE

A POEM FROM JASON TO MEDEA
BY REBECCA DEISHER

Lovely lady dressed in white,
Standing in the pale moonlight,
Come into my arms tonight,
Tell me how to win this fight.
Lovely lady, skin aglow,
Tell me secrets soft and slow.
Lovely lady, your love is sold,
Just help me win that fleece of gold.
Lovely lady, your dress is torn.
I see it red in the sun this morn.
Lovely lady, sail away with me.
I will carry you across the sea.
Lovely lady, our journey is done,
But do not despair, we had our fun.
Lovely lady, what do you lack?
Why is your red dress turned to black?
Lovely lady, have mercy please,
Here I kneel down on my knees!
Wanton woman, you are most unkind
To take away these sons of mine!
Alas, the aching agony I feel!
I must be dreaming, this cannot be real...
Oh, how I wish I had never seen the day
That the lovely lady came my way...

So, the hapless harpy ascended into the sky,
Sailing away with a victorious cry,
Never to be seen again
By any women or other men.
But Jason would see her every night.
For in his dreams, she is his plight.



UNTITLED MECHANISM #2

FOUND OBJECTS

SELKIE

BY HARMONY POULSEN

The wind rushes through my hair, sending the silky, white-green strands into a dance of their own making. The tempo of my steps matches the tempo of my harsh breathing, as I drag breath after breath past my lips into my aching lungs. I feel every rock and root through the soles of my sandals, just as I feel every branch and leaf that runs across my arms and legs. They tear into my skin, drawing the purple blood that dwells beneath the soft, pale surface. I hear the tell-tale sound of fabric ripping from the seams, as the branches grab more than skin. None of this matters though, the only thing that matters is staying ahead; ahead of the hunter with the blood-red eyes. I feel myself weakening, my legs growing tired with each step, and I pray that they don't give out on me. I can almost feel his breath upon me, and another wave of fear washes through me. I know I shouldn't but I can't help myself; I turn to look behind me and before I can pull in enough breath to scream it's already too late.

I jolt upright, my breath choppy and fast as my body and mind try to realign themselves to reality. I want to fall back into the soft comfort of my bed, but I know that any sleep I seek will not be found. Instead I linger in the silver gaze of the twin sister moons Yalena and Calliasandra, taking comfort in their soft effervescent light. Knowing that the mother sun, Hathos, will not take her claim of the sky for many hours I turn from the prison that has become my bed to my desk, something I had rarely used until a few months ago. Its once clean surface was now stacked high with books and layers upon layers of parchment. Sighing at what my life has become I make my way across the warm, smooth, crystal floorboards of my room.

My white night slip sticks to my skin and I curse at the oppressive heat of summer. Without thought I walk to the balcony doors and swing them open, hoping for one whiff of a cool breeze; nothing comes. I turn back to my desk but freeze when I realize what I have done. For months I have kept myself under lock and key, eliminating any avenue of possible

vulnerability. Yet due to a little summertime heat I seem to lose all sense, freely opening my doors to the threats of the night. I go to shut the doors, but stop. It hits me that I have made myself a prisoner in my own home, and that I was my own jailer. Taking a deep breath, I step back from the doorway and make my way towards the desk. It takes everything in me not to jump back up and slam close the breach to my sanctuary but I do so with the encouragement of one thought: I shall no longer be a prisoner.

In an effort to distract myself I turn on the blue crystal lamp beside my desk with a small touch of magic. Pushing aside the book I had been reading earlier I reach beneath my desk, grabbing for the wrapped bundle that lay hidden between the back of the desk and the baseboard. I gently set it down and slowly unwrap the soft cloth covering until it reveals the book that lay inside. My first thought when I see this book is always how old it is, followed by how beautiful. The leather is dark with the aging of three hundred years, but the thin gold filigree lines that are carved upon its surface still shine like it is brand new. The craftsmanship alone is remarkable, but the fact that the effort had been placed into that of a simple diary astounds me to no end. Then again I would expect nothing less from the Mad Queen Beryl whose beauty and tyrannical reign are legendary.

I hadn't wanted this book, had tried to do without it, but for months my research into Selkies turned fruitless. There is little to go on and too many theories to wade through. Selkies, the ancient race of hunters, are able to transform into any living form they wish. Some say they are almost as old as Gia herself. As her first children they possess the ultimate predatory gift, the ability to blend in. These few facts are all that is agreed upon. Their existence is known, but not what that existence is like; if they are nomadic, homebodies, have a large populace, or a low one. Do they have long life spans, or short? Are they able to work crystal like we do; do they have a society of some kind? This information is not known, and I am running out of time to figure it out.

The library had held this book under lock and key, and though it

wasn't a proud moment for me to learn that my crystal magic could be used for more than making jewelry, as the days went by I got more and more desperate. So much so that the old rumor of Queen Beryl taking a Selkie for a lover had set me to stealing. What better way to find out than to read her diary.

The only problem I face now is figuring out how to open it. For the past several weeks I have been trying to open the book, but still to no avail. There is some kind of magic keeping it closed, magic that has nothing to do with crystals. It is no wonder the library kept it locked up tight. Trying to pry it open for the thousandth time I feel my fingers slip across the edge causing a momentary flash of pain as paper meets flesh. I watch helpless as the purple blood quickly swells up from my parted flesh to form a droplet; a droplet that falls from my fingertip onto the diary before I can catch it. Horrified that I might have destroyed a small piece of history I grab the hem of my night slip to try and blot it out before it can stain. But before I can do anything the blood is quickly sucked up by the book. Slowly the gold filigree on the cover gives off a soft glow and I hear a quiet click before the glow dissipates. With trembling fingers I reach for the book, opening its cover without a hitch. I take in a calming breath and push aside my fright at the unknown magic that has just been released. Sitting down I start to read. I simply can't take the chance of waiting any longer.

An hour into reading and I know one thing; I do not want to be an enemy of the Mad Queen. Conniving, calculating, vindictive, and power hungry did not make for pleasant bed fellows. Added to that an unhealthy dose of narcissism and it is no wonder she was eventually assassinated.

I now resign myself to the fact that the rumor was just that, a rumor. I flip pages in disappointment. Cursing myself at being ten kinds of stupid for stealing such a valuable but worthless book, I begin closing the cover when one word catches my attention; Selkie. I resume reading, focusing on one particular passage:

My Selkie lover finally admitted the truth as to what he was, not that I gave him much choice. Oakroot can be so useful at getting to the truth of a matter.

When I asked him what the key to immortality was he had the audacity to laugh at me. He was not laughing when I was through with him; knives really are the best way to go in matters such as these. Effective enough to cause immense pain, but to not have them pass out from it. When I asked once more all he babbled about was his crystal having all the power. As if he has crystals more effective than mine. I had to surmise that he would not tell me and quickly dispatched him. Oh well, on with the hunt as they say.

I wonder what this new information means. I don't notice at first that the light from my lamp has gone out. It isn't until an involuntary shiver runs across my skin that I take in its absence. A sense of dread fills me as I close the book and turn towards the balcony doors. I know what is waiting for me but still I'm shocked at the sight of the man perched on the thick, stone railing that is my balcony. Bathed in the moonlight of the sisters he is just as I remember him; so very tall and dark. His inky-black hair is still a bit shaggy, causing his bangs to fall into his eyes. He brushes them away revealing their ebony color, eyes that still compel me to trust despite their sinister hue. His almost luminescent white skin still fascinates me to no end; such a stark contrast in such a dark man. He is once again dressed in the black tunic and pants that fit the well defined muscle tone that is his body. I feel the flush of my cheeks and am disgusted to realize that I can't tell which of my conflicting emotions of fear, desire, and self-loathing has caused it. The object of my nightmares, of my dreams, he is my very own hunter, my Selkie; the reaper of my death. I drink him in despite the danger he represents, of the fear he brings out in me. I sit up from my seat, feeling more in control on even ground, no matter how slight that is.

He gives me a boyish smile, "My dear Yalena you of all people should know it's dangerous to keep your doors open at night, that the monsters that go bump in the night are real. So why do you provide this tempting invitation to them?"

I swallow my fear and reply, "Hello Ranth, it's been a while."

"Yes it has. Did you miss me my dear?"

"I've missed my freedom."

“It was not I that locked you in this room. This particular prison is of your own making, my love. You can leave anytime you like. No one is keeping you here but yourself.”

“Maybe if you weren’t trying to kill me I wouldn’t be forced to create a prison in my own bedroom,” I say fiercely.

“You’ve got me all wrong Yalena, I don’t want to kill you, I just want a taste.”

“So that was why I was running for my life in the Kelpie Jungle, just so you wouldn’t get a taste?”

I clench my jaw as I carelessly take a step forward, but the pressure and tension of the last three months is finally finding its release as fodder for my anger, and I pay little attention to that one step.

“What can I say? I was angered at your foolishness for following me; I just wanted to teach you a lesson.”

“You compelled me to follow you,” I shout.

“Shhh, Yalena you don’t want to wake your parents or sister do you?” He gave me a pointed look before smiling once again, “No I didn’t think so.”

“I wouldn’t have followed you if you hadn’t used magic to force me to,” I say quietly, unconsciously crossing my arms in a defiant pose.

“You should have resisted.” His voice takes on a harsh tone.

“And how was I supposed to do that? Please enlighten me.”

“You just were.”

“Because that makes perfect sense.”

I start pacing at this point; this is beginning to sound like a lovers’ quarrel more than a killer- killee type conversation and it confuses me to no end. Lost in my dilemma, I don’t immediately see Ranth take in the stacked books and papers.

“Studying up on me are you, Yalena?”

“For all the good it has done me,” I mutter, still lost in my own thoughts.

“I would expect nothing less from you.”

The smile he forms freezes on his lips.

“What is that Yalena?”

His question startles me out of my internal monologue and I see that he has gone still. His eyes no longer track me but instead focus on the Mad Queen's diary. I stop my pacing, using my body to block his view of the book. I try to make the move look casual, but I doubt I pull it off if the half smile that begins to form on his perfect lips was any indication. I really had to get my mind off of his lips.

"It's just a book I'm reading, nothing too exciting."

"And yet you try to hide it from me. Did you find out something interesting from its pages?"

Rising from his perch I watch as he unhurriedly makes his way across the room towards me, towards the book. Without much thought I grab the book, cradling it within my arms as I jump back towards my bed, keeping my distance at all costs.

"That would be a yes," he says quietly.

I realize my fatal mistake too late; I cut off my only paths of escape. By moving towards my bed I have moved away from both my bedroom door as well as the balcony. More importantly I have let on how much the book means to me. All Ranth does is smile at my realization before returning his gaze back to the book, the jerk.

"It really is just a book Ranth." I'm too nervous. I need the book. I know in my gut that it contains more information than the little I just learned; Beryl didn't seem the type to give up. If the look in his eyes is any indication to go by then Ranth did not have plans of leaving without it, and I couldn't let him have it.

"Is it really? If it's what I think it is then it is far more than a book, my love." He turns towards me. "Have you read it yet?"

I hesitate and that was all the answer he needed.

"Yes, I suppose you have. Wherever did you find it?"

"The library."

"I suppose that makes sense. It's a rather clever hiding spot really. And what did we learn?"

"Nothing of importance."

"You shouldn't lie Yelena; it's rather irritating."

I watch as he takes a seat at my desk and turns his attentions towards

the various trinkets and books that litter its surface. He seems to find the object that pleases him the most, a thumb-sized purple crystal that I found in the garden yesterday. The crystal is a common color of no particular size or value and yet he cradles it as if it is a hand spun crystal ornament. I watch as he gently strokes its hard surface until a small glow resonates from its center. The words *the crystal has the power* ran through my head.

“That’s it, isn’t it?” I say breathlessly.

Looking at me, his smile fades as he takes in my expression of discovery. He gently places the crystal back onto the desk, taking a stand once more.

“What is?”

“You’re connected to the crystal, to a particular crystal aren’t you? That’s the big secret isn’t it?”

“I think that it’s time for me to have the book now, Yelena.”

I clutch the book tighter to my chest, unwilling to give it over now that it has indeed proven to be useful. Looking for avenues of escape my eyes stray to the balcony doors, the escape that is closest. Turning back to Ranth I know he can read my face.

“You won’t make it.” Ranth says quietly.

“I have to try.”

“I know.”

I don’t make it two steps before he has me. With my back to his chest his arms easily pin mine. Using one hand to hold my wrists together, he relieves me of the book with the other. Before I know it, the diary is gone, vanished as if it has never been. It’s the last straw and the flood gate that has become my emotions overfills. Sobbing I strain against Ranth, my arching back tight as I try to free myself. He increases the pressure of his hold until I can barely move.

“Where did you put it?”

“Somewhere safe.”

“I need it though. Why won’t you give me a fighting chance to beat you?”

I hear his low chuckle in my ear as his warm breath washes across my

skin.

“You should know that I always fight dirty, and I always fight for keeps. You aren’t ready for the secrets that book holds, trust me. You know too much as it is.”

A bitter laugh fills me at his words, which abruptly turns into another quiet sob. His arms loosen and he slowly turns me to face him. Trying to pull back my tears, my body stills as his hands come up to encircle my face. I haven’t noticed before but his hands are hot, surprising me while still warming me from the outside in. I am literally in the hands of my predator and I have no one to blame but myself. I meet his cool black gaze as tears fill my hazel eyes once more.

“Please, Ranth, don’t,” I whisper.

“Don’t what?” he whispers back to me, a small smile on his lips. His eyes lock onto mine and I feel my legs fall from underneath me.

“Don’t kill me.”

Catching me against him, a genuine smile crosses his lips. I realize that I am starting to lose feeling within my body, a numbness that starts in my toes, but which rapidly makes its way towards my arms. His ebony gaze does not falter from mine, a deadly snare that I cannot break from. I realize too late the trap that I have fallen in as his gaze takes on a red hue.

“I already told you, my Yelena, I don’t want to kill you, I just want a taste.”

My vision goes cloudy as the numbness reaches my head. My eyelids start to flutter as the edges of my vision start to go black. Fear wants to overtake me but it is swiftly washed away by the oncoming tide of oblivion. Only the sound of his voice is left, all I hear is *trust me*.

MAIDEN OF THE WAVES
BY NICHOLE LYNN

She is beautifully dangerous.
She'll call you like a siren,
singing of sunny skies,
of women and wealth and freedom.
Yet the glint in her green eyes foretells your fate.

She'll carry you away.
Alone.
Your fortress of solitude.
And if in that moment you forget,
forget the lessons learned by Santiago and his Marlin,
by captains Ahab and Nemo
she will remind you.

Deep in the night
she will rise,
her temper hot.
Her strikes chilling.
Crashing against you
as if the kelpie themselves beat against your bow.
Howling from the heavens
heaving you high
and then...

She will fall.
Drawing you down with her
into cold depths unfathomable.
An icy vicious grip
pulls you from your sanctuary
and strangles your half-hearted cry.
And though you struggle,

bursting forth to gasp a breath,
she has fallen yet again,
toppling upon you,
embracing you tightly.

And it is only then,
as the darkness engulfs you
and she cradles you to her breast,
you find the freedom you seek.

CAITLIN SMITH



LANTERN HEAD: COVER AWARD

EARTHENWARE

CASTLES MADE OF MUD
BY ELISE SCHAPIRA

They called him Mud and not much else, except “prisoner” and “filthy dirt boy.” That hadn’t changed in all his time down here. His eyes were charcoal and his hair was a perpetual mess of dark brown that hung in one heavy mop across his weathered face. Patches of dirt covered him. It was no wonder they had named him so; he looked like he had been born from a swamp.

He was almost entirely forgotten down in the dungeons among all the other cellmates rotting beside him. Mud blended into the earthen walls. When he spoke, if he spoke, his words were well chosen and rumbled like an avalanche.

The guards prowled just outside his door. Seeing snatches of their fur made him reminisce for those days when it had been his job to place the filthy flea bags in here. He wasn’t supposed to be here of all places. He was - had been - one the Queen’s best Agents and here he was a criminal for no crime at all.

The wolves were the true criminals. The monstrous white beasts had stolen everything, destroyed the castle, and taken control. They had trampled over the kingdom leaving their paw prints on destruction like a bloody signature.

This wasn’t the usual story at all. It wasn’t how it was supposed to be imagined.

She got into bed and rolled closer to her beaten, old teddy bear. Half of his right ear was gone, and his right paw was wearing down. He barely stirred as she reached one arm around him. “How was your day?” she whispered into his ear.

The bear didn’t speak for a moment. He yawned, “The same way I’ve spent all my days in this place.”

“The usual.” She nodded in agreement. “I had to take an absolutely brutal test in class today. I would have much rather been here.”

She rolled away a little and looked up at the ceiling. Even in the dark

light she could make out the patterns she had traced so many times with her eyes. "I wonder if that's all there is to it," she sighed. "I'm so tired of just working to keep up at school. What happened to when we were younger?"

The bear took her offered warmth and tried to return some small comfort. "Trust me," he said in a very small voice. "Those times never leave you."

"If you insist." She settled into the covers. "Have I ever told you how much I hate all this moving and changing?"

"Many times," he said softly as sleep fell over her, "but you get used to it. Changes have been creeping up on us for a while."

The day the Queen had been crowned had long since passed, along with the peace she brought. There were very few people left who remembered the days under the Queen, fewer that remember the coronation ceremony. Mud had been young then, like Mercedes. They were assigned to work as partners and it suited them. Mud had been happy, always happy, with Mercedes fighting at his side. The two new Agents had relished their job and every opportunity of chaos that appeared.

The wolves were kept at bay then, sulking at night. They preyed on fears and conspired in the darkest parts of the forest. Parents told their children that they would be snatched up by them for the most ridiculous offenses and they gobbled it up. Sometimes the wolves did snatch children now, when they weren't burning houses for entertainment.

Mud remembered one of the early days, when the first stirrings of unrest occurred and the wolves were growing too bold. Mercedes was taller, her ebony hair was longer. He had wondered if he was growing too. The first attack on the castle came in the night. Over the next several days the wolves struck different parts of the kingdom at random. So many fell and disappeared in the beginning.

Mercedes had fought next to him, beaten down, but her weapon never faltered. It was a game, and they did not think there was anything to lose. The Agents fought not just for duty to the crown - there was a thrill to the adventure. Mercedes shared this joy with Mud, always eager to

start a new storm of trouble. During one of the skirmishes on the border Mud realized that he'd never been loyal to the Queen. He knew that he was loyal to her, and he would fight any cause for her.

Now Mud has to fight within the confines of his prison cell just to stay alive. One day he woke up, older, and she was just...gone. Above his cell, he knew there were wolves tramping their dirty paws across the marble, wolves shedding their disgusting fur on the velveteen tapestries. Worst of all, he knew what sat in the throne room on the Queen's grand chair - the largest and deadliest wolf, the White King, with red eyes that ruled the torn kingdom with an iron claw.

Mud sat with his back against the wall and continued to disappear. Each day a little more of him was gone, even as he tried to stay. He had to make it, absolutely must fight. He was born that way. There were so many more adventures to have than just this.

"Do you know what happened to him?" She asked another night, reaching over his head to shut off the lamp. She dropped her book and set aside her glasses, preparing to surrender to sleep.

"Who?" He was already tucked under the covers of the small dormitory bed.

"You know." Her eyes were misty. "I haven't been there in...in..."
He laughed. "You don't remember?"

"It's been a while!" she said, half-heartedly trying to defend herself. "You know what I've been through."

"Does this mean you'll forget me too, one day?"

"No." She shook her head. "Never! I promise, really."

Satisfied, he relaxed into her arms, considering her earlier question. "I don't know," he finally admitted. "You have the answer though."

The bear shut his eyes and whispered goodnight. She murmured the same sentiment but no sleep came.

It'd been so long since she'd seen the castles made of mud. She had stopped playing once upon a time when she realized the real world was waiting. As she pulled the covers up a little higher her eyes wandered

over to the textbooks on her desk. Finally exhausted, with nothing left, she let herself slip away.

Dreams came to him of a world outside the castle, outside the far away land where he didn't work for a Queen. Mud hated it. He didn't understand this nonsense he saw. He had dreams on those days when he missed her the most. Dreams, that he knew, only she could explain. They reminded him of the strange and wonderfully weird stories Mercedes told.

The last story she told him he never forgot.

"Once upon a time, two people who loved each other very much raised a beautiful girl with a vivid imagination." Mercedes spread her hands wide to illustrate the story. "She had all sorts of grand adventures in her world. Her best friend," she turned to wink at him, "was made of mud and could do all sorts of amazing things." Mercedes smiled weakly at Mud and took his hand. "They were Agents and spies and mischief makers. But then one day the girl's parents didn't love each other as much and they separated." She took a deep breath before continuing. "The girl knew she had to grow up. And that is why," she concluded with tear-filled green eyes, "we can't play anymore."

Mud remembered that story the most because that was the day the wolves won and the kingdom shattered. It was not too long after that that he first started dreaming. They were not his dreams; they were of a life far away. In his first dream he saw everything he loved packed away in boxes, all his memories of his youth being stored away. It hurt, and it made him feel older. When he woke up, he wished she was there.

In the dirty cell the dreams pained him more than anything else. One time he dreamed that people were celebrating, but it was bittersweet. It meant he was moving again, but he didn't know where. He knew he was going to have to throw away some of his old things, and most of them he didn't even know why he'd kept. The dream ended on wings.

That vision had shaken him to the core and left a bitter taste in his mouth. He wondered exactly what it was he had forgotten and where he was moving to with such eagerness.

Tonight he dreamed of an old worn out bear: The bear limped towards him, shattering the iron bars. He had a raspy voice and held out one helpful paw as he whispered, "She misses you."

That was the worst dream of all because he was starting to forget who "she" was.

"You miss him?"

"Yes," she said unflinchingly. She had shut off her lamp hours ago. The sweat tangled sheets around her provided no comfort.

"Then you should see him while you still can." The old bear looked at her with beaded eyes. "There's not much time left."

She sat bolt upright. "What do you mean? I wouldn't lose him!"

"No, but he's losing you."

She trembled, shaking her head. "He wouldn't...can't..."

He leaned forward. "Mud can't fight without you. And you can't just bury yourself here." He looked over at the stack of homework. "You don't have to grow up so fast."

She pulled him up into her arms and hugged him tightly. "I don't know what scares me more though. Going forward, or going back."

"Just remember, you can't stay still forever." He placed one paw over her chest. "Now dream."

Mud woke up to screaming. The guards above howled in rage. Someone must be attacking the castle. Good for them, though he doubted it would accomplish anything. Mud pulled his knees closer to his chest and wished above all else he could melt into the earthen walls.

"Mud!" A voice hissed. "They're distracted! Let's go!"

He knew that voice. He knew it...but that was so long ago... it wasn't possible. When he looked up he saw her hastily unlocking his cell. She was a woman now, her green eyes were older. "Mercedes," he said in a quiet voice.

"Mud, please." She gestured for him to get up, tossing the stolen key on the ground. "Let's catch up later. I need to get you out!"

He felt new energy flood his veins. Mud jumped up and wrapped his

arms around her. “I missed you. I missed your stories. They’re much nicer than your dreams.”

She leaned into him. “I’m sorry I left you in such a nightmare. I thought growing up meant leaving all this behind.”

“It doesn’t have to be.” Mud smiled. “you didn’t have to leave.”

Mercedes offered him the ax she had brought, “Would you like to stir up a little mischief, Agent Mud?”

He hefted the ax with a wicked grin. “Mercedes,” he repeated to himself, “she is back.”

Mercedes looked up at a noise from overhead. She pulled out her sword and smirked. “Looks like they’ve taken care of the distraction. Think we should go start another one?”

“Yes. Yes we should,” Mud said as he took the lead, charging up the stairs. “Oh, and Mercedes?” He paused and turned around. “Welcome home.”



FIGURE EIGHT

CERAMICS

A LONG STRETCH OF ROAD
BY NICHOLE LYNN

A long stretch of road
lies before my windshield.

The trees fly by
in a solid block of green
while the grass lays peacefully,
gently sighing with the breeze.

The sun rests his head upon the clouds
while they pass to unknown places,
casting shadows that dance on the fields.

There is no station on the radio
and in the silence I remember

Another road, another time,
long ago when I was young
I remember searching the scenery,
as the bus drove on,
looking always for an end
to the long stretch of road
that I will forever travel.

KYLE LAVEY



UNTITLED

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

TWO CUPS OF COFFEE
BY LARS SINGLETON

Two men sit across from each other in a café in the heart of Paris. Outside, snow is falling softly on the cobblestone street. Couples walk by arm in arm; people rush home with bags filled with groceries; mothers walk quickly pulling their children along with them. Boats chug by on the Seine. It is a fairly stereotypical scene for Paris in December. The men are deep in conversation. They don't realize that I can hear them. This is my job: sit and listen to other people's lives and write about it. I'm a cultural anthropologist and am preparing my part of a joint study on modern, urban European life. My advisor had laid it out simply for me: "It'll mean living in Paris for two years, alone, minimal interactions with the locals."

I believed it would be easy. I would be alone all the time, writing about what I saw people doing and heard people saying, interacting to a minor extent as I need.

Small talk is about the limit of my conversation with the locals. I hate not being able to talk to the people around me. I watch the two men as they carry on their conversation. André complains to his lover, Didier, about how they never go visit his family in Alsace for Christmas. André describes how beautiful the village he grew up in is during winter: snow covered hills dotted with trees and small cottages, the snow on the red tile roofs of the white and yellow buildings in the village center, the skaters on the lake, the old church, carolers, and the choir parading through the center of town singing hymns to bring the villagers to Christmas Day mass.

Didier takes a long puff on his cigarette and expels the smoke dramatically from his nostrils, adding extra drama to his already angry face. He forcefully explains that he prefers the winter in Paris or Lyon, his home town. André leans back in his chair, places his arms across his chest angrily and glares out the window, looking past me. Didier grunts his disgust and begins complaining about how childish André is being. Their discussion reminds me of the last conversation I had with my boy-

friend, Alex, before I left for Paris.

“I can come and visit you right?” Alex asked me.

“I’m sorry babe, but you can’t. We can talk on the phone and video chat, but you can’t visit, I’m doing research,” I explained.

“Ryan, you’re going to be gone for two years, I can’t talk to a web-cam for two years!” he retorted with an overly dramatic tone.

“I’m sorry Alex, the answer is no,” I said, closing the dresser drawer I had emptied. “I can’t have you traipsing into my life for two weeks and messing up my concentration on my research.” This was the wrong thing to say. Alex threw down the sweater he was folding and ran out of the room. I sighed and went after him. I found him in the kitchen staring out the window of our apartment at the brick wall of the building across from us. I walked up to him, wrapped my arms around him, and kissed the nape of his neck. “I’m sorry I spoke so harshly,” I said. “I really wish you could visit or even go with me, but I have to live in and experience Paris by myself and be as objective as I can and you would be a distraction.” He stiffened and shifted loose of my embrace and began to stack dishes in the dish washer, creating a cacophony of clattering in an attempt to drown out my explanations. I shift to lean against the counter behind him giving him the space he desires when we have disagreements.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” I said. Alex threw a handful of spoons at a compartment in the dishwasher. “Honey.” Alex crouched in front of the dishwasher with a stack of plates. “Honey.” He ignored me, stacking the plates in the racks. “Honey, dammit Alex stop that!”

“What? Stop what, being angry? What you said really hurt me, is that all I am to you a distraction?” Alex asked. He slammed the racks full of the dishes back into the dishwasher.

“Honestly, yes, you are, but in a good way,” I added. “I would be so distracted by how wonderful it is to be in Paris with the man that I love that I wouldn’t get any work done.”

This made him smile. At least this was honest flattery. I promised him that once my research was done I would arrange for us to spend a few months in Paris together, no work, no research, no papers, just us and Paris.

I stare at the empty chair across from me and wish that Alex was here with me. It had been eighteen months since I had held him. I miss his scent, the way he felt in my arms, his cold feet running up and down my legs on a New York Saturday morning, when we were both too lazy to get out of bed to even get a cup of coffee. We'd play argue over who would get up start a pot. I'd usually lose. Alex always said my coffee tasted better than his anyway: that is because my coffee consists of getting dressed and going downstairs to the café and getting two large raspberry white mochas and two cranberry orange muffins.

I remember my last Saturday in New York. I got up, went downstairs, got our coffees and muffins, came back upstairs, and woke Alex up. We drank our mochas, ate our muffins, and watched the rain streak the window. I called for a cab as Alex got dressed. We loaded my luggage into the trunk of the cab and road to JFK in silence. We checked my luggage in silence, went through security in silence, and waited for my boarding call in silence. Alex leaned against my shoulder and held my hand for the whole two hours. I miss him so much. I can imagine him thumping around my small apartment here in Paris: "Nothing is in the right place," he would declare loudly, and proceed to clean everything, put things away in cabinets, fold and hang up my clothes, and wash dishes all while I typed my report of observances from the day. I wish he was here. I'm useless without him. Every café I visit I order two cups of coffee just to feel like he is here with me, he's just stepped away for a minute to use the bathroom or to talk to the woman behind the counter about her brioche recipe or something.

Didier has given into André's pleas and they are going to Alsace for Christmas. André prattles on about how beautiful it is and how it will be their best Christmas ever and Didier will demand to go back every year. Didier looks unconvinced. They leave the café, André still talking about their trip, Didier pretending to pay attention. I want to go up to Didier, slap him, and tell him to cherish these moments because they are too few and someday he'll be sitting in a café with two cups of coffee on a table drinking one alone and staring at the other.

I finish my coffee and leave. The walk back to my apartment is gor-

geous this time of year: twinkling lights everywhere, vendors selling roasted chestnuts and hot cider on street corners. People hurry around with bags filled with gifts, children talk about what they want Père Noël to bring them for Christmas. It reminds me of Fifth Avenue in New York this time of year, only it seems more family oriented and less about the gifts. My land lady's seven-year-old daughter, Madeline, was more excited about shopping for and preparing Le Reillon and decorating the tree. She was excited about the gifts but her cousins were the extra special treat for her. She only gets to see them once a month, she explained to me, and her cousin Amelie lives in Manaco, so she only gets to see her at Christmas. Madeline dominated many of my reports that I emailed back to the university.

Madeline and another little girl are outside in the small courtyard in front of the apartment building playing in the snow when I arrive.

"Bonjour Monsieur Ryan!" Madeline greets me. She babbles away in French, accented by her heavy lisp, and I miss much of what she is saying. I am able to understand that she is introducing me to the little girl she is playing with: her cousin Amelie. Amelie peers out from behind the snowman they have built. I wave and greet her in French, which causes her to duck behind the snowman. Madeline scolds her for being so shy. I smile and walk towards the building.

"Ah, Salut Ryan!" Brigitte, Madeline's mother, says. She tells me that she had let a man into my apartment because he said he knew me. I shoot her a look of amazement, how could she let some random man into my apartment just because he said he knew me?

"Do not worry, Ryan," Brigitte consoles me. "He is an American. It is the man in the photographs." Alex here in Paris; it can't be.

"Did he tell you his name?" I ask feverishly.

"What did he say his name is..."

"Did he say his name was Alex?"

"Oui-"

"Merci!" I shout over my shoulder, cutting Brigitte off mid-sentence, as I run into the building.

I run up the six flights of stairs to my apartment. As I run up the last

flight, I rummage through my pants pocket and pull out my keys. Reaching my apartment door, I struggle to get my key into the lock. I finally manage to unlock the door and burst into the apartment.

“Alex, Alex, are you here?” I exclaim as I enter the apartment, turning circles in the raised entry area which separates the kitchen and dining area from the living room. I look into the kitchen to see if he is there. He isn’t. I continue to call his name as I jog into the living room. His scarf is draped carefully across the back of an armchair in the far corner of the living room. I cross the room and grasp the scarf, caressing it, then hold it up to my face, smelling it deeply. I can smell his cologne clinging desperately to the threads: I cannot believe how much I missed that fragrance.

I turn and stare at the two French doors that separate my bedroom from the living room. I cross the room, my heart beating rapidly from both the run up six flights of stairs and the excitement of seeing Alex again. My pulse quickens and my heart threatens to burst from my chest with the anticipation of seeing the man I love. I grip the small brass handles on the French doors and open them. There he is, my beautiful love, stretched out on my bed. His shoes sit at the foot of my bed, carelessly kicked off. I step towards the bed and climb onto it. Alex is sleeping soundly. I curl up next to him and brush a lock of his thick, curly brown hair off his forehead. He shifts in his sleep, his eyelids flutter, then his gorgeous blue eyes open and look into mine. He smiles and mouths the word hi; I return the greeting. He sits up and stretches. I sit up next to him, and suddenly I feel the pain of the last eighteen months of separation set in completely. My chest aches dully, shivers run up and down my body, my eyes sting, tears begin to force themselves from their prison cells: I had promised Alex and myself I wouldn’t cry. Now the tears are free, the flood gates thrown open, I cry uncontrollably. I pull him into a tight embrace. I place light kisses all over his face and head.

“I missed you so much,” I whisper.

“I missed you too, that’s why I came. You aren’t angry with me are you?” he asks.

“I’m too happy to be angry,” I admit.

The next morning I sit at the same café table I sat at yesterday. Two cups of coffee are in front of me, the chair across from me empty. Alex stands at the counter speaking sloppy high school French to Colette, the café owner. Paris has a different feel now that he is here.

DAVID ARNOLD



DEPTH OF INSIGHT

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY



LOOKING FOR SOMETHING

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

POSEIDON'S LULLABY

BY MIRANDA DYE

I have a memory that brings me peace
In the sunshine on a rocky beach
Your fluffy fur dark as night
Though the sun made you bright
Between my fingers your warm fur glides
As we sat before the tides

A perfect day full of love
Your yellow bandana shining back above
I can barely remember a time without you
A loyal friend that loved me too
Soulful brown eyes set to seek
Staring in them it was as if you could speak

So I listened as you laid awake
Little did I know my heart would break
I wish things would have gone my way
'Cause I didn't think that this was our last day
The clock struck three, it was time
I was so lucky the day you became mine

The final act, I'll hold you tight
A little pinch, no more pain, good night
You're gone for good so I cry
Especially when I'm in bed and you're not by my side
I play the music box and ask myself why
Then I finally say goodbye
Calling this song Poseidon's lullaby.

JOVELL RENNIE



DEFIANT

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

GOOD INTENTIONS

BY REBECCA DEISHER

Alas, poor babes for ye were born
Cursed by this very day of yorn.
Your curse? It be never to see
Except that which is in front of ye.

Your heads doth bow and your eyes doth squint,
Cast o'er your souls, a blinding tint
Which blocks out the Sun, the Moon, the Stars.
Your curse lies within those tainted bars.

Do not taunt me with questions of why,
Why was this curse sent from the sky?
If answers ye seek, I tell ye thus,
Go and ask Prometheus.



LOCAL MUSICIAN: SETH BOYER

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

SON OF A THOUSAND FATHERS
BY JOHN KENDALL

It's as simple as this: Bianchi has his gun pointed at Guevara, Guevara has his gun pointed at Rollins, and Rollins has his gun pointed at Bianchi.

But Bianchi isn't going down.

He watches Guevara's swarthy, round face partially shaded by his filthy, brown hat and his eyes glowering at Rollins. He can feel Rollins' eyes affixed on him, as mortally as his gun. Behind Guevara a tiny head appears in the window of a post office, like a sun dutifully rising from behind the mountains. A drift of dust floats by and Bianchi tries to put it all out of his mind. There are only three things to focus on: his gun, Guevara's gun, and Rollins' gun. If he pulls his trigger, it certainly will be the end of Guevara, but Guevara will pull his trigger, Rollins will pull his and a bullet will scream into Bianchi's skull and put him in the dirt.

"Looks like we got ourselves," Guevara says with a devilish smile, "In quite the predicament."

Bianchi clenches his teeth at Guevara's arrogance. He wishes to God he had his pistol aimed at his smug smile rather than his temple, but any movement could mean the end. He feels a drop of sweat on his brow. He steadies his aim, fighting an ache in his arm.

Susan appears in Bianchi's mind. Susan with her auburn hair whipping in the wind and across her face. Susan with her silk skin and her sweetbriar cheeks. Susan standing in stalks of wheat, her yellow sundress hanging from her little breasts. Susan and her sultry voice, like a song from the seas. Susan who he will never lay eyes on again. The only thing he sees, the last thing he'll ever see, is Guevara's grimy, evil face. He's finished. No way out.

Bianchi feels the droplet of sweat begin to move down his brow toward his eye. It tingles as it moves, sending shivers through him. But he remains steady, calm. He doesn't shake. He doesn't shudder. He keeps his pistol pointed right at Guevara's head, in spite of its growing weight.

Footsteps and voices off to his right. Two women talking. Bianchi doesn't avert his attention. Guevara keeps his gaze affixed. Rollins' eyes continue to burn Bianchi's hair. The women suddenly gasp and scuffle

about. Guevara snickers and a door slams shut.

Bianchi's father appears in his mind. He's a tall, commanding man with an unconquerable stare. Bianchi sees his younger brothers. The ranch he grew up on. The red and yellow slews of paint in the sky from the sunset that came every night. His father, lying in the dirt, hands Bianchi his pistol, blood on its handle and his hands and waistcoat. His father whispers something to him that he doesn't hear. He gawks at the pistol. It's the pistol Bianchi draws quicker than Hendricks and Foster, the pistol that holds the bullets that drop all the bastards that draw down on him, the pistol that instills fear in anyone that gives him a shifty look. The pistol his father wasn't apt enough to wield. The very one that Bianchi now aims at Guevara.

Bianchi is getting out of this. He's seen tougher situations. His mother appears in his mind but Bianchi shuts her away. There'll be time to think of her later. There'll be time for all of that later. Right now he has to focus on the situation at hand.

The droplet of sweat on Bianchi's face stops at the corner of his eye. He moves his cheek, ever so slightly. The droplet continues down his face. The ache in his arm is immense. Bianchi ignores it. As soon as a distracting enough sound occurs—a door slamming, a horse neighing, window shutters bursting open—Bianchi will buckle his legs. He will drop towards the ground, throwing his head to the side. The guns will go off. Seeing as Rollins' arm isn't fully extended, when he shoots the abruptness will cause his muscles to clench and he'll straighten his arm out as he's pulling the trigger, which will then cause the bullet to fly slightly higher. It'll take off his hat and maybe a little scalp with it, possibly even rake his skull, but won't touch his brain. He'll live. Guevara's pistol will fire a bullet into Rollins' head, just above the ear, and into his brain. Bianchi's first shot at Guevara might not be a kill but he'll have time for a second one as he's falling to the ground. Guevara will hit the dirt last but Bianchi will be the only one left alive.

His mouth and throat are dry. He rubs his tongue on the roof of his mouth. It doesn't help. A ghostly wind creeps through. It tickles the hairs on his face. It tugs at his hat. A sleight tremor goes through his arm. His legs are growing tired. But he's surely not as tired as Rollins and Guevara. What with Rollins' affinity of pulling corks, Bianchi's surprised the

man's gun isn't shaking in his ear. And Guevara, seeing as holding onto a hand of cards and tossing poker chips aren't exactly muscle building exercises, he's nothing to worry about either. Any second now, one of them will falter and Bianchi will have his moment. Those two poor, dumb bastards will be lying in their shallow, bloody graves.

Bianchi's not even sure either of them ever killed a man. Perhaps Rollins. Maybe in some drunken stupor he got a shot off on some unfortunate bastard he mistook for a less than honest man. And Guevara, he would probably attest to killing a man or two. Most likely a number higher than that, but he doesn't have the sand to actually take a man's life.

Dust sprinkles on their faces. Guevara flickers a cowardly arrogant eye, keeping the other open and steady on Rollins. Bianchi doesn't flinch, though. The droplet of sweat has made it to his chin. It barely tickles. Susan will greet him with such an embrace. She will kiss him so sweetly when he returns to her with but a minor scratch on his head. *I was so worried about you honey*, she'll say. *There ain't nothing to worry about with me baby*, he'll reply and kiss her.

His finger clutches the trigger so tightly that it's getting sore. Rollins' pistol isn't drooping, isn't aiming any lower on Bianchi's head, giving him just a few more hairs of grace for when he dodges the bullet. Guevara—keeping his sneer unaffected—blows out the side of his mouth to get a fly off his face. Bianchi is calm. His heartbeat is controlled, steady. The wind settles. No more dust in his face. No breeze moving through his hairs. Or tugging at his hat. Just a perfect quiet as the droplet of sweat rests on Bianchi's chin—gravity pulling at it—and a horse neighs.

“Sam, get away from the window.”

Sam looked back at his mother crouched in the corner with his younger sisters.

“Ma, they ain't going to shoot us,” he replied, annoyed with his mother's coddling. “They got their pistols aimed at each other. We're fine.”

He was on his knees, peering out the post office window at the three men in the street, aiming their guns at one another.

“Still, son, a bullet might ricochet and come through the window.”

Sam heard voices in the street and whipped his head around. He saw two lavishly dressed women walking down the way, gabbing and minding their own business. But when they saw the three men, they gasped and hid in the nearest building.

Sam returned his focus to the three men. He wanted Mr. Bianchi to walk away from this, but knew that wasn't possible. Mr. Bianchi was a dead man. The slightest movement and all three guns would go off. The only way for them to all walk away alive would be to talk it out, but Sam didn't see that happening. He'd witnessed his father die in a similar situation and Mr. Bianchi had been the closest thing to a replacement. He had seen to Sam and his family after his father was killed. He assisted with the family business, and had said to Sam's mother that she'd convinced him to give up on the whiskey. At first Sam hated how Mr. Bianchi would give him that fatherly look and muss his hair, but he came to accept it as a gesture of approval and admiration. After all, Mr. Bianchi did teach him how to shoot, how to draw. But he was a goner now. He probably deserved it too, on account of him being the drunken buffoon he once was and all the debaucheries he no doubt got himself into.

"Samuel Albert Harris, you get over here right now!"

Sam whipped his head around.

"Ma, would you shut up? They're..."

A horse neighed and there was a loud unison clapping sound. Sam almost jumped out of his boots. He whipped his head back to the window. Where, just a moment ago, there were three men standing in the street, he saw three bodies dressed in useless clothes.

"Damnit," Sam muttered.

His mother scolded him for cursing as he got up, but she stayed, huddled in the corner with her two whimpering daughters. He nearly knocked the door off its hinges as he stormed outside. A cool breeze covered the bodies with dust as if the forces of nature were already fast at work on a speedy burial. Sam took in a breath and walked towards the mess.

"Sam, don't you go near them bodies," his mother called.

Off in the distance, ahead of him, the doctor emerged trotting toward the bodies with his bag in one hand, the other holding his hat on his head. Sam got to the bodies just before the doctor did. They barely looked like

men anymore.

The doctor examined them and Sam thought him an idiot. He could clearly see holes in all three of their heads with spears of brain sticking out the back. What more diagnosis did it take?

“Get on out of here, son,” the doctor said. “You don’t want to be seeing this.”

Sam glared at the man. He hated being called son, especially by men who weren’t his father. Mr. Bianchi had never called him son.

Sam unbuckled Mr. Bianchi’s belt and tugged at it until it came out from underneath his corpse.

“Now, what are you doin’?”

Sam ignored the doctor and wrapped the belt around himself. It sagged below his hips but he knew he would grow into it soon enough. He knelt down and picked up Mr. Bianchi’s pistol out of the puddle of red mud. There was blood on the pistol, and now his hands, so he wiped it off on the coat of the blonde-haired man.

Sam took another look at the three pitiful dead men as blood from one of them crept towards his boots. He opened the loading gate of the pistol and turned the cylinder until he found the empty cartridge. He let it drop and it made a plunk, landing in liquid. Sam pulled a bullet out of Mr. Bianchi’s bandolier, stuck it in the pistol, closed the loading gate, and vowed to be quicker, smarter and a better shot than all three of those dead bastards. Come time he was grown, no life-desiring fool would dare draw down on Samuel Harris.

Sam flicked the gun’s cylinder. It whirred as it spun, until it came to a stop in the exact same position it started at. He put the gun in its holster. It made such a noise that the doctor jumped. Sam reveled in the doctor’s small fear. He turned away from the three dead men, and walked away. He felt like a man. Felt taller. Closer to the sun.

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Deisher is an English major attending her fourth year at UAA. Her interests include mythology, languages, any kind of self-expression, marine biology, and pancakes. In her spare time, Rebecca enjoys reading, writing, dancing, cooking, sketching, and battling crazed Ninja-Pirate armies.

Quoc Moon Duong is an American writer from Texas. His name is his most notable characteristic and often times is considered questionable as a “real name.” Although, his name has nothing to do with his character, personality, or writing style, it is impossible to ignore by some people, and this can make his name a distraction.

Miranda Dye graduated high school in Whittier and is currently pursuing an English degree at UAA. Writing has become a hobby she cherishes, one in which life is the inspiration. It’s taking those moments in your life, big or small, and turning them into something memorable.

Robin Farmer was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska, and has had a lifelong love for art. She started attending UAA in the Fall of 2007 and has been active in the art department since then. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts and afterward, hopes to attend a Master’s Program in the not-so-distant future.

Shelley Giraldo creates art to explore her inquisitiveness. Although she has an affinity for watercolor and drawing, sculpture and printmaking increasingly interest her. Her art, a mix of portraiture, symbolism, and abstraction, reflects her quest to realize her own identity.

Serena Hackenmiller is a born and raised Alaskan who was lucky enough to have a photographer as a father. She enjoys taking portraits and lifestyle photos and now shoots primarily with a medium-format camera that her dad used in the 1960’s.

John Kendall was born in Eagle River, Alaska, and has spent his life living either in Eagle River or in Anchorage. A 2011 UAA graduate with a Bachelors in English Literature and a minor in Creative Writing, John is a member of the writing entourage, The Afterthoughts.

Nichole Lynn's love affair with poetry began during her middle school years, though it is only recently that she has begun to submit to contests and publications. With encouragement from her partner, Nichole hopes to continue writing and sharing her ideas about the world.

Michelle Magly decided to be a writer when she was ten years old. Since then, she has written a few unpublished novels and has even been featured in a couple short story contests. She is also a co-founder of the creative writing group, Writer's Ink, a growing collection of UAA and ex-UAA students.

Cheyenne Morse is chasing haphazardly after a Hospitality and Management degree. She is attempting to juggle both school and full-time work. She is also a member of The After Thoughts, a local writing group.

Philip Obermarck was spawned with a 6B pencil in his grip and his dream from a young age was to be an Artist. With that goal in mind, he enrolled in the BFA program at this fine institution and graduates in May of 2012. After graduation, he expects to be seeking his MFA across the waters in Scotland.

Kylie Perry, born and raised Alaskan, has been photographing since her freshman year in high school. Now, five years later and a freshman at UAA, she is studying History as her major and German as her minor. Being published in Understory with her first statement piece is a great accomplishment for her.

Jovell Rennie is a 19 year old student in his second year at UAA. He began taking photos about a year and a half ago and recently became interested in iPhone Photography.

Jenna! Roosdett is a Pre-BFA Graphic Design and Photography major born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. An artist by nature, she grew up making any boring project into a colorful and detailed masterpiece attempting to inspire others around her. Jenna! loves experimenting with all sorts of different techniques and mediums.

Chelsea Ruwe is new to Alaska; she is originally from Cincinnati, Ohio. She now studies with the ceramic department. Her interest in the abstract began with the concept of recurring brain activity within people's cognitive processes that establishes patterns of understanding and reasoning.

Julie Rychetnik was born in Texas and has spent the majority of her life in Alaska. In 2009, Julie earned a BA in English with a minor in Psychology and a minor in Theatre. She is currently working on a BA in Art with a minor in Computer Science, while working for the Anchorage Fire Department as a 911 Dispatcher.

Elise Schapira is currently in a love triangle with economics and writing. Her inspiration is drawn from these twin passions. The two have showed her how many hidden connections there are in the world and how little things can affect those threads. Whenever she completes a piece of prose, her two fish listen when no one else is available.

Lars Singleton is in his fourth year at UAA and is pursuing degrees in Literature and English Education. He plans on teaching either High School or Middle School English. Lars has lived in Alaska for the last 19 years. His home town is Palmer.

Caitlin Smith is a senior at UAA studying in the fine arts program. The first semester she took ceramics as an elective 3D course she soon became enthralled with clay as a medium. This past fall she was accepted into the BFA program with her emphasis in ceramics. Her thesis show will be in the spring of 2013.

un-der-sto-ry

[uhn-der-stohr-ee] n. an underlying layer of vegetation; specifically the vegetative layer, especially the trees and shrubs between the forest canopy and ground cover. The understory is a source of rich diversity, beauty, and often extreme fragility.