

Half Moon

She held the bay in her eyes, green as the sea, looking at the waves of sparkling glass that moved across the Atlantic. At age thirty-nine, Amelia's hair unfurled, like black seaweed in the autumn wind. Her skin turned brown in the sunset, her figure, a dark contrasting silhouette, letting in all of the remaining light, eclipsing her body. This scene was all for her, the ocean, the sand, the birds, everything. But soon, she would have to leave it behind.

Amelia was on break from serving at the Ocean Palace, a restaurant and bar built on the docks overlooking the Kachemak Bay. From the outside, the business looked like a two-story shack with its crooked boards and peeling layers of white paint. Inside, the upstairs was filled with wooden tables covered in white dining cloth. The tables sat on a black carpet with white etches of dolphins, whales and various other sea life. An old chandelier hung from the ceiling, like a conglomeration of fishhooks reflecting light. The room was dim and had windows on three sides with the ocean and masts staring back in. Downstairs, the bar had a small stage where local musicians sometimes performed with a bucket for tourists to drop money in. The bar was like any other with its neon signs of various beers and hard alcohol. It had only two windows in the wall facing the ocean. Many of the sailors and fishermen passing through filled the air with smoke to mix in with the scent of fish guts and booze. A few of the fishermen would often gather to watch Amelia take her mid-shift break on the pier outside. But it wasn't just her looks that garnered male attention, she was a mysterious woman of few words. Most of the tourists and sea faring men wanted to know more about her, but none of them could look her in

the eyes long enough to get a story. Amelia often averted her gaze from the present to the past, thinking of one of her father's trumpet solos or the freedom of the in sea air.

Martin, a fisherman, watched from the deck of the small green fishing vessel named the *Aardvark*. The image of rolled up sails, antennas and flagstaffs stuck out in the distance like needles in a pin cushion. His eyes reflected the evening light, like black pearls, empty and shining. Amelia was off in the distance, but in this picture, she was only a speck of sand in the frame of his sight. He was a tall and broad man with skin tan from fishing in the summer sun, which is rare for Halibut Cove. His beard was soft and long, like a grey knit scarf, making him look older than he was. Martin was forty-three years in age, and had matted black hair that used to be brown. Martin watched the sail flapping in the wind like a white handkerchief being waved in surrender or to say goodbye to loved one. The smell of fish and salt water filled his nose and mind, but they would not replace the thoughts of Amelia, the woman he still longed for. True, he was more gaunt then before, but he hoped she would still find him desirable. He knew he was in love, because losing her still hurt. He thought about what to say, after anticipating this moment for two weeks at sea.

They had just drag netted in the last catch for the day and the captain, a man whose fat had only collected around his belly, looked like a pregnant seahorse while he drove the boat in to dock.

"I got the stern line!" cried Vincent, the young Hispanic shipmate called with his small mouth over the roaring engines. The *Aardvark* cruised and drifted easily into the parking space. Vincent jumped onto the dock and tied off the stern line.

“Stern line secure, captain!” he hollered. Martin did likewise, securing the bow with a half hitch, “Bow secure!” he said, without having to think about it.

Captain Thomas turned off the engines and joined the crew. They walked up a steep dock ramp onto the pier, where Amelia had stood. Hungry and tired, they joined the local rabble inside the bar. Most of the fish they caught had already been cleaned by Vincent. Tomorrow the fish could be sold on the market.

The sun had set and the evening started off as usual, shots of whiskey chased down by a few beers. Martin sat alone at a table. Vincent and the captain shared stories with the other fishermen about both the hundreds of fish and women they had conquered, shining and silver, slick as eels, but as pretty as diamonds, with wide eyes that would suck you right in if you let them. They spoke of all of the parties they would throw and pussy they would get once the season ended, especially Thomas, who was often teased for being married to an octopus. His wife was fat as a walrus and always balancing her check book.

Martin was not amused by the pink and numb cheek masks the men put on when they passed through this town. He sat, looking around, but didn't have to move his head anymore. Amelia float across the room in her skin tight black top, with a frilled white skirt and a waitress' apron tied around her waist, waiting for her to notice him. As he gazed, he fell in love with her all over again.

“Hey, Martin, me and the boys are going over to George's hotel room. He hooked this hot broad, said she'll strip for a hundred bucks. You in?” asked Thomas, interrupting his fantasy of what could've been.

“Nah, you guys go ahead. I'll catch up with you later,” he replied.

“Suit yourself. You’d be better off comin’ with us though. Amelia will just leave your balls blue, the fuckin’ tease. Come on guys.”

The men all paid their tabs and followed George and Thomas out the door to the parking lot. Martin took another sip of his beer and thought of Amelia’s smile. The way she used to laugh when he said something funny. Eleven years ago, Martin and Amelia shared an apartment in Homer, Alaska while he worked in a machine shop as a welder. He remembered the sparks jumping away from the metal, just like the sparks from the bonfire at the beach party where they first met. They danced in their swimsuits together, smiling as they shared a kiss under the silver coin in the sky. Like a coin, he kept her in his pocket, but had lost her somewhere along the way. He took another sip of his beer. Bitter thoughts swelled like ocean waves with each sip.

Martin had heard that Amelia had been working in this bar from another fisherman in Seldovia before arriving at Halibut Cove. He thought of just leaving this shore without a word, like when Amelia had just moved out of their apartment after three years. They grew apart physically and became disinterested in each other. He tried to make her laugh; to love her like he did, but their lives were no longer synchronized. Amelia moved out and started a new serving job at a local restaurant. Lonely and lost, Martin took a job fishing in Newport, Oregon. There, he married the first girl he dated, but he could never bring himself to fall in love with her. They divorced after ten years of marriage. He eventually found his way back to Alaska, leaving behind another lost coin.

He finished his beer and asked the bartender for another. When it cracked open, Martin was reminded of the many drinks they shared and the nights and days that surrounded them. He found Amelia to be even more beautiful than before. True, she had

gained some weight, but in all of the right places. She had soft curves that made most magazine models and actresses look like stick bugs. Her hips rocked as she moved. He thought of her chest, the way it elevated up and down as she breathed on their milk white sofa while reading Sinclair Lewis. Martin could smell the aroma of seafood in the kitchen and he missed the taste of her pancakes in the morning and the taste of her lips at night.

Martin sat, humming along to the Beach Boys in the background, with nothing but a few mutters from the remaining crowd that dampened the music. The alcohol only enhanced his anxiety and would not drown out his thoughts. He kept watching Amelia and she noticed him, but could not place his face in the puzzle of her memory. To her, Martin looked like any other bearded fisherman waiting for his chance to ask her out. Almost all of them did and she always refused, even though Martin hoped she had not forgotten and that she had not moved on. He waited until the patrons all left in their drunken stupors and sways. It was closing time and the music faded out of the juke box in the corner and its dark rainbow light dimmed away. Martin paced himself throughout the night. An hour later, he was just as drunk as when he arrived. Amelia came by and asked him to leave.

“Hi, Amelia.” he addressed her with a weather worn and slurred voice that she did not recognize. He wore a tattered old sweater that looked like it used to be white, but now it almost matched his beard. His pants were brown, like his hair used to be, and covered in stains and a few holes you could pass a golf ball through. He looked tired and worn, but it was hard to see his eyes underneath his black hair.

“Excuse me? I’m sorry it’s closing time. You’re going to have to leave now, mister,” she told him, like she had told many others.

“Oh, come on now, you wouldn’t kick me out like this, would you? After so many years?” he replied, hoping she’d remember him.

“I’m sorry? Look, I don’t know what you’re trying to pull here, but I don’t care who you are. You could be Jesus Christ himself and I wouldn’t want to go out with you. Now go home and sleep it off, it’s been a long night,” she said while turning around to put some chairs up on the table.

“Not even a familiar face?” he said.

“I see lot’s of faces every day and I don’t... Martin?” she paused, gaping her jaw as if to bite the hull of a ship.

He had rolled up his sleeve to show her the tattoo he had gotten while he was with her, a tattoo of mighty mouse in green ink on his forearm.

“You’re so...thin,” she hesitantly responded.

“And you’re as beautiful as ever,” he said. She smiled past the compliment, pretending it didn’t make her ware of her body, mainly her large, curvy thighs. But she just saw them as fat.

“So, would you like to meet up for coffee or something, it’s been a long time, maybe we could catch up?” he asked her.

Amelia hesitantly agreed to meet up tomorrow, explaining that it was her day off and Martin politely excused himself from the bar, returning to his small, cell-like cabin aboard the *Aardvark*. Amelia finished closing out the restaurant and walked home to her third floor apartment seven blocks away from work.

The night air was cool and allowed her to breathe. She wore a white over-coat, with a belt loosely hanging off the sides. The town was quiet and barely any traffic went

by. She was shaken up by the appearance of her ex-lover after eleven years apart. She was single now, but did not know why he was here or what Martin wanted. He had changed and not in the most attractive way. Three more blocks. She could feel the salt in her nose and it reminded her of his sent that night. He used to smell warm and comforting, but tonight none of it was familiar, it just felt strange, like a repeating dream. She heard Miles Davis' version of "Summertime" playing in her head. After arriving at her flat, she slipped into a night shirt and wrapped her hair in a bun, before slipping beneath the sheets and wine red comforter of her queen bed. She fell asleep with the box and wooded side panel TV on. The sound drowned out her thoughts and helped put her to sleep.

In the morning, Amelia woke up to her alarm croaking. Reluctantly, she arose out of bed and headed for the turquoise bathroom of her one bedroom apartment. Standing on old faded and cracked tiles, she took off her night shirt and cotton underwear, facing herself in the mirror, thinking of last nights encounter. She had a full length mirror attached to the brown bathroom door, which when open, faced a white porcelain sink. After washing her face, Amelia admired her smooth, light brown skin and dark hair now loose from the bun she had it in all night. It hung halfway down her back and to her breasts in the front. She did not like that her left breast was larger than her right, or that if she scrunched up her stomach, it rolled into layers of fat, no longer appearing flat or smooth. She thought about what Martin said, her being even more beautiful, but she never quite believed it herself. She stood in front of the mirror, naked, learning how to accept her own body. She could accept all of the bodies of the lovers she has had, but not her own. The warm water running down her spine into a tub filled with hair and small pieces of lavender soap was all she looked at now.

Martin sat that evening at the same table, drinking his beer and soon saw Amelia approaching in a pink tank top with a black skirt high on her waist and heels on her feet. She approached the bearded man as he waved, soon joining him. She looked on, quiet as the snow. A half moon shown through the window, making her look pale. She ordered a pink moscato to match her top. She didn't drink to get drunk anymore. That's a lot of what her and Martin used to do. Martin kept to his beer.

"Look, Marty, I don't know why I'm here, I don't know what you want from me," she said, trying to see what she used to love about Martin, but he didn't show it.

"I don't know. I missed you," he said, "I just want to know what you've been up to. Do you have a boyfriend?" he asked.

"I've had a few boyfriends. No one special, though," she replied, but it wasn't true. Amelia felt as though she was the one who wasn't special. She couldn't understand why. She hated that all of the fishermen and tourists gawked at her.

Her thoughts were soon interrupted by the crash of a symbol. A band was setting up to play on the one step stage and averted Amelia's attention. Martin watched with her, but couldn't hold his tongue, "You know I got married? When I was down in Oregon. Guess it wasn't meant to be. What was it I did that made us fall apart?"

"I don't know, Marty, I guess I was just young and foolish."

"You shouldn't blame yourself."

Amelia turned her eyes back toward Martin and soon, the band began to play. Martin talked over the music. He explained that he missed her warm smile and holding her hand. He apologized, slightly embarrassed by his sentimentality. Amelia ignored Martin, her ears and eyes were on the guitar player, who had just started a solo. The notes

he played filled the room and ears as if the music were a physical element, like oxygen. He could make the room heavy or light and played, not like he loved music, but like the music loved him. His body subtly moved to the rhythm and his eyes were locked in no particular direction, to everyone else, he might've looked lost, but he knew where he was. Some of the band members had already given Amelia an eye, but not this man. And that drew her to him. He was strange, like the sea, thin, but with broad shoulders and taller than most men. The music broke through Martin's words and the need to say anything in reply. Martin kept talking as they drank and clapped between songs. The last tune they played captured Amelia's attention the most. The band sent the evening off with "Stardust", a familiar tune that Amelia's father used to play for her on the trumpet. The melody was coming from the guitar; Amelia could hear her fathers' trumpet so clearly in her head and saw him standing short, with black hair and skin like hers.

Amelia remembered her father playing for her and her mother after school. He would practice all morning and go to the clubs at night. She finished off her glass of wine and toasted to her father, who gave her something no other man could. She found comfort there, in that song. She remembered being fifteen and spreading the ashes of her father over the cliffs above the ocean. The notes moved like his ashes in the wind. He had died in a car accident in the streets of New Orleans.

When the set was over, Martin struck up the courage after a number of drinks to finally say it.

"Amelia, I still love you. I'm out fishing right now, but the season's almost over. I can take my cut early and stay here, if you want. Here's the boat name and number. I'll only be here one more day, so please think about it and let me know. Goodnight. Thanks

for listening,” he said, before kissing her on the cheek and exiting the bar. Amelia stared at the folded piece of scrap paper, feeling like a mouse lost in a maze. She hated the pressure of falling in love, she didn’t want to. She didn’t know how.

Amelia approached the band and told them all how much she enjoyed the set. She spoke to the guitar player last, “Thank you,” she said.

“Well, my pleasure, miss,” he hesitated, while shaking her hand.

“Amelia.”

“Glad you enjoyed it, Amelia. Name’s Jim Green. Say, we’re just finishing off the leg of our tour of Alaska and we’re still looking for a place to stay tonight, you wouldn’t happen to know of a cheap motel around here?”

Amelia promised to tell him, if he stayed and had a drink with her. It was the first time she’d ever asked a man out for a drink. He was kind and laughed a lot, like the way Martin used too. She could feel comfortable in her own body with this man, and then she remembered Martin telling her she was beautiful. She couldn’t feel it then, but she was starting to feel it now. Green pulled out his guitar and Amelia sang a few songs with him, while he comped for her.

Afterwards, Amelia left it all behind, alone in her reverie. She gave the address of a cheap motel called Murphy’s Inn to the band. After Green discovered Amelia could sing, he invited her to finish the tour with them, but once again, she found herself doubting. She still had the number of Martin’s boat. She remembered dancing in this same moonlight when they first met on the beach, only the moon was whole and wondered if they would do that again. Martin never used to pressure her and was always so impulsive. That’s what she loved about him, but he got boring and life felt boring.

Now, she felt like she could go somewhere new, but she was scared and was content with living a familiar life, but Martin no longer felt familiar. She took a coin from her purse and inserted it into the pay phone slot. With the motel number in her head and Martin's number on paper, she started to dial.

Martin looked out from his boat; Thomas could be heard snoring below deck. He looked passed the moonlit bay to the islands in the distance, though he could not see them. The half moon stared down, like the shadow on Amelia's face, waiting for her to call.