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Annual One-Page Award Winner June 2019

Iris Ouellette

Judged by Etruscan author Renée E. D'Aoust

The cottage by the cliffside perched like a seabird, as if a slight change in the wind could compel it to dive into the sea, though unlike the bird it would come to rest there, too tired and groaning to spring out of the water again. She stood at the window, washing the dish, mug, and spoon she owned, watching, always watching. She had been watching for four months.

On the day that he left, he told her the trip would be short, just around the tip of the peninsula to check the crab traps, then down a little farther to the mainland to collect the mussels and oysters that glued themselves to the craggy rock. He'd sell what the sea offered there in town, and once his buckets were lighter and pockets heavier, he'd return. A month, maybe. Not four. Still, she waited.

She set her tableware upside down on the rag by the scrubbing basin to dry, though they'd always taste just slightly of salt. Her shawl hung by the door, the wool stiff but never wet for long. She wrapped it around her shoulders, pinning it in place with the plain silver brooch that had been a wedding gift from her late father. Many gifts were exchanged that day: the brooch, the family Bible from her mother, a small locket from her husband, and in exchange, a pocket watch for him, engraved with Psalm 107:23-24. They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.

Creeping down the narrow walkway cut into the cliffside generations ago, she was careful to touch each smoothed spot she'd touched the day before, afraid that a misstep would mean her certain death. She simply couldn't risk it. If he returned, his heart would surely break to see her there, shattered among the rocks. If, she thought, drawing her eyebrows close so they nearly kissed with worry. Not if, when.