

Caitlin Kelley

Hurricane

Natasha filled the tub with water—didn't want to get thirsty when the power went out. She was kneeling on the bath mat, taking a test sip, when Bernard poked his head in the door. She made a quiet slurping sound.

“Delicious?” he asked, wrinkling his nose. The front of his shirt was damp with sweat; he'd spent the morning moving their furniture away from the windows. “Oh yeah,” she replied, wiping her mouth, “It's the lavender bath salts that really make it.”

Bernard knelt down beside her. They leaned over the water, gazed at strange, pale reflections. He tucked his hand on the nape of her neck, cupping the skin beneath her thick braid.

With a jerk, he pushed her face into the water. Four seconds, five? He let her up when she thrashed her arms. She gasped and wet hair obscured her eyes. Her breath was ragged.

“Hahh, got you!” He laughed and grinned, but felt sorry when she began to cry. She pushed away his embrace, coughed down the hall, and clicked closed the lock on their bedroom door.

Later, in the flicker of eighteen tea lights, Natasha chopped yellow peppers—she'd hardly spoken all afternoon. Bernard peeled garlic, brushing papery skins into the compost pail. He looked down, said, “You know, I won't drink from that tub. Like a dog.”

Drowned

On a lumpy dorm futon, after he'd loved her for two years,
Bernard told Natasha about his older brothers.

How on a bright day, the eldest dove down into the sea and was dragged
under water's muddled, frothing surface by a powerful current.

Bernard explained how Hector and Marcus, skinny teenagers,
swam hard to reach their brother. How they too slipped below.

Days later the divers found all three boys, eyes pecked out,
clinging to each other in rigor on the ocean floor.

When the story was finished, Natasha rolled onto her stomach.
She propped chin between palms and was silent for a minute.

She said, "That would be us, you know. If the big wave crashed
over our heads right now, they would find us holding each other."

Bernard said she was crazy and morbid.
He was reluctant to touch her for the rest of the night.

Years later, at the grocery store, Natasha picked up a package of cod.
Peering over clammy fish flesh, she imagined its thin little mouth
gobbling up her eyeballs, and Bernard's too, at the bottom of the sea.

She threw the package by some salmon steaks, crossed
her arms tight, and thought, "I would not dive after him at all."

The half-full cart was abandoned.
Back at home she baked a chicken instead.