

The Remnants of Hurricane Bill Newport, RI

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We didn't expect the rain and with it
the scent of night jasmine rolling up from
South Florida in the mist and then in torrents.

We expected a clear blue day on a deck
under umbrellas, an afternoon of vodka,
talk of aging parents and aging lovers
against the bay's gentle backdrop.

But no one checked the weather report.

Vaguely, we remembered

Hurricane Bill offshore. Vaguely,

we understood the wind can shift suddenly
as we ran for shelter with all the other tourists.

We didn't expect a man who asked us

not to smoke, who regarded us as if

we were what Hurricane Bill blew in.

I have cancer, he said, and we outside to light up.

In the dimness, I caught in his eyes the limbs
of synchronized swimmers, the implosion of gardenias,
his first and last kiss – all washed up on the beach
when you reapplied your lipstick. He ate so carefully,

the look of death on him. Not that I had ever seen death
on the living. But there was something
about the way he poured cream into coffee
that made me grab the nearest hand.

We didn't expect his gratitude
when he came over to say goodbye.
I pulled him to me a second time and can still feel
his cheek against mine. But we never speak of him.