

Horizon

by Melanie Neale

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Flash Fiction

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From the balcony, the freighters and gambling boats looked like toys thrown across the ocean. They pointed in different directions, some steaming towards Fort Lauderdale or Miami and some at anchor, waiting for pilots. The Gulf Stream was a thin strip of blue on the horizon, and today it was calm. When there was a northerly wind, the swells humped up and you could see them in the distance like buildings or small hills. But today it was flat, and Casey thought of Bimini. A white sportfishing boat climbed a perpendicular line on the horizon. "It's hard to believe Bimini's so close, isn't it?" She leaned forward and folded her elbows onto the bar.

"I know," the man at her right said.

"Poor bastards," she said. "All they've had lately is bad luck."

"Maybe they're paying some kind of karmic debt." He lifted his beer as if he were toasting the tiny island less than fifty miles away. Casey wished she had a cigarette even though she didn't smoke.

They sat on the balcony above Boston's in Delray Beach, where they'd sat exactly a year before and talked to the locals about rental properties. Casey was leaving in a week but the man at her elbow didn't know that.

"I think it comes with the locale," she said. "I mean, it's an island that's sitting on the edge of everything...the Gulf Stream, the Bahamas, the banks. It's either the first or last place you stop, depending on whether you're coming or going."

"True," the man said, and she looked at his face and saw the face of every man who'd ever bought her a drink. "I'm glad we went there when we did," he said.

"I know." When they'd sailed to Bimini, they'd been chased down by a hurricane and had spent a week tied to the dock at Bimini Bluewater Marina, drinking rum and conserving water. A month later, the Compleat Angler caught fire and all the black and white photos of Hemmingway burned with it. Then there was the Chalks seaplane that left Bimini in early December, full of locals on their way to Miami to go Christmas shopping, a year's worth of savings in their pockets. It crashed right off the beach at Key Biscayne, killing everyone. And just this week there had been a police shooting and a riot. The locals burned the police headquarters, three Jeeps, and one boat.

Casey stirred her vodka, letting the ice melt. She'd slowed down in the past year—three drinks were more than enough. On A1A below them, the snowbirds drove up and down in their Cadillacs looking for parking. "We need to go back over there sometime," the man said.

"How? We don't have a boat."

"We can borrow one," he said. That was his problem—he thought there would always be a boat to borrow or money to borrow or luck to borrow. And with him there usually was.

"I don't want to go anywhere on a borrowed boat," Casey said.

"You're too proud."

She liked talking to him, even now, when they'd spent three years talking. She thought about other conversations with other men at other bars, some of the bars on the water and some of them tucked behind shopping centers or off of different highways. People crossed paths and hoped that their timing was right again and again. What nobody seemed to understand was that timing was something you created, not something that happened to you.

Casey ordered another drink. She could always call in to work tomorrow. Since she hardly ever got sick, she had plenty of days left. "What do you believe in?" she asked the man.

"Nothing, really," he said. "Except for you. I believe you're going to do whatever you want."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. That you're not going to let anybody get in your way. That if you think something needs to be changed, you'll change it." He twisted just a little bit to look at her, and took her right hand both of his and kissed it. The bartender set her drink on a fresh coaster.

"That's what you don't get," she said. "I don't always do what I want. I do what I have to do."

Out on the Gulf Stream, the white sportfishing boat fell away as it crossed the horizon, and two sailboats made their way south against the current.

