

# Hurricane Shutters

*by* Melanie Neale

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The thing that really gets you about the house is the hurricane shutters. They're up already, even though it's the end of May, because Buck's uncle is back in Rhode Island for the summer and he's prepped the house on Key Largo like Armageddon is coming.

While Buck's in the shower, you take another look at the photo of his wife on the fridge. Your gut reaction is that you want to be her friend, because she looks like someone who shares your views--an idealist. Her brown hair is pulled back in a ponytail. She's standing between Buck and his dad, at their family reunion in Newport, Rhode Island. *Damn yankees*, you think. You wonder why they decided to move to Florida. You say her name a few times: "Lenora..."

"What are you doing?" Buck stands in the cloud of steam that's coming from the open door of the bathroom.

"Thinking about dinner," you say. The sun hasn't set, but it's pitch dark in the house. You've turned on one lamp in the bedroom, and it casts light into the small den. The light from the bathroom meets it halfway. Buck's uncle's house is small, barely the size of a studio apartment, but it's perfect for the weekend. You and Buck aren't spending much time inside anyway—most of the time you're out freediving on the reef. Buck says he can't believe how deep you can go. He says that diving off of Newport is different: the water is cold and deep and the fish are bigger. They sneak up on you.

There's no point in taking the shutters down, and inside the house they give you the feeling that there's nobody else in the world but you and Buck.

Buck pours himself a Captain and Coke. "Aren't we going to eat that snapper you speared?" he asks.

"I want to go out," you say. You want to go out because it means he'll have to be with you in public. "Let's go to Lorelei's. I'll buy you a drink."

Buck can't say no. That's why he's not divorced yet. You slide your hands around his waist and bury your nose in his neck. His goatee scratches your face. You wish he still smelled like sweat and salt water.

At Lorelei's, you eat conch salad and drink more Captain Morgan while the sun throws light like a cast net over the mangroves. You wonder how many times Buck came here with his wife. After they moved down from Rhode Island, they came to the Keys almost every weekend. Unlike you and Buck, they had a history. "I don't want to move back to Newport," Buck says.

"You don't have to," you say. Lenora is up there and Buck thinks they can try to make it work, but he never says so. You just know it.

"Florida's not so bad. Think of all the diving and fishing and sailing we could do if you stayed," you say.

Buck doesn't let you pay for anything, which bothers you because you want to show him that you're a 21st century woman. You can cuss and clean a fish as good as any man, and you can pay your own bills.

On the ride home, Buck leans away from you and opens the windows like it's too small inside the truck, but once you're inside the shuttered house his hands are all over you. You lead him into the small bedroom, where the light is still on. He pulls you down onto the bed and you turn off the light. You know there's a full moon outside, and the stars are much brighter in the Keys than they are in Rhode Island, but you can't see anything inside the house because of the hurricane shutters.

Buck's body feels soft as you climb on top of him. He sucks in his breath and you want to bite his face—his cleft chin, his sad eyes. You kiss his neck instead.

"What are you doing?" Buck sits upright, pushing you off him.

"I..." You don't know what to say, because it's a stupid question.

"I'm sorry," Buck says.

"Oh. I thought..." You don't know what you thought.

Buck reaches for you and holds you and for a second you think he's about to cry, and your stomach turns upside down because you know this is a waste of your time.

