

After the Flood

by Susannah Felts

After the flood I heard thunder rolling in my dreams. I couldn't find Big Kitty. I called you from the motel and you said you'd be coming by to help. Noon at the latest. At two you called and said you were tied up with helping your mama. You've always been good to your mama, I respect that. Find a man that treats his mama good, Auntie Kris always said to me.

Bernice and Auntie Kris showed up. Poppy, too, after he got the water out his own basement. His back was out but he came. He caught me texting you, said leave that boy be, we don't need no more hands. We can handle this.

That TV you got me? Ruined. And the ionizer fan? Ruined too. All your clothes you left over here, all my work scrubs and weekend dresses too, soaked with that river stink water. I kept thinking bout all the dead creatures. Those piranas got loose, they said, down at the mall. I still couldn't find Big Kitty and I didn't want to think on it. Auntie piled the clothes in Hefty bags, said with a nice hot wash they'd be good as new, but I set em on the curb. Next door at Jimmy Frank's, and over at Miss Pearl's and Tessie's, same thing. House upon house, same thing, just different stuff. Our whole block was houses turned inside out. You should have seen the piles. You should have seen Tessie, just laughing and laughing, hauling out all those old R&B records. The yellow shirt folks got a kick out of her. *I quit laughing, I'll start crying*, she said. I sent you another text: Where r u? A little while later you wrote: Still over at Mama's. Be there soon.

Me and Bernice and Auntie Kris and Poppy stood at the back door, where the water had bust in, looking down the yard, where the water come up from. It had swallowed up the kitchen floor before I could throw some stuff in a bag and go. I got out faster than some. Now all we could see was river mud dried on the bushes down there

at the creek bank, six foot up, like a dirty tub ring on the leaves. The sun was powerful hot. Poppy had his hand on his back, I knew he was hurting. In my bedroom, I could smell mold fixing to bloom. I sprayed some of that cologne Bernice gave me last Christmas. Might as well use it, I figured. You always said you didn't like it.

Them yellow shirt folks showed up and said we had to rip the carpet out fast. They picked up the sofa, put it in the yard. Picked up the recliner, put it in the yard. They found your wallet behind the sofa. Soggy like everything else. What you been doing without your wallet? You ain't missed it? I just don't get it. I just don't get you. I sent a text: You missing your wallet? But you ain't answered. This yellow shirt girl stood there with the wallet in her hands.

That belongs to my fiancé, I told them. He's coming around later.

He's your fiancé? He should be coming around now, this woman said. Shouldn't he?

Well, I didn't know what to say to all that.

Then they took axes to the walls and just started ripping them up. They tore the walls out of my living room and started in on the baby's room. They threw the chunks of wall on the lawn. More piles. Wall crumblings everywhere. I know they was doing what had to be done, but it was hard to watch, you know. I went back in the bedroom with Auntie Kris and made myself busy emptying out drawers. They kept coming back there, asking me do I want to keep this and this and this. Baby clothes and toys and such. I say no. Let it go. Because you just never know. You don't want to take that kinda chance. I didn't want our baby breathing that mold.

The sun went down and Bernice had to go home to her kids, and Auntie Kris and Poppy was so tired. Go home, Poppy, I said. Drink a beer and take some aspirin. I sat on my back stoop, the one where

the water come in, and called and called for Big Kitty. But that cat ain't showed back up yet.

