

{ fork and spoon }



swimming with anaphylaxis

candice may

Your brother is sitting at the kitchen table sorting
peanuts into piles, grabbing fistfuls of Christmas
nuts from a yellow bowl, arranging cashews almonds
walnuts and Brazil nuts into patterns and spirals and
your mother says,

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“Goodness, isn’t that beautiful, how about trying some of these,” because she is always trying to put things into your mouth, taste new things, and last month she drove you

two hours to a children’s dietician who had a chattering set of wind-up teeth on his desk, and he asked you to point at laminated photos of foods you might like—“Would you eat this at home, too?”—and you selected ketchup white bread butter and cheese, your mother sighing, “She’s always been a picky eater,” so on this day, this morning in the trailer with linoleum floors and sepia sunlight streaming through homemade curtains, you say, “I don’t like it,” to the perfectly peeled Brazil nut in your mother’s hand, “No-no-no, I don’t like it,” to which your brother hums an exaggerated, “Mmm!” popping a handful of nuts into his mouth, chewing, “Mmm!” your mother agrees, and “How will you know if you don’t try?” and somehow you do know, but she says “Please,” and so you chew the Brazil nut and swallow, and you don’t remember what happens next—the anxiety confusion coughing rash slurred speech facial swelling trouble breathing low pulse wheezing difficulty swallowing itchy skin

swelling in mouth and throat nausea shock—all you remember is disappearing for a while, with an anchor wrapped around your neck, tugging you to the bottom of the ocean, landing on that shifting sand, and a humpback whale and her baby watching you with stern eyes, schools of angelfish and the ghosts of shipwrecked sailors playing the violin, feeding you scraps of plankton and seaweed and it’s good, you like it, you’d stay here longer but for the fact that your bones float to the surface, and you come up gasping, drenched in seawater and sweat, lying on the itchy plaid couch with a man beside you pressing a plastic mask over your face, tapping your cheeks, your wrists, feeling your pulse, saying, “She’s coming back,” and the first thing you see when you land back on this shore is your brother peeking at you from the kitchen, still chewing those bitter nuts, a handful of empty peanut shells in each fist, and you reach, you want to grab onto him like a life preserver but the man holds you down, saying, “Relax,” and so you just lie there, staring at your brother until you fall asleep—not a deep sleep, an empty sleep where you forget everything, even this story—and you will never really remember who almost drowned that day, or who ate the nut, or who your mother loved the most, or who tried to feed you, or who tried to save you. 🧐



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