Cold, Silent, and Dark

KARY ENGLISH

It is an hour past midnight, and I cannot sleep. Have not slept for a year of nights.

Dim light filters in through the blinds. The moon is thinner than a child’s fingernail, and the stars are pinpricks on the expanse of the velvet night. Their twinkling should be calming, but it isn’t. They stick out like slubs in silk, each one a tiny, itching annoyance.

Jason sleeps soundly beside me. He is not snoring, not snuffling or moaning. He does not toss or call out in his sleep. He is only breathing, but each draw and crash of it grates like sand against my skin. A streetlight buzzes on the corner, and in the distance, an occasional car passes. I bury my head under the pillow, but it does not lessen the assault of light and sound that steals away my sleep.

My only relief is in knowing that this is my last sleepless night.

Jason and I met a year ago at the marina. I was sunning myself on the deck of the Lorelei, earbuds in, singing along with my favorite opera.

He was the captain of a sculling crew, shuttling back and forth to the boathouse with armloads of oars and life jackets. He’d set the oars down, leaning on one of them and watching me until I looked up.
“Shouldn’t you be combing your hair on a rock?” he’d said. “Care for a drink?”

“Shouldn’t you be tied to a mast?” I answered back. He held up the oar. “It’s a very small boat. No mast.”

“Then it will have to be a very small drink.”

We both smiled. One month and several drinks later, we moved in together. I learned to scull; he let me drag him to Lucia di Lammermoor and Madame Butterfly. He asked me once how long I planned to stay.

“A year and a day,” I’d answered. “Maybe longer if the tide turns.”

That was eleven months ago. Three hundred thirty-four moon rises, twenty-two neap tides, and not a single hour of sleep.

The year passed at midnight, and the day begins at dawn.

In the morning, Jason will take me to the marina. He will surprise me with a chartered boat, lilies, and crystal champagne flutes. After we leave the harbor, we will stand near the rail, feeling the spray on our faces and cool, sea air filling our lungs. The wind will lift my hair and whip tendrils across my face and throat.

Jason will move closer, tucking a strand behind my ear and telling me how alive I seem when I’m on the water. He will take the hidden ring box from his pocket.

I will gasp, cover my mouth, let salt tears run down my cheeks. I will wrap my arms around him and whisper “Yes” against his ear.

He will slide the ring on my finger. His eyes will laugh, and he will ask me if the tide has turned.

I will laugh back, bubbling with true joy when I kiss him. The boat will lurch, and I will hold him tight, tighter, tightest. I will arch my back toward the cresting waves and pull him with me into the blue-green sea.

He will struggle, and when he does, he will finally understand that I am most alive in the water, not on it.

He will try to scream, but the green depths swallow all sound.
Cold, Silent, and Dark

We will drift ever downward until kelp surrounds us, and the last green light from above fades to a liquid, velvety black.

When we come to rest, he will be mine forever, down where it is cold, silent, and dark.

Only then I will sleep.

Kary English grew up in the snowy Midwest where she avoided siblings and frostbite by reading book after book in a warm corner behind a recliner chair. She blames her only high school detention on Douglas Adams, whose *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* made her laugh out loud while reading it behind her geometry textbook.

Today, Kary still spends most of her time with her head in the clouds and her nose in a book. To the great relief of her parents, she seems to be making a living at it. Her greatest ambition is to make her own work detention-worthy.