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After Ivan: three poems

Things I Lost in the Hurricane
Salvage
Crossing the Lawn

Louise Ells

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Review of 'After Ivan'

"Lurking within the strict parameters of belonging and longing, Ells carefully dissects the nature of extreme loss with three poems on the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan. The opener 'Salvage' is a surprise, but perhaps the most artful, as the focus of sex returns the idea of loss to human identity as opposed to the loss of property. In this manner, 'Salvage' is a narrative of debauchery and decay, but also holds its ground as a true signifier of 'primal' emotion. No matter how unbelievable the action might be; that's not the point of the poem, and I like that. 'Things I Lost in the Hurricane' is [...] immediate and complete, curious and sad."
~ Rebecca Bird

AFTER IVAN: Three Poems

Louise Ells

Things I Lost in the Hurricane

Fascia, eaves, roof, ceilings, windows,
doors, drywall, studs, the concrete slab
on which our home once sat. Cooker, washer,
dryer, fridge. Dog-eared *Lolita*. *Paradise Lost*, unopened
unread, and all our books and the shelves where they lived.
My grandfather's desk, our honeymoon bed,
the claw-foot tub big enough for two. A pair
of candlesticks we were saving for best, the silver
flute I thought I'd learn to play. Twenty-six shoes,
including two pairs of black stilettos; a gown
of ivory silk I'd promised my niece, its matching veil;
the navy blue dress I wore to dad's funeral. Nine hours
later, three blood clots, bright red.

Salvage

There was nothing else after the hurricane
but the stench of rotting garbage
and loss.

So,

we fucked.

I dragged off
your shorts, pulled you down
onto that mattress, carried
from the mangrove, dirty
and swamp-water wet.

In the shell
of our house,
under flapping blue tarp, I forgot
foreplay, sheets, showers.

I sucked you
and I swallowed:
just more heat, more salt.

Then you mounted me
from behind, my matted hair reins in your hands.
No curtains, but I didn't care who saw us –
I shouted as I climaxed,
confident, we still had this.

Crossing the Lawn

You need to know
I waded through hip-deep sewage, stagnancy
decaying puffer fish with dead eyes
every morning for five months
to reach the remains of the road, to walk into town
so I could fix your roofs.

Where I used to dance on soft grass my toes felt for glass
in the mud and rubble that tried to trip me up; I held
my breath against that water's thick
stink of rotting animals and rancid food
still the stench soaked into my skin.

The sun-baked seaweed and greaseoil slick
on top was impossible to see through.
Slime brushed against my bare legs
and I imagined bodies
un-earthed from their graves, bones
bleached white by the intense Caribbean sun.

Biography

Louise Ells survived Hurricane Ivan when it struck Grand Cayman, her home at the time. She now lives in Cambridge, where she is pursuing a Creative Writing PhD and teaching fiction and poetry at Anglia Ruskin University. Her thesis comprises *Lacunae*, a collection of thematically linked short stories, and research examining Alice Munro's narrative strategies in *Dear Life*.