

### [30-Year Drought](#) [1]

December 18, 2017 [Flash Fiction](#) [2]

[Sex](#) [3]

[Surrealism](#) [4]

### Story by Abigail Uhrick



My thirst for water brought me to him. This ache between my ribs, like a divining rod, leads me.

I have waited before, and I am waiting now. I will breathe, while my skin grows small, dry cracks like everything earth, while I wait for him to become conscious of someone's weight across his legs. My chest will throb toward his chest, my

mouth toward his mouth, until he knows that it is me, and that I have come to drink.

You may wonder how it is that I came to this point. You may be curious about the white space between my pointed toes and land, the way I take air in and let it out as if I am always exhaling the heavy. I will tell you some things. Others, I will not. Some, you may guess or create for yourself, in your room, alone at dusk, the blinds drawn.

I may be a descendant of the women who lived under the sea, those beauties of folklore whose long red locks shone like sun off copper, who sharpened their fins with handfuls of salt. I've caught whispers that I am one of the final frays from a long rope of women who seduced men to the sandy bottom to stay. Only they could never stay—every pore becoming a cup half-full, but collectively too cumbersome to be buoyant.

These women wore the tally of unrequited lusts flat against their bare chests in the shape of shells—and in the shells were the voices of those who moaned like the waves anxious for shore. As do I. They may have made their way onto land to secure better odds. And here am I.

Don't worry. This is not a tale of walking fish. This is a love story.

In my real life, I treat things. All sorts of things. I treat windows and patients, guests and screenplays. I treat abrasions and rugs, children and crops. I have the tools to treat almost anything: coping saws, paintbrushes, matches, lipstick, cooking spray, cotton balls, coins.

But, of course, the most important thing I treat is water. This is where I found him—all hard hat and blue jumpsuit, his eyes the color of drenched sand. His steel-toed boots pointed where my stockings might have been scales. Then something jumped in my chest like live bait, and my throat shrunk dry. He stood there, a saturated sponge, an oasis in this desert of air. I held my clipboard tight to my middle, and he looked at the pipes all around us and said, "Where's the leak?"

This is how all good love stories start—with overflow and condensation. You already know the in-between: the indiscernible increments of *drying out*, the evaporation that ultimately leaves uncrossable space. You have seen it underground, when you are visiting certain amphibians, through the thick glass walls that hold the water in.

And this one will end, like many others, at the bottom of any ocean, forgotten. It will not be different from a hundred other sailor's tales. It will end just as you imagined it once behind closed eyes—with the flip of a tail and a lock of streaming hair vanishing like a rivulet of blood diluting slowly into dark water.

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Abigail Uhrick has worked as a technology consultant for a defense contractor; an editor for a niche publisher; and an instructor of business, technical, rhetorical, and creative writing at colleges in California and Michigan. She currently teaches in Northern Michigan. Her work has been published in *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Axolotl*, and *4ink7*.

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### Links:

- [1] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/30-year-drought>
- [2] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/talkingwriting-categories/flash-fiction>
- [3] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/sex>
- [4] <https://www.talkingwriting.com/tw-channels-and-categories/surrealism>
- [5] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jasonpier/6474864815/>
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