



zero
monsters
by kaitlin wickstrom

We all thought Natalie was the most beautiful, besides Marigold, whom everyone knew believed she was the most beautiful. Secretly, everyone thought that they were the most beautiful, except for Marigold, who thought it out loud. Leanna thought Kim was the second most beautiful, next to Natalie. Natalie thought Marigold was the most beautiful and then herself. I thought Marigold was the most beautiful and then Natalie.

Natalie was the most beautiful because we all decided that we liked her lips and thighs, which were thick and smooth. Walking and talking, she looked like she was inviting you to some spectacular event. We kept quiet, but stared, as she mowed her lawn in her bathing suit in the summer. Her legs sweating with effort, the grass cutting at her skin. She smiled at our husbands and was sweet to the touch as well.

At our barbeque she wore the mother's white lace dress. She greeted us enormously and kissed us each on the cheek with her warm meat lips, and lingered for a second, on our backs, with her warm heat hands.

Marigold too, looked exceptionally beautiful at the barbeque. She pinned her hair back, so we could cut our steaks on her cheekbones. We wouldn't feel weird about it either, because her skin was browned and rosy in the center parts. Her husband wouldn't mind at all, because he liked to cut his tension on her ass.

Carmon showed up late, reminding everyone that Natalie was the most beautiful. Her hair was pulled up in an ugly bun, just in case she had to run away, or stop her children from sticking their fingers in unfit holes, or consuming things that weren't meant for their mouths. She smiled to compensate for her lateness, her ugliness, tiredness, and her husband. She smiled to compensate for her husband who was smile-compensating for his ugly wife. We all then talk-compensated for Carmon's ugliness, her husband's rudeness, our acknowledgment, and Natalie and Marigold's beauty. Today, Marigold might have been the most beautiful, but it's hard to tell with these sorts of things.

The table was set lavishly with almost everything we wanted. Potato salad, baked beans, corn bread,

strawberries, corn on the cob, fried brussels sprouts, fruited Jello, and so much more. Marilee and Janet brought dessert. Ferra, like Carmon, came empty handed, reminding us all to look at Natalie, who brought three side dishes and sangria.

We hesitated longer this time than usual, it seemed, because I think we all really liked Natalie. She was so lovely after all. Strong, too, like a leader, and we were proud of her.

But eventually, inevitably, we all became too hungry. Natalie was far too beautiful, and it had become too much for us, before we were even friends. So Leanna, Carmon, and I invited Natalie into Leanna's kitchen to pick out her very own knife. Smiling, Natalie picked out the loveliest, sharpest, tiniest knife in the kitchen and handed it to Leanna to rinse in the sink. Natalie's little fingers reminded us in private that she was in fact the most beautiful, and by far the best decision. We apologized to Natalie profusely, explaining to her that everyone would be so upset and would be starving if we were to continue the way things were. Knife in hand, Leanna, Carmon, and I looked at one another and agreed: monsters are one of a kind.

Leanna, Carmon, and I carved everyone a serving of Natalie's meat. There was so much to go around, which was appealing and promising. Marigold, pinning her hair back up, carved her husband's piece on her cheekbone. The juice dripped down her chin and then her bosom. We all laughed to compensate the plentiful meat and our insatiable hunger. Then we devoured her, ravenously, ripping every piece away.

After we were finished, we drank wine slowly. We were much too full for the dessert Natalie had prepared. Marigold sat outside of our circle, smoking a cigarette, worrying. I was worried too, it was obvious, Marigold was next. I looked at her for a long moment, trying to apologize.

"I think we can all agree now," Leanna said to all of us, initiating a toast.

We all agreed, and raised our glasses to Marigold, our most beautiful friend.

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