

Underwater

The newspapers said Betania didn't overflow, but that's a lie. It was the worst flood we've ever had. Believe me, we who live by the Magdalena's shore know what we're talking about. I woke up feeling a weight pressing on my chest and holding my body down against the mattress. It didn't hurt, no, it was rather numbing. My bedroom door was open and I saw her sleeping on the sofa. Her hair was dancing on its own, performing tricks I'm sure she never taught it. Behind her, the coffee table and a lamp floated by. That's when I realized we were flooded. You see, clear water had filled our bungalow up to the ceiling and that quiet morning it was perfectly still. I know that look, you don't believe me. I don't blame you, I first put the pressure on my chest down to a rough night. But I swear on my fingertips that never unwrinkled it happened.

It was exciting at first. The windows broke from the strength of the current and the fish swarmed in. I became really good at catching trout. I allowed my body to sway lazily, careful to avoid disturbing the rhythm of the water, waiting for the schools to swim by. When they did, I tickled one's belly until it went limp, then stored it in the drawers of my floating chiffonier. But novelty wore off. The weight seemed to tighten around my chest by the day. And then there was the silence.

She had never been a talkative one, I must admit, but the flood didn't help. If we opened our mouths to speak, only bubbles and a gurgling sound would come out. After a while we just stopped trying and got used to the undulating silence. You see, with time one gets used to anything, and we had plenty of it. We were underwater for five or six months – I'm not entirely sure, they went by in a blur. Whenever I tried to move the water around me swirled and distorted my vision. I got used to seeing my bedroom walls breaking and merging back together. It was dizzying, I was nauseous pretty much all the time, and tired. My arms and legs felt heavy and walking against the current from the bedroom to the front door took an enormous amount of energy and about ten minutes.

I started missing the bus and, eventually, I simply didn't bother trying to catch it. I stopped showering – I didn't really need to. All the days seemed to blend into one long, fuzzy, cold bath. I stopped brushing my hair as well and the once weightless waves turned into nests

and filled with bream eggs. You should have seen them hatch! It felt like my head was birthing an entire constellation of white dwarfs.

But she didn't seem too impressed. She would spend her days lying on the sofa and looking out through our broken windows, maybe trying to spot one of those elusive and smooth-shelled river turtles or maybe avoiding my eyes. We stopped eating together because our dining table floated to the ceiling and, soon after, I stopped eating altogether. Every soaked mouthful of fish and rice tasted like soil, it made me feel like throwing up. I lost weight fast and the water gained it faster. I thought it would be a matter of time until it fractured my ribcage and flooded my lungs. I let it anchor me to the bed, where I spent my days counting carp and staring at her on our living room sofa until one day I didn't see her. The sofa's cushions had floated away and its wooden skeleton now whirled with our broom, our dresser and our night table. I tried calling for her. The bubbles that came out of my mouth disturbed a shoal swimming north. I think I cried but it's hard to be sure, you can't feel the tears if your cheeks are already wet. The next morning I woke up to find the misplaced furniture piled up over the sofa and a dozen fish flailing on the floor. You see, the water had gone like it came, overnight.