

# Flooding

## ONE

We were working together. Not in the way that we would have chosen, had we been given a choice, but it was nice to be working together, and it felt good to help. This help was unpleasant work.

The carpet was drenched and had to be torn up and thrown out- [REDACTED]. The non-upholstered furniture was safe to keep and use, [REDACTED] but it looked terrible.

We rented a dumpster to throw everything out into, but because of demand, [REDACTED] they only delivered the dumpster several days later. In the meantime, we threw [REDACTED] the soaked carpet into the drive, where it shed dirty water down the slight slope, so much so that standing water was visible in the midst of all the sodden gravel and grass and dirt of the drive. [REDACTED] Her cat had died in the flood too. [REDACTED] And her surgery, which had been planned well in advance for just the next week.

This was a while back, they don't do those surgeries as much anymore. But for some reason [REDACTED] they had to pull some of her lower intestine out of her abdomen, and suture it in place. This was temporary, she said. Again, I forget what or why. Just that, as we were trying to tidy up, having removed everything, cleaned everything, brought in the new refrigerator ([REDACTED]) she was hobbling around on pain killers, trying to lie down and rest, but we had put her soaked mattress, couch, and wing chair out in the dumpster.

It had taken both of us, [REDACTED] hating the circumstance, [REDACTED] finding satisfaction in the work, and the help, and the togetherness, to heave the dripping couch, the dripping chair, the dripping mattress up and over the edge of the dumpster. [REDACTED] because of the shortage, they brought us a dumpster much bigger than we needed, so we had to lift things much higher than we should have had to. The couch was the worst, getting one end up on the edge of the dumpster [REDACTED] and then both lifting the other end, and pushing. Realizing too late that the long couch spanned the width of the dumpster, so we had to back [REDACTED] up and push it in at an angle.

Her house was much nicer, after the flood. It was what she needed, to do away with that carpet. Otherwise I think she would have clung to it. [REDACTED]

The yards also became nicer. I remember learning as a young girl that floodplains were the most fertile places in the world. But this flood came from the storm drains and into and out of the basements. They said there was raw sewage in it, chemicals from broken propane tanks and flooded car engines. And yet, somehow, her yards and privet hedges came alive. And once she recovered from the surgery, but still had her appliance, she took to pruning. Very slowly, in a bathrobe draped over what had been normal clothes [REDACTED] but had been demoted to pajamas. Her appliance was frequently visible when she reached up, or across the top of a hedge. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I could tell you were repulsed, but hiding it well.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

The mosses that grew on her patios and walkways changed color afterward. And her moods were endless, so [REDACTED] that when we [REDACTED] came over, we would ban her from her house. And she would wander and pace outside, fingering the edge of her appliance and inspecting the mosses. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Once, while we had banned her for screaming something terrible [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] we went upstairs and took a bath together. She was out in the yard, occupying herself with pruning, and she was used to, and approving of, our intimacy, so it seemed simple to take a bath together at her house. [REDACTED] Her new, energy efficient, water heater never made the water hot enough [REDACTED], so the bath went from warm to intolerably cold in minutes. We ran more hot water into the bath to compensate until it was sloshing down the back-up drain on the side regularly. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we read our separate books in the bath, running hot water and sloshing it back out. Despite this, we managed to steam up the bathroom mirror, which pre-dated the flood and was beautiful. Eventually she came up, less moody, and sat on the horrible tile next to us, telling about how she wasn't sure how often to clean the bathroom now that she had her appliance, and you hid your disgust at this well, though it did cause you to leave me in the tub prematurely, sloshing the water as you did so, and leaving me in a suddenly-adequately-sized tub of greywater, folding over the corners of my pages, so that I could remember them while trying to ignore her repetitive 'ins and outs' jokes about her appliance.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

At the end of the summer, the procedure was reversed. And after a few more woozy days of pain meds, she returned to her usual self, minus the appliance. Which was the same as herself with the appliance, but she would go swimming. And her moods were slightly less intense. And her yards returned to their pre-flood state of apathetic suffering. [REDACTED] she would only sleep on the new couch. The new bed was too soft or too hard, depending on which morning after which night she had spent on the couch. Her bed became instead the refuge of the feral cat that she took in, which also repulsed you, understandably.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The flood came, because of the all the rains and the unseasonably warm weather, and then it stayed, everywhere.

[REDACTED] One day, weeks later, the streets were only damp, and then they were dry. And then, weeks later still, everything was dry. So much so, that nothing moved anymore.

We had planned on throwing a dinner party. [REDACTED] And we made the food [REDACTED] several days in advance, taking breaks only to clean the property and the guest cabins. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It was an abandoned resort, in a town that had previously [REDACTED] been the cosmopolitan pride of the region. But when the rest of the country finally caught up to this resort's progress and enlightenment, the resort had gone backwards. It had become swampy and angry. It closed, eventually, in anger. Though what likely did it in, more than the anger or the end of lumber, was the end of cholera. The end of un-airconditioned summers. The end of the sewage getting pumped into the same flooding river that supplied the drinking water for the valley. Once the infant mortality rate dropped, people stopped going to the resort. But now, without cholera, but with some uninvited acquaintance whose grandparents owned the sinking resort, we wanted to throw a dinner party.

And so we planned an all-salt dinner, with no water served. We had grain alcohol in large pitchers, [REDACTED] with pretzels and lemons and lemon pepper and canned soups prepared in large quantity over sterno pots. And afterward we reclined on towels on the grown lawn and talked about ticks and scratched our elbows and knees. [REDACTED] we tried to continue as long as possible, though our guests despised us, and our host (the acquaintance whose family owned the resort) also despised us, and as our skin lost its turgor... with mosquitos in our ears. Guests left. Hosts left. Someone drank lake water, was ill, and left.

Cars gradually abandoned the drive, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] The spring-time incubated feverish throughout May, and we laid in the grown lawn, angrily, arguing about who didn't listen to whom. Our hands and feet tingled, buzzed, went numb, didn't move.

We spit and pissed, when we could walk at all, into the river. It all came out as powder, and smelled like citrus.

Years later, when the same resort flooded, it was a new series. We had each already flooded over and over again, and had finally, finally, dried up, and didn't move. And when the flood moved out of the resort and into the rest of the valley, we could only watch. We sat on the front steps of the house, [REDACTED] up in the hills, [REDACTED] and watched the stores and restaurants fill up. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

We started running the tap through folded cloth. Our knees became stiff.

After the valley flooded, and even after it dried, there was work, finally. Not work for money, though. The

tattoo shops re-opened after a certain point, they had the least amount of cleaning to do after the flood. People (not us) paid to have tattooed these spidery concentric circles around the red bumps that came before the flooding so that they could measure the growth. None of the tattoo parlors charged for the first two weeks. Any tattoo that anyone wanted was free. Everyone got the same tattoo. Every business reopened selling for free only the thing that it had already sold most of. Everything returned, water damaged, with a similar version of what it had always had.

My leukorrhea returned. The resort, with less buildings, was returned to us. Again abandoned by hosts and left to our projects, we turned the horse stalls, built of river rocks, into handball courts [REDACTED].

Prior to all the preceding, of course, things were much more normal. And it was easy to remember this. It was easy to remember [REDACTED] that the salt dinner was a [REDACTED] tribute to a woman that I had known when I was still a girl. She had died six months after we had met, of causes unrelated to her diet, though I think her diet would have killed her had the bone infection not. She ate mostly lemon salt. She would lick the area of her left hand which was just behind the knuckle of her index finger, shake lemon salt on it, and then lick again until the salt was gone. And then repeat. She would do this for hours, while watching television [REDACTED] on the twin bed in the room that we shared. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

After the ordeal of the salt dinner, long after, you would lie sprawled on the couch, drinking water, with coins pooling out of your pockets. [REDACTED] The vacuum was ruined in the flood, and we never replaced the broom after we wore its bristles down to stumps, sweeping all the sand and silt out.

[REDACTED]

Now, later, but now, as you adjust yourself further into the sofa, and feel the graininess of residual silt against your back, pushing the coins deeper and through the bottom, and I am telling you that you are exhausted. The sofa is exhausted, it's rose upholstery is splitting [REDACTED]. You are joking about wanting your own appliance, about how you need it now. And I joke about how sloppy you are now. You are wading along the walk in boots and large pants. Your elbows are flapping at your sides. You are telling me that how you are now

is how you have always been, and I am agreeing and pressing my fingers where your freckles are not, and where your single, all-encompassing freckle is now, feeling the adhesive.

I sit on a wooden chair, on a bench, on the edge of the table, on the edge of the counter, on the toilet, on the edge of my bed, on the bathroom tile. You lie down on the sofa, on grass, on a tick, on coins, on the center of the bed, on the sodden bathmat. Your blankets and my blankets are all getting much larger. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The mattress is getting softer, and you are sinking [REDACTED] through it. The valley is flooding [REDACTED] and we are going to work together, but not for money. We rake wet brush into the handball courts. We are looking at the worms, dead and otherwise. We are having an enormously formative experience, and we are telling each other elaborate stories about the experience, and we are mostly focusing on the events which are preceding it. We are making a mountain of carpet pieces on the drive, and the water is fleeing the mountain. We are overwhelmed with work, and we are taking baths.