

Flood Season

By Mia-Francesca Jones



I heard rushing water in my dream, but I awoke in Victoria
where the weather was mild.

In the north, the heat pressed heavy,
my brother lost, his family flooded in.
Screens filled with rising tides:
water in kitchens, highways drowning.

In a flash flood, time collapses.
Those who stand outside ask:
Why didn't they leave?
But time moves differently in disaster.

My sister-in-law pulled the children by their ankles,
grasped two birth certificates,
left the others behind.

She drove through water toward higher ground
while my brother waded back,
his tattooed arms
rowing against the current.

All our lives,
it has been sink or swim.
Now, his body has finally become a boat.

A hydrograph maps the river's path, but in flood times,
it rises too fast to be known.

So much of what we love
clings to the water's edge.

I sift through archival documents
Looking for fragments of past storms:
houses ripped from their roots,
timber crushed like wheat,
gardens torn from the earth,
pineapples blown out of the ground.

Water grinds against the past, pulling old ghosts to the surface.

The river ran shotgun
from the front to the back of his house,
writing itself into a new archive with:
a floating cat,
a fridge spitting sparks,
dogs up to their necks in water
drowning in their loyalty.

At Christmas, I flew north
to a town drenched bare.
Through his suburb, the streets stood lined
with the wreckage of lives.
Fences tangled with seaweed,
walls stained with water's retreat,
wooden furniture in rotting piles.

The house was marked *red zone*,
insurance beyond reach.

The flood took what it wanted, left behind what it did not.
Silt-filled plastic toys,
a cane toad belly-up,
photographs lost in the muck.
My brother measured the water by his own body—
Chest-high, he said.

Mangroves hold the land in place, but they, too, are slipping away,
becoming dislodged with rising seas.

There was sickness after the flood. Infection in the air,
soil-borne, hungry, bacterial,
brought up by water through the ground
entering through a break in the skin.

We washed and washed the children's hands.

The house will be torn down,
Still full of unopened Christmas presents and the bugs the cops left in the walls.
They marry days after my father dies, in a seaside chapel,
with a tide of grief rolling in.

A year later, they live in a new house
that feels too bright, too clean.
The boys wear donated clothes, uncanny in their own skin,
Machan's dirt washed from their hands, sand emptied from their shoes.

What they saved have become
mud-covered memories
sitting in the garage, waiting to be washed:

a Jaguar whistle I brought back from Mexico ,
our grandfather's riding goggles—
cleaning them feels like embalming the body of a life left behind.

I return with my daughter,
but find myself distant from this life.
I once dreamed of moving home with my children
who would run barefoot in the tropics,
wake to the hum of frogs,
breathe in the salt of the shore.

But the heat blooms on her skin,
red and raw—
so we stay inside.

The water has spoken. It will rise again.

Water is vessel, is flood, is ruin.

And in my mother's house this wet season, the bathtub is filled,
a quiet well for drinking
in the wake of the next storm

but these waterways are connected
the sea the river the bath
and when on an island
I speak to a woman who counts fish

and she says the coral that turned white
in that unusually warm La Niña
has begun to change again
regaining back its colour
scattering the ocean floor with
red coral love apple cinnabar buff

orange sienna yellow grape hyacinth

the storm warning passes
my mother drains the bath
the sky turns from
an ash grey to a wine yellow

and then a calm and hopeful
flax flower blue.

Image: "[Flooded Streets South Townsville](#)" (CC BY 2.0) by [Rob and Stephanie Levy](#)