

The Flood

Paul Verrept

An extract

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Translator Laura Watkinson

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You furnished the house. And it turned out beautifully.

When I stepped into your rooms, the world fell into place. It was only then that I saw how the things were meant to be, the way they are now arranged in your light spaces.

When I sat, walked, lay, lived in the house... it fitted me like a perfectly tailored jacket.

And so did your stillness. Your silence, which had always attracted me. As a place where I can stay.

Together we sit at the big window. In silence. Looking at the sea.

Then you take me to our bed. And you make love to me.

I have surrendered. A boat adrift, defenceless in the swell.

Sometimes I think I have never wanted anything else.

The house, the sea, and us.

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The sky turns bright red in the first autumn days.

We are surprised by the colours. We wonder if we have ever seen them before.

We look through the big window at the sea.

At the bottom of the dune that our house stands on, the water moves closer.

We sit side by side. My little finger touching yours. We do not move. Our stillness stops time.

The waves come in and then retreat.

In the distance: a few lights from boats.

The setting sun casts long shadows over the beach.

Nothing else. You and I.

You do not look to the side.

We do not have to look at each other. We know the sight by heart. In our hearts. I know your gaze, which is staring into the evening.

A gaze in which the world dissolves.

Until you turn to me as if you are only just noticing me.

Then I dissolve in your gaze.
That's how it happens every evening. That's how our night has begun for years.
Any moment now you will turn towards me. You will look at me and wait until I turn my face towards you.
I can't wait for you to turn your head. Come on.
Look at me. It's time.
I'll take you with me. Take me.
The sea will soon be wavering between ebb and flow. Lay me down just before the water.
I turn my head.
See your profile. Not calm as I expect your face to be, but with an uneasy twist to your mouth.
You are looking at one single point: a place on the beach? Or in the water?
Something that demands all your attention. Something that means nothing else exists now.

Now I look too.
I look with you. My gaze glides over the landscape, in search of what is pulling you in like that.
Longing to join you. To be where you are now.

Now I see it. We see the same thing. But it does not bring me to you.
There are five bodies on the beach, lying close together.
They are lying in the surf. They are not moving.
Not animals that have washed ashore, but people.
I want to cling to you but I freeze.
You are piercing the darkness, which is falling quickly now.
With one swish, I close the curtains.
I take your hand, and we walk to our bedroom.
In the bed we lie still, side by side. On our backs, staring at the ceiling.
We hear the sea, the rush of the waves. As if nothing has happened.
Undisturbed, fish swim, crabs crawl. Undisturbed, seaweed grows.

Why are they lying here? Why didn't they wash ashore on some other beach?
'Should we go and take a look?' 'Tomorrow.'

I wake up early. Earlier than you, as always.
I see you lying in a position that is so familiar to me.
Usually in the morning I stop and look at your face. At the relaxation of sleep, which makes you look younger, reminding me of a snowy landscape before the world has left its marks.
This time I leap up, hurry to the window to see the beach.
The bodies have disappeared.
The beach is untouched. I can forget it all, like a bad dream.
Everything is as it was yesterday.
The room is just as spacious and bright.

I hear you.
You wake up, surprised that I'm not lying beside you. Maybe your hand is seeking my body.
Maybe you are opening your eyes right now.

Suddenly you are standing naked beside me. You are looking at the sea.

'They've been taken away,' I say.

You don't say anything, seem annoyed by my words, by my voice in the silent beginning of the day. As if I am bothering you.

You give me a look that I remember only from long ago, from someone else.

You walk away from me.

I hear running water, you're having a shower. On other days I would walk into the bathroom now, to be with you for a moment, to glance at your back or your buttocks.

You come back into the room, wearing your bathrobe.

We eat breakfast. I notice that you do not say anything.

What should I do? I don't know how to say anything, not now.

You look contentedly outside, fetch your swimming trunks and a towel, and you suggest that we should go swimming, as we always do on warm days.

I'm shocked that you want to go into water where dead people were floating just now.

I want to say to you that you have to stay here. That we have to do something.

That we can do anything now, anything, except for go into the water.

That you can ask me anything but not...

What else can I do but fetch my swimsuit too, tie up my hair, and go with you?

You run across the beach, youthful and happy, dive straight through a wave into the water.

The sea is calm, like a naughty child that is keeping a low profile. As if it wants to deny something.

You swim away from me with regular strokes, while I turn to stone.

Someone underwater might touch me at any moment.

You look out of the window every day.

I sit beside you.

I don't look at the horizon any longer, but at the beach.

No one washes ashore. 'Everything is normal.' I could fit back into my slow and sluggish life.

Now and then I turn my head, hoping to see some sign of confusion or horror on your face.

But I see nothing.

Sometimes I think the muscles in your cheeks tighten for a moment, that they harden, as if you are clenching your teeth together.

But maybe you used to do that before too.

You sit there in your white ironed shirt, your hands beside you, absorbed in watching.

At moments like these I often had the feeling that I could read your thoughts, that we shared our thoughts.

Now I shy away from what I suspect is inside your head.

You open the window and I let out a cry.

- What's wrong?

- We have to go and look.

- You go ahead.

- Come with me.

I'm staying here. Nothing happened.

This is not us. This is the conversation of other people. This is another man and another woman. This is not us. They have taken our voices and our bodies. These are people who just happened to meet. This is not us!

I stay beside you, horrified.

The air from outside blows into the house.

Maybe you're right, maybe everything is the same. The salty air overwhelms me.

Maybe we have nothing to do with the other world, maybe it just entered our field of vision for no more than a moment and then disappeared.

Maybe it only almost touched us just for an instant.

You close the window to keep out the cold, and I see us standing there, reflected in the glass, with the sea washing through us.

I grasp your hand. More firmly, more desperately than usual.

You put your hand on my shoulder.

Maybe we can choose. 'Nothing happened.'

Relieved, I set the table. We eat. I cast another glance at the beach. We go for a walk in the dunes. It is cold, and after a while it starts to rain softly, but it doesn't bother me.

The sea remains closed and silent, revealing nothing.

I become who I was. In the evening I look at the sea, beside you, until your face turns towards me and I dissolve in your gaze. That is how I live.

Again. Day after day. Night after night.

Until the child comes.

Until the child washes ashore.
