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The terror, which would not end for another twenty-eight years — if it ever did end — began,

so far as I know or can tell, with a boat made from a sheet of newspaper floating down a

gutter swollen with rain.

The boat bobbed, listed, righted itself again, dived bravely through treacherous whirlpools,

and continued on its way down Witcham Street toward the traffic light which marked the

intersection of Witcham and Jackson. The three vertical lenses on all sides of the traffic light

were dark this afternoon in the fall of 1957, and the houses were all dark, too. There had been

steady rain for a week now, and two days ago the winds had come as well. Most sections of

Derry had lost their power then, and it was not back on yet.

A small boy in a yellow slicker and red galoshes ran cheerfully along beside the newspaper

boat. The rain had not stopped, but it was finally slackening. It tapped on the yellow hood of

the boy's slicker, sounding to his ears like rain on a shed roof . . . a comfortable, almost cozy

sound. The boy in the yellow slicker was George Denbrough. He was six. His brother,

William, known to most of the kids at Derry Elementary School (and even to the teachers,

who would never have used the nickname to his face) as Stuttering Bill, was at home,

hacking out the last of a nasty case of influenza. In that autumn of 1957, eight months before

the real horrors began and twenty-eight years before the final showdown, Stuttering Bill was

ten years old.

Bill had made the boat beside which George now ran. He had made it sitting up in bed, his

back propped against a pile of pillows, while their mother played Für Elise on the piano in

the parlor and rain swept restlessly against his bedroom window.

About three-quarters of the way down the block as one headed toward the intersection and

the dead traffic light, Witcham Street was blocked to motor traffic by smudgepots and four

orange sawhorses. Stencilled across each of the horses was DERRY DEPT. OF PUBLIC WORKS.

Beyond them, the rain had spilled out of gutters clogged with branches and rocks and big

sticky piles of autumn leaves. The water had first pried fingerholds in the paving and then

snatched whole greedy handfuls — all of this by the third day of the rains. By noon of the

fourth day, big chunks of the street's surface were boating through the intersection of Jackson

and Witcham like miniature white-water rafts. By that time, many people in Derry had begun

to make nervous jokes about arks. The Public Works Department had managed to keep

Jackson Street open, but Witcham was impassable from the sawhorses all the way to the

center of town.

But, everyone agreed, the worst was over. The Kenduskeag Stream had crested just below

its banks in the Barrens and bare inches below the concrete sides of the Canal which

channelled it tightly as it passed through downtown. Right now a gang of men — Zack

Denbrough, George's and Bill's father, among them — were removing the sandbags they had

thrown up the day before with such panicky haste. Yesterday overflow and expensive flood

damage had seemed almost inevitable. God knew it had happened before — the flooding in

1931 had been a disaster which had cost millions of dollars and almost two dozen lives. That

was a long time ago, but there were still enough people around who remembered it to scare

the rest. One of the flood victims had been found twenty-five miles east, in Bucksport. The

fish had eaten this unfortunate gentleman's eyes, three of his fingers, and most of

his left foot. Clutched in what remained of his hands had been a Ford steering wheel.

Now, though, the river was receding, and when the new Bangor Hydro dam went in

upstream, the river would cease to be a threat. Or so said Zack Denbrough, who worked for

Bangor Hydroelectric. As for the rest — well, future floods could take care of themselves.

The thing was to get through this one, to get the power back on, and then to forget it. In Derry

such forgetting of tragedy and disaster was almost an art, as Bill Denbrough would come to

discover in the course of time.

George paused just beyond the sawhorses at the edge of a deep ravine that had been cut

through the tar surface of Witcham Street. This ravine ran on an almost exact diagonal. It

ended on the far side of the street, roughly forty feet farther down the hill from where he now

stood, on the right. He laughed aloud — the sound of solitary, childish glee a bright runner in

that gray afternoon — as a vagary of the flowing water took his paper boat into a scale -model

rapids which had been formed by the break in the tar. The urgent water had cut a channel

which ran along the diagonal, and so his boat travelled from one side of Witcham Street to

the other, the current carrying it so fast that George had to sprint to keep up with it. Water

sprayed out from beneath his galoshes in muddy sheets. Their buckles made a jolly jingling

as George Denbrough ran toward his strange death. And the feeling which filled him at that

moment was clear and simple love for his brother Bill . . . love and a touch of regret that Bill

couldn't be here to see this and be a part of it. Of course he would try to describe it to Bill

when he got home, but he knew he wouldn't be able to make Bill see it, the way Bill would

have been able to make him see it if their positions had been reversed. Bill was good at

reading and writing, but even at his age George was wise enough to know that wasn't the only

reason why Bill got all A's on his report cards, or why his teachers liked his compositions so

well. Telling was only part of it. Bill was good at seeing.

The boat nearly whistled along the diagonal channel, just a page torn from the Classified

section of the Derry News, but now George imagined it as a FT boat in a war movie, like the

ones he sometimes saw down at the Derry Theater with Bill at Saturday matinees. A war

picture with John Wayne fighting the Japs. The prow of the newspaper boat threw sprays of

water to either side as it rushed along, and then it reached the gutter on the left side of

Witcham Street. A fresh streamlet rushed over the break in the tar at this point, creating a

fairly large whirlpool, and it seemed to him that the boat must be swamped and capsize. It

leaned alarmingly, and then George cheered as it righted itself, turned, and went racing on

down toward the intersection. George sprinted to catch up. Over his head, a grim gust of

October wind rattled the trees, now almost completely unburdened of their freight of colored

leaves by the storm, which had been this year a reaper of the most ruthless sort.