

## The Waters

(A Short Story by T. U.-P.)

*“Beyond all bounds, till inundation rise  
Above the highest Hills: then shall this Mount  
Of Paradise by might of waves be moovd  
Out of this plave, pushd by the horned floud,  
With all his verdure spoil’d, and trees adrift  
Down the great River to the op’ning Gulf,  
And there take root an lland salt and bare,  
The haunt of Seales and orcs, and sea-mews clang.”*

~Paradise Lost by John Milton (Book X, v. 824-831)

One Saturday morning, Martin wakes up and heads off to the nearby GO bus station. The rain was pitter-pattering in small November pools, circles growing then disappearing at their curved peripheral edges. As he boards his bus, the rain stayed persistent, opting to stress the point that it was hell-bent on sending its drops myriad by myriad throughout the entire Megacity. As the bus lurched forward, the rain was noticeably making the Central River’s banks swell slightly like swollen feet bound too tightly in a dress shoe. On the way off the bus, Martin’s shoes plunge into a deep puddle as his feet instinctively sought out the curb below. Looking upward, the torrential downpour appeared to intensify, with droplets cascading from storm clouds and then bursting like bubbles upon reaching the ground. Walking toward the Conference Hall, he feels the water bombs pelting against his raincoat and running off toward the ground as small rivulets of vertically pouring lightly acidic rain. Upon entering the large indoor expanse where his company booth was set up, Martin could even hear the tip-tapping sound of falling aqua against the glass of the low atrium.

After spending most of the day in the show hall, Martin helped take down his company’s display booth with some co-workers, and headed back toward the bus station nearby. Outside, the rain felt even more intense with sewers soon approaching their containment capacity. Peering into one of the toothy metallic mouths near the bus ramp, he notices that it is only about a foot or two from the very top. After boarding the bus south, Martin’s eyes scrutinize the heavy downfall drenching the nearby ravines. His gaze catches a nature trail by Central River with torrents now breaching the river’s banks and flowing downward toward Wetlaw Lake.

Upon the bus’s arrival at Bentluck Station, Martin stands up, grabs his briefcase and waits in a short commuter line to exit the two story vehicle. On his way off of the bus’s steps, he once again tries to keep his shoes dry but is forced to walk into another makeshift puddle. After leaving the bus platform, the waters were noticeably rushing over the sewage grates that had reached their limits and were now overflowing. Martin began to wonder about Lake Wetlaw’s water levels which tended to peak at spring-time when the usual melting of ice and snow combined with heavy precipitation could raise levels above the breakers. However, for a fall day, such levels were deemed extremely

rare, with those living close to the water's edge or at a similar altitude to the lake's shores bound to be affected and inevitably forced to evacuate.

On the way home via public transit, the bus rushes onward with its tires half deep in water, spraying pedestrians on the neighbouring sidewalks that were trying in vain to stay dry with their meagre rain duds and ragged umbrellas. Upon exiting the bus at the north end of his street, Martin watches a family of four stuck in an entranceway hoping the cruel tempest will subside. He then walks south on Cleartide Avenue, his soles submerged in the rising rain waters. Upon reaching his abode, he ascends the front steps and enters. After taking off his shoes, he heads over to the living room and looks up at the skylight. Fixated by the incessant unfolding deluge overhead, Martin is astonished by the sheer volume of the heavy droplets of rain sounding like light hammering each time they pelted down against the hard glass surface. The streaming waters continued to run down into the backyard filling up a dry pool by the rock garden. Heading down into the basement, he soon became increasingly concerned about the downstairs bathroom with its small square window needing a good seal in case the waters were to breach the window-sill.

As the rain waters continued to rise, Martin soon found himself outside in the back yard, trying (in vain) to bail out the accumulation pooling rapidly by the window. Finally, he gives up and waits it out on the second floor praying again silently that the floods would soon subside. Reaching for his radio dial, he twists it to clear the static and gets a breaking news update on the FM band:

*"The flood waters of Atlantis County are now filling the ravines... Stay out of West, Central and East Rivers for fear of getting washed away... A rescue occurred thirty minutes ago by helicopter for a resident living by the West River... We will continue to monitor the situation as it intensifies and hopefully subsides."*

Martin then drifts off into a troubled sleep still worried about the flood and rains persisting through the night. After tossing and turning throughout the night, he wakes up rather abruptly, with apprehension in his eyes. He then walks downstairs to reach the front door and peers out onto the street. Upon opening the door, a rush of wind nearly pushed him back into the house. Rains continued to pour down and pools had now become shallow creeks rushing through the streets, submerging even the sidewalks. Terrified about his own submerging property, Martin closes the front door and rushes down one flight of stairs to the basement. Upon reaching the second last step, his socked feet plunge into nearly a foot or two of water that found its way in through the bathroom window and other gaps in the basement's barriers. Giving up again on bailing out the waters of his sinking house-ship, Martin heads into his garage, shin deep in floodwaters. After opening up the garage door, he reaches for an old cedar wood canoe and a paddle stored up against one of the far walls. After lifting the canoe off of its moorings, Martin places the humble vessel right side up, clambers in and uses the paddle to propel and steer himself through the nearby rear gate. Paddling along through the alley-way, he does a j-stroke to turn into a main street and notices someone from the neighborhood in a kayak going in the opposite direction. Martin then spontaneously decides to explore the downtown core by way of canoe and picks up his

strokes passing through a red light intersection. Still pelted by light non-subsiding rain, he notices a pick-up truck stranded at another main intersection with the driver trying to push it from the rear, pant legs soaked from the deepening floodwaters. Upon reaching the Central Boulder Monument in Mt. Venus District, Martin slows his paddling, making a sharp j-stroke and stationing his slender mode of locomotion alongside the boulder. Clambering up, he pulls the bow of his canoe onto the dry granite rock face and walks to the top of the boulder to peer onto Mt. Venus District in the downtown central core, amid the heavy rains creating more intense pooling throughout the once arid cityscape. Far off in the distance, he notices more kayaks and even a small rowboat docking by the window of a flooded convenience store, still serving customers through the front façade windows. Anxious to find higher ground, Martin looks all around him for a high and dry area of the city and decides to head back to his abode to pack up some survival supplies and head off to Upground Park by the Gates of Sir Hercules. Doubling back along the same paddle route, Martin continues to go through red light intersections until arriving at his familiar neighborhood alley-way, making a turn into his backyard and docking his canoe on the elevated patio deck facing his flooded lawn and garden. Climbing up the stairs and entering his home after unlocking the back door, he heads into the attic to fetch a tent and sleeping bag, gathers a tarp, packs his bag with his cell phone charger and all the essentials he can gather from the fridge and cupboards before heading back into the backyard to load his supplies into his canoe. He then trudges through the knee deep waters in the house remembering to bring a city map which luckily can be found on the second floor already sheathed in a dry plastic cover. After gathering his first round of essentials, Martin climbs back into his canoe, steers back out into the alley-way and rhythmically paddles back out onto the main streets. At another large intersection, he spots a small kayak and a raft lined up at a Drive-Thru queue waiting to be served. Outside the Drive-Thru, a partially submerged playground can be seen where a tall tree is swaying in the heavy winds as the rains keep beating down on the city's raging and newly-swelling seas. Martin opts to turn left on a red light since no motorized vehicles can brave the currents, and heads south toward the lake where he eventually stops at a banking centre. He soon notices that the branch is closed but that an ATM appears to be functioning, so he spins the canoe with a rapid set of strokes until he is alongside the cash machine. Upon reaching into his pocket, he finds out that his wallet is mostly dry, and he inserts his debit card, punching a few codes on the machine's waterlogged keypad to gather a wad of twenty dollar bills. After filling his wallet with the bills, Martin sets his course on the Gates of Sir Hercules.

*Stroke...stroke...stroke...* He paddles against the wind, rain droplets hitting his face. After a good fifteen minute paddle, he can see the top of the sculptured gate, newly restored a year back for the opening of the Atlantis County Grand Exhibition. As the gates draw near, he notices that the sculptures of the angels are partially submerged and notices that the gates now appear to be the measuring stick to the high waters. Picking up the rhythm of his paddling strokes again, Martin leaves the Gates of Sir Hercules to the East and approaches Upground Park. The park is built on a ridge overlooking the harbour and urban areas to the North—like his own inundated neck-of-the-woods. Entering through Butterfly Gateway, Martin steers through a channel that was once a meandering walkway heading toward Falcon Hill. This particular part of Upground Park drew birders and ornithologists during spring and fall migration with

several species of raptors flying over with their distinct wing patterns and tail feathers. After passing by Falcon Hill, Martin steps outside his vessel and pulls it up onto the dry land noticing there is no one directly around. He then grabs his bag as well as the tent, tarp and other extras and climbs to the high plateau of the hillock to set up camp. Down below in the distance he sees some willow trees closer to the water's edge half submerged as the freshwater tides keep rising with light drizzle continuing to fall all around the area. Up in one of the willow trees there is a squirrel's nest with a distressed rodent trying like the lost city's human counterparts to stay dry as more and more of Atlantis County progressively began to be submerged in the rising torrents. Martin then grabs his tarpaulin and ties its corners to three trees as the wind howls and rain cascades cumulatively from the large and gray cumulonimbus clouds overhead. Once the tarp is set up, he grabs all of his supplies and provisions and places them under the makeshift shelter, hearing the loud *tap-tap-tap* of the never-ceasing rain droplets. Looking down below, he spots a trio of white-tailed deer wading in a trail that now has become a small creek. The deer then rush off, one of them stotting its hind legs as if a renegade urban predator is chasing after them. Further in the distance by the barely visible Gates of Sir Hercules, a tent-city can be seen by an old rusty rail bridge where several tents of different sizes and colors can be seen, staying sheltered from the East wind by the far side of the crossing.

Martin soon decides to pitch a tent of his own close to the tarp, making sure to anchor the square base firmly to the porous soil. Also, he fastens the fly, which had been waterproofed at the end of his last camping trip with a special sealant. Due to the heavy winds, Martin also finds some small rocks and places them within the tent to further act like an anchor. Looking to the north end of Upground Park, he spots the sloped rock garden as the heavy downpour starts up again. Waters rushing toward the lake almost appeared to be daring the Megacity's bravest kayakers to head through the immersing turbulent set of flood water rapids.

As the downpour suddenly began to subside, he decides to head back into his lowland neighborhood with the plan of first assembling a raft to carry some of his other salvaged belongings. After rummaging around in the park, crossing what was once a bowl-shaped gully and now a pond, Martin assembles pieces of felled trees and shrubs and builds a small raft-shaped ark by fastening the plant limbs together. Once the ark is satisfactory, he tethers it to his canoe and heads through a familiar passage, steering the canoe and the raft through new channels and once dry valleys all the way back to his Atlantis County abode. With rain lightly drizzling against an old baseball cap, he notices that his basement and first floor are now very much a part of the aqueous vastness. After forcing his way through the front door and plunging into the watery abyss, he ascends to his dry second floor flight of steps to recover an old transistor radio. Sad about losing his main sound system with the speakers and their connecting networks now waterlogged and spoiled by raging floodwaters, he searches for some spare batteries in a cupboard within his old office. After gathering a few more salvageable articles such as stationery, an old and trusty laptop, some duct tape and an Aloe Vera plant, Martin descends back toward the abyss and stashes the few things in a dry bag tied to the raft. He then empties the contents of his pockets, leaves them in his canoe and plunges below water, diving into his kitchen to gather all of the canned goods

and tools (such as cutlery) that he can snatch. After resurfacing and putting the last few things onto his meagre float, he sets off for Upground Park and his special pond.

As fall turned to winter, snow began accumulating in the park and the new pond had soon frozen. Martin wore layers when he made solitary meals by a large fire-pit and even slept in those layers as the stars lightly peeked out from the darkened northern sky. Unable to use the canoe, he would cautiously walk on ice testing its hardness with a long walking stick.

On one long icy winter walk, Martin decides to check out Spruce Cemetery roughly an hour on foot from Upground Park. Upon entering the cemetery, he notices that the whole plain had flooded and ice had breached the upper cemetery plots. The tombstone of the town's founder almost stood as an ice sculpture with a cross at its upper extremity barely avoiding being under the ice sheet. On his way back, Martin grew worried about the upcoming spring melt. He would remain in Upground Park the upcoming spring and many other seasons as Atlantis County lived up to its name as a lost and flooded valley.

[The end]