

A Beginning

He is standing on the front porch, all four and a half feet of him, and a light drizzle has arrived. At the moment, he's overdressed--black rubber boots, a yellow slicker, a rubber watchman's hat, buttoned and secure. Below that, he's encased in wool—pants, shirt, and sweater.

He waits.

The rain picks up. The gutter out front begins to fill; first a rivulet, then a torrent. The boy is ecstatic, in a state of juvenile grace. No one is around. His parents are at work; his sisters are still sleeping.

The water rushes by. It is his river, full of asphalt chunks and muddy water. He rushes to the garage, past the sodden yellow stars of a forsythia bush and a few tulip plants, not yet in bloom. Inside, he grabs his rusty metal shovel, then turns back, headed for the road.

Gleefully, the boy plunges his little shovel down through the water, lifting small rocks. Quickly, a dam rises. In his mind it is a giant. The water resists the dam, seeking to tear it down, but the boy repairs the breaks as they occur.

A tiny pond emerges behind the dam, but the restless water seeks to avoid the stones, and it flows into the street. The boy grins.

A passing driver, forced to drive through the puddle, beeps his horn. The boy steps back, and the backwash from the car's tires partially destroys the dam. The boy yelps—not with resentment at the driver, but with joy at the new challenge.

He rushes into the street, laughing, and he plugs his broken dam. "Let them break that," he says to himself. "Let them try. I'll build it again. And again!"

The rain keeps pouring. The boy, so pleased with himself, has forgotten where he is, where he should be. And why not? The rain is there for him. His school is closed. It's St. Patrick's Day, and the holy day has just begun.