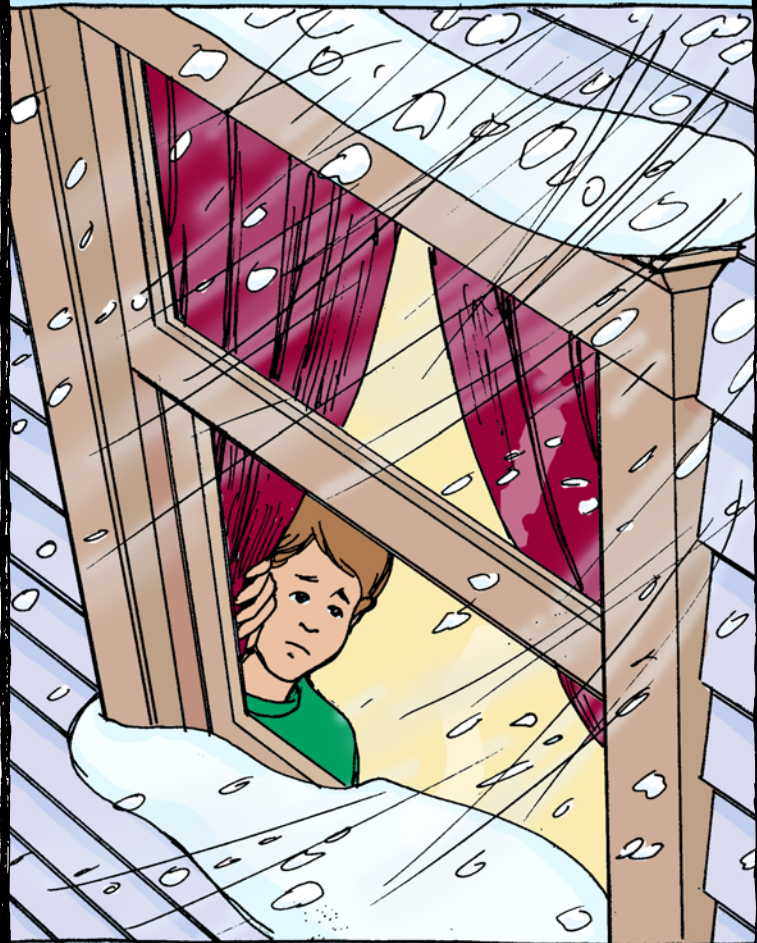


BENCHMARK • Q

The Nor'easter



Written by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by John Kastner

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“Some weather for Thanksgiving, eh Kevin?” Grandma said, her voice seeming to break the ice in the freezing living room. It was silent except for three sounds: the creaking of the house straining against the wind, the *whick, whick* of Grandma’s knife as she whittled another of her wooden dwarfs, and Kevin’s teeth chattering.

“Not a good night for people to be out,” she murmured, almost to herself.

Kevin and his parents had left their apartment in Boston extra early that morning, because it was beginning to **sleet**. By the time they got on the highway, it was nearly a **blizzard**, cars fishtailing everywhere until the whole highway slowed to thirty-five miles an hour. The two-hour trip to Cape Cod ended up taking six, and they **assumed** they would be the last to arrive. But as soon as they stepped into Grandma’s wonderful-smelling but chilly entryway, she called from the kitchen:

“Uncle Bob and his new wife are stuck in a ditch out on the turnpike, and the tow truck’s so busy it can’t get to them for an hour. They asked if you’d pick them up in your four-wheel drive.”

“You stay here, Kevin,” his father had **instructed**, and Kevin groaned. Without his cousins around, the only thing to do at Grandma’s house was listen to another one of her stories.

“Not a good night at all,” she muttered, the knife scratching as she etched the dwarf’s beard. “When I was a girl we had a **Nor’easter** like this right around the holidays, must’ve been twice as bad as this one. You hear that wind groanin’, Kevin? Well, that isn’t the worst of it.”

As if disagreeing with her, the wind suddenly gusted against the house, pounding like an **enormous** fist on all the windows. Outside, Kevin could see the snow sweeping through the single cone-shaped beam of light from the streetlamp.



“There’s something called the storm swell that happens when the **air pressure** drops at the center of the storm,” Grandma continued. “It sucks up a huge dome of water, like God was holding a giant vacuum cleaner over the ocean. Comes in at high tide and you’ve got flooding like you can’t imagine.”

“This storm swell came in at evening tide,” she continued. “My father herded us all upstairs where we watched the ocean from the big bay windows in Mother and Father’s bedroom. First the spray came across the road and began to wet the paint on our neighbors’, the MacIntoshes’, house. Then the water came up to the top of their foundation, and the waves were creeping up our front walk. Then we heard them slap, slapping against the house; sometimes a big one came along, and *whoosh!* we’d hear it drumming against the walls.”

The wind seemed to be listening, for it echoed the noise of the waves. Kevin gasped and looked quickly out the window, imagining for a moment that the blowing snow was the white fringe of a wave crashing against the house.



“The waves kept rising, and one by one we heard our windows smash out. Front door busted open and the water poured into the living room; we could hear our furniture bumping into things as it bobbed around, hear the water slopping up the stairs.

“Father was about to take us up to the attic when we heard this awful crashing noise. We looked out the window, and the MacIntoshes’ house had been ripped right off



its foundation, creaking and groaning as it floated away. Then like a sinking ship, it spun and tipped over, *crash!* I was friends with the little MacIntosh girl, Amy. She and her mom grabbed onto the couch and ended up on the beach in Tonset, alive. They never saw her father or brother again.”

Suddenly there was a horrible screaming sound, and Kevin leapt about two feet into the air.

“Pie’s done!” Grandma announced, getting to her feet and shuffling into the kitchen—it was only the oven timer. Her voice floated out of the kitchen with the warm smell of cinnamon. “Not scaring you, am I? Heck, I’m scared myself; no good having all your children out in weather like this.”

Kevin walked to the window and cupped his hands over his eyes. The only thing **visible** was the cone of falling snow under the streetlamp. He imagined that outside that bit of light, the waves were beginning to crawl up the shore, lapping toward the house.

Yes, there it was—he was sure he saw the white edge of a wave slipping onto the road, splashing into bright flecks of spray. His heart pounded as the shape shifted and grew, and just before he was about to run to his grandmother, he realized what he saw: headlights. The lights from a car shone on the enormous snowflakes, making them look like the moving front of a wave. It was his parents’ car pulling into the driveway, with Bob and Nancy in the back seat. Kevin laughed at himself, and ran to the door to welcome them in from the storm.

Glossary

air pressure (<i>n.</i>)	the push of air on a surface (p. 6)
assumed (<i>v.</i>)	to accept something as being true (p. 4)
blizzard (<i>n.</i>)	a severe snowstorm with high winds and heavy snows (p. 4)
enormous (<i>adj.</i>)	very great in size, larger than is usual (p. 5)
instructed (<i>v.</i>)	to have given directions (p. 4)
Nor'easter (<i>n.</i>)	a cyclonic storm of the East Coast of North America that often causes high seas and snow, named for its strong northeast winds (p. 5)
sleet (<i>v.</i>)	to shower with partially frozen rain (p. 4)
visible (<i>adj.</i>)	able to be seen (p. 9)

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Illustrated by John Kastner

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The Nor'easter

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