

Water

by [Armando Simón](#) (August 2023)



Storm, Ilmari Aalto, 1915

The four members of the family were riveted to the television set, watching the local weather report.

“Hurricane Harold cleared the western part of Cuba last night. The warm waters of the Caribbean will probably strengthen it. At this point, it looks like it will make landfall in Texas, but hurricanes are kinda tricky. They’ve been known to do a ninety-degree turn, right or left,” here the weatherman swept

his arm across the map, "so it's possible it could turn to Mexico, go to Louisiana, but right now all the computer models show it making landfall, here in Texas. So, keep your fingers crossed, and if we're lucky, Harold will pay us a visit tomorrow."

"But, remember, don't get your hopes up. We've been disappointed before."

Sports were next, so Jason switched off the television and spoke to his wife, Gladys.

"You're absolutely ready?"

She pointed to a spot on the floor. "Every pot, every plastic container, every bottle, every can that we have is right there. How about you? Did you clean the gutter spout?"

Even though they knew the answers beforehand, it was somehow reassuring to ask the questions anyway.

"Daddy," Lucy looked back at her father. "Aren't we too far from the coast? Didn't you say the other day we were almost two hundred miles away?"

"Won't matter, honey. Hurricane's huge. We'll get rain and wind, all right, but we won't get a storm surge from the ocean, if there is one." He got up from the couch. "I'm going to see if I can find another barrel."

"Good luck," said Gladys. The twins went outside briefly to look up in the sky to see any signs of an impending hurricane.

As he drove through the neighborhood he looked up and down the streets. Most of the trees were leafless and desiccated and the front yards of every house were brown, though quite a few, like themselves, had opted for xeriscaping in an attempt to re-establish a modicum of lawn.

Almost two hours later, Jason was back.

“Nothing. No luck.”

“Even the feed stores?”

“Yep.”

Anticipation made it hard for the adults to have a sound sleep that night. Jason was up at the break of day. He went to the bedroom window, saw the overcast skies and smiled.

He then went to the living room to listen to the morning news. There were two main stories, Hurricane Harold, of course, and a decision from the U. S. Supreme Court. The latter had affirmed individual states' right to prevent people not native to those states from entering those states and establishing residency. Thus, overcrowded states like Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire in the northeast and Oregon, Hawaii and Washington in the west could prevent newcomers from entering. The Court was also scheduled to decide on cases that asked whether states could deport those out-of-staters already there.

As for Harold, the hurricane had sped up and would definitely make landfall by late morning on the Texas coast. It would then curve up and to the right so that Arkansas and Louisiana would get hit, and with any luck, the eastern part of Oklahoma as well. A film showed long lines of trucks and cars heading towards central and south Texas in order to harvest the water.

Jason called in to work to say he would not be going in, but it was pointless. The business would be closed that day, according to the pre-recorded message.

He would let his family sleep a bit longer. It was going to be a busy day and he guessed they would be exhausted at the end of the day. He knew he would be.

He got his roll of duct tape and scissors, went outside, and taped the windows to minimize any flying debris shattering them. At this distance from the coast, winds would not be as

fierce, especially a Category 3 hurricane like Harold. But just to make sure. Then, he went inside to have a snack and wait.

A little after ten, Gladys woke up. It was beginning to rain. The smiling father went and shook the kids awake, one by one.

“Hey! Wake up! Come see! It’s raining!” The children bolted up, instantly awake and smiling, and ran to the door. It was, indeed, raining. They cheered and jumped up and down.

“And it’s real rain! It’s not sprinkling!” Lucy cried out.

“That’s right,” he said. “We’re not going to be disappointed this time.”

“All right! It’s show time!” Jason announced, clapping his hands once. The family was now energized. He and Danny donned windbreakers and they pulled the hood over their heads. The two rolled the chest-high barrel from the garage to the waterspout and secured it with a belt that fastened to hooks on the wall. They glanced up to see their neighbors doing the same.

The water poured in, at first slowly.

Danny lifted his face and opened his mouth to catch the cold rain. His father chuckled and joined him for a while before becoming serious again.

“Danny, go and tell your mom to give you the coffee pot and bring it to me. Tell her I want her to brew me a hot cup.” It would be great to drink coffee again.

The twelve-year-old was back in a flash. “Dad, mom said she first has to clean it and scrub the crust out. She’ll need more water.”

Jason nodded as he filled up the pot directly from the waterspout. He handed it to the boy. “OK, you and Lucy start

bringing me the containers and the bottles, just like we planned! Bring me the buckets first! No, wait!" He paused. "This is ridiculous! Let's go inside."

Once inside, seeing Danny's puzzled look, his father explained. "This is ridiculous," he repeated. "We're frantic, acting like the rain's going to last ten minutes, like always. It's a hurricane! It's going to be raining for hours!"

Jason handed the pot full of rainwater to Gladys. She had taken out the stacks of dirty plates and placed them on the floor. Now, she would begin cleaning them once there was more water to fill up the sink.

"OK, change of plans! This is what we're gonna do. Jesus, I can't believe I didn't think of this earlier! OK. All the cans and bottles and milk containers have got dried residue. We're going to use that to fill up the two toilets. I'm not going to dip them in the barrels, I got another idea for that. Lucy, put on your windbreaker and bring some of the containers. Danny, you do the same."

"Kids ...! I'm going to cook soup for lunch!" Gladys announced and the two of them cheered.

Jason went to the garage and unwrapped the two buckets he had kept relatively clean inside plastic bags and went back to the barrel, followed by the two teens. There was now a bit more wind and rain. The containers that the two had brought were quickly filled up right at the waterspout opening.

"OK, first fill up your toilet and the toilet tank and then flush. Do this twice. Fill them up again. Then repeat the process with our toilet. And take your shoes off when you go in!!" They left and Jason filled up the buckets and carried them into the kitchen.

"Here you go," he lifted the heavy bucket and poured the water into the plugged-up kitchen sink. "I'll leave the other one

here.” He took the empty bucket back to fill it up and returned it to the kitchen, saw the other empty bucket, picked it up and joined Lucy and Danny to the waterspout to repeat the process.

By the third trip, he saw that the barrel was halfway full. He delivered the bucket and called for Danny to join him in the garage. Danny entered the garage to find his father with a short hose around his neck, next to the second, last, barrel. “Gimme a hand!”

Together, they rolled the second barrel next to the first and repeated the process to secure it. The cold wind and rain were picking up now. Sporadic wind gusts became common. Jason then took the hose inserted one end into the first barrel, sucked the other end, and water began to pour into the second barrel. Lucy joined them, carrying containers.

“Daddy, we finished the toilets,” she yelled over the wind.

“OK, fill up the bottles and jugs, seal them and put them in the garage! Then, go help your mother.” The three went back inside, Lucy slipping on the way.

Gladys had made a dent in the dirty dishes and was now emptying the dirty water from the sink.

“I need more water, but first, both of you take off your pants and your shirts and each of you put on the two T-shirts and a sweater I put there, before going out,” she pointed to some clothes.

“I don’t have time for this,” Jason said, annoyed.

“Do what I say!!” she barked, and the two men practically jumped back.

They took off their wet clothes and put on dry ones, then went out and returned with two buckets full of water. They were about to go back out when she offered them hot coffee. While

they drank, she and Lucy struggled taking the heavy buckets to the closest bathtub where dirty clothes awaited cleaning. The water was poured in.

“Daddy, why is water so heavy? I mean, it’s just water.”

“Honey, I weigh 220 pounds. Out of that, 200 pounds is water.”

Rested, the two men went back out to get wet again. Each had to hold on to an empty bucket with both hands, so the wind would not tear it away. Both barrels were full by now.

They brought the buckets inside five more times before Gladys forced them to change clothes again, rest, and drink hot coffee. They also took aspirins for the pain. By now, all of the dishes, pots, glasses and Tupperware were clean, as was the kitchen itself, and soup was simmering on the stove. The clothes in one bathtub were being washed by Lucy. The clothes in Gladys and Jason’s bathtub would be next.

A bit rested, the pair went out and the relay resumed. Now, not only did they have to contend with the weight of the water in the buckets, but they also had to at times fight the wind while walking. The rain was “falling” horizontally.

The first bathtub was emptied out, with the wet clothes going to the dryer. The bathtub was refilled. The second bathtub, containing clothes, was also filled up.

They changed clothes, followed by the family having lunch.

Soup!

“Hey, Dad, remember when we went to that restaurant a few years back and they charged us \$4 for a glass of water, \$5 with ice?” Danny asked, smiling, just before he ostentatiously lifted a glass of water and drank from it. That restaurant was no longer in business.

They ate to the sound of howling wind outside.

"Any flying debris?" the wife asked.

"No. Just paper, plastic stuff. Nothing serious, though Danny saw a lawn chair being blown down the street. Nothing dangerous," he assured her.

After lunch, Gladys would not hear of anyone going back to work. She ordered everyone, including herself, to relax for one hour. They gladly obeyed her.

Then, everyone resumed their work. The men brought in the water, Lucy washed the clothes and put away the clothes from the dryer, while Gladys began cooking for the next three days. Each trip bringing in the water now took longer.

At one point, Jason muttered, "I was going to wash the car, but I'm just going to fill up the windshield wiper reservoir. I'm too tired."

Hearing this, Gladys called her daughter to her. "Lucy, after you finish with the clothes, put on two t-shirts, a sweater and your windbreaker and go wash the car." Surprisingly, since she usually whined about doing any chore, Lucy nodded agreement without uttering a word of complaint.

"No," Jason objected. "The wind's too strong," he joked.

"She's fat. She won't blow away." was his wife's unsympathetic response.

"I'm not fat!!"

On the third trip bringing in the buckets of water, Gladys declared. "OK, that's enough for Danny. Danny, go take a bath. I warmed up the water on the stove. You're staying inside. I've got some dried clothes ready for you." The boy, exhausted, looked at his father, who nodded in agreement, and Danny disappeared into the bathroom.

"And you, mister, change clothes. And you do nothing for the

next two hours." He did not argue with her.

Just then, there was a WAHHHHHH-WAH-WAH-WAH sound, and the kitchen faucet shook.

"Oh, that's funny," Jason laughed. "That is funny." He went over to the kitchen sink and turned the faucet knob. A slow, thin trickle of brown water came out at first, which then became a clear stream. "I wonder if it's going to be coming out for the usual one hour."

"Probably. And I'll bet you that the once-a-week schedule starts over today instead of Thursday."

Jason went back out in the rain to fill up the buckets and came back much later, staggering. He put them down at the entrance instead of the kitchen.

"I can't, I-I just can't do it anymore. I'm sorry. I sealed and locked the barrels. But . . . I can't go out anymore. I walked a couple of steps and I put the buckets down, walked a couple more and put them down. I-I can't go on. My legs and arms almost don't work, I'm sorry."

"You did good, honey. Now, change clothes again and take another aspirin."

Jason tried to, but he couldn't lift his arms. Gladys helped her husband get out of the clothes and dried him with a towel first, before putting a sweater and pants on him.

The electricity went out. Fortunately, they had a gas stove.

He sat—rather he collapsed—on the couch, meaning to rest for a few minutes, then immediately fell asleep without realizing it.

Somebody was trying to wake him. When he finally woke up after much shaking, it was dark, with a few lit candles here and there.

"Wake u-u-u-up," Gladys said in a soft voice, shaking him gently. He realized that he had been hearing her voice while asleep.

He jerked his body, thinking that he had to go back to get more water, but his body told him *no way* he was going to do so.

"Relax, you need to relax. Don't worry. We did it." She paused to let it sink in. "Everything's finished. The kids took a bath and are sleeping. All the clothes are clean, all the pots and pans. The car's clean. The bathtubs are full and so are the kitchen and bathroom sinks. The ice cube trays are full. I've made popsicles for the kids. And your dinner's on the table, warm and waiting for you. Come on."

Jason tried to get up with difficulty and his wife had to help him. His arms, his shoulders, his legs, his back, they all hurt.

The dinner by candlelight was good, one of his favorite dishes, and he began to eat.

"You?"

"I ate already. So did the kids. I thought I'd let you sleep some more. You were exhausted. The floor's clean, by the way. Actually, the whole house is clean. How do you feel?"

His response was a roll of the eyes.

Good, warm food always helps, regardless of what ails a person and Jason was thankful for it. He realized he had been starving and was not aware of it. He practically inhaled the food. She also gave him some aspirins for his muscle aches.

"After dinner, you can wash up. The bedsheets are clean and smell good."

"Sounds like the rain is dying down." After a pause: "Any

windows broken?”

“No. I looked outside, and no one seems to have suffered any damage. I don’t think that we got the full force of the hurricane. I’m not sure I know exactly where Harold made landfall. We’ll find out once power comes back on and we can check the TV.”

They went to the door to look out at the diminishing rain before turning in. It hurt a lot to raise his arm, but Jason did so and held his wife in his arm. One thought was in both of their minds.

All that water going to waste.

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