

Rowing

He stood in the shadow of the door and watched. He could hear the scratching of the pencil on the notebook and see his father's right shoulder dance. It was important work and he knew he was not supposed to interrupt. He wasn't sure why it was important work. It was something about stories. Mike tried to think of a story but nothing came to him so he just watched and waited.

His father finally put the pencil down and stretched his arms over his head. It was early in the morning and his father walked over to the window and looked out, then turned toward the door.

"Couldn't sleep again?"

"No, Dad."

"Want to go out in the boat?"

"Yes, Dad."

They walked through the house in silence and closed the back door gently. There was dew on the grass and Mike could feel it coming through his shoes.

His father grabbed the bow of the rowboat and started dragging it toward the lake. Mike picked up the other end and tried his best to help. It was heavy. The boat made a scraping noise on the sand.

"Go ahead and get in." Mike scrambled into the bow. His father gave the boat a good shove and jumped in. Mike could feel the boat start to float. His father rowed them away from shore.

"Sit next to me and take an oar." Mike smiled. He had never been asked to help row before. Keeping low in the boat, just as his father had taught him, Mike moved to sit next to him. Mike picked up the oar and started to pull. It felt good to row. He watched the oar move through the water. He tried to take big strokes but the boat still wanted to go in circles.

His father took shorter strokes and the boat went straight. "Let's head over to the swamp."

Mike watched their cottage move away from them and the big moraine appear behind it. Mike liked the rowboat but also thought it was a little strange. How odd to row and see where you have been but not where you are going. Mike watched the cottages pass by.

They came to a natural area and Mike knew they were rounding the point now. He turned around to look. He could see the tree snags sticking up through the water. It looked alright in the morning. It was another thing to move through them at night.

Mike turned back into his seat and continued to row. His oar hit a log under the water.

"Better let me steer now. I'll get us to the channel." Mike put his oar up on the edge of the boat and went back to the bow. His father took up the oar and they continued on slowly. Mike looked into the water and watched the tangle of logs and roots go by.

"I see a fish!" Mike pointed and sat up on his knees. The boat leaned to one side. His father put the oars up on the side of the boat.

"Careful, Mike. You don't want to tip us. I see your fish. It's a big one. He would make a real fine dinner."

Mike thought about that. He wasn't sure he wanted to eat his fish. It looked so right in the water. The fish darted under a log but as the boat floated away, the fish came out again. Mike watched the sun reflect off the scales. His fish was beautiful.

His father picked up the oars again and started to row. They moved further up the channel. Mike saw a shadow in the sky and looked up to see it was an eagle. The eagles liked to build nests in the tall pines around the swamp. Mike hoped his fish had seen the shadow and was back under the log. He knew the eagle's babies needed food but he didn't want it to be his fish. He trailed his hand in the water to scare all the fish back under their logs.

Mike tried to imagine what it would be like to be a fish. How did fish swim so well? He couldn't swim like that. He remembered trying to arch his body back and forth in the water like a fish. He couldn't make it work. And what was it like to breath water? Mike took a deep breath and felt the air in his lungs.

The sun was getting higher in the sky now. His father turned the boat around and they started to go back.

"Can we float for a minute, Dad?" His father put the oars up and they floated in silence. Mike loved to be out on the water. He closed his eyes. The boat rocked gently with the waves. They sat like that for several minutes.

"Ready to go back, Mike? I'm hungry. Your mom probably has breakfast going."

Mike shook his head yes. "Can I help row again?"

"Sure."

Mike took up his position and started to row. The oar locks squeaked in rhythm with their strokes. He watched the swamp get farther away and soon they were around the point and watching the cottages pass by again. He smelled bacon cooking and knew they would see their cottage soon. He looked up at his father and smiled.

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A door slammed and startled Mike. He opened his eyes and looked out the window. The sun had come up and was making the clouds reflect pink on the water. The lake was still as beautiful as when he was a kid. He was slouched in a chair with his feet on the windowsill, his laptop resting on his legs. He poised his fingers on the keyboard and started to type.