

"What happened?" My mouth hurt when I spoke. I must have been unconscious for a while. I could feel again. The novocaine was wearing off.

"You're a lucky boy," Dr. Peterson said. "Somebody found you and brought you in here. The damage isn't too bad. Everything can be fixed."

"I'll be okay?"

"Certainly. The bad news is that you'll have to make five or six visits. There's a lot of repair work for me to do. But there's good news, too."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Well, we already know you aren't afraid of a little needle. And that's a good thing. The work I have to do would be very painful without novocaine. But lucky you, you don't seem to have any problem getting a shot. That's pretty good news, wouldn't you say?"

I nodded, but I really didn't know what to say. Worse, I really didn't know what I'd be saying later, either.

A LITTLE NIGHT FISHING

by David Lubar

Wally Klein was a fishing nut. All us kids fished a bit—some more than others—but no one came close to Wally. He lived and breathed fishing the way other kids lived and breathed basketball or music or food. As much as he loved fishing, Wally never talked you to death on the subject. But if a kid came up to Wally and said, "My dad's taking me up north for pike. What's a good lure?" then Wally would talk for as long as anyone wanted to listen on the subject of pike lures or jigging techniques, or just about anything connected to fishing.

So I wasn't really surprised when he walked over to me on the playground and asked, "Want to go fishing?"

I'd fished with him once in a while. It was fun. He seemed happy whether he caught fish or I caught fish, or even if we were just fishing and didn't catch anything. "Where?" I asked.

"New spot. Out past the old abbey."

Wally was always looking for new places to fish. I remem-

ber seeing a bunch of maps scattered on the floor of his room the last time I was there. The old abbey hadn't been used for years. I think it belonged to a bunch of monks ages ago. "Sounds good. What time?"

"Seven."

"Isn't that a bit late? It'll be dark by eight."

"Night fishing. You'll like it."

"Okay, I'll meet you in front of the school."

"Good." Wally nodded and took off.

I'd never gone night fishing. It sounded like fun. I hung around the playground for a while and shot some more hoops, then went home to get my stuff ready. I had a rod and reel my uncle had given me a few years back. It was a pretty good setup. And I had my own tackle box, crammed full of stuff I'd picked up over the years.

I thought my folks might stop me from going out at night, but Dad just said, "Wish I could join you," and Mom said, "Have a nice time, dear."

Wally was waiting for me at the school. "Here," he said, handing me a small cooler. "You take this, and I'll take the rods."

"Crawlers?" I asked.

He nodded. "And a couple of sodas."

"Great. Is night fishing any different?" I asked.

"Not much. You can't see your line very well so you have to go by feel. The fish will hear the bait hit, then find it by smell, so there's no problem there." He went on, giving me a mini-education in the art of night fishing as we walked up the hill to the old abbey.

We went past the building, then turned down a small path that led to some woods. "This way," Wally said, disappearing among the trees.

"Wait up." The setting sun cast just enough light so I could see him ahead of me. We walked for ten or fifteen minutes, then broke into a clearing near a large pond. I could just make out the opposite bank, maybe fifty yards away.

"I'd guess it's about six acres," Wally said, anticipating my question. "There's a whole world under that water—a whole world we aren't part of." Wally almost sounded sad when he said that. I passed him the cooler. He pulled out two containers of night crawlers, put one in the pocket of his fishing vest, and gave the other one to me.

I pried up the lid and grabbed a crawler, then baited my hook with the large, plump worm. I lost sight of my bait as the cast went out, then heard a splash in the distance when the worm hit the water. I got a nibble almost immediately. Moments later, I had my first fish—a largemouth bass. "Nice spot," I said to Wally as I unhooked the bass and put it back in the water.

"I think it's special here," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure. It's like something is calling to me. I feel like I belong here."

I had no idea what he meant. I went back to fishing. We both caught a lot of bass at first. And some catfish. The action lasted for about an hour. I hooked something real strong, but my line broke. Then things died down. We didn't get a bite for a long time.

"Ready to quit?" I asked.

"Not yet. I think I'm getting a nibble." He said nothing for a moment, then shouted, "Whoa, big hit!"

I watched his rod bend. Wally held on with two hands. Something had grabbed his bait, something that had no plans to come in without a fight. Wally took a step forward, his foot just touching the edge of the water. He pulled back on the rod, then reeled in as he lowered the tip, gaining a bit of line. But he soon lost what he'd gained when the line started feeding out again.

"This is the one," he said. "This is the fish I've been waiting for all my life."

It was weird. The line wasn't ripping out fast like there was a fish trying to get away—it was spooling out slowly. Wally fought back, bringing in more line. He took another step forward. His whole right foot was in the water now, up to the ankle. I didn't think he noticed.

"Wally, you're getting wet."

He paid no attention. He just held on to the rod, cranked a bit, then stepped forward again.

Both feet were in the water.

"Wally, you're going to ruin those shoes." It sounded pretty stupid, but I had no idea what to say to get through to him. "Come on, Wally, let it go."

He stepped forward. The water was almost up to his right knee.

"Wally!" I tried to pry the rod from his hands. His fingers were locked so hard I couldn't move them at all. Whatever was on the other end of that line, I could feel its strength

through the rod. It scared me enough to make me let go and back off.

Wally mumbled something. I wasn't sure what he said, but it sounded like, "It wants me."

I ran for my tackle box. I threw the lid open and fumbled for my knife. Wally might kill me for doing it, but I was going to cut the line. A sharp sting shot through my hand. One of my lures snagged my palm. I yanked the hook out, ignored the pain, and kept looking. There—I found the knife. The stupid blade was rusted stuck. After breaking the nail on my index finger, I finally got the knife open. I turned back to Wally.

He was gone.

A ripple spread across the water in the moonlight. I didn't even think. I just jumped in and tried to follow the muddy bottom of the pond. The water made the blackness complete. I couldn't see anything. I could only feel around. Over and over, dive, swim, breathe, dive again. . . . Nothing. I finally crawled out and collapsed on the bank.

As soon as I got my breath back, I ran toward town. The closest place I could stop for help was the fire station. They organized a search. Everyone tried their best. All they ever found was his rod. There was no line left on the reel.

I stayed away for a month, but I knew I had to go back. And I knew it had to be at night. I stood by the water, thinking about what had happened. There's only one way I can explain it to myself. While Wally was fishing for bass, something down there was fishing for Wally. And, just like Wally wasn't mean or evil, maybe whatever got him wasn't

mean or evil, either. Maybe he was caught because he belonged down there. I was thinking about this, and wondering whether it was a crazy idea, when I saw him.

At first, I thought it was a trick of the moonlight, but then I knew it was real. He was under the water, looking up, pressing his hands against the surface like it was glass or a mirror. He opened his mouth and spoke.

No sound came out, but I could tell what he was saying. "Join me."

I almost ran. But in my heart, I knew that if I ran, I'd be running for the rest of my life. So I waited. It might have been minutes. It might have been hours. Time didn't exist on the water that night. I waited until Wally sank back down. Or maybe he faded. I'm not sure which it was. Either way, he was gone. I stood there until the sun began to rise above the woods, thinking about Wally. I thought about Wally, and fishing, and life. Then I left.

I fish a lot now. I guess it's my way of keeping his memory alive. Sometimes, when I'm near water, I still hear him calling.

PRECIOUS MEMORIES

Dad's going to kill me. I can't believe I did it. It was so stupid. But it was an accident. I was running out of the house, late for basketball practice, when I remembered that they were showing *Frankenstein* on cable. So I threw in a tape and set the VCR. It wasn't until I got home and checked the tape that I saw what I'd done. I could feel all the blood drain from my skin as I held the tape in my hand and read the label—YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, SUMMER VACATION, followed by the date.

I'd just taped over one of Dad's vacation videos. This was serious. Dad spent just about every minute of our vacations with the video camera in his hands. He'd gotten the camera before I was born. I think he was the only parent in the neighborhood who hadn't gone digital. It was a big old thing, and he lugged it everywhere we went. It was almost like he didn't even know whether he'd had a fun vacation until he looked at the videos. Nothing was real for him until he saw it on television.