

Gone Fishin'

It was as if the sun were burning the top off the water, and sucking it into the sky. The distant line of Long Island was lost in the haze, and the route to the Scotch Caps was difficult to make out. Fran the Man wondered if he'd taken on the fatherhood fishing task a bit too soon. Little Timmy had turned green only a few hundred yards into their trip, and he wasn't feeling that great himself. The fumes from the pattering outboard mixed with the salt air. The lingering stench of old fish guts and rotten sand worms drifted up from the boat's wooden floor. There was an odor of creosote emanating from somewhere. Fran the Man breathed shallowly.

"How ya doin' Tim? All right?"

The boy answered with a sour grunt.

"Well, we don't have to all the way to the Scotch Caps. We can anchor somewhere near here.

Forget the blackfish. We'll try for flounder."

The proposal agreed with the boy, so Fran the Man throttled down--just as Cap'n John had showed him. This diminished the fumes and vibrations, and the boy began to return to life.

Are we going to cook 'em, Dad, or Mom?"

Fran the Man hadn't gotten this far in his own thinking. "We'll give Mom the night off," he said tentatively. We'll clean 'em, fry 'em, and eat 'em. But first we have to catch 'em." He cut the motor, grabbed the metal anchor, and chucked it overboard. The splash hit Timmy, and he laughed. The anchor held, the boat stopped its forward *motion*, and they began to set up their gear. Fran the Man understood that Timmy knew more about this than he did, but, as Father in Chief, he felt compelled to display some piscatorial expertise.

"So," he said, "I have to think that 1 oz. sinkers will be enough, don't you?" "Well," said the boy, "I think the tide's running just now. Can we try two ounces?"

Fran the Man opened the tackle box. "Two ounces it is. Let's see." He scanned the bottom of the box, looking for the number two engraved in the oblong hunks of lead. "Yeah, we've got 'em." He flipped one to Timmy, who had already set up his rod. His son threaded the braided nylon line through the rod's metal guides and added a hook and plastic leader. To the main line he added an adjunct one, and on this he hung the sinker. Fran the Man watched carefully as Timmy pulled the knot tight.

"A square knot, eh?"

"Well, not exactly, Dad. A clinch knot. Uncle Edwin showed me how to make it."

Uncle Edwin. Of course. Uncle Edwin. The knuckleheaded hayseed. The Fascist son-of-a...

Imitating his son, he rigged his gear and baited his hook. He threw his bait overboard, just as the boy had done. They waited, their eyes on the grey water.

The waves, gently enough, were still too much for the stomachs of the man and boy. Endless bobbing, infrequent bites, and the *incessant* sun caused Fran the Man to feel ill again. They were becoming edgy. Each was edgy; each contained his edginess as best he could. But the notion that this would be fun was quickly *disappearing*.

After two hours, there were six flounders and three empty soda bottles lying on the bottom of the boat. "Whaddaya say we clean the catch now, son, and head out?"

"Where?"

"Oh, I don't know. How about Cap'n John's?"

"Sounds good, Dad."

The air had cleared. The boy kept his head on the gunwale as the small boat motored through the gently rolling waves, alert for movement below. *He looks at everything*, marveled Fran the Man. *Says very little--at least to me--but he takes it all in. I wonder if that will be good for him.*

When they got back to the rental dock, Tony, Cap'n John's son, was waiting for them. "Back early, eh, Mr. Walsh? Caught all the fish there was to catch in Long Island Sound?"

Fran the Man remembered Tony. *Pulling guard. Always late for practice. Purple Heart. Tarawa— or was it Guadalcanal? No, that was someone else.*

"A few. Left some for you, though, Tony."

"And you, Timmy, did you do the man's share of the catching, or did you just fish?"

Puzzled by the question, Timmy said, "I caught six flounders. Plus about ten bergalls."

"Hope you kicked those bergalls before you threw 'em back, boy. Bait stealers."

Timmy thought of remarking that they were actually very pretty fish, but instead he said, "Sure did."

His father glanced at him, then looked away. *A lie, but a white one. Edwin.* "Nothin's against the law until you get caught" *Edwin. The kid's not acting much like his uncle, but he's beginning to sound like him. Who knows? Before long, he'll probably want a gun. What will I do with him then?*

Together, they walked to the old Buick. The boy got in first, leaving his father to dump their catch in the trunk.

"Don't tell your mother, son. She'll never open the trunk again." The boy laughed. "C'mon, Dad. Don't you think she'll clean 'em?"

They both knew she wouldn't.