

THE BIG FISH

By Grace Raidan

I love fishing. The smell of the water, fresh and cool, the nice sea breeze that fans your hair back, and the calming feeling of sitting on a boat, the water slapping gently against it, rocking you slowly back and forth.

Who am I kidding? I can't stand fishing.

Fishing frightens me. The deep waters that slam themselves against your boat, rocking you back and forth angrily, the cold, chilling feeling the sea breeze gives you, making your teeth chatter and your hands shiver. And oh...the fish. The slimy, floppy fish and their dead, icy eyes.

Why do people even go fishing, anyways? There's a grocery store just waiting for you with nice, fresh fish for your desires. But my dad seems to love it.

My dad's whole life purpose is to fish, in my opinion. Every early Saturday morning, you can hear the hum of his truck starting, the crackle of rocks as he drives down our driveway, and to the big lake that is a ten-minute drive from our house. He even has a lucky fishing hat, an old, worn thing that smells disgustingly of fish. It has little knick-knacks he calls *bait* stuck to it, little multi-colored feathers or plastic worms. He treats his fishing rod like another kid, and it's probably more expensive than another kid, having cost him \$4000.

Yep. He spent four thousand dollars on a fishing rod.

I usually stay home while he goes on his fishing trips. I wake up and make my own breakfast, eggs and sausages, watch TV and wait for him to get home, which is usually around eleven in the morning.

He always comes back with a triumphant smile on his face, a glow in his dark blue eyes, like a little kid with the Christmas present of their dreams. He'll come back with five, ten, maybe even fifteen fish. He and his fishing friends always catch a lot, and split the fish between themselves.

I can guess you're thinking, *wow, they must eat a lot of fish*, and trust me, we do. Fish every single night for dinner. The rest of the fish Dad sells to one of the markets downtown.

I usually don't have fish, and just make myself a nice warm bowl of Kraft dinner while Dad digs into his dinner, finishing his large fish, whether it is a trout or a salmon, or who knows what else, within minutes, while I sit across from him, gagging at his dinner choices.

I'm always happy that I don't have to be dragged along to Dad's fishing trips every Saturday, grateful, even.

But that all ended one Friday night.

We were having dinner. Dad was having a trout right out of the oven, steaming and fresh. I wrinkled my nose as the steam found its way to my end of the table, the smell of trout overwhelmingly disgusting. I squirted some ketchup into my yellow bowl of Kraft dinner, trying to think of something else besides the smell of fish.

"Andy" Dad said as I set the ketchup back on the dining table and picked up my fork. His voice sounded excited and hopeful, his lips spreading into a smile.

"Yeah?" I replied, suspicious, stirring my mixture of ketchup and Kraft dinner together evenly.

"My friends that usually come with me to the lake can't come tomorrow-"

"All of your friends?" my suspicion growing like a weed.

"Yes. I was wondering if you would like to-"

“No!” I said, almost yelling. Dad flinched with surprise. “No” I said quieter. “I can’t, Dad, sorry. I have... a, uh... big math test on Monday. I’m supposed to spend all Saturday studying for it” my lie was so pathetic even I didn’t believe myself.

“It’ll be fun, Andy” Dad said, trying to fish me into his idea like he did to the trout he was eating, seeing right through my lie.

“I have an extra fishing rod, Andy! You’ll love the lake, it’s so calm and serene, and I even bought a lifejacket just for you” he added more and more advantages to our fishing trip faster than I could think.

I was about to say another firm and hard *no*, but I saw the expression in Dad’s eyes again. He’s always wanted me to come along to one of his trips with him. Maybe, maybe this one time I’ll go. Who knows...it may not be as bad as I thought.

Boy, was I ever wrong.

We woke up bright and early the next morning, the sun dazzlingly bright and lighting up the light blue, cloudless sky. I woke up groggy and tired, not used to waking up so early, especially on a Saturday.

I went into the truck with Dad, and got to hold a fishing rod for the first time. It was firm in my hands, but cold, like it was stuck in a freezer overnight. I brushed my fingers against the reel, and looked at all the many strings firmly attached to the rod. I wondered how this thing possibly works.

Dad smiled as he watched me play around with his extra fishing rod as he drove out of our driveway and down our street. “You look like how I did when I first held a fishing rod”

I smiled, too, at the thought of a young Dad, gripping his first fishing rod tightly with excitement, the same glow in his eyes that he has now.

We reached the lake in no time, and I hopped out of the truck while Dad unloaded the boat and docked it out to the lake. I strapped myself into my lifejacket, buckling up the straps, and zippering it up, for good measure.

Butterflies flew around in my stomach as I saw the boat out in the water, bobbing along beside the large, wooden dock. I twisted my flip-flop feet around in the sand nervously, thinking of the worse. A shark attack. The boat flipping over, and me and Dad drowning. An evil octopus coming out of nowhere and eating us.

Dad must've seen the anxious look on my face, because he put a gentle but firm hand on my shoulder and said very calmly "Don't worry, Andy. It's going to be okay"

"A-alright" I swallowed hard, and nodded.

I walked onto the deck with Dad, my feet wobbling slightly. I looked out into the lake, which seemed never-ending, like it stretched on forever and ever. The waves gently slapped the boat and the dock, and I felt like throwing up, already feeling the nausea of seasickness.

Dad hopped into the boat, still standing up, and put our fishing rods down on the floor of the boat. See, our boat isn't exactly fancy, it just has a floor, and a wooden wall, and a little compartment for storing things, but Dad loves the boat like it cost him a million dollars. You could tell by the way he always shows it off to everybody, the way he always proudly says "*I have my own boat*".

I took a deep breath and jumped into the boat beside Dad, making the boat rock terribly, and me to crash down onto the hard floor of the boat.

"Are you okay?" he asks, slightly alarmed.

"Yeah" I said, my voice shaking more than the boat.

Dad pulled out a little wooden box with word BAIT written across it in a bold, black marker. I knew what bait meant. It's those little plastic worms and feathers. I took the box from him and screamed with surprise when I saw that they were actually, live, wiggling worms.

Dad laughed, and I screamed louder. "Don't worry, Andy. I decided to use live bait this time. It usually works better than fake ones"

I quickly handed the box back to him, and sat down beside my fishing rod. Dad untied the rope that attached the boat to the dock, and I swallowed even harder as we slowly bobbed away from the deck, and towards the middle of the lake.

The boat swayed along the water as Dad attached one of the wiggling, brown worms to his fishing rod, and pulled the reel. I watched in awe as Dad swung his rod up, his hook landing somewhere, far, far away from our boat.

"Wow" I whispered, eyes wide.

"Do you want to try?" Dad asked, and I quickly nodded, deciding that I would give it a try.

Suddenly, all my fears of fishing melted away like icecream on a hot summer day as I handed my Dad my fishing rod, my own excitement welling up inside of me like a balloon.

With one hand still gripping his fishing rod, Dad put the worm onto my hook, and winded my rod up for me, and handed it back.

"Now toss it out into the water" Dad instructed, and I did, but it barely went half as far as Dad's rod.

Dad grinned. "You're a natural!"

Now the boring part. Me and just sat there, on the boat, tapping our feet against the floor, staring out into the lake. What was so exciting? I was about to drift off, think about something else, when suddenly, out of nowhere, I felt a tug on my rod. I gasped, and Dad looked over. I stared at him, helpless.

“Okay, good! Just wind it back! This means you`ve caught a fish!” Dad said, his voice full of excitement.

“Oh...okay” I replied uneasily. I winded it back, like he told me to do, but it just kept tugging, harder and harder, until I was leaning over the boat.

“Dad...help!” I said, alarmed. The fish, or whatever that thing was, kept tugging, pulling me hard, as if we were in a tug-of-war competition.

“Just keep winding, Andy! You can do it!” Dad said, and he was so excited he forgot about his own fishing rod, and set it down on the floor.

I kept winding, until I felt the strings on my rod almost crack with pressure. That fish wasn` t giving up, it kept tugging, and tugging, and suddenly, I was tugged out of the boat, and into the water.

All I remember was my face smashing against the cold, icy water of the lake. I wasn` t submerged for long, thanks to my lifejacket, but it felt like an eternity for me. I held my breath, and opened my eyes underwater. I saw blue, blue everywhere. I gripped my fishing rod, hard, so I wouldn` t let go and have it sink away. I looked around, and saw green seaweed, almost dancing in the water. I think I saw some fish, too, small minnows swimming around happily.

And then I was up again, shuddering and shivering against the cold water, and I gasped for air, even though I wasn` t down for long. I heard Dad` s concerned gasp, I heard him say “*Andy! Are you okay?*” but I blocked all that out. All I focused on was getting that fish. All I cared about was that fish. I kept winding and winding, and eventually, the fish stopped tugging back. I could feel it reeling in towards me, and I flicked my rod upwards, and the fish came flying towards me, as if it had wings.

“Quick! Pass me your rod!” Dad said as he saw the fish coming for me. He leaned over towards me, and I handed him my rod, and he reeled the fish in. And oh boy, was that fish ever big.

It was the biggest fish I’ve ever seen in my whole life. It was *HUGE*. It was like a mini-shark. And it was so beautiful. It’s fins sparkled and shined in the morning light, and it’s eyes were a beautiful, mystical green.

It thrashed and throbbed around in Dad’s hands for a while, then it stopped, and as it did, me and Dad cheered a little.

“Wow!” Dad stared at my big fish with amazement. “What a big fish, Andy!”

I laughed, and swam around a little in the lake, no longer feeling cold, but warm and fuzzy.

“Yeah, it certainly is”