Autumn Afternoon

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FALLING and sliding languidly off soft yellow and red fall leaves and off nut-foundered squirrels, the September sun’s rays felt out the placid water of Squaw Creek.

Two ten-year-old boys sat on a sand bar thoughtfully removing their socks and playground-scuffed shoes. Tony, big for his age—his broad shoulders were born to be beaten and to take it. And they had been beaten, and they had taken it. Little Eddy was fat, jovial and scared most of the time.

Tony sunk an inquiring foot into the sand and forced it down until it hit mud. Soft, rubbery mud which he could mold. Diligently he worked the earth into small cubes and then after punching the correct number of dots on each, he threw them down onto the sand, little mud dice.

“Seven, a three and a four. C’mon let’s go wading.”

A bluejay called cynically up the river and a young frog tripped on a rusty beer can as he hastily made for the shallow water. The still water felt friendly around Tony’s hard feet.

“Ohh, it’s cold,” and Tony turned to see Eddy dancing up and down, laughing as he showered himself with river water.

“Christ, you always say it’s cold even if it’s boiling,” and then his freckled face broke into a smile and they started up the river.

No bellowing, belching tantrums to face, no running when he was called to fetch an extra can of beer for Dad and his drunken friends, no rats in the basement crawling in the woodwork and gnawing in the kitchen at night, no old woman screaming when he spilled and splashed water out of the bathtub.

Tony inhaled deeply and inspected closely a track along the water’s edge, “Mink,” he nodded sagely and Eddy bent over and studied the track with fierce concentration, then picked up a half-clam shell. “I wish I had a shell.”

“Why?”
"'Cause then I could hide from things if I wanted to."

Hide, yeah, hide, and then as he heard the raucous, sharp call of a lone crow, he squared his shoulders and forced his normally stoic expression back into place. Nobody would ever make him hide, Tony McCall.

The sun-warmed water swirled about his ankles and the radiant sunlight darted through schools of frolicking minnows and fell upon a round, white object near the bank. Tony slurped a strong right hand into the water and picked out a large clam. "Hey, Eddy, a live clam."

"A real, live one? Gosh, let's see it." The chunky boy came splashing recklessly through the water.

Together they fondled the mussel and then Eddy said, "Let's take 'im home, Ton."

The larger boy furrowed his brown and then said, "All right, but we'll have to keep him at your place. And we'll have to find some bottles to sell so we can buy him some food."

Carefully they made a bed of sand in the bottom of an old fruit-cake can and filled it with water. "You can carry it."

Eddy picked up the can reverently and stared happily down at the silent little animal.

The sun, as it quietly dropped, put a hand on Tony's belt-scarred shoulder. "Let's take a look in the hole before we go home." The hole was the only place where the river was deeper than one foot, about five feet deep.

Bending over the stagnant water, Tony saw the hailing glimmer of shiners which he and Eddy always magnified into ten-pound bass.

As if tired of carrying his load, Eddy set the clam can down with a quiet sigh. He then plopped down beside Tony. The brittle clay on the bank gave way a little and the fruit-cake can tumbled into the water with a soft "Thllp." Both boys grabbed for the can desperately, but the clam was dumped out and spiraled down comfortably in the friendly water.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," wailed Eddy.

"Forget it. He'll be happier here anyway."

They sat in reflective silence while putting their shoes
on over muddy feet. The quiet dusk trod softly in and Tony shivered a little, exchanging his placid expression for one of rock-like apathy.

"Ton."

"Yeah?"

"I don't think I'd want to have a shell like a clam. Clams can't see."

_Cole Foster, Ag. Jr._

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**Peace**

And there is peace —

The peace of a man alone.

The peace of a man alone with his rod.

- life pauses, waits — the whip of the rod,
- a muffled splash, the silent circle grows.

The peace of a man alone with his dog.

- over the plow-tossed earth, along the contorted creek,
- his matted rug beside the chair — before the fireplace.

The peace of a man alone with his boat.

- the steady pull of the sheet, the billow of the sail,
- the refreshing discomfort, the nourishing strain.

The peace of a man alone with his art.

- the soft hum of the lathe, the scratch of the pen or
dab of the brush,
- the clumsy creativity that satisfies.

The peace of a man alone with his God.

- the calm communication, the frank evaluation,
- the sober resolution.

This is peace — the peace of a man alone.

_Tom Irish, Sci. Sr._