

The Escape

He stood alone in the middle of the bridge, looking out over the railing. Downstream, on both sides of the river, he could see policemen and rescuers scurrying up and down the shoreline the way fishermen do when one of them hooks something big. Occasionally, men in black ~~wet suits~~ ^{wet suits} surfaced ~~in the swirling current,~~ ^{in the swirling current,} gestured to ~~the~~ ^{other} men in ~~the~~ ^a green police launch, and dived back down ~~into~~ ^{the} cloudy, golden ~~depth.~~ ^{depth.} On both ~~sides of the~~ ^{banks} people were gradually filling in every available vantage point to view the search ~~operation.~~ ^{operation.}

He glanced over at the policeman who ~~was~~ ^{had} whistled at him and quickly ~~made~~ ^{was} making his way up the bank and onto the bridge. A soft drizzle was falling, but the boy ~~was~~ ^{was} soaked to the skin, and he felt nothing.

"You know," said the officer, ^{trying to catch his breath,} "you shouldn't slip away like that. I'm trying to conduct an ~~investigation~~ ^{investigation} and you're running off."

Cory said ~~nothing~~ ^{nothing}. He continued to watch the ~~black~~ ^{black} men rise and submerge.

"~~You're~~ ^{was} just talking to the guy who pulled you out dry land. Good thing the shad are running and ~~the fishermen are~~ ^{the fishermen are} here -- you're lucky to be alive."

~~The~~ ^{Cory} turned toward the officer. "No I'm not -- I can swim," he replied.

"Doesn't ~~make~~ ^{make} any difference; this ~~river's~~ ^{river's} tidal. You know what that means?"

"No, I don't," ~~he~~ ^{he} ~~replied~~ ^{replied}.
 "It means you shouldn't be messing around on some kind of makeshift raft." The officer stared at the boy a few seconds. "Besides," he said after ~~glancing~~ ^{quickly glancing at} his watch, "I'll bet ~~you're~~ ^{you're} ~~not~~ ^{not} 2:00 yet -- why aren't you in school?" ^{it's not even}

insert 1

The officer smirked in triumph when Cory ~~didn't~~ ^{not} answer him. ~~He~~ ^{he} ~~felt~~ ^{felt} he ~~now~~ ^{now} had the upper hand ~~as~~ ^{as} he gazed at ~~a~~ ^{the} small boy who looked even smaller ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~water~~ ^{water} logged blue jeans and grey T-shirt, which

clung to his ~~body~~ ^{slender} body. But Cory ~~stared~~ ^{only stared} ~~vacuously~~ ^{vacuously} at the officer for a moment, and then he turned ^{perplexed by the boy's behavior,} to resume watching the ^{driver's} ~~stare~~. The officer decided ~~to get back to business.~~

"No sense ~~staying~~ ^{staying} here, Cory; ~~someone's already~~ ^{someone's already} notifying the Collier boy's ~~mother~~ ^{mother} as your mother home."

"No," Cory replied, "she ~~works~~ ^{works} at the Value King."

"Well, what about your father?" asked the officer.

Cory stared at the officer, ^{who ~~was~~ ^{was} waiting for a response,} and ~~not~~ ^{not} smiling in mockery. "I don't have a father," Cory said, "and my mother -- works at The Value King."

"The one on Elm?" asked the officer. He was interested only in getting his job over with. ~~Cory~~ ^{Cory} nodded affirmatively.

"O.K., Cory, I'm going to have someone call your mother and have her meet us at your house. I got all the necessary information down by the river so I can release you to her authority."

"She's not gonna like it," muttered Cory, looking off in no particular direction.

"What, do you mean?" asked the officer.

"~~She's~~ ^{She's} gonna have to leave work on account of me."

"Christ, you could've been killed ^{! Just like} ~~you~~ -- you know."

"She's not gonna like it," repeated Cory.

The ride to Cory's house was short; he lived in a row of colorless bungalows whose back yards fronted the river ^a mile upstream from the bridge. There was a blanket in the police car, but Cory refused it. ~~He~~ ^{Because he} ~~stared~~ ^{stared} ~~expressionlessly~~ ^{expressionlessly} out the window until he recognized his mother, arms folded in front, ^{already} ~~already~~ awaiting his arrival. She was a stout woman wearing a brown-and-beige Value King uniform, and her eyes fixed on Cory as the car pulled to the curb. He closed his eyes and swallowed.

"Good afternoon, madam, I'm Sargeant Gills," said the officer as he got out of the car and walked around the front. Cory let

himself out and stood nearby, looking down at the ground.

"I'm Mrs. Watson, Cory's mother. Just what's going on, Sergeant? I get this call about ~~an~~ an accident, and my son's all right, but I've got to get right home. I mean, this ~~wasn't~~ ^{can't} the first time I've had to leave work on account of him."

"Well, from what Cory says, he ~~was~~ ^{was} fishing with ~~some~~ ^{some} Collier boy when their raft —"

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"Matt Collier!" bellowed Cory's mother. "I thought I told you not to hang around that no-good — you get inside — I'll be right there!"

They watched as Cory slowly climbed ~~to~~ ^{the} front steps and disappeared behind a front door badly in need of paint. Then ~~Officer~~ ^{Officer} ~~Gillo~~ ^{Gillo} ~~said~~ ^{said}, "I have to get back down to the river, but, Mrs. Watson, I think you should know that the Collier boy is presumed drowned."

"Thank you ~~for~~ ^{for} telling me," replied Cory's mother. "And thanks for your time and ~~trouble~~ ^{trouble}."

"Aw, Cory wasn't any trouble," said Officer Gillo, getting into the car and starting the engine.

"That's all he is to me," ~~he~~ ^{she} muttered Cory's mother as the police car sped away.

"Just whattya tryin' to do to me?" yelled Cory's mother while Cory, ~~was~~ ^{sat} in his same clothes, at the kitchen table.

"I'm not tryin' to do nothing," he replied.

"Anything, anything," she corrected. "You wanna be a dummy, like your father, ~~and~~ ^{go} ahead. Keep playing hooky."

"I'm not a dummy," Cory snapped, "I just don't like school."

"So ya gotta ~~play hooky~~ ^{play hooky} and embarrass me when they call? Don't you have any feelin's for me or Jamie?"

"What's this got to do with him?" Cory said ~~angrily~~ ^{angrily}. Then he got up from his chair and stalked into the living room, where he slouched in to ~~the~~ ^{an} easy chair. His mother followed right after

him.

"I'll tell you," she said, "Jamie's different from you; he cares about school, about everything. Miss Farrington said he's the best student in second grade."

"Aah, Farrington's an old fart," sneered Cory.

"No, you're just jealous because ~~you~~^{all} you ever got were C's and D's. Well, don't you ruin it for your brother. I don't want him to suffer because of your reputation."

"Why don't you change his last name!" Cory shouted as he sprang up from the chair and stormed away to his room, slamming the door shut.

"Why don't you change yours!" retorted his mother. She paused for a few seconds to regain her composure, but the sight of Cory's closed door recharged her fury. ~~She went down the hall and threw the door back open.~~ ~~She went down the hall and threw the door back open.~~ She went down the hall ^{to} Cory's room and threw the door back open.

"Now you listen," she hissed in anger, "you're grounded for the rest of the month. And if you cut school again, it'll be for the rest of the year. ~~I want you to stay off that river. Maybe now you learned a lesson.~~ I've gotta go back to work, and I'll be home a little late; I'm taking Jamie shopping after school. There's stuff in the fridge for supper. You make sure you're here when we get back."

Cory waited until he heard his mother start the car and pull away before he got up from his bed. He suddenly felt consumed by tiredness from his grueling swim. ~~He took~~^{He took} off his still damp clothes and hung them over several chairs. Hopefully they would be dry by ~~the~~ morning. Then he went to the medicine cabinet in the bathroom and took two aspirin for the tiny explosions he was feeling inside his head. ~~He got back on to bed, but~~^{He got back on to bed, but} this time deep and under the covers. Before sleep engulfed him he thought about Matt, their plans, ~~the raft~~^{the raft}, the capsizing, the loss of everything. But he couldn't cry.

It was like Matt said, ^a risk. Nothing complicated or profound. You want something badly enough, you go after it. If you don't make it, even if you don't survive, everyone will remember that you tried. So if it's ^{your} life you seek, it's worth the risk of death. Cory remembered Matt's words as he drifted off into deep slumber.

When ~~he~~ ^{Cory} awoke, it was ^{early} the next morning. He ~~had~~ ^{had} been too tired to have supper, ^{the night before} and his mother never awakened him. ~~Typical.~~ All the yelling, ~~and~~ belittling, and threatening. Then back to ~~the~~ quiet disregard. He ~~silently~~ ^{silently} got out of bed and ~~stipped~~ ^{stipped} back into ~~the~~ blue jeans and grey T-shirt, the only clothes he had left. Not quite dry, but satisfactory. He was hungry, but ~~there~~ ^{he} could buy a meal ^{later}. ~~He~~ ^{he} had kept his money in his pocket, and although a bit damp, it ~~survived~~ ^{survived}. ~~On~~ ^{the} way ^{outside} he spotted ~~it~~ ^{the} jar his mother kept on her desk. Her "emergency money," as she called it. More like Jamie's college fund. Cory picked up the jar and thought about it for a moment. ~~Had~~ ^{let} the kid keep it; besides, ~~if~~ ^{the} money wasn't missing, ~~it~~ ^{it} was there.

Once outside, Cory had little left to do. There were no supplies or fishing equipment to take with him, the river had claimed everything on their first attempt to escape. Cory went to the ~~garage~~ ^{dilapidated}, decaying ^{wooden} excuse for a garage, ~~and~~ ^{removed} a neatly folded package of blue and yellow, and walked down to the river's edge. ~~He~~ ^{he} opened the self-inflating, one-person raft he had won in last year's fishing derby, ~~he~~ ^{he} popped the cartridge top, and

the air that ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ less than a minute gushed the flat canvas to life. ~~He~~ ^{he} slid in as he pushed off into the river, mounted the oars, and was on his way. ~~He~~ ^{he} disappeared into the morning mist. ~~Where~~ ^{where} ~~he~~ ^{he} was to ~~take~~ ^{take} him, he ~~thought~~ ^{knew} it would be ^{to} a ~~good~~ ^{better} place than ~~where~~ ^{where} he was leaving behind.

inserts:

① ~~The~~ The water's going in and out from the bay; there's a strong undercurrent."

② She ~~glared~~ ^{glared} at Cory.