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## RAINWATER

by David Nye

Adam rushed through the dark field, blind except for when the lightning struck. With every flash he could see Piper, his dog, rushing after the fox. Piper didn't have much time left but Adam couldn't let her go.

The old dog was twelve, the same age as the young boy. As Adam pursued his friend toward the lake, he prayed she'd stop at the water's edge.

"Please, Piper. Piper, stop you dumb dog!" His sobs interrupted his shouts and his tears were lost in the rain rushing down his face. Adam's cheeks hurt from how the panic twisted his face. His throat was raw and inflamed.

"Adam!" The shrill scream pierced the storm and momentarily cut through his anguish. His mother would chase him. If she caught him Piper would keep going, would be lost in the lake.

A lightning flash showed him Piper again. She was still in full sprint and moving away from the boy. Her old bones slowed

her, but she was still faster than her injured quarry. Adam thought a black dot ahead of her might be the fox. Piper had found it under the porch, hiding from the storm. The fox was famous in the neighborhood for eluding neighborhood dogs. Its favorite tactic was rushing across the water, out-swimming any of its pursuers. The only dog that even tried to follow it was Piper.

The stubborn old bitch had chased it the first time it got into McKlint Farm. Piper chased the fox across the pigpen and out the fence line toward the lake. Adam's father had laughed as Piper ran. The fox wasn't injured then and had easily outpaced the old girl. He hit the water thirty yards ahead and Piper never stood a chance. Piper wasn't so good a swimmer anymore and Adam's mother had reluctantly let her son take the rowboat across the lake to retrieve Piper.

This time though, Adam knew Piper would drown in minutes once the fox lured her to the water.

In another lightning flash, Adam's fears were confirmed. The fox, still ahead despite his injuries, was already in the lake and Piper was continuing her full tilt run.

Piper entered the water well ahead of Adam. By the time Adam got to the rowboat, the fox was lost in the waves and Piper was just a head, barely visible in the flashing bolts of light.

Adam tried to tug the vessel to the shallows but found he couldn't move it. Adam's father always complained that Adam never turned the boat over and rain filled it, rotting the wood.

"ADAM!" The cry came again. His mother was closer; she must have guessed which way Adam had gone when she realized he wasn't in the house. She'd be at the lake's edge soon.

Adam squatted his young body against one side of the boat and pushed up as hard as he could. Some of the water slipped over the side before his footing gave out and he fell to the mud.

Adam squatted again and pushed up. This time, the load was lighter and Adam got most of the water out.

He risked the time to look up. Within seconds, another lightning bolt flashed and Adam could see his mother was a hundred yards away, rushing down the hill. He ran behind the boat and pushed it into the water. The two inches of rain still inside it sloshed around as Adam jumped in. He grabbed the short oar and paddled out into the water, crying his dog's name.

"Piper!" His pleading was lost in the rain. "Piper!"

He paddled hard against the waves churned up by the vicious winds. Lightning flared every few moments, cracking against trees around the lake. One even struck the lake itself. The flash erupted across the water and the little boy was blinded for a few moments. Still, the lightning was constant enough for him to find Piper.

She had lost the fox and was swimming in circles, yelping between swallows of lake water. Adam gripped the oar tighter and navigated the tiny vessel through the waves to the distressed dog.

Water was building in the bottom again. The few inches at the shore had doubled as he paddled and the water was over his

shoes. A glance overboard showed the lake lashing against the boat, just short of swamping the tiny vessel.

Adam was getting closer, though. He could hear Piper's panicked cries as she barked for help, unsure of the way to shore.

"Piper," Adam yelled again. The dog heard him this time. She caught sight of him and began her labored swimming to the boat. Adam paddled toward her eagerly.

They drew closer. Adam took another look at the water in the bottom of the boat. It was partway up his calves now, brushing against the lip of the hull. The young boy made it to his dog who clamored aboard.

But the boat, already suffering from too much rain and too many waves, capsized. The boy spilled into the water below. Piper's churning legs scratched the skin of his face and hands as he reached for the surface. Lightning flashed across the sky and the light spilled into the watery world of Adam McKlint. He saw his dog fighting the storm again, churning her feet across the surface. Piper's dark silhouette stayed on the surface as Adam slipped deeper.