**In the Current**

Del Shortliffe

Passing down among the fir-topped islands, a breeze came low and cut small furrows in the moonlit water's surface. The man held his paddle still across the kayak's cockpit. Letting tension ease from his shoulders and forearms, he considered the single light gleaming from the house. From here the light might seem a warm comfort in the expanse of sky and water. But coming from his own window, in the sole house on a mile-long island, the glow spoke to him of a coldness greater than any felt on the bay.

A seal distracted him. Its round face emerged with a sudden ripple just to his right and bobbed awhile, all frank eyes and comic whiskers. In moon's light, the seal was vivid yet softened, more pencil sketch than photograph, and the man in the kayak was pleased. He smiled a greeting, but the visit suddenly ended, with another ripple and a brief circle of flatness on the water. The man imagined the seal under the water, swimming, its whiskers now thin banners streaming with the broad body's surprising ballet, the comic face now a squinting Buddha's, the seal now, becoming the water. The breeze was cooling the man, and he thought of moving again.

He dipped the paddle to steady himself, the current coming astern, and faced the light. He knew his wife would still be sitting beside the light at the round oak table, the vodka and ice beside her, the album open to her grimace and tears. Pictures of their son. Here he is diapered at two, dapper in plastic horn-rimmed shades. Here he beams from a high chair, a spoon lifted in celebration. Here he stands on lengthening legs in the island waters, a thoughtful gaze fixed on a gray horizon.

She would add a little ice and another splash to her glass and she would not turn the page to that single gravestone on the bluff above the granite shore. If the man were still there with her on this dark anniversary, she would still cry and ignore him, still drink and hear emptiness. When she had started with the bottle and album, he was finishing their few dishes, and he had left them in the drying rack and descended to the beach to pull the kayak from under the tarp.

He should still be there, he thought. She wouldn't have to see him or hear him, wouldn't have to talk. She could drink and be alone knowing he was nearby, in the chair, in the house. There was enough sorrow, enough variety of mourning for them each to do a part. But he became aware of waves lapping on the kayak flanks and the rising wind was colder. He loosened his collar in response and put his hat beneath the seat. This chill demanded motion.

His grip tightened on the paddle and he turned the kayak's bow. He would have to paddle against the current a while, at least until he passed around Ram Island. Maybe he could get there before the moon had fallen, to see that looming tree where, just the day before, he had spied the eagle with her nestlings.

**Directions:** Read "In the Current" and look at the form or formula of the story on the back. Write a story using the "In the Current" format. ("Passing Time" is another example.) Feel free to wander from the form if the story needs it, but use the form as much you need it. The goal is to write a complete story in the time allotted. *Use a setting that you’re very familiar with so you can provide key details effortlessly.*

• Establish setting.

• Introduce a character; reveal something about him.

• Have the character react to the setting, perhaps to a change in the setting.

• Introduce a problem the character is facing (in his mind/memory or in the setting).

• Have the character consider another character (not already considered) or have another character enter the scene.

• Have the character consider the problem.

• Add a detail about setting.

• Have the character take action.

• Create a climax.

• Write a denouement?

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