

Young Adult Fiction

White clouds sailed across a bright blue sky and the tall pines along the shore bent toward the lake under the force of the wind. Waves slapped hard against the rocks along the shore and rebounded back out into the lake, creating a maze of waves from every direction. Whitecaps drove down the center of the lake, building to breaking crests. The sun reflected off the sparkling water, almost blinding Carl as he narrowed his eyes to slits trying to get his bearings. He was fighting the wind and waves, but they fought back against him even harder. The waves smacked his kayak from all sides. He could see them coming toward him from the front and got ready for them, leaning his weight back to get the bow up over the crest of the wave instead of crashing through it. But he couldn't constantly check the quartering waves coming at him at an angle from the rear, and those were the dangerous ones, the ones that would push the stern hard to the side and expose the whole side of the kayak to the next wave. *Brace*, he thought to himself. *I have to brace to keep from being pushed over.* He tried to remember which side to brace the paddle on. *Same side as you're falling toward.* The answer came to him immediately from his paddling lessons. He was tense with adrenaline but his mind was sharply focused and clear. He was aware of nothing except his task of keeping the kayak upright and pointed upwind. His shoulder and back muscles burned but he couldn't take even a second to rest them or he would be pushed off course in an instant. Between the cresting waves he leaned as far forward as he could to make himself a lower target for the wind. He gripped the paddle as if his life depended on it and strained against each stroke, putting every ounce of his strength into inching forward. But the wind pushed him back just as hard and trees and rocks on the lakeshore moved past him at a snail's pace.

Carl began talking out loud to himself. “Come on, man! You can do this!” But he couldn’t hear his own voice over the roar of the wind and waves and so he began to shout. “LEFT! HARD LEFT! WAVE COMING OFF THE REAR STERN! STRAIGHTEN OUT NOW! HARDER!”

The shore of Moose Lake on the west side was formed by a series of points that jutted out into the water. Coming up along each point he was facing into the wind and could keep a straight course, but as he neared the tip of a point he was forced farther out into the open water, where the wind and waves picked up quickly. To round the points he had to quickly make a left-hand turn and somehow avoid being pushed over as the waves now hit him violently from the side. If he could survive each turn, the water would be calmer on the other side of the points.

Coming up to the tip of Flying Point Carl saw angry gray waves ahead of him. He hesitated to make the turn and found himself farther and farther from shore, with the conditions getting worse with each paddle stroke.

I can't keep heading out into the open water! I have to make my turn now!

Carl watched the bow waves carefully and when he saw a wave that was slightly smaller than the previous ones he made his move. He leaned the kayak and dug the paddle in on the right side. He knew he would have to make the turn in a couple of seconds before the next large wave hit him and immediately pointed the bow downwind toward shore on the other side of the point. But as soon as he made his first stroke it was all over in an instant. A sudden gust of wind slammed against him and he was overboard in a split second before he could even think to brace with his paddle to stay upright. He gasped in shock as the cold October water hit him and he

drew in a lungful of water as he sank below the surface. His life jacket brought him back up and he coughed the water back out.

“PADDLE! KAYAK!” he shouted to remind himself to keep contact with the paddle and kayak no matter what. He was aware of items that had been unsecured in the cockpit floating away from him but they didn’t matter. All that mattered was to not be separated from his paddle or the kayak. He quickly grasped the coaming of the overturned kayak with one hand and held onto his paddle with the other. As soon as he could he transferred his hold from the coaming to the safety deck line running from one end of the kayak to the other. The paddle was tethered to the front line but he had to make sure it didn’t get trapped under the kayak and break. He had trained in calm water many times to get the kayak upright after an upset, but the weight of the water in the kayak combined with the wind and waves now made this almost impossible. First he had to get the kayak into a more stable position parallel to the shore, pointing into the wind, and prevent it from being blown against him.

“MOVE!” he shouted at the kayak as he struggled to orient the bow upwind. He held onto the deck line and the paddle and pushed against the bow with his feet several times to try to get the kayak pointed into the wind. As the bow slowly turned northward Hurricane Mountain came into view at the north end of the lake. But the mountain was rapidly receding into the distance as Carl was blown down the lake. He looked toward the west shore and realized that he was now almost a half a mile south of the end of Flying Point and much farther out in the open water than when he had tried to round the point. In the short time it had taken him to turn the kayak around he had been blown almost to the middle of the lake and was now moving swiftly down the lake, away from his campsite. Away from his tent and his sleeping bag. From his food

and all possibility of a warm fire. His heart stopped for a moment when he realized that he now had no control whatsoever over his rapid course down the lake. He could do nothing more than grasp his kayak and paddle. The wind and waves had won. The lake had won and Carl was nothing more than a black speck in the middle of an angry dark-gray ocean. He went limp in the water and stared as Hurricane Mountain grew smaller and smaller at the end of Moose Lake.