INCIDENT AT NORTH POINT

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[Assignment: Relate a meaningful experience, utilizing description. Be sure that diction and images are as concrete and specific as you can make them.]

(1) Winter always hit the lake first, ice-bitten winds piling numbing waves that crashed against the seawalls of North Point. When the winds eased and the last bit of snow dust blew smooth as silicon across the dark, sliding surface, filling in various cracks and slush spots, turning them hard and clear as crystal, it was time to unearth the summer-forgotten midget wood-poles that were trade to an ice-fisherman.

(2) When the children of North River Road tired of skinning hands and cracking knees on the slick, cobbled surfaces of the river and her surrounding canals, and they had done with feeding their faces on the lovely snow bluffs that lined our toboggan tracks down the side of Blue Lagoon Bridge, they made their own tracks to the lake, where, in tribes like migrant flocks of some new, queer and exotic snowbird, the shanties settled.

(3) I loved the wooden huts whose slanted roofs sparkled in the sun with an insulating layer of clean, crusted snow. I would stand for hours on the snow-packed dike and look out over the miniature frost-city that glistened with bright, clear colors in the crisp morning sun. That most of the shacks were shabby and their colors worn thin to flaking, and occasionally one would be missing a door or a side, hardly spoiled the image from the dike; and close up, reality was lost on me. The learned image of a crystal fairyland was safety enmeshed in the sacred illusions of childhood fancy.

(4) In my twelfth year of eagerly pressing interesting designs in the snow banks of the toboggan run with my face, I was still flicking ice particles from my ears and spitting out generous portions of calorie-free slush and creative epithets (learned from my best friend Mikey Blood's father, who drives three-day runs for Trans-Allied), when from the lake came enough thunder to scare the cotton out of me. I forgot my sled and my carefully chosen phrases, and raced Mike and his brother, Charlie, to the dike, where we promptly felt obliged to drop our jaws and gape, wide-eyed, at the biggest mess we ever saw.

(5) The group of shanties nearest us was merely a memory, debris staining the snow everywhere. Mikey picked up a shatter-shocked piece of wood. It was warped, horribly mutated, and seared charcoal at one end; what was left of it was a blue-gill green. We looked at each other, and I felt my stomach drop through my frozen boots. It was part of Jake's shanty.
Jake McCruen had been camping here for nearly thirty-six winters, far as anyone knew, maybe forty. When dusk fell, we'd always be found in the Albatross (his only mildly shabby, eight-by-ten foot ice-castle,) inhaling steaming chocolate and thumb-fighting for best position next to his portable butane heater. The minor squabbles sometimes aroused by the finger game (employed to arbitrate matters of diplomacy), were quickly forgotten as Jake drew our rapt attention with elaborate tales. And there we stayed until the shanty bells rang an end to our night, absorbing the mischievous, horrifying, and sometimes, downright ridiculous adventures, the like of which nobody could weave better than Jake.

Immediately, my vision began blurring, but I could pick out the charred remains, a faded blue latch board or a rusted bell, that told the similar fate of neighboring shanties, among the litter. Sirens screamed bloody murder; I wanted to scream too. While the police and rescue-crews picked through the various piles of blackened rubble and debris for why's and wherefore's, we sat mute on the snow bank, counting green rectangular fishing holes that seemed naked without their warm shells. It wasn't the first time Jake's twenty-five year old heater had blown sky-high, but accidents could happen to anyone, and besides—the last time Jake had been safely out getting fishing supplies.

The police asked more questions. Apparently, miraculously, no one else had been hurt, but where was Jake? Convinced that he had been drowned down his own hole, I started crying.

"Holy Mother Jamaica!!! Must have been some party! Why wasn't I invited?" Behind us, the low whistle that followed was hardly heard as Charlie and I threw ourselves at Jake McCruen's lean 5'9" grizzled frame; even Mikey let out a holler. "Whoa, ho-there! What's with all the water-works?" Gently, he put us away from him, quiet for a moment. Then he looked at what was left of this side of the lake, not to mention his portable butane heater. He bent to pick up part of the disfigured grill that had made its way up on the bank, and turned it over sadly.

He turned it over again and heaved a sigh. We, Mikey, Charlie and I, looked at each other, then at the lake. "Well," Jake straightened, hurling the fragment towards the ruins, "The Albatross was due for a facelift, anyway." We looked at him. He looked at us; then we all looked at the mess. Then Jake started chuckling. He threw Charlie up around his shoulders and headed towards the muddle of people and wood. We watched them go. I shook my head at Mikey; he shrugged his shoulders, grinning from ear to ear, and let me have it with a two-fisted, ice-coated slush ball. I declared war and chased him to the disaster site.
As we caught up with them, I heard Jake telling Charlie a tall one about a spy who hid a roll of secret micro-film in this priceless old heater that had once belonged to Elvis, and wasn't really a heater at all, but a state-of-the-art juke box run by a nuclear disc drive, which was being sought by Soviet Intelligence and was believed by the CIA to have been lost with the Titanic...