

Fish Market**Juliana Allan B.****973 words**

by Julie Allan

At the shores of the Araruama Lake there is a small wood and straw hut. Its heavily discolored foundations started growing mollusks from the splash of the water when the tide is high. But the hut stands now as firmly as it did fifty years ago.

In the earliest hours of the morning, the lonely fisherman rises along with the sun. The door creaks as he steps out into the dim morning light and makes his way into the small blue wooden boat sitting by the shore. The soft waves brush his boots as he approaches. The small hut sits in the company of silent waves, until the man returns hours later. With his bucket, as heavy as his steps, he jumps onto dry land.

“What’s in the bucket?” said a small voice peeking from behind the splintered wood of the boat. The man was startled, and quickly looked away in an attempt to ignore this. But

the boy stared curiously in anticipation. As his expectations for an answer were not met, he pressed on. "My name is Bruno. What 's yours?"

"Edgar," the man responded shortly, with a deep voice.

"Mr. Edgar, is that fish in your bucket? Are you a fisherman? Did you just catch these?" The old man nodded reluctantly but did not say anything. "Gee, you don't talk much do you, sir?" The man kept about his chores without a second glance at the boy. "You know, I have a blue bucket at home too. But mine is broken. I threw it down a hill once by accident, and it was filled with rocks, so it broke all over."

"Why'd you do that for?" The old man asked, finally giving in to the conversation.

"I dunno," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I wanted to bring the rocks home, but they ended up scattered all over the hill. I ran after the bucket as fast as I could..." he moved his arm quickly, mimicking a fall down the hill, "...and I raced the bucket down, and I almost beat it, but then I tripped on a rock, and that's how I got this." He smiled wide revealing a missing tooth. "It'll grow back, Ma said, but I like having a missing tooth, I blow air in it like this." He half-blew and half-spit through the gap of his teeth.

"Hm." The man squirmed.

"Hey, I have an idea! I'm going to get my bucket and help you with the fish. I live just over there, over the corner and then after the tree. Will you take the fish to the market down the road? I never went there, but my mom sometimes goes and comes back with a smelly fish, and then she makes it smell good again and we eat it. I'm going to get my bucket, wait right here," he said, leaping from behind the boat and running until he disappeared around the corner.

A few minutes later, Bruno appeared around the corner again. He ran clumsily, and his tiny legs stepped lightly on the dirt path. He proudly held an old dark-blue bucket. It had a

crack on the rim and the handles were on the verge of falling off. Nonetheless, he smiled, a gap-toothed smile, one hand on his waist and the other holding the broken blue bucket.

“Isn’t it a great bucket, Mr. Edgar?” The old man looked at the child, then the bucket, and back at the child. With a deep sigh, he realized he had no way of ridding himself of company this afternoon.

“Well, let’s see how good the bucket is.” He rummaged through his bucket in search of the smaller fish.

The old man carried his bucket with heavy steps. Bruno followed behind, often interrupted by the crowd forcing him to move around and out of the way as they passed with their own carts and heavy buckets. They passed a busy rocky street full of potholes, stepped over the puddles of melted ice and salt water, until they reached the bend that led onto the market. The old man uttered not a word, nor hesitated at any step, until they arrived at the old, empty booth. The wood there was a dark brown and just as splintered as the boat. The smell of the fish market was busy, smelly, and dirty, and Bruno was tempted to leave, but thought to himself, “If the old man can do it, then so can I”. Besides, he had made it this far. Why would he give up now?

His own bucket was small, very light and broken. But he copied the old man’s labors and struggled to put it up on the counter area. He watched as the old man pulled out a large bag of ice from the old white freezer. He opened it with a small knife he carried on his belt, and in one certain movement spread out the ice over the slanted display in the front of the booth. Then he started to empty out the contents of his bucket. The boy followed suit. From his bucket, the old man produced three large carps, a couple of fat tilapias and with both hands pulled out one large dourado. The boy proudly put on display a small carp and three flounders.

Once the fish were laid out, the old man sat on the wooden chair in the corner behind the counter, crossed his arms over his belly, and closed his eyes in silence. Looking around for a chair, but finding none in the vicinity, Bruno turned his broken bucket upside down and mimicked the old man's gesture. The old man opened his eyes slightly, caught a glimpse of the boy and did his best to hide the slight smile that crept into his face then he closed his eyes again.