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The Adventures of Little Oyster

Robert S. Bailey

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The Adventures
of
Little Oyster

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Virginia Fisheries Laboratory

Gloucester Point, Virginia

1955

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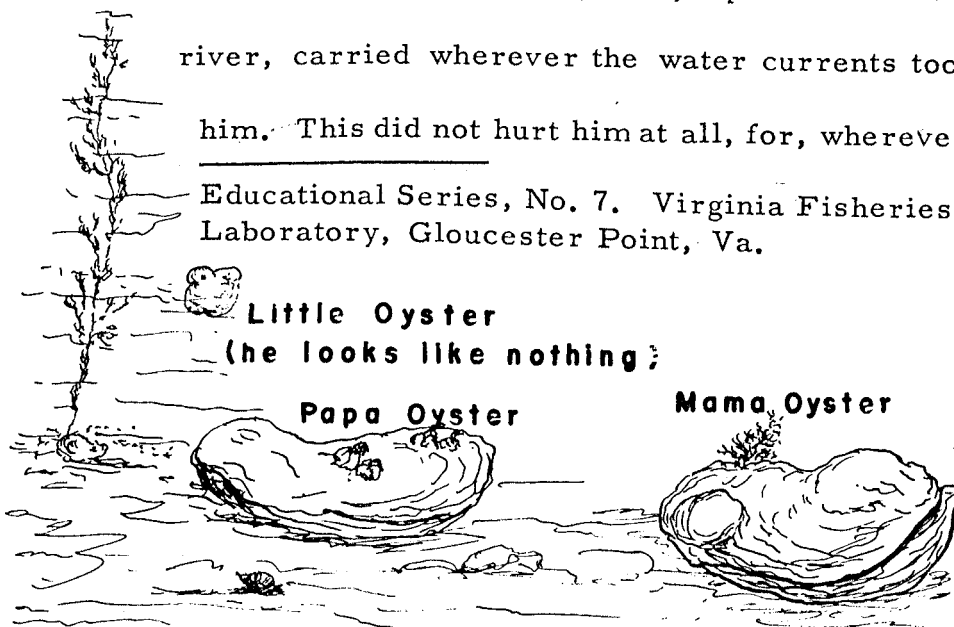
THE ADVENTURES of LITTLE OYSTER

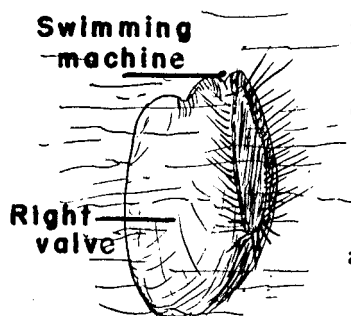
One day, in the middle of summer, deep down in the bottom of a river near the bay, a little creature was born. At first he looked like nothing at all, just round, and you never would have guessed what he was. And he was so small that you could not see him.

But the strangest thing happened. Just as soon as he was born, he was picked up by the water and swept away from home. There was nothing he could do about

that, and he drifted helplessly up and down the river, carried wherever the water currents took him. This did not hurt him at all, for, wherever

Educational Series, No. 7. Virginia Fisheries Laboratory, Gloucester Point, Va.





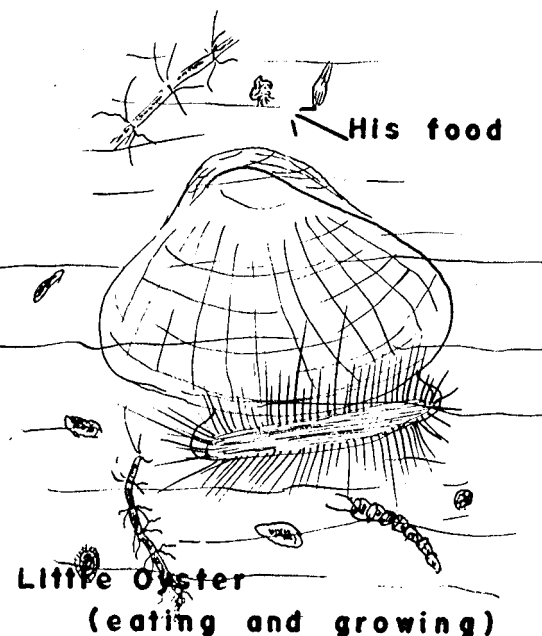
**Little Oyster's
Shell**

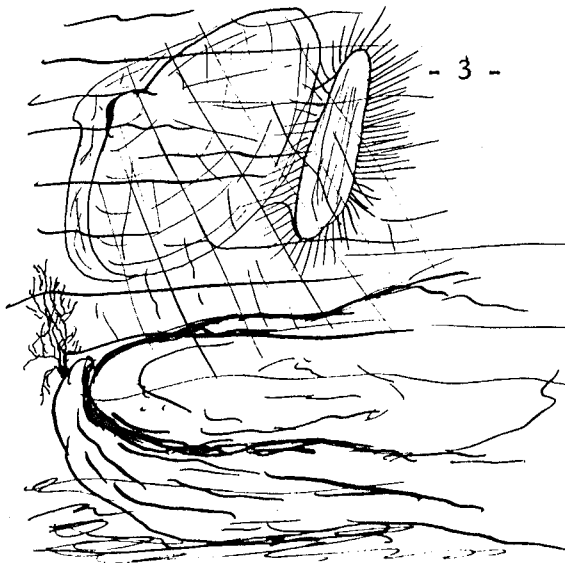
he went, all the food he could eat came drifting along with him.

So he grew bigger and fatter, and when he was two weeks old he had grown as big as a pinhead! He had also changed his shape. The most important change was the tiny shell which he had grown on his back. The shell was really two pieces hinged together so that one part came down over the left side and one part came down over the right side. If you had caught him I wonder if you would have guessed that he was Little Oyster!

When Little Oyster was just two weeks old it was time for him to find a home. So he began to sink slowly down to the river bottom. The water currents had been carrying him all up and down the river, over sand, and shell, and that terrible mud. He would die if he landed in mud.

What was he landing on? A shell!





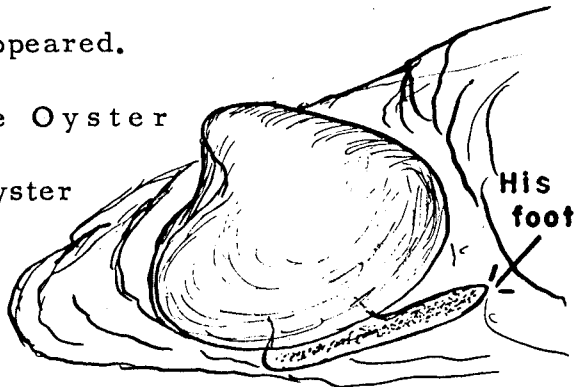
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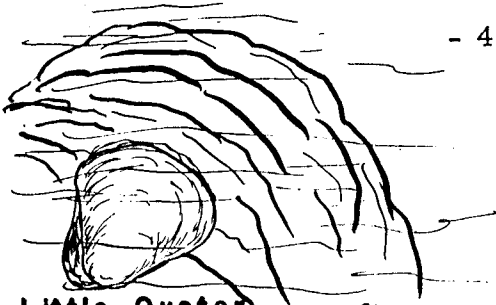
Little Oyster stuck his foot out and felt the shell carefully. Finally he found a smooth spot. He "felt" (he didn't have eyes so he couldn't see) for a good place to fasten himself.

Little Oyster slowly sinking to the bottom. He is the size of a pin head

From a special gland in his foot he poured out a drop or two of cement. This he spread over the clean, smooth spot he had found on the shell. Finally, he lay down on his left side, and using his foot, pushed his left shell firmly into the cement. The cement hardened and Little Oyster was securely fastened where the water current could flow over him, but could not break him loose. He would never need a foot again, so he pulled it back into his shell and slowly it withered away and disappeared.

Although Little Oyster was now living in an "oyster bed" he wasn't sick and he had plenty to eat.





**Little Oyster
attached to old shell**

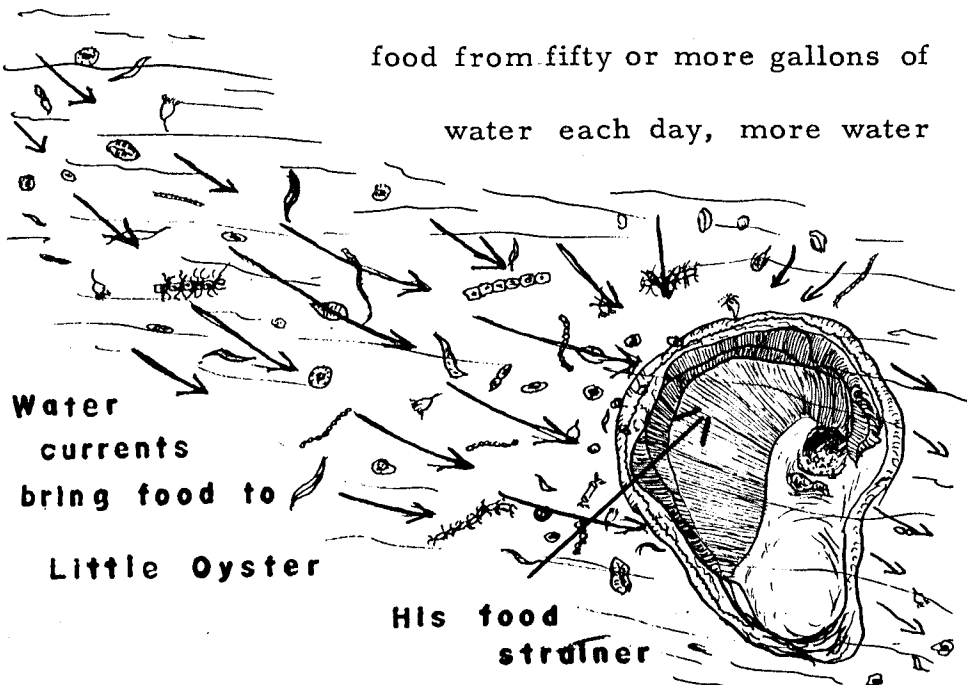
The water currents brought
him tiny plants and animals,
so small that you and I
could not see them, but

these were just the food he needed.

While Little Oyster was being carried up and down the river by the water currents he had grown a food collector of his own--four water pumps with strainers. We call them gills. Over each of his gills he spread a sticky juice and when he strained water through the gills, even the tiniest pieces of food were caught.

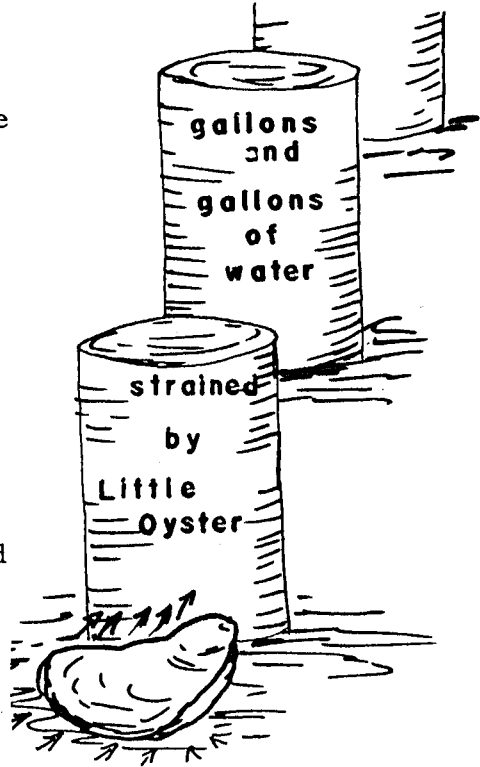
To get enough to eat Little Oyster had to strain

food from fifty or more gallons of
water each day, more water



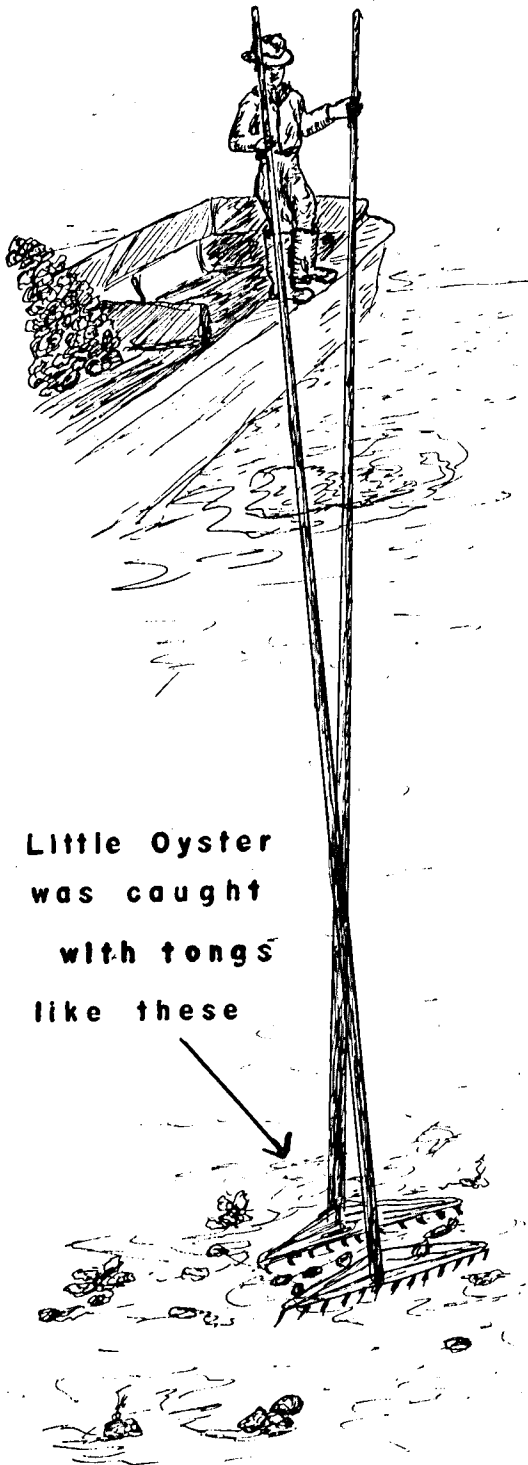
than you need to take a bath!
For many months Little
Oyster lay quietly at the
bottom of the river.

Then, when it was just
a few weeks past his first birth-
day, there was a great dis-
turbance in the oyster bed and
it seemed that the river ex-
ploded around him. Other
oysters lying nearby suddenly
disappeared and then empty
shells came tumbling back to the bed! The water became
cloudy with mud and trash!



Little Oyster hastily snapped his shell shut. That
was all he could do to protect himself. A pair of basket-like
tongs grabbed him, lifted him out of the water and dumped
him into a boat. He had been caught by Tim Tonger.

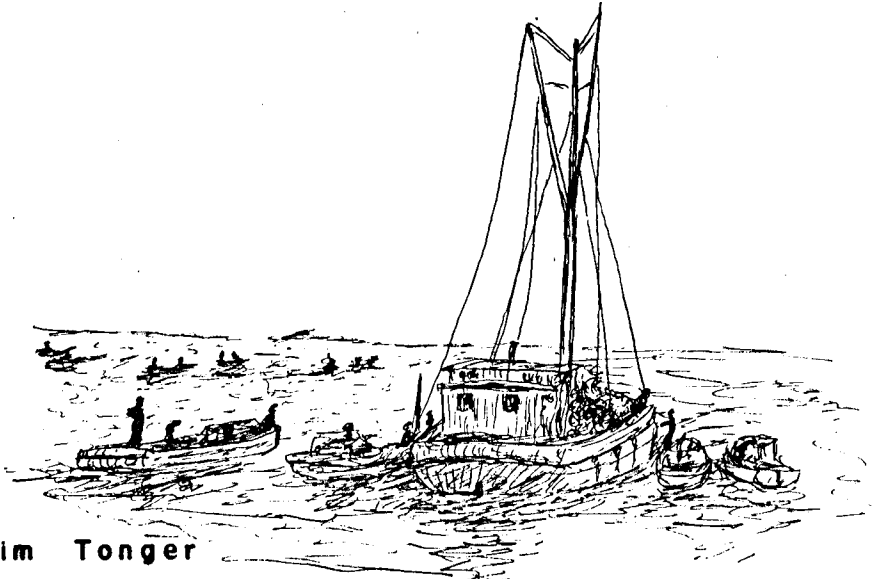
During the next few hours Tim Tonger caught many
other oysters and piled them all around Little Oyster who
lay at the bottom of the boat. All the empty shells were thrown
back into the water.



Little Oyster
was caught
with tongs
like these

When he had a full load, Tim Tonger took his boat alongside a huge buy-boat and sold Little Oyster and others of his kind to the buy-boat captain, Captain Ben. Captain Ben called them seed oysters. Tongers from all over the river brought more oysters to the boat, and soon there was a pile of them as big as a mountain.

Finally, Captain Ben weighed anchor and the buy-boat disappeared down the river. The journey was long. The boat passed other buy-boats which were unloading in



**Tim Tonger
sold Little Oyster to Captain Ben
on a buy-boat**

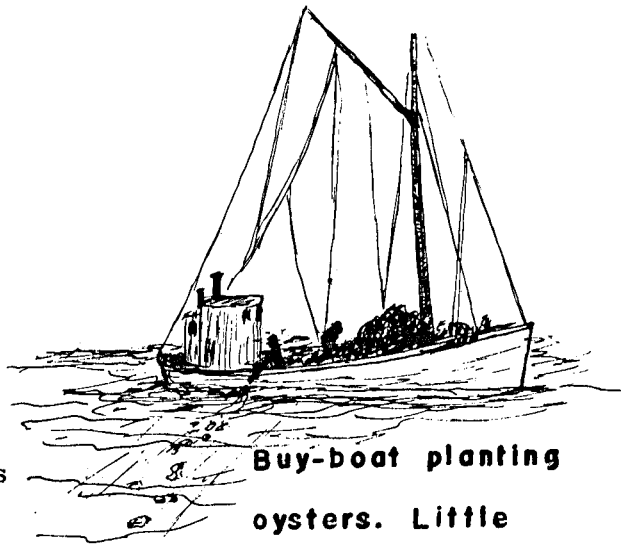
the bay. It went past several rivers and small bays where still other buy-boats were unloading.

Next day Captain Ben arrived at his oyster grounds and men began throwing the small oysters overboard. Little Oyster soon found himself on his way down to the bottom.

Now, here was a mystery. Why did the men work so hard to catch Little Oyster, haul him in the buy-boat many miles away, and then dump him overboard again?

Well, the men wanted Little Oyster to grow bigger and fatter. Just as there is some good and some poor farm land, so there is some good oyster ground and

some poor. And just as a farmer selects good ground to plant his corn, so the oyster farmer selects the best ground he can find to plant his oysters.

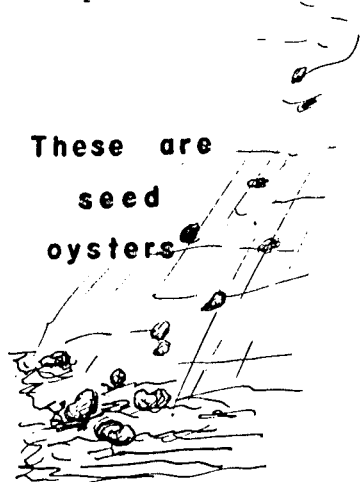


**Buy-boat planting
oysters. Little**

The best ground for raising oysters must be firm enough to keep the seed oysters from sinking in the mud and becoming buried. But it must also contain some mud, for waves can shift a sandy bottom, and the oysters may be washed away, or covered with sand.

**Oyster took a trip
on this boat**

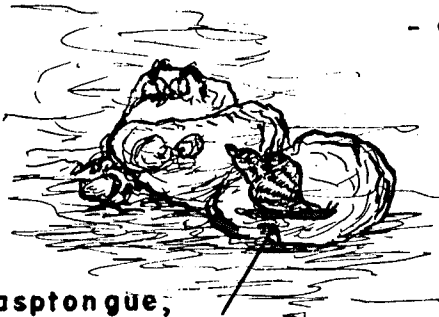
Some oystermen who have land that is too muddy dump thousands of bushels of shells on the bottom to make



**These are
seed
oysters**

it stiff enough to hold up seed oysters.

Out in the water around Little Oyster, there were sneaking enemies to be feared. One was Rasptongue, the



**Rasptongue,
the oyster drill**

drill, and his many relatives, who loved to eat oysters. Rasptongue would softly creep over

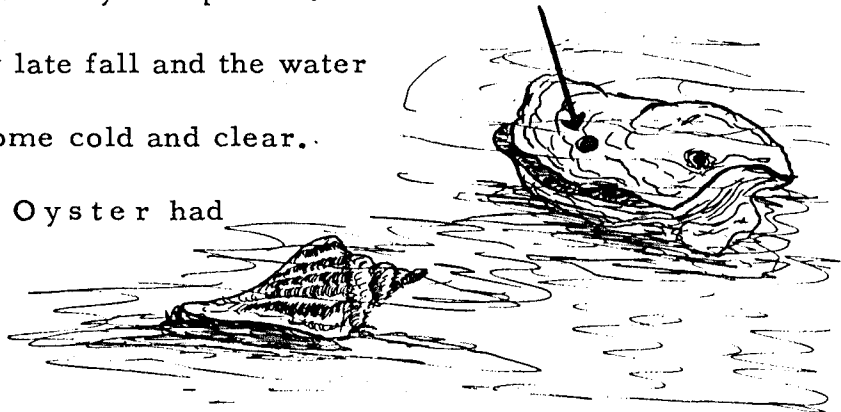
the bed, and then, without warning, set to work with his file to make a hole through an oyster's thin shell. Thousands of seed oysters were murdered, many of them neighbors of Little Oyster, but he was lucky and escaped those bandits.

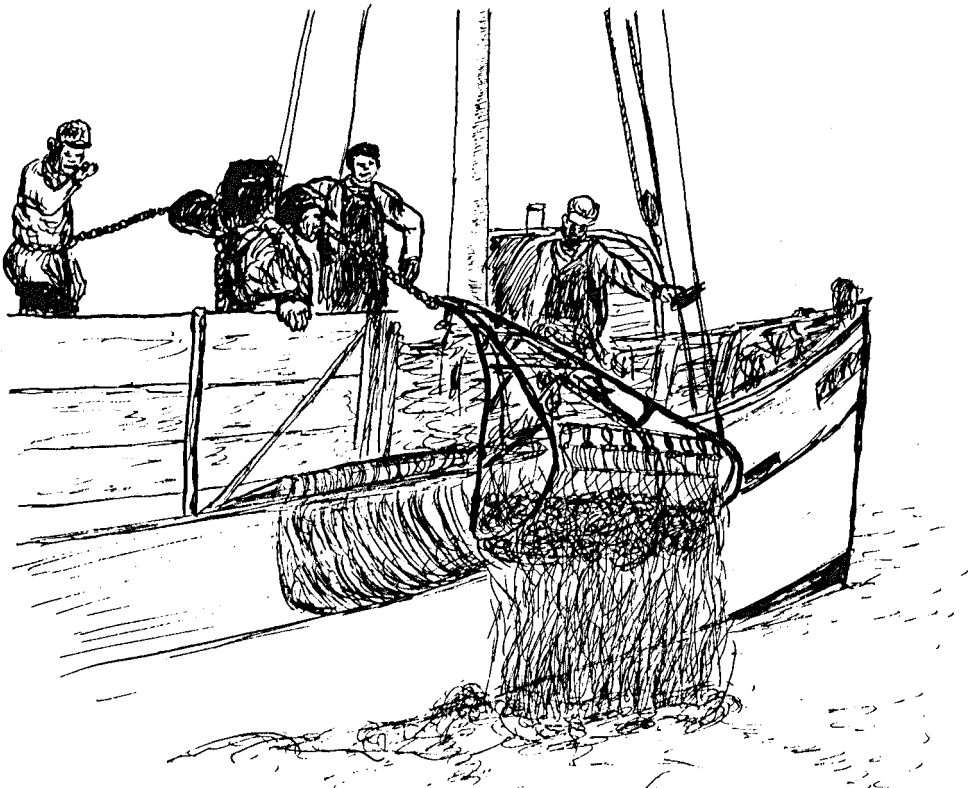
Little Oyster was comfortable in his new home. Day and night, summer and winter, spring and fall, Little Oyster pumped gallons and gallons of water through his gills. He grew larger and larger each month, but he grew most rapidly during the spring and fall. That was when food was in the water.

Three years passed. It was now late fall and the water had become cold and clear.

Little Oyster had

**This hole was
made by Rasptongue**





Little Oyster
was harvested
in this dredge
stored up much food. He was fat and ready for winter!

Out on the river a power boat chugged along. Men had equipped it with dredges to rake up oysters from the bottom. One dredge was pulled from one side of the boat and one from the other. You could hear the clanging of the iron chain on the rollers as a sturdy winch hauled in first one dredge and then the other. But Little Oyster was unaware of what was going on.

Then such a commotion! Little Oyster's world was turned upside down! There was the scraping of



Mike likes
oysters.

They are a
nourishing food

iron against shells and the stirring up of mud. Little Oyster scarcely had time to close his shell when suddenly iron teeth raked him up. He was lifted out of the water and dumped on the deck of a big boat. That had happened before, but this time Little Oyster was going to market.

And that is how Little Oyster ended up as a part of Mike's dinner. Mike did not think of him as "little." That oyster was big and fat!

Mike enjoyed eating oysters. They tasted so good! Besides they were just the food Mike needed for energy and for growing strong bones and teeth and rich blood. Minerals, vitamins, and muscle building materials had been gathered



from the river by Little Oyster. Mike was grateful for these gifts.