

Selections from **Anatomy of a Fisherman**

By Robert Traver

Photographs by Robert W. Kelley

In 1958 a man, already a giant within his beloved Michigan Upper Peninsula, loomed large upon the American literary scene with his best-selling novel, *Anatomy of a Murder*. Under the pen name of Robert Traver he deservedly became a famous man, although as John Voelker, lawyer, prosecuting attorney, Michigan State Supreme Court Justice and resident keeper of the fly-fishing faith, he had long been a hero to the residents of the U.P., as it is known. "John Voelker," a resident once told us, "is our Paul Bunyan. There is no one like him. When they made him, they threw away the mold!"

Life photographer Bob Kelley found this out quickly when he did a feature story on Traver/Voelker, and the natural evolution of this confrontation was the publication several years later of another book, *The Anatomy of a Fisherman*. Thanks to the weird machinations of the publishing and bookselling industries, this charming book was quickly converted into a collector's item.

Happily, John Voelker and Bob Kelley have given us permission to reprint—exactly as originally published—a selection of the delightful essays and sensitive photographs which make this book unique in angling literature. Of course, these can only be a "sampler" of the many thoughtful and witty confections and artistic renderings which thread through every page of this classic book—but they should hold your attention for the next dozen-and-a-half pages.

We asked Bob Kelley to prepare a short introduction to these selections and tell the story of the gestation of *Anatomy of a Fisherman*, which he did with skill, dispatch and affection.

Voelker describes the photograph on the facing page as a "portrait of an inland Captain Ahab who chases slightly smaller whales."

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The View from Behind the Shutter

ROBERT W. KELLEY

FOR ME, FLY-FISHING has become more or less a spectator sport. And I don't mean on some big wide-screen color TV. I mean I've met the master, and my own efforts, admittedly feeble, have given way to watching a man who fishes with such splendor I'm in awe. Not a chance will you catch me flailing away in his presence.

For good reason. John D. Voelker writes wonderful stories, and some of them are about fishing. He uses the name Robert Traver and has snared millions into his corner by penning such classics as *Anatomy of a Murder*, which came close to outselling the *Boy Scout Handbook*. More important, however, he writes about my other passion, fly-fishing, and he did just that some years ago with a slender volume called *Trout Madness*. I was hooked.

At the time I was toiling away all around the world as a *Life* staff photographer, and it was incumbent upon those few of this peculiar calling to have an idea for a story now and again. As I read through John's delightful description of his own fishing madness, I felt the juices stir. Here was a *Life* essay! I would show Voelker not only fishing but expounding in words on how he feels about fishing.

Idea are good beginnings and the lighted bulb over my head impelled me to call this guy on the phone.

I got on the long distance. A low, somewhat gruff, voice answered.

"Judge Voelker?" I asked.

"Make it 'John,'" he growled.

I explained that I wanted to come up to his Upper Peninsula town of Ishpeming and tag along while he fished, take pictures for *Life* and then have him write the captions.

He hesitated for at least a millisecond.

"Just what day do you wish to do this pictorial embalming?" he queried.

"What day?" I yelped. "Hell, I mean for a week or two!"

"I don't guarantee fish," he said flatly.

"That's okay. And I'll try to stay out of your way."

"Fine, come ahead and bring your fishing gear."

That was the beginning of a long friendship. In forty years of photojournalism, John became one of my favorite subjects. Another was Marilyn Monroe—but for distinctly different reasons.

The *Life* story was a success, and included John's famous essay, "Testament of a Fisherman," which reveals why he fishes. From some of those pictures, plus many subsequent trips to John Voelker's bramble patch, came *Anatomy of a Fisherman*.

I might add that it was the first book for which I did the layout and planning. This, for the most part, took place in John's kitchen and den. His lovely wife Grace fled to their summer cottage somewhere else. I had pictures and sketches all over the floor and on every table. John would try to help, but after a spell he would peer out the window. Then he'd say, "Bob, you know more about pictures, so I think I'll just mosey down to... [one of fifty secret places]... and wet a line." And off he'd go.

This man fishes. And that's why I've given up fishing with him. I just watch. To be sitting on the bank on a warm afternoon, beer or whatever in hand, and seeing this man roll-cast is far better than for me to be roiling the waters.

In *Joys of Trout*, his last book on fishing, the late, famed editor of *Esquire*, Arnold Gingrich, nominated John D. Voelker to be the next Dean of fly fishermen. I do hereby call a quorum and suggest he be elected by acclamation. Do I hear an "Aye"?



THERE ARE CERTAIN REWARDS. On long winter nights we can close our eyes and doze by the fire and conjure up surrealist dreams like this—lo, an enchanted trout emerging from a sheet of hammered silver.

Anatomy of a Fisherman

TO PARAPHRASE A deceased patriot, I regret that I have but one life to give to my fishing. This is doubtless a curious confession coming from a man endowed with a four-carat education in the law, one who quit a more or less permanent job on his state's highest court—among lawyers the equivalent of winning the Pulitzer Prize—to devote himself to trout fishing and writing his yarns, but that's the way it is. What makes such a man tick? Well, that's what this book is all about.

Fishing, my research discloses, is older even than love and chess. In fact men have fished as long as there have been men and fish. Once they fished mostly for food, as some still do, but I suspect the reasons most fishermen now fish are nearly as varied as the kinds of fishermen who fish. And while all fishermen are probably a little mad, we shall here consider only fishermen for trout, who are mad in a special kind of way. But even this species of madmen differs among themselves.

Trout fishermen, like Gaul, may be divided into three parts: those who fish mainly to get fish; those who fish mainly to get away; and those who fish because they love the *act* of fishing and love to be

where trout are found. This fisherman counts himself among the last breed, where I suspect most true trout fishermen belong. For trout, unlike men, will not—indeed cannot—live except where beauty dwells, so that any man who would catch a trout finds himself inevitably surrounded by beauty: he can't help himself.

Catching an occasional fish is to the enjoyment of trout fishing what encountering an occasional oyster is to the enjoyment of oyster stew: gratifying, yes, but far from everything. Now any fisherman likes to suspect that there is still a trout lurking around somewhere in the same county, naturally, but a full creel every time out is not what he craves and would in fact spoil half the fun.

These old eyes have beheld the time when, fishing in Ontario, my wrist got so sore catching magazine-cover trout, and myself so bored with the whole enterprise, that I fairly raced home across the border where once again I might stalk my wary native trout, each of which I swear comes spawned into the world with a master's degree in evasion.

What, then, is the mystic lure of fishing?



John Voelker (Robert Traver) and Life photographer Bob Kelley, co-authors of *Anatomy of a Fisherman*, wait for the muse to strike and for John's wife, Grace, to record this happy confrontation for posterity.

THE FRUGAL FISHERMAN

THE MYTH SO COMMON among non-fishermen that fly-fishing for trout is an expensive sport is sheer nonsense. As is well known to even the most fumbling tyro, all a fly-fisherman really needs to catch a trout are five simple things: a rod, a reel, a line, a leader, and a fly. Everything else is exhibitionism and mere frills. Of course if the fisherman is one of those pampered types he can shoot the works and indulge himself in a landing net and creel and perhaps even a pair of boots to keep his feet dry. But these refinements are not really necessary, and even the wildest trout have been known to impale themselves upon the shabby offerings of the crudely equipped fellows who lack these luxuries. Fly-fishing expensive? Utter nonsense!

Take my own case. Naturally I possess the five simple rudiments for fly-fishing, that is a rod and a reel, a line and a leader, besides a couple of old flies. Candor moves me to confess that I also have a net and a creel and a pair of old patched rubber boots. There are a few other odds and ends that I have accumulated over the years and usually lug along, but since they do not come readily to mind, I'll just rest the ballpoint a bit and slip out to the garage and take a quick inventory.

(Two hours later)

Ah, I got back. . . .

Some guys do seem to carry a little more tackle and gear than others. It's a kind of personal whimsey, I guess. But I must say it's amazing how the stuff does accumulate. Let's see now, where shall I start?

Ah, yes, first things first. . . . For example, while rummaging through the jeep just now I happened to glance through my fly vest. (It's utterly silly how that ever slipped my mind; of course I own a fly vest.) Fly vests, as the name implies, are designed mainly for carrying flies, but I seem to have added a few stray odds and ends. Quite a few, in fact. In or adorning this swollen garment I found a compass, a combination scales and measuring tape, a magnifying glass, a pencil flashlight, a tube of powdered graphite (to ease reluctant ferrules), a pair of scissors, tweezers, sun glasses, a combined leader snipper and hook disgorging, a nail file and

clip, a weighted priest for conking languishing trout, a gadget for tying up tippets, a jar of line dressing, a bottle of fly dip, another of fly dope, five coils of assorted tippet material and, of all things, a gummy wad of old trading stamps.

I also came upon one bullet-hard, squirrel-gnawed piece of plug tobacco, a wizened artifact from some brave era when I had doubtless tried to forsake smoking Italian cigars—known among its addicts as the poor man's marijuana. This spurred the search. House cleaning could now be combined with inventory.

Diving deeper I found an aluminum soap box and bar of mechanics' soap to scrub out leaders; a wash cloth to dry my old paddies; a pocket knife; a carborundum hone to sharpen same and my fly hooks; also a miniature monocular for bird watching or casual window peeping when fishing palls, besides several miles of tapered leaders ranging from hawsers down to those as fine as a hair from the golden head of a Scandinavian princess. Alas, I found no princess. . . . I also appear regularly to carry between seven and eight hundred flies in a wild assortment of fly boxes, most of which I'd forgotten I ever owned. So much for a quick tour of the old fly vest.

What next, little man?

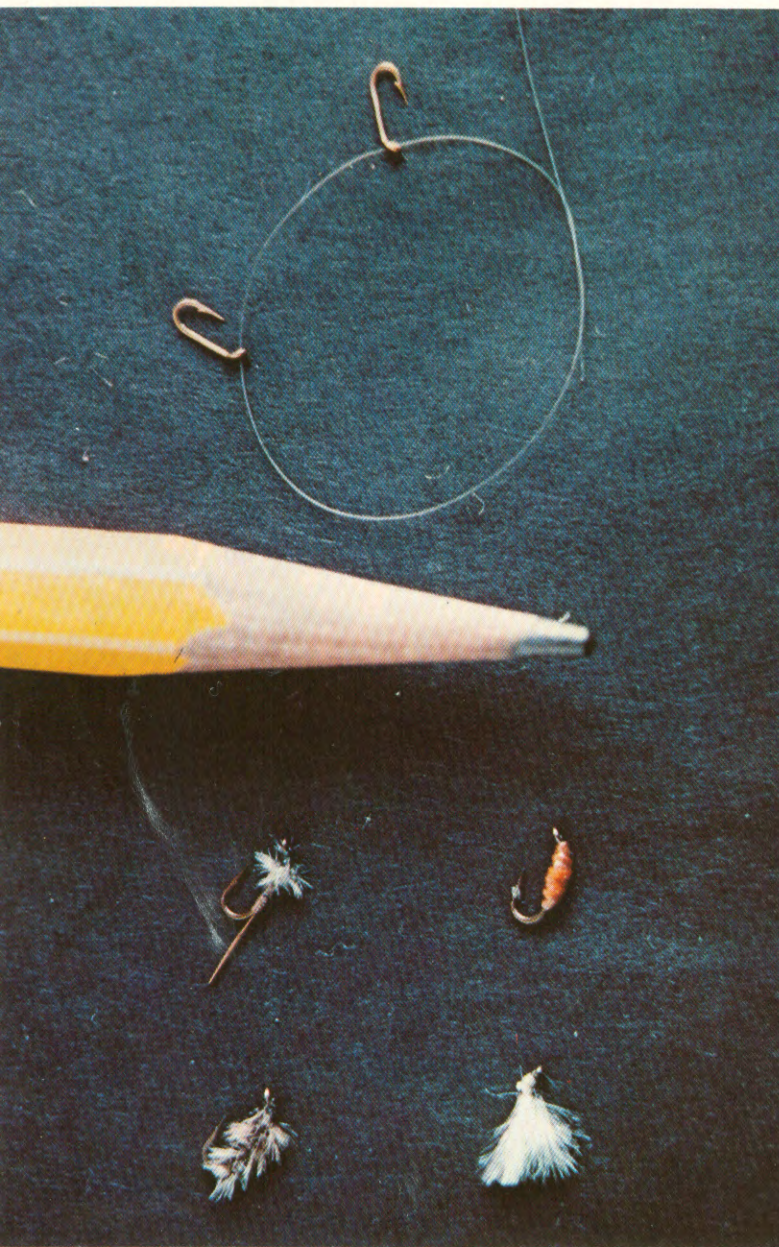
Pawing and tossing stuff around in the jeep at random, I was enchanted to learn that I carry 2 pairs of binoculars, 1 power scope, 2 cameras, dozens of rolls of overripe film, a raft of assorted flashlights ranging from pencil size up to the Lindberg Beacon, a batteryless flashlight that works by some sort of ratchet, 2 old Stonebridge candle lanterns in case science should fail, scores of half-melted plumber's candles for same; 2 pairs each of waders and hip boots, 1 pair of detachable felt sandals, 1 pair of low boat boots; all sizes and types of rain gear; assorted vests, sweaters, gloves and ear muffs in case I should encounter a glacier. . . .

In addition, I found endless assorted nails and screws, nuts and bolts, \$.71 in coins, extra ferrules and guides, winding silk, eye bolts, an old gold filling, emery paper; assorted cements, glues, varnishes, ointments; a bedroll, 3 blankets, a set of



PORTRAIT OF AN IMPOVERISHED FISHERMAN

In short we are a lean, stoic, self-denying crew, always ready to do anything or go anywhere—except home—in our endless quest for trout, Spartanly sacrificing ease, comfort, gracious living—everything—just so long as we can fish. The Pilgrims never had it so rough.



Here is a looped tippet of the thinnest leader material made—7x Platyl—along with a few tiny flies—No. 24's tied by Bill Nault—and two of the smallest eyed hooks made by man (Bill and his microscope are now toiling on them), No. 28's made by Mustad of Oslo. Working flies like these "is like plucking a 'no-see-um' off your wrist and calmly fishing with it."

The Frugal Fisherman . . .

detailed county maps, packsacks of all sizes, and an old ticket to a strawberry festival, an annual U. P. event. Also a tarpaulin, a silk pup tent—and a birthday card sent me ages ago written in the round hand of my oldest married daughter when she was nine. In addition, there are 2 axes, 2 saws, 3 hatchets, 1 fearsome brush knife that could cleave a charging rhino clean down the old spino; 2 sizes of pruning shears to clear out brushy "hot spots"; a hand-cranked tugger to supplement the jeep's winch when retreat seems the better part of valor; assorted tow chains, extra cables, snatch blocks; and enough wrenches and pry bars and hack saws and miscellaneous wrecking tools single-handedly to invade and conquer Fort Knox.

The cultural aspects of trout fishing are not neglected; I carry a small nature library: 2 illustrated books on wild mushrooms, 1 each on birds, wild flowers and trees, even some of my own books, besides the illustrated book of my friend Art Flick, his invaluable *The Fisherman's Streamside Guide*, full to the gills with suave May fly patterns, natural and artificial, besides much other fishing lore. Since books suggest smoking, I recall I carry a battery of old pipes, reamers and cleaners, faded and forgotten boxes of tattered Italian cigars, matches, spare lighters, flints, spare wicks, packets of mildewed tobacco; playing cards and a cribbage board; 2 pin-on compasses plus 3 regular ones; 3 tiny transistor radios and a big powerful all-wave affair, including FM, to keep me abreast of the latest shaving creams and lotions and underarm deodorants, not to mention the state of the uneasy romance between the Russians and the United States.

Since fishermen occasionally must eat, naturally my jeep is an ambulant supermarket bulging with jars and bottles and assorted canned goods; fry pans and nesting cook kits; stoves and grills galore; 1 folding table, 4 folding canvas chairs, 1 luxurious folding rope chair for impromptu press conferences and coronations; 1 small ice box, 1 thermos jug, and enough wine, beer and miscellaneous booze to get half the county plastered. I also carry—but before chaos sets in I'd better set up some categories. On with the categories. . . .

FLY RODS: Like many another guilty trout fisherman, I own enough split bamboo fly rods to furnish buggy whips for most of the harness drivers of America. I possess at least one of every well-known make and quite a raft of others by rod builders one rarely ever hears of, possibly because many of them are dead and the rest have more work than they can handle. And like the man with a million ties on his rack, I usually "wear" only one, a gallant and battered old three-piece number that was old before our children, now grown, were even born. Most of my rods I no longer carry; some I reverently lug along but rarely use; two old favorites have won honorable retirement and are now set up like crossed swords in the tallest window of my den; others of late years I am giving to deserving youngsters; and recently I suspect my wife, Grace, of eyeing several others for curtain rods.

I own but one glass fly rod, which I use only for wind casting, or fishing the heaviest weighted nymphs, or on rugged pack-in trips to unknown new territory. I must say it performs nobly and yet I wouldn't trade my oldest and creakiest split bamboo for all the glass fly rods in captivity—which is doubtless pure snobbery.

FLY LINES: After I had insured the economic survival of England by acquiring enough expensive torpedoed and double-tapered silk fly lines to reach from here to London, I discovered through my friend Art Flick a ridiculously cheap American fly line that does all that any fly line can be expected to do, only twice as well. It requires no dressing, no drying, no cleaning, no uncoiling, no storage, and no love. It positively thrives on abuse (last winter I inadvertently left one wound on a reel in the jeep in our unheated garage, and it leapt forth last spring eager and supple as a snake). Moreover, it floats and floats and floats. . . . If I wrote simply for money rather than for Art, I would reveal the name of it—but then we dreamy fishermen daren't commercialize our sublime sport, dare we?

Categories, categories. . . .



EDITORIAL NOTE: No changes have been made in any of the text in these selections, and the photographs are reproduced from the original color separations. All text and caption material is complete in itself, as published in the original book. Certain passages may be dated—understandable after a dozen or more years—but their substance, like the author, remains sound and true.

The Frugal Fisherman . . .

FLY REELS: I use only one make and it is made in merrie England. After all, the English were fly-fishing long before Columbus got himself lost. . . . It is strong and it is light and moreover it is reversible. I favor reversible reels because I happen to think every right-handed fisherman should reel with his left hand, and vice versa. (My fishing pal Hank Scarffe tipped me off to this one.) This banishes the need for ever riskily shifting the rod from one hand to the other during critical junctures. By 'critical junctures' I of course mean when you're on to a slob. Not that I ever play a fish off the reel, or recommend it, but a lot of loose and trailing slack line is frequently a hazard and always a nuisance, especially in flowing water, and again especially when a good fish works himself below you.

* * *

Most of the stuff I've listed up to now I lug along all the time, it's standard equipment, but naturally, for example, I don't drag all my boats along on every trip or always take my sleep trailer (hah, I'd



clean forgotten the boats and the little old Tear Drop trailer!), so perhaps I'd better range out now amidst the fishing litter I just saw parked and lying around the new garage (see, I'd even forgotten about that nice new garage we had to build to house my boats and trailers and other treasures).

ASSORTED WATER CRAFT: Naturally I own a small fleet. Score: 3 wooden boats, 2 rubber boats, and an interest in a permanently cached metal canoe. Naturally, too, there is a fancy trailer (no, not the Tear Drop) to lug the wooden scows around. In the summer I spot these barges around the countryside, in strategic places, leaving them there until the trout season is over or the porcupines have devoured them.

Fly-casting out of a boat possesses all of the awkwardness and none of the eccentric charm of fishing out of a bathtub, and most fly-fishermen avoid it. But since I live in a rugged, heavily glaciated area where continuously wadable trout waters are rare and simply have to be learned at peril of dunking or drowning, boats are often a necessary evil.

Besides my regular flotilla I have a new rubber float (thanks to the generosity of an equally new fishing pal, Hal Lawin) that I call the Baloney Sausage, which is no more than an inflated truck innertube wrapped in a green canvas cover from which dangles a kind of droopy triangular diaper sling (like a child's bouncer-swing), from which in turn dangles the floating fisherman, exposing to an astonished world but a third of his former self.

This is perhaps the handiest fishing rig I own, since it is readily portable, utterly noiseless, permits stealthy approaches and the most delicate controlled fly-casting, and opens up distant and intriguing trout waters theretofore regarded as un-fishable save from a balloon. Since propulsion of this rig is a bit of a problem, especially in quiet waters, I have tied to it a junior-size wooden canoe paddle—besides wearing at times a pair of metal sculling flippers on my feet. When Hank Scarffe first beheld me encased in this contraption, along with its accessories, he thought I was an ex-



FISHERMEN ENDLESSLY SNIFF AND SNOOP

All is grist to the fisherman's mill. In fact, the amount of Machiavellian subtlety and guile wrapped up in his person is faintly horrifying to contemplate: he is far more devious than Gromyko. Always lusting after new places to fish, he will unblushingly pick the brain of the local game warden—who after all gets around—or, having heard a vague rumor that the janitor at City Hall has caught a beautiful mess, descend guilefully upon the village to sniff the air for clues.





The Frugal Fisherman . . .

pectant space man gone AWOL from Cape Kennedy. Now he's wooing Santa for one of his own.

Now I know I've overlooked lots and lots of stuff (for example, more sun glasses; barometers, thermometers, depthometers, my two harmonicas, my flute-like wooden recorder and my sweet-toned Italian clavietta; my bird calls and animal calls and assorted Indian love calls; the aluminum water scope through which I leer down at unsuspecting mermaids) but a man can't remember everything and moreover exhaustion is setting in. Anyway, you get a working idea.

At least I now dimly suspect why it is that when my pals and I take off on overnight trips people in the streets often stop and stare after us. First comes the groaning jeep, dripping waterbags dangling from either side (my, my, I forgot the water bags), gear piled clean to the roof, the roof itself carrying an inflated rubber boat, the Baloney-Sausage roped to the rear. Next follows the Tear Drop trailer, hitched to the jeep, with another boat lashed to the roof, the inside clanking and awash with the overflow.

The summer before he died, old Danny McGinnis hailed us down as Hank and I were tooling out of town bent on big trout safari. He drank in the spectacle, blinking at our cavalcade, rubbing his wire whiskers, tugging away at his tobacco-stained mustaches. Finally he squinted more closely and spoke.

"'Fraid you got somethin' missin' there, Johnny," he said gravely.

"What's that, Danny?" I inquired in alarm.

"A little dog running behind."

Nevertheless, I still insist that the idea that trout fishing need be expensive is pure nonsense. Frugality is the fisherman's middle name. All one really needs is a rod, a reel, a line, a leader, and a fly. . . . The big trouble with fishermen is that most of us are helpless slaves to what that gallant old British lion, Sir Winston, once said about war: Nothing succeeds like excess.

And where do we put the fish? It's a good question. I often wonder.

Watching a fisherman preparing for his trout devotionals is like watching a tensed percussionist hanging interminably poised over a tiny triangle merely to smite it a single whack. Both performances are to the uninitiated much ado about nothing; both performers devote far too mighty preparations to far too miniscule results. Obviously this is the pursuit of madmen.

In the watery spectral half-world inhabited by fishermen, going fishing is like going courting: a good half of the fun lies in the anticipation. In fact the parallels are faintly eerie. Just as the gallant lover boy muses and daydreams as he pomades his hair for his date, so the fisherman builds fairy dream castles of gallantry and conquest as he lovingly assembles his gear. Just as the one asks himself, "Is she going to be in the right mood today?" so the other wonders wistfully whether his temperamental troutlings will be on the prod today.

There is still another parallel. All youngsters are envied for the spellbound quality of their wonder and awe on Christmas Eve. But consider the plight of the poor fisherman—he can look forward to all the delights and ecstasies of Christmas every day all summer long.



On Trout Fishing and the Sturdy Virtues

Old fishermen never die; instead they write books about their passion, usually couched in a mournful, elegiac, Thoreauesque prose—withal larded with a sort of dogged jocularity—that old fishermen seem helplessly bound to employ when they put down rod and take up pen and look back on all the trout they slew. "Trouting on the Old Nostalgia" might well serve as the collective title of most of these wistful memoirs, some of which are best read to the throbbing accompaniment of an old movie Wurlitzer. Worst of all, too many of these books feed the myth that trout fishing promotes health, serenity and frugality in its disciples.

This is a lot of pious nonsense. Chasing trout is no less wearing and barely less complicated than chasing women. And more frustrating, too, be-

cause women, I have heard, are rather more readily overtaken and caught. As for the frugality bit, I swear my trout run me five dollars an ounce. Troy weight.

The truth is that trout fishermen scheme and lie and toss in their sleep. They dream of great dripping trout, shapely and elusive as mermaids, and arise cranky and haggard from their fantasies. They are moody and neglectful and all of them a little daft. Moreover they are inclined to drink too much.

The truth is that fishing for trout is as crazy and self-indulgent as inhaling opium. What, then, can be said for trout fishing. Simply this: it's got work beat a mile and is, if a man can stand it, indecently great fun.



The Last Day

Each year it is the same: this time, we tell ourselves, the season will never end, the doze and stitch and murmur of summer will go on and on. Yet the lazy golden days glide by on gilded wings—and the spellbound fisherman fishes. By and by his heart is wrenched as he beholds premonitions of the doomed beauty of autumn. Then lo, one day it is the last day of fishing, the very end has come. This is the saddest day of the year.

But our annual melancholy is tinged with relief. For the last day of fishing is both a sentence and a reprieve: a sentence to a long fishless winter's nap; a reprieve from the mad compulsive chase of summer. By and by we blink and peer about, like men emerging from hypnosis. The gleam of lunacy gradually leaves our eyes. We even tell ourselves it's all for the best. Our soothing litany goes something like this:

Don't you see, fella, precious rods can now be gone over and put away—and all the rest of the sad ritual marking the end of fishing. Ah yes, lad, it's all for the best. After all, fishing is no longer sporting, our nerves and domestic relations are equally in tatters, the fly hatches and decent rises are mostly done, the spawn-laden trout are far too easy to catch, to take them now is to bite off one's nose . . .

But we lie. On the last day all fishermen are akin to pallbearers; worse yet, pallbearers who must macabrely attend their own funerals. For going out on the last day is a melancholy ritual that must be observed, a sad job that must be done, like decently burying the dead. But our hearts are leaden and each cast is like waving farewell forever to our adored trout. For what we enchanted fishermen really want is to go on fishing, *fishing*, FISHING—fishing forever into the very vaults and corridors of heaven. With fishermen it's always tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow. . . . And what sustains us through the long ordeal of winter is the wry knowledge that, after all, it's only eight more months till the magic *First Day*!



Testament of a Fisherman

I fish because I love to; because I love the environs where trout are found, which are invariably beautiful, and hate the environs where crowds of people are found, which are invariably ugly; because of all the television commercials, cocktail parties, and assorted social posturing I thus escape; because, in a world where most men seem to spend their lives doing things they hate, my fishing is at once an endless source of delight and an act of small rebellion; because trout do not lie or cheat and cannot be bought or bribed or impressed by power, but respond only to quietude and humility and endless patience; because I suspect that men are going along this way for the last time, and I for one don't want to waste the trip; because mercifully there are no telephones on trout waters; because only in the woods can I find solitude without loneliness; because bourbon out of an old tin cup always tastes better out there; because maybe one day I will catch a mermaid; and, finally, not because I regard fishing as being so terribly important but because I suspect that so many of the other concerns of men are equally unimportant—and not nearly so much fun.

ROBERT TRAVER



Fly Fisherman

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