

THE ANGLER

The angler sat quietly beside the lake. He was aware of the scene that surrounded him, but he also knew that he was merely another element in that scene, a part of the landscape.

Not much moved. A light wind rippled the surface of the lake and blurred the image reflected there; it rustled in the reeds and rushes around him; caused leaves above him to dapple the sun's rays on the lake bed in the shallows near his feet.

A bright blue dragonfly paused for a moment on his rod tip.

Sunlight traced the veins in its translucent, gossamer-like wings.

He sensed rather than saw a flash of turquoise as a kingfisher dipped into the water, unsure whether it had been more successful in its work than he in his.

The tranquility was broken by a sudden squawk and splash as a pair of quarrelsome coots argued noisily across the lake. Just as quickly, their domestic differences reconciled, the row abated and they sailed serenely into the shadows. A dowdy mother duck shepherded a convoy of eager ducklings across the shallows, unaware or untroubled by his presence.

As quiet and calm returned to the scene he resumed the study of his float, a spot of red no more than 7 or 8 yards in front of him.

Was it minutes or hours later? Time had little meaning at the lakeside.

The float slid slowly to the right, then the red tip disappeared. His right hand, holding the rod, lifted quickly but not violently from his right knee to his left shoulder to set the hook. Surprised, the fish paused for what seemed like seconds, but was really only a moment, before running strongly towards the depths off to his right.

Holding the rod high to absorb the jolts of any sudden movement the fish might make, he played it expertly with his index finger on the side of his trusty, old centre-pin reel; just enough pressure to prevent the fish reaching the safety of the snags that lurked in the depths, but not enough to break the line.

He held the first run. The fish paused, giving him time to look up and admire the bend in his rod. A big fish! Was it the monster fish everyone said the lake held? He knew every stretch of water in that neck of the woods had its own story to tell, its own myths, but this lake was large enough, and productive enough to hold the fish of a lifetime.

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Seconds passed, that seemed like minutes. Just as he began to think that the fish had won by reaching the snaggy bottom of the lake, it moved again. This time away from him, faster, perhaps more desperately. He kept up a steady pressure on the reel as he once more gave line, gradually slowing the run.

Controlling the fish he slowly regained the line he had lost and inched the fish back towards him and the bank. Now, he dared to think the fish may be his.

He lowered the landing net slowly, carefully, quietly into the water with his left hand, and gently drew the fish towards it. The fish was surely resigned to its fate, he thought..... A sudden, violent vortex in the water, a splash and a flash of silver and the fish had gone.

The empty hook hung mockingly in front of him.

He knew the fish had been instinctively fighting for its life. He didn't begrudge the loss. The fish wasn't to know it would have been gently unhooked on the bank; its glistening flank stoked, admired, revered even, for a few seconds before being slid carefully back into its wet world.

The angler tilted his head back and felt the warmth of the sun on his face as it creased into a smile.

The wetlands were his world too. Not for him the hills and mountains of the west or even the wide open plains with their big skies, no, he was at home in the marshland, fenland and carrs of Lincolnshire. Like his pagan Anglo-Saxon ancestors the only gods he acknowledged resided in the nature around him, and in the water, especially the water.

He knew his family hailed from further north so he was prepared to accept that some Viking blood also ran through his veins, and maybe, the ginger highlights in his hair testament to this, some Celtic blood too. But mostly he knew he belonged near water; river, lake and marsh where bullrushes and willow marked the boundaries.

A river didn't run through his lake, but he knew that he, too, was haunted by waters.