

Angus' Trout

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"Angus' trout was a monster -- and Angus, being a doctor, was naturally an honest and ethical man, and a very skilled fly-fisherman to boot. But the way in which Angus came by his trout couldn't be described as honest or even legal."

We chuckled at Doc's smug reference to his own profession. We were sitting in his house at St. James after a day's fishing for the late run of yellowtail at the Point. The fish had been well on the bite and we were feeling at peace with the world and expansive in the way fishermen do after a satisfying day.

"Go on, Doc," someone egged him on. "Tell us about the honest medical man and his lapse from grace."

Angus Maclean and he, Doc told us, had been at school together and since Angus had died about a year previously he felt that no harm could come from telling the story.

Their friendship had grown stronger after they had left school and went to London to study medicine, and one of the common interests which they shared was trout fishing. Many halcyon days were spent fishing some of the fine English rivers.

Angus had a wonderful old Greenhart which his father had given him when a boy. Long and light as a feather, it had the name of a London firm long since extinct, beautifully engraved on its butt. It was a true work of art -- and Angus handled it like a master.

When the long years of study came to an end, Angus and Doc parted company, the later to become a surgeon, and Angus, who thrived in the company of his fellowmen, to take up a GP's practice in Cape Town. For many years they saw little of each other. Their brief meetings usually took place at medical conventions, but they corresponded regularly. Then, three years previously, they had met while Doc was living in Johannesburg, and Angus told him the story of the trout....



He and his wife had been on a month's holiday at the lake at Inyanga in the Eastern Districts of Southern Rhodesia. The lake was well stocked with trout, and he had spent in his element fishing both morning and evening for almost every day of their stay.

On the morning of the third day, he was casting his fly gently on the water when he saw a swirl on the surface about ten yards away near a clump of lilies. Minutes later, there was another swirl in the same place. He cast his fly across the spot without result, but still the fish continued to rise. Intrigued he climbed a tree at the water's edge to get a better view. He looked down on the lilies -- and saw the fish. It was huge - a monster with sides like a pig and spots the size of a "tickey".

Trembling with excitement, he scrambled down the tree and seizing his rod, cast out again. The game was on.

"Six pounds . . . six pounds, if an ounce . . ." he muttered as he cast out.

He was not a man given to exaggeration, and his skill was considerable. But the trout was wily and refused to be deceived.

The days dragged into a week . . . then two weeks. Angus tried every fly in his book and even sat up late in the night tying others of his own design, related to the insects that hovered round the lake. He produced succulent-looking wonders that surely should have tempted the most jaded trout palate, but they were all contemptuously ignored. During this period of gloom and frustration, Angus did not go fishless. The allowed daily bag on the lake fell to his rod, but what did this signify against THE trout.

Each night, as Angus entered for his whisky sundowner, the boys around the bar would demand the latest news. He would shake his head sadly and gaze mournfully into his glass. The more heartless of his companions began to cast aspersions about the very existence of the fish — and Angus found himself vehemently on the defence.

Then another fear began to prey on his mind. Supposing another fisherman, and not he, should catch the trout. After all, such a prize might weigh more than a brief comradeship with some fisherman. He began to view the others in a new untrustworthy light and fished all the more desperately, no matter what the weather. In the middle of the last week Angus caught the trout.

He came into the bar that evening and the boys jokingly asked their usual question, expecting the customary glum denial. Angus looked about him defiantly and announced coldly, "Aye, I've caught him."

They looked at him, stunned into silence, and then exclaimed at once clapping him on the back and congratulating him. How much did it weigh? Did it give a good fight? What did it look like? They whistled in appreciation when Angus told them that it had weighed 6 lb. 8 ozs.

"Where are you sending it for mounting, Angus?" someone asked.

"It's no going to be mounted," came the surprising reply, "I've eaten it! He drained his drink and walked out of the bar. There was a stunned silence. It was incredible — such a fish would have been a credit to any glass case, and surely any normal man would have wanted to keep the trophy of so protracted a battle. But to eat the fish . . .!

About a week after this strange event, Angus and his wife passed through Johannesburg on their way home. Angus rang Doc, and he and his wife were invited to dinner that evening.

The women chattered gaily, but Doc noticed that Angus seemed particularly withdrawn, even furtive. Was he ill? Something on his mind?

Dinner over, the men retired to the lounge, and Angus confessed the whole sad story.

He had grown fearful that some other fisherman would catch his elusive monster trout, and when two other anglers appeared nearby and started along the edge of the lake towards him, he became apprehensive in the extreme.

As they worked their way among the reeds and grasses at the edge of the lake 'wuth theer swishy, flashy rods, druppin' there flies like hand grenades on the watter', panic seized him!

Bending down, he dug frantically in the grass of the bank with his pen-knife until he found what he sought. He re-rigged his line; snipping off the droppers, and using only the leader, he cast out towards the lilies.

Within seconds, his reel screamed as the huge fish eagerly snapped up the fine, fat juicy worm which Angus had placed on his hook. Skilfully, Angus played him out of the lilies and reeds until he had got him to the landing net; then he hastily grabbed his gear and ran to his car. He hurled everything in, started up and drove hell for leather down the dusty dirt road.

He felt completely bereft of pleasure and continually glanced remorsefully at the quivering fish on the seat beside him.

At home, he weighed it, then held it in his hands and looked at it thoughtfully for a long time. He had committed the greatest sacrilege possible for any dedicated fly fishermen — he had used a worm to gain his ends.

The thought of all the lies he would have to tell if he displayed the fish was more than he could face. Sadly he wrapped his trout in an old newspaper — and put it in the dustbin.
