

## The solitary fisherman

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### By JOHN L. SLOAN

He is back again this morning in his usual place, the big tree out on the point. I have fished several days this week and he has been there every morning. I have never seen a fisherman sit so still. If I didn't know, better I would think he was statue or maybe a Bill Vandeford picture.

It is foggy this morning and his head is hunched between his shoulders to stay warm and ward off the damp. I feel somewhat the same way but instead make a cast. Soon, the sun will rise behind him and he will become a silhouette. Later when it gets really hot, he will move down the bank and closer to the drop-off where it goes from just a rocky bank to 40 feet of cooler water. He is following the natural movement as am I. Of course, we are both just guessing. I am betting we are right but until one of us catches a fish, we won't know.

It is warmer now and I shed my light jacket. He continues his monocular stare into the water as it swirls around the rocks and logs. There is no current and little wind but the natural ebb and flow of the lake causes the water to move. He puts me in mind of a prospector swirling rocks and gravel around in his gold pan, eyes intent on the debris, looking for the sparkle among the worthless grains.

I set the hook. Something decided it wanted my white fluke. It is a nice smallmouth bass. I admire it but do not look to see if he is watching. I release the fish and we both go back to looking.

I wonder if he can see as well as me. My Polaroid glasses allow me to see several feet down into the water. I wonder if he can with no glasses of any kind. If I see that tell tale flash of silver, I shall immediately cast to it. Can he see as well as me?

A light breeze, suddenly dances across the water. One of those slight gusts that remind me of an exhale from a sudden sigh. Nevertheless, this one comes from nowhere and goes to the

same place, dancing across the surface of the lake and nudging the leaves on the shore. Just a breath from a ghost, long gone. It feels good on my face and I notice it ruffle the white on the top of his head. How does he tolerate the midday sun with no hat? I am not that tough.

Something catches his eye and he takes one tentative step, pausing to look closely. Satisfied he has been fooled, he settles back while giving me a glance. I know he has seen me before and recognizes me but he gives no indication. I turn the boat just a click to see better into the now flat water. My white fluke with a three-ought circle hook craftily hidden waits for a flash of silver...or gold. The solitary one waits for the same flash.

Shad. The prey.

Behind the shad will come the predators, the bass or perhaps the rockfish. Either will do. The fluke will imitate the shad and maybe fool the predators. If it does, game on!

The sun is now too high for fishing the point. He leaves; the solitary angler and I tend to think that is a good idea. I know of a shaded bank with a flat ledge that drops quickly off. The water will be cooler there and the fish should move into it to take advantage of the shade. It provides both cooler water and to some extent, cover from prying eyes, eyes such as ours.

He beats me there. He is already slowly slipping down the rocky bank when I throttle back on the big Mercury.

He gives me one of his patented looks and clears his throat. It is a sound I cannot describe.

A cross between a hark and a harrumph. I grin as I ponder why I would even think of it.

My lure has changed. I now use chartreuse and white spinner bait with two gold blades.

I feel it will be better seen in the shadows and perhaps the spinners, creating that underwater turbulence and vibration will trigger a reaction strike. I cannot see what manner of enticer he uses.

We work the bank in separate directions. A matter of courtesy practiced by experienced fishermen, those not embroiled in a struggle to win some silly tournament but simply enjoying a morning on the water.

He, high-stepping his way, the way herons do and I, gently nudging the trolling motor.

At once, I get a revelation. We are both solitary anglers. Fishing alone and alone with our thoughts.

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