

Emphasize his personality.

Yellowstone
4-way stops

About 2200 words

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Never really got to know him —
No gossip from 3rd parties. Not transparent like a Yankee.
Fishing is the collection of sensation (?), not
binnen 1 after a certain age). The best of excuses & more.

August

Remained a mythic figure, self-created.

ADRIANO AND THE RATTLESNAKES

He set out for trout but what he
caught, mostly, was America.

When Adriano wrote that he would visit Montana, I saved the best stretch of Henrietta Creek for him. Henrietta is big enough to sing, too small to growl, ample in pools, narrow-waisted in riffles, and far enough from the road to be lonely. Adriano had shown me a stream like that in his own country, when my work took me there. Henrietta's European brown trout would make him feel at home now. The other three kinds of trout would welcome him to a new continent.

Adriano is difficult to picture; production of his model

2) { ended before most of us were born. Let me start with the the noun
"gentleman" and fill in the adjectives as we go along. He is

young enough to enjoy the walk to Henrietta Creek. He is old enough that my wife and I worried as he crossed the Atlantic, and then most of America, to reach our valley. He had not made flight reservations beyond New York because he wanted to ride in a Pullman Car, seeing the villages along his route. It was a good idea except that passenger trains do not come this way anymore. He got here on wait-listed flights after two overnight stops in cities that he could not pronounce. Then he unpacked, hung his six wool suits in the closet (where they stayed for the rest of the trip), and asked my wife to hide a stack of fifty-dollar bills. Adriano does not trust credit cards. He said that he had enjoyed the whole trip but that the best thing, for him, had been the helpfulness of every American he met.

I was in a hurry to introduce him to Henrietta, but perhaps I should not have mentioned the fish called cutthroats. He asked me if there were also rattlesnakes. I provided solemn assurances that the native trout are not related to piranhas and that Henrietta is too high up in the mountains for poisonous snakes.

On the drive there, we watched the farmers harvesting their first cutting of alfalfa. Half-ton bales of it bumped off the back of machines the size of a European cottage. The winter wheat was starting to ripen but the barley was still growing, and in the breeze it looked the way waves look when you're out in a canoe. Adriano does not understand much English, so he was

bears, however, I began to catch on. Age does not stop some people from being adventurers.

By then, too, Adriano had leaked news of his adventures between the landing at Kennedy Airport and arrival in Montana. In New York he had walked out of his hotel and hailed a taxi -- enough adventure for some people. He told the driver to go to Harlem. Adriano had heard of that, back home, along with Fords and Packards and Chicago mobs. In Harlem, he tried to pay the driver, get out, and walk back to the hotel. The driver turned out to be Portuguese, like Adriano. Instead of a stroll through Harlem with no sense of direction, foreign clothes, and a bale of fifty-dollar bills bulging his coat pocket, my friend got a tour of greater New York and a dinner at the driver's home.

Luck is an important quality in adventurers. Adriano is a direct descendent of explorers who discovered the route to India while Columbus was looking for it in the wrong ocean.

This is a hard act to follow, so I began with a story of my own about the only stream in Yellowstone Park where a fellow has any hope of snakebite. (Rattlesnakes often disappoint; rattlesnake stories never do.) Years ago, I told Adriano, two boys hiked down to the Gardner River, catching their bait along the way. In the mid-day heat grasshoppers opened their wings and went rattling off over the sagebrush, with the boys in fair chase. Once there was another rattle. The tone was like that of a flying

grasshopper but the cadence was steady, not intermittent. One boy noticed the difference and jerked his friend back by the collar just in time. The friend was angry for a couple of seconds, and then he saw. I have not had many chances to watch a fellow's face going pale, but that rattlesnake did it.

Of course Adriano wanted to hike into the same spot. It was his last day of fishing in America. There was a warm, dry wind -- not ideal for snakes, but who knows? Stream insects do not like heat either and, with few flies around, the trout were slow to rise. Adriano's three wet flies worked poorly. I fished with a high rod, bouncing a grasshopper fly on the dark water below boulders. Whitefish ignored it and brown trout took it, but only after a lot of teasing. When the concentration became tiring I changed to a deep nymph and caught three trout quickly in a pool that Adriano had just fished. The last was a rainbow that jumped high with the nymph in its mouth. Adriano waded across to me, asking me to show him what these peculiar American trout wanted. I rigged him up with a weighted fly, split shot, and float. He was troubled to find that he could not fly-cast all this weight. When he got used to the idea of heaving it out like bait, however, he did fine. I watched him land a rainbow, then hiked off upstream while he was playing a whitefish, not sure if I had done him a favor.

When I returned to Adriano an hour later, he had gone back

to his three wet flies and was casting slow loops that were pretty to see. A fluffy little cloud hid the sun long enough for him to catch two small trout at the head of a pool -- one on the tail fly and one on the top dropper. The double made him happy, though he was still hoping for something a yard or so longer, with fangs.

We climbed back to the car through scents of junipers and sage, sounds of magpies and river. "I will remember all this, exactly," Adriano said. We hiked up another hundred yards of dusty trail and a big grasshopper flushed at his feet, rattling away on yellow-and-black wings. He jumped. Then we stopped and breathed deeply and looked back at water running white above boulders, dark below them. We could not see the trout, but a fisherman storing such a stream in his memory would know which pockets held the browns. The currents with rainbows were not so obvious.

"Yes sir," Adriano said. "I find this very good."

I am not sure that he ever understood American trout, but he caught America, all right.

unaware that much of the nation was drying up. This valley was a fruited plain and around it were purple mountains. I wanted to tell my friend about the song we used to sing in school right after the pledge of allegiance, back when that sort of thing was encouraged, but I could not remember all the words. Besides, there is the part on brotherhood from sea to shining sea, which would have needed explanation. Folks around here do not invariably agree on things like timber harvesting in the national forests and reintroducing wolves into Yellowstone Park. An attempt to explain the American way of making decisions might have worked no better than my try at translating cutthroats.

Adriano enjoyed seeing so many big new Packards on the road. They were one of the two kinds of American cars that he knew about, the other being Fords. I assured him that Packards were no longer being made and that the most of the old ones had been dumped in trout streams (something I learned while researching my definitive Field Guide to Western Stream Improvements). Adriano listened attentively. Then, a couple of miles down the road, he admired a brand-new Packard passing my truck. It occurred to me that his version of reality was better than mine anyhow.

Adriano's fishing outfit was like nothing that Henrietta Creek had seen since Packard times. He wore corduroy knickers and a coat tailor-made of stout twill, with lots of pockets for trout

flies and leaders and such. It fit better than most coats you see on Sunday mornings in Montana. He left off the necktie as a concession, perhaps, to American usage, but he wore fingerless gloves. A mesh bag slung around his shoulder carried a snake-bite kit, water bottle, and other essentials. For landing fish there was a splendid telescopic net in a green-lacquered metal tube, ready to extend at the press of a finger and perhaps a shake or two. Like most such devices, it was never used, but I regretted offering him one of my cheap aluminum substitutes: when he tried it, briefly, it looked wrong.

During our walk Adriano kept his hip boots rolled up because of the snakes, so cool stream water must have come as a relief. He fished three flies upstream with elegant, wide-looped casts. Americans who still use wet flies generally work them downstream and slowly, but in Adriano's way they almost floated. Brook trout loved them. He admired these new fish with green flanks and fins like butterflies. Their habits were comfortable, too; they and the browns liked the same shady, undercut banks. The rainbow trout, on the other hand, were a puzzle. They fed aggressively in the currents, not the slow places, and they darted for flies instead of sipping them politely. Rainbows are the most American of trout.

Spruce trees too are fond of long leaders with three flies to tangle, but Adriano did not begrudge the limbs their share. He

sat on a boulder and tied on new flies slowly, holding his arms out straight and squinting through eyes that were as good as ever, at exactly the right distance. He enjoyed looking even at the trees that had robbed him. "This is all very beautiful," he said. "I am fixing it all in my mind. I will remember it just so for the rest of my life." This may sound formal, as fishing talk goes, but Adriano says exactly what he means. I had known him a long time before I realized why he sounded like family: he phrases things as people did in the old novels that my grandparents kept in their summer cabin.

Far upstream, where a cottonwood trunk had dammed the stream, a native trout took Adriano's top dropper-fly in deep, still water. I pointed out the red-orange slashes below the fish's tongue. Adriano listened carefully, then shook his head. The cutthroat was too pretty for its name. In the Latin languages trout are of the female gender and are not named after pirates.

Next day we fished the evening rise on the Gallatin River. We parked where the river flows past a big trailer camp, and I took Adriano a mile downstream with instructions to fish back up to the car. Then I started below him so that he could cover the fish first. He should have finished before me, but when I got back at dark he was missing. I opened the truck, honked, stowed my rod, honked, wondered what I would tell his wife, groped downstream a mile on one bank, stumbled back up the other. I

forced myself to look in the moon-shadows under willows. I kept the panic out of my voice as I called Adriano's name, time after time, and got no answer but the mutter of current pushing into deep pools.

In time I gave up and walked toward the trailer-camp's office to call a rescue squad. A group of people at a campfire asked if I had lost a friend speaking strange tongues. One of the group had found Adriano far away and was now driving him around to look for me in all the wrong places. Another car went out to find the first. By the time we all got together around midnight, Adriano's new companions had adopted him. He made a speech of appreciation and farewell, which I translated while they fidgeted.

From this I learned never to turn loose in strange surroundings a person who does not read maps. In his country Adriano had navigated by familiar landmarks, and he found it difficult to grasp the scale or shape of new space. The lesson he derived had to do with human rather than natural geography: when you get into trouble in this country, he said, somebody always comes along and helps you out.

My courage came back in a couple of days, and Adriano's never got lost. He enjoyed everything so much that it was hard to guess where he would most like to go fishing next. When his interest in rattlesnakes expanded into questions about grizzly