

# THE PASSING HOURS

By GARRETT EVANS

We were sitting reading Victor Pohl's *Farewell The Little People*. My little son was with me and we were sitting up under an overhanging ledge well out of the rain. It was wonderful there. It rained hard with much thunder and lightning; the thunder roared and then rolled through the mountains all around. The old folks used to say people with destructive characteristics revel in such storms. Surely this is not always the case — but I loved that storm nevertheless. The stream didn't rise much and shortly fishing was possible again. We stayed reading while the trees and stones dripped and things settled down.

Pohl's writing is as simple and unpretentious as the surroundings in which I saw him for the first and last time. It was a perfect place to be reading him. His words give the same sensation one has hearing a Mountain Reedbuck's sharp echoing whistle high among the deafeningly quiet slopes. And now all was quiet again but for that soothing sound of water on stone. The boy pointed out a rising fish at the top of a pool. The trout were on the feed, about three to the pound and numerous, which pleased us no end.

I still would have preferred to use my little Sharpe's Midge cane rod but the end sections don't seem to do well in South Africa. They didn't in the Transvaal, maybe they will here in Natal. I flicked a No. 12 Coch-y-bundu in using a little Hardy's Midge glass fibre rod. The fly was hardly on the pool when I had an offer. In the pool and along that stretch we took half a dozen trout, keeping two. We then began once again to move up through the mountains. In Virginia it had always been difficult to stop, turn back and start downstream from the Blue Ridges. In Corsica there had been the same problem. One always thinks of other streams from time to time. The curve of the current round a rock, the sunlight on the pebbles of a shallow stretch and one travels instantly to other settings.

There in the mountains of Natal, one is constantly reminded of Corsica. It started with the aroma of pines and eucalyptus; it had been more pronounced in Corsica in the mountainous area around Chisa or Solenzara. The Algerians working on the roads had given us information on where the fish were biggest. Some of the streams had that beautiful yet slightly sterile look one finds in parts of Scotland.

There were a lot of fish around Chisa particularly in the smaller streams feeding into the River Travo. The trout rose up from between underwater stones to hit our flies floating along under the small trees. I recall Bimble McEwen pointing out the wild fig trees along the stream and telling me how I would find much the same in parts of South Africa. We did well, though the fish were mostly small, they were scrappy. I think that I prefer small trout as long as they're wild, and the streams small and in wild places.

We came off the water late that night and went back through Solenzara to have a trout dinner and a great deal of the fine local white wine. We sat there feeling very pleased with ourselves on the porch of our small house under the trees. There was the sound of the wind in the pines and that unreal light caused by moonlight on the sea. It was a wonderful time. The following morning at dawn I managed to shoot a number of large mullet in a nearby cove. A Frenchman joined me and I learned how to recognise the large sole that lay just under the sand along the edge of the sand-seagrass border in about ten or fifteen feet of water. It was like shooting at spirits but we got a number of fine ones between the two of us.

Later several of us crossed over to Sardinia. It seemed senseless to do so as we could only stay an hour or so. It was a marvellous little jaunt with the ship dashing along through the sunlight and tossing waves. Sardinia seemed a good place. As we came in to land there were cicadas calling on the cliffs over the sea with their shrill songs overcoming the sound of our engines. Undoubtedly there were trout streams inland but we had time for only a few grappas. On return to our jumping off spot, the port of Bonifacio, we noticed a couple of chaps wearing towels and beards waiting for their birds to get off the boat. It was a sobering thought to contemplate: that, but for a few innane commitments, it could be us standing there.

We were anxious to get back for the evening rise, so while waiting to be collected, we went over to admire the yachts. While standing and joking with a blonde on a magnificent 70 foot sailing job I received a great compliment. The master of the club rushed up to inform me that I must move my boat to one side. There were some others trying to come in. 'The whole basin does not belong to you,' he said.

Having lived in the Mediterranean before, I fell into the way of life quite easily again. These few weeks came as an eye opener. I was finished with the north and its leaden skies. Life in the Mediterranean or the Aegean seemed infinitely preferable at that point. We returned down the streams in moonlight through the spicy smelling forests that could be scented miles out at sea as one approached Corsica. We often sat up late on the porch drinking wine and discussing future prospects. But even then time was marching on.

*The moon has sunk and the Pleiads  
And midnight is gone  
And the hours are passing, passing*

The sun was breaking through to stream down over the trees and boulders of the Drakensberg. We made our way back down along the pathway for the shadows were growing long. We had several brace of plump little trout in the creel. The small boy was tired. Once back at the truck, he fell asleep almost immediately there on the floor by the rod, creel and musette bag. The wind was blowing down from the mountains, sighing softly through a sea of grass. The child breathed gently, the breeze moved through the grass. On the slopes above a Mountain Reedbuck whistled. There was lightning suddenly illuminating certain huge clouds and quickly fading away. It was an idyllic hour, one of total content but for the knowledge of the transience of all such hours. I sat there surrounded by utter beauty, by utter tranquility, realising that already it was passing, passing.