

Royal Coachman

by Kitty Boots

I knew I'd find the Herter's catalog in my parent's bathroom. It was on top of the stack of *Field and Stream* magazines by the toilet. George Leonard Herter's catalog was full of pictures of big game he'd bagged on safari, survival tips, recipes for cooking anything you caught or killed, taxidermy supplies and all the hunting and fishing equipment you'd ever need.

Daddy ordered his fishing gear from Herter's when he started getting serious about fishing. He had several rods and reels, a minnow bucket, a cricket cage. A pair of waders and a creel hung in the garage. His tackle box contained spoons and spinners, and my favorite, a Hula Popper.

We'd always fished together. He took me to farm ponds, the smelly South River and the dark, cold Upper Sherando Lake. Our next fishing trip would be different, he said. He'd ordered a fly rod and a fly-tying kit. We were going after rainbow trout.

The rod and reel arrived in the mail with the fly-tying kit. It was exciting--all the different colored feathers, thread, pieces of fur and hooks. Daddy set up a vise on our kitchen table. I watched as he wound gut, thread, fur and feathers into a fly. The first one he made he gave to me. He said it was the most popular fly, a "Royal Coachman".

We spent evenings after dinner practicing our casts in the backyard, he with his fly rod, me with my Zebco rig. I loved to watch him whip the line through the air, a faint "*whoosh*", his wrist flicking.

Swift moving oxygen-rich waters are perfect for trout. The St. Mary's River was our destination. White water tumbled and gushed over rocks. We walked along the river looking for deep, quiet pools

under a canopy of trees. Looking down into a sun-dappled pool, I could see trout, hovering. Daddy put his finger to his lips, a signal for me to quit talking. He waded into the river. I fished from the bank with my Royal Coachman.

The trout hit my fly as it touched the surface of the pool. "Daddy, Daddy, I caught one!", I screamed. "Set the hook," he shouted. I jerked the rod and slowly reeled the trout in. Daddy netted it for me. With a smile he nodded at me and said, "You know what to do." I wet my trembling hands in the river and took hold of the trout, trying to be gentle as I removed the hook. Lowering the trout in the water, I held it for a few seconds. Mouth open, fins moving, gills working. In a flash of silver and pink it was gone.

