A Voice from the Fog

by Ben Ames Williams

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

THE sun climbed above the pines that topped the rocky heights along the eastern shore of the lake, and the fish lost their appetite. But if they were no longer hungry, we were. William turned the boat toward camp, and we landed at the flat rock like a landing stage below our tent. I cradled a handful of birch bark and a few twigs into a crackling little blaze, and had a pot of coffee boiling by the time William had split four of our morning's catch of bass. Half-pounders they were, not trophies of which I should boast when I returned to civilization, but toothsome, nevertheless.

Spitted on green twigs, the fish turned from pink to white and then to golden brown as we broiled them in the flames. The coffee had a pinewoods aroma all its own, the bass were beyond compare, and only William's wife, Annie, could make such doughnuts as those he produced from the basket in the tent door.

When the last white bone was picked, we doused our fire with water splashed from the lake, lit each his pipe, and found a spot where a spreading hemlock let the climbing sun warm a flat rock just enough and not too much. It was lazy weather in late September, a sky without clouds, and a placid lake that rippled to the caress of each whisper of wind as a cat's fur ripple to the hand that strokes it. The morning mist had gone where good mists go, a suggestion of it yet remaining so that the lake seemed to steam lazily in the sun; and I said to Williams, lazily:

"I'm going to take a swim in an hour or so."

William puffed slowly at his pipe and for a time said nothing. "I used to be a right smart swimmer when I was a boy," he remarked at last, almost as though it were a confession. "Ain't cared much for swimming these last few years, though."

I was moved to an oration on the joys of swimming. I spoke at length and with feeling, though not too much feeling, for it was more pleasant not to exert one's self unduly.

"Greatest of sports," I orated. "Nothing like it. No sensation to equal floating along——"

"I cal'late that's right," William agreed with what was almost a hint of impatience in his voice. "But there's things that a man can't stand. I sort of got put out of the notion of swimming, here a while back."

I looked at William from the corner of an eye and saw a story in his face; and so I made myself as small and as quiet as possible and left William to address himself to his bubbling pipe and to the dimpling lake and to the fair September morning.

"Yes, sir," Williams repeated, "I 'uz a good swimmer. Never saw but one that could beat me at it. An' that 'uz a woman."

And so he began.

You know (said William) there used to be a summer camping ground up on Round Pond, ten-twelve miles no'theast of here. There was quite a bunch of folks that come there, reg'lar, every year. But they don't come no more. The lake don't look as purty to them now as it did then, mebbe. I used to own a farm up that way myself, but I sort of moved away after a spell and bought down here. It was Nick Radimon's drowning that seemed to set folks ag'in' the place, and L'ander Gipper's finish put the finish to the summer camping, too.

I c'n rec'l'ect the fust time I ever took p'tickler notice of this Nick Radimon. I used to be a kind of a handy man around the camp. The cottages and tents was set on a slope, 'mongst the pines, and I used some boating and take 'em fishing an' carry their truck in to the camp from th' railroad, no'th of there. So naturally I was down there right smart, an' this day I first took note of Nick Radimon was one day they was all in swimming.

It was right at the start of the season, and there was some of the new ones that I didn't know yet; but right away I spotted this woman by the raft. And, gentlemen, but she could swim. The rest of the crowd was watching her do stunts, and I didn't blame 'em a mite; she was wu'th watching. She was laughing, and they kept egging her on to do new tricks of one kind and another, and she'd do whatever they said.

I see her do two dives that was as smooth as the sun dipping behind the trees. She'd go down from the top of the raft ladder as straight and slim and soople as a piece of steel that's tempered just right. And the water, it seemed like it reached right up to meet her and just took her right down into like a lover takes his girl. And the little quiver of her as she slipped down out of sight was for all the world like the little way a girl seems to pretend to hold back when her boy holds out his arms to her.

They ain't many things any prettier than a pretty dive, now is there?

I was out on a rocky point to one side, a-watching her, and I forgot pretty near everything in just seeing this woman pufform. She was just a girl, you'd say at first—not over twenty, surely. And then the next minute you'd be sure she was a woman grown, and no girl at all. Then one of the men challenged her to a race, and they div' off the raft and started toward the point where I was. She struck right into the crawl, smooth as clockwork. Her arms 'ud come up—left one up a little, right a little higher, then right one high and left not quite so high—you know how I mean; and the stroke never lost one beat of time nor varied an inch in the reach and the drive of them. And she made the fellow racing her look like he was standing still, so that he give up and laughed and turned back to the raft, and she stopped and went after him and beat him back to it.

After that, they all took to diving for white pebbles, and this woman beating them all. Once she stayed under water extra long, and I heard some one give a gasp right behind me, but shucks—I felt that same way myself, and I didn't even turn 'round to see who it was.

And then, a minute later, this girl-woman climbed the ladder on the raft and waved her hand to them all and div' off—and didn't come up.

When she'd been down thirty seconds, I began to watch for her purty close; and when I figured she'd been under close on a minute, I started to edge toward the water—not knowing what I'd do, but just to be on hand. And when she'd been down something over a minute, I heard the man behind me speak out. It sounded like the words was choked out of him, like you squeeze the seed out of a cherry, and I wheeled like a shot. "My God!" was all he said; and that ain't so awful much to say, maybe. But the way he said it and the look on his face told me he was scared to the edge of nothing.

A nice set-up man he was, with clean skin and a good, clear eye. He didn't see me looking at him, just stared past me at the water, leaning forward a bit. And then there come a little splash and a gasp behind me, and I turned and there was the woman just climbing out on the rocks at our feet. She'd swum all that way to the rocks from the raft under water. It must have been around five-six rods.

"Hello, Nick," she called to the man behind me. "I saw you and came over."

He was too paralyzed to reach out a hand to help her up the rock, but she didn't need help. She swung up them and took his hand, not seeming to notice the scared face of him.

I hadn't had a real good look at her before this, but she passed right by me now, and I see she surely was built pretty. She was breathing deep, and you could see her sides swell, clear down to the tip of her lungs, with each breath. No wonder, breathing like that, she could stay under as she liked. Straight she was, and when she walked there was a ripple to her from her throat to her toe. Through her wet bathing clothes you could see the swell of her chest, and the flexing of her thigh muscles as she climbed the rocks.

Most women you see in their bathing suits, there's some part of them—a skinniness or a fatness, or a flatness in the wrong place, that spoils the picture. But this woman, if you'd only seen a part of her as big as your hand, you'd have known every bit of her was perfect. Animals are that way. The average woods animal is finished smooth to the last knot-hole; but there ain't many humans that don't look better for keeping most of theirselves under cover.

This woman was as perfect as a doe, or a catamount. There was something about her, too, even that first day, that made me think of a catamount. She went along with this man that had been so scared, the one she'd called Nick, and I saw them go to their cabin up among the pines.

Folks told me about her, when I asked. The man was Nick Radimon, and she was Helen Radimon, his wife. Radimon and his partner, Leander Gipper, was at the camp that summer for the first time. There was an idea that Radimon had been a clerk or something and had married her and she had money. That's what folks said.

The thing they didn't tell me about Radimon, because they didn't know it, even if I had begun to figure it out for myself, was that he was scared of the water.

You never caught him in swimming; and if he went fishing, which he did, it was because his partner, this Gipper, pestered him into it. I've been out with them and I've seen Gipper tip the boat just to see Radimon shiver and grab the thwarts.

You'd think you wouldn't have no use for a man that was scared of water that way. But you couldn't help liking Radimon. I knew he wasn't a coward, for one thing, for I saw Gipper snag him in the thumb with a hook one day, and Radimon whipped out his knife and cut the thing out without a whimper. He was a friendly sort of a man, and he wasn't afraid of his share of the work that went with good times. He was just folks, like the rest of us; not the kind that slaps you on the back every little while, like Gipper—but you liked him just the same.

Now, you take Gipper, and it was different, and that was a right funny thing, too. I always figured L'ander Gipper was like an egg that's been kept just a day too long. If he wasn't addled, there was a musty streak in him somewhere. He was always smiling, for one thing; and if there's anything sorrowfuller than a man that never smiles, it's a man that's always smiling. Gipper's smile wasn't right pleasant, anyhow. It looked to me like his collar was choking him. His eyes stuck out a little, too; and there was something about him I couldn't put a name to, that made me fidget like a nervous girl.

They was a funny pair of partners, and I studied 'em, right smart, and Mrs. Radimon, too. There was a woman; and as wrapped up in Nick Radimon as a hen with one chick. His being scared of water, and her loving it so, naturally worried her, and she used to try to get him to learn to swim, but there wasn't a chance. Her and me, got right friendly after a spell, and she'd talk to me about Nick in a way to make you cry.

It always struck me as sort of pitiful, someway, the way things as fine as women themselves all tied up with us men, but I reckon they're built so they can't help it. Helen Radimon was more that way than most, too. She was a mother, and a wife, and a sister, and a chum, and a lot of other things to Radimon, all at once.

She told me one day that his being scared of the water come from his father being drowned, and his mother always warning him of the water when he was a baby and a kid.

I'd always figured Gipper and Radimon would have a blow up as partners, some day; and it come late that summer in the camp. The inside of it I never knew, but I know I driv' a man in from the railroad to see them, and I left them together on a rock below the cabins, and I come past a little later and they were at it. Both of them were mad, and Gipper's eyes was as hateful as a snake's. I heard Radimon say:

"Well, pay this man's bill—pay him what's due him, or I'll show you up before the whole city."

I went on past; and after a bit I saw the

stranger head back for the railroad in one of the other teams, and he looked to be satisfied.

The next afternoon it was that I took Gipper and Radimon out trolling. They seemed to have patched things up a bit, but I noticed Gipper was studying Radimon, like he was picking out a place to hit. We got back to camp and Mrs. Radimon was waiting for us at the slip, all cool and purty in some white dress she'd put on for the evening. We come alongside the slip, and I got out and held the boat while Gipper stepped up beside me. Radimon was half standing up in the boat; and Gipper, in stepping out, happened to give the thwart a kick and the boat tipped.

Well, Radimon went all to pieces. He dropped flat in the boat and hugged on to a seat and his face was gray with fright. There wasn't three feet of water under him, either. Maybe it was funny, though it didn't strike me so. Gipper laughed till he cried.

"By the Lord, Nick," he yelled, "I'm going to make you learn to swim yet. I'm going to take you out in the canoe some day and tip you over. You'll swim then, I'll bet a fortune."

At that, things got almighty quiet of a sudden. Radimon climbed out on the slip moving careful; and I saw Mrs. Radimon had her eye on Gipper. I wouldn't have liked it much, to have her look at me like that. I looked his way to see how he took it.

Gipper wasn't noticing. He looked like a man that had just heard a hail, off in the woods somewhere; or like a fellow that had just remembered something important. And I saw his eyes flash toward Radimon, and there was something in them raging like a trapped snake that twists and squirms and strikes at everything in reach. And then Radimon and his wife went to their cabin, and Gipper went off along the rocks by himself.

The next day it was that Radimon got drowned. Him and Gipper had planned to go fishing at dawn, and me being up early like I always am, I was down t' the slip when they put out. Misty it was, like it most always is in the morning on Maine lakes. They come down to the slip together, and Radimon started to put their truck into a boat, but Gipper stopped him.

"Put the truck in a canoe," he cried. "I'm not going to go rattling those oars all over the lake, scaring the bass to death."

Radimon started to argue it, then changed his mind. He hated like time to admit how he felt about the water, and hid it all he could, and Gipper could fairly raise welts on him with his jeers. Radimon had on a gray flannel shirt, I rec'llect, and he had a white handkerchief tied around his head. He'd had a headache when he started out, Mrs. Radimon told me after. I offered to go along with 'em and handle the canoe, but Gipper put me down

"Damn it, don't butt in," he says.

So they paddled away, Gipper in the stern, and was lost in the fog before they'd passed the swimming raft off the slip. I didn't see Radimon again till I dragged up his body two days later.

I was still down t' the slip when Gipper come back, alone, and I knew without his telling me, what had happened. He was wet, he'd been in the lake, and there was some water in the canoe. You know how a canoe will do, that way—tip a man out and scarcely wet its own bottom at all. I ran to help Gipper pull the canoe up, and I says:

"Where's Mr. Radimon?"

"We upset," he says. "He tried to turn around on his seat and tipped us both out. He went down like a rock. He's drowned."

I couldn't say anything, but just looked at him. He looked like a pale frog that had just had an awful scare. Yes, sir, that's just what he looked like. It made me feel a mite sick to look at him. He was a good swimmer, but I figured he'd been too scared to dive for Radimon. He went to his cabin, and I was just about to go away, knowing some one would have to tell Mrs. Radimon, and not wanting to be the man, when I heard Rimbel's canoe coming.

Shucks, now, I ain't told you about Rimbel, have I? I always do get things mixed up when I try to tell a straight story. Listen then.

This Eugene Rimbel was one of the men in the camp; an oldish man, and a kind of an invalid, and a chap that liked to stay by himself and to paddle around the lake in his own canoe, alone, and so on. He'd told me his heart was bad, and he was taking things easy for fear of a shock of some kind.

Well, I heard this other canoe coming, and I see it was Rimbel's, and him in it. And then I forgot all about Radimon, for I see Rimbel needed help more and quicker. He couldn't hardly paddle. He was weaving in his seat, and zigzagging

toward the slip, and his face was all torn and drawn into wrinkles like some one had gone over it with a rake. His eyes were popping, and the worst of it was, he was laughing. I hate to hear a man laugh like that.

I give a hail, and Bill Waitt and Guy Falkley, that worked around the camp like me, come running down to the water as Rimbel's canoe beached. He tried to step out, and his knees buckled, and he dropped on his face in the shallow short water. We carried him to his tent and, while the rest of the camp was thinking and talking about the news Gipper had brought, we worked to revive Rimbel.

He did come 'round at last, enough to tell us what had happened. He said he'd heard Radimon drown. "Heard" was the word he used.

He said he'd paddled out to the Ledge, two-three miles from camp and near the wild shore across the lake, and had just started to fish a little when he heard another canoe, off in the fog. You know how sound carries that way. He couldn't tell how far off this other canoe was, but he said he heard voices and talking, and then he heard a sudden clatter and a voice that he recognized as Radimon's yelled:

"Gipper—for God's sake—look out! You'll tip us over!"

There wasn't no answer to that, Rimbel said, but just another kind of a choky yell, and a splash, and the scrape of a paddle falling over a canoe thwart—and he knew they'd upset.

Rimbel was a sick little cuss, and he never thought to go to help them—just sat and listened. His story isn't easy to get, for he was fighting us and trying to get out of bed, but he did say he heard Radimon yell:

"Hold the canoe—for God's sake—so I can keep up."

Then, he said, there came a sort of a gurgle—Rimbel said that gurgling was the worst—and then Radimon again:

"Help—Gipper!"

And then nothing more for a while—and then the noise of a man swimming, and a paddle rattling in a canoe, and after a bit the noise of a man paddling away. And Rimbel said he started back for camp and that was about all he could tell us.

Falkley had gone for a doctor first off, but Dr. Hughes, the only one in camp, was out with the others hunting for Radimon and before Falkley could paddle across the lake and get him, Rimbel up and died. Heart cracked on him, the doctor said.

They told me the first thing Mrs. Radimon said when she heard was:

"Leander Gipper killed him."

Me—I didn't hardly think she was right, spite of what Rimbel had said. Rimbel was a sick man, half dead, and he'd heard them tip over and heard Radimon drown, and that was bad enough to upset any man so he wouldn't be too sure of what Radimon had yelled. He'd rambled all over the lot, in telling it to us, and it wasn't even as straight out as I've given it to you.

Dike Bransford, the district attorney, came up to camp to see about it, and talked to me, and I told him what Rimbel had said. He felt like I did, that you couldn't count on a sick man hearing straight, on a thing like that. And he said you couldn't get that story before a jury anyhow. We got Radimon's body, and there isn't a mark on it. So though there was some talk about Gipper doing it, he wasn't even arrested, and the whole thing seemed to just drop.

Mrs. Radimon took Nick Radimon's body and the clothes he had worn that last day and went home. Guy Falkley driv' her to the railroad. She said good-by to me at the camp, and just as she was getting into Guy's wagon, Gipper came up and said something and put out his hand.

She didn't speak to him, but just looked in his eyes and then down at his hand, and he jerked it back like she had stuck a knife into it. And then she drove away. Looking after her, and at Gipper, I says to myself:

"Bill Plaice," I says, "there'll be another chapter to this story yet."

And there was, stranger than the first, and it was this that stopped the campers coming to the lake.

It was the next summer. The crowd didn't begin to come to the camp, take it as a usual thing, till along in June. Jim Waitt owned the place, and he'd made a good thing out of it for several seasons. He'd built a big dining-hall, and a sort of a lodge where folks could get together on rainy

days, besides the cabins, tents scattered through the trees. The next summer after Radimon was drowned, along the middle of May, Jim sent for me.

"Bill," he says, "I want you to start in early this season. That man Gipper is sick, or something, and he wants to come here early. I've agreed, and I want you to take care of him. The cook won't be here till the first of June, so you'll have to cook for him, and take him around."

"I didn't figure he'd come here again," I says.

"Tell you straight, I'd as soon he didn't," says Jim. "But I don't like to refuse him."

So I 'greed to take charge of L'ander Gipper, and when he came I met him at the station and carried him over my team. I saw right away that he was a medium sick man, like Jim had said. He looked right poorly.

It's a funny thing, but folks seem to like to tell me their troubles. I bet I've heard more secrets than a doctor, and so I wasn't what you'd call surprised when Gipper got confidential, first time we went out after bass. When we started, I'd headed the boat up the lake, but he says:

"No, let's go across to the ledge."

So I done like he said. I'd only figured he wouldn't want to fish where Radimon had been drowned. That was at the Ledge, and there was just as good fishing up the lake. What we called the ledge was a place where the big rocks on the bottom of the lake was piled up to within ten or fifteen feet of the surface, and with sand from them to the nearest—a great place for fish.

It was Gipper that started the conversation, after we'd fished a while with nothing doing. "I s'pose you're surprised I come back this year," he says.

"Not in p'tickler," I tells him. "This is a right nice place to come to."

"But after last year—" He begins and I cut in on him.

"Accidents c'n happen anywheres," I says.

He thought that over for a while before he said anything more. "I didn't intend to come," he says at last, and then he let go of himself a little. "I didn't want ever to see the place again," he says in a hoarse kind of a way. "But I won't be scared out," he says.

That didn't seem to call for me to say anything, so I didn't say it.

"I won't be scared," he says again. "Nobody—nothing can scare me away!"

And then he whisked around to look over his shoulder as if he expected some one to hit him.

"Why should you be scared?" I says, just to be talking; and at that he whips out a letter and hands it to me.

"Look at that," he tells me.

It wasn't rightly a letter. You've seen these calendar pads, with a date at the top, and a place to write below. It was a sheet torn off one of them and it says:

"I'll expect you at the Ledge this summer."

And it was just signed "Nick."

"Nick?" I says, feeling the flesh on my cheeks crawl a little. "Who's that?"

He leaned toward me. "Radimon," he says. "He used to leave notes like that on my desk when we were to meet anywhere and he had missed me. That is his writing, I'll swear it."

"But—where'd this come from?" I says.

He looked around as though afraid someone might hear.

"There's been one like that on my desk every Tuesday morning this winter," he told me. "Always the same words, always in Radimon's hand, always on Tuesday morning. And I've had detectives, and yet never succeeded in finding how the thing gets there. Always on Tuesday morning, man. Don't you understand?"

It was a Tuesday morning when Radimon was drowned. I gave Gipper back his note. I was glad to.

Well, things went along, and the other campers begun to get there, and nothing happened, and Gipper chirked up some. I got him off my hands, me having other jobs to attend to. He didn't make friends much, but he'd go off fishing by himself all morning, round the lake, and in the evenin' he'd be out again.

He went out one morning so, in the mist 'bout sunup; and it was a Tuesday. I seen him go, but I didn't think nothin' of it. I wuz workin' around the camp, like I always wuz; and in about an hour I heard some one comin' like mad across the lake; and they weren't paddling quiet or careful, neither.

So I watched, and it wuz Gipper; and he'd had an awful scare. I helped him to land, and I had

to all but carry him to his tent. He wouldn't tell me a word; but he stayed in his tent all that day, and when I tried to take him some dinner he raved at me and told me to git away. Which I did. I wondered some about that; but I set it down to nerves or somethin', for Gipper had come to camp in a bad way, and I reckoned he weren't cured yet.

But a week after that he come to me, and he says:

"Will you take me trollin' to-morrow mornin', Bill?" he says.

I figured. "To-morrow's Tuesday, ain't it? Sure—I ain't got any date for to-morrow. Start early?"

He nodded; didn't say a word; just went on to his tent. And 'twa'n't till 'twas too late that I remembered that Tuesday was a sort of Jonah day for him. I could have backed out then, and I would've, if there'd been anything to back out for. But there wasn't no excuse I could make, so I let things go along.

So we met down t' the shore next morning when it wuz just comin' light; and he stowed his stuff in the stern o' the boat, and I took the oars; and I asked him:

"Whur'll we go?"

"The Ledge," he says. "Row back and forth across the Ledge." And I see then that his face was white, and he was gritting his teeth to keep them from chattering.

"Cold?" I says.

"No," he snaps at me. "Don't bother about me, Bill. There's a—a fish over t' the Ledge I'm going to get—or it 'll get me."

So we rowed over, and rowed back and forth, and back and forth, in and out, part o' the time not a hundred yards f'om shore; part o' the time further out. Me, rowing, had my back to the front; and Gipper was trolling over the stern; but he didn't seem to put his mind to it. He missed two or three good strikes by jerkin' too soon.

Finally I says to him:

"Watch your line closer, and you'll have better luck."

He started to say somethin', and changed his mind; and fer a spell he kept his eyes on his line. Then he got to looking around the boat, and ahead again. And then, all of a sudden, the hair stood up on the back of my head, for I saw Gipper turn a sickly white.

"Listen!" he whispers in a sort of a choky voice. "Hear that?"

I listened, and what with the chucklin' of the little waves and all, it was easy to think I heard somethin', but the next minute I knew there wa'n't nothing to hear.

"Hear what?" I asks him, looking all around. I'd stopped rowing. There was mist on the water, and we couldn't see much. But I knew where we wuz—on the inside of the Ledge, not fur offshore.

He didn't say anythin' more, and I looked at him. Then I see his lips was moving fast, like he was trying to tell me something. He was looking past me, acrost the water, and his mouth going that-away, then, all of a sudden, he yells:

"For God's sake! Did you hear that, man? Choking—splashing—"

He mouthed something I couldn't hear, then:

"Row—pull ahead," he yelled, and pointed over my shoulder.

I looked that way. There was something—just a flash of white, and something gray, lifting, off in the mist—maybe it was a touch o' white foam on a lifting little wave.

But when Radimon wuz drowned, you rec'lect, he had a white handkerchief round his head and he was wearing a gray flannel shirt.

I wuz paralyzed for a spell; and then Gipper let out a scream. "Hear that?" he yells. "Hear him—calling—'Help—Gipper!'"

I lunged on my oars, and I swung around as I done it, and I ain't ashamed to say that we made time back to camp. And Gipper in the stern begging me hurry to go back; and then begging me to hurry to camp, and then dropping forward in the boat to cry into his arms like a sick baby; and I hated the man. You've seen a spider, half-smashed and with a broken leg or something, wriggling around; and you know how there'll come something surging up in you to make you set your heel on the ugly, squirming thing and grind it into the dirt.

That's the way I felt toward Gipper. He was sweating, and I felt like his sweat was the poison coming out of him. My nose and my eyes and my ears was sick from smelling and seeing and hearing him. I felt like I was getting in the way of the workings of somebody outside the world. I felt like Gipper had been marked and set apart to take that which was coming to him; and I didn't want no part in it. When we landed, and he staggered up the slope to his tent, I took and upset the boat

in the lake and washed it out, where he'd been setting. It was my boat—and that show how I felt about Gipper.

Mebbe I was wrong; but I'm giving this the way it happened.

Well, Gipper stayed ashore all that week; but something seems to be dragging at him: and come a Monday, he asked me to take him out the next morning.

"Can't do it," I told him. "I got other plans."

"But I can't go alone," he says, his voice shaking. "And—I've got to go."

I didn't say no more; and he says, "Please—come along."

And I didn't say anything to that, neither; so he saw it wa'n't no use; and all that day I could see he was trying to make himself go out alone, and he asked some others to go with him. But it happened none of them would do it.

So Gipper didn't go out the next morning; and he stayed in his tent all that day.

Nothing happened—but once when I was over that way I heard some one talking inside his tent. Him maybe. That evening he come up to me.

"You ought to have gone out with me." he said in a queer, level tone. "Next week—Tuesday—I must go."

I turned around and went away and left him standing there. I reckon I didn't treat that man right; but I was sure now he'd done it to Radimon; and, anyway, there was something about him that tasted bitter in my mouth. He was unclean, like a leper. Not but what he washed, a-plenty. But he seemed that way—if you know how I mean.

The next Monday night a big man come to camp; an old customer named Hodges. He was big and fat and hearty, and crazy for bass; and he was a crank on fishing in the rain. She started in to rain that night; and this Hodges decides he wants to go fishing first crack in the morning. So I was nominated to take him out.

It struck me that the next morning 'd be Tuesday; but there wasn't no way I could get out of it without a fuss. So me and this Hodges got a boat and started out, first crack o' day.

Gipper hadn't left his tent then. I looked, and I knew.

It was raining in steady, slicing streaks that come right straight down and flailed the water of the lake till the little dancing drops were a constant cloud along the surface; and the rain was warm, and the water itself was steaming in the early morning. It was right comfortable to be out, if you wuz fixed for it; that is, with plenty on or nothing at all. We had rubber boots and oilskins, and oilskin hats, and we were dry enough.

This Hodges decided it wasn't good weather for trolling; but he'd got some helgamites from the boss before we started; and we tried a hole up the shore above camp, and didn't have no luck, so he says:

"Take me across to the Ledge."

That didn't appeal to me. "They ain't biting there like they used to," I says. "But there's a great old hole up the lake a ways."

"Huh-uh," said Hodges, him being a stubborn citizen. "I've got a hunch they'll eat us up over at the Ledge."

Now I didn't want to go to the Ledge, no more'n nothing; and yet I had a sort of a sneaking curiosity, too. So I went along, and we started at one end and anchored there a spell, and moved down a little at a time.

The rain kept coming down in sluices; and you couldn't hardly see your boat's length, it seemed like.

When we got over toward the Ledge I was listening and trying to look around us through the rain. I couldn't help it. And while we wuz fishing down the length of it I kep' this up. Till sure enough there come a noise, a voice—low, and queer-sounding and familiar, somehow.

"What's that?" says Hodges, hearing it. "Some one in trouble up there. Row up that way."

So I did; I give a couple of shoves with the oars, and all of a sudden, out of the mist and the rain, Gipper appeared. He wuz in a canoe, about three—four rods ahead of us.

Hodges see him, too. "Why—he's alone," he says. " Thought I heard him——"

Gipper sees us, and give a sort of yell, and stood up in the canoe, and Hodges turns white.

"The man's crazy," he says.

I sings out: "Hello, Gipper! What's wrong?"

At that he screamed like a woman. "Help, Gipper!" he yells. "Oh, God!"

And he dove over the other side of the canoe and down. In the fog and rain beyond it seemed like I could see something gray and white. But Hodges yells:

"We've got to save him. He's crazy."

I couldn't stay by and see Gipper drown.

He'd gone down, and hadn't come up yet—even if he wuz a good swimmer. So I jerked off my coat and hat and boots, and over I went, Hodges shoving the boat over to Gipper's canoe to stand by.

I went straight down for the bottom; and I see Gipper in a minute, dim, through the water. He was swimming around down there, and he saw me, I guess—for he turned and started to swim away.

I had the start, and I grabbed at his arm; and he whipped around down there fifteen feet under water and fought me. He shoved and scratched at my face, and jerked loose and went up toward the surface; and I went up too for air.

Time I got there, water out of my ears and all, he'd gone down again.

"He's drowning!" Hodges yelled, so I made another try. But this time he got a hold of me, down on the bottom there; and he was crazy, wild, fought like he'd tear me to pieces.

I got all sick inside. It wasn't natural, the way he fought me. And then, all of a sudden, I remembered something.

I had on a gray flannel shirt; and my hair was as white then as 'tis now. He couldn't tell it from a white handkerchief, maybe—under water, that way.

I thought of that, and then all I wanted was to get away; and I did it, somehow. The air and the rain sluicing down felt good, when I got to the surface.

"You're all cut!" Hodges yells. "Did you get him!"

"He fought me," I gasps, trying to get my breath back. "I couldn't manage him."

He helped me into the boat in a hurry.

"He'll come to the surface once more," he says. "Maybe we can grab him then."

But Gipper didn't come to the surface; and the story got around. That sort of made folks stay away from the camp.

He stopped, as though that were all the story. And I waited, and when he did not continue, I said: " But—is that all?"

William had allowed his pipe to go out. He lit it again, with sober care, and nodded. " Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I reck'n that's all."

I found myself trembling a little. "I suppose—it was Mrs. Radimon—swimming there—calling——"

William shook his head steadily.

"Figured you'd think that," he said. "Figured myself she sent him them notes—through th' winter. But—'twa'n't her that called to Gipper f'om the waters on the Ledge."

"How do you know?" I persisted. "She might have——"

"Twa'n't her." William repeated, "because—when Nick Radimon's boy baby was born t' her that April—she died."