



TROUT SUMMER

A novel by John Peter

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Publisher's Preface

We may be in the last days of narrative fiction. Writers of novels could be joining epic poets in the dustbin of literary history. Reading is being replaced by viewing, so the future belongs to cameramen, film makers, and animators. What can be done about the decline of serious reading?

In order to seduce the young we-never-read-books, we-only-look-at-stuff generation to the written word, we have created the *photofiction literary genre* where photographic illustrations share the page equally with text.

The first book of this type, *A Maine Yankee at Big Sur*, includes more than a hundred related photographs of the Big Sur area. *Trout Summer* is the second book in this series. Once we use the art to lure the readers in the door, we hope to get them to say, "Novels, what a

great idea."

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In recent years, the publishing industry has been hit with several "false memoirs" scandals-- *Love and Consequences*, *A Million Little Pieces*, and more. In all these cases porported truth was actually fabricated narration. Here we are doing the exact opposite. **This is fiction**, but by augmenting the text with photographic illustrations, we are saying *all of this could be true*.

This excerpt has been sized for small color e-readers like the Kindle Fire and the original iPad. Use the landscape mode to properly view the illustrations.



Exile in the Desert Forest

Interstate transit was invented to torture children with boredom, anxiety, and exhaustion. Danny Trout didn't know this when he boarded the bus in Hartford, but by the time he got into Massachusetts, he knew that he was in for a long ride, a very long ride. The swaying motion of the bus made it impossible to read, it was too hot and stuffy to just relax and enjoy the scenery, and the occasional wafted tincture of diesel fumes added an inverse aromatherapy to the malaise. Furthermore, he forgot the extra cartridges for the video game player.

There were no other kids on the bus, and it was two-thirds empty. All of the other passengers were elderly or weird-looking--for example, the middle aged man in the front seat wearing the purple leather motorcycle jacket, bobbling his head to some unshared ear-jacked music--so none of them looked to be someone with whom he would want to strike up a conversation. Besides, he wasn't feeling very talkative. He just wanted the trip to end.

In Boston he thought about getting on the "wrong" transfer bus and going back home, but he didn't. He had to spend the summer at his aunt's place in Northern Maine, the whole summer. Now he knew how Moses felt about the prospect of forty years in the desert; this was the same thing, but with trees. He had visited Maine with his mother three years ago, but that had been only for a one-week stay. The place was Dullsville, and that week it rained most of the time. There wasn't even TV. No mall. No baseball. Nothing. Just trees. Bore-ring! This time he was being sent off by himself for the summer, the whole summer.

In New Hampshire he got a brief glimpse of salt water from a bridge, but you don't see much at sixty miles per hour. Then, the Welcome to Maine sign made him think that perhaps the worst was past. *It's only a little further*, he told himself.

At the Portland stop: *It's only a little further*.

At the Lewiston stop: *It's only a little further.*

At the Augusta stop: *It's only a little further.*

At the Bangor stop: *Where the hell is the end of this state?*

Then, more than a hundred and twenty miles and a gazillion passed trees later, there was the sign: Canada - 10 miles.

Canada? Canada? Was he supposed to go to Canada? He looked at his ticket and it didn't say anything about Canada.

Finally, "Last stop Houlton," the driver announced. This is where he was supposed to meet his Aunt Elizabeth. The long ride was finally coming to an end ... or so he thought.



Brick works

As the sole occupant of the back of the bus, Danny, dragging his over-sized school backpack, was the last one to get off. There weren't many people hanging around the bus stop, but there was one person who was unmistakable.

"Aunt Elizabeth!"

A woman with her palms-out hands raised to shoulder height, fingers spread, and a surprised look on her face replied, "Yo! Danny? You've grown a mile!"

"No I haven't!"

"Well, eight, twelve inches any way." She warped him in a big hug.

The driver was hauling luggage out of the belly of the bus. There were only three departing passengers, so there were only a few suitcases, plus a thirty-gallon plastic storage tub with the cover secured with duct tape and string. "You the pick-up for this kid?" he asked Aunt Elizabeth.

"My nephew, Danny."

The driver shrugged his shoulders and pushed the plastic tub forward.

"There was a sign that said Canada," Danny said to Aunt Elizabeth. "Are we going near Canada?"

"Canada is that way," she said, pointing East. "We're going that way," pointing North.

"Oh."

"Of course, if you go far enough North, you'll get to Canada that way too, but we're not quite going that far."

"That's good. I've been on the bus since seven o'clock in the morning!"

"I suspected that would be the case, so I've got some mitigating circumstances in the Jeep."

"Circumstances?"

"Let's get your luggage loaded," Aunt Elizabeth said, hefting Danny's tub. "You taken up brick work?"

"Ummm?"

"This box has a bit of weight."

"Well, I've got to be here for the whole summer."

"You heard of the *To travel right, travel light* adage?"

"Ummm ... Ah ..."

Aunt Elizabeth laughed. "Could be worse. My grandma would have needed dozens of steamer trunks for a summer travel."



Hot rod Jeep

Aunt Elizabeth's Jeep was a "pre-SUV" model, a dark red 1972 CJ-5 with a metal top. It was in pristine condition, except for the mud splashed on the wheels and lower body. It was a work vehicle. The doors featured a rising brook trout logo and the words (above) Trout Camp (below) Lake Osprey, Maine. She unhooked the tailgate and slid Danny's tub and backpack inside next to a cooler and a large toolbox.

"Jump in," she instructed, pointing to the passenger seat.

Once Danny was belted in, she fired up the engine with a throaty roar.

"Wow. Is this a hot rod?" Danny asked.

Aunt Elizabeth laughed. "Hardly! My husband just had a boyish thing about glass packs, but I'm not going to replace it with a quiet muffler until this one rusts out. Meanwhile, it's just sound and fury that signifies naught."

"Oh. I've never been in a hot rod."

Aunt Elizabeth goosed the engine and popped the clutch, launching them out of the bus stop with neck-snapping acceleration. "Well, Tommy may have thought of this as his hot rod, but it's only got a V-6" she said with a grin.

"I think that this is enough of a hot rod for me."



Vampire mosquitos

They were only going forty-five miles per hour, but the car noise and the narrowness of the road made it seem like a hundred and forty-five to an inexperienced city boy like Danny. They were outside of Houlton in minutes, and heading North on Highway One. The Jeep was austere, without even a built-in radio, but it had a boom box wired to someplace under the dashboard. Aunt Elizabeth played some sort of Caribbean-sounding music that was unfamiliar to Danny. It featured a lot of steel drums. They listened to the music and passed through a few small towns, then Aunt Elizabeth drove near a river called Meduxnekeag, and asked, "Did you eat enough on the bus? Are you hungry?"

"We stopped at a lot of burger places, but ... um ... they kinda were not so too good."

"Just as I suspected. I've got a little bit of supper in the cooler. Are you ready to eat?"

"Um ... I could eat a horse!"

"Sorry, I've only got a pig, and not a very big one."

" ... Oh ..."

"I suppose I could find a pony someday, but for now ..." Aunt Elizabeth pulled off to the side of the road where a small tributary stream entered the river, then reached for the cooler.



A woodland stream

"Pony?" *Do they eat ponies in the Maine woods?* "I guess I'll stick with the pig."

"Pork sandwiches, actually," Aunt Elizabeth explained.

The sandwich was built on a baguette, but it was not an ordinary French loaf. This one had flecks of onion and garlic imbedded throughout. Furthermore, the contents were also far from ordinary. The meat was of the tenderest cut and was topped with tomatoes, lettuces of a kind that Danny couldn't recognize, onions, pickles, plus a rich mustard-and- yam sauce. Aunt Elizabeth sliced off a generous chunk, cradled it in a large paper napkin, and handed it to Danny. She took a smaller portion for herself. There was still a third of a sandwich left. Danny was given the choice of milk or apple juice, and he chose the latter.

They were parked in a small clearing a short distance from the water. "Can we go and eat by the water?" Danny asked.

Aunt Elizabeth pointed to an insect dancing on the outside of the windshield. "That," she said, "is the Maine Vampire Mosquito."

Then Danny noticed that around the other windows there were more mosquitoes trying to get in.

"Oh ... maybe that's not a good idea."

"Good thinking."



Gothic trout

They drove for nearly two hours, and at each junction, the road seemed to get narrower and less well-traveled until they finally left asphalt for gravel. Then they turned off a wide gravel road onto a narrow dirt one. Danny's sense of constriction was enhanced by the fact that the trees seemed to be getting taller and closer. In many places the arching branches made an incomplete cathedral roof over the road, occluding the waning moonlight. By the time they got to trout camp, it was dark. To Danny, used to the perpetual glow of the city, it was really dark. Only the Jeep's headlights provided a narrow cone of illumination. A glance into the roadside woods revealed nothing--total darkness. If there were stars--there were, he would later discover--the tree branches and leaves hid them from view.

Suddenly, Aunt Elizabeth turned sharply to the left. She put the Jeep into neutral and silently glided down a gentle slope for a hundred yards. The headlights briefly revealed shimmering water ahead of them, then she turned again, and stopped. Now, there stood before them a large log lodge. A single light, buried deep inside it, cast a faint glow over the walls and deck, but the roof and rest blended into the dark



Trout Camp

The scene was, Danny considered ... Gothic? Was that a bat flitting through the darkness, or did he just imagine it?

"Ah, home," Aunt Elizabeth said, shutting off the engine and killing the headlights. It was now, if possible, even darker.

Aunt Elizabeth opened her door, and there was the faint smell of woodsmoke.

"Anything you need 'tween now and morning?" Aunt Elizabeth asked, indicating Danny's luggage.

"Ummm ... I dunno ... Maybe pajamas?"

"Pajamas? I suppose a kid needs pajamas. Okay, let's get your box o' bricks out."

Aunt Elizabeth heaved up Danny's box by its tie strings and started up the staircase. Danny followed with his backpack. At the top of the stairs was a wide, long porch, then a large door. Aunt Elizabeth swung the door open with one hand and shoed Danny inside, closing it quickly before any "Maine Vampire Mosquitos" discovered this opportunity for entrance.

"Welcome to Trout Camp," Aunt Elizabeth said softly.



Inside a dog

At the far end of the room there was a single light burning. It was an over-the-shoulder floor lamp positioned behind an easy chair, one of several scattered before the fireplace. A few small flames flickered there, but they seemed more than not to enhance the dimness about the room. There was a stack of books perched on the arm of the chair, and a small empty wineglass on top of those books, however, the reader was apparently asleep.



Evening reading

With a crook of a bent finger, Aunt Elizabeth motioned for Danny to follow her to a hallway on the left. In the hall there were two closed doors on the right and a set of up stairs on the left. Under the stairs was another door, which Aunt Elizabeth swung open, then flipped on an overhead light switch. The room contained a bed, a bureau, a chair, and on the far side, between the bed and a window, a nightstand with a lamp and a clock. These things about filled the room. There were a few shelves in the space under the lower part of the staircase, but cramped was the best word to describe the accommodations. Everything was newly cleaned and polished, however.

Aunt Elizabeth heaved Danny's container onto the top of the dresser. "Okay, the bricks an' pajamas are ready for you. You need anything else before morning?"

"Um ... I don't think so."

"The bathroom is the door directly across from yours. The fire exit sign inside will give you enough light to find the light switch beside the door."

"Okay."

"We don't have any sports with reservations scheduled until Friday, so breakfast won't be until after seven for the next two mornings. You ain't one of em' Franklin types, are you?"

Danny frowned. "Um ... I dunno ... Franklin?"

"Early to bed, early to rise."

"Oh, um ... you mean ... like ... before ten?"

Aunt Elizabeth laughed. "Maybe I better give you the *lunch* schedule."

Danny didn't reply. Although it wasn't past his usual bedtime, the long, boring, and exhausting bus ride reset his biological clock, and the small bed, piled with pillows and a fluffy comforter, looked mighty inviting.

"Okay, then good night." Aunt Elizabeth turned to go. "Remember, the bathroom is right across the hall. The other door is Anne L's room."

"Anne L?"

"The girl reading by the fire. She's working here for the summer. We also have a woman named Ann Croteau who helps with the housekeeping chores a few days a week. We call her 'Ann C' so there is no confusion."

"Oh." Danny glanced at the bed again, then, "Good night, Aunt Elizabeth."

As she closed his door, she commented, "*Lunch* isn't until noon ... just so you know."

Danny started to undo the tape and twine sealing his "luggage." This task took nearly fifteen minutes of struggling and muttering impolite oaths under his breath, then it took him several minutes of rooting amid the contents to find his pajamas. Two minutes thereafter he was ready for bed. However, as he turned out the light, OOPS! Everything was completely black. *The bed is that way, right?* He turned the overhead light back on. It was fortunate that he hadn't moved away from the switch. He hadn't exactly been facing the bed, it turned out. He went and turned on the bed lamp, then went over and again turned off the overhead light. Finally, in bed, he turned off the lamp.

Black!

Somehow the phrase "reading inside a dog" occurred to him, but how that might be relevant escaped him as he drifted off to sleep.



Silent trees

There was something wrong, but he couldn't say what it was. There was a grayness that revealed the outlines of the things around him. He knew that he was at his Aunt Elizabeth's place in Maine. He knew that he was in a room there. He even remembered that the bathroom was right across the hall, but there was something, a sinister sense of something that was forebodingly wrong. He sat up in bed and looked out the window. There were outlines of trees, a bit of mist at their bases, but they were merely the outlines of trees, unmoving in the morning stillness. Yet, there was something distinctly unfamiliar.

He listened.

Nothing.

Quite.

Quite.

Danny couldn't remember hearing this much silence. There was no nearby traffic noise. There was no distant hum from the highway along the Connecticut River. There were no occasional indistinct shouting voices. There was nothing of the usual constant tuning of the disharmonious symphony that was a part of living in Hartford. Morning silence, more than anything, told him that he was far, very far, from home. And he was going to have to be here for the whole summer.

He looked out the window. Yes, trees, just trees. They didn't sorta look like the trees of, say, Colt Park, but they were just trees. Quiet trees. But the call of the forest would have to wait for the call of nature, and Danny went to investigate the bathroom facilities. Except for the exit sign and the fire door, it was basically a blue and white tiled home bathroom.

Danny wandered towards the main room. The reading lamp was off, the fire was out, and there was no one about. Then Danny smelled coffee. From where he was standing, a few feet into the hallway, he could not see the kitchen area which was at the back of the dinning room and on the left of the fireplace. However, such was the insidious nature of coffee that Danny, almost involuntarily, began to follow his nose.



Breakfast at Elizabeth's

Aunt Elizabeth was standing at a work counter kneading bread dough. There was a large cup of coffee at her side. She was wearing a blue plaid wool shirt, sleeves rolled up to the elbows. Last night she wore red plaid, Danny recalled. She had on blue jeans and wore heavy tall-heeled work boots. Her hair was tied behind her head with a blue ribbon.

"Oh, Dr. Franklin, I presume," she said by way of greetings.

"Um ... Good morning, Aunt Elizabeth. Something must have woken me up."

"Well, it wasn't the lunch cart. You're even ahead of breakfast."

"Oh."

"Another twenty minutes, or so."

"Okay."

"But just so you know, house rules: no pajamas in the dinning room."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Not a problem. There aren't any customers yet. We've got to set a good example for 'em sports. Standards, you know."

"Okay." Danny turned to leave.

"If I remember correctly, you eat pancakes, right?"

"Right!"

By the time that Danny returned in more appropriate clothing--an oversized T-shirt featuring an image of a long-extinct rock 'n roll band and baggy trousers--Aunt Elizabeth was not alone. Separating the dining room area and the kitchen was a serving bar with six stools in front of it. On the furthest stool sat a man with a with a handled tool tray on his left and a large coffee mug on his right. He also wore a plaid work shirt and jeans, but more faded and less crisp than those Aunt Elizabeth wore.

"Danny, this is Mr. LeClair. LeClair, this is my nephew Danny," she said by way of introductions.

"Hello, Danny."

"Um ... hi."

"You ready for those pancakes?" Aunt Elizabeth asked Danny.

"Sure."

"Sounds good to me," LeClair commented.

"I thought that you always breakfasted before dawn," she said to him.

"Did. That was hours ago."

"You startin' the work season settin' a new precedent?"

"Wouldn't want to be a stuck-in-the-mud, set-in-my-ways kind of guy, would I? Besides, have I ever turned down the opportunity of eating your cooking?"

"Well, if you're settin' new precedents, Mr. Double-breakfast, set a table for four. You remember how to set a table?"

LeClair just laughed, then sauntered into the otherwise empty dining room where he started setting one of the window tables. He worked one-handed, however, the coffee cup occupying his right hand.



Maine's Macbeth

Before LeClair was halfway through his chore, a huge bouquet of wildflowers and greenery came through the front door. So large was the clutch of vegetation that it was as if Brinan wood do come to Dunsinane, however, there were vases on the tables, and as each was passed, a handful of flora was deposited so that gradually it emerged that a buxom girl with a mane of frizzy blonde hair was carrying the flowers. "Good morning, everyone," she said.

LeClair silently raised his coffee cup in salute.

"Morning, Anne L," Aunt Elizabeth said to the young woman "This is my nephew, Danny. Danny, this is Anne L, my assistant for the summer." She turned to the flower girl, who had now deposited her greenery in the last vase, the one on the counter, "And Mr. LeClair will be joining us for pancake breakfast this morning."

She raised an eyebrow, but said nothing, then turned to Danny, smiled, and said "Hello."

"Um ... Hi."

"Anne L cleaned out the storage room and turned it into your bedroom," Aunt Elizabeth said to Danny.

"Oh Thanks."

"It's tiny. It's a good thing you turned out to not be a big kid. I hope it's okay."

"Umm ... well ... on a submarine it would be the luxury suite, right?"

Anne L laughed--a light tinkle of bells.

"Platter of pancakes. Two minute warning," Aunt Elizabeth called out. "Fill your coffee cups while there is time." She frowned at Danny, "You don't drink coffee, do you?"

"Only if it is half milk," he replied.

"Better make that two-thirds milk. We make strong coffee here."

"Okay."

By the time Danny got his diluted coffee, Aunt Elizabeth was bring the platter to the table. Quickly the dozen large pancakes were distributed in stacks, each with a pat of melting butter on top. Aunt Elizabeth passed around a pitcher of maple syrup, then a pitcher of orange juice. The meal proceeded in silence.

When the pancakes were done, there were coffee refills, except ... "I think that a third of a cup is enough daily coffee for a kid," Aunt Elizabeth suggested to Danny. He recognized that this was not really a "suggestion." Then she turned to LeClair, "Thanks for coming over on short notice yesterday afternoon and fixing that leaking pipe that Anne L discovered."

"No problem. I won't even charge you the usual time-and-a-half-after-beer-thirty rate."

"I take it that it was well past beer-thirty?" Aunt Elizabeth asked with a frown.

"Let's just say that I wasn't expecting to have to work."

"Well, you can expect to work for the next few days. We've got a bunch of last minute fixes to do before the first payin' customers get here."

"Not a problem."

"You haven't seen the door to cabin five which needs replacing."

"You have to replace cabin five?"

"Just the door! There is a roof leak in cabin three. And all the screens have to be checked to make sure that they are tight and sound. That should keep you busy to beer-thirty ... which isn't until sunset, right?"

"She who pays the fiddler calls the tune."

"Well, it's time to tune up this place before em' sports get here, so fill your coffee cup and go to it."

LeClair saluted and got up to follow the orders of the day.

Aunt Elizabeth turned to Anne L, "We're going to start by layin' in a supply of soup stock. I've got a pile of beef bones and trimmings, and there are two turkey carcasses and a chicken in the freezer, so we'll have both meat and poultry stock to do this morning."

Finally, she turned to Danny. "I'm going to be busy for the next few days, so you're mostly just going to have to shift for yourself."

"Um ... well ... I suppose I gotta unpack my stuff."

"Make the room shipshape."

"Um ... submarine shape!"

"Right!"

END OF EXCERPT
