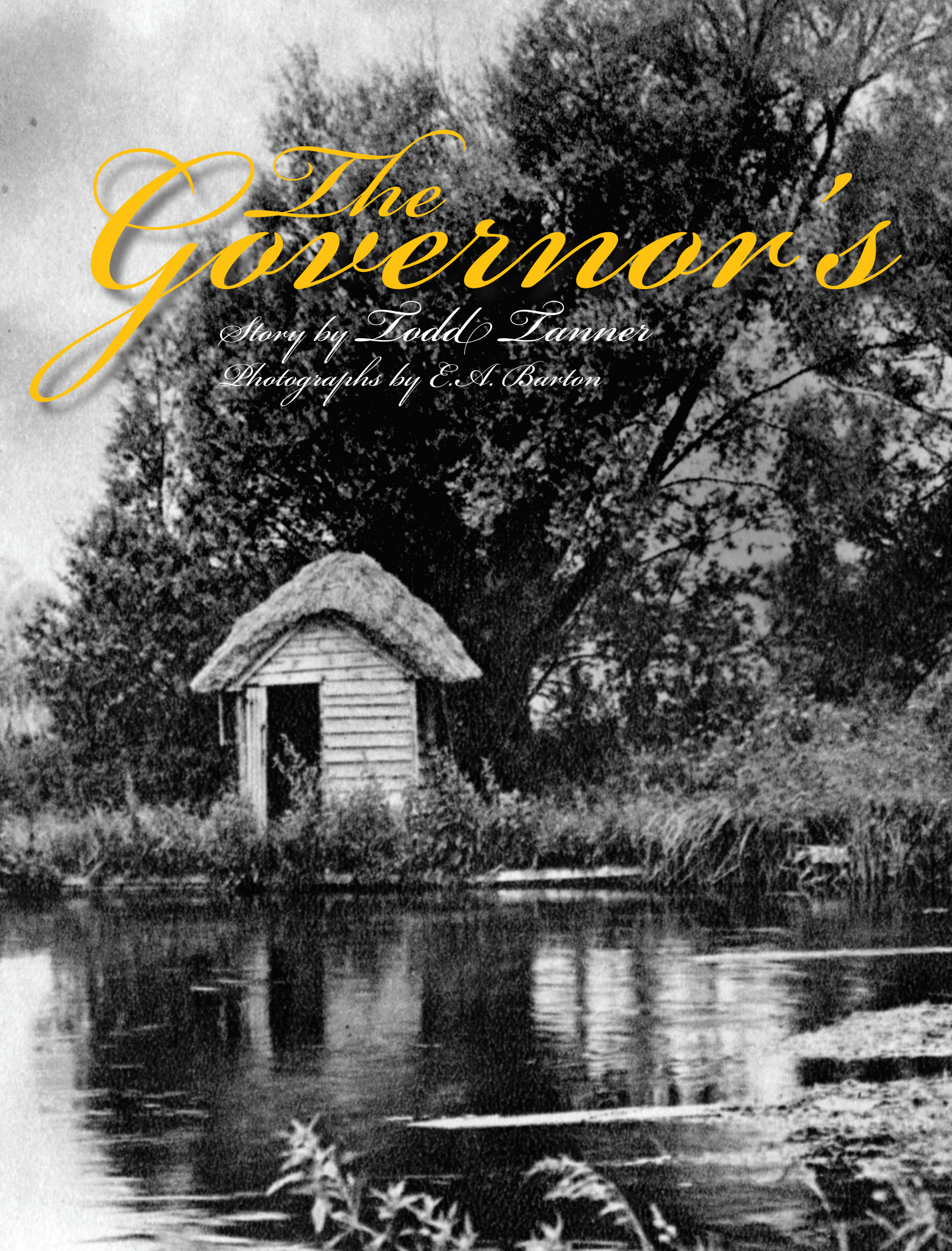


The Governor's

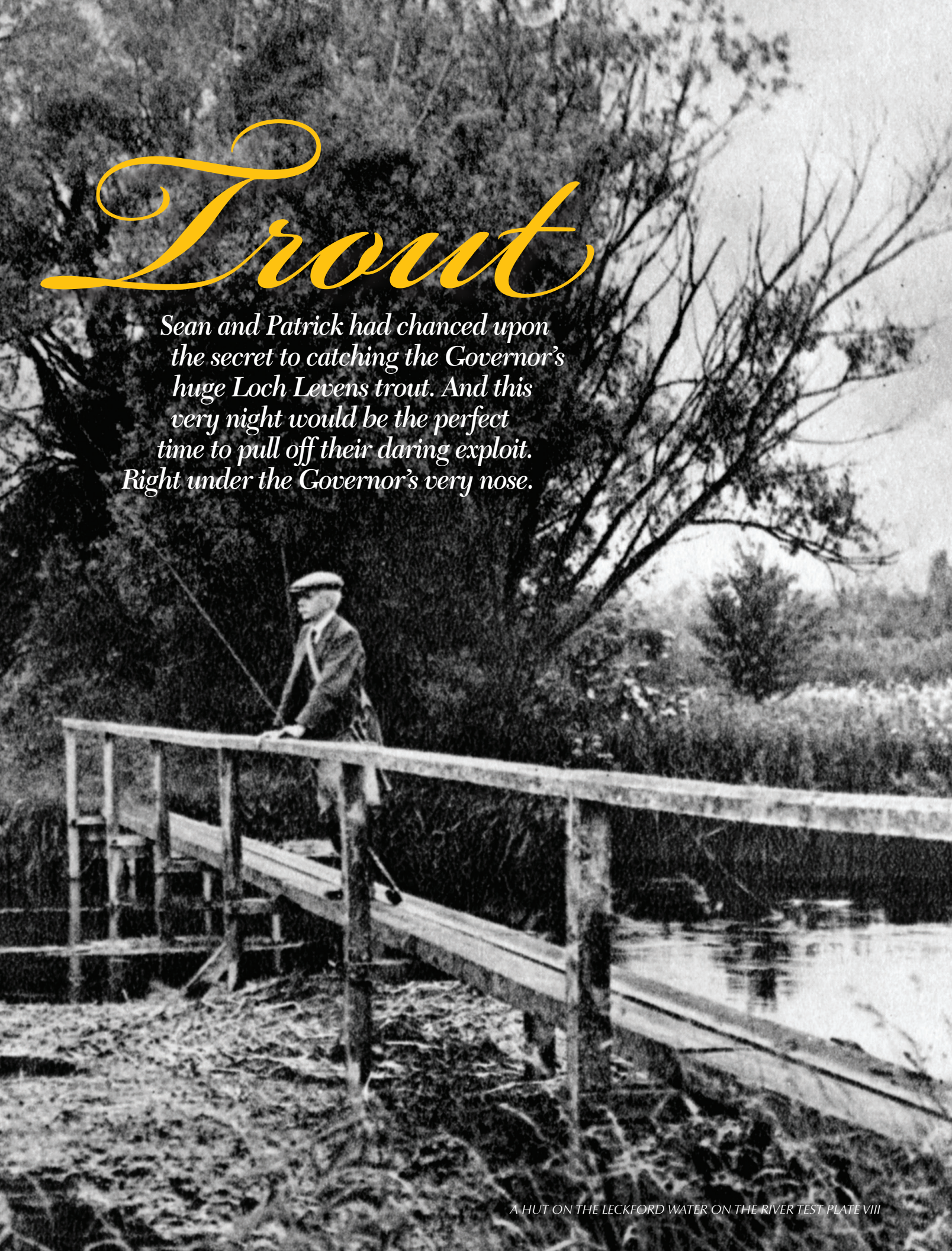
Story by Todd Tanner

Photographs by E. A. Barton



Trout

Sean and Patrick had chanced upon the secret to catching the Governor's huge Loch Levens trout. And this very night would be the perfect time to pull off their daring exploit. Right under the Governor's very nose.



Sean Michael McCabe was exactly 37 years old on the day his life changed forever. As it was his birthday, and as the little one-bedroom house was empty – Molly having gone off the day before to help her widowed sister, whose youngest had the cough and whose oldest the flu – Sean decided a stop at the pub might be just the thing for a thirsty man finished with his day's duties.

So instead of turning right he turned left, and left rather than right, and in no time at all he

found himself seated in front of the bar at The Industrious Rabbit; the exact same Industrious Rabbit where the legendary Seamus Linehan, on a dare and a bet, had downed ten pints at lunch and then held his water till the Rabbit's smoky old Grandfather chimed midnight. They still – Sean included – speak of Seamus' feat 52 years later and, one and all, toast, "Let it run, man, let it run!" each night when the hands stand straight up and Grandfather tolls midnight.

Now Sean, who's a man of moderation and known far and wide as the most levelheaded in the country, had finished off perhaps a drop more than his usual when down to his right sat Patrick O'Rourke. And Patrick, who's a hound, a poacher and a scallywag when he's not in worse trouble, looked over at the four empty mugs on the bar (The Rabbit, as most of the county's fine establishments, makes a practice of not collecting "Retired Generals" on a man's birthday, so that his friends might know when he's had enough and send him off home to bed) and said, "Ho, Sean, I've got two presents for you on this great day of your birth. First, Michael the barkeep will pull you a pint and it's on me, as we've always been fast friends. And second, I have the answer to that quintessential question of your very own existence. I'm prepared, in full and intimate detail, to explain how we're going to catch the Governor's trout."

And with that, Sean and Patrick put their heads together and lowered their voices, so no one could hear what was said, or even who said it.

Now the Governor's trout, as you well know, are the envy of every fisherman in the county, and quite a few outside the limits. They're of the Loch Leven strain, and grow to great size and, as the saying goes, "They're smarter than the brightest from Darby." The Governor himself, an acknowledged champion of the long rod, has spent fully half his life fishing his trout, and most of the remainder thinking over them, and yet he's only caught a handful and those were little ones, shorter than your arm.

Of course, his lack of success is small wonder when you note that the Governor's stream is slow and shallow, and it rises from the ground on one end of his great meadow and sinks back into the earth on the other, and the trout won't eat during the day.

"And why should they?" you might



ask, as they're all nasty browns – known for their nefarious nighttime habits – and near impervious to the feathered tomfoolery plied by the Governor and his distinguished guests.

So that very night, at the stroke of Linehan's hour – “Let it run, man, let it run!” – here come two shadows skulking by the Warden's cottage, and one of the shadows belongs to Patrick O'Rourke and the other to our friend Sean. And Sean had his bamboo tucked inside its tube and his reel in his pocket, and Patrick had his poacher's creel, and together they were dressed for the hunt.

“We'll have to be quiet, Sean,” said Patrick, “or we'll have the Warden on us for sure.”

Sean, being a sensible sort, said nothing.

The Governor's meadow, indeed, and would be even if the Governor's stream didn't wander right through the middle of

it, is thick and lush, just the kind of place your cows would hope to spend a week or two. It's also dotted with small seeps that filter down to the streambed and add their volume to the slow-moving flow.

Of particular import to our story, this very meadow is (and, as far back as anyone can remember, always has been) perfect habitat for that most preferred of all nocturnal Loch Leven brown trout foods. And it's not Juneflies, or caddis, or grassjumpers, in case you've hazarded a guess. As evidenced by the noisome feeding that greeted Sean and Patrick as they neared the water, and the tiny lights flashing all around, the Governor's trout absolutely adore that most princely member of the insect kingdom.

The ever-succulent firefly.

Now Sean was well aware of this fact, as indeed were most of the country's brotherhood of the angle, for the secret feeding habits of the Governor's trout had long been exposed. Yet our friend had no recourse, for as everyone knows, an imitation of the fly that lights up the night sky doesn't exist. Indeed, the Governor himself had puzzled and worried away many an

hour on just this problem, and spent time researching batteries and flylines that carry electric currents and other such solutions, but none had proved their success in the field. His field, that is, and that's the only one we're concerned with.

“Here it is!” said Patrick, as they sat down on the bank, and he reached into his creel and pulled out a small leather bag tied off with a bit of twine. “Do you have that dark green beetle birthed from stag's hair and the wool from a ram's stones?”

Sean nodded “yes” and held the tiny fraud up in his callused palm.

“Then this is your treasure, Sean, the one and only answer to the singularly reclusive nighttime habits of the Governor's much-coveted trout, and you and I are the only ones who know the mysterious properties of this fair elixir, or that it even exists. And tonight with your skill and my alchemy, we'll pluck the Governor's Loch Levens, the pride of his possessions, from under his very nose.”

And with those words, and not one more, Patrick

opened his pouch.

Out came tumbling his stash, his stuff, the moist, crumbled remnants of luminescent lichen that he'd found down some dank shaft in the ground. For, you see, Patrick the Poacher knew every bolt hole and spelunker's hideaway in the country, and in one cave, dark and deep, he'd turned off his lamp as the constable's shouts neared, but instead of black there was light, the faint living glow of rare elf moss, and an idea hatched in his quite nimble mind. He gathered a handful of moss, popped it in his bag, and once the sounds of pursuit diminished, was off quick as you please.

So Sean rubbed his fly in the glowing clump of Patrick's hoard, and then ever-so-softly tucked one over the Governor's

stream. The luminous fluff settled down nicely, and floated on the surface like a single star against the vast night sky. But only for a moment, though, because one of the Governor's trout lunged from below and snapped it right up.

The trout who attached himself to Sean's line was not yet full grown, being no larger than a small dog, but he comported himself with style, and it was all Sean could do to hold on for dear life. And when Mr. Loch Leven ran downstream, Sean had to follow; and when he ran upstream, Sean had to follow there too.

Once he slipped and fell, and said unkind words that we won't repeat, and once he stepped in a muskrat hole and said something worse. All in all, though, Sean fought a good fight, an after barely half an hour he slid the Governor's trout up on the bank.

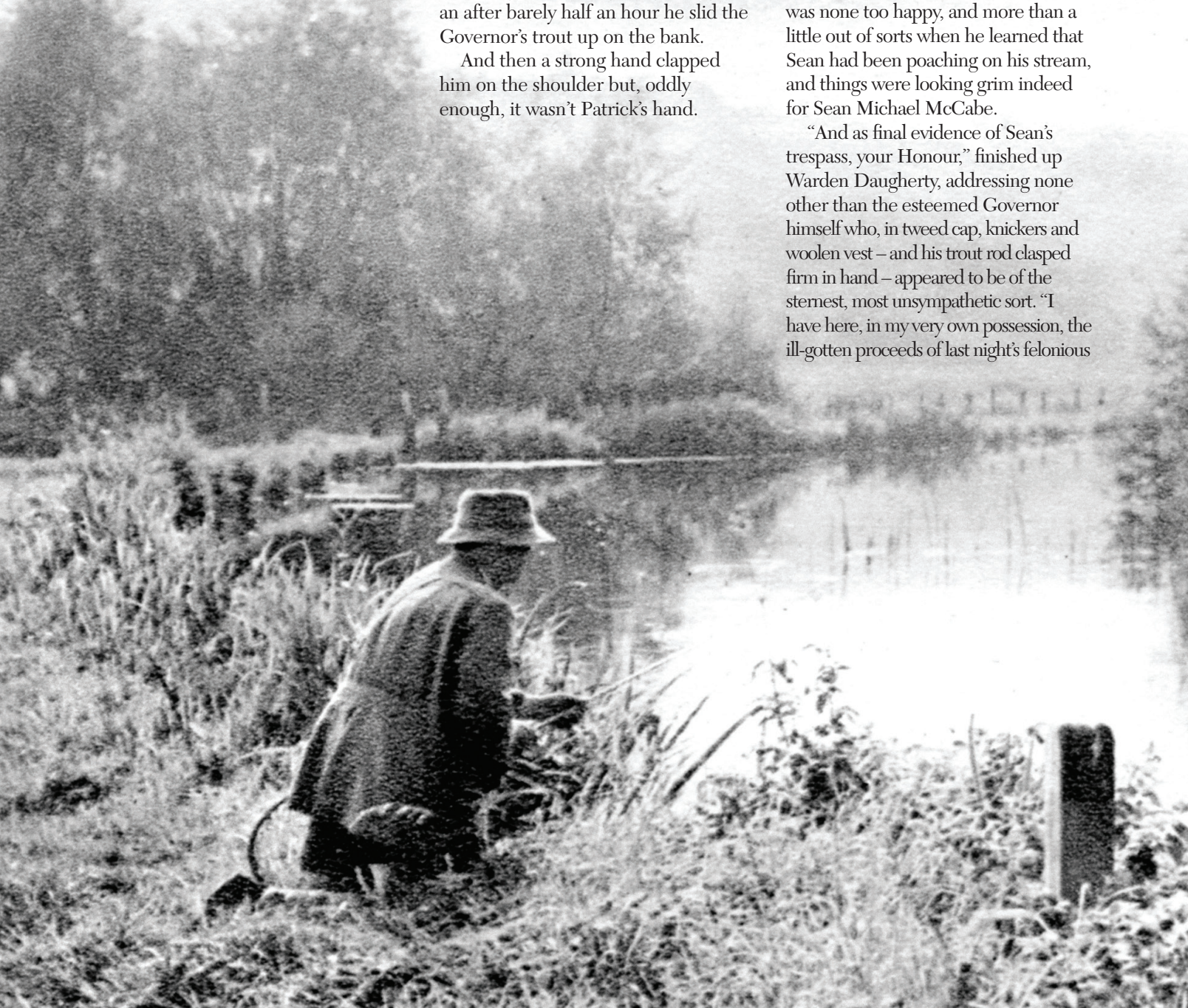
And then a strong hand clapped him on the shoulder but, oddly enough, it wasn't Patrick's hand.

"Well, well, Sean Michael McCabe," said the Governor's Warden, Tom Daugherty. "That was a memorable sight, and nicely done. I've seen some fine stream-work in my day, indeed I have, but this night's the finest. It's a pity we'll have to go before the Governor on the morrow."

He tried this way, he tried that, but nothing Sean said could break the famous Daugherty resolve, and off they went to spend the night in the Warden's cottage. And it wasn't until later that Sean realized Patrick had slipped out like a mouse, and gotten clean away.

So in the morn they went up to the estate house, and found the Governor at the pool, practicing his roll cast. And the Governor was none too happy, and more than a little out of sorts when he learned that Sean had been poaching on his stream, and things were looking grim indeed for Sean Michael McCabe.

"And as final evidence of Sean's trespass, your Honour," finished up Warden Daugherty, addressing none other than the esteemed Governor himself who, in tweed cap, knickers and woolen vest – and his trout rod clasped firm in hand – appeared to be of the sternest, most unsympathetic sort. "I have here, in my very own possession, the ill-gotten proceeds of last night's felonious



incursion.” And Tom Daugherty reached into his burlap sack and hauled out by the tail a leg-long brown of some 24 pounds.

“My God, man!” bellowed the Governor. “You’ve poached my Prince Rupert! Do you know the penalty for snagging a trout of this stature? Out of my very own stream? It’s six months in the county house with a pick and shovel for you!”

“Begging your Honour’s pardon,” broke in Daugherty, “but Sean didn’t snag the Prince. Unlikely as it seems, he hooked your esteemed Rupert with a dry fly, and in the prescribed gentlemanly manner. He’s a poacher, sir, and he deserves what he gets, but he’s also a top-water man, and I’ll vouch that he’s not sullied your stream with trebles or nymphs.”

“Astounding,” said the Governor, “simply astounding.” And after taking a minute or two to light his pipe, he sat down on the grass, his long legs folded like a newborn foal’s, and motioned

for Sean to sit beside him.

“I’ve been after this particular fish for years, Sean,” the Governor mused, “and though I’m accounted a fair hand with a rod, he’s done naught but laugh and offer me the fin. Yet you caught my Prince, and absolute scoundrel of a Loch Leven, with a dry fly. Hmmm, it seems that you and I will need to discuss a few things before we can resolve this matter properly . . .”

Neither Sean, nor Tom Daugherty, nor even the Governor himself, ever spoke one word of the conversation that came after. A nimble mind, though, can add two plus two plus two, and if you put them all together a warden with

a sudden interest in spelunking, and a large, anonymous order for stag’s hair and ram’s wool at the local fly shoppe and a new full-time gillie (who, for reasons never fully explained, received permission to fish the Governor’s stream every other Tuesday) – well, I think you’re beginning to see the picture.

And when Sean next saw Patrick the Poacher at the Industrious Rabbit three Saturdays after, he walked up and said, “Patrick, you rotten old scalawag, the next one’s on me.”

E.A. Barton, *The Ansel Adams of The Chalk Streams*

There once was a time when fly fishermen were the epitome of class, dressed in ties, tweed and trousers . . . when the good life was simply enjoyed rather than envied . . . and when the black-and-white photograph was as romantic as the scene it depicted. And in that time, there was E.A. Barton, considered by many the Ansel Adams of the chalk streams.

Edwin Alfred Barton was born July 12, 1863 in England, the eldest son of Alfred Bowyer and Editha Helen Barton. Before entering the field of photography, he was a family doctor in Kensington Square.

Today, Barton's photographs remain unmatched in the world of fly fishing. He captured the grace of the rod on its pendulum, wistfully waving fly and line across the waters of England. Then there was the majestic trout and countless images of his favorite fish.

But a little-known fact is that Barton's favorite subject was himself. He worked with a tripod and shutter-release system in order to give him time to set himself into the scene. And in doing so, he captured moments in time of ethereal beauty that have not been recreated in the last two centuries.

Barton found photography and fly fishing as the perfect marriage among the fine arts. He became a master of the darkroom, where he used dodging and burning techniques to create haunting effects. Even today, almost 150 years after his death (February 10, 1953), E.A. Barton remains possibly the best angling photographer of all time.

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ON A TEST TRIBUTARY PLATE XXXVI