

TROUT FISHING ON THE BEVEL

The two graveyards were next to each other on small hills and between them flowed Graveyard Creek, a slow-moving, funeral-procession-on-a-hot-day creek with a lot of fine trout in it.

And the dead didn't mind me fishing there at all.

One graveyard had tall fir trees growing in it, and the grass was kept Peter Pan green all year round by pumping water up from the creek, and the graveyard had fine marble headstones and statues and tombs.

The other graveyard was for the poor and it had no trees and the grass turned a flat-tire brown in the summer and stayed that way until the rain, like a mechanic, began in the late autumn.

There were no fancy headstones for the poor dead. Their markers were small boards that looked like heels of stale bread:

Devoted Slob Father Of

Beloved Worked-to-Death Mother Of

On some of the graves were fruit jars and tin cans with wilted flowers in them :

Sacred
To the Memory
of
John Talbot
Who at the Age of Eighteen
Had His Ass Shot Off
In a Honky-Tonk
November 1, 1936
This Mayonnaise Jar
With Wilted Flowers In It
Was Left Here Six Months Ago
By His Sister
Who Is In
The Crazy Place Now.

Eventually the seasons would take care of their wooden names like a sleepy short-order cook cracking eggs over a grill next to a railroad station. Whereas the well-to-do would have their names for a long time written on marble hors d'oeuvres like horses trotting up the fancy paths to the sky.

I fished Graveyard Creek in the dusk when the hatch was on and worked some good trout out of there. Only the poverty of the dead bothered me.

[Once, while cleaning the trout before I went home in the almost night, I had a vision of going over to the poor graveyard and gathering up grass and fruit jars and tin cans and markers and wilted flowers and bugs and weeds and clods and going home and putting a hook in the vise and tying a fly with all that stuff and then going outside and casting it up into the sky, watching it float over clouds and then into the evening star.]