

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVE HAEFELE

POINT TAKEN

A POIGNANT LESSON IN LURE STORAGE.

BY DOUG PIKE

Many of the best stories that wind up in this column start with a promise, from me to the teller, that I won't use real names. This time, my pledge to uphold confidentiality went to Cliff Webb, veteran guide from Baffin Bay, Texas, who almost got left holding the bag on a trip long ago.

Back in the infancy of breathable waders, he and a client — we'll call him Tote — were casting and catching their way down a quiet shoreline. Tote decided to swap lures, likely because Webb was ahead a few fish. He clipped the Corky he'd been using off his line — seldom a good idea in big-trout water — and dropped it into the little pouch at the front of the slick new waders he had on.

Minutes later, Tote let Webb know he was shoreline bound to relieve himself of the morning's coffee. Once he was safe on dry sand, the waders came down, nature's call was answered, and Tote yanked the watertight pants upward quickly so he could rejoin Webb out on the water. But there was a snag — a sharp, painful snag. It turns out that one of the hooks from that Corky had



punctured the little pouch in the waders and found its way into the little ... oh, the cruel, cruel irony.

Over his shoulder, Webb heard a high-pitched scream, followed by a couple of unsettling whimpers. The guide turned just in time to watch Tote drop abruptly to his knees, roll onto his back, then his side, and onto his back again. "Oh my God! Oh my God! That Corky's stuck in my ... uh ..." Tote shouted. "Please tell

me you got wire cutters!"

Webb cringed, and his breakfast rolled in his stomach. It hurt even to imagine the how and why — and especially the where — of what had befallen Tote. Professional par excellence, though, Webb shuffled toward the wounded Tote with braid-cutting scissors and nail clippers — the only tools available — in hand.

As Webb neared the injured angler, he confessed to me, his pace slowed a

little. Tote was in trouble, to be sure, but Webb hoped silently that his client would remedy the situation before any physical contact became necessary — preferably even before he had to put eyes on the situation.

Once uncomfortably close, Webb saw that Tote had somehow managed to extract one bare, pasty, hairy leg from those waders.

"It was sticking straight up in the air," Webb recalled, "and the rest of him was all balled up." Tote was trying to get a clearer view of the problem and a better angle to work on it. "It looked like a cat licking itself," explained Webb.

Now taking baby steps, Webb averted his eyes and prayed for resolution. And that prayer, no doubt similar to the one Tote was sending heavenward, was actually answered.

"I got it! I got it!" Tote declared. "Hook's out!" So the waders came back on, the men walked back to the boat for a rest, and both shared a laugh. There was ample time left to wade some more if Tote was able, so Webb asked his client, "What do you want to do?" "Your call," he replied. "Whatever happens the rest of this day," Tote assessed correctly, "is fine by me." ●