

!: dawn dreams to dawn

It's behind a chain-link fence, weeping willows and other sullen, droopy domesticated trees ringing its blue-stoned water. Still, they persevere, throwing long limbs laden with heavy leaves over the pond's surface, bestowing shade and the errant broken branches to the water. A grate shielding a water control device of some sort provides additional cover. I'm there, albeit apprehensive about being caught, but I bust out a cast or two, and, in the fog of false memory, do believe a bluegill I held. But the apprehension, it overwhelms me, and I escape through a hole in the fence back to the safe world, the safe world where I look back longingly at the off-limits pond, where some fucking rich bitch in bright-white pantaloons and a tawdry teal blouse lazes around the pond, like some imperious regent surveying her inherited, unearned lands.

Hot, a sere, flat landscape, the diamond heat blurring and smoothing the transition between land and atmosphere. In contrast, a few dark ponds, looking like the handiwork of man, square, but with tenacious Nature that refuses to bow down to civilization's pressures. Willows and tules and cattails and cottonwoods claim the ponds' margins for their own, and claiming the water, too - they rain down sticks and branches and stumps and whole tree trunks, from which snake milfoil and pondweed, gifting the ponds' lives secrecy and intrigue. I walk down a dirt road fringed with fallow weeds of early autumn, weeds done their time in life's cycle, and I feel just a bit too late. Robust bluegill beckon, that I know, but I can never reach the ponds, and the road, the ponds, the dying light of fall's falling golden evening, evaporate.

The sun set, and I rush to it, some little speck of water surrounded by the epitome of suburban America: neat tract homes, all hued a bland white; tarry black road colored garish by brand-new yellow ordering lines; a fringing lawn, the omnipresent fringing lawn, through which threads a concrete path for power-walkers and for octogenarians clod-hopping their walkers. And the pond, like the others, fecund and rebellious in its unbridled plant and animal life: scummy algae, the stubborn cattails, the croaking big bullfrogs, and, again, bluegill, rust-breasted brutes of misplaced non-native but wild animal force. A lavender sky shading to vacuum black, vermilion streaks of clouds heralding day's death, and, again, I arrive too late, and all, myself included, dissolve into the black-hole death of an entangled engram of fantasy and reality.

A cobble wall of ancient stones, clothed with embracing vines, scented sweetly by thorny roses beckoning in innocent lust. Inside, rolling hummocks of velvety emerald grass, the flowing interrupted by either stark, intrusive golf-course obstacles or decayed headstones of lives long lost. It's near the northeast corner - don't know how I know, but I do. A little cove pokes north, with steeply sloped banks, cattail patches waving in the dusk wind speaking ghostly whispers. Fucking late again. Turquoise water, stained by man's poisons, houses, of all things, smallmouth bass. I catch one, a good fish, and we vanish.

I'm in a watercraft, poking in and out of weedy pockets of a clear-water pond, a pond sandwiched on two sides by boundless drones of car-clogged freeways. A bridge spans overhead, and the sun's abandoned the water. A slight flow speeds me too quickly past good holding water, and, frustrated, I paddle back up-flow irately. Finally in a decent position, the dusk light favorable, and I throw a good cast and come up tight, tight to a bountiful half-foot green sunfish, a great fish. I remember equivocation, however - bass may have been the target,

relegating the illustrious sunnie to by-catch status. I slip the little warrior back into the water, and all - the fish, the water, me - dissipates.

A country road through humid, hazy atmosphere, a blue sky stroked with fluttering wisps of clouds, and there, along the cracked road split by faded lines, a pond, oblong, fringed with senesced rushes, enveloped by a well-tended park-like sliver of lawn, with old, bony benches at set intervals. I drive west by the pond, neck craned to its roily, brown waters, waters ruffled by a biting breeze. I thought to myself that I'd return with rod in hand to extend the reach and caress a carp, but I never did - I just kept driving, on and on and on into the unknown ether of a surrealist horizon.

Why the fuck here, of all places? Fucking high-rise slate-colored monstrosities, goddamn business conventions overflowing with infestations of suit-clad automatons, domesticated ducks adding an apocalyptic clatter to the humanoid blather, a fountain spurting alien water into a concrete-lined pond with a few nodding, sad trees that can't touch the shading potential of the skyscrapers. And yet, here I am, for the carp are, too. I somehow get my lines in the water, but some bitch tangles 'em and fumbles my quest.

Two of 'em this time, and, yeah, like the others, their smooth outlines seemingly crafted by the earth-moving of man. They run south of the road, but beyond, further south, big cottonwoods and walnut trees, in collusion with crumpled thickets, cloak a much wilder world. The two ponds - one's big, long, lined with the omnipresent tules and cattails, and it ain't spring or summer since the marsh plants are all jaundiced. The other's smaller, less excluded by waving walls of vegetation, and a bare bank on the west end allows enough room to run a few rods, and, serendipitously, by the fish-attracting corners. This time, I'm on time - I nab three carp quickly, then head to the car, stow my gear, and leave, driving east on the road, an arctic wind blowing, the sagging winter sun shunting meekly through naked hardwood limbs. I can't stop looking at the bigger pond.

A revealing full moon casts cobalt light on the stony architecture that frames this slot of water. This one differs: smooth, polished, giant jade slabs of rock adorn the waterway's banks rather than the more common greenery of lawns, of trees, of marsh plants. It's warm but not hot - a sweetly soothing summery night breeze softly brushes the canyon that cradles this pond, and despite the endless anxiety that haunts my every second, the setting somehow caresses and calms my tumultuous mind. I've the rod and my gear, but the sidling air, the kind moonlight, they, for an instant, bequeath a contentedness that's so rare in my life that I can't leave. I hold fast, breath still, a statue, and space and time slide off to infinity.