

## ***! ontogeny***

Abandoned Lake Gregory in winter. I was young - 14, maybe 15 years old. I recall hiking over to the little east-side cove, underdressed, in the bone-clattering winter cold. I remember wearing a hand-me-down brown coat of some sort, with a pillied faux-fur neck lining; maybe some jeans; a pair of Off the Wall Vans; certainly not appropriate mountain winter wear. Cold. The home situation didn't help the temperature. Cold. I had some big, crazy hair, so that at least kept my head's top a little warm. With salmon eggs and nightcrawlers, I caught trout, beautiful 'bows, that have me thinking that maybe, just maybe, those were wild fish that had somehow - doubtfully, I admit - been spawned in the silted-in inlet of Houston Creek. I remember not a blemish on 'em. Vivid green backs and bright pink stripes, they somehow seemed to parallel the greens and blues of the conifers and lake's waters, but they opposed the solemn, austere, lifeless brown and white of the stippled snow peppering the ground. It gave a loud crunch, that ice-morphed snow, when you stepped on it. And the light filtering through the bones of the alders - it burned, it didn't warm. It hurt, it didn't soothe. It stabbed the eyes.

I killed one of those fish, a lovely hen about 18 inches. Didn't really know why, only that that was what you were supposed to do. Fish as food at that age was a hard concept to accept given the fucking fast-food diet I'd been brought up with. Didn't take until years, years later with Tom's guiding hand that, yeah, fish are food, and, in fact, *real* food - that processed shit that somehow fueled my aimless life for more than 20 years was the imitator. I think I probably killed that fish also for the trophy value and for some sort of fucking recognition from the dreary home.

It didn't work.

Another grey, somber, colorless morning, seething of a Scottish moor ambiance, and harkening back in my memory to Arrowhead. The stifling isolation of being a loner in my English class, staring outside at the baleful monochrome overcast world of my sophomore year, looking away from the fucking pasty-faced, well-adjusted jacks and jills jockeying for pecking-order position. That human-devoid expanse - it represented a respite from the cloistered, dangerous, ostracizing modern society by which I felt myself increasingly interred. The fog and conifers of Arrowhead's winter - a moist, bog-like, dream-like, sun-less, grey and green-black vision not unlike that experienced by my ancient memory in western and central Europe - they could've shielded me, like in a fantasy novel, from the violent conformity-enforcing mainstream. Clothed in the veil of the opaque, wet atmosphere, that shitty-ass weather erased much of the flitting busybody humanity rolling around in their cars, strolling in the soaking grass, eliminating their presence and thus gifting a safer world for li'l ol' me. Too, people are such pussies - that little bit of fog and cold would pin so many in the cocoon of their houses. And so - in that fucking lame English class, misanthropy brewing and flowering, I felt a comfort in that milky, freezing air swooning by the classroom window.

I remember that fucking awful, dry, gusty, freezing morning after that shameful fight, that broken-hearted fight, with the big open waters of the angry sapphire lake as the backdrop, jagged waves, dirty, old snow smothering broken-down docks and abandoned vacation homes. Austere, cold and austere, the lake, that mountain lake, could throw some of yourself back at you with crystal-clear vision. *You don't belong here.*

The main body of the lake - pliable, reflecting every whisper and wail of the wind, pounding violence and sinister calm, it's very easy to relate those dynamics to gnarly society and the loves and hates that entity unleashes. But in the coves, the quiet inlets, that's safety and security and protection and gentleness and an open love shielded from the rage of weather that bashes and crashes the volatile open waters. One's extroverted, open to the influence of the ways of the world, while one's introverted, only ruffled slightly by the swings and swirls that flail in the lake's center.

And I, of course, I stalked and sheltered in the inlet's shadows.

Secluded, alone, safe within the darkness of the mellow summer night at Arrowhead, where I slinked around docks in placid cove water and cast the ol' buzzbait for lumbering largemouths and stout smallies. Pines and cedars shrouded with kindness overhead, and a perfection of climate clothed my skin and soul with complete contentment...when alone, at least. As I snaked my way down the dirt path to unplumbed docks, warm golden lights shone through bay windows, illuminating elegant dinners attended by successful people, powerful people, good-looking and well-adjusted and imperious. I longed for a similar scene, one where I could be at the head of a grand old hardwood table, in a genteel lakeside cottage, under a winking full moon, my dining hall filled with effervescent, brilliant, powerful people, shaping the future world through ideas and ideals. Fine wine and a hearty dinner and witty conversation and philosophical progression that would've awed Caesar's court.

But I always looked from the outside in, pining, dreaming, daydreaming, wanting, and never, ever getting even a smidgen close to such a scene. Given the structure of my life, my mind, attainment of such an ideal was - is - a total fantasy, a fallacy. My misanthropy, my descent into dissociative ruts, my awkward social skills, my working-class background, all, the maelstrom of all those facets of my character, they spiraled the highfalutin dinner beyond the stratosphere and forever out of my reach. It's taken me a long, long time to accept that I can never be part of that mainstream world, that mainstream world of bucks and babes and recognition. I needed to learn to look away from that middle-class American world, needed to turn my eyes away, my mind away.

So I swiveled my head and gazed at the foreboding, impenetrable water alluring under a violet sky, and I finally accepted my love.