

V: parallels

Despite dissociation breathing promises of love and lust huskily into my ear, despite her seductive pleas for me to stay home, to drown myself in booze and in her embalming arms, I somehow roused myself at dawn's birth, grabbed crutches to support a mending hip, and went carp fishing. At an urban pond, blaring streets cornering it, corralling it with monotonous, monochrome prison-like tract homes, blasting, barreling fucking giant construction trucks and power equipment slashing the aural theater. Good Americans, walking, jogging the well-graded sidewalk encircling my pond, pampering their pooping pooches, smart-phone a ubiquitous accompaniment and accoutrement to the ringing throng. And a cold, bitter, bitter wind, a brutal wind, slashing, killing, cracking my skin and bones, a raging old bitch that encased me in a psychic icicle, and the carp, too. Two nudges were all my baits drew in the morning's arctic gales.

But they were nudges - more than nothing. Contact. And they weren't alone. Birds, myriad birds, they interacted with me far more than the self-entombed power-walkers, what with ears shunted by their headphones, their visual world corralled and shunted by the smart-phones' insidious screens. The birds. Great Egrets and a lone Great Blue Heron stalked regally around the pond's edge. Black Phoebes and Say's Phoebes, Western Meadowlarks, little Yellow-rumped Warblers, Barn Swallows, all swiped at the billowing midges lifting off the pond's surface in the afternoon. Indefatigable Brewer's Blackbirds and American Crows bathed and frolicked in the evening sun and in shimmering water covering a concrete launch ramp. Far above, imperious, Turkey Vultures and Northern Harriers and kestrels and young Red-tailed Hawks vied for the aerial throne. Coots, Mallards, and honkers roiled and rolled the pond's water. Cormorants and soaring White Pelicans announced copious fish in nearby waterways. Red-winged Blackbirds, crooning their marshy anthem, spoke of Wild still in place, a Wild found, a Wild occupied, even in that fucking asphalt- and concrete-overrun world.

I sat there all day, through the bone-crushing cold morning, through the austere afternoon, through 'til the sun set and the water glassed. A recurrence, back to square one, back to Apollo Park, those concreted confused water pockets sunk into the searing, lifeless expanse of the Antelope Valley where antelope don't roam. Apollo Park I fished frequently as a kid, rarely catching anything, and when something did clamp down on my lonely hook, it was almost always a poor hatchery-bred retard of a fish - low-resolution, domesticated copies of rainbows and channel catfish. The most noteworthy catch from that pond was big golden shiners, no doubt unintentionally introduced as bait. It was a dreary place, Apollo's pond - so artificial, and just so fucking out of place, where side-blotched lizards and glossy snakes should've been rather than the truck trout that occasionally raided my baits. Nevertheless, given my upbringing to that point, it was one of the first palatable tastes I had of the aquatic world - it would've been more difficult, I think, for me to have begun in a place with a lot more Wild given my fear of everything that exists outside my head. It was like a puff of pot, a gateway drug.

And so Bridgeway "Lake," another human-dug pit a mere few footsteps from an automobile just like Apollo Park, but the "lake" - it wasn't nearly as wrong as Apollo. Bridgeway wasn't intruding on land that was once the domain of tough terrestrial critters, but it lay where, 200 years ago, river waters once roamed and collected and settled, the waving cattails and tufts of tules standing sentinel over the pond an ancient, flitting reminder that the place was once marshy and full of ponds. It wasn't aquatic cattle raised for slaughter like those I chased on the desolate shoulder of the Mojave, but wild fish, smart fish, wise fish, the magnificent common

carp singing the siren's song. And the big minnow wasn't alone, sharing Bridgeway's murky waters with myriad swimming starlets of Wild: threadfin shad and Mississippi silversides serving as dinner for largemouth bass and white and black crappie; warmouth and green sunnies stalking the pond's banks and probably eating a few of the little fishes, too; and a catfish species lurking along the bottom. Who knows what native fishes were gliding and flying around in there - can't not think a few. And the birds - can't forget about the birds. Wild vestiges, a sense of belonging, whether the flopping carp, the chattering Red-wings, or the waving, stately cattails, emanated from the little pond I took as home for half a day.

And, y'know, for not having fished for nearly two months, I did okay. Casts pretty good - in fact, I think my leaders turned over well every time. Got good presentations, although the wind fought my attempts at retaining slack lines. Shit, even with my restricted mobility, I still moved around well, following where logic dictated the carp would be. And of the three spots I plopped baits at, two revealed activity. Given challenging conditions for carp - the water temperature a little lower than normal because of the gale-force wind that ramped up evaporation the day before - the responses I received were good. Two pick-ups in the morning, a very carp-like take in the early afternoon, and, at dusk, an unmistakable carp bite, though, consistent with the unfavorable water temperatures, a very timid one. But before that, in evening light, one carp, a gorgeous, brilliant fish 'bout 15 inches, took and took well, and I hooked, played, and landed that fish, feeling a temporary softening of my stony heart. At first glance, I thought the carp was a little small, about a foot, to be an adult, but when I chested her and began dislodging the hook, I realized that she was bigger, a mature lass - one I wish now, as has been the case so many times before, I could repossess through the camera's magic. Instead, I just gave her a thanks for breathing some life back into my frail, stodgy bones and slipped her back into the water without a photo session, her disappearing instantly into a muddy underwater world only penetrable by rod and line. I miss her already.