

## ***0.v: tried***

Little Hughes Lake, perched in a little nook of the San Gabriel Mountains. The bullheads were wonderful. Pretty sure they were browns, but they could've been either yellows or blacks. My mother took me there once on a crisp morning; we sat on cheap folding lawn chairs that slowly sank into murmuring mud. She said little to me, paying more attention to her ubiquitous crossword puzzles. My fishing technique with her was crude, ignorant - I remember using a fixed plastic casting weight for my sinker, not even realizing that it was for practice, and I caught no fish. Then I went with the old man a few times, and I'd made the sensible switch to actual sinkers and sliding rigs - that paid off. Once, I think the old man had come straight from work - his stupid grocery-store job - to pick me up, then drove us to Hughes in diminishing evening light. We walked down a dirt road, the atmosphere silent other than the chattering cottonwood leaves and sighing lake water, and plopped down at a bare bank where we could get clean casts and sets. He was still wearing his cheap black slacks, his spring-spool key ring filled with keys to myriad grocery-store doors still clipped to his belt. Shiny, distracting - a symbol. After daylight died, the bulls went on an unprecedented feast, and several chocolaty foot-long nighttime denizens greeted me at the bank. Even the old man, who had no talent for catching fish, caught a bull or two. A rare shared success. I killed and cleaned those fish and gave 'em to this white-trash woman at the local fishing-goods store: fucked-up teeth, rail-thin body - likely from meth - hair-metal-fan mullet hairdo, prematurely crinkled skin, but with an inherent warmth, reflected in a joyous laugh and, what seemed at the time, a genuine appreciation for the catfish I gave her. A priceless gratitude, which my parents couldn't understand - to them, wild fish as food was inconceivable.

It took tremendous effort - emotional and physical - from my parents to tote me all the way to Hughes and then sit by me for a few hours since both were so tired and weak and scared. The old man must've been exhausted - he worked long hours at the grocery store, although that was really his first love - it kept him from having to deal with the people at my house, who horrified him. A child in a man's body needing to do a man's job. And my mother - she, too, was likely pretty beat, having worked all week at some soul-killing job - flipping burgers at Burger King, answering phones at a medical office, filing paperwork at a hospital. Like my old man, she was totally unable to deal with the complicated human relationships she helped create, exhibited when she'd immediately drown herself in fucking recorded *Days of Our Lives* VHS tapes after returning home from work, then falling, falling asleep in her well-worn recliner. Tragically, they never left their distractions, their delusions, to strain for, to struggle for, to actualize their potential for living well. But in those few hours at Hughes - they tried.