

Casting

By Matt Shaner

My father and I flew into Dallas/Fort Worth airport in late December. Snow covered the highways at home. It was almost eighty in Dallas.

We rented a late model Honda and drove east towards the lake. The roads were long and straight. The speed limits went up to seventy-five. Longhorn cattle watched us from fields next to the road. They ate grass with disinterest.

The buildings of the city gave way to small towns. Finally we were passing through fields and scrub. A warm wind buffeted the car. The radio stations played only country music. We passed a car accident. The vehicle appeared to have crashed sometime around twenty years ago.

The lake appeared on the horizon. We turned down an unpaved road to get to the motel. There was a barbeque joint at the corner. The windows were open and only screens filtered out the smoke. The motel was a hundred yards away from the dock.

The birds woke us at six in the morning.

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We walked to the dock in the dark. The guide set up his boat. He argued with an older man about the use of live bait. He smiled when we arrived and took us out to the water.

The wind ripped through our jackets as we skimmed across the water. Two minutes later he stopped. We readied our lines. We cast out, in turn, my father at the back of the boat and me at the front. He looked over to me.

"So," he said.

"It's a nice morning," I said.

"It is," the guide said.

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We sat it at the third spot of the day. At first I thought it was a large fish. We drifted closer. One bass had the other in its mouth. The second was too large to swallow. They struggled against each other, the large one trying to eat and the smaller one trying to escape.

The guide tried to net them and help out but the larger one swam away.

"They'll die, fighting each other like that," the guide said.

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That night we ate at the barbeque place.

"I out fished you today," dad said.

"You did."

"You'll get more tomorrow. Just have to watch for the shadows. This is the place to catch them."

"Good point."

"We should get an earlier start tomorrow. I'll wake you up."

"That sounds good."

I wished I was in the middle of that lake, thousands of gallons of water preventing me from returning to the surface.

"How is your mother?"

The food arrived.

"She's fine."

He nodded. We ate in silence.

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I stood outside our room watching the bugs dance in the night heat. The years of missed opportunities went through my head. Each visit was a "chance to heal." We

owned our conflict but never took care of it. It festered under the surface. My nerves jumped when I decided to have a meaningful conversation. I psyched myself up. Time passed. I opened the door and started to speak.

The lights were out and his snoring blasted through the darkness. I undressed and went to bed.

Matt Shaner is a writer living outside of Philadelphia. He spends his days in a financial company which provides more than enough horrors for writing at night. He has stories published on various online outlets including a novella published by RS Publishing. He is working on his third novel while shopping around the first two for representation. He and his wife Valerie are expecting their first child in August.