

Guest at the Duck Pond

I'm sure you can guess where you'd find me on a Friday night, just after dark. You can find me stumbling, sweaty and exhausted, just outside of campus. I'm making my way around the waterline of the Duck Pond with a fishing pole in hand. On a warm spring night, my iPhone flashlight has trouble illuminating the obstacles of rocks and divots. My frustration boils over into a reckless walk back to my car; unlike myself, I know the bass that flopped off my line and the goose that chased me down are satisfied with themselves.

My nights at the Duck Pond are usually completed in solitude. I enjoy the presence of soon to be graduates, posing in their cap and gown on the gazebo for photos that will preserve the night for eternity. I'm accompanied by families with curious children, whose eyes stare at the same height of the geese they look into. I'm mirroring my peers from across the pond, who habitually cast and reel, just as I cast and reel. However, the majority of my company for the evening is non-human.

The ecosystem I stand before never fails to introduce me to new inhabitants. In the late afternoon hours, I squint my eyes into a commotion of bubbles and splashes to see a restless mink. A few inches beyond my toes are splashes and disturbed murky waters made by pickerel frogs practicing their commute in and out of the pond. I see a deep brown silhouette that is followed by the snout of a red eared slider turtle, breaking the surface for some air. Juveniles of the same species swim by the surface within my shadow, resembling small palm-sized disks, paddling fiercely. Of course, there are also the geese, who belligerently hiss and flap their wings at one another, assuming some kind of dominance. The mallard ducks travel in bonded pairs around the pond, fonding over their habitat and their feathered friends. Above me, the evening chorus of communications from red-winged blackbirds and crows is underway. Just after sunset,

the last guests of the night come in, sporadically flying around the treeline and skimming the surface of the pond. The big brown bats make their presence known just after dusk around the Duck Pond. Their entrance for the night is also a closing sign for the rest of the pond's guests. It is at this time when I reflect on my solitude. After all, I say I spend these nights at the Duck Pond alone. Yet, with all of these creatures to accompany me, I'm not sure if I'll ever spend an evening at the pond alone.

With this realization of my accompaniment, I'm also faced with the fact I have yet to even see the scaled and gilled guests of the pond. The lure at the end of my line has remained untouched the entire evening. The graduates posing for pictures and the children enthralled by the feathered species of the pond have since left. My mirroring partners have stopped their casting and reeling, leaving only me with a lure in the pond. Finally, I do get a bite; it's a largemouth bass that has tried to score his meal for the night. I reel it in, finally satisfied with the pond showing its most prized inhabitant. But of course, in one powerful breach, the bass spits out the lure and I only watch as it's yellow plump underbelly splashes back into the pond. I feel the eyes of the mink, geese, bats, turtles, ducks and frogs on me; I feel I may now be an unwelcome guest at this party.

I'm sure a few blocks away, there's another unwelcome guest at a college house party, stopped at the doorstep. Perhaps, the bats of the night have started to come in, late, but making their presence known. Somewhere in the house is a mink, the one of a kind creature making a commotion of some sort. There must be a bonded duck pair, sitting together in the corner of the room, admiring the excitement happening before their eyes. Those resembling the habits of the pickerel frogs are making their way in and out of the parties around the block. Some try to remain under the radar, only sticking their nose in the business of party games and disappearing

back into the crowd, just like small turtles. At last, every get together has a goose, somewhat belligerent and dominating of their space.

I once again have the realization, I too, am a guest at a party, just like my peers. My party may have different guests and is in a different setting, but my time there may be no different than those at the house party down the street. My night ends in frustration, I'm alone and without my prized catch. I stumble my way down a path, sweaty and exhausted. My Friday night ends just like the nights of the majority population of college students. Perhaps, their night is crazy enough to end sober and with a fishing pole in hand.