

## MISSING LAKE

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It was gone. I wept as I looked across the mutilated land that recently had been a little lake surrounded by trees. I had come today, as before, to reflect while watching the sunset. I drove under the familiar arch, through the gate, and along the dirt road until, suddenly, I realized I was not at Quayle Lake anymore. I was in the middle of a plowed field. The roughly turned soil left brown clumps standing dark and disfigured above a light blanket of snow. In a sunken patch of desert filled with weeds, a bitter wind whipped the ground, wrenching loose grains of soil, driving them recklessly across the dry bed. I looked in all directions trying to get my bearings. In my mind's eye I sketched in the old shore line of lake. In a blink I filled the hollow cavity with sky-blue water and redrew the scene.

It was not a grand lake or a magnificent setting. Rather it was peaceful, like one's own back yard, with friends joined together for an afternoon party. The east shore was a cozy camping and picnic area with grass, trees, thickly painted green tables, places to build fires for warmth and cooking, and an area for children with swings and play structures, all well taken care of by someone unknown to me. But I always noticed the tidiness, and it helped me to do my part when it was time to leave. Often, as I drove away, I silently thought of that caretaker and gave thanks in my heart.

Now the towering trees, their branches fanned like peacocks' feather, were gone, extracted like so many rotten teeth. The tables and swings were smashed, crushed, or dismembered and hauled away. The grass was scalped from the skin of the earth, and the land was slashed in long lacerated lines; ripped open like bowels exposed, sliced over and over...

Piles of wooden carcasses were burning. The red-yellow tongues licked at the coarse skin of the once robust trunks. Billowing black clouds, thick as oil spewing from uncapped drilling rigs, boiled upward, rolling in funneled cones, releasing skyward the timeless memories—people who came to play and relax at the lake—now to be stored in heaven's vaults, and the ashes to be scattered upon an ocean of air.

I allowed this to happen. As did others. And I felt a certain guilt. Silence and apathy—whether personal or global—allow holocausts to happen. Maybe next time I will be strong enough, determined enough, to speak before its too late.

A tired sun was slowly drowning in a cold sea of winter air. I started my car and drove away. I didn't look back. I didn't want to see the sunset. The sunsets I wanted to remember are those from warm summer nights,

when I heard a gliding breeze play against the leaves of the trees. When I heard the water lap untroubled against the shore. When I heard children laughing. When I saw, from my favorite spot on the shore, a reflection of mountains and sky and trees and clouds, but most of all the sun, as it slipped behind the mountains at Quayle Lake. ☺