

Hard To Know You Can't Go Back

by Brendan Garbee

The light against the nylon walls of the tent gets me feeling a little down. The air's wet inside, but it's warm. The whole world outside is creaking and chirping, everything that wakes up with the dawn's first tepid blue light does so and starts making noise. I'm horny and lonely. It's hard to know that you can't go back, even when you know it. Becky's furry little body is pulsating under her blanket, her rhythmic breathing like a little drum beat. I rub her belly a little and she sighs in her sleep.

I unzip the tent fly and step out into the fog. It's coming billowing up over the ridge of the hill in big drafts. Everything tastes like the sea. I see some quail going along in the brush, little black figurines marching along in a little clan. Maybe I'd think it was cute, except it makes me feel lonely. I should get the dog up, I think, to chase 'em away. I undo my pants to piss, and then hear a voice behind me.

There's a older gentleman there, maybe 20 feet across the wet grass. I hear Becky scrambling up, and she lets out a warning bark before I tell her to shut up. I can't see him very well. I wonder if he's got a gun, or what. Some people I met the night before, back in Fairfax, told me that the local landowners could be a little nutso about trespassers. I hold both my hands up, so that he knows I'm not up to anything, and I come around the other side of the tent so he can see me.

"You're out here camping?" He asks. "Just camping, sir," I say. "Did you cut my fences?" "I hopped them, sir." "There are hefty fines for trespassing."

I don't say anything and we just stare at each other.

"You're from the city?" He asks after a while. "San Francisco, yes."
"And you're on a vacation, or what?" "No, sir." I don't know what else to say. "I had to leave, and I didn't know where..." I stop. "I can pack up and be out of here if you give me a minute."

"Alright," he says gruffly. "I'll go back to my house and call the police. If you stick around, they'll pick you up."

And then he turns around and goes back to his house. I can see it now, a big black shape in the haze. Becky whines inside of the tent. I go back in and rub her. The warmth and the sour smell of our blankets makes me want to lay down. I sigh and pack up. The loneliness is crushing right now, but I'll feel differently later. I'll feel better when the sun is out, and I can stretch out and take a nap in some brush and forget this and everything. We go quickly over the ridge and down the rise. Within ten minutes, we're over the fence and into another field. I could stop and look over the maps, to figure out which direction to the sea, but I'm nervous about the cops, so we push ahead across the field, hoping it isn't more private property. Every little living thing in the grass gets silent as me and Becky cross, and I can hear my own breathing. I'm expecting to hear a gunshot. Some crazed rancher with a shotgun. The fog is dispersing already. The gray soup of sky starts to churn. A little bit of sunlight is coming through. I feel like a soldier in a war movie...there's the fence...I start running, and Becky shoots off in front of me...I go so quick over the wire that I slice my gloves up a little. Doesn't cut all the way through to the skin. On the other side of the fence, we're in a dense patch of trees. My heart is still pounding and I'm still trying to move quickly. Too quickly, so that I'm already off-balance when I catch my foot on a root. Down the hill I go. It's steeper than I thought, but I manage to get my backpack off and roll with the fall. Down, down, down. I take a few blows from roots and rocks and

stuff, but I'm not too badly beat up when I land in the rough, spiny and dew-drenched grass. Loud, low animal noises all around me. I get up slowly, trying to feel in my body for any bad pains. Big, black cows stand around staring at me, chewing curd slowly and gazing with pitch black gentle wet eyes. They aren't scared or anything, just gentle and peaceful, watching me. Becky looks to me for guidance, and then, when I don't say anything, she starts to cautiously investigate the big, black animals. They gaze at her with those same eyes. I get up, and they start to move away a little to give me some room.

Beyond the cows is the sea.

