

from
**NOT EASY TO BUY A
BUS TICKET**

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We Made Our Way Up The Coast

We made our way up the coast filling trash bags with bottles and cans from the rest stops. Frank was our ticket. He had a beard and wiry muscles and came to the boardwalk the same way we did, hungry, and started talking the way we used to think, with stars over every horizon, cities at the end of every trip. He wasn't staying in town any longer than he had to. We liked the sound of that. His rusted Corolla had bungee cords hanging off sides like streamers and the back seat was nothing but a metal hump above where the wheels sat. We got in anyway. This country isn't that long.

At the rest stops Frank would get out, eyes shining, and rush long-legged to the nearest trash can. He'd stick his whole head in there and start to windmill bottles into the garbage bag he had tied to his waist. Then move on to the next one. Soon we got the hint. You could fill a whole trash bag at a good station, with three of us working, and in fifteen minutes we were back into the Corolla and rumbling down the highway's right lane. Frank would strap the bags to his roof, jam them into his trunk, clump them in the backseat. What's all the bottles for? we yelled the first time over fifty-five miles per hour of highway gust through the open windows. He brandished a bottle he had gripped in his hand. You can get ten cents a piece for these! he shrieked, leaning into the gas. They're like gold! Then he threw it out the window in a fierce display.

We were inland almost to saguaro country when Frank left us. Just

a matter of time, I guess it was, and we should have known, but we didn't. The cartop belched outward with bags and the trunk couldn't go any higher. Darlene sweat death in the backseat with the black plastic smothering her legs and little arms. At the rest stop we got out as we always did, tying bags to belt loops and reaching shoulder deep into the decorated trash cans. When we came up for air, Frank was gone.

I couldn't blame him. It was his car and his plan, and we were hanging on just the way he was, except to less. But Darlene screamed until long after his car had mounted the exit ramp and disappeared. I looked around and the only thing was more road that way and more road the other way, and a thousand citizens sitting on it in boxes that don't give. There was no point even in beginning to walk. So I sat down at a picnic table covered in french fry crumbs and waited for Darlene to yell herself out. She was pretty, there, wrenching in the wild sun. Everywhere are gems.

Sequia Semper Something

Sequoia semper something. America's redwoods. The tallest trees in the world, or at least the tallest until lands besides America are discovered. We walked into a grove of them In Memory of Carl A. Schenk, Ph.D., Forester, Teacher, Democrat, sun basking low behind horizons we could not see, last cars pulling from the dirt turnoff on their way to the motels and hotels of Crescent City for the night. We would bed ourselves down on the soft pine-lit ground of Carl A. Schenk grove, stare up at the trees stopping only shortly before they converged at that distant impossible point in the sky, strip our clothes and feel the nakedness of America all around us in small, humming clusters of air. We stopped in the clearing and set down our packs. Took out our sleeping bags. Spread them and lay, looking up, at the promised sky.

Everything growth, ferns and luminescent fungus over every inch besides the walked-on. And yet everything silence. Impossible to feel the awe you ought to feel until you let that silence come on, cover you, slip down nose and throat into the intestines and aerate the blocked internal pores. Like the forest was hunting us. Like there was something inside it

that wanted to be inside us but would wait patiently if it had to until the end of time.

We made love on our side-by-side sleeping sacks and lay again, stilled, heaving breaths lost in the oncoming night. Darlene asked me: Do you think there are mountains lions in this forest? No, I said. These aren't mountains but hills. Ah, she sighed. Hands folded under our heads. The fog settled in the clear air and covered our naked skin in fine dew. We slipped into our sacks. Said nothing else. Until I woke to shakes, Darlene slapping me, pointing her finger through the utter blackness at further utter blackness. A rustling, certain. I breathed as silent as a man can breathe. We both sat, our bags curled upward in an L. Able to see nothing for no moonlight penetrated that redwood forest. And then a pinpoint, bobbing its way with footsteps, widening in the curves and roots of the path until it was at the head of the grove then past, illuminating the upright of a walking-sticked form with straightened mouth and downcast eyes. In a khaki shirt and slacks. Padding softly across the needles.

The next day we were walking highwayside with our thumbs held out again. The forest so great, we agreed, that we were not able to hold its greatness. The nights so clear our intentions wept for they were themselves polluted by the coughing world.

You begin to notice, eyeing the other rough couples walking roadside with packs, or flattened bikes, or signs: everyone with his thumb held out is trying to leave. But everyone had to get here somehow.

The School District

The school district. Cul-de-sacs. Walking distance to the local natural foods store. Bicycling distance. The fire department. Average age of neighborhood families and their children. We had it set. Ethnic diversity. Cost of living. Relative width of the neighborhood roads. Darlene sipped her coffee and I leaned into the booth's plush faux leather and the waitress came to take our order and I waved her away, smiling at my wonderful wife. We sized up the folks walking past the picture windows that made up the diner's whole front. Nodded at the men with plaid shirts and the women with their

strollers. Frowned when the street urchins shuffled by, hands outheld at no one. I grabbed Darlene's skirted knee under the table and squeezed it. She yelped. We are going to make a beautiful life, I said, holding my mug and clinking hers as the rest of the restaurant went about its business tinkling forks, scraping across ceramic. We were invisible, finally. I moved my hand up her leg. Darlene glared at me and the waitress came back again and I held up the coffee for a refill. We were no longer the assailants but the assailed. She returned with the steaming stainless steel thermos and topped us off and smiled and walked away. I took that to mean we might stay as long as we liked. We had worn our best clothes that day, fooled almost even ourselves. Strolled into the diner and stripped two dollars off the tip at a dirty booth and sat calmly in the next one. Smiled the smiles they smile at us when we are seated on the curb next to our packs and they do not mean to give us money. The smiles of the guilty and the forward thinking. Where the two dollars is inside you already, and you could die and they would know what to do *a priori*. Bury you with your best suit, and serve waffles at the luncheon.