

LOST OASIS
by Patrick Gabridge

CHARACTERS:

Tom: 30s, weary, finally returning to this meadow.
Jill: Tom's wife, late 20s, tired, not an outdoorswoman.
Danny: A woman in her 30s, at home in nature.

SETTING:

A meadow surrounded by forest.

Patrick Gabridge
19 Netherlands Road, #1
Brookline, MA 02445
www.gabridge.com
pat@gabridge.com
(617) 277-1018
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AT RISE: A young woman, DANNY (Danielle), sleeps by a tree at the edge of a meadow. A blanket and picnic basket are spread out next to her. Her clothes are earth-colored, and she blends in.

After a moment, TOM and JILL hike through the woods. He's in his mid-thirties, she's in her late twenties. They are fully geared for a long hike--big backpacks, sleeping bags, etc. Tom looks extra burdened, as if he's taken small items from Jill over the past few days. Jill walks as if her feet hurt, and her clothes are perhaps a little formal for the woods; she has new hiking boots. Both Tom and Jill have the unwashed look of three days in the woods. They stop at the edge of the meadow.

This is it.

TOM

It's beautiful.

JILL

I was afraid it would fill in with trees, but it's still my meadow.

TOM

They walk all the way in.

We're really here?

JILL

This is it. End of the line. Our home for the next week.

TOM

She tosses down her pack.

Thank God. It'll take a week for my feet to heal. I have a huge blister.

JILL

A blister? You can't have a blister.

TOM

Tom, we've been walking for three days. I deserve a blister.

JILL

TOM

Those boots do not give blisters.

JILL

They did this time.

TOM

The Alpacas are my best design ever.

JILL

Well, I have a blister.

TOM

A blister. (puts down his pack) I'll have to redesign them.

JILL

Tom. I'm sure it's just my feet. You know how my feet are.

TOM

No, no, no. (beat) You really think so?

JILL

I'm sure of it.

TOM

I guess I'll worry about it later.

They sit and admire the meadow.

JILL

It's bigger than I expected. Broader.

TOM

Our first time out... I don't know how we came here. We could never find the right spot to set up camp. So we just kept on looking. Until this. After three days of solid pines, walking through a tunnel of needles with slits of blue overhead, we found space--a little bit of sky, birds singing, the brook over there, in the gully, clear and cold. My Dad walked right in and said, "This is it, boys." He was right.

JILL

I can't believe you ever found it again.

TOM

The first time we came back, we almost missed it. But after that it was just like coming home. You pointed your nose north and set your feet a-walking.

JILL

You know, a couple hours ago, I started to think we were lost. I thought--ten years, he's not going to find it. We're in the middle of nowhere, miles from the trail.

TOM

I might have also had a twinge of concern.

JILL

Pine tree after pine tree. They all look the same after a while. And I kept thinking--if only the phone worked.

TOM

We're too far out.

She pulls a cell phone from her pack.

JILL

Might as well try.

TOM

Put it away.

JILL

Hold on.

TOM

It won't work.

JILL

I've got a signal.

TOM

It's just a... it won't... we're twenty miles from civilization.

JILL

It's ringing.

TOM

Jill, please put it away.

JILL

Hold on.

Tom walks away. Danny wakes up and watches the following.

JILL

Hello? Hello? Rick? Rick! I can't believe... Tom, it works. Hi, Rick. We were just... we got to our destination and it... it worked... I have no idea. The middle of nowhere... Any news on the Reston Foundation? They should call by this afternoon. Whatever you do, don't let them say no. This exhibit will turn everything around.

Tom returns, carrying a large rock.

JILL
(quickly)
Um, Rick, I'd better go now. Call you later. Bye.

She hangs up.

TOM
Put it away.

JILL
Tom.

TOM
Put it away now.

JILL
Okay. Okay. See? In the pack. All right?

TOM
There are no phones allowed in this meadow. No phones, radios, TVs, curling irons, microwaves--

JILL
I get the point.

TOM
Good.

JILL
Now please put that down.

He does.

JILL
Why don't we just calm down a little? All right?

TOM
Sorry.

JILL
It's just a stupid phone.

TOM
I know.

JILL
There's no need to resort to violence, right? It's just a phone.

TOM
I'm fine. It's just... Everything's so... it gets too much, and now we're finally here. I want it to be just right.

JILL

If I need to use the phone, I'll go up the hill, into the woods. Okay?

TOM

Okay.

They relax again.

JILL

Want something to drink?

TOM

Sure.

She hands him a water bottle from her pack.

JILL

What are we supposed to do now? Should we set up the tent? Chop firewood? What?

TOM

The tent would be good. Dad always said, "Make camp first, goof around second." Pretty poetic, huh?

They pick up their stuff.

TOM

Right here. The tents always go right here--

Tom sees Danny and is paralyzed. Jill follows his gaze. Danny waves.

DANNY

Hi.

TOM

Wh... Wh... what are you doing here?

DANNY

I'm Danny. Nice to meet you.

TOM

What are you doing here?

JILL

He means Hello. I'm Jill. This is my husband, Tom.

TOM

What are you doing here?

JILL
He's much more articulate than he seems.

TOM
What are you doing here?

JILL
Say Hello, Tom.

DANNY
Is he all right?

JILL
Just a loose wire or something.

TOM
What are you doing here?

DANNY
I'm having a picnic.

TOM
A picnic?

JILL
Progress. Let's set up the tent, dear.

TOM
A picnic?

JILL
Oh, no.

DANNY
Does he always do this?

JILL
No.

TOM
You can't have a picnic here.

DANNY
I am. See? Picnic basket, lunch, blanket.

JILL
That's a picnic, all right. Come on, Tom.

TOM
(walking over to Danny)
Not here. This is a secret place. No one knows about this place. This... this is in the middle of nowhere. You can't just find this place.

(MORE)

TOM (cont'd)

It's not on a map or in a guidebook.... it's a three-day hike from civilization. Where's your pack? Where's your tent? You can't just be here on a picnic. YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE.

DANNY

I hate to break it to you, but I am definitely here, I am definitely having a picnic, and it's nowhere near a three-day hike to this place.

TOM

Yes, it is. It always has been.

JILL

Three long days.

DANNY

Not since they cut the road to the north. About eight years ago. I come here all the time. It's not even two hours from my cabin.

TOM

You come here all the time?

DANNY

Wouldn't you?

JILL

We would if we could. Especially since the phone works. Did you know that cell phones work out here?

DANNY

I've heard that.

TOM

We're not here to play with the stupid phone.

JILL

It's been a long trip. He's been trying to get back to this spot for ten years.

DANNY

Ten years?

TOM

It's taken a lot of effort, a lot of effort. So I'm afraid you're going to have to leave.

DANNY

What?

TOM

You can't stay here. This is our meadow.

JILL

He means--

DANNY

I was here first. You should leave.

TOM

I was here before you ever even thought about this place, before they even dreamed of putting some stupid road in up north.

DANNY

Well, you weren't here when I got here. Next time do a better job claiming it. Put up a flag or something.

Tom turns and walks back to their gear.

TOM

It's not supposed to be like this. This is the place away, the sanctuary.

DANNY

I was here first.

Tom starts to assemble the tent.

TOM

Jill. Jill! Help me put up the tent.

JILL

He'll be fine. Stress. Too much stress.

DANNY

Don't let him put up that tent. You can not camp here.

TOM

Jill!

JILL

Coming.

Jill joins Tom.

TOM

We need to put up the tent.

JILL

You were very rude.

DANNY

Hey! Hey, don't put that up here.

TOM

Help me with this pole.

JILL

She was here first.

TOM

Just follow the seams. It goes right in there. Push.

DANNY

Hello? You don't own this place. I was here first. No tent.

JILL

Why don't we put it over there? Give her a little more room.

DANNY

I don't want room. I want you to leave.

TOM

The tent goes here. It always goes here.

JILL

All right. All right.

DANNY

You can't do this. Wait. You're not listening to me. You're not... This is unbelievable. You can't put up a tent here. stop. Don't... Don't... This is wrong. it's wrong for you to do this. Ever hear of camping etiquette? Common courtesy?

TOM

Okay, last pole. Push. Push. There you go. Good. Put your end in the hole.

JILL

Is that it?

Danny walks back to her picnic, grabs her stuff, and dumps it right in front of their tent.

TOM

We'll put on the rain fly later.

JILL

I'm sure she'll leave soon.

TOM

Who?

JILL

Tom. Tom. Listen to me. I know this is a problem, but we'll find a way to get a little privacy, okay?

TOM

What problem? I don't know what you're talking about.

JILL

The woman with the picnic. Danny.

TOM

What woman? There's no one here but us. This is a secret place. No one know about this spot. No one is here but us.

He sits down and takes off his boots.

JILL

What are you doing?

TOM

Taking off my boots. What does it look like?

JILL

Why?

TOM

I'm going barefoot.

JILL

You never go barefoot. Even in the shower, you don't go barefoot. Whatever happened to, "I'm field-testing my shoes?"

TOM

I am in The Meadow. We're finally away from everything. No shoes. When I was a kid, I didn't need shoes. It's important to feel the pine needles, the wet grass. We used to have barefoot races around the perimeter. I never beat Spider, except once. He tripped on the stump, right over there. Beat him by a mile.

JILL

Was he hurt?

TOM

We didn't have to carry him out. We never had to carry anyone but...

JILL

I know. Are you all right?

TOM

I'm fine. I just need a couple minutes. To calm down. I'm fine. I'll walk around a little bit, if my feet aren't too tender. I won't bother... anything, okay?

JILL

I'm going to unpack.

Jill takes her stuff into the tent and zips the door. Tom, trying not to look at Danny, walks to the other side of the meadow, exploring, cautiously;. His feet are very sensitive. He sits in the grass. Danny starts to whistle "It's a Small World After All." Tom tries to ignore her. She keeps whistling. Finally, he can't take it anymore.

TOM

Do you have to do that?

DANNY

No.

TOM

Could you please stop it then?

DANNY

Go away.

TOM

I'm sorry we interrupted your picnic.

DANNY

You're not sorry. You're just pretending to be nice, so I'll take pity on you and leave.

TOM

Is it working?

DANNY

No. Try it with more sincerity next time. Right now, in addition to acting like you own the whole world, you're also patronizing me. I don't need that.

TOM

Sorry.

DANNY

That's better. I used to be a corporate rat, like you.

TOM

I'm not corporate. I'm a designer.

DANNY

For a big-city, high-flying corporation. A fair amount of kissing up is needed, I imagine. Everybody always checks to make sure they're not losing an ounce of power. And what's power if you don't use it to throw your weight around a little? That's fine in the office, buddy, but it don't fly out here. Not in the woods. You let your soul decay. You should have come back sooner.

TOM

I've been trying.

DANNY

Right.

TOM

I have. Every single year.

DANNY

You're telling me that for ten years you could never manage a week away?

TOM

Not on the Solstice. Someone got sick or we didn't have the money. There was always something.

DANNY

You should have tried harder.

Jill pokes her head out of the tent.

JILL

You're not helping.

TOM

That's okay. She's right.

He sits down and puts his shoes on.

JILL

No, she's not. She doesn't know anything. She's just trying to make you feel bad.

TOM

Well, it worked.

JILL

Don't let her manipulate you.

TOM
I'm not.

JILL
Maybe if we just explain--

TOM
Not an option.

JILL
But I'm sure--

TOM
I'm going for a walk.

He walks into the woods. Silence.
Jill stands next to Danny, stern.

DANNY
I'm not leaving.

JILL
Why not?

DANNY
That's the rules, see? If a person gets to a site first,
it's hers. If I let you camp here, that's fine. If I don't
want you here, you're supposed to get lost.

JILL
Who made these rules? You?

DANNY
No. They just exist. Ask your husband, he'll tell you.

JILL
Look, he needs some privacy, and it has to be here. It's
important.

DANNY
If he needs to be alone, he can go somewhere else. You are
intruding on my privacy, not the other way around.

JILL
There are reasons.

DANNY
Yeah? I've got my reasons, too. I don't let people push me
around. Not even our here. I've been trying to get away
from all that garbage. Even in my cabin, I'm not safe. A
Jehovah's Witness found me the other day. He's lucky I
didn't have a gun. This used to be a safe place.

(MORE)

DANNY (cont'd)

But now the world is willing to hike three days just to give me a hard time.

JILL

Right. You pegged it. We were sent here just to bother you. That's our hobby. We scour the earth looking for people who have too much solitude. I was just saying to Tom, "It's been a pretty hike but I sure hope we can wreck somebody's day."

DANNY

I don't know what you people think. Your husband is pretty far around the bend, that's for sure.

JILL

Try being married to him. (beat) He's been a lot worse lately. The last two years... all I ever hear about is his Dad and this meadow. The Meadow.

DANNY

I wouldn't put up with it.

JILL

I keep telling myself he'll be fine soon. We're finally here. This is what he needs...

DANNY

It's just a meadow.

JILL

His father died here. A regular Mr. Outdoorsman. When he found out that he had cancer, he wouldn't have anything to do with hospitals. At the end, he called together the boys: Tom, Ron, Spider. They walked in here. On the third day, they had to carry him, but they made it. It didn't take long for him to go, once they got here. Tom's mother insisted on a funeral, so they had to carry him back out. Tom was supposed to come here on the Summer Solstice, to scatter the ashes. But... it's been ten years. That's why he needs you to leave. He needs a little time alone, with his Dad.

Silence.

DANNY

You really expect me to believe that?

Tom strides out of the woods with a long, straight stick, on the end of which are a pair of boxer shorts, creating a makeshift flag. Tom plants the flag at Danny's feet.

TOM

I hereby claim this meadow for the McElvoy family, for this generation, the one before, and all those to follow. Let no man or woman dispute my claim. (beat) How's that?

JILL

Very dramatic, dear.

DANNY

Too late, I was here first.

TOM

Where's your flag?

DANNY

Why don't you just go away? I usually don't mind hikers passing through. We share some food, talk for a while. But you two stop in here trying to be kings of the jungle---

JILL

Normally, we'd--

DANNY

And don't even waste your breath with various sob stories.

TOM

What sob story?

JILL

I told her about your Dad.

TOM

What? Why would you do that? It's none of her business.

JILL

I thought maybe--

TOM

His death is not some sort of screwdriver to pry unwanted people from this meadow.

DANNY

This is a game, right? Good spouse/bad spouse? I've seen this on TV.

JILL

I was just trying to explain why you were acting like such an idiot.

TOM

An idiot?

JILL

Sorry. An insane person. Of course she doesn't believe me. She hasn't seen you gradually lunify yourself over the past four years. He's dead, Tom. Bury him and get it over with.

TOM

I've been trying to take care of this. You know I have.

JILL

What I know is that everyone has been extremely patient... except you. You keep prolonging the agony, torturing yourself, along with everyone else. I'm sick of it!

She grabs her cell phone and storms up into the woods.

TOM

She's a little tired, that's all.

DANNY

Maybe you two should learn to take naps, because you both get really cranky when you're tired.

TOM

She'll be fine. The woods aren't her thing, you know. She just came along because no one else would, and she's worried about me.

DANNY

She should be.

TOM

Maybe.

DANNY

This is all very elaborate, but I... I don't really believe it, you know. The sob story, the fighting. It's a good try, really... There's another very nice camping spot about half a mile from here.

Tom walks into the tent and emerges with an urn.

DANNY

What's that?

TOM

My father.

DANNY

In there?