

I'VE BEEN WAITING SO LONG
TO BE WHERE I'M GOING

By Pamela Hobart Carter

SETTING

A steep trail.

TIME

A summer day.

CHARACTERS

FRANKIE and MICKY, close friends. Hikers.

FRANKIE and MICKY move in a common direction, up: silent, focused, FRANKIE in the lead. More silence and focus. FRANKIE stops abruptly and turns 180 degrees.

FRANKIE

smiles.

OK.

MICKY

OK?

FRANKIE

That's far enough.

MICKY

slides off backpack.

Good place for a drink.

finds drink bottle, drinks.

FRANKIE slides off backpack, finds drink bottle, drinks.

A moment of quiet drinking.

looks around, caps bottle. Inhales deeply.

Getting my quota of fresh forest air.

FRANKIE

Changes you, doesn't it?

A moment of appreciation.

MICKY

Must be chemically different from what we breathe at home.
shoulders pack. Faces uphill.

FRANKIE

caps drink, etc. Faces downhill.
I'm ready to go back.

MICKY

Feeling OK?

FRANKIE

Fine. Ready to go.

MICKY

We're not at the lake.

FRANKIE

Um—I can see that, Micky.

MICKY

This's a hike to the lake. Your ankle bugging you?

FRANKIE

shakes head.
I've gone far enough.

MICKY

We can slow down? You've kind of been running up this.

FRANKIE

shakes head.
It's all good. I'm just ready to go back. Hiked enough today.

MICKY

I'm confused. Didn't you want to do this hike, Frankie? Don't you want to see the lake?

FRANKIE

I did. Lakes are nice. The reflections.

MICKY

OK, then. C'mon.
starts uphill.

FRANKIE starts downhill.

What're you doing?

FRANKIE

Going home. I'm being clear: I've hiked enough.

MICKY

The trail's another mile. This hike ends at the lake.

FRANKIE

The hike *ends* when we turn back, Micky.

MICKY

"We" haven't turned back.

FRANKIE

It's been a good outing.

MICKY

It still is. Sort of. Except your being weird.

FRANKIE

Lakes are great. Views are great, but I just wanted a hike. I've had a hike. My body feels like it's been used in a good way. My head's rinsed of regular stuff. I've been getting to hear birds, see this fern jungle—the salal, the cool second growth, work a bit—sweat, enjoy your company. You know how to be quiet, not like those people who yak the whole time. It's been great.

MICKY

I want to go to the lake.

FRANKIE

A lake isn't better than this. The lake is an artificial endpoint, Mick.

MICKY

It's not. It's a real place. A body of water. A natural place. The trail goes to the lake. That's it.

FRANKIE

Some other person decided the lake was the endpoint, is what I'm saying. Instead, I'm choosing my endpoint. Here.

MICKY

I don't get it.

FRANKIE

I'm choosing an endpoint to my hike. Here. And turning around.

MICKY

We agreed on this lake hike and you're ... breaking that. I want to go to the lake. I'm going to the lake, Frankie.

comes down to FRANKIE.

And don't think of taking the car. Give me your keys.

FRANKIE

No.

steps away.

MICKY reaches to take FRANKIE's pack.

FRANKIE spins and shoves MICKY off.

MICKY has to jump back to stay on the narrow trail. It's a close call.

Don't hurt yourself. This wouldn't be a good place to fall.

Panting, MICKY and FRANKIE stare at each other.

MICKY

What's wrong with you!? I can't believe all this ... antagonism. This disturbance. Bringing ... violence to—here. To a hike.

FRANKIE

Violence? You're the one trying to grab my pack. It's my car, Micky.

MICKY

“It's my car”!? You're kidding! That doesn't mean you're in charge of everything. It means you own a car. Being weird, saying no, dodging around: that's violent. And possessive. What is this, really? Are you worried, Frankie?

FRANKIE shakes head now and at every further suggestion in this speech...

You're afraid? You know you can do this. You can finish. You're really strong, stronger than you think. Your pace's great. You could keep it up all week. Why can't you continue? You can't get to the end? Any end!? Can't finish things? It's about death! The lake is death! But you could think of the car that way—the real end of the hike; the lake's the middle. You're not making this a metaphor for your life, or your inability to complete stuff? You are always jumping into new projects, leaving the mostly-done stuff to languish.

FRANKIE

Hey!

MICKY

This better not be some stupid philosophy thing about whether looking at this dumb fern is equivalent to looking at the lake, some elitism about ranking nature. I'm not hiking to a fern. It's a stunning fern, but it's not a lake, with sky open above and that liquid mirror. A fern has no ...

wetness. No rock walls dropping down to meet it. No newts. No fish. No water-gliders. No vastness. This isn't about death, Frankie, —unless you try to throw me over the edge again. This is how we put together our lives. We go out into the world. Spend time in it. See the variety of it, beyond the sameness of ferns. We decide to visit lakes and we visit lakes. We stand at their shores and we look across to their far sides. Squint at sun on their surfaces. Sometimes, we kick off our shoes and we wade. Even swim. A lake gives a hike shape. Perspective. A thing to remember. (Although now I'm destined to remember this fern on my deathbed.) This is just about hiking to the lake with me, Frankie.

FRANKIE sighs a tree-shaking sigh—almost crying? Laughing?

You lead, Frankie. I like you in front.

A moment of staring, with no panting. Then smiles on both sides.

FRANKIE takes up the lead.

A few moments of contented, silent movement up the hill.

END