

Don was stranded, there was no doubt about it.

His car had broken down in the middle of a dirt road going to Larsen Mountain. It was thirty miles back to paved roadway... thirty miles of ups and downs and switch back turns... back to a road that would be lucky to see two cars travel on it in a day; back to a road that would travel another 10 miles before it connected with a semi-major thoroughfare.

Don was stranded, and Don was pissed off!

He'd remembered to bring his cell phone, but had forgotten to insure that the battery was charged. "Stupid, stupid, stupid!" he said as he tossed it back into the glove box.

It was another 30 miles to his getaway cabin... well, John's cabin that was to serve as his weekend getaway; a place to recharge his batteries and try to work through his writer's block. A cabin where he was going to be alone, which meant that no one would be worried at his not arriving, which meant that no one would be driving around looking for him.

So he had set off on foot, and that had been fine. But about two miles down the road, he noticed a fire lookout tower. It wasn't very far from him... maybe two or three miles. but that was as the crows flies, and Don was no crow. He also had no idea where the access road was, so he decided to head off directly for it... through the woods.

And now he is lost. Down on the forest floor, he can no longer see the tower; he can only see the sky directly above him; and he hadn't tried to mark his path. "Stupid, stupid, stupid!" he repeats.

Fortunately, he stumbles upon a stream. It is about thirty feet wide, but not very swift. He can cross it without much trouble, but it was sure to be cold. Mount Larsen would have snow on it for another couple of months, and this stream would likely be fed by snow.

He is feeling more confident now; certain he is getting close to the tower. All he has to do is get to the other side of the stream to find it. "Maybe I'll try going upstream a ways to see if it gets any narrower, or if there is a tree that has fallen across it.

He stops and gets a drink of the water, cupping his hands to bring it to his mouth.

"Hey! That's my river you're drinking from!" comes a deep, unfamiliar voice.

Don jumps up to look around, but doesn't see anyone. "Who's there?" he calls out.

"My name is Augden," comes the reply, "and this is my river."

Don's eyes finally locate the source of the voice. Several hundred feet upstream, standing on a stone bridge, is a man. He has curly brown hair, a goatee, and obviously works out. His pectorals are obvious even beneath a heavy layer of curly brown chest hair. He is smiling, so Don relaxes, feeling that there is no real threat. He smiles back and begins walking toward him. "Look, I am sorry. I did not mean to trespass, but I'm lost. My stupid car broke down and I am trying to reach the fire lookout tower so they can call for help."

"The tower is about 5 miles in that direction," Augden replies, nodding in the general direction that Don had been traveling. He leans casually forward onto one of the stone walls of the bridge, crossing his one arm over the other.

"What a handsome man," Don thinks. "So how can this be your river... I mean, I know you can own the property, but how can you own the river?"

"The river is mine. If it weren't for me, this river would not be here!"

Don starts slowing down as he gets closer to the man. There is something not quite "right" about him... about his head. Then he realizes... Horns! He has horns on either side of his forehead! He comes to a stop, now less than 20 feet from the bridge. He can now see that his eyes are a golden yellow and his ears are furry and pointed, like an animal's.

"What are you?" he blurts out.

The man stands up and walks to the bank. "I am a satyr," he says, and as he walks from behind the stone wall, Don can see his legs are covered with curly brown fur; and they aren't human legs either. They look like the hind legs of a goat. The calves and biceps are human, if a bit short, but very muscular; but the calves quickly taper down to another joint and another bone runs down to cloven hooves.

Don isn't sure what to do... his mind is reeling with confusion. "How can this be?" he thinks. "I thought satyrs were only myths... from Greek mythology?" he says, aloud.

"Obviously not!"

"Look, I've got to cross the bridge so I can get some help."

"Fine. That'll be one gold coin."

"What? I don't have any gold coins... people haven't carried gold in decades, where the heck have you been?"

"Here! For a very long time."

"Look, I've got to get to the other side," he says, pulling out his wallet. "I can give you..." he quickly counts the bills "fifty-seven dollars. Will that cover the toll?"

"What am I going to do with paper?"

"What the fuck can you do with gold? Is there a store close by that deals in gold?"

"Many things can be made with gold," he smiles.

As put out as he is getting, he has to admit this man has a nice smile... for a freak!
"Can't you just let me cross the bridge?"

"If you cross my river, you have to pay. If you want to cross the bridge, but you don't have any gold, there is an alternative."

"Great! What?"

"I haven't been with a man in a very long time!" he says, as he moves a step closer.

Don is at once repelled and turned on. The human part of this creature was definitely a hunk, Don would have had no problems having sex with him, but this freak of nature... maybe if he closes his eyes... And then, as Augden starts to get excited, he realizes that the red tip of a goat's penis is extending from a sheath between his legs.

"God no, you fuckin' freak! Keep away from me!" and Don runs back down the river.

Augden is startled, and crushed. He sits down on the ground and begins to sob. "God, I am so lonely! You are the first human I've seen in over two years... and the first one I've ever felt anything for."

Now Don is really confused. He feels badly about hurting this... creature's feelings... but he doesn't really care to do anything about it. Should he go back and console him, or... fuck it! He needs to cross the river, and if the bridge isn't available, he'll wade!

He takes off his shoes, stuffs the socks inside and lobs them across the river. They hit the far bank and roll into the forest.

"What are you doing?" Augden's voice asks.

"Are you stupid as well as being a freak? I'm going to cross the river."

"You still have to pay!"

Don has removed his shirt and pants and rolled them into a bundle. Throwing them across the river, he shouts "Fuck off!"

"You are a very attractive man, you know?"

Don steps into the river... it is freezing.

"A shame there's not more between your legs!"

Don is up to his knees, and he can barely feel his feet anymore. Looking back at Augden he can see that he is still sitting on the ground. "God damn it, stop looking at me!"

"And a little hair on your body would make you look so much better."

He steps cautiously this time, and his balls dip into the icy water. "Shit!"

"You know it would have been a lot less painful to have crossed at the bridge."

The water is up to his belly button now. Looking back at the bank he had left, he estimates he's almost half-way across. "Look! I don't want to fuck a freak. Now shut the fuck up!"

"I did mention that you'd still have to pay, didn't I?"

"Yeah? How are you going to collect?" Don asks, just as he is hit by a sudden wave of dizziness. He's halfway across the river... he knows he can make it! He takes another step, and his skin begins to tingle, his eyes start to burn, his head starts to ache...

"Damn it... what's wrong with me?" he yells, still determined to keep moving.

He opens his eyes, and everything looks washed out and faded... his vision is spotted with "stars," but he can see the satyr has moved back to the bridge, and is watching him with great interest. "At least he's not moving to stop me," he thinks.

He takes another step and his chest feels like a thousand ants are crawling on it. Looking down, he can see brown curly hairs growing on his chest... and his arms. Don is not certain what to think... he's always wanted a hairy chest, but why now? How could it be happening so fast? Hell, how could it be happening at all?

Still feeling like he may pass out at any moment, he takes another step, and begins to feel better... until sharp pains pierce either side of his forehead. In his ears, he can hear crunching and grinding sounds. He reaches up to gently touch his forehead, and finds two large bumps, almost the size of golf balls. He touches his ears, which were still burning, and realizes they are covered with fur, and are coming to a point.

"God, no! You're making me a satyr, too!"

"I told you, if you cross my river, you have to pay!"

Don immediately turns around and walks back toward the shore he came from. "I'll be damned if I'll let you turn me into a freak!"

"Too late now, stud! When you crossed over the halfway point, you crossed the point of no return!"

Don ignores this and continues to return to shore. He has difficulty keeping his footing... for some reason the rocks seem a lot slicker. After several steps, he reaches up to feel his forehead, and feels the blunt end of two horns breaking through the skin. He feels his ears, and they are more pointed than before... and they twitch when he touches them. "Damn it, no!" he cries.

As he steps closer to the bank, he realizes the feeling is returning to his hips... and they are covered with dripping wet brown curly fur. He runs out as fast as he can, but has difficulty keeping his balance and collapses on the bank. Rolling on his back, he lifts his legs, and sees the legs of a goat... and the genitals. "Stupid, stupid, stupid!" he hears echoing in his head. And then he notices a painful lump at the base of his spine. "What the heck am I laying on?" he thinks, and rolls to one side. Reaching back, he feels a tuft of fur; it wiggles as he touches it.

"I'd like to say that I'm sorry this happened to you... but I'm not," Augden's voice says, from the bridge. "I would have been happy to have sex with you once and let you go... but I hate being called a freak."

"Go away!" Don shouts. "If you think I'll have sex with you now, you're crazy!"

"There aren't a whole lot of goats up in these mountains, you know. And if you're thinking you can return to civilization and live a normal life, think again!"

Don watches as Augden leaves the bridge, walking onto the opposite bank. "You know, I wasn't always a satyr... I was born human, like yourself. That was a very long time ago."

"So what happened?"

Augden picks up Don's clothes and shoes, and then starts walking into the river. "I had a run-in with a freak of nature... called himself a satyr, and he wanted gold or sex for me to cross the bridge."

Don sat up, taking a bit more interest. "What'd you do?"

Augden is almost halfway across the river now. "Oh, pretty much the same as you." He stops for a moment, covers his eyes, and drops his head. When he looks up, his eyes are a beautiful deep blue. As he continues to walk closer, Don can see his horns receding into his head; his hair relaxing and turning jet black; the fur on his chest and arms diminishing and darkening; and as his lower body emerges from the water, his legs are furless, and his genitals are very much human.

As he talks, he begins putting on Don's clothes. "I was arrogant, and crossed the river as you did, and he was able to leave, much as I will do."

"You can't just leave me here!" Don cries.

Augden thinks for a moment, and then says "I think you need time to yourself. I think you need to appreciate nature. I think you need to rethink the need to apply negative labels to people." He puts the last shoe on, and looks at Don. "I need time to take care of some things, but I couldn't leave the river. If there is no satyr keeping watch, the river will dry up, the bridge will crumble, and part of the forest will die."

"I can't leave here?" Don gasps.

"You may not go any further than a mile from the river... of course, you may go all the way upstream or downstream. The river will provide for you. You will always have fish to eat, and clean water to drink. And if a handsome stranger passes by... you know what to do."

"This isn't a very well traveled area, is it?"

"Nope! It's been two years since I had company, and it was very fleeting."

"I will die of loneliness."

"You cannot die. The river will not permit it!"

"Is it too late to say I'm sorry?"

"Yes... and no." The man looks down at the ground. "There is something about you... I really do like you, despite your angry words. I will be back... in a year or so. If, at that time, you wish to return to humanity, I will exchange with you. Or, if you come to love this form, I will join you, and we can consummate the form and remain together forever."

Don starts to stand up, but loses his balance and falls. Augden comes over and offers him his hand. Don accepts and stands up, very awkwardly. He wraps his arms around him; they press their lips together and kiss for a very long time. Then they part, and Augden walks away, not letting Don see the small tear he wipes from his eye.