

# HARD TO MOVE

by Wm. Brett Hill

**Wm. Brett Hill** is an American writer who lives on Maryland's Eastern Shore with his wife, daughter, their dog, and three chickens.

"Wow, would you look at that view!" said Tom.

He looked down at the shimmering surface of the lake, the light dancing off ripples caused by any number of unseen creatures. In the distance he spotted a rowboat, almost indiscernible among the tall reeds that served as its hiding place. A tiny man cast his line out, no ounce of hurry visible in his actions.

"Yeah, yeah, it's a rare gem. An absolute beauty nestled in the mountains, untainted by man. Blah, blah, blah. Save it for the marketing material," answered his companion. "Now come over here and look at what I'm trying to show you."

Tom tore his gaze away from the scene and walked over to the car, the hood of which was covered by a large map of the area and a blueprint of the potential development. "I've seen the drawings, Eddie. I'm trying to eyeball the site, now."

Eddie tapped down hard on a spot on the map. The metallic thumps echoed down the steep hill and across the sparkling

water, startling a group of mallards. "This here spot is the one I was telling you about. The holdout."

Tom looked on the map at the tiny strip of land along the edge of the lake. Eddie had circled it in red several times and written "Asshole!" across the top, marring the drawing of the lake.

"So this guy won't sell?"

"He won't sell, and he says the lake is his. Can you believe that? He thinks he can stop our project just to protect his little fishing hole."

Tom shrugged. "Throw more money on it. Everyone has their price."

"That's just the thing," spat Eddie. "I've already tripled the original offer. He won't budge."

"And that's why you brought me here? To have a talk with him?"

Eddie snorted and ran his fingers across his sweaty scalp. "Last time I tried to negotiate with a stubborn seller, I spent that night in jail. I need someone sweet-talking like you to handle this. We have to get this guy to give it up. If we don't own the entirety of the land around the lake, everything gets hosed up."

Tom turned and looked across the water to the fisherman again. He could see that the boat had moved, and on closer inspection he saw it was crossing the lake slowly, heading toward the parcel of land in question.

"Okay, Eddie. It looks

like he's coming in," he said. He held his hands up as if to placate the red-faced man. "Let me do the talking, and don't lose your cool. Got it?"

Eddie grunted and nodded fiercely. "Just get him to sign the papers, Tom."

They made their way down the hill silently save for the crunch of their shoes on the rough landscape. Tom studied the land as they went, taking in the untouched wilderness on either side of the path, the beauty of it all. Birds sang melodious serenades to one another as frogs added their own verse. He spotted a deer grazing not twenty yards from him and wondered how close he would be able to get before it bolted.

Eddie coughed. The deer fled, startled into unbridled panic. Birds launched from several nearby branches, irritated by the jarring intrusion. Tom looked back at him and almost tutted.

"What is this man's name?" he asked his coarse companion.

"Frank Walters," came Eddie's terse reply. All of his energy seemed to be bound up in keeping his rage in check.

The fishing shack was unremarkable, save for the fact that it stood at all. It looked as though it had been thrown together and had accidentally become four walls and a roof.

"Mr. Walters, may I have a moment of your time?" shouted Tom.

He wanted the man to know they were coming, after all.

The diminutive appearance of the fisherman as seen from afar stood in stark contrast to the giant of a man who walked out of the hut as the poorly-hung door slammed open. Tom had a mental image of this man breaking a blustering Eddie in two, and knew his task was a difficult one. The man held a line laden with fish in one hand, and in the other he held a long, slender blade which gleamed menacingly in the small amount of sun that made its way through the canopy to shine down upon them.

"I'll allow it," said the fisherman.

"I appreciate that, and I appreciate that your time is precious and I hope to take up as little of it as possible," started Tom. He smiled as the fisherman slid his knife into a sheath on his belt. "My name is Tom Williams, and my colleague here is Eddie Graeme. We represent the company that wants to develop this land and create endless possibilities for a multitude of families to enjoy this beautiful lake."

The fisherman looked

from his face to Eddie's and back. Scratching his rough stubble, he shook his head and said, "The lake is mine."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Walters, but..."

"Frank," said the man.

Tom smiled. "Excellent. I appreciate that, Frank, but I'm wondering if you've been made aware that my company has purchased all of the land surrounding the lake except for your small plot."

"Heard that. Didn't care," answered Frank.

Tom forced his smile to remain. "I appreciate that you are unwilling to sell, Frank, but I have to say we have been extremely generous in our offer and you have to know that this development will go on with or without your approval or agreement."

Frank shrugged. "Still don't care. Take care now."

He turned and walked back into the shack, slamming the door shut behind him.

Tom looked back into the crimson face of his colleague. He could see everything going to hell quickly if he let Eddie so much as speak a word. He held out his hand and put a finger to his lips to shush the ire bubbling up.

Eddie shook his head and walked away. Tom turned back to the shack and addressed the crooked door.

"Mr. Walters...Frank...I wonder if you've thought this through completely. With the amount of money we're offering to pay you for your small lot, just imagine what you could buy. You could even wait until we're done developing the area and buy a large house, with a dock and everything. No more getting your feet wet climbing in and out of your boat. You could be living in luxury."

"Not interested," replied the man from within. The sound of a knife ripping through fish

guts could be heard and Tom was suddenly grateful for the door.

"We would even be prepared to quadruple our original offer," added Tom.

Eddie was standing next to him then, clenching his fists. "If he doesn't sign the damn paper I'm busting in there and making him," he hissed.

"Good luck with that," said Tom.

Eddie took a step forward. "Well? What's it going to be?" he shouted.

There was a long pause as Tom held his breath and Eddie seemed to be prepared to charge at the door. The sound of fish being gutted had stopped, and the silence hung in the air. Both men stared at the bent door knob, waiting for something to happen.

When the door opened both men jumped, unaware of how tensed they had been, one to run forward, the other to run away. Frank stood in the doorway, his knife noticeably absent, and shook his head. "Not interested," he said.

"Listen here, you ignorant simpleton," shouted Eddie. Tom pulled back on his shoulder to keep the man from charging forward, but the action did nothing to stifle his words. "We're going to develop this lake. We're going to build houses, and docks, and a huge fricking clubhouse right down there at the end. People from all over the world will buy property here and come settle in this quiet part of God's fricking green earth and no bumbling redneck like you is going to stop it!"

Frank looked from Eddie's raging face to the panicked one of Tom, then back. He registered no reaction whatsoever.

"We're being needlessly generous here, and you spit in our faces. If you continue with this delusion that holding out will somehow prevent this project from proceeding and

refuse to sell us this pathetic little lot, I will personally make sure that you have a house within two inches of each side of that stupid shack of yours. Hell, I may even buy one myself so every day I can walk out on my front porch and piss on your door. This is happening whether you like it or not, so get with the program and sign the papers and get out!"

Spittle flew from Eddie's mouth as he screamed at the unflinching features of the larger man. He then turned and stomped away, wisely choosing not to punch above his weight.

Frank watched him go then turned to regard Tom with a frown. "That all true?"

Tom shrugged. "This is happening, here, at this lake. I don't know about him buying a house, though. He's kind of a cheap bastard."

Frank gave a slight smile and looked past him, out over the water. "This is my lake," he said simply.

"I know, Frank, believe me I do. I understand you're reluctant to let it go, but I'm afraid you have little choice here. This project will proceed with or without your cooperation. Things around here are going to change no matter what you do. You're best off taking the money," responded Tom.

The big man looked around as if studying the landscape, taking in every leaf, every rock. He looked back into his shack and let out a heavy sigh.

"Hard to move, but so be it," he said.

Tom pulled out the paperwork. "You won't regret this, Frank. Believe me, it will be well worth your while."

Signed paper in hand, Tom quickly walked up the path. Halfway to the car he found a fuming Eddie.

"I'll burn that shack down. I swear I will. That idiot will have nowhere to claim then," he spewed.

"No need," interrupted Eddie. He held up the signed papers and continued walking to the car, feeling very proud of himself.

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"The money has been transferred, and Frank Walters is officially bought out," said Tom as he poked the glimmering face of his phone.

"About damn time," grunted Eddie. "Now I get to do the very thing I've been wanting to do since I laid eyes on that shack. I have a sledgehammer and a chainsaw in the trunk just for the occasion."

Tom shook his head and laughed. He felt badly for Frank, having to give up his dream spot to a couple of eager developers, but that was just the way of the world. Secluded places never stay secret forever.

They rolled down the road to the lake and Tom, remembering the serenity of the area, looked out the window to take in the view. He couldn't believe his eyes.

"Stop the car!" he shouted, jumping out before it had even stopped moving forward. He looked down the steep hill and saw nothing but an enormous, muddy hole where the lake had once been.

He ran down the path, leaving the sputtering Eddie behind, this time not pausing to enjoy a single step of the journey. As he got to where the deal had been struck he saw that the shack previously occupied by the fisherman sat where it always had. Only now it sat on the edge of the hole.

On the crooked door a crumpled piece of paper was held, stabbed through the center with Frank's knife. As Eddie approached, he realized he already knew what it said.

"The lake is mine." 🌿

