

HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS

A Short Story by

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Adapted by

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September 20, 2012
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CHARACTER LIST:

MAN — an American male about twenty-five years old.

GIRL — an English speaking female about eighteen years old.

WAITRESS — a middle aged Spanish woman.

SETTING:

The train station of a small Spanish town somewhere between Barcelona and Madrid. The neighbouring arid fields contrast with the distant line of long, white hills. There are a few tables and chairs on the patio near the open doorway to the station's bar. A curtain of bamboo beads hangs in the doorway with a liquor advertisement for Anis Del Toro. It depicts a bull charging a bullfighter who holds a cape in one hand and a bottle of liquor in the other.

SCENE ONE

A MAN and GIRL sit at a table in the shade of the train station. The Girl sits with her back to the bead curtain so that the audience can see her eyes. Two bags covered with hotel labels are nearby.

MAN: The express from Barcelona to Madrid will be here in forty minutes. Can we be reasonable about this?

GIRL: *(placing her hat on the table)* It's too hot to think. *(pause)* Let's have a beer?
(turning and looking at the curtain) Could we try the drink in the ad on the curtain?

MAN: *(calling through the doorway)* *La camarera, dos cervezas. Big Ones. And dos Anis del Toro.*

GIRL: *(looking past the Man)* Did you notice? The hills across the valley look like white elephants.

MAN: I have never seen one.

GIRL: No . . . you wouldn't have.

MAN: I might have. Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything.

A WAITRESS enters carrying a tray with two large glasses of beer, two small glasses of a dark liquid, and a pitcher of water. She sets the glasses on the table, and adds water to the small glasses from the pitcher. She exits.

GIRL: *(taking a sip)* It tastes like licorice.

MAN: That's the way with everything then.

GIRL: *(sarcastically)* Really. Everything tastes of licorice, then. *(playing with her hat on the table)* Especially all the things you've waited so long for . . . like absinthe.

MAN: *(taking a long drink of his beer)* Oh, cut it out!

GIRL: Well, you started it! (*pause*) I was being amused. I was having a good time.

MAN: OK! (*softly, under his breath*) Let's try and have a good time.

GIRL: OK. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. And I wanted to try this new drink. That is all we do, isn't it, move from hotel to hotel, look at things and try new drinks?

MAN: Yeah. I guess so. (*drinking his beer*) The beer is nice and cool.

GIRL: (*drinking her beer*) It's lovely.

MAN: It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig. It's not really an operation at all. (*the Girl looks past the Man*) I know you wouldn't mind it, Jig. It's really not anything. It's just to let the air in. (*the Girl fidgets with her hat*) I'll go with you and I'll stay with you all the time. They just let the air in. It's all perfectly natural.

GIRL: (*looking down*) And then, what will we do afterward?

MAN: *(drinking from his glass)* We'll be fine afterward. We'll be fine, just like we were before.

The Girl turns to look at the picture of the bull and bullfighter in the advertisement on the curtain.

GIRL: *(turning to look at the Man)* Why do you think that?

MAN: Because, that is the thing that bothers us. That's the only thing that is making us unhappy.

GIRL: And you think—then—we will be all right and be happy.

MAN: I know we will. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of people that have done it.

GIRL: So have I. *(sarcastically)* And afterward they were all so happy.

MAN: Well, Jig. If you do not want to, you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But it is perfectly simple.

GIRL: And you really want to?

MAN: I think it is the reasonable thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you really don't want to.

GIRL: And if I do it you'll be happy and things will be like they were and you'll love me?

MAN: I love you now. You know I love you.

GIRL: I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again, and if I say things are like white elephants, you'll like it? Even though they don't really look like white elephants, just the coloring of their skin through the trees?

MAN: I'll love it, like I do now. I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry.

GIRL: If I do it you won't ever worry?

MAN: *(folding his hands on the table)* I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple.

GIRL: Then I'll do it, because I don't care about me. *(the Man looks at the Girl)* I don't care about me! But I'll do it and then everything will be fine.

MAN: I don't want you to do it if you feel that way.

The Girl gets up from the table and walks past the Man. She stands with her hands on her abdomen and with her back to the Man.

GIRL: *(sarcastically)* And we could have all this. And we could have everything and every day we make it more impossible. We can have everything.

MAN: Be reasonable! I care about you. We can have everything! The whole world.

GIRL: No, we can't! It isn't ours any more. Once they take it away, you never get it back.

The Girl crosses back to the table and sits.

MAN: You mustn't feel that way. We must be reasonable. I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do.

GIRL: Nor that isn't good for me. I know that! But I don't feel . . . any way. I just know things. Could we have another beer?

MAN: *(calling)* *La camarera, dos cervezas.* Look. You've got to realize that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I am willing to go through with it if it means anything to you.

GIRL: I realize that. But doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along.

MAN: Of course it means something to me. But I don't want anybody but you . . . no one else.

GIRL: Would you do something for me now? Would you please, please, please stop talking?

The Waitress enters, and placing two glasses of beer on the table, she says something in Spanish. She exits.

MAN: The train is coming in five minutes. I should move the bags to the other side of the station. *(drinking beer)* Do you feel better?

GIRL: *(smiling)* I feel fine. *(drinking beer)* There is nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.

Blackout.