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Beyond The Hills

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BEYOND THE HILLS

by

JOEL K. CATES

Under the Direction of Dr. John Holman

ABSTRACT

A couple travels through Spain in order to obtain an abortion for an unwanted pregnancy. The couple, an unnamed American man and a woman known only by the nickname Jig, has a much more complicated relationship than first seems and must navigate through complex emotions and gender roles. This story, and elaboration on Hemingway's well known "Hills Like White Elephants", attempts to give the characters introduced by Hemingway more depth and back story than the original short story.

INDEX WORDS: Abortion, Hills, Couple, Foreigner, Spain

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Graduation with Undergraduate Research Honors
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

2009

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Georgia State University
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife and children whose support has been essential for all my success in school and in life.

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I would like to thank Dr. John Holman, who allowed me to pursue this project under his guidance. His input and time have been greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank the honors department for their understanding with me during the completion of this project.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the work of Ernest Hemingway which inspired me to write this story. His mastery of craft is an inspiration to all aspiring authors.

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21 June, the Train from Barcelona –

The train pulled away from the station a few hours ago. It was the last stop before Ebro. We decided to rest on the car. I tried to get her to eat, but she only nibbled and pushed the food around her plate. The lunch was not bad for train fare but she preferred the chilled beer to anything. The ride from the coast has been largely uneventful, and the other passengers are blessedly few and keep mostly to themselves. I have noticed Jig looking at a young woman near the back, though. I think it is due to the baby she travels with. Luckily the child seems to sleep most of the time and I have not heard one cry the entire trip thus far. Jig stares at the woman frequently. I wouldn't say she smiles at her, but rather looks somewhat puzzled at the woman, and the child. I can only assume it is Jig's condition which affects her. I have tried to cheer Jig, but she persists in spending her time silently staring out the window as the landscape moves past, occasionally glancing at the woman in the back. I shall make her get off the train at the next stop. It will do her good to get some fresh air and stretch her legs a bit.

I bought her a new hat before our leaving Madrid and it rests in the seat beside her. It is a very expensive design, imported from France, and the blue reminds me of the waters off the coast where we spent such a wonderful time when our trip began. She thanked me when I bought it for her, but she was reluctant to pack away the old one into her bag. The old one was an awful thing, covered with faded yellow daisies. I assume it was a gift from him, but did not ask. It is enough that she has ridded herself of it.

She is sleeping now. The heat in this car is oppressive, and the constant rocking of the train has most of the other riders dozing. I have decided to stay awake and watch over her as she rests. This train ride has been the only chance to reflect on the past few months here. Writing seems to help make sense of the events, or at least keeps them correctly ordered in my mind.

I sent word ahead to the clinic. The doctor I consulted in Barcelona suggested the place. I call him a doctor even though in this part of the world that might mean anything from a university trained physician to a fisherman's son, patching up the sailors like so much sail. Jig was not happy about my suggestion that the young man examine her, so I did not press the issue. It is enough that we will be at the clinic soon and can put this episode behind us. Luckily it is still early enough, and the doctor assured me that she would suffer no long term effects. I think it is the best thing; the only thing, really.

I suppose this whole affair is partly my fault. I cannot help but feel she did it to get back at me somehow. Revenge and jealousy are dangerous things in this heat. But, she knew what our relationship was before I agreed to have her as a traveling companion. I explained my feelings in the matter quite clearly. I have seen too much of the world now to ever think one place or person could hold me. After the war, no place offers true contentment, not even thoughts of home or family. It is strange how the things I was supposedly fighting for hold so little appeal for me now. Maybe it was the war which rid me of any desire to go back myself, but I suspect I would have left eventually. I have always felt a need to wander, to experience. If there were some hurt feelings on her side, though, then I suppose I had a hand in them. Still, I

intend to hold by our agreement. If she had felt differently, then she could have told me rather than taking such a drastic course of action.

The rolling hills outside are mostly lifeless save the occasional farmer and oxen attempting to bring life to the baked soil. It is no wonder the people in this land invented the siesta. Although, the country does seem changed now that I no longer trod long miles in combat boots; marching, always marching. In those days our biggest worry was to keep our heads down and our masks close. At night we would try and find some comfortable spot in the trench to get a few hours sleep, and hope no one saw you shaking. We all shook of course; we just didn't want others to see.

The porter has just informed me that we will be stopping at the Ebro station soon. There is a café there. We can get off the train for a while and stretch a bit. Our luggage will have to be moved as well since we are changing trains. This one will head back the way we have come, and pick up more tourists I suppose. I never considered myself a tourist. My luggage is covered with stickers from all parts of the globe now, and its cracks and wear hold many memories for me. Jig was so excited when we first started covering hers with the names of towns. The luggage always reminds us where we have been. She was so excited to see these places once, and I enjoyed showing them to her. She is still sleeping. I will not wake her until we stop.

21 June, Train from Ebro –

We had a few drinks at the station, more than a few actually, but again I could not convince her to eat. She has become more and more hostile as we approach Madrid. I have tried to persuade her that this decision is the best thing, but I fear she does not fully understand the situation. I do not wish to marry, not now, perhaps not ever. It isn't that I have no feelings for her, I do. I am not ready to be a husband, or a father. There is still the question of whether the child is even mine. I suppose the only way to know for certain is to see the child born. That man's dark complexion and hair is so different from my own German ancestry. My light hair and green eyes would certainly stand out on any child of mine. She has not even worn the new hat I purchased, even in this blazing sun.

She mentioned foregoing the procedure, but how can she ask such a thing? I suppose many would not be inclined to agree with my choices. After all, she is an impressionable young woman. It could easily be construed that I am somehow to blame for the predicament, but should I be forced into such a life-altering situation due to her rash emotions? She is lucky that I am even willing to take her back after this fiasco, and pay for the procedure. Most men would not do even this much I imagine. Hopefully after the procedure she will be more like her old self. I am sure it will take some time, but I think we can get back to normal again. I may suggest heading over the border into France for a time. She has always wanted to see Paris.

We should arrive in Madrid shortly before midnight. I plan on having a late supper and bath. This car has become stifling, even as the sun sets. Most of the other passengers could use a bath as well, judging from the stench that hangs in the air. If I

thought it wouldn't wake her, I might open the window. Perhaps I will slip out of the car for a moment on the back stoop. I have always enjoyed looking back along the rails. If she is still unpleasant when we arrive, I may request separate rooms. Perhaps she would appreciate time alone. I have sent word ahead to the clinic to contact me at the hotel as soon as possible. Tomorrow I shall get things sorted out and we can begin to put this behind us. After a good night's rest things will be easier for both of us.

.....
22 June, Hotel Morning –

Dear Sir,

I have taken the liberty of scheduling a room to be made available on the 24th. I shall be ready to perform the procedure at any time after eight in the morning. If this is convenient to you, please send word to me here at the clinic or at my home. The hotel has both addresses and can send word to either place. I want to reassure you that I have had much experience in these matters, and expect no problems whatsoever. As per our earlier correspondence, I wish to reassure you as well that strict privacy is very important to both me and my staff. You can assure your companion that no one other than me and my two nurses will ever know. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jamon Cancucióne

The letter was waiting at the front desk when we checked in last night. The doctor's writing is almost unintelligible; in fact it took me some time to decipher it which gives me at least some reassurance that he is, in fact, a legitimate medical man. I have not said anything to Jig about the letter for fear of reviving our conversation from the station. I will send word after my breakfast to confirm the appointment. I have decided for the procedure in the afternoon if at all possible, but I suppose it will be up to her. She has not risen yet, or at least has not come out of her room. She asked as we were carried here from the station that we have separate rooms. Naturally I conceded having already decided such an arrangement would be best to both our tempers given the circumstances. Luckily, the hotel arranged for a suite which has two rooms connected by a common sitting area in which I now find myself enjoying the mid-morning sun rising over the peaks in the distance.

The streets outside are still largely empty, though I can hear a few villagers passing along the cobblestones below. The large French doors, which stand open, lead to a small balcony overlooking one of the many fountains here. I had them closed for a time, in order not to wake her with the street noise, but the stuffiness of the room became too much. The fresh air and noise are a welcome relief. Most of the furniture in the room has seen better days, but it is still elegant and sturdy. The private bath, which I used last night, was a welcomed luxury after such a long and dusty trip. I offered to run her a bath, but she stated that she only wanted sleep, which seemed strange considering all the sleeping she did on the train. Still, I left her to her own devices and soaked for the better part of an hour. I have a real fondness

for baths ever since the war. Being clean is a luxury for mind and body. I will suggest that we go to a nice restaurant for dinner tonight, perhaps somewhere with music and dancing. I am sure she will not be ready for dancing, but being around merriment will be a nice diversion and will keep our conversation to a minimum. Perhaps we can even catch a show or go to the fights like we used to do. I will let her sleep a few more hours before going into her room to wake her.

.....

Goodbye,

My dear,

I have decided this is the best way to part our company together. By the time you read this letter, I will have already made substantial headway along my path. Please do not trouble yourself with following me, as I left while you were soaking in the tub last night. I sincerely appreciate all that you have done for me, as well as the great efforts you have made on my part during our tour together. I implore you to respect my wishes and do not try and locate me, as I have every intention of losing myself for a time. So that you know this decision is not merely some problem of nerves or mental exhaustion, I wish to also explain a little to you about my condition, and how I arrived at my decision to part our company.

Let me begin by stating that I owe you an apology regarding my own character in this. When we left on the boat together, so many months ago, I led you to believe that I would be an excellent traveling companion. I did in fact try to be so, but perhaps I was a bit naïve in such matters, and not fully prepared for what awaited me. Understand, in this I hold you blameless, as

you were clear with me from the beginning. The fault lay in my own character. Do not misunderstand; I do feel we had many good times together, especially in the beginning of our adventure. After a while though, things became...different somehow. It was not you, at least not a change in you, but perhaps I truly began to see things as they were. I mistakenly supposed the world was ours then, but of course it wasn't.

I began to feel restless, and tired of our travels. There were still diversions and places to see of course, but I began to feel more a piece of luggage to you. That was when I met him. The young man, whom you so vehemently hate, in fact did me an enormous favor. I hope after my explanation you will have a kinder view of his involvement. Everything that was done, he did for my benefit as a kindness, and I would consider it rather poor character to try and punish him for any anger you feel towards me.

I am keeping the baby, and it is not yours.

I must confess, for a time I did wish to be so. I even had some rather misguided dreams about it, but that time has passed for me. I am sure you have many questions but, I am not sure I can give you any satisfactory answers. I could tell you that it was an attempt to get back at you in some way, or maybe I hoped it would stir feelings in you toward me that I longed for, but I suppose the reason doesn't really matter. I have always known about the other women, of course. At first it didn't bother me, at least not much. I must say that you never lied to me about them, and you were considerate enough to be discreet. Still, I began to feel useless to you and I

suppose I did not care for it. Over time, the nights in bars, and never knowing whether I would wake beside you, or find you on some couch still in your street clothes began to make me feel, less than myself somehow. I remember looking in a mirror one night, when you had not returned, and not particularly caring for whom I saw there. I do not blame you, of course, since you were very honest about what you wanted from me as companion. You have shown me all the places you promised, and I would never been able to see such wonders without your help. My only excuse is that I did not fully comprehend what our arrangement would really mean to me. Whatever the case may be, after that last night in Barcelona, I made a decision. I felt that, if I had my own trist, perhaps you would wish to protect me somehow, as you did in the beginning.

Of course, not knowing the language or customs of this place very well, I did not feel all that confident when I decided to venture to a bar. It was one of the many nights you went out by yourself and told me not to wait up for you. Despite hindrances, however, I quickly found that men react to a flirtatious woman the same. Luckily for me, there was a man who saw through my foolishness, and took pity on me. Yes, I say he took pity on me, and so became a closer friend here, in this place, than I have known for a long time. Luckily for me, he had served in the war, like you, and had learned English during those days. I will not tell you of all the contacts we had after that first night, nor the nature of our conversations, even though at one time I wanted to tell you. Perhaps I wanted more for you to ask about them, but of

course you have never seemed interested in my condition other than to change it.

This man took great care of me while in Barcelona. I do not know when you began to suspect, but his was the only company I had during those weeks. He gave me something which once belonged to one of his sisters, who had died in an accident; the hat with the daisies which I noticed causes you some anger. When you at last discovered my secret, I thought you would be angry, or at least leave me in that place. To my surprise, you seemed more concerned with me than ever, and perhaps that is why I did not tell you the child was not yours. I am sure you suspected, but you never questioned me. I still wonder why. I think I became angrier with you then than in all the times before. You were being kind and considerate and respecting my infidelity with a restraint I had not expected. At the time, I blamed you for many of the wrongs I brought upon myself. Although I still had some affection for you, I must admit most of my feelings were not generous then. To your credit, I must say that you held up better than I probably had reason to expect. Now I see that the whole situation was nothing more than my own petty childishness. I am sorry for any pain this event has given you.

I suppose you will not believe me regarding this, and perhaps you have no good reason to trust me now. But I pray you consider what I tell you as truth. I hold no claim on you, and do not require anything of you now. It would be impudent of me to require you to take responsibility for this situation even though I must admit at our stop at that station I wanted you to take the

chance. I will, at some point contact my family, but I will trust you to leave that business to me. Be assured that I will be discreet about your involvement, and have no desire to tarnish your reputation.

As to where I am going now and what I shall do, I must honestly tell you that my plans at this point are unclear. As much as I desire to go back to the man who showed me such kindness in Barcelona, I know better than to return there. My presence would only complicate his life, and I have no desire to see him suffer for my folly. So, please be assured that by the time you read this letter, I will be heading for an unknown destination. I am going to attempt to lose myself here in this place for a while. At least until my condition forces me to make other arrangements. Whatever love I once held for you is now, and forever, gone. I encourage you to think of our good times together, and I shall attempt the same.

I have left the hat you bought for me here. I find I prefer the old one, even though it too is full of memories which I shall try to forget.

With Remembered Fondness,

Jig

.....
18 July

The bamboo curtain brushes against the waitress as she heads back into the bright sunlight. She places the single bottle of beer down on the table.

“Anything else?” she asks, noticing the man staring out across the plains at the hills in the distance. He sits alone.

“No, nothing,” the man says absently, his Spanish is fluent and easy, though his manner and face seem tense to the waitress.

She recognizes the man. He was here not long ago. She usually remembers the Americans who pass through. Her mother told many stories about the young boys in their uniforms passing through the stations all day and night during the way. She remembers the man was with a woman before, another American. Their luggage was covered with stickers of far off places; places she would like to see.

She walks back into the cool darkness kept behind the curtain. The bar here is always empty, except when a train stops to take on water or passengers. The locals know the better places, where tourists and sightseers never go. She absently begins wiping the bar with the dirty towel she keeps hung from her belt that is only a tied bit of rope.

“Hola chica,” the fat bartender calls to her. He always calls her chica.

“Sí?” she says, not looking at the man who has made his intentions very plain over her time waiting tables here. He owns the bar, and is by all standards a good catch for any local girl. He is the only overweight local for a hundred miles. Most women would give in.

“Only one passenger to Barcelona today?”

“Sí, just one.”

She continues to wipe the bar and wonders what has happened to the other American; the woman. She watches the man outside sitting in the sun, ready to head back out if called. When he was here before, she had at first thought them married. But they wore no rings, and Americans, especially women, always wear jewelry. He

had looked worried for her, which most American's always were for their women in this place. American women were not tough like the women here must be, like she is. She thinks they are all spoiled.

As she puts the rag back into her belt, she wonders about the man. She even pictures herself with him, riding away from this station with him on the train. She has only been on the train a few times, and never to the end of the line. Names like Barcelona and Madrid are like the sun gleaming through the curtain to her, or the hills far across the plains. She does not imagine she will ever see them close. She remembers a beautiful blue hat the woman had laid on the table before. How she would love such a hat. A month's wages would not pay for such a thing, even if there was somewhere in this valley to buy one. The train will be arriving soon, and take the man away again, somewhere wonderful and exciting where real things happened. As the sun sets, she daydreams about the hat, and the man, and the train, and travelling along the rails beyond the white hills.

.....

25 April

The café is largely unchanged from when she was here last. The changes to her are evident in the small child sleeping quietly in her lap. She has named him Charles, after her own father who she has not seen for several years and has no knowledge of the grandson who bears his name. The baby has the pale complexion of his mother and looks too clean for the dirty train station; his green eyes and sandy hair make him a beautiful child that everyone who sees him must notice. His

mother's fair complexion, scorched and tanned by the Spanish sun, now gives her skin a red tinge not unlike the sun setting over the hills.

The mother hears the waitress passing through the bamboo curtain and glances up to see the elderly woman's face, cracked and leathery like the young woman's luggage which sits against the back wall.

"Can...I something for you?" she manages in broken English. Her smile is genuine although her teeth are yellowed and some are missing.

"No, thank you, we are fine." The woman adjusts the blanket around the baby.

The old waitress stares at the young baby with a mother's eyes. Something in them tells of both love and sadness.

"Does something for the baby?" She asks with thick accent, still gazing at the young child and motioning with her hands to her mouth; the universal sign for eating.

"No, he just ate and is sleeping now," the American woman says.

"He is beautiful,"

"Thank you."

The old woman turns and goes back through the curtain. The rainy season has started across the valley and even now the rain is steadily falling on the thatched roof. The young mother looks out across the valley in the direction of the distant hills. She can't see them now, although she remembers their appearance.

The train will take her further north, towards Paris. She brushes the child's few golden locks of hair absently and makes plans for their trip. Her own hair is tied in a bun, wound tightly with a dark blue ribbon which matches her own brown hair.

Packed in her luggage is a worn hat, with yellow flowers. She has not worn it for some time; the rainy weather and time of year have made it unnecessary. She still keeps it though, realizing she will need it again someday.