

From *Hills Like White Elephants*
By Ernest Hemingway

"What should we drink?" the man asked. He had taken off his hat and put it on the table.

"It's pretty hot," the woman said.

"Let's drink beer."

"Dos cervezas," the woman said into the curtain.

"Big ones?" a man asked from the doorway.

"Yes. Two big ones."

The man brought two glasses of beer and two felt pads. He put the felt pads and the beer glass on the table and looked at the woman and the man. The man was looking off at the line of hills. They were white in the sun and the country was brown and dry.

"They look like white elephants," he said.

"I've never seen one," the woman drank her beer.

"No, you wouldn't have."

"I might have," the woman said. "Just because you say I wouldn't have doesn't prove anything."

The man looked at the bead curtain. "They've painted something on it," he said. "What does it say?"

"Anis del Toro. It's a drink."

"Could we try it?"

The woman called "Listen" through the curtain. The man came out from the bar.

"Four reales." "We want two Anis del Toro."

"With water?"

"Do you want it with water?"

"I don't know," the guy said. "Is it good with water?"

"It's all right."

"You want them with water?" asked the man.

"Yes, with water."

"It tastes like liquorice," the man said and put the glass down.

"That's the way with everything."

"Yes," said the guy. "Everything tastes of liquorice. Especially all the things you've waited so long for, like absinthe."

"Oh, cut it out."

"You started it," the man said. "I was being amused. I was having a fine time."

"Well, let's try and have a fine time."

"All right. I was trying. I said the mountains looked like white elephants. Wasn't that bright?"

"That was bright."

"I wanted to try this new drink. That's all we do, isn't it—look at things and try new drinks?"

"I guess so."

The man looked across at the hills.

"They're lovely hills," he said. "They don't really look like white elephants. I just meant the colouring of their skin through the trees."

"Should we have another drink?"

"All right."

The warm wind blew the bead curtain against the table.

"The beer's nice and cool," the woman said.

"It's lovely," the man said.



"We'll be fine afterwards. Just like we were before."

"What makes you think so?"

"That's the only thing that bothers us. It's the only thing that's made us unhappy."

The man looked at the bead curtain, put her hand out and took hold of two of the strings of beads.

"And you think then we'll be all right and be happy."

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

"So have I," said the guy. "And afterwards they were all so happy."

"Well," the woman said, "if you don't want to you don't have to. I wouldn't have you do it if you didn't want to. But I know it's perfectly simple."

"And you really want to?"

"I think it's the best thing to do. But I don't want you to do it if you don't really want to."

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

"I love you now. You know I love you."

"I know. But if I do it, then it will be nice again if I say things are like white elephants, and you'll like it?"

"I'll love it. I love it now but I just can't think about it. You know how I get when I worry."

"If I do it you won't ever worry?"

"I won't worry about that because it's perfectly simple."

"Then I'll do it. Because I don't care about me."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't care about me."

"Well, I care about you."

"Oh, yes. But I don't care about me. And I'll do it and then everything will be fine."

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

The man stood up and walked to the end of the station. Across, on the other side, were fields of grain and trees along the banks of the Ebro. Far away, beyond the river, were mountains. The shadow of a cloud moved across the field of grain and she saw the river through the trees.



"Come on back in the shade," she said. "You mustn't feel that way."

"I don't feel any way," the man said. "I just know things."

"I don't want you to do anything that you don't want to do—"

"Nor that isn't good for me," he said. "I know. Could we have another beer?"

"All right. But you've got to realize—"

"I realize," the man said. "Can't we maybe stop talking?"

They sat down at the table and the man looked across at the hills on the dry side of the valley and the woman looked at her and at the table.

"You've got to realize," she said, "that I don't want you to do it if you don't want to. I'm perfectly willing to go through with it if it means anything to you."

"Doesn't it mean anything to you? We could get along."

"Of course it does. But I don't want anybody but you. I don't want anyone else. And I know it's perfectly simple."

"Yes, you know it's perfectly simple."

"It's all right for you to say that, but I do know it."

"Would you do something for me now?"

"I'd do anything for you."

"Would you please please please please please please please stop talking?"

She did not say anything but looked at the bags against the wall of the station. There were labels on them from all the hotels where they had spent nights.

"But I don't want you to," she said, "I don't care anything about it."

"I'll scream," the man said.