

Get a Seeing-Eyed Dog, Ernest Hemingway

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"AND WHAT DID WE DO THEN?" HE asked her. She told him.
"That part is very strange. I can't remember that at all."
"Can you remember the safari leaving?"

"I should. But I don't. I remember the women going down the trail to the beach for the water with the pots on their heads and I remember the flock of geese the toto drove back and forth to the water. I remember how slowly they all went and they were always going down or coming up. There was a very big tide too and the flats were yellow and the channel ran by the far island. The wind blew all the time and there were no flies and no mosquitoes. There was a roof and a cement floor and the poles that held the roof up, and the wind blew through them all the time. It was cool all day and lovely and cool at night."

"Do you remember when the big dhow came in and careened on the low tide?"
"Yes, I remember her and the crew coming ashore in her boats and coming up the path from the beach, and the geese were afraid of them and so were the women."
"That was the day we caught so many fish but had to come in because it was rough."

"I remember that."
"You're remembering well today," she said. "Don't do it too much."

"I'm sorry you didn't get to fly to Zanzibar," he said. "That upper beach from where we were was a fine place to land. You could have landed and taken off from there quite easily."
"We can always go to Zanzibar. Don't try to remember too much today. Would you like me to read to you? There's always something in the old New Yorkers that we missed."

"No, please don't read," he said. "Just talk. Talk about the good days."
"Do you want to hear about what it's like outside?"
"It's raining," he said. "I know that."

"It's raining a big rain," she told him. "There won't be any tourists out with this weather. The wind is very wild and we can go down and sit by the fire."
"We could anyway. I don't care about them any more. I like to hear them talk."

"Some of them are awful," she said. "But some of them are quite nice. I think it's really the nicest ones that go out to Torcello."
"That's quite true," he said. "I hadn't thought of that. There's really nothing for them to see unless they are a bit too nice."
"Can I make you a drink?" she asked. "You know how worthless a nurse I am. I wasn't trained for it and I haven't any talent. But I can make drinks."

"Let's have a drink."
"What do you want?"
"Anything," he said.
"I'll make a surprise. I'll make it downstairs."

He heard the door open and close and her feet on the stairs and he thought, I must get her to go on a trip. I must figure out some way to do

it. I have to think up something practical. I've got this now for the rest of my life and I must figure out ways not to destroy her life and ruin her with it. She has been so good and she was not built to be good. I mean this sort of good. I mean good every day and dull good.

He heard her coming up the stairs and noticed the difference in her tread when she was carrying two glasses and when she had walked down barehanded. He heard the rain on the windowpane and he smelled the beech logs burning in the fireplace. As she came into the room he put his hand out for the drink and closed his hand on it and felt her touch the glass with her own.

"It's our old drink for out here," she said. "Campari and Gordon's with ice."

"I'm certainly glad you're not a girl who would say 'on the rocks'"
"No," she said. "I wouldn't ever say that. We've been on the rocks."
"On our own two feet when the chips were down and for keeps," he remembered. "Do you remember when we barred those phrases?"

"That was in the time of my lion. Wasn't he a wonderful lion? I can't wait till we see him."

"I can't either," he said.

"I'm sorry."

"Do you remember when we barred that phrase?"

"I nearly said it again."

"You know," he told her, "we're awfully lucky to have come here. I remember it so well that it is palpable. That's a new word and we'll bar it soon. But it really is wonderful. When I hear the rain I can see it on the stones and on the canal and on the lagoon, and I know the way the trees bend in every wind and how the church and the tower are in every sort of light.

We couldn't have come to a better place for me. It's really perfect. We've got the good radio and a fine tape recorder and I'm going to write better than I ever could. If you take your time with the tape recorder you can get the words right. I can work slow and I can see the words when I say them. If they're wrong I hear them wrong and I can do them over and work on them until I get them right. Honey, in lots of ways we couldn't have it better."

"Oh, Philip—"

"Shit," he said. "The dark is just the dark. This isn't like the real dark. I can see very well inside and now my head is better all the time and I can remember and I can make up well. You wait and see. Didn't I remember better today?"

"You remember better all the time. And you're getting strong."

"I am strong," he said. "Now if you—"

"If me what?"

"If you'd go away for a while and get a rest and a change from this."

"Don't you want me?"

"Of course I want you, darling."

"Then why do we have to talk about me going away? I know I'm not good at looking after you but I can do things other people can't do and we do love each other. You love me and you know it and we know things nobody else knows."

"We do wonderful things in the dark," he said.
"And we did wonderful things in the daytime too."
"You know I rather like the dark. In some ways it is an improvement."
"Don't lie too much," she said. "You don't have to be so bloody noble."
"Listen to it rain," he said. "How is the tide now?"

"It's way out and the wind has driven the water even further out. You could almost walk to Burano."

"All except one place," he said. "Are there many birds?"

"Mostly gulls and terns. They are down on the flats and when they get up the wind catches them."

"Aren't there any shore birds?"

"There are a few working on the part of the flats that only comes out when we have this wind and this tide."

"Do you think it will ever be spring?"

"I don't know," she said. "It certainly doesn't act like it."

"Have you drunk all your drink?"

"Just about. Why don't you drink yours?"

"I was saving it."

"Drink it up," she said. "Wasn't it awful when you couldn't drink at all?"

"No, you see," he said. "What I was thinking about when you went downstairs was that you could go to Paris and then to London and you'd see people and could have some fun and then you'd come back and it would have to be spring by then and you could tell me all about everything."

"No," she said.

"I think it would be intelligent to do," he said. "You know this is a long sort of stupid business and we have to learn to pace ourselves. And I don't want to wear you out. You know—"

"I wish you wouldn't say 'you know' so much."

"You see? That's one of the things. I could learn to talk in a non-irritating way. You might be mad about me when you came back."

"What would you do nights?"

"Nights are easy."

"I'll bet they are. I suppose you've learned how to sleep too."

"I'm going to," he told her and drank half the drink. "That's part of The Plan. You know this is how it works. If you go away and have some fun then I have a good conscience. Then for the first time in my life with a good conscience I sleep automatically. I take a pillow which represents my good conscience and I put my arms around it and off I go to sleep. If I wake up by any odd chance I just think beautiful happy dirty thoughts. Or I make wonderful fine good resolutions. Or I remember things. You know I want you to have fun—"

"Please don't say 'you know'"

"I'll concentrate on not saying it. It's barred but I forget and let the bars down. Anyway I don't want you just to be a seeing-eyed dog."

"I'm not and you know it. Anyway it's seeing-eye not seeing-eyed."

"I knew that," he told her. "Come and sit here, would you mind very much?"

She came and sat by him on the bed and they both heard the rain hard against the pane of the window and he tried not to feel her head and her

lovely face the way a blind man feels and there was no other way that he could touch her face except that way. He held her close and kissed the top of her head. I will have to try it another day, he thought. I must not be so stupid about it. She feels so lovely and I love her so much and have done her so much damage and I must learn to take good care of her in every way I can. If I think of her and of her only, everything will be all right.

"I won't say 'you know' all the time any more," he told her. "We can start with that."

She shook her head and he could feel her tremble.

"You say it all you want," she said and kissed him.

"Please don't cry, my blessed," he said.

"I don't want you to sleep with any lousy pillow," she said.

"I won't. Not any lousy pillow."

Stop it, he said to himself. Stop it right now.

"Look, tu," he said. "We'll go down now and have lunch in our old fine place by the fire and I'll tell you what a wonderful kitten you are and what lucky kittens we are."

"We really are."

"We'll work everything out fine."

"I just don't want to be sent away."

"Nobody is ever going to send you away."

But walking down the stairs feeling each stair carefully and holding to the banister he thought, I must get her away and get her away as soon as I can without hurting her. Because I am not doing too well at this. That I can promise you. But what else can you do? Nothing, he thought. There's nothing you can do. But maybe, as you go along, you will get good at it.

The End