

Summer People, Ernest Hemingway

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HALFWAY DOWN THE GRAVEL ROAD FROM Hortons Bay, the town, to the lake there was a spring. The water came up in a tile sunk beside the road, lipping over the cracked edge of the tile and flowing away through the close growing mint into the swamp. In the dark Nick put his arm down into the spring but could not hold it there because of the cold. He felt the featherings of the sand spouting up from the spring cones at the bottom against his fingers. Nick thought, I wish I could put all of myself in there. I bet that would fix me. He pulled his arm out and sat down at the edge of the road. It was a hot night.

Down the road through the trees he could see the white of the Bean house on its piles over the water. He did not want to go down to the dock. Everybody was down there swimming. He did not want Kate with Odgar around. He could see the car on the road beside the warehouse. Odgar and Kate were down there. Odgar with that fried-fish look in his eye every time he looked at Kate. Didn't Odgar know anything? Kate wouldn't ever marry him. She wouldn't ever marry anybody that didn't make her.

And if they tried to make her she would curl up inside of herself and be hard and slip away. He could make her do it all right. Instead of curling up hard and slipping away she would open out smoothly, relaxing, untightening, easy to hold. Odgar thought it was love that did it. His eyes got walleyed and red at the edges of the lids. She couldn't bear to have him touch her. It was all in his eyes. Then Odgar would want them to be just the same friends as ever. Play in the sand. Make mud images. Take all-day trips in the boat together. Kate always in her bathing suit. Odgar looking at her.

Odgar was thirty-two and had been twice operated on for varicocele. He was ugly to look at and everybody liked his face. Odgar could never get it and it meant everything in the world to him. Every summer he was worse about it. It was pitiful. Odgar was awfully nice. He had been nicer to Nick than anybody ever had. Now Nick could get it if he wanted it. Odgar would kill himself, Nick thought, if he knew it. I wonder how he'd kill himself. He couldn't think of Odgar dead. He probably wouldn't do it. Still people did. It wasn't just love.

Odgar thought just love would do it. Odgar loved her enough, God knows. It was liking, and liking the body, and introducing the body, and persuading, and taking chances, and never frightening, and assuming about the other person, and always taking never asking, and gentleness and liking, and making liking and happiness, and joking and making people not afraid.

And making it all right afterwards. It wasn't loving. Loving was frightening. He, Nicholas Adams, could have what he wanted because of something in him. Maybe it did not last. Maybe he would lose it. He wished he could give it to Odgar, or tell Odgar about it. You couldn't ever tell anybody about anything. Especially Odgar.

No, not especially Odgar. Anybody, anywhere. That had always been his first mistake, talking. He had talked himself out of too many things. There ought to be something you could do for the Princeton, Yale and Harvard virgins, though. Why weren't there any virgins in state universities? Coeducation maybe. They met girls who were out to marry and the girls helped them along and married them. What would become of

fellows like Odgar and Harvey and Mike and all the rest? He didn't know. He hadn't lived long enough.

They were the best people in the world. What became of them? How the hell could he know. How could he write like Hardy and Hamsun when he only knew ten years of life. He couldn't. Wait till he was fifty.

In the dark he kneeled down and took a drink from the spring. He felt all right. He knew he was going to be a great writer. He knew things and they couldn't touch him. Nobody could. Only he did not know enough things. That would come all right. He knew. The water was cold and made his eyes ache. He had swallowed too big a gulp. Like ice cream. That's the way with drinking with your nose underwater. He'd better go swimming. Thinking was no good. It started and went on so. He walked down the road, past the car and the big warehouse on the left where apples and potatoes were loaded onto the boats in the fall, past the white-painted Bean house where they danced by lantern light sometimes on the hardwood floor, out on the dock to where they were swimming.

They were all swimming off the end of the dock. As Nick walked along the rough boards high above the water he heard the double protest of the long springboard and a splash. The water lapped below in the piles. That must be the Ghee, he thought. Kate came up out of the water like a seal and pulled herself up the ladder.

"It's Wemedge," she shouted to the others. "Come on in, Wemedge. It's wonderful."

"Hi, Wemedge," said Odgar. "Boy it's great."

"Where's Wemedge?" It was the Ghee, swimming far out.

"Is this man Wemedge a nonswimmer?" Bill's voice very deep and bass over the water.

Nick felt good. It was fun to have people yell at you like that. He scuffed off his canvas shoes, pulled his shirt over his head and stepped out of his trousers. His bare feet felt the sandy planks of the dock. He ran very quickly out the yielding plank of the springboard, his toes shoved against the end of the board, he tightened and he was in the water, smoothly and deeply, with no consciousness of the dive. He had breathed in deeply as he took off and now went on and on through the water, holding his back arched, feet straight and trailing. Then he was on the surface, floating face down. He rolled over and opened his eyes. He did not care anything about swimming, only to dive and be underwater.

"How is it, Wemedge?" The Ghee was just behind him.

"Warm as piss," Nick said.

He took a deep breath, took hold of his ankles with his hands, his knees under his chin, and sank slowly down into the water. It was warm at the top but he dropped quickly into cool, then cold. As he neared the bottom it was quite cold. Nick floated down gently against the bottom. It was marly and his toes hated it as he uncurled and shoved hard against it to come up to the air. It was strange coming up from underwater into the dark. Nick rested in the water, barely paddling and comfortable. Odgar and Kate were talking together up on the dock.

"Have you ever swum in a sea where it was phosphorescent, Carl?"

"No." Odgar's voice was unnatural talking to Kate.

We might rub ourselves all over with matches, Nick thought. He took a deep breath, drew his knees up, clasped tight and sank, this time with his eyes open. He sank gently, first going off to one side, then sinking

head first. It was no good. He could not see underwater in the dark. He was right to keep his eyes shut when he first dove in.

It was funny about reactions like that. They weren't always right, though. He did not go all the way down but straightened out and swam along and up through the cool, keeping just below the warm surface water. It was funny how much fun it was to swim underwater and how little fun there was in plain swimming. It was fun to swim on the surface in the ocean. That was the buoyancy. But there was the taste of the brine and the way it made you thirsty. Fresh water was better. Just like this on a hot night. He came up for air just under the projecting edge of the dock and climbed up the ladder.

"Oh, dive, Wemedge, will you?" Kate said. "Do a good dive." They were sitting together on the dock leaning back against one of the big piles. "Do a noiseless one, Wemedge," Odgar said. "All right."

Nick, dripping, walked out on the springboard, remembering how to do the dive. Odgar and Kate watched him, black in the dark, standing at the end of the board, poise and dive as he had learned from watching a sea otter. In the water as he turned to come up to the air Nick thought, Gosh, if I could only have Kate down here. He came up in a rush to the surface, feeling water in his eyes and ears. He must have started to take a breath.

"It was perfect. Absolutely perfect," Kate shouted from the dock. Nick came up the ladder. "Where are the men?" he asked. "They're swimming way out in the bay," Odgar said.

Nick lay down on the dock beside Kate and Odgar. He could hear the Ghee and Bill swimming way out in the dark. "You're the most wonderful diver, Wemedge," Kate said, touching his back with her foot. Nick tightened under the contact. "No," he said. "You're a wonder, Wemedge," Odgar said.

"Nope," Nick said. He was thinking, thinking if it was possible to be with somebody underwater, he could hold his breath three minutes, against the sand on the bottom, they could float up together, take a breath and go down, it was easy to sink if you knew how. He had once drunk a bottle of milk and peeled and eaten a banana underwater to show off, had to have weights, though, to hold him down, if there was a ring at the bottom, something he could get his arm through, he could do it all right.

Gee, how it would be, you couldn't ever get a girl though, a girl couldn't go through with it, she'd swallow water, it would drown Kate, Kate wasn't really any good underwater, he wished there was a girl like that, maybe he'd get a girl like that, probably never, there wasn't anybody but him that was that way underwater. Swimmers, hell, swimmers were slobs, nobody knew about the water but him, there was a fellow up at Evanston that could hold his breath six minutes but he was crazy. He wished he was a fish, no he didn't. He laughed.

"What's the joke, Wemedge?" Odgar said in his husky, near-to-Kate voice. "I wished I was a fish," Nick said. "That's a good joke," said Odgar. "Sure," said Nick. "Don't be an ass, Wemedge," said Kate.

"Would you like to be a fish, Butstein?" he said, lying with his head on the planks, facing away from them.

"No," said Kate. "Not tonight."

Nick pressed his back hard against her foot.

"What animal would you like to be, Odgar?" Nick said.

"J. P. Morgan," Odgar said.

"You're nice, Odgar," Kate said. Nick felt Odgar glow.

"I'd like to be Wemedge," Kate said.

"You could always be Mrs. Wemedge," Odgar said.

"There isn't going to be any Mrs. Wemedge," Nick said. He tightened his back muscles. Kate had both her legs stretched out against his back as though she were resting them on a log in front of a fire.

"Don't be too sure," Odgar said.

"I'm awful sure," Nick said. "I'm going to marry a mermaid."

"She'd be Mrs. Wemedge," Kate said.

"No she wouldn't," Nick said. "I wouldn't let her."

"How would you stop her?"

"I'd stop her all right. Just let her try it."

"Mermaids don't marry," Kate said.

"That'd be all right with me," Nick said.

"The Mann Act would get you," said Odgar.

"We'd stay outside the four-mile limit," Nick said. "We'd get food from the rumrunners. You could get a diving suit and come and visit us, Odgar. Bring Butstein if she wants to come. We'll be at home every Thursday afternoon."

"What are we going to do tomorrow?" Odgar said, his voice becoming husky, near to Kate again.

"Oh, hell, let's not talk about tomorrow," Nick said. "Let's talk about my mermaid."

"We're through with your mermaid."

"All right," Nick said. "You and Odgar go and talk. I'm going to think about her."

"You're immoral, Wemedge. You're disgustingly immoral."

"No, I'm not. I'm honest." Then, lying with his eyes shut, he said,

"Don't bother me. I'm thinking about her."

He lay there thinking of his mermaid while Kate's insteps pressed against his back and she and Odgar talked.

Odgar and Kate talked but he did not hear them. He lay, no longer thinking, quite happy.

Bill and the Ghee had come out of the water farther down the shore, walked down the beach up to the car and then backed it out onto the dock. Nick stood up and put on his clothes. Bill and the Ghee were in the front seat, tired from the long swim. Nick got in behind with Kate and Odgar. They leaned back. Bill drove roaring up the hill and turned onto the main road. On the main highway Nick could see the lights of other cars up ahead, going out of sight, then blinding as they mounted a hill, blinking as they came near, then dimmed as Bill passed. The road was high along the shore of the lake.

Big cars out from Charlevoix, rich slobs riding behind their chauffeurs, came up and passed, hogging the road and not dimming their lights. They passed like railway trains. Bill flashed the spotlights on cars alongside

the road in the trees, making the occupants change their positions. Nobody passed Bill from behind, although a spotlight played on the back of their heads for some time until Bill drew away. Bill slowed, then turned abruptly onto the sandy road that ran up through the orchard to the farmhouse. The car, in low gear, moved steadily up through the orchard. Kate put her lips to Nick's ear.

"In about an hour, Wemedge," she said. Nick pressed his thigh hard against hers. The car circled at the top of the hill above the orchard and stopped in front of the house.

"Aunty's asleep. We've got to be quiet," Kate said.

"Good night, men," Bill whispered. "We'll stop by in the morning."

"Good night, Smith," whispered the Ghee. "Good night, Butstein."

"Good night, Ghee," Kate said.

Odgar was staying at the house.

"Good night, men," Nick said. "See you, Morgen."

"Night, Wemedge," Odgar said from the porch.

Nick and the Ghee walked down the road into the orchard. Nick reached up and took an apple from one of the Duchess trees. It was still green but he sucked the acid juice from the bite and spat out the pulp.

"You and the Bird took a long swim, Ghee," he said.

"Not so long, Wemedge," the Ghee answered.

They came out from the orchard past the mailbox onto the hard state highway. There was a cold mist in the hollow where the road crossed the creek. Nick stopped on the bridge.

"Come on, Wemedge," the Ghee said.

"All right," Nick agreed.

They went on up the hill to where the road turned into the grove of trees around the church. There were no lights in any of the houses they passed. Hortons Bay was asleep. No motor cars had passed them.

"I don't feel like turning in yet," Nick said.

"Want me to walk with you?"

"No, Ghee. Don't bother."

"All right."

"I'll walk up as far as the cottage with you," Nick said. They unhooked the screen door and went into the kitchen. Nick opened the meat safe and looked around.

"Want some of this, Ghee?" he said.

"I want a piece of pie," the Ghee said.

"So do I," Nick said. He wrapped up some fried chicken and two pieces of cherry pie in oiled paper from the top of the icebox.

"I'll take this with me," he said. The Ghee washed down his pie with a dipper full of water from the bucket.

"If you want anything to read. Ghee, get it out of my room," Nick said. The Ghee had been looking at the lunch Nick had wrapped up.

"Don't be a damn fool, Wemedge," he said.

"That's all right. Ghee."

"All right. Only don't be a damn fool," the Ghee said. He opened the screen door and went out across the grass to the cottage. Nick turned off the light and went out, hooking the screen door shut. He had the lunch wrapped up in a newspaper and crossed the wet grass, climbed the fence and went up the road through the town under the big elm trees, past the

last cluster of R.F.D. mailboxes at the crossroads and out onto the Charlevoix highway.

After crossing the creek he cut across a field, skirted the edge of the orchard, keeping to the edge of the clearing, and climbed the rail fence into the wood lot. In the center of the wood lot four hemlock trees grew close together. The ground was soft with pine needles and there was no dew. The wood lot had never been cut over and the forest floor was dry and warm without underbrush. Nick put the package of lunch by the base of one of the hemlocks and lay down to wait. He saw Kate coming through the trees in the dark but did not move. She did not see him and stood a moment, holding the two blankets in her arms. In the dark it looked like some enormous pregnancy. Nick was shocked. Then it was funny.

"Hello, Butstein," he said. She dropped the blankets.

"Oh, Wemedge. You shouldn't have frightened me like that. I was afraid you hadn't come."

"Dear Butstein," Nick said. He held her close against him, feeling her body against his, all the sweet body against his body. She pressed close against him.

"I love you so, Wemedge."

"Dear, dear old Butstein," Nick said.

They spread the blankets, Kate smoothing them flat.

"It was awfully dangerous to bring the blankets," Kate said.

"I know," Nick said. "Let's undress."

"Oh, Wemedge."

"It's more fun." They undressed sitting on the blankets. Nick was a little embarrassed to sit there like that.

"Do you like me with my clothes off, Wemedge?"

"Gee, let's get under," Nick said. They lay between the rough blankets. He was hot against her cool body, hunting for it, then it was all right.

"Is it all right?"

Kate pressed all the way up for answer.

"Is it fun?"

"Oh, Wemedge. I've wanted it so. I've needed it so."

They lay together in the blankets. Wemedge slid his head down, his nose touching along the line of the neck, down between her breasts. It was like piano keys.

"You smell so cool," he said.

He touched one of her small breasts with his lips gently. It came alive between his lips, his tongue pressing against it. He felt the whole feeling coming back again and, sliding his hands down, moved Kate over. He slid down and she fitted close in against him. She pressed tight in against the curve of his abdomen. She felt wonderful there. He searched, a little awkwardly, then found it. He put both hands over her breasts and held her to him. Nick kissed hard against her back. Kate's head dropped forward.

"Is it good this way?" he said.

"I love it. I love it. I love it. Oh, come, Wemedge. Please come. Come, come. Please, Wemedge. Please, please, Wemedge."

"There it is," Nick said.

He was suddenly conscious of the blanket rough against his bare body.

"Was I bad, Wemedge?" Kate said.

"No, you were good," Nick said. His mind was working very hard and clear. He saw everything very sharp and clear. "I'm hungry," he said. "I wish we could sleep here all night." Kate cuddled against him. "It would be swell," Nick said. "But we can't. You've got to get back to the house."
"I don't want to go," Kate said.

Nick stood up, a little wind blowing on his body. He pulled on his shirt and was glad to have it on. He put on his trousers and shoes. "You've got to get dressed, Stut," he said. She lay there, the blankets pulled over her head. "Just a minute," she said. Nick got the lunch from over the hemlock. He opened it up. "Come on, get dressed, Stut," he said.

"I don't want to," Kate said. "I'm going to sleep here all night." She sat up in the blankets. "Hand me those things, Wemedge."
Nick gave her the clothes. "I've just thought of it," Kate said. "If I sleep out here they'll just think that I'm an idiot and came out here with the blankets and it will be all right."
"You won't be comfortable," Nick said. "If I'm uncomfortable I'll go in."

"Let's eat before I have to go," Nick said. "I'll put something on," Kate said. They sat together and ate the fried chicken and each ate a piece of cherry pie. Nick stood up, then kneeled down and kissed Kate.

He came through the wet grass to the cottage and upstairs to his room, walking carefully not to creak. It was good to be in bed, sheets, stretching out full length, dipping his head in the pillow. Good in bed, comfortable, happy, fishing tomorrow, he prayed as he always prayed when he remembered it, for the family, himself, to be a great writer, Kate, the men, Odgar, for good fishing, poor old Odgar, poor old Odgar, sleeping up there at the cottage, maybe not fishing, maybe not sleeping all night. Still there wasn't anything you could do, not a thing.

The End