

HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS

Written by

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Based on the short story by
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BLACK - UNKNOWN

Footsteps on a wooden floorboard. They're old. They creak.

One is heavy and purposeful, one can barely be heard shuffling quickly to keep up.

The shuffling stops, the wind is heard.

GIRL
What's that?

MAN
What's what?

GIRL
It says something on the side.

MAN
Hang on. Keep up.

GIRL
Which is it?

The heavy footsteps stop.

MAN
What?

EXT.- TRAIN STATION- DAY

A girl in a flower dress stands opposite of a man in blue jeans and a smart plaid button down, not tucked. They are at a standstill.

It is bright and hot and dry. The middle of nowhere, but that's exactly where they deserve to be.

GIRL
'Hang on' implies you're coming back here, 'keep up' implies I am coming over there. So which is it? What do you want me to do?

MAN
...

GIRL
Well?

MAN
...

A FLASH

The girl is in the shower, gripping the handicap bar. She is just leaning, and letting the water get colder and colder. It's better than getting out...

The man is making a racket, slamming cabinets and cursing. Clothes get mishandled and thrown, heavy footsteps cross back and forth across the dingy hotel room. The closer and louder the footsteps get, the more her hands tighten around the bar.

The local news blares the weather. Same as usual. Hot. Dry. Windy.

We never see her face, covered by wet hair. So we never see if she is crying... or cannot cry anymore.

The footsteps make it into the bathroom, as pill bottles get shuffled around.

MAN (CONT'D)
 (singing softly)
 'bongo bongo bongo I dont wanna
 leave the Congo, oh no no no no no'

Her head turns away from the tap to watch his shadows play on the wall.

MAN (CONT'D)
 (still singing)
 'Bingle Bangle Bungle I'm so happy
 in the jungle I refuse to go...'

The shadows look tribal in the florescent light.

The man hums the song. The shadow becomes menacing, getting closer.

The man reaches through the curtain and turns off the tap.

MAN (CONT'D)
 Ready?

GIRL
 Uh huh.

The shadow moves away.

MAN
 (still singing)
 'That no matter how they coax
 him...'

EXT. - TRAIN STATION-DAY

A small sound escapes with the last of her will to fight this one.

The man turns and continues to walk. She looks after him before following him out of frame.

EXT. - TRAIN STATION-DAY

The hills glint off the light of the sun. The weatherman was right.

The station itself is plain, almost like time had forgotten it somehow. There is a small platform next to the track with a few benches and some outdoor tables at the far end, leading to the entrance of a makeshift bar/cafe. They only sell coffee, light snacks, and basic booze, but mostly the staff drinks it.

The Girl looks at the hills as she walks. They are round and white. She turns her head side to side as she walks... trying to place what they remind her of.

She stops right before she walks into the Man, who is looking at her with a sly smile. Depending on the angle, it could be kind or menacing.

MAN

Let's sit.

Not a question.

EXT- TRAIN STATION BAR TABLE- DAY

They sit at a table outside the bar. A radio is playing 50's music with a bright tempo, but if you listen to the lyrics too closely... it might be a warning.

The Girl moves around the Man to get to her seat, and catches sight of an old man smoking and reading a paper on a bench positioned at the end. He merely turned the page, not seeing her.

The Man takes the seat opposite her.

A Waitress comes up behind her, big and curvy, exotic looking. She pulls a pad and pen out of her apron, but will not write on it. It's ceremony she performs religiously.

The Girl looks at the hills instead.

OFFSCREEN

WAITRESS

Yes?

MAN

Dos cervezas,

WAITRESS

Big ones?

MAN

Yes big ones.

The Waitress walks away and back through a beaded curtain, it jingles with the movement like the roll of a thousand dice.

The man hums offscreen to the radio offscreen.

The Waitress returns with two beers and two felt pads. As she leans over the table to serve the Man, her breasts take over a majority of the frame, not intentionally, just... they are in the way. But we can still see enough of the Girl adjusting to get out of the way.

WAITRESS

Anything else?

MAN

(yes)

Not yet.

WAITRESS

Alright.

She returns back through the beaded curtain without stopping.

The Girl takes a small sip of her beer. The glass is the size of her face.

Silence.

Suddenly she figures it out.

GIRL

They look like white elephants.

The Man follows her gaze.

MAN

I've 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.

The Girl looks at the Man.

GIRL

But have you?

The Man drops his gaze and drinks.

MAN

Anis del Toro.

GIRL

What?

MAN

That's what the sign said. 'Anis
del Toro.' It's a drink.

GIRL

Can we try it?

The Man thinks.

MAN

Can't hurt anymore.
(to Waitress)
Excuse me.

The beads rustle.

MAN (CONT'D)

Two Anis del Toros.

WAITRESS

With water?

MAN

(to Girl)
Do you want it with water?

GIRL

(to Man)
I don't know, is it good with
water?

MAN

(to Waitress)
It's good with water?

WAITRESS

Yes.

MAN

Then two with water.

The beads rustle with the exit. The dice rolls again.

The radio keeps playing.

MAN (CONT'D)

Let's try and have a good time.

GIRL

I am trying. I said the mountains look like white elephants.

MAN

Yes you did.

GIRL

I wanted to try this new drink. That's what we do. Look at things and try new drinks.

MAN

Cut it out.

GIRL

You started it.

MAN

The beer is nice and cool.

GIRL

Yes it is.

The Waitress returns with the absinthe,, again tits blocking frame for the briefest moment. We see her pull an empty beer glass from in front of the Man. The Girl has barely drank half of hers.

MAN

It was so simple, Jig. It wasn't really an operation at all. It wasn't really anything. Think of it as just letting the air in.

The Girl, Jig, takes a sip of the absinthe. The joy of the new discovery is muffled, like trying to hear underwater.

JIG

It tastes like licorice.

MAN

That's the way with everything.

JIG

Everything tastes like licorice?

MAN

Didn't I say I would stay with you the whole time? And I did, didn't I. They let the air in and it's perfectly normal.

JIG

And now? After?

MAN

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

JIG

What makes you think so?

The Man takes a frustrated sip, and slams the glass down.

MAN

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

Jig takes a string of beads and intertwines them in her fingers. She looks up to see the old man glancing at her, smoke rising from the tip of his cigarette.

JIG

Do you think we will be happy?

MAN

I know we'll be happy. You don't have to be afraid. I've known lots of women who have done it.

Jig keeps looking at the old man surrounded by twirling smoke. The Man has definitely known women who have... done it.

JIG

Just because you say so...

MAN

What?

He heard her. He is daring her to finish the sentence.

JIG

So have I. And they were all so happy.

MAN

If you didn't want to, you didn't have to. But I knew how simple it was. I'm happy you trusted me.

JIG

And you'll love me?

MAN

I love you now.

JIG

And when I say things like the hills are like white elephants, you'll like it?

MAN

I'll love it. But I can't when I'm stressed. You know that. It's stressful caring about you.

JIG

Well, I wouldn't want you to worry.

The Waitress returns with the beer for the Man, but this time we follow Jig moving to get out of her way as she looks at old man, trying to see what shapes the smoke is making.

JIG (CONT'D)

I didn't care about me.

The Waitress looks at her. Finally.

WAITRESS

Do you need something?

They share a moment. Two stuck women, in the middle of nowhere.

JIG

(yes)
Not yet.

MAN

Thanks you.

The Waitress walks to the beaded curtain, but we see her pause in the background before walking in. Even though we don't see her, she is never too far away from the door.

MAN (CONT'D)

I told you to cut it out.

JIG

They don't really look like white elephants... they look like... well...

A FLASH

A woman and man, naked, intertwined on a bed. The woman is on top, and we just glance at their torsos. The white skin creates curves that nearly look like...

The man flips them over and in haste his hand swipes the bedside table and knocks over the glass of water sitting there. With the shatter-

FLASH ENDS

EXT.- TRAIN STATION- DAY

We are back. She moves her feet under the table. The radio is faster paced for a dance party for no one.

JIG

...just the way their skin looks through the trees. We could have had everything.

MAN

We still can.

JIG

No.

MAN

Why not?

JIG

It isn't ours anymore.

MAN

You're talking crazy. More beer?

She still hasn't finished the first one.

MAN (CONT'D)

It'll be exactly as it was. Perfectly simple. We could get along.

JIG
Yes, you know it's perfectly
simple.

MAN
I do know. I wish you'd just trust
me.

JIG
Can you do something for me now?

MAN
(to Waitress)
Hey! Another beer for the lady
(to Jig)
Yes of course.

JIG
Would you please please please
please please please please stop
talking?

The Waitress returns as if she was waiting. She sets down the beer, and another felt coaster... very carefully, keeping the beer on top of it as she sets it down. Jig looks up at her.

The Waitress leaves through the curtain. The dice rolls again.

MAN
I don't want you to-

JIG
Dad-

MAN
I'd do anything for-

JIG
I'll scream.

Silence. She lifts the beer slightly, notices something, then lowers it quickly back on the coaster.

The Waitress pokes her head out and calls down the platform.

WAITRESS
The train will be arriving in a few
minutes. Come close your tabs.

She disappears.

The Man gets up, his chair scraping the floor, it's cringing.

MAN

I'll go pay then.

He disappears inside, the curtain's rustle is almost violent. One string breaks, and the beads drop everywhere and we follow one as it rolls across the platform towards the edge.

A pair of dainty fingers picks it up. Jig crouches at the edge of the platform, and holds the bead up to the light. She closes one eye to line it up with a hill.

JIG

I could have all this... and
everyday makes it more impossible.

Footsteps get closer to her and she prepares for the inevitable. She looks up-

The radio is now playing a crooning tune: 'It's all over but the crying.'

The old man is standing on the opposite side of a support beam, still smoking, and watching her. There is enough space for it not to be threatening.

There is a sound of male grunting from behind the beaded curtain, barely drowned out by the radio still crooning.

Jig stands, her hands high towards her chest, her shoulders raised and tense. She glances at the beaded curtain for her dad. Nothing. But she remains still, and moves her eyes back to the man.

He takes a small step toward her, and pulls out a cigarette from his pocket. Without breaking eye contact, he lights it on his cigarette, and hands it to her.

She takes it.

She puts it to her lips.

They both breath in.

They both exhale.

The smoke intertwines.

She gives a breathless laugh, but it is real.

OLD MAN ERNEST

Do you feel better?

He is like a grandfather, or that magic uncle from the Nutcracker, giving a young girl a priceless gift.

JIG

I feel fine. There's nothing wrong
with me. I feel fine.

He nods, stamps out his cigarette, and walks back to his bench to read the paper.

She watches him, and sees the train in the distance.

She takes another drag of the cigarette, and lifts her left hand that has been holding the coaster this whole time. She reads it. But we don't.

The camera swings away from the train as she reads it. A taxi pulls up on the right side of the platform.

The train whistles, and she whips her head to the left.

She is running out of time. The waitress bought her time, "taking" her dad's bait, but a train whistle will rush even him.

She looks toward the waiting taxi, and takes a drag.

The wind rustles her dress as she looks out onto the hills. Hills like white elephants.

The camera catches the hem of her dress in the breeze, and the amber glow of ash as she drops the cigarette, stamps it out with her left foot, and exits to the right, toward the running taxi.

The crooning radio swells as the camera pulls back through the curtain to reveal the empty platform.

'It's aaaaaalllllll over.... But the cryyyyyyying'

We see the hills in all their glory.

'And I caaaaaaan't get over.....cryyyyyyyiiiiing oveeeerrr youuuuuuuuuuu'

The train whistles as Jig's father yells after her.

[The car starts as we cut to BLACK]