

HEMINGWAY  
IN LOVE

• HIS OWN STORY •

*A Memoir by*

A. E. Hotchner

PICADOR

PART ONE

A Room at  
St. Mary's Hospital

In the beginning of June 1961, on my way back to New York from Hollywood, I took a flight that stopped in Minneapolis. From there, I rented a car and drove ninety miles to St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester. For the second time, my close friend—Ernest Hemingway—was a patient in its psychiatric section, under the care of doctors from the nearby Mayo Clinic. I had previously visited him there during his first confinement, on my way to Hollywood several weeks earlier.

For the past six weeks, Ernest had not been allowed to make or receive phone calls or to have visitors, not even his wife, Mary, while he was undergoing a series of ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) treatments. Now, during a respite before continuing with another series

of ECTs, his Mayo Clinic doctors permitted him to phone me and arrange for a visit.

The Mayo Clinic itself had no hospital facilities; an affiliation existed, however, with Rochester's St. Mary's Hospital, run by an energetic order of nuns, who allowed the clinic's doctors to treat patients they hospitalized there.

Back then, electric shock was brutally administered, the electric current projected into the patient's brain without benefit of an anesthetic, a piece of wood clenched between his teeth as he writhed in torturous pain. The Mayo doctors had diagnosed Ernest as suffering from a depressive persecutory condition and had prescribed the ECTs in an attempt to diminish it.

There had been many conjectural explanations at the time for his downturn: that he had terminal cancer or money problems; that he had quarreled with Mary. None was true. As his intimate friends knew, he had been suffering from depression and paranoia for the past year of his life, but the roots of this suffering had not been uncovered, if, indeed, they ever would be. I had tried to reason with him, attempting to help him overcome some of his destructive phobias, but the little progress we made turned out to be deceptively temporary. I had also tried to get him away from his destructive environment by arranging an extensive tour

of all those fishing places around the world he had always coveted, but on the eve of departure, he backed off. And when Mary urged him to see a psychiatrist, he said hell no, he already had a psychiatrist, his Corona typewriter.

Ernest and I saw each other often during the thirteen years of our friendship. I dramatized many of his stories and novels for television specials, theater, and movies. We shared adventures in France, Italy, Cuba, Mexico, and Spain. The summer before the onset of his delusions, Ernest and I had enjoyed a glorious bullfighting tour of the many cities in Spain where the *mano a mano* competitions between Spain's reigning matadors—the brothers-in-law Antonio Ordóñez and Luis Miguel Dominguín—were staged (the deadly *mano a mano* combat between two competing matadors instead of the usual three). In one of those cities, Ciudad Real, Antonio dressed me in one of his matador get-ups, assigned "El Pecas" (The Freckled One) as my name, and Ernest induced me to go into the bullring as *sobre-saliente* (a third matador who fights the bull only if the two matadors on the bill are gored and disabled) for these great matadors, while he posed as my manager. As *sobre-saliente*, I had to make one obligatory pass for the crowd,

but Ernest told me to stick close to Antonio, who helped me bring it off by imperceptibly enticing the bull to charge him.

Ernest's zest for life was infectious.

In July of 1959, we had celebrated Ernest's sixtieth birthday in Churriana, a village in the hills above Málaga, with a wonderful party that lasted two days. Mary Hemingway, who was Ernest's fourth wife, pulled out all the stops on this one. She felt that Ernest's previous birthdays, because of his lack of cooperation, had always been observed with a pause rather than a celebration, and she was determined to make up for all the lost parties with this one. She succeeded.

There was champagne from Paris, Chinese food from London, *bacalao à la Vizcaína* (a Basque-style codfish stew) from Madrid, a shooting booth from a traveling carnival, a fireworks expert from Valencia (the citadel of fireworks), flamenco dancers from Málaga, and musicians from Torremolinos. Celebrants came from all over and included the Maharajah of Jaipur with his maharani and son; the Maharajah of Cooch Behar with his maharani; Gen. C. P. "Buck" Lanham from Washington, D.C. (he commanded the troops in the Hürtgen Forest battle, which Ernest joined ex officio, in World War II); Ambassador and Mrs. David Bruce, who flew

down from Bonn; various Madrid notables; and many of Ernest's old Paris pals.

Ernest thoroughly enjoyed himself. At the shooting booth, he used a decrepit old rifle to shoot cigarette butts from the lips of both the Maharajah of Cooch Behar and Antonio Ordóñez, Spain's numero uno matador. He led a conga line around the grounds and delighted in opening his mound of presents and holding them up for all to see.

The highlight of the party occurred when the firecracker wizard from Valencia fired a salvo of giant rockets, which landed in the top of a royal palm tree near the house and set the treetop on fire. The Málaga fire department was alerted, and the hook and ladder that arrived was straight out of a Mack Sennett comedy, as were the firemen. They scaled the tree and extinguished the blaze, and then Ernest immediately assimilated them into the party. For the rest of the night, Ernest wore the fire chief's metal hat; Antonio appropriated the fire engine and raced around the grounds, with Ernest beside him and the siren blaring.

The end of that summer was the last of the good times.

Over the following year, I witnessed rather abrupt and puzzling changes in Ernest's demeanor: his tortured

inability to condense *The Dangerous Summer* for *Life* magazine; for the first time since he lived there, not participating in the annual pheasant shoot near his home in Ketchum, Idaho; his sudden insistence that fields he had always hunted were now off-limits. As his paranoia deepened, he became convinced that his car and house were being bugged by the FBI and that IRS agents were auditing his bank account.

On my last visit to Ketchum, Mary, Ernest, and I went to dinner the night before I left. Halfway through the meal, Ernest, who seemed to be enjoying himself, suddenly grew tense and whispered that we had to leave the restaurant immediately. Mary asked what was wrong.

“Those two FBI agents at the bar, that’s what’s wrong.”

Later that night, Mary pulled me aside. She was terribly distraught. Ernest spent hours every day with the manuscript of his Paris pieces, trying to write but unable to do more than turn its pages. He often spoke of destroying himself and would sometimes stand at the gun rack holding one of his guns and staring out the window. After much prodding, his Ketchum doctor induced him to enter, under an assumed name, the psychiatric section of St. Mary’s, where his Mayo doctors performed a series of ECTs.

He called me from the hall phone outside his room.



He sounded in control, but his voice held a forced heartiness that didn't belong there. His delusions had not changed or diminished: His room was bugged; his phone was tapped; he suspected that one of the interns was a fed. I had hoped his treatment would make him less fixated on his catalog of injustices, but, unfortunately, the phone call demonstrated that, if anything, they had intensified.

After he had undergone the series of ECTs, along with many sessions with the psychiatrists, I visited him for the first time, on my way out to Hollywood, again hoping he would be less pursued by his delusions; but, no, the same obsessions haunted him.

Inconceivably, Ernest was released by the Mayo doctors soon after my visit. He called me in Hollywood to say how delighted he was to be home in Ketchum and back at work. He had gone hunting the day after his return, he said, and there were eight mallards and two teals now hanging over the woodpile outside the kitchen window.

His bonhomie was short-lived, however. His old trepidations soon found their way back and, in fact, intensified. He twice attempted suicide with a gun from his vestibule rack and was stopped only by vigorous physical intervention. During a return flight to St. Mary's, though heavily sedated, he struggled to jump from the

plane. When it stopped in Caspar, Wyoming, for repairs, he tried to walk into a moving propeller.

As I reached the outskirts of Rochester in my rented Chevy on that June day in 1961, I was feeling anxious about Ernest's condition. I hoped the latest round of ECTs, along with accelerated sessions with the Mayo psychiatrists, had eliminated Ernest's phobias, or at least reduced their hold on him.

I checked into my hotel and went directly to the hospital. The head nurse opened Ernest's door for me with her key, a foreboding. The room was small, but it had a large window that admitted abundant sunshine. There were no flowers and the walls were bare. On a table beside the bed were three stacked books, and next to the table was a straight-backed metal chair. There were metal bars horizontally across the window.

Ernest was facing the window, his back to the door, standing at a hospital table that had been raised to serve him as a desk. He was wearing his old red woolen bathrobe (christened by Mary the "Emperor's Robe"), which was secured with a worn leather belt that had a large buckle embossed "*Gott Mit Uns*," a belt he had liberated from a dead German soldier during World War II's battle of Hürtgen Forest. He wore his favorite scuffed Indian

moccasins and a soiled white tennis visor over his eyes. His beard was scraggly and he seemed to have lost quite a bit of weight.

“Mr. Hemingway, your guest is here,” the nurse said.

Ernest turned; the startled look on his face held for a moment and then faded into a broad smile as he connected with me. He came to greet me, pulling off his visor as we wrapped our arms around each other Spanish-style and thumped each other’s backs. He was genuinely glad I had come. He appeared attenuated, as if the man he once was had disappeared and the man before me was only a marker to show who he had been.

“Well, Hotch,” he said, “welcome to Never Never Land, where they frisk you and lock the door on you and don’t have the decency to trust you with a blunt instrument.”

The nurse was standing in the doorway.

“Nurse Susan,” Ernest said, introducing me, “this is El Pecos, the famous matador. Pecos, this is Susan who holds the key to my heart.”

That got a laugh out of both of us.

I gave her a tin of caviar I had brought for Ernest, to keep in the refrigerator.

Ernest and I sat for a while, he on the bed, me on the chair, and at first he sounded like he was back on solid ground, but to my dismay, he began to lapse into

a repetition of his old miseries: the room was bugged, also the telephone outside the door; poverty complaints; accusations against his banker, his lawyer, his doctor in Ketchum, all the fiduciary people in his life; worries about not having proper clothes; distraught over imagined taxes. There was much repetition.

I stood up, intent on directing him away from the same grievances that had assailed him when I had visited him during his previous confinement. The ECTs obviously hadn't affected them. I walked over to the table and asked him what he was working on.

"Paris."

He was referring to his impressions of Paris and of some of the people he knew when he first went to live there with his first wife, Hadley, back in the early twenties.

"How's it going?"

"That's the worst of it. I can't finish the book. I *can't*. I've been at this damn table day after day after day after day. All I need is . . . maybe a sentence, maybe more, I don't know, and I can't get it. Not any of it, you understand? I've written Scribner to scratch the book. It was all set for the fall, but I had to scratch it."

I asked him if these were the sketches from the Ritz trunk, the ones I had read.

He said they were, plus a final new one, which mattered most.

“But those sketches,” I said, “as wonderful about Paris as anyone can hope to write.”

On one of our trips to Paris, when we were staying at the Ritz (the time our Hemhotch syndicate won a steeplechase race at Auteuil that paid 27-1), we had lunch one day with Charles Ritz, who had succeeded his father, César. Charles informed Ernest that in redoing the hotel’s storage area, they had recently discovered a Louis Vuitton trunk that Ernest had stored there in the thirties. It was a trunk that Vuitton himself had made for Ernest, and he was delighted to see it come back to him. We opened it in Charles’s office, and among other things inside, there were a number of schoolboy blue notebooks in which Ernest had written about Paris in the twenties and the people he knew during his early years there. Ernest had given me the sketches to read; they were exquisite, poetic, penetrating, callous, timeless, like no one had ever written about Paris and the fascinating people of the twenties who were Ernest’s contemporaries.

There was a rap on the door and nurse Susan came in. She said that Ernest’s doctor wanted him for some tests but that he wouldn’t be long. Ernest took a sheaf of papers from his improvised desk and handed them to

me to read until he came back. He said this was a chapter I hadn't read, the one that would conclude the book, the one that had to count.

I pulled the chair over to the window and began to read the handwritten sketch that Ernest had left with me. Entitled "There Is Never Any End to Paris," it was different from the other sketches I had read that time at the Ritz, sketches that concentrated on Paris neighborhoods and the people Ernest had known back then: Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach (an American-born bookseller and publisher), Ford Madox Ford, Ezra Pound, Scott Fitzgerald among them. This sketch I was now reading was obviously intended to be the book's finale; what made it different was that this one was written both as a tribute to his struggling but wonderful early years in Paris and as a lament for how it turned out for him, and what had caused it.

Overall, it was a fervid declaration of love directed toward his first wife, Hadley, the memory of her in their fourth-floor walk-up on Rue Cardinal-Lemoine, and then where they had lived with their infant son, Bumby, at 113 Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, on the second floor, above a sawmill in the courtyard, and how, wrapped in sweaters, Hadley had played on an old piano Ernest

had rented for her in the frigid basement of the local patisserie.

In the sketch, Ernest also reveled in his skiing adventures with Hadley: Schruns in the Voralberg in Austria, where they both learned to ski and where the rooms at the Taube Inn had big windows, big beds with good blankets and feather coverlets, and served splendid breakfasts with big cups of coffee, fresh bread and fruit preserves, eggs, and good ham; the Madlenerhaus, the beautiful old inn where they slept close together in a big bed under a feather quilt, the window open and the stars close.

Halfway through the sketch, however, Ernest veered off the romantic early years with Hadley, when they were very poor but happy, to describe what happened to their idyllic life when the rich people appeared, led by a pilot fish, neither the rich nor the pilot fish identified. When there are two people who love each other, Ernest wrote, the rich are attracted to them but that he and Hadley were naifs who did not know how to protect themselves. Charmed by these rich, Ernest admitted he was as stupid as a bird dog who goes out with anyone with a gun.

And, most important, there was another of the rich, an unmarried woman who coveted Ernest and befriended Hadley as a means of infiltrating their lives

and breaking up their marriage. Ernest confessed that he had been seduced by the simultaneous attention of these two women and that he had the bad luck of being in love with both of them.

Before he ended his life, it was important to him that his final words explain the self-inflicted pain of letting the only true love of his life slip away. The tragedy of having loved two women at the same time had bedeviled him all his life. It was after he had a near-death experience in a plane crash that he decided to relive those perilous days that had consumed him back in the twenties, when he initially went to Paris, diluting the pleasure of the publication of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Ernest relived those years by describing them to me, and in the telling he found some measure of closure. But over the years of his life, it was an irreparable tragedy, one that he was never able to overcome, not through fame or plaudits or the profits of genius.

I had read the chapter twice and let it settle in while Ernest was meeting with his doctor. In his summing up of his Paris years—the people, the places, the reversals, the triumphs, the fulfillments, the disappointments, the redolent recollections of life with Hadley—I was surprised he had omitted so many telltale revelations, like the one-hundred-day suspension of his marriage, which he had once told me about. It may be that his persecuted



mind and his dire struggle to write precluded a full accounting, or perhaps he had intended that I be the custodian of his account of the tragic fallout of loving two women at the same time, the debacle from which he never extricated himself.

There was a rap on the door and nurse Susan came in to tell me the blood pressure tests were going to be a while longer and that if I preferred to wait in the lounge, where it was more comfortable, she'd come to get me. I told her I'd rather wait where I was.

So sitting there at the window with the final chapter in my lap, I began to think about the plane crash—in fact, the two crashes—that led me to meet up with Ernest at the Gritti Palace Hotel in Venice in 1954.