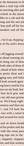
Ernest Hemingway

My Old Man

Thomas Hotchner's last story, "My Old Man," is his unpublished, possible sixth novel, based on Ernest Hemingway's life in Paris.



Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway

MY OLD MAN

PARIS, 1926 It was my old man was on the outs with the racing people and he had a bet on a sure thing and I was to place it for him at a track I had never been to before. I was a boy of fourteen and he was sitting on the steps with a bottle of wine between his knees when I left the apartment on the Quai de Bethune and he told me where to go and what to say. He was a big man with a red face and he was sitting there in his shirt with his suspenders down and his hat pushed back on his head and he was drinking the wine and he was in a good humor when I left him. He was a great jockey in his time and he had ridden in the Grand Prix de Paris and he had ridden in the Grand Prix de Vienna. He was a little too heavy now and he was sitting there in his shirt with his suspenders down and his hat on his head and he was drinking the wine and he was in a good humor when I left him.

I was a boy then and I was small for my age and I wore a cap out of the pocket and my shoes tapped on the pavement as I walked along the Quai de Bethune and I was carrying the bet in my head and I was going cheerfully, happy that my dad was in a good humor and I was carrying the bet in my head and I was going to place it for him. It was a long way to the track and I was going to take the Metro to the Porte d'Auteuil and then I was going to have to walk a long way but I was in no hurry. I was carrying the bet in my head and I was in no hurry and I was going cheerfully and I was carrying the bet in my head.

I was in no hurry but I was working out in the bet and I was with the horses. The man who had given me the bet was a friend of my dad's. He had been with my dad in the war and he was a big man with a red face and he had blue eyes and he was big and he was a friend of my dad's. He had been with my dad in the war and he was a friend of my dad's and I was carrying the bet in my head and I was going to place it for him.

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My old man was dead when they brought him in and while a doctor was listening to his heart with a thing plugged in his ears I heard a shot up the track that meant they'd killed Gillford. I lay down beside my old man when they carried the stretcher into the hospital room and hung onto the stretcher and cried and cried and he looked so white and gone and so awfully dead and I couldn't help feeling that if my old man was dead maybe they didn't need to have shot Gillford. His hoof might have got well. I don't know. I loved my old man so much.

Then a couple of guys came in and one of them patted me on the back and then went over and looked at my old man and then pulled a sheet off the cot and and spread it over him ; and the other was telephoning in French for them to send the ambulance to take him out to Maisons. And I couldn't stop crying, crying and choking, sort of, and George Gardner came in and sat down beside me on the floor and put his arm around me and says, « Come on Joe old boy. Get up and we'll go out and wait for the ambulance. »

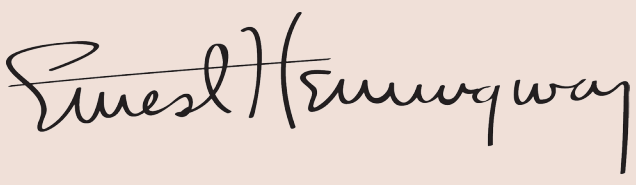
George and I went out to the gate and I was trying to stop bawling and George wiped off my face with his handkerchief and we were standing back a little ways while the crowd was going out of the gate and a couple of guys stopped near us while we were waiting for the crowd to get through the gate and one of them was counting a bunch of *mutuel* tickets and he said, « Well Butler got his all right. »

The other guy said, « I don't give a good goddam if he did, the crook. He had it coming to him on the stuff he's pulled. »

« I'll say he had, » said the other guy and tore the bunch of tickets in two.

And George Gardner looked at me to see if I'd heard and I had all right and he said, « Don't you listen to what those bums said, Joe. Your old man was one swell guy. »

But I don't know. Seems like when they get started they don't leave a guy nothing.



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