

JIM BARNES

*What They Lost*

They crossed the Seine at pont Solferino just as the sun dropped down into clouds that presaged rain. They had spent most of the day in the shops of Palais Royal, not so much shopping as browsing, although they did buy a few very old picture postcards and a French flag from the medallion boutique. Now they were going to their favorite cafe in the heart of the Latin Quarter where they knew Ahmed was just beginning to prepare the *brochette de mouton* for the spits and the couscous for the pots. They turned down rue de l'Université which, they knew, would become rue Jacob, and maybe this time they would locate Hemingway and Hadley's apartment. Musée d'Orsay was dark against the sky, but the little tabac opposite was brightly lit, and Carolina reminded James that he really ought to allow himself a package of Café Creme *blond* since he loved to have an occasional cigar when they were in Paris.

—I really shouldn't, he said.

—Oh, please, go on. You've quit anyway, she said.

They stepped inside. A few customers were drinking wine or coffee. The proprietress handed James the little cigars in their standard blondish tin. A block down the street, James felt his coat pocket. His wallet was not there. He remembered putting it there, or was it the tin he put there? Could he have missed his overcoat's breast pocket? Or perhaps he left his wallet at the counter? He raced back to the tabac passing the one customer who had entered just behind them. Carolina searched along the sidewalk back to the tabac. The proprietress lifted her hands in innocence when James asked about the wallet. He thought he could read guilt on her face. Then he remembered the customer and hurried out the door. The figure had disappeared around a corner. The *chinoise*, he thought, she had, now that he thought of it, seemed reluctant to pass them on the sidewalk as if she were threatened. Either the proprietress or the *chinoise*, but what to do?

—What can we do? Carolina was nearly frantic.

—There is nothing, James replied. If they have it then they have it.

—How much did you bring?

—All of it.

—All.

—Yes, the francs and the Deutschmarks.

—Oh, my god what will we do? Let's go back and look. Could we call the police?

—That would only add insult to injury. They would laugh at us. The streets of Paris keep what you give them.

—But our days here and then the three months in Germany, what can we do? It's so discouraging. You should not have carried the money. The hotel has a safe, you know that.

James nodded. Yes, he should not have carried all their cash. It had been foolish. He couldn't explain it. He had put the French francs in one compartment and the marks in another. Someone is very happy today, with a fistful of notes, he thought. Carolina began to cry softly.

—Oh, how could you, she said. How could you be so careless?

He tried to soothe her, telling her not to worry, that they had the credit cards and the check book and the Paris American Express office was only a few meters from their hotel. Getting cash was not a problem. The problem was that they had planned to spend the cash any way they wished. Now they would have to watch their budget carefully. There could not be many extras, that was for sure.

By the time they reached rue du Bac, Carolina was weak with worry. James tried to calm her and decided that they should stop on St.-Germain at Café de Flore for coffee. It was after all a cold night. In a few short days, the century would be gone. The preparatory celebrations of the night before had left Paris calm and tired and a little colder than normal, due in part to the great wind storm of a few nights earlier. James and Carolina had heard of it on the network news in the States just before they left and had seen clips of the ravaged woods of Versailles. Paris had gone dark for hours. But that was days ago and they were glad to be here in the city they loved. It is just that they had had money to spend *recklessly* and now they had none.

The terrace at Café de Flore was overflowing with tourists. James and Carolina climbed the stairs to the *premier étage*. There were only a few customers there, solitaries who had letters to write or journal entries to make. They had been taking *les expresses* at the cafe ever

since their first visit to the city those long years ago. The price was ridiculously inflated, but the bathrooms were always clean and the tables bright. You were always glad to pay for the privilege of being there.

They couldn't get the loss out of their minds. It must mean something. An omen perhaps. Of what the new millennium would be, one of darkness and poverty. So many things ran through their heads. Would they still get to go to Baden-Baden to look into the Youssoupov problem? On the wall above their table, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Dali, and others looked down on them. Carolina said they were frowning in disapproval, as if to say: —What a waste!

—How should others feel, having just lost the equivalent of 2000 dollars in cash on the streets of Paris? Carolina wanted to know. James could not tell her, for he had never known anyone to have lost hard cash on any street. Cash on gambling, yes. Cash on faulty products, yes, often. But good hard cash in hand dropped or left, no. He had never heard of anyone who had lost that. He had been so careful with the money wallet. He had only the money and a business card in it. The passports, the credit cards, and his driver's license were tucked away safely in the front pocket of his trousers. It was, now that he thought of it, as if he had been planning to lose the money.

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On New Year's Eve the Ferris wheel on Concorde glowed even more intensely in its fierce white light. The crowd was immense: from the Arche to Concorde there was a constantly flowing mass. James watched as Carolina tried to focus the tiny Olympus to the point where it would be possible to capture all the lights of the Ferris wheel and also of the Tour Eiffel across the river. He had tried and it had been too tedious for him. That, together with the memory of his stupidity, was causing him pain. He'd never lost *anything* before. With the beginning of the new millennium would there be a new him, a constant loser of things? And Carolina was still wondering how they would make it through the months. They were sure to want things. He knew he had to stop thinking about it.

—We're too close, Carolina said.

—What?

—We're too close to get the whole picture.

She began walking toward rue Rivoli. James took her arm, and they pressed their hips together against the cold. There were hundreds of onlookers directly beneath the giant wheel pressed tightly together and inching up for the ride. They made their way through and finally across the Place de la Concorde and stopped in front of the Crillon, where they had planned to have the millennium drinks and watch the fireworks at midnight. But that was before James had lost the money. Now they would have to have their drinks elsewhere. Three hundred francs was now an unreasonable price for two Amarettos straight up. They would go to the Ritz, the Hemingway Bar, which would be outrageously expensive, too, especially now on New Year's Eve. They would do it, nonetheless, for they knew the intimacy of the small bar would compensate for the expense whereas the Crillon's glitzy bar never could. And, besides, the last time they were in Paris there was a jolly group of Brits and Russians at the Ritz. Perhaps they could stop thinking about the money among those gathered there to see the old century end or the new one begin.

They walked across the Place Vendôme to the entrance of the Ritz. The doormen smiled and opened the way for them, even as if they were honored guests. Perhaps the doormen recognized them from the several years they had come there before. Though they had never stayed at the Ritz—they knew the prices were outrageously inflated and you could always get better lower if you knew where—they often had drinks at the Hemingway Bar. They made it a point always to enter the front of the Ritz, though the bar was more easily reached from the side street, just four or five steps inside.

Along the long hallway leading from the main parlor to the bar were displays of Paris' finest: Bvlgari rings and watches, Cartier necklaces, Lagerfeld evening gowns. All were behind glass so that the whole hallway was radiant with light. James and Carolina could not hear the murmur from the bar until they were at the door. The room was packed, and ribbons of confetti and paper hats were scattered about and here or there a paper whistle waiting to be blown at midnight. They made their way to one end of the bar, where one stool stood empty, just below the bespectacled bust of Papa. The spectacles, though not part of the sculpture, had been left behind by a drunken admirer years ago and had never been removed. Carolina was tempted to straighten them, but James reminded her that they

had always sat on the nose the same way, at least from the first time they had visited the bar those many years ago.

When they had grown accustomed to the dim light, they took stock of others about them. Most were very young and intent on drinking as much as they could. James and Carolina knew that they would soon be very sick. There was a group of a half dozen who, however, seemed to be having the kind of fun that good friends have on certain occasions. Among them was a young boy of about ten years of age. He was enjoying a large Coca-Cola and the company of a large balloon that kept rising each time the boy looked the other direction. He came over, bowed politely, and welcomed James and Carolina. His name was Jean-Pierre and he was with his maman and his papa. They lived in the Loire valley on a great estate and they were visiting their cousins in Paris for the holiday and he, Jean-Pierre, was being treated to the turn of the millennium because he would never see the old century again and after all he was not a child anymore. At midnight he would have a small sip of champagne, too. They asked him to join them and when he finished the Coca-Cola they bought him another to his great delight.

Shortly before midnight, the young revelers left, their noise following them like the wake of a bad dream, and the music from the old phonograph player sitting on a rickety table at the opposite end of the bar could be heard now and enjoyed. When the hour chimed, nothing could be heard of the howl and hubbub of the Eiffel Tower's exploding light nor of Concorde's million cheers. "Auld Lang Syne" ran smoothly around the room as the old record wobbled on to its melancholy but hopeful end, and Jean-Pierre had his sip of champagne from his private glass and blew gayly on a paper horn. James and Carolina embraced and promised each other that the next year would be better than the last, though the last had been good, except at the end when you know who had lost the mad money. They had never been rich, nor could they imagine what it must be like. James had been a professor of English literature at St. Paul University since receiving his Ph.D. some twenty years ago. Carolina had been one of his first advisees. They were married before she finished college, and as soon as she had her degree they bought a small house in the suburbs and traveled to Europe almost every year, sometimes for extended periods because of grants that James had been able to get. His writing, much more than his teaching, was responsible for the

grants though they were always small in terms of finance, and they had had problems getting by in Europe at first, until they became accustomed to ways of cutting costs. This trip, James had a grant from his university that would cover hotel and travel for the two of them during the Christmas and New Year's holidays, the break between the fall and spring semesters. When they reached Germany next week, James's stipend would be waiting for them and three carefree months in a castle, at Schloss Solitude. The lost cash had been put aside for *reckless* spending, *mad money* Carolina called it.

Jean-Pierre was practicing his English with Carolina's help. He would come to America one of these days, he said. He would speak good English and would go to the New York zoo and see the pandas and to Disneyland.

—My papa has promised, he said. He has the trust fund established and I am to go to America for university study. Perhaps I will see you in America. You would permit it?

—But Jean-Pierre, we live hundreds of kilometers from New York, in the Midwest.

—Midwest?

—In Minnesota, St. Paul. It is very cold in St. Paul for a long time each year. We try to not be there when the snow and ice come.

—In summer it is cold? Jean-Pierre asked.

—Oh, sometimes, yes, even in summer.

Jean-Pierre was having some trouble understanding the weather and distances in the US. James gave Jean-Pierre one of his professional cards and made him promise to telephone once he arrived in the States. There was something about the boy's look, one of absolute sincerity, that told them both that he would indeed call, in 2007. They would be very happy to see him. Oh, yes, he must call. They meant what they said, too. They both embraced him goodbye and then said goodbye to his father and mother, to whom they had only spoken a few words. They would leave it to Jean-Pierre to report what he would of their conversation. They knew that he would tell his papa and maman everything they discussed and that Jean-Pierre's mother would place the card in a safe place until Jean-Pierre would leave for America.

They picked up the rental car on avenue Kleber at noon on their seventh day in Paris, drove back to the hotel and loaded their luggage and took the route along the Seine that flowed into Autoroute 6. It would take them directly to Strassbourg where they would cross into Germany. It would be only a short drive then to Stuttgart and Schloss Solitude. James had written a check at the American Express office on rue Scribe the day before, and he calculated that they would be in fine shape until the first third of the stipend were paid. He knew it could have been difficult in the years before World War II if an American had lost his cash. Telegraphs between American and European banks were then just about the only answer. But now with check cashing privileges at American Express, credit cards, and bank debit cards there was little to worry about, except going into debt.

Traffic on the autoroute was light, and the countryside soon appeared. The smooth and greening farmland was indeed like another country, for Minnesota still lay under a thick, frozen strata of snow. By midafternoon they were passing through the Verdun country where fighting had been fierce in both wars. Off in the distance, on a small rise, a cemetery with symmetrical rows of identical white stones stood solemn witness in a broad green field that seemed to have no end.

—How foolish of us to think our loss was anything at all, Carolina said. Look how the hill shines in its isolation. It's like a little village in the sun.

—It's what they are here, villages of the dead, James said.

They began to see signs of the storms that had swept across central Europe a week before they had arrived. As the fields began to give way to woods and streams, they could see great swatches of forest had been laid flat by straight hard winds. There was none of the twisted, whirled masses that they knew so well in the Midwest, but rather there was the impression that a great weight had been dragged across the woods. Old trees and young alike had succumbed to the successive winds. Clean up had already begun: cords upon cords of wood were stacked near the roads and logs were being skidded to portable loading ramps. There was no putting things off here, unlike Minnesota, where weather and lethargy dominated year round. What had been lost to the storm would be

turned in part to gain nonetheless. The people of the region had been for centuries in the path of various sorts of destruction from wars to plagues and everything in between and no mere storm was going to disrupt their lives for very long. James and Carolina understood the French and German attitudes as well as they did most of America's oddities and swore one day they would come to Europe to stay. Americans were growing far too ruthlessly narcissistic for them. Moving to Europe was always on their minds. Even in the best of times in the States—and times were occasionally good despite the far right leanings of the moral majority and the bickerings of academic life—they would find themselves talking of making that permanent move to France or Germany, or perhaps Switzerland, where James had been offered a position two years before at the University of Geneva but had refused because of the vindictive pettiness evident in some of the professors who had invited him to the campus. The move was no less on their minds today as they neared the German border.

—If we lived here, Carolina said, I would have a big black dog. A Great Pyrenees, yes. Like the one that looked at me in Paris that time on rue Washington. Remember? And a goat. A little goat wouldn't be much trouble, would it? But a Pyrenees for sure.

—That would be fine, James said. You can have a little goat, too. I'm feeling generous today. What the heck!

They passed through Strassbourg without getting stalled in the heavy rush of traffic. There was no gate at the Rhine. The border was completely open. The approaching switch to the Euro demanded it. There were no checkpoints, no fumbling for passports, just the streets flowing with car after car across the river east and west. So much had changed in so few years. From the bridge they followed the Autobahn north and could see the high blue and rainy mountains of the Schwarzwald on their right. They knew the storm had not spared the Black Forest. The newspapers were full with accounts of the loss. The storms had tracked from the southwest of France leaving total destruction in their wake. Western and southwestern Germany had not escaped the winds. Damage was greatest in the Black Forest.

—Are you sure you don't know any of the other fellows who will be there? Carolina asked. They had bypassed Stuttgart on the Autobahn and she knew they were getting close to Leonberg and their exit.

—None of the old bunch remain, I'm sure. It will be a whole new crew. God only knows!

The problem with Akademie Schloss Solitude, though properly called an artists' colony, was that it invited mainly beginning artists from twenty-five to thirty-five years of age. Though when James and Carolina were here before, there were several seriously engaged older artists at work—a Russian novelist, an Armenian composer, a painter from Basel. Other artists, too, were there: video technicians and designers, architects, sound engineers, costume designers for the theatre, and so on. What would have been called professionals in the States were here called artists. James was termed a guest fellow, one of which the Schloss invited each year, presumably to set an example for the younger artists.

—It would be good to see Christophe and Natasha again, Carolina said. But I don't suppose they will be allowed to return any time soon. It's such a shame in a way, don't you think?

—Of course. But everyone would want to come back, and then what would you do?

—You're right. But there are places you want to come back to, and some of the artists will never again get to. Everyone ought to have the chance to go back somewhere they were happy. At least once in a lifetime. We've been lucky, haven't we?

—We've gone back lots. That's why we want to stay, but we can't stay because we go back often. There is always a catch, isn't there? And when someone starts losing the cash, well—

—Oh, you mustn't think about that anymore.

—You're right.

They took the Leonberg exit, and in the approaching darkness found their way up the mountain past Schillerhöhe, with its Krankenhaus for terminally ill patients, to the Schloss. There was evidence of the recent storm about, but not the total devastation they had seen earlier in the day. Trees seemed broken by random selection instead. James went alone from the darkening parking lot to the back tier of apartments where one of the fellows, a composer

from Argentina, gave him access to the Schloss through his apartment.

The caretaker, Herr Friedrich, was expecting them and had the apartment key ready. They would be staying in their old apartment, Herr Friedrich reported, and Herr Joly, the director, would see them tomorrow. With gate and apartment keys in hand, David walked back to the car. Carolina had grown apprehensive: the night had become very dark and a soft rain had begun.

—I'm sorry but the back door was locked and I had to knock on one of the apartment doors.

—Oh, yes. I remember we had to do that before when we left our door keys upstairs. But now we are here again!

—Yes, and the same apartment. Herr Friedrich will bring up the luggage on his cart.

—Oh, James, I love old misty Germany even in winter. Isn't it wonderful being here? Schiller lived right here on this hill for a while. Just think of it. We are the lucky ones, aren't we? What does a couple of thousand dollars matter?

Carolina was remembering the last time they were at Schloss Solitude, two years ago during the spring months. It was the beginning of April—she reminded James—and the new grass was up. She had risen early one morning and noticed that the giant pussy willow outside their window was heavy with yellow pollen and had heard first the twinkle of a bell and then clatter of four hundred little hoofs on the cobblestones. An old shepherd and his border collie were bringing his whole flock of sheep up the mountain for spring grazing. All the Schloss turned out to witness their passing, which was leisurely, for the hillside was resplendent with new grass. Carolina hoped their stay this time would keep them long enough to witness the event once again. Every year just before Easter, the sheep came to Schloss Solitude on their way to spring pasture. A tradition, Herr Friedrich had called it when they were here before.

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The soft rain continued for several days. Then it turned colder and the rain was mixed with snow, and when the sun shone it was too cold to remain long outside. They had driven the car back to Strassbourg (on the French side of the Rhine; on the German side

it was Straßburg. No Euro would change the spellings, James had commented) for drop off at Budget France. Living at the Schloss, they could view the car only as a needless expense, for a bus to and from Stuttgart stopped at the front door of the Schloss every thirty minutes between 6 a.m. and midnight. They could take the bus the ten miles to Stuttgart for shopping or pleasure or to Tingelmann's Supermarket at Westbahnhof, half way down the mountain toward Stuttgart Zentrum. Nearly never a day went by but what they took the bus to either the Rathaus bus stop or rode it all the way to the Hauptbahnhof, the terminal for most of the city buses and a very busy train station. They liked to get off at the Rathaus stop best. Just across the street was Breuninger's, Stuttgart's most fashionable department store and a popular cafe in the middle of it, familiarly called Der Stern for the intricately designed tile floor. James and Carolina had cappuccino there often.

It was at Der Stern that they had decided they must take the train to Baden-Baden for a long weekend the first week of March. They knew that the crocuses would be in full bloom then. Carolina wanted very much to see the sight: all along the River Oos the length of the Lichtenthaler Alle the crocuses would be radiant in purple, white, and yellow. Certainly they must not miss the chance to try to find the tomb of Felix Youssoupov's father. She and James had discovered in their readings of Russian history that the elder Youssoupov had died in Baden-Baden, but were not sure about the place of burial. The Youssoupovs had been the wealthiest family in the world just before the Revolution and intimate with the Tsar and the Tsarina. Surely someone would know. The priests at the Russian Orthodox Church in Baden-Baden could tell them.

True to prediction, by the first of March the ground had warmed and even in Stuttgart the crocuses and the daffodils were breaking through and showing their colors. It was scarcely more than an hour's train ride to Baden-Baden. The sun was warm as they stepped off the train and took a local bus to the center of the city, Leopoldplatz. Most of the town was nestled snugly in the valley among the hills of the northern approach to the Schwarzwald, the many thermal springs no doubt contributing to the higher than normal regional temperature.

James and Carolina fell in love with the town: it did not take itself too seriously, knew it was for locals a village, but knew too

that it was and would remain an international town of renown for its thermal spas and natural beauty. They stayed at the Queens Hotel (surprisingly a member of the Holiday Inn chain) and were themselves treated as honored guests, and they loved the Germans even more for this amenity.

Their first morning they rose early, had breakfast at the hotel, and then set out on their first walk. They crossed the River Oos just west of their hotel and walked up the paved Lichtenthaler Alle as far as the convent, then doubled back past their hotel all the way down to the Kurhaus park. It was early enough that there were only a few people along the way, and the crocuses were brilliantly greeting the warm sun, their purple and white and yellow oval and opening tops ecstatic in the bourgening early spring. James took several pictures of Carolina standing amongst them. In a short time the crocuses would be gone, until next year when the same brilliant ritual would take place. But the daffodils were standing in the wings and the virtual flowering performance would continue until the height of the summer roses, which, too, had their special place in the history of Baden-Baden.

Try as they did, they could find no evidence of Felix Youssoupov's father having died in Baden-Baden. At the Russian church neither the resident priest nor his secretary, a wizened woman of sixty selling church trinkets just inside the door, knew anything of the dead count, and there was no record of burial in the church books.

—*Nach hause, in Russe*, the secretary offered. James and Carolina could only agree, perhaps at home in Russia. Felix's biographers were of no help, for those Carolina had read mentioned only the death in Baden-Baden, not the interment. Perhaps the biographers had researched only as far as Carolina and James had. Russia's borders had been closed for three-quarters of a century after all.

—We forget too much, the priest said, saying goodbye to James and Carolina. You must come again soon. New friends refresh us. The memory of Felix Youssoupov is vague here, his father's even more so, I think, though many Russians come to Baden-Baden now and not always to pray, alas. The waters and the casino, you know.

They shook hands with the priest and walked back to the hotel, barely three blocks away.

—You must not worry, James said. Someone somewhere will tell us what we want to know if we remain persistent.

—How can we be sure? What if no one remembers Felix's father? What if Jean-Pierre does not remember us? Think of what is lost then.

But James and Carolina did not want to think of what was lost. You could stand only so much before madness set in. They would remember all that was found, everything, every bit of their lives, and all of others' that they could. They would find Felix's father's tomb even if it were in cold Russia. They would expect to hear from Jean-Pierre in 2007, and they would keep coming back to things as long as they could, and the memory would grow, images sinking under the weight of images yet remaining distinct and retrievable at a moment's notice. They would always come back to where they had been and would again find themselves there, happy despite all the other losses around them.