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True at First Light

Winner Take Nothing

Ernest Hemingway on Writing



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“~~In Africa a thing is true at first light and a lie by noon and you have no more respect for it than for the lovely, perfect weed-fringed lake you see across the sun-baked salt plain. You have walked across that plain in the morning and you know that no such lake is there. But now it is there absolutely true, beautiful and believable.~~”

—ERNEST HEMINGWAY

INTRODUCTION

THIS STORY opens in a place and at a time which for me, at least, remains highly significant. I spent the first half of my grown-up life in East Africa and have read extensively the history and literature of the British and German minorities who lived there for a brief two and a half generations. The first five chapters may be hard to follow today without some explanation of what was going on in Kenya in the Northern Hemisphere winter of 1953–54.

Jomo Kenyatta, a well-educated and widely traveled black African, a Kikuyu who had married an Englishwoman when he lived in that country, had, according to the British colonial administration of the time, returned to his native Kenya and unleashed there a black farm laborers' insurgency called Mau Mau against the landowning immigrant farmers from Europe whom the Kikuyu believed had stolen the land from them. It's Caliban's grievance in *The Tempest*:

*This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me! When thou camest first
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.*

Mau Mau was not the Pan-African independence movement that forty years later has finally achieved black African majority rule in the whole of the sub-Saharan continent but something, for the most part, specific to the anthropology of the Kikuyu tribe. A Kikuyu became a Mau Mau by taking a sacrilegious oath that separated him from his normal life and turned him into a kamikaze human missile aimed at his employer, the European immigrant farmer. The most common agricultural implement in the country was called in Swahili a panga, a heavy-bladed, single-edged sword, stamped and ground from sheet steel in the English Midlands, able to cut brush, dig holes and kill people under the right conditions. Almost every agricultural worker had one. I am not an anthropologist and what I am describing may be nonsense, but that's how Mau Mau was seen by the European immigrant farmers, their wives and children. Sadly enough, the most people eventually killed and maimed by this bit of applied anthropology were not the European immigrant farming families it was designed to harm but those Kikuyu who resisted oath-taking and cooperated with the British colonial authorities.

What at the time of this story were known as the White Highlands, a reserve set aside exclusively for

European agricultural settlement and which the Kikuyu felt had been stolen from them, lay at higher altitude and were better watered than the traditional lands of the Kamba. Although speaking a Bantu language closely related to Kikuyu, Kamba subsistence farmers needed to hunt and gather more when they lived to supplement their less reliable cultivated fields and were of necessity less site-attached than their Kikuyu neighbors. The cultural differences between the two peoples are subtle and best understood by comparing two nations that live together on the Iberian peninsula, the Spaniards and the Portuguese. Most of us know enough about these two to see why what might work with one would not appeal to the other and so it was with Mau Mau. It did not work in most instances with the Kamba and it is lucky for the Hemingways, both Ernest and Mary, that it didn't, for they would have then stood a good chance of being hacked to death in their beds as they slept by the very servants they so trusted and thought they understood.

By the start of the threat of an outside attack on the Hemingways' safari camp by a group of oathed Kamba Mau Mau escaped from detention has evaporated like dawn mist under the warmth of the morning sun and the contemporary reader will enjoy what follows without difficulty.

Because of my fortuitous position as number two son, I spent a great deal of time with my father during my later childhood and adolescence, the period of his marriages to Martha Gellhorn and Mary Welsh. I remember one summer when I was thirteen inadvertently walking into Papa's bedroom at the house Marty had found for the two of them in Cuba when they were making love in one of those rather athletic ways recommended in manuals for the pursuit of happiness in married life. I immediately withdrew and I don't believe they saw me, but when editing the story presented here and coming across the passage where Papa describes Marty as a simulator, that scene came back to me very vividly, after fifty-six years of forgetfulness. Some simulator.

Hemingway's untitled manuscript is about two hundred thousand words long and is certainly not a journal. What you will read here is a fiction half that length. I hope Mary will not be too cross with me for making so much of Debba, a sort of dark-matter opposite to what was Mary's real class act as a wife who did end up committing twenty-five-year-long suttee, fueled by gin instead of sandalwood.

Ambiguous counterpoint between fiction and truth lies at the heart of this memoir. Using it the author plays at length in passages that will doubtless please any reader who likes to listen to that music. I spent some time in the safari camp at Kimana and knew every person in it, black, white and read all over, and for a reason I cannot adequately explain it reminds me of some things that happened back in the summer of 1942 on the *Pilar* when my brother Gregory and I, like General Grant's thirteen-year-old son, Fred, at Vicksburg, spent a month as children with its remarkable crew who were in temporary service as naval auxiliaries. The radio operator was a career marine who at one time had been stationed in China. That sub-hunting summer he had an opportunity to read *War and Peace* for the first time, as he was only working for very short periods while on standby duty most of the day and night and the novel was part of the ship's library. I remember him telling us all how much more it meant to him since he had known all those White Russians in Shanghai.

Hemingway was interrupted in his first and only draft of the manuscript by Leland Hayward, then married to the lady who has therefore to live by the long-distance telephone in this story, and the other movie people filming *The Old Man and the Sea* to go and help them fish for a picture marlin in Peru. The Suez Crisis, which closed the canal and ended his plans for another trip to East Africa, could have

been one reason he never returned to his unfinished work. We know he was thinking of Paris “in the old days” from what we read in this story and perhaps another reason he left it was he found he could write more felicitously of Paris than East Africa, which for all its photogenic beauty and excitement had lasted but a few months and mauled him badly, the first time with amebic dysentery and the second with the plane crashes.

Were he still alive, I would have asked Ralph Ellison to do this introductory note because of what he wrote in *Shadow and Act*:

“Do you still ask why Hemingway was more important to me than Wright? Not because he was white or more ‘accepted.’ But because he appreciated the things of this earth which I love and which Wright was too driven or deprived or inexperienced to know: weather, guns, dogs, horses, love *and* hate and impossible circumstances which to the courageous and dedicated could be turned into benefits and victories. Because he wrote with such precision about the processes and techniques of daily living that I could keep myself and my brother alive during the 1937 Recession by following his descriptions of wing-shooting; because he knew the difference between politics and art and something of their true relationship for the writer. Because all he wrote—and this is very important—was imbued with a spirit beyond the tragic with which I could feel at home, for it is very close to the feeling of the blues which are, perhaps, as close as Americans can come to expressing the spirit of tragedy.”

I am pretty sure Hemingway had read *Invisible Man* and that it helped him pull himself together after the two plane crashes that came so close to killing both Mary and himself, when he started to write again with his African manuscript in the mid-fifties, at least a year after the events that inspired this return to creative work. He may have had Ellison in mind in his remarks in the draft manuscript about writers stealing from each other, for the scene in Ellison’s novel of the lunatics from the asylum is very much like that of the vets in the bar in Key West from *To Have and Have Not*.

Ellison wrote his essay piece in the early 1960s, not so long after Hemingway’s death in the summer of 1961, and Ellison, of course, had not read the unfinished African manuscript, which I have licked here into what I hope is not the worst of all possible shapes: *True at First Light*, taking what my father wrote in the morning and doing with it what Suetonius describes in his *Lives of Illustrious Men*:

“When Virgil was writing the ‘Georgics,’ it is said to have been his custom to dictate each day a large number of verses which he composed in the morning, and then to spend the rest of the day in reducing them to a very small number, wittily remarking that he fashioned his poem after the manner of a she-bear, and gradually licked it into shape.”

Only Hemingway himself could have licked his unfinished draft into the *Ursus horribilis* it might have been. What I offer in *True at First Light* is a child’s teddy bear. I will take it to bed now always and having laid myself down to sleep and prayed the Lord my soul to keep, if I die before I wake, I will pray the Lord my soul to take and God bless you, Papa.

Patrick Hemingway
Bozeman, Montana
July 16, 1999

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THINGS WERE not too simple in this safari because things had changed very much in East Africa. The white hunter had been a close friend of mine for many years. I respected him as I had never respected my father and he trusted me, which was more than I deserved. It was, however, something to try to merit. He had taught me by putting me on my own and correcting me when I made mistakes. When I made a mistake he would explain it. Then if I did not make the same mistake again he would explain little more. But he was nomadic and he was finally leaving us because it was necessary for him to be at his farm, which is what they call a twenty-thousand-acre cattle ranch in Kenya. He was a very complicated man compounded of absolute courage, all the good human weaknesses and a strangely subtle and very critical understanding of people. He was completely dedicated to his family and his home and he loved much more to live away from them. He loved his home and his wife and his children.

“Do you have any problems?”

“I don’t want to make a fool of myself with elephants.”

“You’ll learn.”

“Anything else?”

“Know everybody knows more than you but you have to make the decisions and make them stick. Leave the camp and all that to Keiti. Be as good as you can.”

There are people who love command and in their eagerness to assume it they are impatient at the formalities of taking over from someone else. I love command since it is the ideal welding of freedom and slavery. You can be happy with your freedom and when it becomes too dangerous you take refuge in your duty. For several years I had exercised no command except over myself and I was bored with this since I knew myself and my defects and strengths too well and they permitted me little freedom and much duty. Lately I had read with distaste various books written about myself by people who knew all about my inner life, aims and motives. Reading them was like reading an account of a battle where you had fought written by someone who had not only not been present but, in some cases, had not even been born when the battle had taken place. All these people who wrote of my life both inner and outer wrote with an absolute assurance that I had never felt.

On this morning I wished that my great friend and teacher Philip Percival did not have to communicate in that odd shorthand of understatement which was our legal tongue. I wished that there were things that I could ask him that it was impossible to ask. I wished more than anything that I could be instructed fully and competently as the British instruct their airmen. But I knew that the

customary law which prevailed between Philip Percival and myself was as rigid as the customary law of the Kamba. My ignorance, it had been decided long ago, was to be lessened only through learning by myself. But I knew that from now on I had no one to correct my mistakes and, with all the happiness one has in assuming command, it made the morning a very lonely one.

For a long time we had called each other Pop. At first, more than twenty years before, when I had called him Pop, Mr. Percival had not minded as long as this violation of good manners was not made in public. But after I had reached the age of fifty, which made me an elder or Mzee, he had taken, happily, to calling me Pop, which was in a way a compliment, lightly bestowed and deadly if it were withdrawn. I cannot imagine a situation, or, rather, I would not wish to survive a situation in which I called him, in private, Mr. Percival or he addressed me by my proper name.

So on this morning there were many questions I wished to ask and many things I had wondered about. But we were, by custom, mute on these subjects. I felt very lonely and he knew it of course.

“If you did not have problems it would not be fun,” Pop said. “You’re not a mechanic and what they call white hunters now are mostly mechanics who speak the language and follow other people’s tracks. Your command of the language is limited. But you and your disreputable companions made what tracks there are and you can make a few new ones. If you can’t come up with the proper word in your new idiom, Kikamba, just speak Spanish. Everyone loves that. Or let the Memsahib talk. She is slightly more articulate than you.”

“Oh go to hell.”

“I shall go to prepare a place for thee,” Pop said.

“And elephants?”

“Never give them a thought,” Pop said. “Enormous silly beasts. Harmless everyone says. Just remember how deadly you are with all other beasts. After all they are not the woolly mastodon. I’ve never seen one with a tusk that made two curves.”

“Who told you about that?”

“Keiti,” Pop said. “He told me you bag thousands of them in the off-season. Those and your saber-toothed tiger and your brontosaurus.”

“The son of a bitch,” I said.

“No. He more than half believes it. He has a copy of the magazine and they look very convincing. I think he believes it some days and some days not. It depends on whether you bring him any guinea fowl and how you’re shooting in general.”

“It was a pretty well illustrated article on prehistoric animals.”

“Yes. Very. Most lovely pictures. And you made a very rapid advance as a white hunter when you told him you had only come to Africa because your mastodon license was filled at home and you had shot

over your limit on saber-toothed tiger. I told him it was God's truth and that you were a sort of escaped ivory poacher from Rawlins, Wyoming, which was rather like the Lado Enclave in the old days and that you had come out here to pay reverence to me who had started you in as a boy, barefoot of course, and to try to keep your hand in for when they would let you go home and take out a new mastodon license."

"Pop, please tell me one sound thing about elephants. You know I have to do away with them if they are bad behaving and if they ask me to."

"Just remember your old mastodon technique," Pop said. "Try and get your first barrel in between the second ring of the tusk. On frontals the seventh wrinkle on the nose counting down from the first wrinkle on the high forehead. Extraordinary high foreheads they have. Most abrupt. If you are nervous stick it in his ear. You will find it's simply a pastime."

"Thank you," I said.

"I've never worried ever about you taking care of the Mem sahib but take care of yourself a little bit and try to be as good a boy as you can."

"You try too."

"I've tried for many years," he said. Then, in the classic formula he said, "Now it is all yours."

So it was. It was all mine on a windless morning of the last day of the month of the next to the last month of the year. I looked at the dining tent and at our own tent. Then back to the small tents and the men moving around the cooking fire and then at the trucks and the hunting car, the vehicles seeming frosted in the heavy dew. Then I looked through the trees at the Mountain showing very big and near this morning with the new snow shining in the first sunlight.

"Will you be all right in the truck?"

"Quite. It's a good road you know when it's dry."

"You take the hunting car. I won't need it."

"You're not that good," Pop said. "I want to turn this truck in and send you one that is sound. They don't trust this truck."

It was always they. They were the people, the watu. Once they had been the boys. They still were to Pop. But he had either known them all when they were boys in age or had known their fathers when their fathers were children. Twenty years ago I had called them boys too and neither they nor I had thought that I had no right to. Now no one would have minded if I had used the word. But the way things were now you did not do it. Everyone had his duties and everyone had a name. Not to know a name was both impolite and a sign of sloppiness. There were special names too of all sorts and shortening of names and friendly and unfriendly nicknames. Pop still cursed them in English or in Swahili and they loved it. I had no right to curse them and I never did. We also all, since the Magadi expedition, had certain secrets and certain things privately shared. Now there were many things that

were secrets and there were things that went beyond secrets and were understandings. Some of the secrets were not at all gentle and some were so comic that you would see one of the three gun bearers suddenly laughing and look toward him and know what it was and you would both be laughing so hard that trying to hold in the laughter your diaphragm would ache.

It was a clear and beautiful morning as we drove out across the plain with the Mountain and the trees of the camp behind us. There were many Thomson's gazelle ahead on the green plain switching their tails as they fed. There were herds of wildebeests and Grant's gazelle feeding close to the patches of bush. We reached the airstrip we had made in a long open meadow by running the car and the truck up and down through the new short grass and grubbing out the stumps and roots of a patch of brush at one end. The tall pole of a cut sapling drooped from the heavy wind of the night before and the wind sock homemade from a flour sack, hung limp. We stopped the car and I got out and felt the pole. It was solid although bent and the sock would fly once the breeze rose. There were wind clouds high in the sky and it was beautiful looking across the green meadow at the Mountain looking so huge and wide from here.

"Do you want to shoot any color of it and the airstrip?" I asked my wife.

"We have that even better than it is this morning. Let's go and see the bat-eared foxes and check on the lion."

"He won't be out now. It's too late."

"He might be."

So we drove along our old wheel tracks that led to the salt flat. On the left there was open plain and the broken line of tall green-foliaged yellow-trunked trees that marked the edge of the forest where the buffalo herd might be. There was old dry grass growing high along the edge and there were many fallen trees that had been pulled down by elephants or uprooted by storms. Ahead there was plain with new short green grass and to the right there were broken glades with islands of thick green bush and occasional tall flat-topped thorn trees. Everywhere there was game feeding. They moved away as we came close, moving sometimes in quick bursts of galloping; sometimes at a steady trot; sometimes only feeding off away from the car. But they always stopped and fed again. When we were on this routine patrol or when Miss Mary was photographing they paid no more attention to us than they do to the lion when he is not hunting. They keep out of his way but they are not frightened.

I was leaning out of the car watching for tracks in the road as my gun bearer, Ngui, who sat in the outside position behind me was doing. Mthuka, who was driving, watched all the country ahead and on both sides. He had the best and quickest eyes of any of us. His face was ascetic, thin and intelligent and he had the arrowhead tribal cuts of the Wakamba on both cheeks. He was quite deaf and he was Mkola's son and he was a year older than I was. He was not a Mohammedan as his father was. He loved to hunt and he was a beautiful driver. He would never do a careless or irresponsible thing but he, Ngui and myself were the three principal bads.

We had been very close friends for a long time and one time I asked him when he had gotten the big formal tribal cuts which no one else had. Those who did have them had very lightly traced scars.

He laughed and said, "At a very big Ngoma. You know. To please a girl." Ngui and Charo, Miss Mary's gun bearer, both laughed.

Charo was a truly devout Mohammedan and was also known to be very truthful. He did not know how old he was, of course, but Pop thought he must be over seventy. With his turban on he was about two inches shorter than Miss Mary and watching them standing together looking across the gray flat at the waterbuck that were now going carefully, upwind, into the forest, the big buck with his beautiful horns looking back and to either side as he entered last in line, I thought what a strange pair Miss Mary and Charo must look to the animals. No animals had any visual fear of them. We had seen this proven many times. Rather than fearing them, the small blond one in the forest green coat, and the even smaller black one in the blue jacket, the animals appeared interested in them. It was as though they had been permitted to see a circus or at least something extremely odd and the predatory animals seemed to be definitely attracted by them. On this morning we were all relaxed. Something, or something awful or something wonderful was certain to happen on every day in this part of Africa. Every morning when you woke it was as exciting as though you were going to compete in a downhill ski race or drive a bobsled on a fast run. Something, you knew, would happen and usually before eleven o'clock. I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke that I was not happy. At least until remembered unfinished business. But on this morning we were relaxed in the momentary irresponsibility of command and I was happy that the buffalo, which were our basic problem, were evidently someplace where we could not reach them. For what we hoped to do it was necessary for them to come to us rather than for us to go to them.

"What are you going to do?"

"Bring the car up and make a quick swing to check for tracks at the big water and then go into that place in the forest where it borders the swamp and check and then get out. We'll be downwind of the elephant and you might see him. Probably not."

"Can we go back through the gerenuk country?"

"Of course. I'm sorry we started late. But with Pop going away and everything."

"I like to go in there in that bad place. I can study what we need for a Christmas tree. Do you think a lion is in there?"

"Probably. But we won't see him in that kind of country."

"He's such a smart bastard lion. Why didn't they let me shoot that easy beautiful lion under the tree that time. That's the way women shoot lions."

"They shoot them that way and the finest black-maned lion ever shot by a woman had maybe forty shots fired into him. Afterwards they have the beautiful pictures and then they have to live with the god-damn lion and lie about him to all their friends and themselves the rest of their lives."

“I’m sorry I missed the wonderful lion at Magadi.”

“Don’t you be sorry. You be proud.”

“I don’t know what made me this way. I have to get him and he has to be the real one.”

“We overhunted him, honey. He’s too smart. I have to let him get confidence now and make a mistake.”

“He doesn’t make mistakes. He’s smarter than you and Pop both.”

“Honey, Pop wanted you to get him or lose him straight. If he didn’t love you you could have shot any sort of a lion.”

“Let’s not talk about him,” she said. “I want to think about the Christmas tree. We’re going to have a wonderful Christmas.”

Mthuka had seen Ngui start down the trail for him and brought up the car. We got in and I motioned Mthuka toward the far water at the corner across the swamp. Ngui and I both hung out over the side watching for tracks. There were the old wheel tracks and the game trails to and from the papyrus swamp. There were fresh wildebeest tracks and the tracks of the zebra and Tommy.

Now we were going closer to the forest as the road swung and then we saw the tracks of a man. Then of another man wearing boots. These tracks had been rained on lightly and we stopped the car to check on foot.

“You and me,” I said to Ngui.

“Yes,” he grinned. “One of them has big feet and walks as though he is tired.”

“One is barefooted and walks as though the rifle were too heavy for him. Stop the car,” I said to Mthuka. We got out.

“Look,” said Ngui. “One walks as though he were very old and can hardly see. The one with shoes.”

“Look,” I said. “The barefoot one walks as though he has five wives and twenty cows. He has spent a fortune on beer.”

“They will get nowhere,” Ngui said. “Look, the one with shoes walks as though he might die at any time. He staggers under the weight of the rifle.”

“What do you think they are doing here?”

“How would I know? Look, the one with shoes is stronger now.”

“He is thinking about the Shamba,” Ngui said.

“Kwenda na Shamba.”

“Ndio,” Ngui said. “How old would you say the old one with the shoes is?”

“None of your damn business,” I said. We motioned for the car and when it got up we got in and I motioned Mthuka toward the entrance to the forest. The driver was laughing and shaking his head.

“What were you two doing tracking yourselves?” Miss Mary said. “I know it’s funny because everybody was laughing. But it looked quite silly.”

“We were having fun.”

I was always depressed by this part of the forest. The elephants had to eat something and it was proper that they should eat trees rather than destroy the native farms. But the destruction was so great in proportion to the amount they ate from the trees they pulled down that it was depressing to see it. Elephants were the only animal that were increasing steadily throughout their present range in Africa. They increased until they became such a problem to the natives that they had to be slaughtered. Then they were killed off indiscriminately. There were men who did this and enjoyed it. They killed old bulls, young bulls, cows and calves and many liked their work. There had to be some sort of elephant control. But seeing this damage to the forest and the way the trees were pulled down and stripped and knowing what they could do in a native Shamba in a night, I started to think about the problems of control. But all the time I was watching for the tracks of the two elephants we had seen leading into this part of the forest. I knew those two elephants and where they would probably go for the day, but until I had seen their tracks and was sure they were past us I must be careful about Miss Mary wandering around looking for a suitable Christmas tree.

We stopped the car and I took the big gun and helped Miss Mary out of the car.

“I don’t need any help,” she said.

“Look, honey,” I started to explain. “I have to stay with you with the big gun.”

“I’m just going to pick out a Christmas tree.”

“I know. But there could be every kind of stuff in here. There has been too.”

“Let Ngui stay with me then and Charo’s here.”

“Honey, I’m responsible for you.”

“You can be an awful bore about it too.”

“I know it.” Then I said, “Ngui.”

“Bwana?”

The joking was all suspended.

“Go and see if the two elephants went into the far forest. Go as far as the rocks.”

“Ndio.”

He went off across the open space watching ahead for tracks in the grass and carrying my Springfield in his right hand.

“I only want to pick one out,” Miss Mary said. “Then we can come out some morning and dig it up and get it back to camp and plant it while it is still cool.”

“Go ahead,” I said. I was watching Ngui. He had stopped once and listened. Then he went on walking very carefully. I followed Miss Mary who was looking at the different silvery thorn shrubs trying to find one with the best size and shape but I kept looking back at Ngui over my shoulder. He stopped again and listened then waved toward the deep forest with his left arm. He looked around at me and I waved him back to us. He came in fast; as fast as he could walk without running.

“Where are they?” I asked.

“They crossed and went into the forest. I could hear them. The old bull and his askari.”

“Good,” I said.

“Listen,” he whispered. “Faro.” He pointed toward the thick forest on the right. I had heard nothing. “Mzuri motocah,” he said, meaning, in shorthand, “Better get into the car.”

“Get Miss Mary.”

I turned toward where Ngui had pointed. I could see only the silvery shrubs, the green grass and the line of tall trees with vines and creepers hanging from them. Then I heard the noise like a sharp deep purr. It was the noise you would make if you held your tongue against the roof of your mouth and blew out strong so your tongue vibrated as a reed. It came from where Ngui had pointed. But I could see nothing. I slipped the safety catch forward on the .577 and turned my head to the left. Miss Mary was coming at an angle to get behind where I stood. Ngui was holding her by the arm to guide her and she was walking as though she were treading on eggs. Charo was following her. Then I heard the sharp rough purr again and I saw Ngui fall back with the Springfield ready and Charo move forward and take Miss Mary’s arm. They were even with me now and were working toward where the car must be. I knew the driver, Mthuka, was deaf and would not hear the rhino. But when he saw them he would know what was happening. I did not want to look around. But I did and saw Charo urging Miss Mary toward the hunting car. Ngui was moving fast with them carrying the Springfield and watching over his shoulder. It was my duty not to kill the rhino. But I would have to if he or she charged and there was no way out. I planned to shoot the first barrel into the ground to turn the rhino. If it did not turn I would kill it with the second barrel. Thank you very much I said to myself. It is easy.

Just then I heard the motor of the hunting car start and heard the car coming fast in low gear. I started to fall back figuring a yard was a yard and feeling better with each yard gained. The hunting car swung alongside in a tight turn and I pushed the safety and jumped for the handhold by the front seat as the rhino came smashing out through the vines and creepers. It was the big cow and she came galloping. From the car she looked ridiculous with her small calf galloping behind her.

She gained on us for a moment but the car pulled away. There was a good open space ahead and Mthuka swung the car sharply to the left. The rhino went straight on galloping then slowed to a trot and the calf trotted too.

“Did you get any pictures?” I asked Miss Mary.

“I couldn’t. She was right behind us.”

“Didn’t you get her when she came out?”

“No.”

“I don’t blame you.”

“I picked out the Christmas tree though.”

“You see why I wanted to cover you,” I said unnecessarily and stupidly.

“You didn’t know she was in there.”

“She lives around here and she goes to the stream at the edge of the swamp for water.”

“Everybody was so serious,” Miss Mary said. “I never saw all of you joke people get so serious.”

“Honey, it would have been awful if I had had to kill her. And I was worried about you.”

“Everybody so serious,” she said. “And everybody holding on to my arm. I knew how to get back to the car. Nobody had to hold on to my arm.”

“Honey,” I said, “they were only holding your arm so that you wouldn’t step in a hole or trip on something. They were watching the ground all the time. The rhino was very close and might charge anytime and we’re not allowed to kill her.”

“How did you know it was a female with a calf?”

“It stood to reason. She’s been around here for four months.”

“I wish she wasn’t right in the place where the Christmas trees grow.”

“We’ll get the tree all right.”

“You always promise things,” she said. “But things are much simpler and better when Mr. P. is here.”

“They certainly are,” I said. “And they are much easier when G.C. is here. But there is nobody here but us now and please let’s not fight in Africa. Please not.”

“I don’t want to fight,” she said. “I’m not fighting. I simply don’t like to see all you private joke people get so serious and so righteous.”

“Have you ever seen anybody killed by a rhino?”

“No,” she said. “And neither have you.”

“That’s right,” I said. “And I don’t intend to. Pop’s never seen it either.”

“I didn’t like it when you all got so serious.”

“It was because I couldn’t kill the rhino. If you can kill it there’s no problem. Then I had to think about you.”

“Well, stop thinking about me,” she said. “Think about us getting the Christmas tree.”

I was beginning to feel somewhat righteous and I wished that Pop was with us to make a diversion. But Pop was not with us anymore.

“We are going back through the gerenuk country at least aren’t we?”

“Yes,” I said. “We turn to the right at those big stones up ahead across the mud flat at the edge of the high tree bush those baboons are crossing into now and we proceed across the flat to the east until we come to that other rhino drop. Then we go southeast to the old Manyatta and we are in the gerenuk country.”

“It will be nice to be there,” she said. “But I certainly miss Pop.”

“So do I,” I said.

There are always mystical countries that are a part of one’s childhood. Those we remember and visit sometimes when we are asleep and dreaming. They are as lovely at night as they were when we were children. If you ever go back to see them they are not there. But they are as fine in the night as they ever were if you have the luck to dream of them.

In Africa when we lived on the small plain in the shade of the big thorn trees near the river at the edge of the swamp at the foot of the great mountain we had such countries. We were no longer, technically children although in many ways I am quite sure that we were. Childish has become a term of contempt.

“Don’t be childish, darling.”

“I hope to Christ I am. Don’t be childish yourself.”

It is possible to be grateful that no one that you would willingly associate with would say, “Be mature. Be well-balanced, be well-adjusted.”

Africa, being as old as it is, makes all people except the professional invaders and spoilers into children. No one says to anyone in Africa, “Why don’t you grow up?” All men and animals acquire a year more of age each year and some acquire a year more of knowledge. The animals that die the soonest learn the fastest. A young gazelle is mature, well-balanced and well-adjusted at the age of two.

years. He is well-balanced and well-adjusted at the age of four weeks. Men know that they are children in relation to the country and, as in armies, seniority and senility ride close together. But to have the heart of a child is not a disgrace. It is an honor. A man must comport himself as a man. He must fight always preferably and soundly with the odds in his favor but on necessity against any sort of odds and with no thought of the outcome. He should follow his tribal laws and customs insofar as he can and accept the tribal discipline when he cannot. But it is never a reproach that he has kept a child's heart, child's honesty and a child's freshness and nobility.

No one knew why Mary needed to kill a gerenuk. They were a strange long-necked gazelle and the bucks had heavy short curved horns set far forward on their heads. They were excellent to eat in this particular country. But Tommy and impala were better to eat. The boys thought that it had something to do with Mary's religion.

Everyone understood why Mary must kill her lion. It was hard for some of the elders who had been on many hundreds of safaris to understand why she must kill it in the old straight way. But all of the back element were sure it had something to do with her religion like the necessity to kill the gerenuk at approximately high noon. It evidently meant nothing to Miss Mary to kill the gerenuk in an ordinary and simple way.

At the end of the morning's hunt, or patrol, the gerenuk would be in the thick bush. If we sighted any by unlucky chance Mary and Charo would get out of the car and make their stalk. The gerenuk would sneak, run or bound away. Ngui and I would follow the two stalkers from duty and our presence would ensure the gerenuk would keep on moving. Finally it would be too hot to keep on moving the gerenuk about and Charo and Mary would come back to the car. As far as I know no shot was ever fired in this type of gerenuk hunting.

"Damn those gerenuk," Mary said. "I saw the buck looking directly at me. But all I could see was his face and his horns. Then he was behind another bush and I couldn't tell he was not a doe. Then he kept moving off out of sight. I could have shot him but I might have wounded him."

"You'll get him another day. I thought you hunted him very well."

"If you and your friend didn't have to come."

"We have to, honey."

"I'm sick of it. Now I suppose you all want to go to the Shamba."

"No. I think we'll cut straight home to camp and have a cool drink."

"I don't know why I like this crazy part of the country," she said. "I don't have anything against the gerenuk either."

"It's sort of an island of desert here. It's like the big desert we have to cross to get here. Any desert is

fine.”

“I wish I could shoot well and fast and as quick as I see to shoot. I wish I wasn’t short. I couldn’t see the lion that time when you could see him and everybody else could see him.”

“He was in an awful place.”

“I know where he was and it wasn’t so far from here either.”

“No,” I said and to the driver, “Kwenda na campi.”

“Thank you for not going to the Shamba,” Mary said. “You’re good about the Shamba sometimes.”

“You’re who is good about it.”

“No, I’m not. I like you to go there and I like you to learn everything you should learn.”

“I’m not going there now until they send for me about something.”

“They’ll send for you all right,” she said. “Don’t worry about that.”

When we did not go to the Shamba the drive back to camp was very beautiful. There was one long open glade after another. They were linked together like lakes and the green trees and the brush made their shores. There were always the square white rumps of the Grant’s gazelle and their brown-and-white bodies as they trotted, the does moving fast and lightly and the bucks with their proud heavy horns swung back. Then we would round a long curve of green bushy trees and there would be the green tents of the camp with the yellow trees and the Mountain behind them.

This was the first day we had been alone in this camp and as I sat under the flap of the dining tent in the shade of a big tree and waited for Mary to come from washing up so we could have our drink together before lunch I hoped that there would be no problems and that it would be an easy day. Bad news came in quickly enough but I had seen no harbingers waiting around the cooking fires. The wood truck was still out. They would be bringing water too and when they came in they would probably bring news of the Shamba. I had washed and changed my shirt and changed into shorts and a pair of moccasins and felt cool and comfortable in the shade.

The rear of the tent was open and a breeze blew through off the Mountain that was cool with the freshness of the snow.

Mary came into the tent and said, “Why, you haven’t had a drink. I’ll make one for us both.”

She was fresh looking in her freshly ironed, faded safari slacks and shirt and beautiful and as she poured the Campari and gin into the tall glasses and looked for a cold siphon in the canvas water bucket she said, “I’m so glad we’re alone really. It will be just like Magadi but nicer.” She made the drinks and gave me mine and we touched glasses. “I love Mr. Percival so much and I love to have him. But with you and me alone it’s wonderful. I won’t be bad about you taking care of me and I won’t be irascible. I’ll do everything but like the Informer.”

“You’re awfully good,” I said. “We always do have the most fun alone together too. But you be patient with me when I’m stupid.”

“You’re not stupid and we’re going to have a lovely time. This is so much nicer a place than Magadi and we live here and have it all to our own. It is going to be lovely. You’ll see.”

There was a cough outside the tent. I recognized it and thought something that I had better not write down.

“All right,” I said. “Come in.” It was the Game Department Informer. He was a tall dignified man who wore full-length trousers, a clean dark blue sport shirt with thin white lateral strips, a shawl around his shoulders and a porkpie hat. All of these articles of clothing looked as though they had been gifts. The shawl I had recognized as being made from trade goods sold in one of the Hindu general stores at Laitokitok. His dark brown face was distinguished and must once have been handsome. He spoke accurate English slowly and with a mixture of accents.

“Sir,” he said, “I am happy to report that I have captured a murderer.”

“What kind of a murderer?”

“A Masai murderer. He is badly wounded and his father and uncle are with him.”

“Who did he murder?”

“His cousin. Don’t you remember? You dressed his wounds.”

“That man’s not dead. He’s in the hospital.”

“Then he is only an attempted murderer. But I captured him. You will mention it in your report, brother, I know. Please, sir, the attempted murderer is feeling very badly and he would like you to dress his wounds.”

“OK,” I said. “I’ll go out and see him. I’m sorry, honey.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Mary said. “It doesn’t matter at all.”

“May I have a drink, brother?” the Informer asked. “I am tired from the struggle.”

“Bullshit,” I said. “I’m sorry, honey.”

“It’s all right,” Miss Mary said. “I don’t know any better word for it.”

“I did not mean an alcoholic drink,” the Informer said nobly. “I meant only a sip of water.”

“We’ll get some,” I said.

The attempted murderer, his father and his uncle all looked very depressed. I greeted them and we all shook hands. The attempted murderer was a young moran, or warrior, and he and another moran had

been playing together making mock fighting with their spears. It had not been about anything, his father explained. They were only playing and he had wounded the other young man accidentally. His friend had thrust back at him and he had received a wound. Then they had lost their heads and fought but never seriously; never to kill. But when he saw his friend's wounds he was frightened that he might have killed him and had gone off into the brush and hidden. Now he had come back with his father and his uncle and he wished to surrender. The father explained all this and the boy nodded his assent.

I told the father through the interpreter that the other boy was in the hospital and was doing well and that I had heard neither he nor his male relatives had made any charges against this boy. The father said he had heard the same thing.

The medical chest had been brought from the dining tent and I dressed the boy's wounds. They were the neck, the chest and the upper arm and back and were all suppurating badly. I cleaned them out, poured peroxide into them for the magic bubbling effect and to kill any grubs, cleaned them again, especially the neck wound, painted the edges with Mercurochrome, which gave a much admired and serious color effect, and then sifted them full of sulfa and put a gauze dressing and plaster across each wound.

Through the Informer, who was acting as interpreter, I told the elders that as far as I was concerned it was better for the young men to exercise at the use of their spears than to drink Golden Jeep sherry in Laitokitok. But that I was not the law and the father must take his son and present him to the police in that village. He should also have the wounds checked there and should be given penicillin.

After receiving this message the two elders spoke together and then to me and I grunted knowingly throughout their speech with that peculiar rising inflection grunt that means you are giving the matter your deepest attention.

"They say, sir, that they wish you to give a judgment on the case and they will abide by your judgment. They say all that they say is true and that you have already spoken with the other Mzees."

"Tell them that they must present the warrior to the police. It is possible that the police will do nothing since no complaint has been made. They must go to the Police Boma and the wound must be checked and the boy receive penicillin. It must be done."

I shook hands with the two elders and with the young warrior. He was a good-looking boy, thin and very straight but he was tired and his wounds hurt him although he had never flinched when they were cleaned out.

The Informer followed me to the front of our sleeping tent where I washed up carefully with blue soap. "Listen," I said to him. "I want you to tell the police exactly what I said and what the Mzee said to me. If you try anything fancy you know what will happen."

"How can my brother think I would not be faithful and do my duty? How can my brother doubt me? Will my brother loan me ten shillings? I will pay it back the first of the month."

"Ten shillings will never get you out of the trouble you are in."

"I know it. But it is ten shillings."

"Here is ten."

"Do you not want to send any presents to the Shamba?"

"I will do that myself."

"You are quite right, brother. You are always right and doubly generous."

"Bullshit to you. Go along now and wait with the Masai to go in the truck. I hope you find the Widow and don't get drunk."

I went in the tent and Mary was waiting. She was reading the last *New Yorker* and was sipping at her gin and Campari.

"Was he badly hurt?"

"No. But the wounds were infected. One pretty badly."

"I don't wonder after being in the Manyatta that day. The flies were really something awful."

"They say the fly blows keep a wound clean," I said. "But the maggots always give me the creeps. I think while they keep it clean they enlarge the wound greatly. This kid has one in the neck that can't stand much enlarging."

"The other boy was hurt worse though, wasn't he?"

"Yes. But he had prompt treatment."

"You're getting quite a lot of practice as an amateur doctor. Do you think you can cure yourself?"

"Of what?"

"Of whatever you get sometimes. I don't mean just physical things."

"Like what?"

"I couldn't help hearing you and that Informer talking about the Shamba. I wasn't overhearing. But you were right outside the tent and because he is a little deaf you talk a little loud."

"I'm sorry," I said. "Did I say anything bad?"

"No. Just about presents. Do you send her many presents?"

"No. Mafuta always for the family and sugar and things they need. Medicines and soap. I buy her good chocolate."

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