

THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO

Adapted by

Hal Cropsey

[1/5/2012]

Hal Cropsey
862 Longmeadow St.
Longmeadow, MA 01106
hmcropsey@gmail.com
413-262-1535

CHARACTERS

HARRY - A successful, middle-age writer on safari with his wife. Has been injured in his travels and is very weak.

HELEN - Harry's wealthy American wife

COMPTON - Harry's age or older. An English pilot living in Africa who flies in on the rescue plane. His mannerisms should imitate those of Harry during his dream segments.

LISIMBA - An adult servant, serving as a porter and guide on safari.

WAMBUA - Another servant and porter assisting the couple as they hunt and travel.

MOLO - The son of Wambua

SETTING

African safari campsite, with forays into memory and hallucination

TIME

1936

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Projected: “Kilimanjaro is a snow covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. It’s western summit is called the Masai *Ngaje Ngai*, the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.”

(Lights up)

(Before us is a campsite on the African plains. The camp is set under the shade of a mimosa tree. Helen and Harry emerge from their tent. Helen assists Harry as he limps, grimacing, towards a seat. Helen eases Harry into a sitting position, and elevates his leg. Helen then wanders the campsite, occasionally sitting or attending to Harry’s needs. In the distance lies the snow-capped peak of mount Kilimanjaro. Lisimba and Wambua continue the process of setting up camp.)

HELEN

Easy does it. There you go, darling. How’s that feel?

HARRY

Eh? The marvelous thing is that it’s painless. Tough, but painless. That’s how you know when it starts.

HELEN

Is it really?

HARRY

Absolutely.

(Harry lifts up the bandage on his leg. Prodding his leg with his finger.)

Absolutely painless. I’m awfully sorry about the odor though. That must bother you.

HELEN

(Looks over to see Harry poking his leg)

Don’t!

(Harry looks at Helen but continues.)

Please don't.

HARRY

It's been hurting less and less. Almost miss the pain.

HELEN

Why on earth would you say such a thing?

HARRY

Pain means it's real. Keeps it fresh. Makes it last.

(The sound of wings flapping rises. Soon a few hisses and squawks can be heard as vultures land. As the sound rises, Harry replaces the bandage and attempts to stand)

HARRY

Look at them! Now is it sight or scent that brings them down like that?

HELEN

It isn't sight and it isn't scent. It's scraps. Those ugly birds follow us from camp to camp.

HARRY

Never this close.

(He takes a stumbling step forward, attempting to shoo at the birds.)

Inching forward since the day the truck blew. Today's the first they ever lit so close on the ground, though. Scavengers. I watched the way they sailed very carefully at first (*beat*) in case I ever wanted to write them. (*Chuckling to himself*) Seems funny now.

HELEN

I wish you wouldn't.

HARRY

Now they don't fly so much. Just sit there and watch. Waiting. Waiting. Biding time till I collapse and they tear me apart.

HELEN

Darling, please.

HARRY

I'm only talking. It's much easier if I talk. But I wouldn't want to bother you.

HELEN

You know it doesn't bother me! It's that I've gotten so nervous not being able to do anything. Still we should help make it easy as we can until the plane comes.

HARRY

Or until the plane doesn't come.

HELEN

Please, just tell me what I can do. There must be something.

HARRY

You can take the leg off and that might stop it, though I doubt it. Or you can shoot me. You're a good shot now. I taught you to shoot, didn't I?

(Harry slumps down into his chair and, with great effort, is able to lift his leg to elevate it)

HELEN

Please don't talk that way. *(beat)* Couldn't I read to you?

HARRY

Read? Read what?

HELEN

Anything! Anything in the book we haven't read yet.

HARRY

No. I can't listen to it.

HELEN

How about a game?

HARRY

Perfect. Let's go kick a ball around. Hmm ...

HELEN

Don't be cruel.

HARRY

Why not? It's easy. We fight and that makes the time pass.

HELEN

I don't fight. I don't quarrel. No matter how nervous we get, let's not quarrel any more. Maybe they will be back with another truck today. The plane may come. Now, let me read to you.

HARRY

No reading. No moving, either. There is no sense in moving now except to make it easier for you.

HELEN

That's cowardly.

HARRY

Can't you let a man die comfortably without calling him names? What's the use of clanging me?

HELEN

You're not going to die.

HARRY

Don't be daft. I'm dying now. Ask those bastards. *(Gestures towards the vultures)*

HELEN

I'm telling you, every camp has vultures. You never notice them. You can't die if you don't give up.

HARRY

Where the hell did you read that? Bloody fool.

(The two sit in silence for a moment. Helen reads, and Harry scans the horizon)

HELEN

Wouldn't you like me to read? There's a breeze coming up.

HARRY

No thanks.

HELEN

Maybe the truck will come.

HARRY

I don't give a damn about the truck.

HELEN

I do.

HARRY

You give a damn about so many things I don't.

HELEN

Not so many, Harry.

HARRY

What about a drink?

HELEN

It's supposed to be bad for you. You know that. It said in Black's to avoid all alcohol. You shouldn't drink.

HARRY

Molo!

MOLO

(Molo, who has been working off to the side of the camp, now comes jogging over to Harry)

Yes, Bwana.

HARRY

Bring whiskey-soda.

MOLO

Yes, Bwana.

HELEN

This is exactly what I said about giving up! You're a fool! A selfish, hopeless fool! I don't know when but you stopped. You stopped listening. You stopped caring! And now you are drinking! You say I'm daft, yet, in your condition, you drink a whiskey-soda? The book says it's bad for you. I know it's bad for you!

HARRY

No. *(calmly)* It is good for me.

(Molo hands Harry the drink. Harry takes a sip.)

It even tastes good for me. Thank you, Molo. Run along now.

HELEN

I wish we'd never come. You never would have gotten anything like this in Paris. You always said you loved Paris. Paris or anywhere. I would have gone anywhere. Anywhere you wanted. If you really wanted to shoot, we could have gone shooting in Hungary and been comfortable.

HARRY

All your bloody money.

HELEN

That's not fair. It was always yours as much as mine. I left everything and I went wherever you wanted to go and I've done what you wanted to do! Everything we did, we did together, but I wish we'd never come here.

HARRY

You said you loved it.

HELEN

I did. I did when you were all right. But now. Now I hate it. I don't see why that had to happen to your leg. What have we done to have that happen to us?

HARRY

I suppose what I did was to forget to put iodine on it when I first scratched it. Then I didn't pay any attention to it because I never infect. Then, later, when it got bad, it was probably using that

weak carbolic solution when the other antiseptics ran out that paralyzed the minute blood vessels and started the gangrene.

(Turns to look at Helen, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world)

What else?

HELEN

I don't mean that.

HARRY

If we would have hired a good mechanic instead of a half-baked Kikuyu driver, he would have checked the oil and never burned out that bearing in the truck.

HELEN

I don't mean that.

HARRY

If you hadn't left your own people. Your goddamned Old Westbury, Saratoga, Palm Beach people to take me on. If you hadn't done that I'm sure you'd be quite all right. As it is though ...

HELEN

Why, I loved you. That's not fair. I love you know. I'll always love you! Don't you love me?

HARRY

I don't think so. I never have.

HELEN

Harry, what are you saying? You're out of your head.

HARRY

(Slightly slurring his speech)

No. I haven't any head to go out of.

HELEN

Please stop drinking that. Darling, please. We have to do everything we can.

HARRY

(Holds out what remains of the drink to Helen.)

You do it. You do everything we can. I'm tired.

HELEN

I am. I'm doing everything. Doing it all *(beat. Helen takes a locket from around her neck and, holding it in her hand, begins to rub it with her thumb)* but all I want is to go back. To do it again. Again, but right this time. To change all the little things. The things we did and never noticed. *(beat)* At least not till it's too late to change.

HARRY

(Yelling)

Well I can't sit here and play "what if?" You're exhausting and the sun only bakes in the rot.

Lisimba! Wambua! Into the tent!

(The two remaining porters assist Harry into the tent as Helen walks off right, head in hands)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

(As the porters lift Harry into his cot, the harsh yellow glare of the savannah softens to a blue hue when Harry drifts off to sleep. The porters begin the process of tidying up the interior, but quickly begin transforming the stage into an empty set as the scene moves forward in Harry's mind. The porters begin conversing Swahili, but the language shifts into English mid-conversation for the audience to understand.)

LISIMBA

Ugh, mtu huyo ni nzito. (Ugh, this man is heavy.)

WAMBUA

Sisi wamefanya nyati kwamba kupima chini! (We have carried buffalo that weigh less!)

LISIMBA

Nini hema machukizo. (What a disgusting tent.)

WAMBUA

It is definitely a mess. Help me clean it up.

LISIMBA

Why?

WAMBUA

Well to start with, the American's were supposed to be back four days ago. Also that *mjinga* (fool) Abasi ruined the truck. I'm sure Bwana and Memsahib loved that! So if we want to be paid for any of these extra days, we have to be perfect.

LISIMBA

Do you really think they'll pay us more?

WAMBUA

I hope so. And if they do, all the better my son is still here. Bring home more for the family.

LISIMBA

Exactly. That's why we're here, isn't it? (*Wambua nods*) How long, do you think, till help comes? When I left, I left them plenty food to last the trip. But how much longer before we return home?

(Once the stage is cleared, the two revert back to speaking Swahili, and walk off, leaving only Harry and his cot on-stage. Now the lights turn a deeper shade of blue.)

HARRY

(Harry begins lying on his back, talking dreamily as if in a daze. As the monologue continues, however, Harry stands and embodies the emotions and actions he describes.)

(Yawns, stretches) Hell of a fight. Almost one for the books. Almost reminds me of back then.

All alone in Constantinople after that hell of a row in Paris. Just as I was sending out she left at me. Grace, the first one! The first real one at any rate. She dove right down my throat. How I was always running off to some new engagement. A new war. A fight she never heard of. How when I was home, I'd be either working or out on the town. How I was a lout who never treated her right. But the train left on the hour, and my salary went with it, so I left. Chasing the train the whole way cross Europe, was Grace's letter. She must have sent it minutes after I left. Must have had it all written out and prepared. She would too. But that letter landed square on my chest like a brick. After everything we went through, she wrote me a letter, just like that, poof, she was gone. Sailing off to New York.

Alone in Constantinople that whole time. Drank the whole time. Acted as a real byzantine should. *(Laughs to himself)* Whored the whole time too. Tried to kill the loneliness, but only made it worse. So I wrote her, Grace, the first one. The one who left. Wrote her a letter telling her how I'd never been able to kill it. *(Beat.)* Told her how I thought I saw her outside the Regence one time. Told her how it made me go all faint and sick inside. Told her how I'd follow a woman who looked like her in some way, along the Boulevard, afraid to see it wasn't she. Afraid to lose the twisted, knotted feeling it gave me. Told her how each new one I slept with only made me miss her more. How what she had done, how her leaving could never matter

because I knew I couldn't cure myself of loving her. I wrote it all at the Club, cold sober, and mailed it to New York, asking her to write me at the office in Paris. That seemed safe.

That night I missed her so much I got to feeling all twisted and hollow and sick inside. So I wandered up to Maxim's, picked up a girl, and took her out to supper. Went out dancing with her after. She was terrible.

(Harry begins to act out this dance, and it becomes clear that she may have been a fine dancer, but Harry, however, is stumbling drunk at this point in the night.)

I dropped her for some hot Armenian slut. Dancing so hot it almost scalded. Took her away from a British gunner subaltern after a row. Both of us outside.

(Harry begins to act out the fight, possibly alone or with one of the porters)

I'd hit him twice, hard, in the side of the jaw. Didn't go down so I knew I was in for a fight. He got me in the body, dropped my guard, and socked me right in the eye. I swung left and landed but he fell on me. Tore the sleeve right off my coat. Clubbed 'im twice behind the ear and smashed him one with the right as he pushed away. When the gunner went down, he went down head first, hard. So I ran with the girl when we heard the M.P.'s coming. That's when the Armenian and I got in a cab.

(Harry sits back down on the cot, using it as the back seat of the cab)

We took that taxi and rode out along the Bosphorus and back in the cool night. She felt as over-ripe as she looked, but smooth. Rose petal, syrupy, smooth-bellied, big-breasted, and the sun rose on my half of the bed first. The pale dawn light came down to shine on her back and her short hair. Just like Grace. I left her before she woke. Turned up at the Pera Palace with a black eye and carrying my coat cause the sleeve was missing.

That same night, left for Anatolia, riding all day through the fields of poppies that they raised for opium and how strange it made you feel, finally. The first time I saw those dead men wearing

white ballet skirts and upturned shoes with pompons on them. Saw the Turks coming steadily, and the skirting men running. Then the officers shooting, and running then themselves. And the British correspondent and I ran until our lungs ached and our mouths tasted like pennies, and still they came. Flashes, then fountains of dirt. They came. They came and I saw things I can never think of and, *(beat)* and later still, much worse.

So when I got back to Paris I could not talk about it or stand to have it mentioned. Came back to no one. And back in our cafe were that American poet with a pile of saucers in front of him and a stupid look on his potato face talking about Dada with a Romanian who said his name was Tristan Tzara and always wore a monocle and had a headache. And back in our apartment was only my desk. *(beat)* My desk, a bed, and the things she left behind. *(beat)* So I had them. Ha. Her hand mirror. A comb. A slipper. *(beat)* They were what I had and I'd talk to them. Talked to them, yelled at them, cried to them and held them close. Then I smashed them, wrecked them. Everything she left.

Of course, after Grace there came others.

(Helen enters quietly, hair masking her face. She moves to stand behind Harry and to the side)

Sometimes, we'd grow close. And then we always picked the finest places to quarrel. Always when I was feeling best. What better way to step out than at your peak and how you choose?

That way you take everything with you.

(Harry notices Helen, turns towards her. Helen remains passive)

Things would be fine. Not quite happy, but comfortable. Just on the edge of content. When I realize: *(beat)* you aren't her. I'm not even sure who in hell you are, but you aren't her. You aren't her goddamn it! You aren't fucking her! I'm sick of it and it never fucking stops! I just have to shake you off like a parasite. You'll worm and you'll crawl and you'll dig in deep. So

deep that I can't survive cutting you out. So I shake you off now, you dumb whore. Now get out and don't leave any crap for me! You get the fuck out and you go on my terms damn it!

And I'd feel it. Inside. Again and again, every day, this was in me. This was all who I am, and I never wrote it. I never wrote any of that. At first I never wanted to hurt anyone. It just seemed too close. Then it seemed that there was enough to write about without it. And I always thought I'd come back. Always pushed it back to into eventually. But then those years. Idle years when I let it all slip away. When Helen's money became my armor. Let me abandon my craft. Never wrote because of her. No. That's wrong. Helen wasn't there. I was there. I'd been in it and I'd watched it and it was my job. It was my duty to write it. *(Beat)* But now I never will.

(Harry sits down on the bench, dejected)

ACT 1, SCENE 3

(Harry sits alone on the bench, and then reclines into a sleeping position. Lisimba and Wambua reenter and return the campsite to its original status, as when Harry dozed off to sleep.)

WAMBUA

How many did you say you left behind?

LISIMBA

Four. My father, my wife, and two young sons.

WAMBUA

I also left four, but my son is with me.

LISIMBA

I just pray they have enough food until I return. They had food to last little over a full moon.

WAMBUA

We were supposed to return on the full moon.

LISIMBA

I don't think of much else.

WAMBUA

All the worse as the village lies only two days travel from this very camp.

LISIMBA

But to leave Bwana and Memsahib we go to jail, or even our deaths.

WAMBUA

So we stay.

LISIMBA

Still, this camp feels cursed. Rotten. If things get worse, I go home and do not look back.

WAMBUA

(Laughs) A curse? You superstitious *mjinga*. Convince me we are cursed and I will run home right along your side.

(Having successfully returned the set to its original design, from the beginning of the play, the lights change back from blue, to the harsh yellow glare of the savannah. The porters leave and sit off by a fire pit, preparing a fire for later that evening. Helen enters and sits near Harry. She begins to read a book. Soon, Harry starts to wake.)

HARRY

Where did we stay in Paris?

HELEN

At the Crillon. You know that.

HARRY

Why do I know that?

HELEN

Because that's where we always stayed.

HARRY

Never at the Regence?

HELEN

The Regence? That old dive? Never. Albert booked us there once. I made him switch after the first night. Either way that was a lifetime ago. No. Now, when you and I went, we stayed at the Crillon and at the Pavillion Henri-Quartre in St. Germain. You said you loved it there.

HARRY

Love is a dunghill, and I'm the cock that gets on it to crow.

HELEN

If you have to go away, is it absolutely necessary to kill off everything you leave behind? I mean do you have to take away everything? Do you have to kill your horse, and your wife and burn your saddle and your shield?

HARRY

Yes. Your damned money was my shield. My sword and my shield.

HELEN

Don't.

HARRY

All right. I'll stop that. I don't want to hurt you.

HELEN

It's a little bit late now.

HARRY

All right then. I'll go on hurting you. It's more amusing. As it is, the only thing I ever really *liked* to do with you I can't do, now.

HELEN

That's not true. You like to do many things and everything you wanted to do I did!

HARRY

Oh, for Christ sake stop bragging, will you?

HELEN

(Helen tearing up, begins to cry quietly, again plays with locket.)

Why Harry, why? How are you like this now?

HARRY

Listen. Do you think that it is fun to do this? I don't know why I'm doing it. It's trying to kill to keep yourself alive, I imagine. I was all right when we started talking. I didn't mean to start this, and now I'm crazy as a coot and being cruel to you as I can be. Don't pay any attention, darling, to what I say. I love you, really. You're sweet to me.

(Beat.)

You bitch. You rich bitch. *(Laughs.)* That rhyme? That's poetry. I'm full of poetry now. Rot and poetry. Rotten poetry. *(Laughs.)*

HELEN

Stop it. Harry, why do you have to turn into a devil now?

HARRY

I don't like to leave anything.

(Beat.)

I don't like to leave things behind.

(Helen stands and leaves the tent. Picks up a rifle, and walks purposefully out to the right of the campsite to go hunting. Helen gestures for Lisimba and Wambua to follow her.)

ACT 1, SCENE 4

(Helen, Lisimba, and Wambua exit the stage. This leaves Molo and Harry together. Harry sits inside the tent and cannot see where the others have gone. Molo sits around the fire-pit where Lisimba and Wambua had been sitting previously)

HARRY

Molo! Come, come!

MOLO

(Jogs into the tent)

Yes, Bwana.

HARRY

Where have the others run off to?

MOLO

Memsahib's gone to shoot. Others follow. Does Bwana want?

HARRY

Oh, nothing just now. So she's gone off to kill a piece of meat. She always did know how I like to watch the game, and there she goes. Well off the other way so as not to disturb this little pocket of the plain I have. Always was thoughtful.

(Lights begin to shift to a sea-green, signifying another shift in Harry's unstable mental condition. As the infection begins to affect his thinking, he imagines a scene of himself drinking to explain the change in his mood. He remains physically and mentally in the camp, yet shows complete denial of his injury.)

Molo?

MOLO

Yes, Bwana.

HARRY

Another whiskey-soda.

MOLO

Yes, Bwana.

(Molo opens a chest in the tent, removing a glass and prepares Harry his drink.)

HARRY

It was never Helen's fault that when I went to her, I was already over. How could she know if I meant nothing I said? How could she know I spoke only from habit and to be comfortable?

(Molo hands Harry the drink.)

Thank you, my boy.

(Harry stands and begins to walk around the tent with no sign of injury)

MOLO

(Now when Molo speaks, he speaks in perfect American English, with no trace of an accent.)

Never a trouble, sir.

HARRY

Good. Strong. I like it. Now where was I. Yes. Well, I never really lied to Helen, I just had my life, and it was over, and then we went on living it again with different people and more money. The best of all the same places, and some new ones too. And, you see, by then my life was exactly what she needed.

MOLO

How might that be?

HARRY

A husband dead, and going on nine years. Didn't have much else when it happened, so she threw her whole life into the two sons. Spoilt em sick if you ask me. Then they left her to books and to bottles. After that came the lovers. With them she did not drink so much because she did not have to be drunk to sleep. But the lovers bored her. She had been married to a man who had never bored her and these people bored her very much. Then one of her two was killed in some plane crash and after that was over she did not want the lovers, and drink being no anaesthetic she had to make another life.

MOLO

So you two lost souls met right in the time of need.

HARRY

More that the steps by which she found me and fell in love fell right in part with the regular progression of the new life she built for herself and the old life I traded away. A good trade too. Full of money and comfort for a life I couldn't keep up, anyways.

MOLO

Oh, but that must have been wondrous! All the money you could ever have wanted!

HARRY

I never thought it was all that marvelous. You see, fear of death increases in exact proportion to increase in wealth. Still, I thought I could write about those people, about the very rich. I said to myself, "You are not one of them, Harry, but a spy in their midst"

(Harry gestures wildly at this, spilling some of his drink)

I would leave. When I had enough, I would leave and it could finally be written about by someone who knew what they were writing of, damn it!

MOLO

Well, sir, what happened? Surely you had many fabulous trips and adventures.

HARRY

Ah, yes! Traveling from one great exotic gala to the next. Fighting my way through the brutal hordes of introductions. Helen certainly loves me. As a writer, as a man. As a companion and a proud possession. She would show me off at her parties and I would perform. Then we would travel to the most exotic places with a Michelin rank.

(He spits out the last two words as if they were poison.)

MOLO

And your writing?

HARRY

By then my pen had run dry. Each day dulled and blunted my tools until I put them away. Left in the closet to do no work at all. I'm not even sure writing was my talent anyway. It might have been a talent, but I always traded on it, never really *using* it. It was never what I had done, always what I *could* do. But by then I was doing nothing at all. But Africa was where I'd been happiest in the good part of my life, so we came out here for a sort of re-birth. Minimum comfort. No hardship, but not luxury either. A trip to ease back into training. Clear off some of the rust. To work the fat off my soul the way a fighter goes to the mountains to work and train and burn it out of his body.

(Looks over to the right)

Is that Helen back?

MOLO

Yes, sir. And I believe they are calling me to help, if I might be excused.

HARRY

(Harry nods and takes a seat back in his chair, where he began the scene. Molo begins to walk off stage, but is stopped as Harry begins clinking the ice in his empty glass)

Oh, Molo. *(Beat.)* Be sure not to leave anything behind.

(Molo takes the glass from Harry and places it back in the chest from which it came. Molo then exits to assist Lisimba and Wambua carry in Helen's kill)

ACT 1, SCENE 5

(As Helen enters from the right, she meets Molo at the edge of the stage, and hands him her rifle. Molo then jogs with the rifle and places it in a rack, just on the outside of the tent. Lisimba and Wambua dawdle carrying the ram back in to the camp. When Helen looks back at their progress, they quicken their pace, only to slow as she turns around again. Helen is visibly tired and worn)

from the hunt, yet is excited nonetheless. She wears her hair pulled back so it won't fall in her eyes while she shoots.)

HARRY

That was quick!

HELEN

I shot a Tommy ram. Quite a big one and at well over a hundred yards!

HARRY

You shoot marvelously you know. You have the whole trip.

HELEN

Well, he'll make you a good broth and I'll have them mash some potatoes with the Klim. How do you feel?

HARRY

Much better.

HELEN

I thought you might. You were sleeping when I left.

HARRY

Yes, I had a good sleep. Did you walk far?

HELEN

A few hills over. Could be a mile or so. I made quite a good shot on the Tommy. Down with one shot and dead by the time we made it to him!

HARRY

You've really taken to it quite well.

HELEN

It's so exciting! I love it. I've loved Africa. Really. If you're all right it's the most fun I've ever had. You don't know the fun it's been to shoot with you. I love the country.

HARRY

I love it too.

HELEN

Darling, you don't know how marvelous it is to see you feeling better. I couldn't stand it when you felt that way. You won't talk to me like that again, will you? Promise me?

HARRY

No. I don't remember what I said.

HELEN

You don't have to destroy me. Do you? I'm only a middle-aged woman who loves you and wants to do what you do. I've been destroyed two or three times already. Richard and his damned plane. Simon and his damned mistress. You wouldn't want to destroy me again, would you?

HARRY

I'd like to destroy you a few times in bed.

HELEN

Yes. That's the good destruction. The way we're meant to be destroyed. The plane will be here tomorrow.

HARRY

How do you know?

HELEN

I'm sure. It's bound to come. The boys have the wood all ready and the grass to make the smudge. I went down and looked at it again on the hunt. There's plenty of room to land and we have smudges ready at both ends.

HARRY

What makes you think it will come tomorrow?

HELEN

I'm sure it will. It's overdue now. Then, in town, they will fix up your leg and then we will have some good destruction. Not that dreadful talking kind.

HARRY

Should we have a drink? The sun is almost down.

HELEN

Do you think you should?

HARRY

I'm having one.

HELEN

We'll have one together. Molo, *letti dui* whiskey-soda!

HARRY

You'd better put on your mosquito boots.

HELEN

I'll wait till I bathe before supper.

(Helen shakes her hair down and takes a seat near Harry, relaxing. Molo arrives with the two drinks. Harry and Helen share them in silence. As they drink, a flutter of wings starts to sound. Harry and Helen turn now to look and their gaze follows a hyena crossing a hill near their camp. The sight of the scavengers turns Harry's demeanor cold again.)

HARRY

That damned hyena crosses there every night. Every single night for two weeks. Always just before dark, when there's not enough light for a shot at the bastard.

HELEN

He's the one that makes the noise at night. I don't mind it. They're a filthy animal though. What is it, Harry?

HARRY

Its like he senses the rot. That bastard. Those damn birds too, the way they all watch like they're feeding with their eyes. Sucking away as I suffer. Fucking scavengers. To see me like this, it feeds them, keeps them rapt at attention.

HELEN

But we're doing so well.

HARRY

Nothing. You had better move over to the other side. To windward.

HELEN

Did Molo change the dressing?

HARRY

Yes. I'm just using the boric now.

(Harry removes the dressing and begins to apply a weak antiseptic solution. Harry shows alarm at how high up the infection has spread and begins to run in to medicine all the way to his upper thigh. Helen peeks over to look, but winces and turns away. Harry takes offense.)

HELEN

How do you feel?

HARRY

Still so sure the plane will be here tomorrow?

HELEN

(Weakly) Yes. It has to be.

HARRY

Well are you sure I'll be here to greet it? You're nothing but a fool.

HELEN

You promised you wouldn't. *(Helen leans forward, hair falling in front of her face)*

HARRY

Pitiful. *(Beat.)* Really, it's sad. Sad just how weak you are. Sad how soft. Look at you. Beaten down by a pitiful rotting freak. That's the problem with your whole lazy life. You *let* yourself be beaten down because you *can*. Because you can fall back and land in piles of soft plush money. Why learn how to fight when you can't ever be hurt. It makes me sick. Sick of you and sick of myself for falling into a spirit-sucking trap.

HELEN

Why? Why are you like this? Can't you step back and see what you do?

HARRY

Back? I never used to fall back. I used to stand up and step forward. Now I can't stand at all. I don't know when, but I lost the fight in me. I've been running and hiding like a bitch ever since.

HELEN

I don't know why I ever married you.

HARRY

I do. You wanted a plaything. Something you could buy and be proud of. Show off to your friends so they could be nice and jealous. And I was just running through wives, of course you knew that. You knew *just* who I was. Hadley. Pauline. Martha. Mary. Each one more comfortable than the last. But you. You're the only one *wealthy* and *stupid* enough to bother staying with! But you still got your money's worth. Bleeding out all my stories for chit-chat over cocktails.

HELEN

You *bastard*. You stinking rotten bastard! (*Crying and rubbing the locket*)

HARRY

Yes! That's *exactly fucking right*. It may not hurt anymore, but you can't hide the stink. The goddamned rotten stink! Ha! Just like you. What a pair. At least we keep our rot below the belt. Talk about destruction! Trapped in the wild with a rich little whore who's money finally can't solve all her problems. So I sit here like a fucking *poof* rotted up to my thigh in my own goddamned *flesh*. (*Beat*)

Nothing? Nothing to say? Just going to sit there and rub on your little chain? You dumb bitch, it won't bring him back you know! You ruined him like you ruined me! "Mommy I want a pony! Mommy I want a car. Oh, mother, can't I please learn how to fly?" Everything. And he's not coming back. He's nothing. Just a lump in the ground. A worm eating its way right into his fucking head. And I'll be just the same. But if you even think of putting me in there with him, of wasting your time rubbing my picture when your scared or nervous, I'll goddamned kill you myself.

HELEN

(As Harry speaks, Helen rises from her seat to look down at him. When Harry says finishes, Helen throws her hair back and hurls the glass so it shatters at Harry's feet.)

Fuck you.

(Helen storms off, left.)

ACT 1, SCENE 6

(Harry remains quietly in his chair. Lisimba and Wambua build up a fire and prepare the camp for a meal. They prepare a simple table and arrange the camp for the night.)

WAMBUA

Hii inakwenda tu kuwa mbaya zaidi. (This just goes from bad, to worse)

LISIMBA

Je, mimi kusema? (What did I say?) Now do you believe this camp is cursed? Look at Bwana.

Sitting still as stone. His health is draining quickly and Memsahib runs.

WAMBUA

What you say is true. Still, I see no curse.

LISIMBA

Well, to travel with them back to Arusha means four more days away from our families. And that is if the plane arrives tonight!

WAMBUA

I know what you are saying, and I too miss my family, but our contract is with the Bwana, and it must be honored.

LISIMBA

So, if Bwana were to pass on ...

WAMBUA

You will do *nothing*.

LISIMBA

Of course! But we have no contract with the Memsahib.

WAMBUA

Fine. If the Bwana dies, I will return with you.

(The two nod to each other in agreement. Helen enters from the left, wearing new clothes, and drying her hair with a towel.)

HELEN

Lisimba!

(Lisimba jogs over, and she hands him the towel.)

Is supper ready?

LISIMBA

(Looks questioningly at Wambua, who nods the affirmative)

Yes, Memsahib. Your meal is ready.

HELEN

Good. I'm ready to eat.

HARRY

I'd rather write.

HELEN

(Helen sits to eat) Take the broth. You need your strength up.

HARRY

I'm going to die tonight. I don't need my strength up.

HELEN

Don't be melodramatic.

HARRY

You saw. I'm rotted halfway up my thigh now. What the hell should I fool with broth for? Molo, bring whiskey-soda.

HELEN

No. Lisimba. Wambua. Bring Bwana to the table. Molo. Bring broth.

(They all do as she orders)

Harry. Take the broth.

(Harry begins to drink, but it is too hot and he spits it out. He blows on it and is eventually able to take it down, gagging, as Helen watches.)

HARRY

You're a fine woman. Don't pay any attention to me.

(Harry continues to struggle with the broth. Helen begins to eat the ram and potatoes.)

They can bring my net out later and hang it from the tree and build the fire up. I'd like to be outside tonight. It's a clear night. There won't be any rain.

HELEN

Good

HARRY

You can't take dictation, can you?

HELEN

I never learned.

HARRY

That's all right. I'm sure you'll do fine.

(Lights on stage begin to dim and fade to darkness. A spotlight shines on Harry, as he is no longer able to identify differences between his internal and external realities. He still attempts to set down a dictation but grows confused and rambling. While the lights are dimmed, Lisimba and Wambua bring Harry's cot by the fire, and set up a mosquito net. Afterwards, all except Harry exit the stage)

Where to start. Where to start. Well, to begin with, I'd like a whiskey-soda. When she goes, I'll have all I want. Well, not all I want, but all there is. There isn't time, of course, to get down everything I left out. But, still, it seems as though it could all be telescoped into one paragraph if I can get it just so. Well I need to capture Paris. The way it was when I loved it. Back when it was home. And that trail went up in the hills and the cattle in the summer were shy as deer? Walking back down through the timber in the dark, holding the horse's tail when you couldn't

see. And the sight of the cabin. Right on the water. Lit up from from the chimney and candles and the light of the moon. So *many* good stories from out there and I've never written one.

Why?

HELEN

(Helen remains unseen but can be heard as a voiceover)

Why what?

HARRY

Why nothing. No reason. No reason at all. But still, I can't shake the feeling that I should be farther along by now. That I'd be better. Know more. That I'd have an *answer*. Still this has been very easy. If it's no worse than this as is goes on there is nothing to worry about. Except I might be in better company. Though, who would I want to have? No. When everything you do, you do too long, and do too late, you can't expect to find the people still there. The people are all gone. The party's over and I am with the hostess now. But I'm getting as bored with dying as with everything else. It's a bore.

HELEN

You certainly can be.

HARRY

Come again?

HELEN

A bore.

HARRY

Yes. Like anything you do too bloody long. One hell of a bore.

(Harry walks over to a cot by the fire and falls asleep.)

ACT 1, SCENE 7

(The lights brighten as dawn rises red the next morning. The color stays throughout the scene. The light of the fire has died down. The door to the tent is shut. Harry wakes to the sound of a plane)

HARRY

Boys! Boys!

(Lisimba and Wambua run in from the left.)

Light the smudges to guide in the plane!

(Two run off stage left. Helen opens the tent door and strides over to Harry)

HELEN

Oh, darling, I knew the plane would come!

HARRY

It seems this time you were right.

(The sound of a plane plays across the ceiling, eventually descending to stage level, indicating that the plane flies over again before making a safe landing.)

HELEN

Oh, I'm just so glad it's all going to be fine! What should we do now that we're saved?

HARRY

What do you mean?

HELEN

I mean that we've made it! We're getting back where we belong! We will get you to help, and get you fixed up right quick!

HARRY

How long'll it take, do you think?

HELEN

Well someone round here can take care to patch you up. Then we can rest somewhere nice! Give you all the time you need to recuperate before bounding back.

HARRY

Somewhere nice? Where do you think?

HELEN

Corsica? Rome? Oh, why not Paris! It would be lovely! You could write. I could nurse you by day and then each night I'd get to tear you apart.

(Compton walks in from the left and directly over to Harry)

COMPTON

Hello, hello! What's the matter, old cock?

HARRY

Bad leg, I'm afraid. Will you have some breakfast?

COMPTON

Thanks. I'll just have some tea. It's the Puss Moth you know. A bi-plane. I won't be able to take the Memsahib as there's only room for one.

(To Helen)

Your lorry is on the way though, Madam, so you have nothing to fear.

HELEN

Oh, thank you. Thank you so, so much.

COMPTON

Not at all! Come, we'll get you right in. I'll be back for the Mem. Now I'm afraid we'll have to stop at Arusha to refuel, so we had better get going.

HARRY

What about the tea?

COMPTON

I don't really care about it, you know.

HARRY

Well, then, let us away!

HELEN

Oh, Boys!

(Lisimba and Wambua return)

Do help Bwana into the plane.

LISIMBA & WAMBUA

(Together, in American English, without any accent)

Yes, madam.

(The two assist Harry off, then return where they stand with Helen. Together, they all wave to the sound of the plane taking off. After waving for a moment, Helen returns to the tent, shutting the door. The lights dim but they engine sound remains loud. Lisimba and Wambua exit stage right. When they block Harry's cot from view, Harry should return to his reclining position. When they exit the stage the plane engine fades into the growl and laugh of a hyena)

ACT 1, SCENE 8

(All stage lights should be off. The light of the campfire returns, shedding its glow on Harry, lying in the cot by the fire. As Harry sleeps, the sounds of the hyenas grow louder until a single hyena stalks through the audience and onto the stage. The hyena can be portrayed similarly to the picture noted on the final page, with an actor in costume. The animal tears at the net, and the sound brings Helen out startled from her tent. Through the net, the hyena begins to bite at Harry's leg. Helen runs around to the side of the tent with the gun rack, grabs a rifle, and loads it. Harry drifts awake and strikes weakly at the animal. Helen begins to line up her shot, aims, but brings the gun down. Adjusting, she raises the gun again and fires. Harry and the hyena are struck by the same shot. Harry's body falls onto the animal. Sounds of hyenas in the background fade as they run away scared. Porters run on to the stage, frightened.)

WAMBUA

Nini kimetokea? What has happened?

(Lisimba points over towards the campfire)

HELEN

(Quietly)

Molo?

MOLO

Yes, Memsahib?

HELEN

Whiskey-soda.

(Lisimba grabs a few possessions and exits in the direction of his family village. Wambua then grabs Molo by the hand and pulls him off in the same direction, leaving Helen alone)

All right then, I'll take care of it myself.

THE END

