The Snows of Kilimanjaro

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

In addition to his critically-acclaimed writing, Nobel-prize winning novelist, short story author, and journalist Ernest Hemingway is also famed for his adventurous lifestyle that took him across continents, cultures, and conflicts. He was an ambulance driver in Italy in World War I and a journalist covering the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. He witnessed the Allies landing on the beaches on D-Day and the liberation of Paris from Nazi occupation during WWII as a foreign correspondent. He moved to Paris in the 1920s with his first of four wives, Hadley Richardson. There he became part of a group dubbed "The Lost Generation," which included the likes of artist Pablo Picasso and writer James Joyce. He divorced Richardson for Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927, whom he later left for Martha Gellhorn in 1940. He met his last wife, Mary Welsh, during WWII in London. Hemingway won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 for his celebrated novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. After sustaining various injuries, including from surviving several plane crashes in Africa, Hemingway retired to Ketchum, Idaho, where he shot himself on July 2, 1961.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At its height in the early 20th century, Literary Modernism was a reaction and response to the traditional viewpoints and aesthetic of the Victorian period. The writers of this era had recently lived through the chaos of World War I, and the horrors and suffering of trench warfare radically changed their perspectives on society, humanity, and artistic expression. Hemingway became a key figure of the movement when he met the expatriate community known as "The Lost Generation" in Paris in the 1920s. Later, the effects of the Great Depression reverberated globally throughout the 1930s after the Wall Street Crash in 1929. Crippling poverty hit across many levels of society, a stark contrast to the excesses of the Roaring Twenties, exposing the failings of the contemporary social and economic system. The violence of the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s also had a profound ideological impact on many influential artists and writers of the time and their work, including Hemingway and his fellow Lost Generation member, Pablo Picasso.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Influential writer Ezra Pound summed up the Literary Modernist period succinctly: "Make it new." Thus, experimentation was a guiding principle of the literary works of the time. This brought about untrustworthy narrators, an indistinct concept of "truth," and a fascination with consciousness, leading to the stream of consciousness style Hemingway employs through much of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." James Joyce's *Ulysses* is noted as a leading example of the storytelling style, where the events of the novel take place largely within the mind of protagonist Leopold Bloom over the course of a routine day. A fellow member of "The Lost Generation," Joyce was an acquaintance of Hemingway's in Paris. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* also uses stream of consciousness techniques and flashbacks, although dissimilarly to Hemingway's story, the narrative moves back and forth between the eponymous upper-class Clarissa Dalloway and WWI veteran Septimus Warren Smith. However, the contrast between the anxieties of the ultra-rich socialites and the suffering of the shell-shocked veteran draw on social tensions similar to those explored in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Snows of Kilimanjaro
- **When Written:** 1935
- **Where Written:** USA
- **When Published:** 1936
- **Literary Period:** Literary Modernism
- **Genre:** Short story, modernist fiction
- **Setting:** African plains
- **Climax:** Harry's plane flies toward Mount Kilimanjaro
- **Antagonist:** Death
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

An offer Hemingway could refuse. On his return to America after being on safari in East Africa in 1935, Hemingway was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying he was only back in the country to earn more money for another trip. Reading this, an incredibly wealthy lady invited him to tea to offer to pay for the trip, on the condition she could join him and his wife. Hemingway politely declined, and later told a friend that he wrote "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" "as a study of what would or could have happened" to him had he accepted the tempting offer.

F. Scott Fitzgerald. In an earlier draft of the short story, Hemingway named F. Scott Fitzgerald as the writer mocked for his "romantic awe" of the very wealthy in his work. Hemingway later changed the name to Julian, although the reference

remains clear.

PLOT SUMMARY

Stranded on safari in the African plains, Harry apologizes to his wife Helen for the stench of the gangrene eating its way up his leg. The two of them watch the carrion **birds** that have encircled the camp, waiting for his death. The couple bicker over how to handle his illness, how to pass the time, and whether to get a drink from the servant, Molo.

Harry, a writer, begins to ponder his situation, regretting that now he'll never have the time to write everything he had planned to. Helen wishes they had never come on safari, and the two quarrel again over how they ended up in this situation. Frustrated, Harry declares that he's never loved Helen.

In a series of flashbacks, Harry remembers various moments from his past—overhearing diplomat Fridtjof Nansen's fateful underestimation of the Bulgarian mountain snows while traveling on the Orient Express; helping a deserter with bloody feet while living in a woodcutter's house in Austria; Christmas day in Austria, when the snow was so bright it hurt the soldier's eyes; and skiing, drinking, and hunting across European mountains.

Coming back to the present, Harry goads his wife into another argument, taunting her about her money and mocking the life of luxury they lived in Paris. He tells her it's amusing to hurt her this way. Seeing that he's made her cry, he says that he does truly love her, but he thinks to himself that this is the familiar lie by which he makes his bread and butter. He quickly insults her again and falls asleep.

Waking up from his nap, Harry discovers that Helen has gone hunting, so he is left alone with his thoughts. He muses on his life with her and among the rich, and how wasted the time has been. He had come on this safari to try to wean himself off the good life, to get back to the rougher lifestyle he had once pursued. Helen is a good and strong woman, but he does not truly love her. He has distracted himself from the more important task of writing by seducing a series of rich women for their money.

Helen returns with a ram she has shot to make a broth for Harry. Reflecting more about his wife's past, losses, and pursuit of him, Harry makes more of an effort to be civil. Helen repeats her belief a plane will soon arrive to take him to a hospital. Harry seems less sure, asking why she thinks it will. A **hyena** crosses the edges of the firelight as they settle in for the evening, and while he has his first pang of realization that death is coming for him, he hides his dread.

Harry slips into another flashback, this time about the women he has loved and lost: the first woman he loved who had left him, a previous wife, and time he had spent "whoring" and fighting in Constantinople. He then remembers life on the front during WWI, full of military blunders and panic-stricken retreats. Later, he had met irrelevant intellectuals at cafes in Paris and quarreled more with his wife at the time. He had never written about any of it, even though he saw it as his duty to write it all.

Coming back to reality, Helen offers Harry some broth. It's terrible. He looks with admiration at Helen anyway, and he feels death come again. He becomes more desperate to write, but Helen does not know how to take dictation, and he realizes the opportunity to write has passed for good. In another flashback, he recalls scenes from the mountainside, including his Grandfather's log house and a trout stream they rented in a Black Forest valley. He thinks back in detail on his time spent in the slums of Paris and the struggles of the poor there.

Harry has a brief conversation about drinks with Helen, but he falls asleep once more, the flashbacks coming thick and fast as he weakens. He thinks about a ranch where a "half-wit" boy had killed a trespasser, and Harry had taken him to the police. He had never written these stories either. Briefly awake, Harry has a confused conversation with Helen and repeats to himself he would never write of her or her kind of people. He remembers Williamson from the WWI trenches who had died in horrific circumstances, and back in the present he thinks his own death is comparatively easy—he's even bored with how it's dragging on, as he gets bored with everything.

Then, death comes for him a final time. Harry can feel its head on his cot, drawing closer, and he loses the ability to talk. In the morning, a friend called Compton comes in a small plane to take Harry to hospital. On the way, they steer off course toward the bright white snows of Mount Kilimanjaro, and Harry realizes he won't make it to the hospital but will instead lie in peace on the mountainside. None of this, however, is real: back on the plain, Helen is awakened by the distant cries of the hyena, and she discovers a lifeless Harry beside her.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harry – Harry is an American writer who has spent his recent years married to various rich women in order to live a life of luxury. Stranded while on safari in Africa with his current wife Helen, a thorn scratch leads to his leg becoming infected with **gangrene**. The infection ultimately takes his life, with story's narrative focusing on his quarrels with his wife and his death-bed musings until that point. While bedridden, Harry spends his waking hours bickering with the dutiful Helen about whether a plane will come to rescue him and whether he should have an alcoholic drink, while also antagonizing her about her wealth. At times he looks at her with admiration, while at other times he treats her with contempt. His inconsistent manner with Helen reflects his own inner turmoil, as he looks back on

his life unsatisfied and seeks someone to blame. In a series of flashbacks, the reader sees that Harry has lived an eventful life but has not written all the stories he had saved up to put down on paper. He experienced the trenches of World War I, spent time living in Paris in poverty and later as a well-financed socialite, and has hunted in woodlands and mountains across continents. At first, he blames his wife and her money for distracting him from his calling. But in the end, Harry decides if it was not her it would have been someone else, and he had destroyed his own talent by living in unproductive comfort and wasting his opportunities. Harry's life and career bear similarities to Hemingway's own, and so he is often seen as a reflection of the real-life writer's own concerns with his unfulfilled potential. Indeed, Hemingway once told a friend that "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is a study of what could have happened to him had he given in to a life of comfort, like Harry had.

Helen – Helen is Harry's wife, a wealthy woman who likes to drink, shoot, and make love. Her first husband died while she was relatively young. Struggling to bear the weight of the loss, she turned to lovers and drink, though neither satisfied her. Afterward, one of her two children also died in a plane crash and she decided to start life afresh, fearing loneliness. She pursued and married Harry, whom she loves and respects. She has given him access to all her money and followed his whims around the world. Nevertheless, Harry quarrels with her often, even as she is typically the voice of reason seeking to calm him. He tells her he has never loved her, calls her a "rich bitch," and fires insults at her to alleviate his anger with himself and his situation. These cut her to her core, as she loves Harry deeply, but she takes them in stride, believing he is a better person than he lets on. She shoots a ram to make him a broth and constantly expresses optimism the plane will come to rescue him. Although Harry resents her, it is clear he also admires Helen for her strength of character, which shines through despite the story being told from her husband's point of view.

Compton – "Compie" turns out to be a character in Harry's deathbed hallucinations, as he never left his cot by Helen's side at the camp. A friend of Harry and Helen's, Harry imagines Compie flying in to rescue him. At first, Compie plans to fly to a hospital, but later he redirects the plane to Mount Kilimanjaro, where Harry realizes he will lay to rest (though this all only takes place in Harry's mind).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Molo – An African servant boy provided on the safari trip. He helps change the dressings on Harry's infected leg, serves drinks, and helps move Harry's cot.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

EVER-PRESENT DEATH

In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry is on safari in Africa when an untreated thorn scratch turns into **gangrene** in his leg. Stranded without access to medical care, the leg slowly rots away, and Harry knows that he will soon die. As he awaits his end, he thinks about the death of his writing career, which will also be extinguished when he dies. Through Harry's regret over his wasted life and talent, Hemingway suggests that one should make the most of life, as death is ever-present and could strike at any time.

Throughout the story, as Harry lays on his cot, death is a physical presence, and the constant stench of Harry's lethal infection is the story's clearest manifestation of death. In the first conversation that Hemingway depicts between Harry and his wife, Harry apologizes for the odor, since he believes it must bother Helen. Later in the story, the smell takes on a more psychological role, becoming part of Harry's hallucinations as he feels that "death had come … and he could smell its breath." The smell of death pervading both the story's real and imagined scenes makes clear that death is inescapable, but the **hyena** lurking around the campfire also gives death a physical presence. Hyenas are scavengers, and the animal's presence implies that Harry is close enough to death to begin scavenging for his remains—in fact, when Harry dies, it's the hyena's call that alerts Helen. The hyena is both literally there (Helen notices it, calling it a "filthy animal") and part of Harry's thoughts about his death. When he feels death approaching, he imagines "a rush of … evil smelling emptiness" and notes that "the odd thing was that the hyena slipped lightly along the edge of it." The beast's symbolic significance intertwines with reality in Harry's mind, giving death physical form—one that is notably threatening and always lurking.

As Harry reflects on his many varied experiences, it becomes clear that death has in always been a dramatic force invading his life. For instance, Harry remembers a WWI bombing officer called Williamson who died caught in the wire lining the trenches. Having been hit by a German bomb, he screamed for Harry to shoot him as his bowels fell out and tangled in the wire. The deeply unsettling image is clearly one that has haunted Harry for a long time, revealing that he is no stranger to human mortality. Harry also recalls a hotel owner in Triburg whose livelihood had been ruined by inflation. The money he had worked hard to save became worthless, and he hanged

himself. While economic powers beyond the man's control drove him to his hopeless end, Harry has been living comfortably off others' money. Since both men blunder into doom, the story suggests that luck and circumstance cannot thwart encroaching death.

Now that Harry is approaching his own end, he realizes he never learned to use the time and talent given to him. It is not so much his death itself that weighs heavy on Harry's heart, but rather his wasted life and opportunities. Hemingway notes that the gradual decay of Harry's writing career began years earlier: "each day of not writing, of comfort, of being that which he despised, dulled his ability and softened his will to work so that, finally, he did no work at all." The focus here is on Harry's willful inaction, as the fault is clearly his own. Hemingway encourages readers to "despise" Harry for this through his harsh, scornful language throughout the story. It is often Harry's own voice that uses such language against himself, underscoring his frustration. This serves as a stark warning from a character that has experienced such regret first hand. Given the evidence Hemingway has provided of Harry's experiences with the untimely and often gruesome deaths of others, his unwillingness to write—that is, to make the most of his life and talent—is presented as a great moral failing: "He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would." In this way, Hemingway shows that Harry has not only let himself down, but also betrayed those whose stories will now also die with him.

Death is ever-present in this short story, as it is in life. Hemingway paints many varied pictures of the way death has invaded Harry's eventful life and his psyche as he approaches his own end. But Harry, though intimately acquainted with human mortality, has not heeded warnings of death's simultaneous unpredictability and inevitability and has not completed his life's work in time. Ultimately, the story makes the case for living life and striving toward personal goals while the opportunity remains, as no one can predict the time or nature of their own end.

COMFORT VS CALLING

In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Hemingway examines why and how an artist can fail in his calling. At first, Harry (who is a writer) finds various excuses for his lack of achievement—primarily the distractions of his romantic entanglements and living among the rich. Harry had told himself he would experience the high life and eventually write about the very wealthy, casting himself as a "spy in their country." Ultimately, however, he is seduced by a life of comfort at the cost of his artistic output. In contrast, he sees his earlier life among the poor as the best source material for his craft. In this way, Hemingway suggests that excessive comfort is the enemy of art.

From the outset, Hemingway characterizes a life of ease as antithetical to creative output. Harry's example shows how prosperity distances a writer from both the desire and ability to produce meaningful work, noting that "each day of not writing, of comfort, of being that which he despised, dulled his ability and softened his will to work so that, finally, he did no work at all." Here, comfort is set in direct opposition to a healthy work ethic and instead presented as an active force chipping away at Harry's talent. Harry directs anger at his rich wife, Helen, for drawing him into this world of plenty: "Your bloody money," he remarks early in the story, and repeatedly refers to his wife in his head as a "rich bitch." This aggression reveals that he sees her money as an enemy to his aspiring talent, further reflecting his association of comfort with a lack of creativity. In the end, Harry regrets his years spent socializing with wealthy people: "The rich … were dull and they were repetitious." Hemingway's dismissive attitude toward the luxury in which Harry has spent his later years suggests that such a lifestyle cultivates creative impotence, given its lack of stimulus.

On his deathbed, Harry wishes he had time to write about the struggling poor people he once lived among, whose experiences—unlike those of the rich—provided a well of inspiration. For instance, he describes at length his time in the slums of Paris and laments never writing about the suffering of the ordinary people that he witnessed there: "No, he had never written about Paris. Not the Paris that he cared about." Harry spends far more time at the very end of his life recalling those tougher, grittier experiences than he does reflecting on any of the high society parties he later attended. The implication is that writers should focus on that which moves them, and that writers have to be on the ground, living in hardship, to produce anything of consequence: "There was so much to write. He had seen the world change … He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would." Because Harry chose comfort over calling, the meaningful stories of those people will die along with him, which Hemingway presents as a major betrayal of purpose and a moral failing.

On greater reflection, Harry accepts that he cannot blame anyone but himself for the fact he has fallen into the temptations of a life of comfort. He decides that his wife and the lifestyle she provided him are not to blame for him not writing, but rather his own choices are: "He had destroyed his talent himself," he thinks. "Why should he blame this woman because she kept him well?" Upon accepting his responsibility, Harry reflects that "he had traded away what remained of his old life. He had traded it for security, for comfort too." The fault lies with Harry for allowing the allure of comfort to undermine his work. The two cannot be pursued side by side, and so the writer must make his choice. In this way, Hemingway points the finger squarely at artists to ensure their lifestyles are conducive to meaningful output.

By exploring Harry's regrets, Hemingway argues that choosing

comfort over calling is a selfish act that provides no sense of fulfilment. Harry's life is a great waste: he has let down those whose stories will now go untold, whose lives and deaths will not be recorded for posterity. It is an artist's choice, then, to decide if their life's work is to be meaningful, and Hemingway suggests making this choice will take great passion and presence of mind. Hemingway further demonstrates for the reader, via Harry's unsuccessful career, how true artists should experience the "real" world, which, the author suggests, is the only world worth writing about.

DEATHBED MEMORIES

At first, Hemingway takes pains to separate Harry's flashbacks from the story's current events and Harry's personal inner monologue. However, as Harry grows weaker, the distinction begins to fade, and his memories overwhelm and infiltrate his consciousness. The sum total of Harry's life flashes before his eyes on his deathbed, overwhelming him as he remembers, regrets, and wishes to record the memories he has failed to put into writing. Hemingway suggests that memories overwhelm Harry's grasp on the present because, in facing death, he desperately wants to relive—or to record—the experiences of his life.

With lines breaks, italicized text, and long, rambling sentences that evoke a stream of consciousness, Hemingway offsets Harry's flashbacks from his interactions on the African plains. Breathless sentences containing Harry's remembrance of the past run together as Harry's memories crowd in on him, fighting for space in his mind and on the page. For example: "Now in his mind he saw a railway station at Karagatch and he was standing with his pack and that was the headlight of the Simplon-Orient cutting the dark now and he was leaving Thrace then after the retreat." This creates two images of Harry: the aloof front that he presents to his wife and others, and his frustrated inner self hurtling through layers of long-distant past. The passages narrating the present also include Harry's thoughts and memories, but they are far more ordered. Sentences are shorter, and Harry offers succinct analysis of his past: "It wasn't this woman's fault. If it had not been she it would have been another. If he lived by a lie he should try to die by it." This is the introspection of a sane and conscious man in control of his faculties, and it contrasts greatly with the rushing narrative of the flashback portions.

As Harry's condition deteriorates, however, he finds this line between past and present harder to maintain. The memories that have been consuming his private contemplation spill unfiltered into his interactions. As the **gangrene** in his leg progresses, Harry begins to forget whether he is thinking or speaking. Coming back from a reverie about life on a ranch and all the stories "from out there," he demands that his wife, Helen, answer the question he had just wordlessly asked himself (that is, why he'd never written those stories): "'You tell them why,' he said. 'Why what, dear?'" Harry's mask begins to slip as his remorse outweighs his conscious front. Events and regrets from long ago increasingly absorb him as he approaches his death, making him progressively less concerned with actual, current conversations. Harry's memories are all he has to show of his life, and his failure to write—in a sense, his failure to record the world he knew—while he had the chance, has consumed him. On emerging sleepily from yet another memory (this time the grizzly death of a fellow soldier in the trenches during WWI), Harry says to his wife, "I've been writing … But I got tired." Lying in a sick bed, immobilized by his gangrene, he is now unable to write all he had planned to. His desperation drives him to resort to reliving his past as a last-ditch attempt to record his life.

Approaching his final breaths, Harry cannot look back on a life well lived, one in which his goals were met and his potential achieved. He re-lives key moments of his past in a race against the clock to symbolically preserve his experiences—something he failed to do with the time given him. Harry is finally, in a way, writing all those stories he never did—even if the only reader is himself.

A MAN'S VIEW OF WOMEN

In "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Harry has dysfunctional relationships with women. He typically sees them as nothing more than a means to an end, since he uses their money to live a life of luxury. Though at times he is cruelly dismissive of his own wife, Harry does occasionally display genuine respect for Helen by acknowledging the strength she has shown in the face of great emotional hardships. In his inconsistent attitude toward women, the reader sees Harry's insecurities. As a kept man, he is not fulfilling the typical gender roles of the era in which men were expected to provide for their wives, creating a sense of inadequacy which he projects onto the women who keep him. Hemingway doesn't disprove or challenge Harry's view that relationships require a leader and that the man ought to lead; however, by framing Harry's resentment as rooted in his own anxiety about manhood, the story implicitly highlights the reductive and restrictive nature of stereotypical gender roles.

Harry sees the role of women in his life as functional rather than romantic. He has used wealthy women to maintain a lifestyle that suits him. Harry depicts his relationship with Helen (and by implication his previous lovers) as purely transactional, noting to himself that "it was strange that when he did not love her at all and was lying, that he should be able to give her more for her money." Their partnership is more related to business than romance, though he feigns the latter to ensure his pay check. Harry also paints his wife as the "hostess" at the end of a party. This dismissive depiction further reveals his view of her as only a bit part within a wider story—which is, of course, his own story.

Rich women have been instrumental to Harry's pursuit of a quality of life beyond his means. He resents these women, however, deflecting his frustration that he needs their money and is not self-sufficient. From the very beginning of the story Helen's money comes between them, revealing more about Harry's own insecurities than her value as a person. Harry's first exchange with his wife, for instance, leads to bickering over Helen's "bloody money" and his references to her "own people." He holds her wealth against her, despite the fact she considers it his wealth, as well: "It was always yours as much as mine." Helen has opened her life up to him, but he responds with bitterness at his subordinate social standing. Furthermore, Helen is not the only woman Harry has used in this way, as a string of women have kept him in the life of comfort to which he has become accustomed: "It was strange, too, wasn't it, that when he fell in love with another woman, that woman should always have more money than the last one?" He notes that lying to these women about loving them is how he "made his bread and butter." His cynical tone highlights his resentment of his dependence, his distaste revealing a self-awareness of his deficiencies. He ought to be the breadwinner, but instead he has chosen a life reliant on women's wealth, fostering his sense of inadequacy.

Yet, at other times Harry reveals deep respect for his wife, as well as his previous partners. His frustrations are rooted in his own insecurities, and his changing attitude further reveals that his viewpoint is not objective. After yet another round bickering, Harry reflects on Helen's many qualities, such as her strong spirit and shooting skills, with a depth of feeling akin to a truly loving husband. When leaving aside his resentment over her higher social status, Harry clearly has high regard for his wife as an individual, revealing a more layered treatment of women in the story than the couple's first argument would suggest. Without his own self-doubt, he can simply admire the strong woman standing before him. Helen is a well-rounded character in her own right in the story. She goes out to hunt by herself, notably bringing back a male antelope. Her backstory involves personal loss, emotional hardship and self-assured independence—she did not need Harry, but sought him out for herself. "The steps by which she had acquired him," Hemingway writes, "were all part of a regular progression in which she had built herself a new life and he had traded away what remained of his old life." While Harry respects her strength, he sees her independent spirit as mutually exclusive to his own. According to his world view, one half of the couple must lead, and Harry has traded away his normative gender role (and thereby his own independence and self-respect) to defer to her.

In this first-person narrative, the protagonist's view of women is limited by his own insecurities, in particular his sense of emasculation. Even as Hemingway gives depth to Helen's character with a detailed and dramatic back story, she serves a subordinate role because she is seen only through the lens of Harry's subjective perspective. That Hemingway doesn't flatly reject Harry's viewpoints, however, doesn't mean that the story inherently supports or disagrees with them. What it does show is that men of the era saw women primarily through the prism of their own—perhaps insecure—masculinity.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GANGRENE

After Harry's thorn scratch becomes gangrenous, the infection moves slowly up his leg. Immobilizing him and weakening his physical and mental state, the steady yet painless progress of the gangrene—which ultimately kills Harry—mirrors the steady yet almost imperceptible deterioration of his life as a writer. Although gangrene is killing him, Harry notes this manner of dying is easy compared with others he has seen, the only discomfort being his inability to move around by himself. In a similar manner, despite seeming innocuous, too much comfort in his life has undermined and prevented his success as a writer: "each day of not writing, of comfort…softened his will to work so that, finally, he did no work at all." Harry's talent and passion gradually died after a life of comfort ensnared him, much as he will eventually pass away under the painless clutches of his gangrene infection.

THE HYENA AND BIRDS

Both a hyena and a flock of scavenging birds circle the safari camp as Harry gradually succumbs to his **gangrene** infection. As animals that eat carrion, these creatures are omens of Harry's impending death. Accordingly, they appear throughout the story at moments when death, or Harry's awareness of it, is especially close. At one point, Harry deflects a question by pointing to the birds and saying, "I'm dying now. Ask those bastards." More birds arrive as Harry's death creeps ever closer: "The birds no longer waited on the ground. They were all perched heavily in a tree. There were many more of them." The animals' growing numbers and urgency create a sense of momentum and dread. The hyena, too, is directly connected to Harry's impending death at various points throughout the story. When he feels death approach for the first time, for example, he notes that "the odd thing was that the hyena slipped lightly along the edge of it." The animal is a physical reflection of the fate awaiting Harry, and he begins to fixate on it as his mind grows weaker and more confused. Harry eventually tells Helen that death can take on any form, including "the wide snout of a hyena," just as he feels death itself lay its head on his cot. It is also notably the hyena's cry

that awakens Helen in the night and alerts her to Harry's eventual passing.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *The Complete Stories of Ernest Hemingway* published in 1987.

"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" Quotes

So now it was all over, he thought. So now he would never have a chance to finish it. So this was the way it ended, in a bickering over a drink.

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the story, Harry has been bickering with his wife Helen about whether or not to have a whiskey-soda, as their medical guide advises against drinking when infected with gangrene. Having realized this is truly the end of his life—tghathe has run out of time to do all he had hoped to achieve—Harry deflects his frustrations into quarreling over whether or not to drink. This reflects the way he has, for years, focused on the desire to live in comfort rather than strive to achieve his calling. In this way, Hemingway sets in motion Harry's, and the readers', gradual realization that life is what one makes of it, and one must make the most of it while they can—lest they end their days bickering over trivialities.

Now he would never write the things that he had saved to write until he knew enough to write them well. Well, he would not have to fail at trying to write them either. Maybe you could never write them, and that was why you put them off and delayed the starting. Well he would never know, now.

Related Characters: Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

On his death bed, Harry regrets delaying his life's work now that he has run out of time. As a writer, Harry has been holding onto memories and experiences which he planned one day to write down. He has faced the typical writers' concern that he cannot achieve his potential, but his excuses here are weak and self-serving. His procrastination, he reflects, has perhaps been a sign that he lacked the skill to do his stories justice in the first place. While that much will forever remain unclear, it's obvious that he has lacked the dedication that his chosen calling requires. Hemingway thus sets Harry up as an example to other writers and artists who have turned away from their calling in favor of comfort. Harry's laziness and self-doubt serve as a warning and, in a way, encouragement; one must at least try, as the alternative is the regret of never knowing one's potential. This, in the story, is itself perceived as failure.

"I love you, really. You know I love you. I've never loved any one else the way I love you." He slipped into the familiar lie he made his bread and butter by.

Related Characters: Harry (speaker), Helen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Harry has again been quarrelling with Helen and made her cry. Although he does not actually love his wife, he does not wish to punish her for his own hopeless situation, and easily lies about his affections. The cynical reference to how he makes "his bread and butter" is contrasted against the fact he is not the breadwinner in the relationship. He lives off Helen's wealth, as he did the women before her. As social norms of the time dictated he should be the financial provider in the relationship, such a situation would be distinctly emasculating; indeed, Harry he despises himself for his scheming resulting from his inability to provide himself with the lifestyle he desires. His feeling of emasculation highlights the restrictive nature of gender roles, and elucidates why Harry seems so full of resentment towards the women in his life..

... you said that you would write about these people; about the very rich; that you were really not of them but a spy in their country; that you would leave it and write it and for once it would be written by someone who knew what he was writing of. But he would never do it, because each day of not writing, of comfort, of being that which he despised dulled his ability and softened his will to work so that, finally, he did no work at all.

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

Harry considers himself distinctly separate from the wealthy upper-class society into which is relationships have granted him entry. He clearly resents these people yet fails to acknowledge that he has effectively become one of them, readily giving into the comfort such a lifestyle affords. From his deathbed, however, he asserts the rich are dull to observe and also actively dull his ability to write, as Hemingway positions comfort as antithetical to artistic calling.

Hemingway also makes use of an interesting pronoun switch here, from "you" to "he." Harry's immediate thoughts are within the context of his own past, so "you" indicates he is speaking to himself. The switch to the third person suggests a sort of authorial judgment of Harry, something more objective than Harry's own internal musings; as such, this allows Harry's experience to become a stark warning to others.

And he had chosen to make his living with something else instead of a pen or a pencil. It was strange, too, wasn't it, that when he fell in love with another woman, that woman should always have more money than the last one?

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Harry has used a series of rich women to provide the luxurious lifestyle that suits him. Hemingway sets Harry's primary calling, writing, in opposition to his current "career," bedding wealthy women, through implied word association: pen, pencil, penis. This set up also argues that pursuing a comfortable life and producing meaningful work are mutually exclusive.

Although written in the third person, the narrative is from Harry's perspective as he looks back on his life. His contemptuous tone here shows that he despises himself and his lifestyle. The rhetorical questioning is a means to mock his past choices. This reveals a scornful insecurity, as Harry feels emasculated by his reliance on his partners' money. His self-contempt stems from not adhering to the restrictive social norms of his era. The story does not directly challenge these norms, but Harry's self-loathing shows their negative, limiting effect on him, and by extension wider society.

The steps by which she had acquired him and the way in which she had finally fallen in love with him were all part of a regular progression in which she had built herself a new life and he had traded away what remained of his old life. He had traded it for security, for comfort too, there was no denying that, and for what else?

Related Characters: Helen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

The roles are reversed in Harry and Helen's relationship: she both pursued and provides for him. Harry was willing to accept wealth in place of independence but feels emasculated at turning to a woman for security and comfort. The emphasis is on the trade that must take place—one side must give way the other. There is no sense of compromise, only a leader and the lead. This reflects Western social conventions of the era and the sense of inadequacy men could feel in not performing their gender role.

Hemingway shows Harry has made the wrong decision, given his regretful tone. Focusing on Harry's trading of calling for comfort, Hemingway argues that that fate is worse than his willful emasculation. The latter is collateral damage in Harry's betrayal of his artistic purpose.

And just then it occurred to him that he was going to die. It came with a rush; not as a rush of water nor of wind; but of a sudden evil-smelling emptiness and the odd thing was that the hyena slipped lightly along the edge of it.

Related Characters: Harry

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Harry is talking with Helen when he suddenly feels an ominous foreboding. While he was previously stoic and pragmatic about his death, the significance of his situation suddenly dawns on him. The imagery of this realization illustrates Harry's perception of death and the nature of his fear. He does not picture death as a dramatic physical force overwhelming him bodily. He dreads death primarily because it brings to an end his psychological existence. It is not the pain or struggle that worries Harry, but the finality of the end. Ultimately, he fears the unknown—the "emptiness."

This "evil-smelling" emptiness in turn reflects the putrid stench of his infection, which attracts the hyena—a harbinger, or omen, of death—both in the real world but also in Harry's agitated musings. The border between Harry's perception of the present and his internal reflections begins to melt away from this point on, breaking down as he deteriorates. Hemingway suggets how when approaching death, a man's true, unfiltered being comes to the surface.

> There was so much to write. He had seen the world change ... He had been in it and he had watched it and it was his duty to write of it; but now he never would.

Related Characters: Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Harry is lost in his deathbed memories, reflecting on past romances that he thought he would one day write about. Indeed, he has meant to write about many of his varied experiences, but now time has run out. He had chosen comfort over calling, delaying the day he would deliver on his duty to his fellow man and write about their suffering. Hemingway's choice of wording here is very clear, that a man of talent has the obligation to record and inform the world. Harry's moral failure betrays those who had shared experiences with him, as well as those who would have learned from reading about them.

> "You can't take dictation, can you?"
>
> "I never learned," she told him.
>
> "That's all right."
>
> There wasn't time, of course, although it seemed as though it telescoped so that you might put it all into one paragraph if you could get it right.

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

As his death approaches, Harry becomes more desperate to write down his experiences. As comfort is no longer a possibility, he becomes more concerned with achieving his calling as a writer. He asks Helen to assist, but she has never learned to take dictation. It's too little too late, and the blame here lies with Harry, whose rich world experience long ago taught him death is an ever-present reality that could strike at any time. Hemingway illustrates the dangers of procrastination and comfort, as Harry's potential lies tantalizingly out of reach.

The final sentence reflects Hemingway's long-held view that "one true sentence" was the starting point of good writing. Here he expands the idea, that one good paragraph could hold the essence of truth, "if you could get it right."

> But if he lived he would never write about her, he knew that now. Nor about any of them. The rich were dull and ... they were repetitious.

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Harry comes back to the present after a flashback remembering "twenty good stories from out there" of which he had never written. Those memories of suffering,

hardship, and adventure contrast sharply with his later life among the rich—people he has decided are not worth writing about. This again implies that comfort is the enemy of art or creativity. Harry also largely dismisses Helen simply because she is wealthy, and therefore, in his view, boring. Harry, and by extension Hemingway, scorns the rich, who he sees as having easy lives devoid of wider significance or meaning. Instead of living such a life of comfort, writers seeking material for their work should live adventurously, experiencing hardship firsthand.

> No, he thought, when everything you do, you do too long, and do too late, you can't expect to find the people still there. The people all are gone. The party's over and you are with your hostess now.

Related Characters: Helen, Harry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

Harry thinks about the many horrific deaths he has seen and reflects on the nature of his own impending end. He decides he wishes only that he was in better company. His dismissive view of his caring wife (thinly) veils his deflected frustration with his own life choices, as Hemingway shows Harry should have stayed on course as a writer rather than living as a kept man. Harry sees life as a series of parties; you get the most you can from the situation and move onto the next one once the fun dries up. He sees rich women only as a means to an end and overstaying the day's events as poor judgement. But these parties (real and symbolic) have been a distraction, as a life of comfort that has dulled his ability to work—in the world of the story, a major moral failing. The lesson for both Harry and the reader is to focus on the meaningful aspects of life, not the excesses of high society.

> Compie turned his head and grinned and pointed and there, ahead, all he could see, as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun, was the square top of Kilimanjaro. And then he knew that there was where he was going.

Related Characters: Compton, Harry

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Harry is hallucinating that a friend called Compie has arrived in a plane to fly him to hospital. But they change course and fly instead toward Mount Kilimanjaro, which Harry understands to be his final resting place. Mountains appear often in the story as settings for great achievements or personal improvement. Here, Kilimanjaro offers the possibility for both. Harry knows he has underachieved in life, but a final resting place on the slopes of the mountain would place him in the ranks of the famed and respected adventurers he wishes to join. The snows also offer the possibility of a second attempt in the afterlife, the pure white snow symbolic of spiritual cleansing and fresh starts.

This bittersweet ending inspires pity, as Harry clings onto hope of an honorable, memorable life and death. He did not make it to Mount Kilimanjaro in the real world, of course, nor did he achieve his potential as a talented writer. Hemingway thus creates a poignant moment that comforts Harry in his final moments but underlines the importance of living a full life in the short time given.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

"THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO"

An unnamed man (later revealed to be Harry) says that it's "marvelous" that something is "painless," but he apologizes to his unnamed companion (his wife Helen) for its "odor." Laying on a cot under a mimosa tree, Harry wonders if the circling **birds** are drawn by this smell or by the sight of him. The birds have been circling since "the day the truck broke down," but they haven't touched the ground until today—a fact he notices because he planned to "use them in a story" someday.

Hemingway begins right in the middle of the action with little context. That he withholds the characters' names and the details of their situation echoes their sense of powerlessness. Slowly, the facts emerge: the circling scavenger birds indicate the presence of death, while the reference to the broken-down truck reveals that the characters are stranded in the wilderness. One thing Hemingway does disclose about the characters themselves is that the man is a writer— a fact divulged even before his name, highlighting its central role in his identity.

Harry tells Helen that it's "much easier if I talk," but that he doesn't want to bother her; she says that she's only nervous because there's nothing she can do until the plane comes. Helen asks what she can do to help, and Harry tells her that she could "take the leg off and that might stop it," or she could shoot him. Barring that, Harry says that talking is "the easiest" because quarreling makes the time pass. Vowing not to quarrel "no matter how nervous we get," Helen says that maybe someone will come for Harry today, but Harry says he doesn't want to move, which Helen calls cowardly. Harry responds, "Can't you let a man die as comfortably as he can without calling him names?"

Helen's reasonableness contrasts with Harry's antagonism as they quarrel. Helen chooses optimism in an attempt to calm and encourage them both, despite her nervousness and his defeatism. She also remains focused on possible solutions, even though actual ideas currently remain lacking. Meanwhile, Harry seems concerned only with how to pass the time, choosing to bicker instead of thinking positively or living his final hours with forgiveness and acceptance. Beyond indicating that they are very familiar with each other, this dynamic establishes their personal dispositions: Helen is caring and sensible, while Harry is argumentative and petulant.

While Helen insists that Harry won't die, Harry says that he is currently dying—"Ask those bastards," he comments, referencing the circling **birds**. Helen tells him he won't die if he doesn't "give up," and he calls her a "bloody fool." The pair fall quiet and look across the plain at herds of gazelle and zebra in the bush. She offers to read to him, but he refuses. Instead they bicker about whether a new truck will come and whether he should have an alcoholic drink in his condition. She tells Harry their concerns are not so different, really. Harry orders a whiskey-soda from Molo despite her protests.

Here, the nature of their predicament becomes clearer: Harry is nearing death, although it remains uncertain exactly how. Harry is resigned to his fate and, given the presence of the scavenger birds, it seems he has some reason to be; death hangs in the air above them, reflected physically in the form of the birds. The description of the bush clarifies the setting of the story in the plains of Africa, in a camp offering relative comfort. During this round of arguing, Helen also uses Harry's name for the first time, giving the reader further details about this dying writer. The pair are on holiday, it appears, and Harry ordering a drink from an African servant suggests they are financially comfortable. This gradual but steady stream of information reassures the reader all will be told in due course, establishing the narrative style and flow of the remainder of the story.

Harry thinks to himself that it's really "all over," and now he'll never have the chance to "finish it." He thinks about how since the **gangrene** started in his leg, the pain had left, and with it the horror of death. He feels great tiredness and anger, but no curiosity, even though the idea of death had obsessed him for years. Harry, still musing to himself, realizes now he will never have the opportunity to write all of the things he had saved up to write. Maybe he delayed it because he couldn't do it anyway, he thinks, but now he'll never know.

Harry is fatalistic, accepting his inevitable end. It is not the nature of his death that concerns him now, but simply the fact that he has run out of time. He is unsatisfied with his life, having never written about his many experiences. This seems at odds with his assertion he had been obsessed with death for years and raises the unwritten question of why, if he had been so concerned about the end, he didn't begin writing long ago. The indecisive wording of his reflections, meanwhile, suggests he never had a serious push to consciously consider why he was not writing earlier, and betray a nagging fear that his procrastination may really have been a guise for a lack of talent. These new, incomplete lines of thinking crop up when death is closer than ever, leaving this question of why he has failed in his calling without a satisfactory answer.

Helen looks at Harry over her drink and says she wishes they'd stayed in Paris or gone shooting in Hungary, where they would have been safe. Harry responds: "Your bloody money", which she protests, saying it had always been his money too, and she had followed him wherever he wanted to go, to do whatever he wanted to do. Harry says that she'd always loved it. She had loved it, she says, but not this trip, now his leg is injured.

Harry's aggression toward Helen's money begins to explain his ill-disposed demeanor toward his wife. Her protestation that she has shared her life and wealth with him contrasts her generosity with his petulance, characterizing him as a spoiled child. This also shows they have lived a life of comfort in Europe, placing them high on the social hierarchy.

Helen asks, rhetorically, why all this has happened to them, and Harry answers that he hadn't treated his thorn scratch properly, leading to the **gangrene**. Or maybe it was the truck driver that had burned out the truck, he suggests, or maybe leaving her "goddamned Old Westbury, Saratoga, Palm Beach people." Helen says, "I don't mean that" several times, as Harry forces the point. Helen tells Harry she loves him and he's not being fair. He replies he has never loved her. She dismisses his anger and tries to calm him down, saying, "You're out of your head," and begging him to stop drinking as they have to do everything they can to fight the gangrene. Harry tells her to do it, as he's tired.

The strange, strained relationship between Harry and Helen plays out as he goads her, mocking her rhetorical question with direct answers. Despite Harry's intentionally hurtful words, Helen remains calm and rational, reasoning that he is ill and cannot mean what he says. Helen comes across in this exchange as a sensible and clear-headed woman who loves her husband. Harry's constant references to her money indicate his sense of inferiority that taint his view and treatment of her. He is not naturally one of her "people," creating distance between the couple on account of his insecurities.

In a stream-of-consciousness flashback, Harry remembers leaving Thrace on the Simplon-Orient railway from Karagatch after a retreat on the front during World War I, and hearing Nansen misjudging the mountain snows in Bulgaria, leading to the deaths of those he ordered to cross it. There was also snow another Christmas on the Gauertal when they lived in a woodcutter's house for a year, where they helped a barefooted deserter evade the police. On another Christmas day, in Schrunz, the snow was blinding as he looked out from the inn, as memories of skiing and gambling in Europe come flooding back to him. Herr Lent lost everything gambling the week they were snow-bound in the Madlener-haus. But Harry had never written about any of that.

In the first of many series of flashbacks, Harry recalls memories relating to his experiences around World War I, which took place from 1912-14. Thrace is an area in Europe that is now spilt between Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. After the war and the changing of borders as agreed upon in the Armistice, Fridtjof Nansen was a key figure in the movement of peoples across these new borders. Harry overheard his fateful miscalculation of the safety of the mountain passage while riding the Orient Express, a glamorous railway that traveled across Europe, showing he lived in close proximity to key decision-makers at the time. The Gauertal valley lies in Austria, where the war still loomed over Harry's life, as a deserting soldier wanders across his peaceful mountainside hermitage. Harry speaks with familiarity of Schrunz, in the tiny European principality of Liechtenstein, and the variety of his travels demonstrate his diverse life experiences—experiences that Harry never got around to writing about.

Nor had Harry written about another cold bright Christmas day, when a soldier had bombed the Austrian officers' train and someone had called him a "bloody murderous bastard." It was the same Austrians they'd skied with after, Harry thinks, before reconsidering this. He had talked with Hans about the various battles they had both witnessed when they hunted hares together, but Harry had never written a word about that either. He'd lived four winters on the Vorarlberg and the Arlberg, sipping good kirsch and skiing on powder snow as they sang on their way to the inn, where in the "smoky, new-wine smelling warmth, they were playing the accordion."

These recollections reveal that Harry saw many terrible events during his time at the front, which blurred the idea of right and wrong—a phenomenon that strongly influenced the Modernist movement in art and literature. People on Harry's own side, this moment makes clear, committed unthinkable acts, and after the war Harry even socialized with people who were once his enemy (although none of them were truly the same people as they were before the war started). Alongside the horrors of war lies Harry's nostalgia for leisure time spent in Europe, drinking too much and singing rousing songs while skiing. The stark contrast shows how on the one hand Harry had the worst experiences of his life in Europe, but one the other he also had some of his best. To him, these are all worth writing about—the pain alongside the joy. Again, though, he never wrote about any of it.

Coming back into focus on the present, Harry asks Helen where they had always stayed in Paris, bickering over the details. She says, "You said to loved it there," to which Harry replies love is a dunghill and he's the cock that gets to crow on it. Helen asks him if it's necessary for him to, metaphorically, burn his saddle and armor on his way out. He replies that her "damned money" was his armor. She asks him to stop and he agrees to as he doesn't want to hurt her, though she says it's too late. He quickly decides antagonizing her is "more amusing," as the only thing he really liked to do with her he can't now. She points out they liked to do many things together, and he tells her to stop bragging.

Fresh from mulling over the blurred lines between good and evil, right and wrong, Harry questions the nature of love. He suggests lovers are merely performers—an insight into his own mercenary approach to romance. Helen reminds him of her feelings by once again trying to bring him back to reason. Turning the argument back to her money via a tenuous link, Harry shows he is only concerned with licking his own wounds. They cannot make love to pass the time, so he chooses to quarrel instead. His selfish approach evidences his dismissive view of the other sex. Referring to Helen's money as his protection underlines Harry's insecurity on this point, suggesting he feels emasculated because he relies on her wealth.

Helen cries. Seeing this, Harry explains he doesn't know why he's being like this, suggesting "it's trying to kill to keep yourself alive." He says he does love her really, like he's never loved anyone else. He thinks to himself how easily he tells this familiar lie he has used to "make his bread and butter." Helen says he's sweet to her, but Harry immediately falls back to insulting Helen: "You rich bitch." She asks him why he has to become a devil now, to which he responds he doesn't like to leave things behind.

Harry does not love his wife but has used her for her money. The social norms of the time stipulated Harry ought to provide for his wife, but the opposite is true in this relationship. This causes him embarrassment, which he deflects into contempt directed at Helen, whom he characterizes as the source of his shame. The strength of his cruelty to Helen reflects the depth of his inner anguish at his inability to provide for himself. Just as Harry's cruel words say more about him than Helen, his insecurity says more about the social framework of the time than his own mental strength. Although Hemingway does not directly argue this point, his characters' relationship reflects the perspective of the wider society from which Hemingway wrote. Gender roles and expectations were restrictive and inflexible, causing pain where there could be love. Helen, a good woman, loves and cares for her husband, but he cannot accept and reciprocate her love freely due to his sense of financial—and, as such, masculine—inadequacy.

It seems Harry has been asleep, as he awakens in the evening. There are more **birds** waiting in a nearby tree. A servant tells him Helen has gone off to shoot. He notes she has gone far off so she won't disturb the animals nearby he likes to watch. She's thoughtful, he thinks to himself. It is not Helen's fault she believes his well-practiced lies, he muses, which he has used on many women previously, repeatedly moving onto richer and richer circles. He had seen himself as a spy in the midst of high society, but he had discovered there was nothing he wanted to write about any of these rich people. They were dull and living among them had dulled his ability and willingness to write.

The fact that more birds gather and Harry unwittingly falls asleep bodes ill. Death lingers on the edges of the narrative. Helen, meanwhile, remains hopeful and continues with her day-to-day activities, albeit with respect to Harry's peaceful repose. She remains a positive figure—optimistic, pragmatic, and independent. Harry's attacks on her seem to be even greater evidence against his view of her and the social pressures on their marriage. Sensing this himself, Harry's thoughts turn inward toward his own failings. Here Hemingway presents Harry as an emasculated figure, as he disdains himself for his leech-like lifestyle. In contrast to the harsher memories in Harry's earlier flashbacks, his life among these wealthy people, however comfortable, has been unproductive. High society provides no writing prompts, and worse yet, has attacked his drive to write at all. Comfort has undermined his calling, while hardship had fostered it.

Harry had come to Africa, where he had the best and happiest times of his life, to escape from that inertia, to try to work, like fighters who go to the mountains to train. Helen had enjoyed the adventure, Harry thinks to himself, and he mustn't punish her because his end is near. If it hadn't been her it would have been another; each woman always seemed to have more money than the last. He destroyed his talent himself, by betraying himself, drinking too much, and by trading his talent. Yet he was never satisfied. Perhaps how "you make your living is where your talent lies," he reflects. But he would never write that now, though it was well worth writing.

Through Harry's failure and regret, Hemingway demonstrates how writers who turn away from their calling cannot blame their chosen distractions—in Harry's case, the comforts of being a kept man—as an excuse. Hemingway sets high standards for men of talent, condemning Harry for wasting his; talent is something to be deployed purposefully and meaningfully, not traded for prosperity. Harry speaks mockingly of his relationships with a series of rich women, and his scorn reveals both the transactional view he takes of the, and, on a deeper level, his disgust at this mercenary approach.

Harry sees Helen heading back to the camp with a ram she has shot. Harry looks at her with admiration as a good shooter, lover, and drinker. He recalls her past, how her husband had died, and she had sought solace in alcohol and men. Later, one of her two children died, and she had to make a new life for herself, as she was frightened of being alone. The way she pursued Harry was a "progression" by which he had "traded away" his "old life" as she built a new one, he thinks to himself. He had traded his old life for security and comfort, and for something else he can't quite identify. He is as happy to have her for a partner as anyone else, though this new life was now ending because he had not properly treated his thorn scratch while trying, and failing, to photograph waterbuck.

Giving Helen a more detailed background, Hemingway paints her as a well-rounded character with her own motivations and interests. Harry's scorn for her reflects badly on him, and Helen's loyalty to Harry is laudable. Death once again hangs over the text, this time in Helen's past. Unlike Harry's response to similar experiences, however, in the face of loss and an awareness that death could come at any time, Helen set out to create a new life for herself. Harry, meanwhile, depended on others to provide a life of comfort, aiming simply to pass the time. Hemingway focuses here on Harry's betrayal of his calling: he traded away his talent to secure his comfort. Helen and her money have been simply vehicles to aid that transition.

Helen arrives back in camp, saying she has killed the ram to make a broth for Harry, and asks how he is. He treats her far more civilly, saying she shoots "marvellously." She says she's loved Africa, if only Harry was all right. It's "marvellous" to see him better, she says, and asks him to treat her better now. Harry claims not to remember what he said. Helen shares her fear that Harry will "destroy" her again, and having been destroyed several times before, she cannot bear it. Harry responds he would only destroy her "in bed," which she describes as they way we're made to be destroyed. Helen is sure the plane will come tomorrow, and says the boys have everything ready for its arrival. After Harry's better they'll have the good destruction, she says, not the "dreadful talking kind."

Having settled on blaming himself for his own inadequacies, Harry can now treat Helen with the courtesy she has shown she deserves. Despite his treatment of her earlier, she still seeks to care and provide for him, hunting meat for a broth to strengthen him and voicing both concern and optimism. She makes herself vulnerable to Harry by expressing her fear of being "destroyed," which he playfully turns into a well-received sexual advance. Helen's approval and reciprocal responses suit a happily married couple's exchange, as Hemingway presents his view of a healthy romantic interaction—losing (destroying) themselves in each other.

Harry suggests they have a drink. Night falls as they do so, and a **hyena** passes beyond the edges of the camp. Harry says the "bastard crosses there every night." Helen describes it as "a filthy animal," although she doesn't mind them. In the evening calm, with camp activity taking place around them, and no pain except for the discomfort of lying in the same place, Harry regrets his earlier injustice to Helen, who has been kind to him. Suddenly, Harry feels the rushing realization that he will die. It reminds him of an evil-smelling emptiness, with the hyena somehow circling the edge of the void. He hides his dread from Helen, saying only he feels "a little wobbly," and she leaves to have a bath.

The presence of the hyena, a scavenging beast, brings the narrative focus back onto the ever-looming presence of death. Although Harry and Helen are on better terms, he remains on his fatal trajectory, the contrast clearest when an ominous foreboding interrupts Harry's admiration of his wife. The hyena's presence in his image of the void cements the creature's role as a symbol of death in the story. Harry's perception of death, meanwhile, reveals the nature of his fear. He does not fear pain, and in fact has none. Rather, the bleak unknown prompts his dread. Harry's time is nearly up, and he fears dying without success, as a nobody, with no chance to make it right. In this way, Hemingway uses Harry's regret as an example for all artists of talent, suggesting that they must make the most of the time given them while they still can.

In another rambling flashback, Harry remembers his time in Constantinople after quarrelling with a previous wife in Paris. He had "whored the whole time" but failed to kill his loneliness. Feeling worse, he had written a letter, cold sober, to his first love, who had left him long before, telling her how "he'd never been able to kill it." Everyone he'd slept with after had made him miss her more. Missing her so much he felt sick, he picked up a "hot Armenian slut" at a club and picked a fight with the tough gunner she was with. In the morning, he returned to his own hotel before she woke up. He had a black eye and was carrying his coat because one sleeve was missing.

As he weakens, Harry begins to fall into longer and more frequent flashbacks. In this section, sentences run together to create a breathless, rushing narrative as Hemingway pulls the reader into the middle of Harry's frenzied, dramatic encounters. The strength of his memories overwhelms him as his desperation to write them becomes more urgent. Here, the reader sees another motivation behind his dismissive treatment of women: beyond seeking their money, he has used women to heal himself of past wounds, albeit unsuccessfully.

Harry recalls leaving that same night for Anatolia and later on the same trip riding through fields of opium poppies. The newly-arrived Constantine officers "did not know a god-damned thing," and upon attacking the guns had fired into the troops and the British observer had cried like a child. It was the first time they had seen dead men wearing ballet skirts and pompoms, and when the Turks had advanced "lumpily" the skirted men had run, so officers had shot into them, but then they fled themselves. They all ran, the British observer included, until they could taste "pennies" in their mouths and their "lungs ached." When he got back to Paris that time he couldn't stand to talk of it, or the other worse things he had seen. He passed an American poet in a café with "a stupid look in his potato face," whose conversations with another intellectual about literary movements seemed irrelevant.

Death returns to the story, this time in the faceless, massive losses of war. The horror of the scenes drove grown, worldly men to cry like children. The fact one instance involves friendly fire underlines the pointlessness of this loss. The ballet skirts and pompoms refer to the uniforms of Greek soldiers, lying dead on the ground as the Turkish forces advanced. The officers randomly executed deserting soldiers, shooting into the fleeing masses, although in the face of their own certain death they themselves joined the retreating horde. That Harry highlights the Greek uniforms as ridiculous mirrors the grotesque comedy of their deaths, while the officers' failed attempts to stem the retreat further shows the pointlessness of all the violence. This chaos and terror contrasts starkly with the poet Harry later sees at a cafe in Paris discussing literary theory. Writers, Hemingway argues, need to be on the ground, living in the middle of the action and hardship to understand the meaningful realities of the world. Sitting comfortably in a cafe leads to creative impotence.

Harry recalls being glad to be home after returning from the front, and loving his wife again. But the "end of the beginning of that one" started when a response to his letter to his long-lost love had been sent up to the apartment one morning and his wife has seen it. Harry thinks back on the good times with "them all," and the quarreling. He wonders, why is it "they always quarreled when he was feeling his best?" He considers why he had never written about any of those experiences. He hadn't wanted to offend anyone, and then there had been other things to write. But he had seen the world change, and he remembers the people and how they changed too. He had been there and seen it, and he had a "duty to write of it," but now he never would.

Having seen Harry bait Helen into quarreling despite her determination not to humor him, the reader takes Harry's rhetorical question with a pinch of salt. An imperfect narrator, Harry does not provide an objective view of his relationships. As Harry approaches his final moments, the memories that overwhelm him are those he had saved up to write down. He recollects the meaningful chapters of his life, rather than any of the time spent amid high society. He sees these as not only worth writing about, but his "duty" to write about. Hemingway expands the directive he provides for writers of talent: to follow and commit to their calling as an obligation. Harry's laziness is a moral failure, then, and a warning.

Coming round from his flashbacks, Harry sees Helen has returned from her bath. She suggests he have some broth to keep his strength up. He declares he'll die tonight and doesn't need his strength. Helen tells him not to be melodramatic, but he tells her to use her nose, as the **gangrene** has rotted halfway up his thigh. He demands a drink instead. Helen asks more softly for him to try the broth, and he agrees. He tells Helen, a "fine woman," not to pay attention to him. As he looks at her "well-known pleasant smile," he feels death approach him again, this time like a puff of wind that makes a candle flicker. Once again, he hides the imaginary encounter from Helen.

Death is a stench in the air, a future reality plaguing the couple's thoughts, and a physical presence as Harry's condition deteriorates. The gangrene progressing up his leg heralds his soon departure, as well as the closing door on his opportunity to achieve his calling. Helen remains pragmatic, offering broth and positivity, although Harry is a reluctant recipient of both. Her insistence paints Helen as independently minded, while Harry's obedience despite his pessimism shows his reformed approach to his marriage. Yet this cannot save him from the reality of his situation, as death again makes itself known to its next victim.

Harry says he'll lie out by the fire tonight rather than in the tent as it will not rain. He thinks to himself, "so this is how you died, in whispers you cannot hear." He promises himself he will not spoil the "one experience" he has never had with quarrelling. He asks Helen to take dictation, but she doesn't know how. There is no time anyway, Harry says to himself, but it feels like he could fit it all in one paragraph if he could just get it right.

Perceiving tonight will be his last, Harry decides to sleep under the stars, perhaps planning to gaze upon the void to prepare himself for that other abyss. A worldly man, Harry does not want to spoil the one experience he has never had himself. Death has been presence throughout his life, but he has learned its lessons too late. Now, he has run out of time to write, though—in phrasing reminiscent of Hemingway's own writing philosophy—Harry feels he could fit it all into one well-written paragraph; Hemingway often said that starting with "one true sentence" would provide the momentum for the rest of the work. Harry expands that idea, suggesting that all of his truth could be captured in a paragraph, "if only he could get it right." The implication is that one paragraph capturing the essence of existence is the writer's ultimate, perhaps unattainable aim, though Harry certainly cannot achieve that within the few hours he has left.

Slipping back into flashback, Harry remembers his grandfather's log house on a hill above a lake, which had been burned down and rebuilt with white lumber. The melted remains of his grandfather's guns had been left where they fell. He didn't buy any others and had stopped hunting. After the war, they rented a trout stream in a Black Forest valley, and Harry casts his mind back to the two tree-lined mountainside trails that led there. A hotel owner in nearby Triburg whom they had been great friends with had killed himself when the next year's inflation put him out of business. He could dictate all that, Harry thinks.

Harry casts his mind back to idyllic mountainside scenes, but even here death and destruction are present. Harry's grandfather's loyalty to his melted guns reflects his sense of loss, leaving their remains in the ashes as a memorial to his burned down house. Life and circumstances are always temporary, a lesson Harry has not acted on in good time. The beauty of the Black Forest in southwest Germany cannot protect the hotel owner, whom economic forces overwhelm, driving him to suicide. These stories of people's vulnerability and suffering are placed at odds with Harry's unproductive life of comfort, which has led to his betrayal of those people whose stories he believes he had the duty to write.

You could not dictate the Parisian slums Harry had lived in, he thinks to himself, with their flower sellers, the old men and women always drunk, and runny-nosed children. He remembers the smell of sweat, poverty, drunkenness, and whores. His poor neighbors were descendants of Communards. The Versailles troops had come in and killed their family members—anyone who looked working class—after they took down the Commune. In that quarter was where Harry had written the start of all he was to do. There was never another part of Paris he had loved like that, where he lived in a cheap room at the top of a hotel and could see all of Paris' roofs, chimneys, and hills.

Harry feels he cannot dictate the poverty of the Parisian slums, but actually being there, in the midst of it, had given him the power and focus to write. Again, Hemingway emphasizes that writers must be personally familiar with their topic—including its people and the locations—to truly capture them in writing. Harry's detailed memories come in quick succession as he rushes to remember all the details while he still can; unable to write them now, he seeks at least to remember. Once again death is present even in his memories, reflected in the massacre of communists in the slums. Here the killing was largely indiscriminate, further reflecting the unpredictability of death.

Helen brings Harry back into the present, offering him some more broth. He asks for a drink instead, though they agree it's bad for him. He thinks to himself, when she leaves he'll have all he wants. Feeling exhausted, he notes death is not there at that moment. It must have gone around to another street, he thinks to himself: "It went in pairs, on bicycles, and moved absolutely silently on the pavements." He falls back asleep.

Although Harry cannot feel death's physical presence at this moment, its menacing influence lingers and he bides his time until it comes to collect him. He feels he is becoming more intimately acquainted with death now that he knows it is on his trail, beginning to imagine its specific shape and habits. Helen, though meaning well in her care for Harry, distracts him from his more urgent task of "writing," in his mind, the memories he is desperate to save. He views Helen as an impediment, one he would rather be rid of.

In another series of flashbacks, Harry returns to Paris, regretting never writing about *that* Paris, the one he cared about. He calls to mind the ranch behind the mountains where a "half-wit" young farmhand had killed a trespasser. Harry had strapped the frozen, half-eaten corpse onto a sled and the two of them skied it into town, where Harry had turned the boy over to the police. The boy had had no idea he was going to be arrested, thinking he'd be rewarded. There were at least twenty good stories from out there and he hadn't written one, he thinks to himself. Why?

*Harry sees the Paris he cares about as separate and distinct from the one that he later inhabited with his rich wives. Immediately returning there, to "*that *Paris," after only a brief exchange in the present demonstrates how his memories are overpowering him, physically and mentally. His regret that he has not written these stories essentially paralyses him, gripping his consciousness. The story of the boy on the ranch yet again brings death to the fore, as Harry's physical familiarity with its grim realities underlines his overdue realization of his own mortality.*

Coming to, disoriented, Harry tells Helen to "tell them why." She doesn't follow his meaning, asking "Why what, dear?" Harry thinks to himself how he would never write about her, nor the dull rich people she associated with. They drank too much, played too much backgammon, and were repetitious. He remembers poor Julian who had a romantic awe of them, starting a story with the line: "The very rich are different to you and me." Someone had responded: yes, they have more money. Julian had thought they were a special, glamorous race and when he found they weren't it had wrecked him, Harry remembers. He on the other hand could beat anything as long as he didn't care. The one thing that had worried him about death was the pain, though he could withstand it as well as any man, but here, with this, he had no pain.

Harry's memories hold him in their grasp as he cannot concretely separate his internal musings from the present, leading to a confused exchange with Helen. His contempt of the rich comes from experience, as his attempt to participate in their lifestyle and find something to write about has left his writing career in tatters. Harry scorns other writers who viewed them with "romantic awe." The reference here often considered to be to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who began a story with a similar opening line. Harry's scorn is hypocritical, given he abandoned his own calling as a writer to pursue a life of comfort from the rich. Although he might not have been "wrecked" like Julian, his life of leisure came at the cost of his talent. He distances himself from such psychological pain by not caring, and so the only aspect of death he fears has been physical pain. But even in death he remains in relative comfort, with no pain coming from the infection.

Falling back asleep, into another flashback, Harry remembers the gruesome fate of bombing officer Williamson in the trenches, his guts spilling into the wire after he was hit by a German stick bomb. He was a very brave man and a good officer. They brought him in alive and had to cut him loose. Williamson had begged Harry, "For Christ's sake shoot me." They had talked before that the Lord would never send anything you couldn't handle, and thought it meant you would faint before the pain was too great, but Williamson was awake until Harry gave him all of the morphine he had saved for himself, though it didn't work right away.

Falling sleepily back into another flashback, weakened by his infection and rushing memories, Harry recalls a grisly death he witnessed that contrasts his own painless passing. Hemingway shows the grim reality of death close up here. Harry is intimately acquainted with human fragility, as well as the fact that life, or perhaps death, can portion out suffering beyond a man's capacity to handle. This throws into sharp relief the excuses Harry had made for his failures earlier, as well as the blame he had apportioned to others; he has long known the horrors of death, which have obsessed him for years, yet he did not act on those insights and write his experiences in due time.

Waking up, Harry contemplates his coming death, which he considers his to be relatively easy. Only, he wishes he had better company. But no, when you do everything too long and too late the people are all gone, he thinks wordlessly. He's left with the hostess of a long-finished party. He's even getting bored with dying. Aloud, he says anything you do too long is "a bore." The firelight shines on Helen's "pleasantly lined face" and he hears the cry of the **hyena** beyond the firelight. He tells her he's been writing, but he got tired. They discuss going to bed, and Harry says he feels strange — he feels death come around. Harry tells Helen the one thing he never lost was his curiosity, and she says he's the most complete man she knows. He responds, "How little a woman knows."

Harry feels alone in the world because he has left the life with which he felt truly connected. His wife, though he admits her personal merit, is not part of a lifestyle that he feels has empowered him or his talent. Instead he has moved in high society circles but found they have sapped his talent, and now that the party is over he is left only with his wife, or "hostess," who invited him. Harry's disparaging view of his wife's role in his life again underlines his transactional view of women, that she provides a service for his convenience, opening doors for him into higher echelons of society. Again, his perspective arises from his insecure sense of masculinity, as he depends on her, in what is a role reversal for the time, which implicitly suggests the limitations of those roles in the first place. The presence of the hyena, meanwhile, brings Harry's approaching death back into focus, and soon after he feels death come by again. Hemingway characterizes death as predatory, and Harry himself is the prey. Harry tells Helen he has been writing, although of course he has not moved from his cot. For him, reliving his varied life experiences is a desperate attempt to symbolically preserve them, even if he is the only reader.

Harry feels death comes again, this time lying its head on his cot. He tells Helen not to "believe all that about a scythe and a skull," as it can just as easily be two policemen on bikes or a wide-snouted **hyena**. He tells it to go away and asks Helen to tell it to leave too. It moves up him, no longer taking a shape, just taking up space. He finds he can no longer speak and it settles on his chest so heavily he cannot breathe. Helen asks Molo to carry Harry's bed into the tent as she believes he has fallen asleep, and when they lift the cot the weight lifts from his chest.

Death takes on its most physically present form as it finally approaches and weighs heavily on Harry. Working up from the foot of his cot and settling onto his chest, the reader understands that it is the progress of the gangrene eating at him from the inside out. From Harry's perspective, though, he has weakened enough for death to move against its prey, much as the nearby hyena only eats carrion or dying animals. After following him for much of his life, across continents and peoples, death has finally taken him for its own. Hemingway shows that death comes for all men, in the end, and the time and manner cannot be anticipated. As such, it is imperative to live a full life, particularly for writers or artists with the duty to represent those experiences.

In the morning, Harry hears a plane and the boys preparing for its landing. Compton arrives, and Harry offers him breakfast. After a brief discussion with Helen beyond Harry's range of hearing, "Compie" comes back seeming cheery and decides to skip the cup of tea he'd requested. There's only space for Harry in the plane. The boys carry Harry over, and they manage to settle him in with his bad leg stretched out straight. They wave goodbye and set off with the familiar roar and clatter. Harry watches the wildlife and landscape below as they set out. Instead of going to Arusha to refuel as planned, they turn left. They begin to climb and seem to be heading East, Harry judges. After passing through a storm, Compie points to the mountain saying, "as wide as all the world, great, high, and unbelievably white in the sun … the square top of Kilimanjaro." Harry realizes that was where he is going.

Although not italicized like the other imagined or remembered scenes (in order to delay the climax), this scene takes place exclusively within Harry's mind. Given Harry has produced this alternative ending to his own story, it provides an insight into the manner of death he would prefer. First, he is remembered: his friend Compton makes it to him in good time to save him. Harry believes he has not stayed too long at the party, having lost track of his friends, after all. This reveals a core desire only hinted at by his previous, deflected frustrations: the desire to belong to a people that value him. Second, his final resting place on the highest mountain in Africa gives him an honorable ending worthy of remembering. Although he has not written down his life experiences for posterity, such a prestigious gravesite leaves a notable mark to commemorate a life well-lived.. Harry's passing is bittersweet, as he believes he has been and will be remembered, though in reality this is not necessarily the case. But Hemingway does not condemn him for these aspirations. Rather, Harry's failure to secure this manner of passing is a warning to others squandering their talent and wasting their lives, which can end in a moment.

Back in the tent, Helen is asleep. The "strange, human, almost crying" of the **hyena** rings out in the night. Helen, still asleep, dreams of her daughter's debut at "the house on Long Island" and her father being rude. The hyena makes another, louder sound and rouses her. She wakes up disoriented and afraid. She looks over to Harry, who has lifted his leg out of the cot and is unresponsive. His dressings have come off his leg and she can't bear to look at it. Panicking, she calls out for Molo to come help. She calls his name several times but cannot hear Harry breathing. The hyena calls out again, but she can't hear it because her heart is beating too loudly.

Hemingway brings us back into the present this time by focusing on Hele —this fact alone indicates the truth of Harry's fate to the reader. She is dreaming of her own past and family, and of social situations a world away from those that plagued Harry's dreams. The hyena's call awakens her to reality, the one in which Compton did not make it in time to save Harry. She panics, not as familiar with death as Harry had been, and sensibly calls for help. But it is too late; it had long been too late for Harry. The hyena's "strange, human, almost crying" call seems to lament and confirm Harry's passing, as death finally has Harry in its grasp.

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