

# The Snows of Kilimanjaro

By Ernest Hemingway

## Chapter One The Pain and the Vultures

The African sun was hot, and the light was strong over the flat, dusty land. In the shadow of a mimosa tree, a man named Harry lay on a camp bed. His right leg was badly infected. It had turned dark, swollen, and full of pain. He had not moved much in days. Next to him sat a woman named Helen. She was trying to stay calm, but her eyes were full of worry.

“The wonderful thing is—it’s painless,” Harry said, staring at the sky. “That’s how you know when it starts.”

“Is it really?” Helen asked quietly.

“Yes. I’m very sorry about the smell. That must be hard for you.”

“Don’t talk like that,” she whispered. “Please.”

Above them, big, ugly vultures circled in the sky. A few of them sat nearby, watching the man on the bed. Harry noticed them.

“Look at those birds,” he said. “Do they come because of what they see or what they smell?”

The cot creaked as Harry shifted a little. He was in pain, but his voice was calm. He had accepted what was coming.

“They’ve been watching since the truck broke down,” he said. “None landed until today. Maybe they think it’s time.”

Helen didn’t answer. She didn’t want to hear more of this. Instead, she turned to look out at the wide land. The truck that had brought them here had broken down days ago. They were waiting for a plane that hadn’t come.

“I’m just talking,” Harry continued. “It’s easier to talk than to lie here with nothing in my head.”

“You know I don’t mind,” she said. “I only wish I could help. I feel useless.”

“You can cut off my leg,” he said, smiling bitterly. “That might stop it. Or maybe shoot me? You’re a good shot now.”

“Don’t joke like that,” she said. “Let me read something to you?”

“Read what? A book we’ve already read?”

“It’ll help pass the time.”

“We pass time by fighting. That’s what we do best.”

Helen stood up and walked a few steps away, trying to hold back tears. She didn’t know what to do. She hated feeling helpless.

“Maybe the plane will come today,” she said.

“Maybe,” Harry answered. “Or maybe not.”

He closed his eyes. He was tired. Very tired. There was no more pain now, only a strange feeling of sleepiness and anger. Angry that this—this terrible end—was happening here, without meaning.

## Chapter Two Things He Didn't Write

The sun was setting behind the hills, and the camp began to cool. Helen sat quietly next to Harry's cot. The firelight danced on the canvas of the tent. A soft wind moved through the grass, and the smell of smoke filled the air.

Harry opened his eyes and looked at her. His voice was weak, but his thoughts were strong.

“You know,” he said slowly, “I never wrote the things I really meant to write.”

Helen turned to him with concern.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I always waited,” he said. “I told myself I'd write them one day. The stories about the war. The poor. The things that mattered.”

He looked out across the plain, past the trees, toward the horizon.

“I was afraid to write them. Afraid they wouldn't be good enough. So I wasted time. I wrote what people wanted instead.”

Helen didn't know what to say. She had never seen him like this before—so full of regret, yet so calm.

“But you're a wonderful writer,” she said.

“I was,” he replied. “But then I started living off the money. The rich people. The easy life. I drank too much. I hunted too much. And I stopped writing the truth.”

He closed his eyes for a moment. Then he spoke again.

“I remember one Christmas. The snow fell so hard in Austria. We were trapped in a cabin for a week. We played cards by lantern light. Everyone was laughing. But I didn't write a word of it. I kept it all in my head.”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because I told myself I'd write it later,” he said bitterly. “And later never came.”

A silence passed between them.

“You still have time,” Helen said softly.

Harry smiled, but it was not a happy smile.

“No,” he said. “I don't think so.”

He remembered the wars. The people. The pain. All those moments that had passed through his life like wind through tall grass. And yet, he had written so little of it.

"I lived," he said, "but I didn't write."

Helen took his hand gently.

"Then tell me now," she said. "Tell me everything you remember. Let me hear it."

Harry looked at her and felt something warm in his chest. He had always pushed people away. But now, maybe, he didn't want to.

"All right," he said. "I'll tell you. But only if you promise to listen."

"I promise."

And so he began to speak, slowly and carefully, about the people he had known, the places he had been, and the stories he had never told.

### **Chapter Three      The Weight of the Past**

That night, Harry lay in the cot, staring into the darkness. The fire outside had gone low, and the shadows danced against the tent. His leg burned, but there was no strength left in him to care. All he could do was think. His memories were stronger now than the pain.

"You asleep?" he asked.

"No," Helen said softly. "I'm just sitting here."

"It's strange," he said. "I can't stop remembering things. All the places. All the people. It's like my whole life is passing through me now."

He paused.

"I remember a railway station in Thrace, during the war. The snow came so early that year. We stood outside in the cold, waiting for orders. Some never left that place."

He closed his eyes, seeing it all again in his mind. The bitter cold, the noise of the boots on stone, the smoke in the air. His hands trembled slightly.

"We were so young then," he said. "And we believed we were doing something important. But mostly, we were just trying to survive."

Helen listened quietly, letting him speak.

"I saw men freeze to death. I saw men go mad from fear. I wrote none of it down. And now—now it's all I can think about."

He sighed.

"You see, the truth is—I've wasted time. Time I'll never get back. I had so many chances. I was going to write about the soldier who stole bread for his mother. Or the girl who hid us during the retreat. But I didn't. I drank. I hunted. I chased money."

Helen reached over and took his hand.

“Harry, please don’t be hard on yourself.”

“But I must,” he whispered. “Because it’s all I have left.”

The fire outside cracked softly. A hyena howled in the distance.

Suddenly, Harry felt a chill.

“It’s coming again,” he said.

“What is?” Helen asked.

“Death.”

He didn’t say it like a frightened man. He said it like someone who had accepted the truth.

“It sits by my cot, waiting. I can feel its breath.”

Helen moved closer, her eyes wide.

“You’ll be all right in the morning. The plane will come.”

“Maybe,” Harry said, “but I’m not sure I’ll still be here to see it.”

A silence filled the tent.

“Tell me something,” he said after a while. “Why do you love me?”

She looked into his eyes.

“Because I see the man inside you. The one who wanted to tell the truth. The one who still can.”

He looked away, tears just behind his eyes.

“It’s too late,” he said. “I had the talent. I had the stories. And I didn’t use them.”

#### **Chapter Four The Burning Truth**

The morning came with a red and golden sky, but Harry didn’t notice the beauty. He had been awake most of the night, thinking about his life, his choices, and his regrets. His body felt weak, and his leg was heavy like stone.

Helen sat beside him, holding a cup of tea. Her face looked tired too.

“How do you feel today?” she asked gently.

“Like something’s already gone,” he answered. “I feel light. But not in a good way.”

Helen didn’t speak. She just looked at him with love and sadness.

Harry closed his eyes again, and more memories rose in his mind. Not just of war, but of Paris, of nights filled with music and drink, of parties and lost friends.

“Paris...” he whispered.

He remembered walking the streets with poets and painters, talking about art and love, and dreaming of changing the world with words.

But in those same streets, he had also argued with women, gotten drunk, and wasted hours in smoke-filled cafés doing nothing.

“I never wrote about Paris,” he said. “Not the real Paris. Only the parts I wanted to remember.”

“You can still write about it, Harry. You’ll get better,” Helen said.

Harry smiled weakly.

“No, I won’t. That chance is gone. And maybe that’s what I deserve.”

He looked at her. She was kind, loyal, and generous. But he had been cruel to her many times—sometimes with words, sometimes with silence.

“I hurt you often, didn’t I?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “But I loved you anyway.”

“Why?” he asked.

“Because I saw something in you. Something beautiful. I thought if you let it out, you’d be the man you were meant to be.”

Tears welled up in Harry’s eyes. He had kept so much hidden inside. All the pain, the guilt, and the stories. Especially the stories.

He thought about the time he had gone to the mountains alone, hoping to write something powerful. But instead, he drank, hunted, and wasted the weeks.

He remembered the soldier who died next to him without saying a word. He had promised himself to write that story. He never did.

“Helen,” he said. “There’s a part of me that never lived. I just carried it, like a weight.”

“Then let it go,” she said. “You don’t have to carry it anymore.”

Harry nodded slowly. The pain in his leg was changing. It didn’t burn like before. It was cold now.

Suddenly, outside the tent, the boys began shouting. A small plane had appeared in the sky. It circled once, then again, coming lower.

Helen jumped up and looked out.

“Harry! It’s the plane! You’re going to be saved!”

But Harry didn't move. He stared at the tent roof, silent.

"You'll fly back to town," she said. "Doctors will help you. We'll go back home."

He didn't respond.

"Harry?"

He opened his mouth slowly.

"I dreamed of the snow again," he said. "Of the mountain. Of Kilimanjaro. It was shining."

## Chapter Five Flying Toward the Light

The next morning, the plane landed on the rough ground near the camp. Two men got out and began preparing a stretcher. Harry could hear their voices, but he didn't try to speak. His eyes were half open, and his breathing was soft and shallow.

Helen was full of hope.

"They're here, Harry," she said. "You're going to be okay now."

Harry didn't respond right away. He only looked at her for a long time.

"Did I say goodbye last night?" he asked.

"You didn't have to," Helen said. "You're still here."

The two pilots carried Harry carefully into the small plane. Helen kissed his forehead and stepped back.

"I'll follow in the car," she told the pilot. "Take him to the hospital."

The plane took off slowly. The wind hit the canvas wings hard, and the engines roared across the flat land. Helen stood below, watching as the plane rose into the bright sky.

Inside the plane, Harry felt the movement. The shaking. The sound. But he also felt something else—a kind of peace. The world below him became small. The pain in his leg faded. He could no longer feel his body clearly.

He looked out the window and saw the mountains rising in the distance.

"Kilimanjaro," he whispered.

And then, it was there—the white peak, glowing in the morning sun, standing proud and still above the clouds.

Suddenly, it seemed the plane was not heading toward the city, but directly toward the mountain. The pilot didn't speak. Harry was not afraid.

He felt light. Free.

"So this is where I was meant to go," he thought. "Not to a hospital. But here."

He looked down and saw a clean, white snowfield. It was bright, shining, and endless.

He remembered the legend he had once heard—that the top of Kilimanjaro was the highest point in Africa, and that a frozen leopard lay near the summit. No one knew what the leopard was seeking. No one ever found out.

“Maybe he was looking for what I was,” Harry thought. “Something pure. Something that mattered.”

The air was cold now. But it didn’t hurt. It felt clear. Strong. He felt like he was rising, not just in the plane, but in spirit.

“I’m not afraid,” he thought. “Not anymore.”

The snow came closer and closer. The sky was open and silent. There was no pain, no anger, no regret. Only light.

## Chapter Six What Remains in Silence

The sun had climbed high in the sky when Helen finally returned to the camp. Her clothes were dusty, and her eyes were tired from watching the plane disappear hours ago. She had hoped to hear from the hospital, but the camp radio was silent.

She walked back to the tent and saw that everything was still in its place—except one thing: Harry’s cot was empty.

At first, she felt joy.

“Maybe they moved him to a safer spot,” she thought. “Maybe he’s on his way to town already.”

But as she stepped into the tent, something in the air felt wrong. It was too quiet. The hyenas, always near at night, were gone. Even the vultures had flown away.

Helen stood there for a moment. The silence wrapped around her like a blanket. Slowly, she walked back outside and sat down near the fire pit. She waited.

And then she heard it.

Not the sound of a plane, not the sound of a truck—but the slow, deep laugh of a hyena, close and sharp, coming from behind the trees. It was not a friendly sound. It was not afraid.

She didn’t turn. She didn’t cry. She just sat there and looked at the hills in the distance, where the sun was now beginning to fall.

In her mind, she imagined Harry up in the mountains, not dead, but alive in some peaceful place. She saw him climbing toward the snow, not limping, not sick—but strong and young, his notebook in hand, finally writing the stories he had carried for so long.

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