



True At First Light: A Fictional Memoir

By Ernest Hemingway

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Both a revealing self-portrait and dramatic fictional chronicle of his final African safari, Ernest Hemingway's last unpublished work was written when he returned from Kenya in 1953. Edited by his son Patrick, who accompanied his father on the safari, *True at First Light* offers rare insights into the legendary American writer.

A blend of autobiography and fiction, the book opens on the day his close friend Pop, a celebrated hunter, leaves Ernest in charge of the safari camp and news arrives of a potential attack from a hostile tribe. Drama continues to build as his wife, Mary, pursues the great black-maned lion that has become her obsession, and Ernest becomes involved with a young African girl whom he supposedly plans to take as a second bride. Increasingly enchanted by the local African community, he struggles between the attraction of these two women and the wildly different cultures they represent. Spicing his depictions of human longings with sharp humor, Hemingway captures the excitement of big-game hunting and the unparalleled beauty of the landscape. Rich in laughter, beauty and profound insight. *True at First Light* is an extraordinary publishing event -- a breathtaking final work from one of our most beloved and important writers.

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True At First Light: A Fictional Memoir By Ernest Hemingway Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Ernest Hemingway's final posthumous work bears the rather awkward designation "a fictional memoir" and arrives under a cloud of controversial editing and patching--but all of that ends up being beside the point. Though this account of a 1953 safari in Kenya lacks the resolution and clarity of the best Hemingway (*The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms*) it is "real" Hemingway nonetheless. Let scholars work out where memoir leaves off and fiction begins: for the common reader, the prose alone casts an irresistible spell.

In *True at First Light* the glory days of the "great white hunters" are over and the Mau Mau rebellion is violently dislodging European farmers from Kenya's arable lands. But to the African gun bearers, drivers, and game scouts who run his safari in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro, Hemingway remains a lordly figure--almost a god. Two parallel quests propel the narrative: Mary, Hemingway's fourth and last wife, doggedly stalks an enormous black-maned lion that she is determined to kill by Christmas, while Hemingway becomes increasingly obsessed with Debba, a beautiful young African woman. What makes the novel especially strange and compelling is that Mary knows all about Debba and accepts her as a "supplementary wife," even as she loses no opportunity to rake her husband over the coals for his drinking, lack of discipline in camp, and condescending protectiveness.

As usual with Hemingway, atmosphere and attitude are far more important than plot. Mary at one point berates her husband as a "conscience-ridden murderer," but this is precisely the moral stance that gives the hunting scenes their tension and beauty. "I was happy that before he died he had lain on the high yellow rounded mound with his tail down," Hemingway writes of "Mary's lion," "and his great paws comfortable before him and looked off across his country to the blue forest and the high white snows of the big Mountain."

Passages like these--and there are many of them--redeem the book's rambling structure and occasional lapses into self-indulgent posturing. Joan Didion dismissed *True at First Light* in *The New Yorker* as "words set down but not yet written," but this fails to acknowledge the power of these words. The value of *True at First Light* lies in its candor, its nakedness: it provides a rare opportunity to watch a master working his way toward art. --David Laskin

From Publishers Weekly

More a curiosity than a major contribution to his oeuvre, this fictional memoir of a 1953 safari in Kenya, edited by Hemingway's son Patrick from a first-draft manuscript and published to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Papa's birth, is a sometimes entertaining, sometimes trying read. Hemingway narrates the rambling story in his own voice, and others, including his wife, Mary, are identified by name. More humorous than most of Hemingway's novels, the narrative also contains enough hunting scenes for Hemingway and others to show the requisite grace under pressure. The old Hemingway magic flashes sporadically, like lightning, but not often enough. There are a series of sentences intoning "I wished..." reminiscent of his earlier linguistic triumphs, and some dialogue, crisp and to the point, like the stichomythia of Greek tragedy. Lines like "So I carried her in and she weighed just what a woman that you love should weigh when you lifted her in your arms..." still resonate. The Kenyan setting is atmospheric, but the promising elements of the plot--a possible Mau Mau attack on the camp, Miss Mary's determination to kill a lion--too often stagnate for lack of action and dramatic tension. Some uneasiness occurs between Hemingway and Mary over Hemingway's attraction to an African woman, Debba, but even this is pretty tame. A supporting cast of African characters are not distinct individuals, and the prolific use of Swahili

words is often confusing in spite of a glossary. Yet, as prose by Hemingway, no matter how distanced and imperfect, the book is still worth reading. Perhaps it will inspire new readers to delve into Hemingway's true legacy, the novels and stories like "Cat in the Rain," and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." BOMC main selection; first serial to the New Yorker; rights sold in Denmark, England, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the Czech Republic.
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From Library Journal

It's not often that this column gets to cite something by a truly classic author, but here it is: Hemingway's last work, written after he returned from his 1953 safari and edited by his son, Patrick, in time for this July's centennial celebration. Hemingway even stars in this "fictional memoir," running the safari camp in the absence of friend and lead hunter Pop even as hostile tribes gather to attack. But he still has time to sneak in an affair with an African girl. Along with this work, Scribner will publish three new hardcover editions of Hemingway classics: *The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories* (ISBN 0-684-86221-2. \$25), *Death in the Afternoon* (ISBN 0-684-85922-X. \$35), and *To Have and Have Not* (ISBN 0-684-85923-8. \$25).
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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