Valley Southwoods
Freshman High School

The Hero's Journey

A Guide to Literature and Life
An Introduction to the Hero’s Journey

Dear Student,

According to the words of a once popular song, “a hero lies in you.” But how can that be when there are so many definitions of a hero? Ask any of your friends to define the term, and you will get definitions and examples ranging from the traditional “man of great strength favored by the god(s),” to stars of sport, screen and music, to siblings, parents and grandparents. But there is another definition, one that goes beyond the ordinary definitions. This definition, derived from the work of Joseph Campbell, is as broad and as old as the world itself because it springs from the innate humanity of the world’s mythology. According to Campbell, a hero is any male or female who leaves the world of his or her everyday life to undergo a journey to a special world where challenges and fears are overcome in order to secure a reward (special knowledge, healing potion, etc.) which is then shared with other members of the hero’s community.

Perhaps a hero is in each of us because all of us participate in a life journey that is a quest for self-awareness and self-development. From cradle to grave, we are all searching to discover who we are and why we are here. Spiritually and psychologically, the journey is a metaphor for growth.

The psychological basis for the journey is largely credited to Carl Jung, who once studied under Sigmund Freud. Jung believed that people from around the world shared in what he termed a “collective unconscious.” Here lay dormant all of the knowledge we, as humans, needed in order to know who we are and what is valuable and worthwhile in life. Although we vary greatly in our conscious attitudes and goals, our unconscious minds, revealed through dream studies and psychological research, are quite similar the world over. Jung suggested that these similarities, or archetypes, reflected different aspects of the human mind and that our personalities divide themselves into these archetypal characters to serve various roles in our lives.

Joseph Campbell built upon Carl Jung’s work by studying world mythology. In The Hero With a Thousand Faces (Princeton University Press, 1949), Campbell shows how these archetypes reveal themselves in myth after myth in the universal theme of the Hero’s Journey. All heroes follow a path that takes them from their known world, initiates them into a new world order, and returns them, forever changed, into the old world with new talents and gifts to share with the community.

More recently, Christopher Vogler, a movie script and story analyst, has written an easy to understand and use manual for screenwriters using Campbell’s ideas to write scripts for movies, plays, and television productions. The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters (1992) is a wonderful text to use as a guide for beginning writers. It describes each of the archetypes and shows how they are used in writing successful works.

At this point, you may be wondering why you should study the Hero’s Journey. What is the relevance to your own lives? Vogler would tell you that the archetypes are facets of the hero’s personality. As such, if applied to oneself, you can see how these aspects combine to create a rounded character, or a complete, whole, fully functioning human being. The journey, seen as a process of self-discovery and self-integration and as a way of maintaining balance and harmony in our lives, can be confusing and painful, but, as with any process of growth and change, it brings opportunities to develop confidence, perspective and understanding.

Vogler contends that by knowing the components of the journey, students can “construct a story to meet almost any situation, a story that will be dramatic, entertaining, and psychologically true” (The Writer’s Journey, 13). Understanding the stages of the Hero’s Journey gives students a powerful method of analyzing literature, movies, and drama by going straight to the heart of the story. It can also help us to understand the experiences that shape our lives. By recognizing the stages of the journey and how they function, we begin to recognize the points of separation and return in our own lives and respect the significance they have for us.

If you decide to pursue your study of the Hero’s Journey in greater depth, there are numerous books and several good web sites worth exploring. Enjoy your adventure!

Ms. Graves
Two Worlds, One Experience

A high school senior steps onto the stage to receive her diploma. Nearby, dressed in the robes of their universities, sit the teachers who guided her. Her diploma is presented to her by the school principal. As he gives it to her, he looks into her eyes, one adult to another, and shakes her hand. From the audience, her parents and other community members watch, sharing her pride and preparing to welcome her into the society of adults. After the ceremony, the girl will attend a graduation party where she and fellow graduates will join parents, teachers, and friends to acknowledge and celebrate this major life passage.

In the highlands of West Africa, a 14-year-old boy of the Dagara tribe returns to his village after a six-week initiation ordeal. He has meditated in the blazing sun, endured pain, faced danger, and seen the spirit world from which all life comes. Now he is home, and the whole village excitedly awaits the return of a new adult member. For the boy, it is like returning to the human world. He is accepted and respected. Everybody knows that he has changed, that he is aware. He joins his family, community, and other initiates in dance and celebration.

These young people live in different worlds, both geographically and culturally, but the experience they are having is the same. It is the Rite of Passage, the transition from child to adult. The significance might be missed by the American girl and her friends, but that doesn't make it any less important.

These two rites of passage, different as they are, carry the same message. They tell the teenagers that it is time to change the way they think and live, and they tell the community that the children are now adults, to be treated with equal status and equal rights.

Ritual In Our Culture

The Rite of Passage is just one of many rituals we go through during our lives. Rituals are important to us, but they have been maligned in our culture. They are often associated with witchcraft and cults. Now, if someone speaks of "performing rituals," he is seen as a deviant.

The truth is that we all ritualize. We just don't call it that. Any regular activity which is performed in a set manner, formally or informally, is a ritual. Graduation ceremonies, church services, school pageants, and memorial observances are all performed in a set manner and are all rituals.

What's more, we need rituals. Humans are ritualizing creatures. Rituals put us in harmony with what is happening in our lives and environment. Try to imagine marriage with no wedding, death with no funeral, graduation with no ceremony, or religion with no services. Rituals add significance and meaning. Without them, these events lose much of their importance, and we feel that the experience is somehow hollow or incomplete.

Why We Need Ritual

Rituals help us to understand the changes in our lives and to give meaning to experience. Graduation, for example, helps us make the transition from student to adult and tells us how to view it. Marriage guides us from individual life to family life and prepares us for the changes we must make.
Rituals also impose the order we need to live in a shared world. We use ritual to standardize the way we relate to our environment and each other so that we can all get along and live together. To see this, imagine the process of earning your driver’s license as a ritual. Like the Dagara boy in the example earlier, you must study, learn the signs, laws and procedures of the road. You practice with a mentor, who helps you develop the skills you need. Then you take the test to demonstrate that you can assume this responsibility. Finally, where the Dagara boy might be tattooed, you are fingerprinted and photographed, confirming that you are initiated.

In a sense, earning a driver's license is a ritual whereby society "initiates" you into the order and state of mind we all must have if we are to share the roads safely. Every driver trusts that every other driver knows the code and will follow it. If not, the system collapses. Ritual helps maintain the system.

**We All Ritualize**

As teens, you ritualize all of the time. The way you greet friends, behave at parties, or prepare for athletic contests are all ritualized activities. For example, there is a style of dress and behavior that is appropriate for an after-game dance and another style for the senior prom. The person who arrives at the prom wearing the blue jeans and sweatshirt she would wear to an after-game dance violates the ritualized standards of the prom.

There are countless other activities which have been ritualized. Decorating a Christmas tree is an annual ritual. The birthday party with its songs, games, cake and candles is a ritual. Even where you sit at the dinner table may be ritualized.

Rituals are crucial to the functioning of our community structures, whether that structure is a single family or an entire country. The order, direction, and significance they give to our shared lives form the glue which holds us together. Without effective rituals, the patterns we need for relationships disappear and our sense of community -- you and I sharing a common space and experience -- vanishes.

**Rituals In Native Cultures**

In native cultures, the community provided the rituals. Families stayed together, and people worked in small, supportive groups. People were *interdependent*, not *independent*, because they relied on each other for support and survival. Everyone had to be part of the group, share the load, and work together or the group died.

Because of this need, social roles were well defined and the transitions between them were clearly marked with elaborate rituals. Birth, naming, passage into adulthood, marriage and death all demanded community rituals to help everyone understand and respect the transition.

Rituals sanctified (made holy) these changes and gave them meaning. They kept individuals and communities in harmony with the patterns of life. Rituals bonded one generation to another and were passed on as part of a group's cultural and spiritual legacy.

Unfortunately, our modern culture has diminished the value of ritual, which has created many problems. If the society doesn't provide guiding rituals, we invent or find them for ourselves. Drugs, sex, and alcohol become "ritualistic" expressions of independence and self-identity, personal Rites of Passage. Much of the increase in gang activity, our obsessive fascination with sports, or the growth of formal religion can be traced to a search for ritual structure and meaning.
The Rite of Passage

For native cultures the most important ritual was the Rite of Passage. To insure its survival, the tribe needed capable adults, so when a child could take on adult responsibilities, everyone rejoiced. Rites of Passage rituals marked this important transition.

Native peoples saw the Rite of Passage as a symbolic death and rebirth: the death of the child's weak, dependent self and the rebirth of the strong, capable adult. The ritual told the child that he had to learn to think in a new way.

To have the power and depth needed to make this difficult transition, the Rite of Passage had to be long, frightening and mysterious. For many tribes, this meant acting out symbolically the child's death and rebirth: a mythical monster swallowed the child and disgorged the adult, or a fearsome spirit killed the youth and afterwards brought him back to life as a new person. This process had three stages:

1) the separation, when the initiate is severed from everyday life;
2) the initiation/transformation, where consciousness is changed and the initiate's old self is destroyed so that the new self can emerge, and
3) the return, when the new adult is reunited with life, but at a higher station.

The Separation

In the separation, the initiate is dragged (sometimes literally) from her home, family, and normal life to confront the "monster" of growth and change. This is a moment of great meaning to the family. The parents know that their child will "die" and become an adult in the tribe with adult status and roles.

Physical and psychological separation are essential. The initiate must be fully absorbed by the ritual, so she has to be removed from all distractions. Separation also strips the initiate away from the framework of relationships that supports her old self, the self that has to die.

The Initiation/Transformation

Once separated, the initiate undergoes the long and difficult process of initiation and transformation. This may take a few weeks to many months. In certain Australian Aborigine tribes, boys had to complete a "walkabout" to become men. They had to walk alone across a desert wilderness. They carried only a spear and the survival skills they had learned. The walkabout often lasted several months, and there was only one requirement to pass: you must survive. If the boys lived through the walkabout, they were men; if not, well....

During the transformation, the initiate "dies" as a dependent, ego-centered child and is "reborn" as a responsible adult member of the community. This psychological change is often marked by a physical change, such as by tattooing, circumcision, or scarring.

Sometimes psychological death and rebirth were acted out symbolically. In some Native American tribes, the initiate had to kneel before the chief. The chief told him that he was going to face a spirit who would strike him dead and then immediately restore him to life. As the chief, he became "animated" by the spirit and shook violently.

Then the spirit/chief threw a bean or stone at the initiate. When the initiate was hit, he fell, believing he was dead. Moments later, the chief would began striking the "dead" boy, and the boy would "come back to life" as a new person, ready to assume adult responsibilities and help support the tribe.
**The Return**
After their initiation/transformation, the initiates return to their village. They have made the mental and emotional adjustments needed to take on the vital adult tasks of protecting and sustaining their society. In traditional cultures, the return was important for both the initiates and the community. The welcome ceremony secured the initiates in their new roles and told the village that they were now adults, entitled to the respect and rights of adulthood.

**Benefits of Passage**
Although the Rite of Passage was painful and difficult, children were anxious to make it. An adult who had not been initiated was considered a "non-person," unworthy of respect or recognition. Adulthood brought rights and privileges that were denied to children. In most cultures, the uninitiated could not marry or own property, nor were they allowed a voice in tribal affairs.

The tribe, too, was anxious for the children to make the passage. Its existence depended on adults who could protect and provide for the group. The Rite of Passage, and the bestowing of the rights of adulthood, was an honor for the child and a time of celebration for the tribe.

**Take the Journey**
Our culture no longer has formal Rites of Passage. Events which would normally be considered transitions into adulthood have lost their power and meaning. With no rituals to provide meaning, we must create meaning for ourselves. Understanding how the Rite of Passage puts us in harmony with our social and natural worlds can help us do that. Understanding our points of passage can help us make difficult transitions and keep us on the path to growth, discovery and understanding.
Brothers Are the Same
by Beryl Markham

They are tall men, cleanly built and straight as the shafts of the spears they carry, and no one knows their tribal history, but there is some of Egypt in their eyes and the look of ancient Greece about their bodies. They are the Masai.

They are the color of worn copper and, with their graceful women, they live on the Serengeti Plain, which makes a carpet at the feet of high Kilimanjaro. In all of Africa there are today no better husbandmen of cattle.

But once they were warriors and they have not forgotten that, nor have they let tradition die. They go armed, and to keep well-tempered the mettle of their men, each youth among them must, when his hour comes, prove his right to manhood. He must meet in combat the only worthy enemy his people recognize—the destroyer of their cattle, the marauding master of the plains—the lion.

Thus, just before the dawning of a day in what these Masai call the Month of the Little Rains, such a youth with such a test before him lay in a cleft of rock and watched the shadowed outlines of a deep ravine. For at least eight of his sixteen years, this youth, this young Temas, had waited for his moment. He had dreamed of it and lived it in a dozen ways—all of them glorious.

In all of the dreams he had confronted the lion with casual courage, he had presented his spear on the charging enemy with steadiness born of brave contempt—and always he had won the swift duel with half a smile on his lips. Always in the dreams.

Now it was different. Now as he watched the place where the real lion lay, he had no smile.

He did not fear the beast. He was sure that in his bones and his blood and in his heart he was not afraid. He was Masai, and legend said that no Masai had ever feared.

Yet in his mind Temas now trembled. Fear of battle was a nonexistent thing—but fear of failure could be real, and was. It was real and living—and kept alive by the nearness of an enemy more formidable than any lion—an enemy with the hated name Medoto.

He thought of Medoto—of that Medoto who lay not far away in the deep grass watching the same ravine. Of that Medoto who, out of hate and jealousy over a mere girl, now hoped in his heart that Temas would flinch at the moment of his trial. That was it. That was the thing that kept the specter of failure dancing in his mind, until it already looked like truth.

There were ten youths hidden about the ravine, and they would stage and witness the coming fight. They had tracked the lion to this, his lair, and when the moment came, they would drive him, angered, upon Temas and then would judge his courage and his skill. Good or bad, that judgment would, like a brand mark, cling to him all his life.

But it was Medoto who would watch the closest for a sign, a gesture, a breath of fear in Temas. It was Medoto who would spread the word—Medoto who surely would cry “Coward!” if he could.

Temas squirmed under the heavy, unwholesome thought, then lifted his head and pierced the dim light with his eyes. To the east, the escarpment stood like a wall against the rising sun. But to the north and to the west and to the south there were no horizons; the grey sky and the grey plain were part and counterpart, and he was himself a shadow in his cleft of rock.

He was a long shadow, a lean shadow. The shuka that he wore was now bound about his waist, giving freedom to his legs and arms. His necklace and bracelets were of shining copper, drawn fine and finely spiraled, and around each of his slender ankles there was a copper chain.

His long hair, bound by beaded threads, was a chaste black column that lay between his shoulders, and his ears were pierced and hung with gleaming pendants. His nose was straight, with nostrils delicately flanged. The bones of his cheeks were high, the ridges of his jaw were hard, and his eyes were long and dark and a little brooding. He used them now to glance at his
weapons, which lay beside him—a spear, a rawhide shield. These, and a short sword at his belt, were his armament.

He lowered his glance to the place he watched. The ravine was overgrown with a thicket of thorns and the light had not burst through it yet. When it did the lion within it would wake, and the moment would come.

A feeling almost of hopelessness surged through him. It did not seem that he, Temas, could in this great test prove equal to his comrades. All had passed it; all had earned the warrior's title—and none had faltered. Even Medoto—especially Medoto—had proven brave and more than ready for his cloak of manhood. Songs were sung about Medoto. In the evenings in the manyatta when the cattle drowsed and the old men drank their honey wine, the girls would gather, and the young men, too, and they would chant to the heroes of their hearts.

But none chanted to Temas. Not yet. Perhaps they never would—not one of them. Not even . . .

He shook his head in anger. He had not meant to think of her—of Kileghen of the soft, deep-smiling eyes and the reedbuck's grace. Even she, so rightly named after the star Venus, had only last night sung to Medoto, and he to her, laughing the while, as Temas, the yet unproven, had clung to the saving shadows, letting his fury burn. Could she not make up her mind between them? Must it always be first one and then the other?

He saw it all with the eye of his memory—all too clearly. He saw even the sneer of Medoto on the day the elder warrior, the chief of them all, had tendered Temas his spear with the wise words: “Now at last this weapon is your own, but it is only wood and steel and means nothing until it changes to honor, or to shame, within your grasp. Soon we shall know!”

And soon they should! But Medoto had laughed then. Medoto had said, “It seems a heavy spear, my comrade, for one so slight—a big weight for any but a man!” And Temas had made no answer. How could he with Kileghen leaning there against the boma as though she heard nothing, yet denying her innocence with that quiet, ever-questing smile? At whom had she smiled? At Medoto for his needless malice—or at Temas for his acceptance of it?

He did not know. He knew only that he had walked away carrying the unstained spear a little awkwardly. And that the joy of having it was quickly dead.

Now he spat on the earth where he rested. He raised a curse against Medoto—a harsh, a bitter curse. But in the midst of it he stiffened and grew tense. Suddenly he lay as still as sleep and watched only the ravine and listened, as to the tone of some familiar silence.

It was the silence of a waking lion, for mornning light had breached the thicket, and within his lair the lion was roused.

Within his lair the lion sought wakefulness as suspicion came to him on the cool, unmoving air. Under the bars of sunlight that latticed his flanks and belly, his coat was short and shining. His mane was black and evenly grown. The muscles of his forelegs were not corded, but flat, and the muscles of his shoulders were laminated like sheaths of metal.

Now he smelled men. Now as the sunlight fell in streams upon his sorrel coat and warmed his flanks, his suspicion and then his anger came alive. He had no fear. Whatever he judged by strength—or lack of it—and men were puny. And yet the scent of them kindled fire in his brooding eyes and made him contemplate his massive paws.

He arose slowly, without sound—almost without motion—and peered outward through the wall of thorns. The earth was mute, expectant, and he did not break the spell. He only breathed.

The lion breathed and swung his tail in easy, rhythmic arcs and watched the slender figure of a human near him in a cleft of rock.

Temas had risen, too. On one knee now, he waited for the signal of the lifted spears.

Of this ten comrades he could see but two
or three-a tuft of warrior's feathers; here and there a gleaming arm. Presently all would leap from the places where they hid, and the Masai battle cry would slash through the silence. And then the lion would act.

But the silence held. The interminable instant hung like a drop that would not fall, and Temas remembered many of the rules, the laws that governed combat with a lion—but not enough, for stubbornly, wastefully, foolishly, his mind nagged at fear of disgrace—fear of failure. Fear of Medoto's ringing laughter in the manyatta-of Kileghen's ever-questing smile.

"I shall fail," he thought. "I shall fail before Medoto and, through his eyes, she will see my failure. I must fail," he said, "because now I see that I am trembling."

And he was. His hand was loose upon the long steel spear—too loose, the arm that held the rawhide shield was hot and too unsteady. If he had ever learned to weep he would have wept—had there been time.

But the instant vanished—and with it, silence. From the deep grass, from the shade of anthills, from clustered rocks, warriors sprang like flames, and as they sprang they hurled upon the waiting lion their shrill arrogant challenge, their scream of battle.

Suddenly the world was small and inescapable. It was an arena whose walls were tall young men that shone like worn gold in the sun, and in this shrunken world there were Temas and the lion.

He did not know when or how he had left the rock. It was as if the battle cry had lifted him from it and placed him where he stood—a dozen paces from the thicket. He did not know when the lion had come forward to the challenge, but the lion was there.

The lion waited. The ring of warriors waited. Temas did not move.

His long Egyptian eyes swept around the circle. All was perfect—too perfect. At every point a warrior stood blocking the lion from improbably retreat—and of these Medoto was one. Medoto stood near-a little behind Temas and to the right. His shield bore proud colors of the proven warrior. He was lean and proud, and upon his level stare he weighed each movement Temas made, though these were hesitant and few.

For the lion did not seek escape, nor want it. His shifting yellow eyes burned with even fire. They held neither fear nor fury—only the hard and regal wrath of the challenged tyrant. The strength of either of his forearms was alone greater than the entire strength of any of these men, his speed in the attack was blinding speed, shattering speed. And with such knowledge, with such sureness of himself, the lion stood in the tawny grass, and stared his scorn while the sun rose higher and warmed the scarcely breathing men.

The lion would charge. He would choose one of the many and charge that one. Yet the choice must not be his to make, for through the generations—centuries, perhaps—the code of the Masai decreed that the challenger must draw the lion upon him. By gesture and by voice it can be done. By movement, by courage.

Temas knew the time for this had come. He straightened where he stood and gripped his heavy spear. He held his shield before him, tight on his arm, and he advanced, step by slow step.

The gaze of the lion did not at once swing to him. But every eye was on him, and the strength of one pair—Medoto's—burned in his back like an unhealed scar.

A kind of anger began to run in Temas's blood. It seemed unjust to him that in this crucial moment, at this first great trial of his courage, his enemy and harshest judge must be a witness. Surely Medoto could see the points of sweat that now rose on his forehead and about his lips as he moved upon the embattled lion. Surely Medoto could see—or sense—the hesitance of his advance—almost hear, perhaps, the pounding of his heart!

He gripped the shaft of his spear until pain stung the muscles of his hand. The lion had crouched and Temas stood suddenly within the
radius of his leap. The circle of warriors had drawn closer, tighter, and there was no sound save the sound of their uneven breathing.

The lion crouched against the reddish earth, head forward. The muscles of his massive quarters were taut, his body was a drawn bow. And, as a swordsman unsheathes his blade, so he unsheathed his fangs and chose his man.

It was not Temas.

As if in contempt for this confused and untried youth who paused within his reach, the lion's eyes passed him by and fastened hard upon the stronger figure of another, upon the figure of Casaro, a warrior of many combats and countless victories.

All saw it. Temas saw it, and for an instant—for a shameless breath of time—he felt an overwhelming ease of heart, relief, deliverance, not from danger, but from trial. He swept his glance around the ring. None watched him now. All action, all thought was frozen by the duel of wills between Casaro and the beast.

Slowly the veteran Casaro sank upon one knee and raised his shield. Slowly the lion gathered the power of his body for the leap. And then it happened.

From behind Temas, flung by Medoto's hand, a stone no larger than a grain of maize shot through the air and struck the lion.

No more was needed. The bolt was loosed.

But not upon Casaro, for if from choice, the regal prowler of the wilderness had first preferred an opponent worthy of his worth, he now, under the sting of a hurled pebble, preferred to kill that human whose hand was guilty.

He charged at once, and as he charged, the young Temas was, in a breath, transformed from doubting boy to man. All fear was gone—all fear of fear—and as he took the charge, a light almost of ecstasy burned in his eyes, and the spirit of his people came to him.

Over the rim of his shield he saw fury take form. Light was blotted from his eyes as the dark shape descended upon him—for the lion's last leap carried him above the shield, the spear, the youth, so that, looking upward from his crouch, Temas, for a sliver of time, was intimate with death.

He did not yield. He did not think or feel or consciously react. All was simple. All now happened as in the dreams, and his mind was an observer of his acts.

He saw his own spear rise in a swift arc, his own shield leap on his bended arm, his own eyes seek the vital spot—and miss it.

But he struck. He struck hard, not wildly or too soon, but exactly at the precise, the ripened moment, and saw his point drive full into the shoulder of the beast. It was not enough. In that moment his spear was torn from his grasp, his shield vanished, claws furrowed the flesh of his chest, ripping deep. The weight and the power of the charge overwhelmed him.

He was down. Dust and blood and grass and the pungent lion smell were mingled, blended, and in his ears an enraged, triumphant roar overlaid the shrill, high human cry of his comrades.

His friends were about to make the kill that must be his. Yet his hands were empty, he was caught, he was being dragged. He had scarcely felt the long crescentic teeth close on his thigh, it had been so swift. Time itself could not have moved so fast.

A lion can drag a fallen man, even a fighting man, into thicket or deep grass with incredible ease and with such speed as to outdistance even a hurled spear. But sometimes this urge to plunder first and destroy later is a saving thing. It saved Temas. That and his Masai sword, which now was suddenly in his hand.

Perhaps pain dulled his reason, but reason is a sluggard ally to any on the edge of death. Temas made a cylinder of his slender body and, holding the sword flat against his leg, he whirled, and whirling, felt the fangs tear loose the flesh of his thigh, freeing it, freeing him. And, as he felt it, he lunged.

It was quick. It was impossible, it was mad, but it was Masai madness, and it was done. Dust clothed the tangled bodies of the lion and the
youth so that those who clamored close to strike the saving blows saw nothing but this cloud and could not aim into its formless shape. Nor had they need to. Suddenly, as if En-Gai himself-God and protector of these men of wilderness-had stilled the scene with a lifted hand, all movement stopped, all sound was dead.

The dust was gone like a vanquished shadow, and the great, rust body of the lion lay quiet on the rust-red earth. Over it, upon it, his sword still tight in his hand, the youth lay breathing, bleeding. And, beyond that, he also smiled.

He could smile because the chant of victory burst now like drumbeats from his comrades' throats—the paens of praise fell on him where he lay, the sun struck bright through shattered clouds, the dream was true. In a dozen places he was hurt, but these would heal.

And so he smiled. He raised himself and, swaying slightly like any warrior weak in sinew but strong in spirit from his wounds, he stood with pride and took his accolade.17

And then his smile left him. It was outdone by the broader, harder smile of another—for Medoto was tall and straight before him, and with his eyes and with his lips Medoto seemed to say: “It is well—this cheering and this honor. But it will pass—and we two have a secret, have we not? We know who threw the stone that brought the lion upon you when you stood hoping in your heart that it would charge another. You stood in fear then, you stood in cowardice. We two know this, and no one else. But there is one who might, if she were told, look not to you but to the earth in shame when you pass by. Is this not so?”

Yes, it was so, and Temas, so lately happy, shrank within himself and swayed again. He saw the young Kileghen's eyes and did not wish to see them. But for Medoto's stone, the spear of Temas would yet be virgin, clean, unproved—a thing of futile vanity.

He straightened. His comrades—the true warriors, of which even now he was not one—had in honor to a fierce and vanquished enemy laid the dead lion on a shield and lifted him. In triumph and with songs of praise (mistaken praise!) for Temas, they were already beginning their march toward the waiting manyatta.

Temas turned from his field of momentary triumph, but Medoto lingered at his side.

And now it will come, Temas thought. Now what he has said with his eyes, he will say with his mouth, and I am forced to listen. He looked into Medoto's face—a calm, unmoving face—and thought: It is true that this, my enemy, saw the shame of my first fear. He will tell it to everyone—and to her. So, since I am lost, it is just as well to strike a blow against him. I am not so hurt that I cannot fight at least once more.

His sword still hung at his side. He grasped it now and said, “We are alone and we are enemies. What you are about to charge me with is true—but, if I was a coward before the lion, I am not a coward before you, and I will not listen to sneering words!”

For a long moment, Medoto’s eyes peered into the eyes of Temas. The two youths stood together on the now deserted plain and neither moved. Overhead the sun hung low and red and poured its burning light upon the drying grass, upon the thorn trees that stood in lonely clusters, upon the steepled shrines of dredging ants. There was no sound of birds, no rasping of cicada wings, no whispering of wind.

And into this dearth, into this poverty of sound, Medoto cast his laugh. His lips parted, and the low music of his throat was laughter without mirth, there was sadness in it, a note of incredulity, but not more, not mockery, not challenge.

He stared into the proud unhappy face of Temas. He plunged the shaft of his spear into the earth and slipped the shield from his arm. At last he spoke.

He said, “My comrade, we who are Masai know the saying: 'A man asks not the motives of a friend, but demands reason from his enemy.' It is a just demand. If, until now, I have seemed your
enemy, it was because I feared you would be braver than I, for when I fought my lion my knees trembled and my heart was white-until that charge was made. No one knew that, and I am called Medoto, the unflinching, but I flinched. I trembled.”

He stepped closer to Temas. He smiled. “It is no good to lie,” he said. “I wanted you to fail, but when I saw you hesitate I could not bear it because I remembered my own hour of fear. It was then I threw the stone-not to shame you, but to save you from shame-for I saw that your fear was not fear of death, but fear of failure-and this I understood. You are a greater warrior than I-than any-for who but the bravest would do what you have done?” Medoto paused and watched a light of wonderment kindle in Temas's eye. The hand of Temas slipped from his sword, his muscles relaxed. Yet, for a moment, he did not speak, and as he looked at Medoto, it was clear to both that the identical thought, the identical vision, had come to each of them. It was the vision that must and always will come to young men everywhere, the vision of a girl.

Now this vision stood between them, and nothing else. But it stood like a barrier, the last barrier.

And Medoto destroyed it. Deliberately, casually, he reached under the folds of his flowing shuka and brought from it a slender belt of leather crusted with beads. It was the work and the possession of a girl, and both knew which girl. Kileghen's handiwork was rare enough, but recognized in many places.

“This,” said Medoto, “this, I was told to bring, and I was told in these words: 'If in his battle the young Temas proves himself a warrior and a man, make this belt my gift to him so that I may see him wear it when he returns. But if he proves a coward, Medoto, the belt is for you to keep.’”

Medoto looked at the bright gift in his hands. “It is yours, Temas!” He held it out. “I meant to keep it. I planned ways to cheat you of it, but I do not think a man can cheat the truth. I have seen you fight better than I have ever fought, and now this gift belongs to you. It is her wish and between us you are at last her choice.” He laid the belt on the palm of Temas's open hand and reached once more for his shield and spear. “We will return now,” Medoto said, “for the people are waiting. She is waiting. I will help you walk.”

But Temas did not move. Through the sharp sting of his wounds, above his joy in the promise that now lay in his hands, he felt another thing, a curious, swelling pride in this new friendship. He looked into the face of Medoto and smiled, timidly, then broadly. And then he laughed and drew his sword and cut the beaded belt in half.

“No,” he said. “If she has chosen, then she must choose again, for we are brothers now and brothers are the same!”

He entwined one half of the severed belt in the arm band of Medoto, and the other half he hung, as plainly, on himself.

“We begin again,” he said, “for we are equal to each other, and this is a truth that she must know. She must make her choice on other things but skill in battle, since only men may judge a warrior for his worth!”

It was not far to the manyatta and they walked it arm in arm. They were tall together, and strong and young, and somehow full of song. Temas walked brokenly for he was hurt, and yet he sang:

Oi-Konyek of the splendid shield
Has heard the lowing of the kine . . .

And when they entered the gates of the manyatta, there were many of every age to welcome Temas, for his lion had been brought and his story told. They cheered and cried his name and led him past the open doors to the peaceful earthen houses to the singara, which is the place reserved for warriors.

Medoto did not leave him, nor he Medoto, and it was strange to some to see the enemies
transformed and strong in friendship, when yesterday their only bond was hate.

It was strange to one who stood against the boma wall, a slender girl of fragile beauty and level, seeking eyes. She was as young as morning, as anticipant. But this anticipation quickly dimmed as she saw the token she had made, one half borne hopefully by Medoto, the other as hopefully carried by Temas!

Both sought her in the gathered crowd, both caught the glance and gave the question with their eyes. Both, in the smug, self-satisfied way of men, swaggered a little.

So the girl paused for an instant and frowned a woman's frown. But then, with musing, lidded eyes, she smiled a woman's smile-and stranger yet, the smile had more of triumph in it, and less of wonder, than it might have had.