

"THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS"

by

William Goldman

FADE IN ON

A TINY FIGURE OF A MAN hurrying toward camera. The figure gets larger as he approaches. But as yet we cannot tell who he is or where we are.

MALE VOICE (over)

This is the most famous true story of Africa. It happened a hundred years ago, but even now, when children ask about it, you do not tell them at night.

(The FIGURE continues to grow)

It began with the race to build a railroad across Africa.

(beat)

But this is not about building a railroad- it is about Patterson.

And now we can tell that the FIGURE is a YOUNG MAN, A LIEUTENANT COLONEL. This is PATTERSON. He is gifted and bright and serious, serious about his life, serious about his career. He has been successful in everything he's attempted, in part because of his talents, in part because he is willing to outwork anybody.

AND THIS IS WHERE WE ARE: ENGLAND.

More specifically, in a high-ceilinged corridor of an elegant building - lovely woodwork all around. Everything is neat, everything is clean and in order.

MALE VOICE (over)

Patterson was thirty. A brilliant engineer. A fine man, but do not become attached to him- there are many fine men in this story but do not become attached to any of them.

(beat)

So many of them die.

Patterson stops at a large ornate door, knocks. Waits.

MALE VOICE (over)

And remember this: only the

impossible parts of what follows
really happened...
 (Now the door opens
 and we-)

CUT TO

Just a wonderfully handsome man standing in the doorway. This is
ROBERT BEAUMONT - 40, with an irresistible smile. We're in his
office and the place reflects the man - clean, cold. There are
maps and charts on the walls. He ushers Patterson inside.

 BEAUMONT
 (The great smile flashes)
John Henry Patterson, come in. I'm
Robert Beaumont.
 (They shake hands)
Firm- I like that, tells me a lot
about you-
 (beat)
-now why don't you tell me about me?
To get you started, many people find
me handsome, with a wonderful smile.
I'm sure you agree.
 (Surprised, uncomfortable,
 Patterson nods)
Winning personality, heaps of charm?

 PATTERSON
My wife is the game player in the
family, sir.

 BEAUMONT
Games?
 (staring dead at Patterson)
Look at me closely, Patterson: I am
a monster. My only pleasure is
tormenting people who work for me,
such as yourself.
 (again the smile - only
 now it's chilling)
One mistake and I promise you this:
I'll make you hate me.

CUT TO

PATTERSON, as he realizes Beaumont is serious. Beaumont turns
sharply and moves to a large map.

CUT TO

THE MAP. It covers a great deal of East Africa with a very clear
line that ends at Lake Victoria, a distance of some 600 miles.

 BEAUMONT
 (pointing along the line)
We are building this railroad

across Africa for the glorious purpose of saving Africa from the Africans. And, of course, to end slavery. The Germans and French are our competition. We are ahead, and we will stay ahead providing you do what I hired you to do-

CUT TO

A MORE DETAILED MAP. This one ends at "Tsavo," 130 miles in.

BEAUMONT

-build the bridge over the Tsavo river. And be finished in four months time. Can you do that?

PATTERSON

I'm sure you've examined my record. So you know I've never yet been late on a bridge.

BEAUMONT

You've never built in Africa.

PATTERSON

But I have in India- every country presents problems.

BEAUMONT

You'll need your confidence, I promise you.

PATTERSON

I've got a reason far beyond confidence: my wife is having our firstborn in five months and I promised I'd be with her when the baby comes.

BEAUMONT

Very moving, Patterson; I'm touched you confided in me.

(beat)

But I don't really give a shit about your upcoming litter. I've made you with this assignment-

(the smile)

-don't make me break you.

PATTERSON

(smiling right back)

You won't have the chance.

(glancing at his watch)

Any further words of encouragement?

(silence)

Then I've a train to catch.

They look at each other a moment in silence - and it's very clear they do not like each other. Patterson turns, leaves and we

CUT TO

A RAILWAY STATION, IMMEDIATELY AFTER

A train is loading up. A lot of activity, a lot of noise. Patterson stands in the midst of it, anxiously looking around.

CUT TO

HELENA PATTERSON, hurrying through the crowd. Early 20s, with the kind of serene beauty of Jean Simmons. She is still slim, has not begun to show. She spots him, puts a smile on, goes straight into his arms.

HELENA

I tried to be late, John- it would have been easier if you'd gone.

PATTERSON

(They are nutty about each other - he nods)
We're not much good at goodbyes, Helena.

HELENA

(brightly)
Tell me about Beaumont- does he understand how brilliant you are, how lucky he is to have you?

PATTERSON

It was embarrassing- the man showered me with compliments.

They start to walk hand in hand along the platform toward a quieter place. Patterson is suddenly very serious-

HELENA

Oh dear-
(beat)
-you're getting that downtrodden look again-

PATTERSON

-well, it's just...
(beat)
...other men don't abandon their wives at such a time-

HELENA

(not unkindly)
-oh please- if I'd been against your taking this, you would have abandoned

me. You've been desperate to see Africa
your whole life.

PATTERSON

What if there are complications?-

HELENA

-not "what if"- there will be, there
always are. Which only means that our
"son" and I- note my confidence- will
have an excuse to come visit.

THE TRAIN WHISTLE sounds.

HELENA

Go, now.

(He kisses her hand)

Such a gentleman.

(Now he holds her)

PATTERSON

I am desperate to see Africa- but I
hate the leaving.

CUT TO

HELENA. She hates it, too.

HELENA

You build bridges, John-

(beat)

-you've got to go where the rivers are.

They hold each other a moment more, then break, then back into
each other's arms a final time, then-

CUT TO

THE TRAIN, and thick clouds of steam-

-Patterson runs into the clouds and disappears.

HOLD FOR A MOMENT.

KEEP HOLDING.

Patterson runs out of the steam and we

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

A DIFFERENT TRAIN, A DIFFERENT COUNTRY, A DIFFERENT WORLD.

This is the train to TSAVO and Patterson is alone on the engine
seat- a wooden bench in front of the engine used by railroad
inspectors and visiting VIPs. Behind it is a white circular piece
of wood used to keep the engine heat from the passengers.