

## POINT LENANA

Two Americans found the body. It was lying on its back in the ice, a few hundred feet below the summit. They couldn't make out what it was at first, but as they drew nearer they saw that it was a white man, frozen solid among the rocks at the edge of the glacier.

The Americans approached it cautiously across the ice. Above them, the twin peaks of Mount Kenya glinted austere in the evening sunshine. To their right, the tip of Point Lenana lay just out of sight behind the glacier. The Americans had climbed the mountain earlier and were on their way down when they spotted the body. It was only by chance that they noticed it at all.

They reached it at length and squatted down to examine the dead man. He was in his thirties, with several days' growth of beard and a head of hair bleached almost white by the sun. His eyes were blue and his face was strong. He had been good-looking before he died.

'Bad business.' One of the Americans shook his head. 'What're we going to do with him?'

It would be dark in an hour. They had to be safely off the rock face by then, pitching camp much further down the mountain. They had no time for bodies.

'Not much we *can* do,' said the other. 'We can't take him with us.'

It was for mountain rescue to bring the body down, professionals with the right equipment. It wasn't for amateurs like the Americans.

'You think we should just leave him here?'

'Can't do any harm. He's been here long enough already.'

About fifty years, by the look of his clothes. The man's body had been preserved almost perfectly by the ice as if he had only died yesterday, instead of half a century ago.

'We'll mark the spot,' the first American decided. 'So they know where to come looking.'

They marked it with a red sweatshirt and photographed the body to show where it lay in relation to the mountain. Then they continued their descent, arriving at the scree below the snowline just in time to make camp before it grew dark.

A few hours' trek next morning brought them to the climbers' hut at the roadhead, where transport was waiting to take them off the mountain. They signed out and reported the dead man to the park warden.

The warden took the details but displayed no interest in their find. Neither did the porters leaning idly against the hut wall. An injured climber was worth a lot to them if he could pay for his rescue, but a man dead fifty years had no value at all. Best to leave him where he was.

'You can't do that,' the Americans protested. 'You can't just leave him there. It isn't right.'

The porters shrugged. Not their problem, if there was no money in it.

'Maybe his family,' suggested the warden. 'If he has family, maybe they can pay.'

'But who is he? We don't even know his name.'

All they had to go on was the photo they had taken. A blond man wearing the clothes of fifty years ago. His family would be hard to trace after so long. If they behaved like most families, they wouldn't pay for him to be brought down anyway.

The Americans refused to leave it at that. They made inquiries when they returned to Nairobi. The news agencies picked up the story and searched their files. It didn't take them long to match the photograph of the body to Manfred von Linden, a German aristocrat who had disappeared on Mount Kenya in 1950 in circumstances that had never been satisfactorily explained.

The dead man was a Bavarian baron. His family had been prominent in the old Germany before the wars. They had searched for him when he disappeared, but had never found any trace of his body or discovered why an experienced mountaineer had taken it into his head to climb Mount Kenya on his own. Baron von Linden had been a sensible man, but climbing the mountain without a companion had not been a sensible thing to do. His family had found no explanation for his behaviour. Neither had anyone else.

An explanation did exist, however. As CNN flashed von Linden's photograph around the world, two people saw it and in their different ways were badly shaken to learn that his body had been discovered at last. One of the two was an old Kenya settler named Hugh Greenwood. The other was Amber de Lisle, an old lady living in Cheltenham, a quiet little town in the depths of the English countryside.

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Amber de Lisle was in the High Street when she learned that von Linden had been found. She was passing a television shop when his face appeared on a dozen screens at the same time. Amber stared in disbelief for a moment before hurrying into the shop and asking them to turn up the sound. The news had moved on and von Linden had disappeared by

the time they did, but it had been him, all right. Amber was sure of it.

She wandered out again in a whirl, her mind racing. Manfred had been found. He must have been, if his photograph was on the news. Why else would he be on television, if his body hadn't been found?

Amber hurried home at once. There was a radio in her room at the retirement home. She switched it on as soon as she got back and sat down impatiently to wait for the lunchtime news. It took forever to come on, but it was the news Amber had waited half a lifetime to hear:

*'Abroad now, and from Kenya reports are coming in of a fifty-year-old body on Mount Kenya. The body was discovered near the summit of the mountain. Early indications suggest that it may belong to Baron von Linden, who disappeared on the mountain in 1950.'*

*'The weather. Most of England and Wales will have a cold and cloudy day with occasional drizzle. Temperatures will be slightly below average for the time of year...'*

Amber slumped back in her chair. So the mystery had been solved at last. Manfred wasn't still alive somewhere, as she had sometimes hoped and imagined. He had died alone on Mount Kenya, just as everyone had thought at the time.

Amber wasn't sure if she was happy or sad to know the truth at long last. Just relieved that she *did* know it, for better or worse. Glad the wait was over.

Manfred von Linden. What a long time ago it was now. More years than Amber cared to remember, since she had first met him. More years than she had ever thought possible.

Amber's room at the home was bright and cheerful, filled with mementoes of her

childhood in Kenya. There was a display of flamingo feathers on the table, a painting of Mount Kenya on the wall, and the skin of a leopard shot by her father draped across the back of the sofa. Somewhere in the chest of drawers she had a cache of letters written by the Africans after she had left, imploring her to come back to Kenya and look after them again. Somewhere else, an old photograph album full of Kenya pictures, including one of Manfred taken long before he died.

Amber rummaged through her things. She found the album at the bottom of a drawer, next to her father's medals from the Great War that she was determined not to sell. She got the album out and sat on the sofa with it, leafing slowly through the pictures as the memories came flooding back to her.

There they all were, Amber's family from the early days in Kenya. Her father had gone out after the Great War to farm cattle on the Laikipia plains. Amber had grown up in the shadow of Mount Kenya, a wild place of marauding elephants and lions in the night. She and her brother had run free across the plains with the sun glinting off the mountain and Masai children for companions.

There was their house with Mount Kenya in the background. There were Amber and her brother, and there was the leopard their father had shot, the same one she was leaning against now. They had propped up its chin on a stick for the photograph, her father standing proudly over it with his rifle while her mother held on to his arm.

There was Amber again, older now, skinny and truculent as she turned into a teenager. She had never quite been beautiful, not even as a young girl, but she had always been attractive, with dark eyes and a luminous face. Amber had been fearless when she was young, never afraid of anything. The boys had always liked her for that, treating her

as one of themselves.

There she was at her English school, sent home at the age of fourteen to get her away from the boys and complete her education in Surrey. Amber had hated every minute of it. She had been homesick from the first and had never adapted to the dullness of life in England. The weather, the stifling conformity, the bullet proof stockings. The other girls at Amber's school had all wanted to marry stockbrokers when they grew up.

Kenya was where Amber had wanted to be. Kenya was where she had returned soon after leaving school, back to the land she loved. Her father had booked her a passage aboard the *Azania*. She had sailed in May 1939, travelling out via the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal.

Amber turned the page. There she was aboard the *Azania*, somewhere beyond the Red Sea by the look of it. And there was Manfred von Linden as Amber had first known him, standing on the deck of the *Azania* in white flannels and tennis shoes. A German baron aboard a British ship in May 1939. Manfred had fought for Germany later, yet more in sorrow than anger. He hadn't wanted to fight, any more than anyone else.

May 1939. That was when it had begun for Amber. Sailing from Southampton in the last few months of peace before the Second World War had engulfed them all.

Amber laid the album aside. Suddenly she was nineteen again, leaning happily over the rail on a lovely May afternoon as the *Azania* cast off her moorings and pulled away from the dockside at Southampton. Coloured streamers were being thrown, confetti was raining down and the band was playing *Auld Lang Syne* as the ship straightened up in Southampton Water and turned towards the open sea. Amber watched from the rail for a while and then went forward to the bows to enjoy the breeze as the *Azania* picked her

way through a flotilla of smaller craft and increased speed towards the Solent.

At Spithead, they came to a trio of old forts spaced across the channel: man-made islands built in Victorian times to protect Portsmouth from attack. Shading her eyes, Amber could see a party of naval ratings at work on the nearest one. Some were painting the fort's six-inch gun in camouflage stripes of blue, green and grey. The rest were erecting a battery of searchlights in readiness for an attack from the air. It seemed extraordinary that they should be preparing for war on such a beautiful day, with barely a cloud in the sky.

The ship dropped the pilot once they had cleared Nab Tower. A motorboat lay alongside as the man emerged from a hatch and climbed down a rope ladder. The motorboat turned back towards land as soon as he was safely aboard. The Isle of Wight receded astern and the *Azania* was on her way, heading for Gibraltar first and then the Mediterranean, the outward leg of a journey that would take her down the coast of East Africa and across the sea to Australia, if the Germans hadn't declared war by then.

Amber soon made friends among the other passengers. One was Hazel Adams, a cheerful blonde in her late twenties, who knew Amber's parents slightly. She had been to England for medical treatment and was returning to Kenya to rejoin her husband at Nanyuki.

Another was Johnny Carew, a young army officer travelling out to join the King's African Rifles. Smart in evening clothes, he introduced himself at the Captain's cocktail party on the second night at sea.

'It's my first time in Kenya,' he told the two women. 'A three year posting. I must say, I'm rather looking forward to it.'

‘Gosh.’ Amber was intrigued. ‘Can you even speak Swahili?’

‘Not yet. I’ve done a course, but I haven’t been making much progress.’

‘Kitchen Swahili,’ said Hazel. ‘That’s all you need to know.’

‘I’d like to learn it properly if I could.’

‘Kitchen Swahili. I’ve never spoken anything else.’

‘To be honest,’ Johnny said, ‘I’m not even sure I’m doing the right thing, joining the King’s African Rifles. It’s quite the wrong place to be, if there’s a war coming.’

‘Why?’

‘They wouldn’t ever use native troops against the Germans. I’ll miss the whole show if I’m in the K.A.R. when the war comes.’

‘You really think it will?’ Amber asked.

‘Bound to. It’s only a matter of time now. And I shall miss it if I’m in the K.A.R.’

‘There won’t be a war,’ Hazel said. ‘It’s too stupid. Who in their right mind would want to start another war?’

*To be continued*