



# SWITZERLAND

BY JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH



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SWITZERLAND  
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*For Nita Murray-Smith*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to express gratitude to Randall Arney, Amy Levinson, the late Gil Cates and the staff of the Geffen Playhouse, to Andrew Upton and the staff of the Sydney Theatre Company, to Sarah Goodes and Mark Brokaw, and to the brilliant cast members of both premiere productions: Sarah Peirse, Eamon Farren, Laura Linney, and Seth Numrich. The late Sarah Jane Leigh was instrumental in the writing of this play. Thanks to Cathy King and her associates at Independent. Love and thanks, as always, to Raymond Gill.

The co-world premiere of SWITZERLAND was first presented at Sydney Theatre Company (Andrew Upton, Artistic Director; Patrick McIntyre, Executive Director) in Sydney, Australia, by special arrangement with the Geffen Playhouse, on November 3, 2014. It was directed by Sarah Goodes; the production designer was Michael Scott-Mitchell; the lighting designer was Nick Schlieper; and the composer and sound designer was Steve Francis. The cast was as follows:

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ..... Sarah Peirse  
EDWARD/TOM ..... Eamon Farren

SWITZERLAND was commissioned and presented as a co-world premiere by the Geffen Playhouse (Randall Arney, Artistic Director; Gil Cates, Jr., Executive Director) in Los Angeles, California, on March 6, 2015, at the Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater. It was directed by Mark Brokaw; the scenic designer was Anthony T. Fanning; the costume designer was Ellen McCartney; the lighting designer was Lap Chi Chu; the composer and sound designer was John Ballinger; and the production stage manager was Cate Cundiff. The cast was as follows:

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH ..... Laura Linney  
EDWARD/TOM ..... Seth Numrich

## CHARACTERS

PATRICIA HIGHSMITH: An older woman, distinct vestiges of beauty.

EDWARD: Twenties, handsome, sexually ambiguous.

## SETTING

It's 1994. We are in the spacious study of Patricia Highsmith, in her minimalist modern house in Tegna, Switzerland. By contrast to the bunker-like architecture, the study is a brilliant archive of a life. Books, pictures, rugs, and artifacts — all somehow unique or beautiful — fill the space, including a collection of antique weapons, both knives and guns. Every object in the room has been “placed” there by her, so that the overall effect is curatorial rather than cluttered. Her desk is furnished with a 1956 Olympia Deluxe typewriter, papers, an ashtray, a packet of Camel cigarettes — she smokes on and off throughout the play — a half-empty bottle of scotch, and a glass. Through the window may or may not reveal a classic picture-postcard vista of Switzerland.

# SWITZERLAND

## ACT ONE

*Lights up. 1994. Early fall. Early morning. Patricia Highsmith is sitting at her desk. She is wearing men's trousers, a boy's shirt, and loafers. She is older now, but there are vestiges of her once-great beauty, and she has an innate gender-neutral style. As she types, her bottom lip spills out exaggeratedly. Edward, an ordinarily handsome young man of around twenty-five — neatly if inexpensively dressed — is standing. A backpack and a small suitcase sit beside him on the floor. He has a copy of Vanity Fair under his arm, with Nicole Kidman on the cover. He is nervous.*

PATRICIA. (*Without turning to look at him, still typing.*) You're late.

EDWARD. Oh.

PATRICIA. I know that because this is Switzerland. (*Beat. She turns around to take him in.*)

EDWARD. The train was um ... late leaving Paris.

PATRICIA. Is that my business?

EDWARD. I tried to call from the *Gare du Nord* —

PATRICIA. I don't answer the phone.

EDWARD. I did email to say —

PATRICIA. I don't do email.

EDWARD. No, I get that —

PATRICIA. Something that easy makes you sloppy. And if you're impulsive, it's downright dangerous.

EDWARD. I guess that's true!

PATRICIA. No one realizes that the whole point of an envelope and a stamp is to act as a buffer between *thought* and *deed*.

EDWARD. I never thought of that before.

PATRICIA. I can sound very pleasant, benevolent even, in a letter, but in an email, my personal generosity doesn't come through.

EDWARD. Really?

PATRICIA. I emailed my German publisher and he completely misread my tone.

EDWARD. What did you write?

PATRICIA. I said, "*What the hell makes you think I'm going to have the goddamn wool pulled over my eyes by a bunch of Nazis who'd sell their mother to make an extra Deutschmark?*" ... It came across as "hostile" apparently.

EDWARD. Computers are changing everything. We're at the dawning of a new age.

PATRICIA. A new age of mediocrity. And *you're* the Messiah. (*He steps forward nervously and offers his hand.*)

EDWARD. Edward Ridgeway. (*She looks at it disdainfully. He retracts it.*)

PATRICIA. What's that?

EDWARD. Ah, um, *Vanity Fair*.

PATRICIA. Who is that?

EDWARD. Nicole Kidman.

PATRICIA. Who's Nicole Kidman?

EDWARD. Um ... Well, she's married to Tom Cruise.

PATRICIA. Who's Tom Cruise? (*Beat as he absorbs this.*)

EDWARD. A movie star. And a Scientologist.

PATRICIA. Doesn't get much better! You're not a Scientologist, are you?

EDWARD. No ... You don't like Scientologists?

PATRICIA. I just don't want one in my house.

EDWARD. Oh. Right. Well — (*Nerves showing.*) Is it okay if I — sit? It's been a long trip!

PATRICIA. Boo-hoo.

EDWARD. Miss Highsmith, I'm hoping we're going to address the situation —

PATRICIA. The "situation" —

EDWARD. I think we both know —

PATRICIA. I guess we do know —

EDWARD. The reason I'm here —

PATRICIA. You're the troubleshooter?

EDWARD. Well, I'm confident that —

PATRICIA. Confident, eh? Think you're going to "sort me out"?



EDWARD. Well —

PATRICIA. Once upon a time, you could *depend* upon confidence. People asked themselves: Do I have the *right* to be confident? You *earned* that degree of self-affirmation.

EDWARD. Well, I —

PATRICIA. Whereas these days, young people ... they *start out* confident. Why? I'll tell you why! Because they're deluded. They're *silly little fuckers!* And then *life* has to take the wind out of their sails.

EDWARD. I don't think I'm deluded!

PATRICIA. That's because you are deluded, genius!

EDWARD. Miss Highsmith, first of all I want to take this opportunity to say that we're sure it was just all some kind of misunderstanding.

PATRICIA. Who's "we"?

EDWARD. Mr. Hunter and the company. And I would certainly add my vote to that.

PATRICIA. You would, would you? Are you old enough to vote?

EDWARD. (*Carefully.*) We think Bradley Applebee probably just allowed himself to let his imagination get the better of him.

PATRICIA. Bradley Applebee didn't have any imagination.

EDWARD. Well, his mind —

PATRICIA. There was no indication Applebee had a mind, either.

EDWARD. The company wants you to know there are no hard feelings.

PATRICIA. Presumably, Applebee has a couple of hard feelings.

EDWARD. Well, actually he's —

PATRICIA. What?

EDWARD. Bradley's left the company.

PATRICIA. No great loss!

EDWARD. We're hopeful he —

PATRICIA. Hopeful?

EDWARD. A full recovery. (*Beat.*)

PATRICIA. Well, no doubt this is all some distant memory for Bradley Applebee. He's probably pushing a pen in some mediocre office as we speak.

EDWARD. Oh no — no, Bradley's not ready for work yet.

PATRICIA. "Not ready"?

EDWARD. Well, he's — ah — in counseling. I think he took it rather hard.

PATRICIA. Well, that says it all. The company had no business sending a timid little nobody with no sense of humor.

EDWARD. He's still having flashbacks, apparently —  
PATRICIA. Flashbacks!  
EDWARD. About the knife.  
PATRICIA. There was no knife!  
EDWARD. Well, that's what we mean about his imagination taking the lead.  
PATRICIA. As if I'd —  
EDWARD. Exactly. That's what we said. As if Miss Highsmith would —  
PATRICIA. I don't have time to threaten underlings with —  
EDWARD. Of course not!  
PATRICIA. I'm not in the habit of —  
EDWARD. He kept saying it wouldn't have been so bad in the daylight —  
PATRICIA. *Nothing's* so bad in the daylight. That's why we revel in darkness!  
EDWARD. For whatever reason, he had a strong sense of waking up in the pitch black and feeling the steel blade against his throat —  
PATRICIA. Crazy.  
EDWARD. Crazy. Exactly.  
PATRICIA. *He* woke *me* up in the dead of night. It's not my fault Hunter sent a kid with a capacity to hallucinate. I tell you what though, that kid could scream! Hitchcock would have bottled it. When Applebee gets out of therapy you could suggest he do it for a living.  
EDWARD. Anyhow, Bradley aside, we still feel very strongly —  
PATRICIA. "We"?  
EDWARD. Mr. Hunter and the company —  
PATRICIA. Want to make some money.  
EDWARD. Well, yes. Okay. Companies generally like to make money. Is there anything wrong with that?  
PATRICIA. They want to make money off of me.  
EDWARD. They want you to make money, too.  
PATRICIA. I'm touched.  
EDWARD. And they wanted me to come and tell you that the reason they are overlooking — the reason I'm here, is to let you know we have every confidence.  
PATRICIA. Really? You're the company spokesman? You've still got your baby teeth!  
EDWARD. I'm older than I look. And not to blow my own trumpet, but I think I have the sensibility to understand you.

PATRICIA. Notice how it's only trumpet blowers who use that phrase?  
EDWARD. I think I can help and everyone will be happy.  
PATRICIA. From the moment you walked through that door, I could see that you brought all the slap-dash of America with you. Maybe I've been in Europe too long, but the attention to detail is very beguiling here — Europeans use their *senses*. Americans like you, and Americans *are* like you, think “close enough” is good enough. It's a kind of general national callow youth. The sensibility is just not *fine*. How is your mind? Is it a fine mind?  
EDWARD. My mind?  
PATRICIA. Is the taxi still here? Tell him to keep the meter on.  
EDWARD. Please, Miss Highsmith —  
PATRICIA. That honestly is the very best thing about Switzerland. When you call a cab, *the cab comes*.  
EDWARD. Just give me a chance — just a —  
PATRICIA. They should put *that* on the tourism ads. Enough with the *chocolate*, for Christ's sake. The dependability of a cab, *that's* the secret to its success.  
EDWARD. I've come a long way.  
PATRICIA. Yes, you have. And for absolutely no reason.  
EDWARD. All the way from New York City.  
PATRICIA. New York City!  
EDWARD. The greatest city on earth.  
PATRICIA. The greatest city on earth! Full of pseuds and Jews and Catholics! *The greatest city?* Is that where you get your air of self-congratulation? Sitting there at your little desk in a publishing house that thinks it's hit the big time with Tom Wolfe. Tom Wolfe! What a joke! I can see you in your cheap suit sitting in Emmett's coffee shop thinking that those pretty girls eating pie and drinking coffee are going to be impressed that you're some big cheese because you get to fraternize with authors. Like you're an intellectual!  
EDWARD. Emmett's has gone.  
PATRICIA. What?  
EDWARD. There is no Emmett's.  
PATRICIA. (*Wind out of sails.*) Emmett's is gone?  
EDWARD. And girls don't eat pie. They eat ... *romaine*.  
PATRICIA. What the hell is romaine?  
EDWARD. It's a lettuce. They eat lettuce. And yogurt. There are very few (*Makes the quotation mark sign with his fingers.*) “diners.”  
PATRICIA. (*Mimicking and nasty.*) Please don't do that.

# SWITZERLAND

by Joanna Murray-Smith

1M, 1W

Somewhere in the Swiss Alps, grande dame of crime literature Patricia Highsmith lives with an impressive collection of books, and a somewhat sinister collection of guns and knives. She finds solace in her solitude, her cats, and cigarettes. But when a mysterious international visitor arrives at her perfectly secluded home, her love of fictional murders becomes a dangerous reality.

*"Writers of crime fiction are rarely as brutal or twisted as the characters they create. But meet Patricia Highsmith, by general agreement a foul-mouthed misanthrope who spent decades detailing the psychotic narcissism lurking in humanity's dark heart. ... SWITZERLAND will likely send spectators giddily speeding back to such novels as Strangers on a Train and ... The Talented Mr. Ripley."* —Variety

*"SWITZERLAND [is] an act of homage by way of larceny, appropriating Highsmith the real person as a fictional character in one of her own queasy dramas. The play hinges on an irresistible conceit ... Murray-Smith has great fun emulating Highsmith's terse, caustic register ... SWITZERLAND is obviously an act of identification: one writer wrestling with a creation wrestling with her most famous creation of all."*

—The Hollywood Reporter

*"[SWITZERLAND] explores what it's like to be a woman writer in a man's literary kingdom ... Murray-Smith's dialogue sparkles with witty one-liners and delicious snark ... But she also suffers from that peculiar mix of ego and insecurity that fuels many of the greatest writers; she has vulnerable spots."*

—Time Out (Sydney)

*"Murray-Smith's work has never been darker or more compelling ... It's impossible to know what Highsmith herself would have made of the play. But it's not hard to imagine her delighting in its intelligence, humour, darkness and gentle unravelling. It's a truly great play."*

—Daily Review (Australia)

Also by Joanna Murray-Smith  
HONOUR

ISBN: 978-0-8222-3435-7



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