

*In the acknowledgements, I mention the friend I part-dedicated the book to ('And to Natasha, who taught me – when I needed it most – how to navigate without a map') before turning to the morning writing. By this time, I'd largely migrated from working in my kids' bedroom to taking over the kitchen.*

...The actual writing was begun with the author and his papers spread out on the front seat of a parked Land Cruiser 6,000 feet up in Tanzania, windows rolled up in a vain attempt to block the howling gale up from the Great Rift Valley, while an enthusiastic Scandinavian friend was calling out – it was hard to hear her over the wind's roar – that it wasn't usually this cold! That any moment now the wind would fade! She was right, albeit off by a few hours, and sitting on her balcony a little later, watching the sunset and regaining my circulation, gossiping about this and that, and then half-closing my eyes to listen to her read aloud, I realized what the tone of the book could be. The world is old, but electricity is older. It shaped the Masai Hills that I could vaguely see; it's shaped the lives of everyone who's walked across those hills as well.

The book is now being completed, five miles over the Atlantic, jetting in tranquil comfort beside my eight-year-old daughter, home soon to her big brother. How they helped they will only realize later.

I did some of the writing at night, but mostly took to getting up very early and doing it then. We have a big kitchen, with big windows, and I loved waking in the dark, with London quiet outside; then pattering to the kitchen, and making coffee or tea before spreading out my papers on the wooden table where we'd later have our breakfast. Usually I'd have stopped to look in on the kids in their rooms – Sam with his giant Homer Simpson cut-out; Sophie with fairy castles on the wall – but even when I hadn't, I felt a great tranquillity just from knowing they were there.

Gradually the birds would get louder and louder from the gardens outside, and early hints of light would appear; by six-thirty or seven the first sleepy pyjama-clad child would wander in, ready for some chatting or at least emergency supplies of fruit juice or warm chocolate. They'd lean against the wall under the biggest window,

either reading their own books or drawing a little, or sometimes not doing much of anything, just happy to keep their dad company. I tried not to smile as I scribbled away, feeling their thoughts, their tenderness, enter my soul.

Feeling their contentment enter my words.