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Hemingway tells the story from the point of view of the young American. By telling the story from the American's point of view, he manages to objectify the intimacy established between the reader and the American. The central issue of the story, the courage is necessary for life as well as death is not revealed until the end of the story. Death is haunting refrain playing quietly under the surface of narrative. Though the hospital is "very old and very beautiful" the American observes: "There were usually funerals starting from the Courtyard". The major never talks of his own bravery or his courage and his exploits on the battlefield. He lives a highly disciplined life. The photographs of restored limbs that the doctors first show the men and then put on the wall don't inspire great confidants. The strong optimism of physician employing new machine is contrasted with the skepticism of an Italian major. ("the greatest fencer in Italy"). He comes regularly for therapy to his hand, nevertheless disbelieving in the machine. His regular attendance is like his interests in having the young American learn grammar. The major, who had instructed the American never to put himself "in a position to lose", has himself just "lost" his wife he had married when he felt sure that his own wounding had taken him out of danger of being killed at the front. Despite the ineffectiveness of the machines, the major's behavior offers an example of the only "therapy" possible in this world of wounds and machines. The major's wife sudden death from pneumonia leads the Italian major to learn he cannot control life and cannot protect him from life's vulnerabilities. Courage is not just facing enemy fire on the front line but also picking up the pieces of their damaged lives and facing the prospect of tomorrow.

He is crushed by the news. Nothing can ease the internal wounds which the major suffers. He missed three days of treatment because of the death of his wife. He was brave enough to go on living.