

International Imitation Hemingway Competition

Grand Prize Winner – 1986

The Snooze of Kilimanjaro By Mark Silber

Kilimanjaro is a big mountain, 19,410 feet high, and that's not counting the TV transmitter. The summit, marked by a single welcome mat, is called "Mmble-Br!npx," the Front Porch of God. Close to the summit are the frozen remains of a lemonade stand. No one has explained why anybody would try to sell lemonade at that altitude.

He had come with the woman to Kilimanjaro to gather ideas for a cycle of haikus he was writing. The woman had suggested, in the aristocratic manner of the rich, that living on a diet of dried bark and dirt would toughen something inside him that had gone soft and prevented him from creating. Instead it softened him further, and now he was dying of severe dysentery complicated by writer's block.

Now he would never write the things he had saved to write until he learned to spell them. For instance, *accommodation*. One C, two Ms, or the other way around? He wasn't sure. Or *chrysanthemum*? On rugged Kilimanjaro, there was not even a dictionary.

"How do they know I'm dying?" he asked the woman, indicating the crowd of undertakers, florists and wake caterers who were gathering at the edge of the campsite. "Is it the odor?"

"Of your poop?" she asked. "Or your poetry?"

She knew how to hurt him this woman, this female being, this person of the nonmale persuasion. And he would have hurt her back, at least challenged her to a thumb wrestle, if he hadn't felt it just then. The cold stale breath.

Death.

He could taste Death in the wind. He could hear it tiptoe around the campsite. He could see it climbing a tree, hiding in a garbage can, tripping over a root. Clumsy Death. Once he thought Death tapped him on the shoulder, but it must have ducked when he turned around to see who it was. "The night can play strange tricks on a man," the woman had said. Sure enough, when he awoke, the next morning, there was a "Kick Me" sign pinned to his back.

Sensing Death nearby, he wished he had never left his comfortable job at Harry's Bar, where he had made good money as a cocktail waitress during a confused period of his adolescence. Yes, that was another poem he would never write, mainly because he couldn't even pronounce *scampi grigliati*, let alone spell it. For him, there was but one haiku left:

*I came for ideas
But instead I'm going to die
You rotten mountain*

He scratched the words into a pile of uneaten dirt and waited for Death to stumble his way.