The Snows of Kilimanjaro etc

E.Hemingway

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To depict your own death is an act of melodramatic sentimentality. Hemingway does it. A writer married to a very rich woman is destroyed by the comfort such resources provide. He no longer writes, as he has gotten out the habit, lost his discipline. Now on a safari by the mountain his leg is going gangrenous after a mistreated infection. The pain is gone as a result, but instead it starts to smell and vultures are being attracted to the site. He realizes that he is going to die without ever having committed to paper all those things that was in him. The narrative, mostly consisting of dialogue with his rich wife, is interspersed with fragments of other writings, set off in slanted fonts. Maybe those are the things he is writing at the time, or what is simply going on in his mind as things he would have liked to put on paper? In the end a plane arrives and brings him with it. Is he being saved? The planes takes off and he sees the ground below him sink almost into insignificance. At the end the pilot is heading for the snowcapped peak of Kilimanjaro. The man is happy, he is being taken home. The story ends by the wife finding her husband dead. So was it but a dream this rescue by plane? It is melodramatic enough and also not very satisfying. It is here you find the oft quoted lines to the effect that the rich are different from you and me, and the reply, yes, they have more money.

From then on every story in the selection are introduced by a fragment which has nothing to do with the story itself. Sometimes the fragments are scenes from wars, the First World War as well as the Greco-Turkish one. Sometimes they are concerned with bullfighting and hapless matadors gored by sharp pointed horns. Did Hemingway put those in, or the editors? Either way it is rather stupid and pointless and at best merely pretentious.

The stories are rather short and in the nature of being evocations and thus fragmentization is a supposed virtue. They are sketches, and as such one suspects conceived with no small dose of laziness. The most successful ones are the Nick Adams stories, in which he depicts the life and landscapes of logging and lakes in the far north. The life of forested Michigan, where fish still abounds in lakes and rivers, and with native Indians still at the fringe. Particularly charming is the depiction of Adams going on a trout fishing excursion, camping alone in the woods. The pleasures of loneliness are lovingly evoked, a loneliness in which the universe becomes very small and focused, unsullied by social intrusion, and the day is filled with successful execution of small things, each necessary for survival. The setting up of a tent is described in detail, lingering successively on the frying of pancakes, the making of sandwiches, the collecting of grasshoppers as future bait to be put into an empty bottle plugged with a pine stick. All those trivial chores, each of such significance when isolated. And then of course the hunt for trout, the ice cold water of the stream, the shaded shallows in which the prey is sure to hover. The slackening of the line, the hooking, the reeling in. The story ends with the gutting of the fish and the hunters love of the beautiful animal. In such Michigan stories the writer has found his metier, and also a kind

of duty and obligation, a mission in his writing life, which he soon would abandon, for the thrills of an expatriates ventures. As an expatriate he ventures into war on the Austrian front, he climbs and skies in the Dolomites and the Tyrol, fishing in the Black Forest and living it up in Paris, dipping down into Spain and into bulls and of course drinking a lot, having many women, and being bored with life. The cheap thrills of which would charm a multitude of readers who in his hard-boiled dialogues, stripped down prose and affectations with macho pursuits would find a true and raw life, worthy of both adulation and emulation.

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