

Chris Bullard

Where to Put Death

It is always good to put something about dying in the last line of your poem because that gives the reader a start a pause a hmm and maybe even compels him or her to go back and re-read the text that he or she might have just skimmed when they read it the first time because maybe your poem is made up of descriptive language which face it sounds rather plain because maybe your own life is a just a little on the dull side am I right but now your readers can see just what you were really leading up to and that you had a theme so he or she can better grasp the craft you've shown by getting everyone to follow your sly narrative argument which before seemed to involve only some sort of description of the objects in your house or perhaps the workplace but which now they know was riffing on something really big anyway it's always better to throw death in at the end because putting it at the beginning of your poem means it's just another goddam poem about death and that sort of a thing is a buzzkill to most people so save it up for the big finale the big blow off because that's just what life always does I mean like it just did to so many I can't count.

Afterlife

- 1) I wasn't very successful as a person, so I hope to do better as a ghost.
- 2) I never felt comfortable with my soul stuffed into this sausage casing.
- 3) The demands my body made were absurd.
- 4) I can't believe the stuff I had to eat to keep it moving.
- 5) I can't believe the nonsense it made me say.
- 6) I couldn't drink fast enough to shut it up.
- 7) I was supposed to love others.
- 8) Others found that I was too other for them.
- 9) I was detached as much from their satisfaction as I was from my own.
- 10) In the afterlife, I'll be your secret valentine.
- 11) I'll leave surprise chocolates on the pillow and unexpected roses on the dining room table.
- 12) I'll send you dreams that will let you solve your life crises.
- 13) I'll be a better man by not being a man at all.
- 14) I was absent before, but now I can be absent in a positive way.

Under Observation

- 1) A machine beeps.
- 2) Someone looks at his watch.
- 3) Someone makes a note on a chart.
- 4) A machine beeps.
- 5) Someone hangs a bag above a bed.
- 6) Someone watches liquid trickle down a tube.
- 7) A machine beeps.
- 8) Someone observes numbers that appear and disappear on a screen.
- 9) Someone checks a column on a print-out.
- 10) A machine stops beeping.
- 11) Someone leans over a bed.
- 12) Several someones meet.
- 13) Someone turns a machine off.
- 14) Someone takes a body away.

Cold Mountain Dines at the Monastery

Several of the elders had submitted commentary on the one hand clapping theorem in the *Journal of Applied Koans*. Some had written scholarly monographs describing the sevenfold path to enlightenment. They split on whether it was rocky or primrose-ish. If one of the monks opened his mouth at dinner Cold Mountain would throw his rice bowl and plunk him on the head. Worse, Cold Mountain scrawled poems on the dining hall wall: crazy stuff about his namesake place. At the committee meeting, the monks agreed that Cold Mountain's submissions did not fit their current needs although some thought it might help his self-expression if he took their seminar in *Zen Creativity*. The elders approached him with grant forms. "People taking Cold Mountain Way never arrive." he said and walked until the road gave out and the heart of the mountain gave him entrance.

Hiding Out

- 1) my way out was hiding
- 2) I hid
- 3) by letting myself be seen
- 4) though what I allowed to be seen
- 5) was only more of my hide
- 6) rough and impenetrable
- 7) yet seductively calm
- 8) a contrivance that charmed some
- 9) who sought cover there
- 10) seeking a heart under the skin
- 11) but found my hide
- 12) was not hide enough
- 13) to hide more than one
- 14) once inside they only wanted out.