

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Burning
in
Water
Drowning
in
Flame

HarperCollins e-books



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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The poems in the first three sections of this book are from the years 1955-1968 and the poems in the last section are the new work of 1972-1973. The reader might wonder what happened to the years 1969-1971, since the author once did vanish (literally) from 1944 to 1954. But not this time. *The Days Run Away Like Wild Horses Over The Hills* (Black Sparrow Press, 1969) contains the poems from late 1968 and most of 1969, plus selections from five early chapbooks not covered by the first three sections of this book. *Mockingbird Wish Me Luck* (Black Sparrow Press, 1972) prints poems written from late 1969 to early 1972. So, for my critics, readers, friends, enemies, ex-lovers and new lovers, the present volume along with *Days* and *Mockingbird* contain what I like to consider my best work written over the past nineteen years.

Each of these sections brings back special memories. For It Catches My Heart In Its Hands I was required to make a trip to New Orleans. The editor first had to check me out to see if I was a decent human being. Catching the train at the Union Station just below the Terminal Annex of the Post Office where I worked for Uncle Sam, I sat in the bar car and drank scotch and water and sped toward New Orleans to be judged and measured by an ex-con who owned an ancient printing press. Jon Webb believed that most writers (and he'd met some good ones including Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner, Hemingway) were detestable human beings when they were away from their typewriters. I arrived, they met me, Jon and his wife, Louise, we drank and talked for two weeks, then Jon Webb said, "You're a bastard, Bukowski, but I'm going to publish you anyhow." I left town. But that wasn't all. Soon they were both in Los Angeles with their two dogs in a green hotel just off skid row. Re-check. Drink and talk. I was still a bastard. Goodbye. Much leaving and waving through train windows. Louise cried through the glass. It Catches was published...

The bulk of the poems in *Crucifix In A Deathhand* were written during one very hot, lyrical month in New Orleans in the year 1965. I'd walk down the street and I'd stagger, sober I'd stagger, hear

churchbells, wounded dogs, wounded me, all that. I had gone into a slump or a blackout after the publication of *It Catches*, and Jon and Louise had brought me back down to New Orleans. I lived right around the corner from them with a fat, kind woman whose exhusband (who'd died) had come very close to being welterweight or middleweight champion of the world, I forget which. Each night I went over to Jon and Louise's and we drank until early morning at a small table in the kitchen with the roaches running up and down the wall in front of us (they particularly liked to circle around an unshaded lightbulb sticking out of the wall) as we drank and talked.

I would go back to my place and awaken about 10:30 a.m., quite sick. I'd dress and walk over to Jon's place. The press was below street level and I'd peek down at him before I knocked. I could see him through the window, calm, cool, hardly hungover at all, humming, and feeding pages of *Crucifix* into the press.

"Got any poems, Bukowski?" he'd ask as I walked in. (One had to be careful: feeding poems into a waiting press can easily dissolve into journalism.)

Jon would become downright unlaced if I didn't have a handful of poems. It wasn't as pleasant to be around that bastard then, and I'd find myself back in my room beating the typer. In the evening, if I brought him a little sheaf of poems, his mood would be better.

So I kept writing poems. We drank with the roaches, the place was small, and pages 5, 6, 7 and 8 were stacked in the bathtub, nobody could bathe, and pages 1, 2, 3 and 4 were in a large trunk, and soon there wasn't anyplace to put anything. There were 7-and-one-half foot stacks of pages everywhere. Very carefully we moved between them. The bathtub had been useful but the bed was in the way. So Jon built a little loft out of discarded lumber. Plus a stairway. And Jon and Louise slept up there on a mattress and the bed was given away. There was more floor space to stack the pages. "Bukowski, Bukowski everywhere! I am going crazy!" said Louise. The roaches circled and we drank and the press gulped my poems. A very strange time, and that was *Crucifix...*

I used to go to John Thomas' place and stay all night. We'd take pills and drink and talk. That is, John took the pills and I took the pills and drank, and we both talked. John was then in the habit of taping everything, whether it was good or bad, dull or interesting, worthless or useful. We would listen to our conversations the next day, and it was a worthwhile process, at least for me. I realized how oafish and overbearing and off-target I often was, at least when I was high. And sometimes when I wasn't.

At one time during these tapings John asked that I bring over some poems and read them. I did. And left the poems there and forgot about them. The poems were thrown out with the garbage. Months passed. One day Thomas phoned me. "Those poems, Bukowski, would make a good book." "What poems, John?" He said he had taken out the tape of my poems and had listened to it again. "I'd have to type them off the tape, it's just too much work," I said. "I'll type them up for you." I agreed, and soon I had the poems back in typescript form.

At this time a balding red-haired man with a high, scrubbed fore-head, meticulous and kind, with a very faint, perpetual grin was coming by. He worked as the manager of an office furniture and supply company and was a collector of rare books. His name was John Martin. He had published some of my poems as broadsides. He wrote me out checks as I sat in my kitchen across from him, drinking beer and signing the broadsides. It was the beginning of the Black Sparrow Press, a house that was soon to begin publishing a large portion of America's avant-garde poetry, but neither of us knew it then.

I showed John Martin the poems Thomas had typed off the tape for me. I had checked his transcriptions, and he'd done a careful, accurate job. John Martin took the poems home with him and phoned me a couple of days later: "You have a book there and I'm going to publish it myself." And that's how some almost lost poems were found again and printed in book form and the Black Sparrow was flying. I called the book *At Terror Street And Agony Way*.

Looking at these poems written between 1955 and 1973 I like (for one reason or another) the last poems best. I am pleased with this. I have, of course, no idea what shape my future poems will take, or even if I will write any, because I have no idea how long I will go on living, but since I began writing poetry quite late in life, at the age of 35, I like to think they'll give me a few extra years now, at this end. Meanwhile, the poems that follow will have to do.

Charles Bukowski January 30, 1974 I

It Catches
My Heart
in
Its Hands

Poems 1955-1963

lay down lay down and wait like an animal

the tragedy of the leaves

I awakened to dryness and the ferns were dead, the potted plants yellow as corn; my woman was gone and the empty bottles like bled corpses surrounded me with their uselessness; the sun was still good, though, and my landlady's note cracked in fine and undemanding yellowness; what was needed now was a good comedian, ancient style, a jester with jokes upon absurd pain; pain is absurd because it exists, nothing more; I shaved carefully with an old razor the man who had once been young and said to have genius; but that's the tragedy of the leaves, the dead ferns, the dead plants; and I walked into a dark hall where the landlady stood execrating and final, sending me to hell, waving her fat, sweaty arms and screaming screaming for rent because the world had failed us both.

to the whore who took my poems

some say we should keep personal remorse from the poem, stay abstract, and there is some reason in this, but jezus; twelve poems gone and I don't keep carbons and you have paintings too, my best ones; it's stifling: are you trying to crush me out like the rest of them? why didn't you take my money? they usually do from the sleeping drunken pants sick in the corner. next time take my left arm or a fifty but not my poems: I'm not Shakespeare but sometime simply there won't be any more, abstract or otherwise; there'll always be money and whores and drunkards down to the last bomb, but as God said, crossing his legs, I see where I have made plenty of poets but not so very much poetry.

the state of world affairs from a 3rd floor window

I am watching a girl dressed in a light green sweater, blue shorts, long black stockings; there is a necklace of some sort but her breasts are small, poor thing, and she watches her nails as her dirty white dog sniffs the grass in erratic circles; a pigeon is there too, circling, half dead with a tick of a brain and I am upstairs in my underwear, 3 day beard, pouring a beer and waiting for something literary or symphonic to happen; but they keep circling, circling, and a thin old man in his last winter rolls by pushed by a girl in a catholic school dress; somewhere there are the Alps, and ships are now crossing the sea; there are piles and piles of H- and A-bombs, enough to blow up fifty worlds and Mars thrown in, but they keep circling, the girl shifts buttocks, and the Hollywood Hills stand there, stand there full of drunks and insane people and much kissing in automobiles, but it's no good: che sera, sera: her dirty white dog simply will not shit, and with a last look at her nails she, with much whirling of buttocks walks to her downstairs court trailed by her constipated dog (simply not worried), leaving me looking at a most unsymphonic pigeon. well, from the looks of things, relax: the bombs will never go off.

for marilyn m.

slipping keenly into bright ashes, target of vanilla tears your sure body lit candles for men on dark nights, and now your night is darker than the candle's reach and we will forget you, somewhat, and it is not kind but real bodies are nearer and as the worms pant for your bones, I would so like to tell you that this happens to bears and elephants to tyrants and heroes and ants and frogs, still, you brought us something, some type of small victory, and for this I say: good and let us grieve no more; like a flower dried and thrown away, we forget, we remember, we wait. child, child, child, I raise my drink a full minute and smile.

the life of borodin

the next time you listen to Borodin remember he was just a chemist who wrote music to relax; his house was jammed with peor e: students, artists, drunkards, bur s, and he never knew how to say: no. the next time you listen to Borodin remember his wife used his compositions to line the cat boxes with or to cover jars of sour milk; she had asthma and insomnia and fed him soft-boiled eggs and when he wanted to cover his head to shut out the sounds of the house she only allowed him to use the sheet; besides there was usually somebody in his bed (they slept separately when they slept and since all the chairs were usually taken he often slept on the stairway wrapped in an old shawl; she told him when to cut his nails, not to sing or whistle or put too much lemon in his tea or press it with a spoon; Symphony #2, in B Minor Prince Igor On the Steppes of Central Asia he could sleep only by putting a piece of dark cloth over his eyes; in 1887 he attended a dance at the Medical Academy dressed in a merrymaking national costume; at last he seemed exceptionally gay and when he fell to the floor, they thought he was clowning. the next time you listen to Borodin, remember...

no charge

this babe in the grandstand with dyed red hair kept leaning her breasts against me and talking about Gardena poker parlors but I blew smoke into her face and told her about a Van Gogh exhibition I'd seen up on the hill and that night when I took her home she said Big Red was the best horse she'd ever seenuntil I stripped down. Though I think on the Van Gogh thing they charged 50 cents.

a literary romance

I met her somehow through correspondence or poetry or magazines and she began sending me very sexy poems about rape and lust, and this being mixed in with a minor intellectualism confused me somewhat and I got in my car and drove North through the mountains and valleys and freeways without sleep, coming off a drunk, just divorced, jobless, aging, tired, wanting mostly to sleep for five or ten years, I finally found the motel in a small sunny town by a dirt road, and I sat there smoking a cigarette thinking, you must really be insane, and then I got out an hour late to meet my date; she was pretty damned old, almost as old as I, not very sexy and she gave me a very hard raw apple which I chewed on with my remaining teeth; she was dying of some unnamed disease something like asthma, and she said, I want to tell you a secret, and I said, I know: you are a virgin, 35 years old. and she got out a notebook, ten or twelve poems: a life's work and I had to read them and I tried to be kind but they were very bad. and I took her somewhere, the boxing matches, and she coughed in the smoke and kept looking around and around at all the people and then at the fighters clenching her hands. you never get excited, do you? she asked. but I got pretty excited in the hills that night, and met her three or four more times helped her with some of her poems and she rammed her tongue halfway down my throat but when I left her she was still a virgin and a very bad poetess. I think that when a woman has kept her legs closed

for 35 years it's too late either for love or for poetry.

the twins

he hinted at times that I was a bastard and I told him to listen to Brahms, and I told him to learn to paint and drink and not be dominated by women and dollars but he screamed at me, For Christ's Sake remember your mother, remember your country, you'll kill us all!...

I move through my father's house (on which he owed \$8,000 after 20 years on the same job) and look at his dead shoes the way his feet curled the leather, as if he was angrily planting roses, and he was, and I look at his dead cigarette, his last cigarette and the last bed he slept in that night, and I feel I should remake it but I can't, for a father is always your master even when he's gone; I guess these things have happened time and again but I can't help thinking

to die on a kitchen floor at 7 o'clock in the morning while other people are frying eggs is not so rough unless it happens to you.

I go outside and pick an orange and peel back the bright skin; things are still living: the grass is growing quite well, the sun sends down its rays circled by a Russian satellite, a dog barks senselessly somewhere, the neighbors peek behind blinds. I am a stranger here, and have been (I suppose) somewhat the rogue, and I have no doubt he painted me quite well (the old boy and I fought like mountain lions) and they say he left it all to some woman in Duarte but I don't give a damn—she can have it: he was my old man

and he died.

inside, I try on a light blue suit much better than anything I have ever worn and I flap the arms like a scarecrow in the wind but it's no good:

I can't keep him alive no matter how much we hated each other.

we looked exactly alike, we could have been twins the old man and I: that's what they said. he had his bulbs on the screen ready for planting while I was lying with a whore from 3rd street.

very well. grant us this moment: standing before a mirror in my dead father's suit waiting also to die.

the day it rained at the los angeles county museum

the jew bent over and died. 99 machine guns were shipped to France. somebody won the 3rd race while I inspected

the propeller of an old monoplane a man came by with a patch over his eye. it began to rain, it rained and it rained and the ambulances ran together in the streets, and although everything was properly dull I enjoyed the moment like the time in New Orleans living on candy bars and watching the pigeons in a back alley with a French name as behind me the river became a gulf and the clouds moved sickly through a sky that had died about the time Caesar was knifed, and I promised myself then that someday I'd remember it as it was.

a man came by and coughed. think it'll stop raining? he said. I didn't answer. I touched the old propeller and listened to the ants on the roof rushing over the edge of the world, go away, I said, go away or I'll call the guard.

2 p.m. beer

nothing matters but flopping on a mattress with cheap dreams and a beer as the leaves die and the horses die and the landladies stare in the halls; brisk the music of pulled shades, a last man's cave in an eternity of swarm and explosion; nothing but the dripping sink, the empty bottle, euphoria, youth fenced in, stabbed and shaven, taught words propped up to die.

hooray say the roses

hooray say the roses, today is blamesday and we are red as blood.

hooray say the roses, today is Wednesday and we bloom where soldiers fell, and lovers too, and the snake ate the word.

hooray say the roses, darkness comes all at once, like lights gone out, the sun leaves dark continents and rows of stone.

hooray say the roses, cannons and spires, birds, bees, bombers, today is Friday the hand holding a medal out the window, a moth going by, half a mile an hour, hooray hooray hooray say the roses we wave empires on our stems, the sun moves the mouth: hooray hooray hooray and that is why you like us.

the sunday artist

I have been painting these last two Sundays; it's not much, you're correct, but in this tournament great dreams break: history removes her dress and becomes a harlot, and I have awakened in the morning to see eagles flapping their wings like shades; I have met Montaigne and Phidias in the flames of my wastebasket, I have met barbarians on the streets their heads rocking with rodents; I have seen wicked infants in blue tubs wanting stems as beautiful as flowers, and I have seen the barfly sick over his last dead penny; I have heard Domenico Theotocopoulos on nights of frost, cough in his grave; and God, no taller than a landlady, hair dyed red, has asked me the time; I have seen grey grass of lovers in my mirror while lighting a cigarette to a maniac's applause; Cadillacs have crawled my walls like roaches, goldfish whirl my bowl, hand-tamed tigers; yes, I have been painting these Sundays the grey mill, the new rebel; it's terrible really: I must ram my fist through cleanser and chlorine, through Andernach and apples and acid, but, then, I really should tell you that I have a woman around mixing waffle flour and singing, and the paint sticks to my plan like candy.

old poet

I would, of course, prefer to be with the fox in the ferns instead of with a photograph of an old Spad in my pocket to the sound of the anvil chorus and legs legs legs girls kicking high, showing everything but the pisser, but I might as well be dead right now

everywhere the ill wind blows and Keats is dead and I am dying too.

for there is nothing as crappy dissolute as an old poet gone sour in body and mind and luck, the horses running nothing but out, the Vegas dice cancer to the thin green wallet, Shostakovich heard too often and cans of beer sucked through a straw, with mouth and mind broken in young men's alleys. in the hot noon window I swing and miss a razzing fly, and ho, I fall heavy as thunder but downstairs they'll understand: he's either drunk or dying, an old poet nodding vaguely in halls, cracking his stick across the backs of innocent dogs and spitting out what's left of his sun. the mailman has some little thing for him which he takes to his room and opens like a rose, only to scream loudly and vainly, and his coffin is filled with notes from hell. but in the morning you'll see him packing off little envelopes, still worried about rent cigarettes wine

women

horses, still worried about Eric Coates, Beethoven's 3rd and something Chicago has held for three months and his paper bag of wine and Pall Malls. 42 in August, 42, the rats walking his brain eating up the thoughts before they can make the keys. old poets are as bad as old queers: there's something quite unacceptable: the editors wish to thank you for submitting but regret... down down

down the dark hall

into a womanless hall to peel a last egg and sit down to the keys: click click a click, over the television sounds over the sounds of springs, click clack a clack: another old poet going off.

the race

it is like this when you slip down, done like a wound-up victrola (you remember those?) and you go downtown and watch the boys punch but the big blondes sit with someone else and you've aged like a punk in a movie: cigar in skull, fat gut, but only no money, no wiseness of way, no worldliness, but as usual most of the fights are bad, and afterwards back in the parking lot you sit and watch them go, light the last cigar, and then start the old car, old car, not so young man going down the street stopped by a red light as if time were no problem, and they come up to you: a car full of young, laughing, and you watch them go somebody behind you honks and you are shaken back into what is left of your life. pitiful, self-pity, and your foot is to the floor and you catch the young ones, you pass the young ones and holding the wheel like all love gone you race to the beach with them brandishing your cigar and your steel, laughing,

you will take them to the ocean to the last mermaid, seaweed and shark, merry whale, end of flesh and hour and horror, and finally they stop and you go on toward your ocean, the cigar biting your lips the way love used to.

vegas

there was a frozen tree that I wanted to paint but the shells came down and in Vegas looking across at a green sunshade at 3:30 in the morning, I died without nails, without a copy of the *Atlantic Monthly*, the windows screamed like doves moaning the bombing of Milan and I went out to live with the rats but the lights were too bright and I thought maybe I'd better go back and sit in a poetry class:

a marvelous description of a gazelle is hell; the cross sits like a fly on my window, my mother's breath stirs small leaves in my mind;

and I hitch-hiked back to L.A. through hangover clouds and I pulled a letter from my pocket and read it and the truckdriver said, what's that? and I said, there's some gal up North who used to sleep with Pound, she's trying to tell me that H.D. was our greatest scribe; well, Hilda gave us a few pink Grecian gods in with the chinaware, but after reading her I still have 140 icicles hanging from my bones.

I'm not going all the way to L.A., the truckdriver said.

it's all right, I said, the calla lilies nod to our minds and someday we'll all go home together.

in fact, he said, this is as far as we go. so I let him have it; old withered whore of time your breasts taste the sour cream of dreaming... he let me out in the middle of the desert;

to die is to die,

old phonographs in cellars, joe di maggio, magazines in with the onions...

an old Ford picked me up 45 minutes later and, this time, I kept my mouth shut.

the house

they are building a house half a block down and I sit up here with the shades down listening to the sounds, the hammers pounding in nails, thack thack thack, and then I hear birds, and thack thack thack and I go to bed, I pull the covers to my throat; they have been building this house for a month, and soon it will have its people...sleeping, eating, loving, moving around, but somehow now it is not right, there seems a madness, men walk on its top with nails in their mouths and I read about Castro and Cuba, and at night I walk by and the ribs of house show and inside I can see cats walking the way cats walk, and then a boy rides by on a bicycle, and still the house is not done and in the morning the men will be back walking around on the house with their hammers, and it seems people should not build houses anymore, it seems people should stop working and sit in small rooms on second floors under electric lights without shades; it seems there is a lot to forget and a lot not to do and in drugstores, markets, bars, the people are tired, they do not want

to move, and I stand there at night and look through this house and the house does not want to be built; through its sides I can see the purple hills and the first lights of evening, and it is cold and I button my coat and I stand there looking through the house and the cats stop and look at me until I am embarrassed and move North up the sidewalk where I will buy cigarettes and beer and return to my room.

side of the sun

the bulls are grand as the side of the sun and although they kill them for the stale crowds, it is the bull that burns the fire, and although there are cowardly bulls as there are cowardly matadors and cowardly men, generally the bull stands pure and dies pure untouched by symbols or cliques or false loves, and when they drag him out nothing has died something has passed and the eventual stench is the world.

the talkers

the boy walks with his muddy feet across my soul talking about recitals, virtuosi, conductors, the lesser known novels of Dostoevsky; talking about how he corrected a waitress, a hasher who didn't know that French dressing was composed of so and so; he gabbles about the Arts until I hate the Arts, and there is nothing cleaner than getting back to a bar or back to the track and watching them run, watching things go without this clamor and chatter, talk, talk, talk, the small mouth going, the eyes blinking, a boy, a child, sick with the Arts, grabbing at it like the skirt of a mother, and I wonder how many tens of thousands there are like him across the land on rainy nights on sunny mornings on evenings meant for peace in concert halls in cafes at poetry recitals talking, soiling, arguing.

it's like a pig going to bed with a good woman and you don't want the woman any more.

a pleasant afternoon in bed

red summers and black satin charcoal and blood ringing the sheets while snails are stepped on and moths go batty trying to put on the eyes of lightbulbs in artificial cities; I light her a cigarette and she blows up a plasma of relaxation to prove we've both been good lovers white on black, and in black; and her toes strike dark intersections in my beefy sheets she says, that elevator boy... y'know him? I say yes. a bastard...beats his wife. I put my hand flat to the surface where the curve goes down. damn for an OLD man, you sure likes to play! I reach over and pick up the bottle, suck it down flat on my back, the suds like soap gagging me with gulp-dull sounds, and she's listening, eves rolling like newsreel cameras, and suddenly I have got to laugh, I spiral out a whale-stream of foam and liquid majestic against the wallpaper not knowing why, and she laughs looking down at my flat madness, she laughs
holding her cigarette
high in the air
with one arm
smoke sifting off
ignored
and we are in bed together
laughing
and we don't care,
about anything
and it is very
very funny.

the priest and the matador

in the slow Mexican air I watched the bull die and they cut off his ear, and his great head held no more terror than a rock.

driving back the next day we stopped at the Mission and watched the golden red and blue flowers pulling like tigers in the wind.

set this to metric: the bull, and the fort of Christ: the matador on his knees, the dead bull his baby; and the priest staring from the window like a caged bear.

you may argue in the market place and pull at your doubts with silken strings: I will only tell you this: I have lived in both their temples, believing all and nothing—perhaps, now, they will die in mine.

love & fame & death

it sits outside my window now like an old woman going to market; it sits and watches me, it sweats nervously through wire and fog and dog-bark until suddenly I slam the screen with a newspaper like slapping at a fly and you could hear the scream over this plain city, and then it left.

the way to end a poem like this is to become suddenly quiet.

my father

he carried a piece of carbon, a blade and a whip and at night he feared his head and covered it with blankets until one morning in Los Angeles it snowed and I saw the snow and I knew that my father could control nothing, and when I got somewhat larger and took my first boxcar out, I sat there in the lime the burning lime of having nothing moving into the desert for the first time I sang.

the bird

red-eyed and dizzy as I the bird came flying all the way from Egypt at 5 o'clock in the morning, and Maria almost stumbled on her spikes: what was it, a rocket? and we went upstairs. I poured two glasses of port and we sat there as the money-grubbers were belled out of their miserable nests and Maria went in and watered the bowl and I sat there rubbing my three-day beard thinking about the crazy bird and it came out like this: all that really mattered was going someplace the faster the better because it left less waiting to die. Maria came out and peeled back the covers and I tore off my greasy clothes and crawled beneath the sweaty sheets, closing my eyes to the sound and the sunlight, and I heard her drop her spiked feet and her frozen toes walked the backs of my calves and I named the bird Mr. America and then quickly I went to sleep.

the singular self

there are these small cliffs above the sea and it is night, late night; I have been unable to sleep, and with my car above me like a steel mother I crawl down the cliffs, breaking bits of rock and being scratched by witless and scrabby seaplants, I make my way down clumsy, misplaced, an oddity on the shore, and all around me are the lovers, the two-headed beasts turning to stare at the madness of a singular self; shamed, I move on through them to climb a row of wet boulders that break the sea-stroke into sheaths of white; the moonlight is wet on the bald stone and now that I'm there I don't want to be there the sea stinks and makes flushing sounds like a toilet it is a bad place to die; any place is a bad place to die, but better a yellow room with known walls and dusty lampshades; so... still stupidly off-course like a jackal in a land of lions, I make my way back through them, through their blankets and fires and kisses and sandy thumpings, back up the cliff I climb

worse off, kicking clods, and there the black sky, the black sea behind me lost in the game, and I have left my shoes down there with them 2 empty shoes, and in the car I start the engine, headlights on I back away, swing left drive East, climb up the land and out, bare feet on worn ribbed rubber out of there looking for another place.

a 340 dollar horse and a hundred dollar whore

don't ever get the idea I am a poet; you can see me at the racetrack any day half drunk betting quarters, sidewheelers and straight thoroughs, but let me tell you, there are some women there who go where the money goes, and sometimes when you look at these whores these onehundreddollar whores you wonder sometimes if nature isn't playing a joke dealing out so much breast and ass and the way it's all hung together, you look and you look and you look and you can't believe it; there are ordinary women and then there is something else that wants to make you tear up paintings and break albums of Beethoven across the back of the john; anyhow, the season was dragging and the big boys were getting busted, all the non-pros, the producers, the cameramen, the pushers of Mary, the fur salesmen, the owners themselves, and Saint Louie was running this day: a sidewheeler that broke when he got in close; he ran with his head down and was mean and ugly and 35 to 1, and I put a ten down on him. the driver broke him wide took him out by the fence where he'd be alone even if he had to travel four times as far, and that's the way he went it all the way by the outer fence traveling two miles in one and he won like he was mad as hell and he wasn't even tired. and the biggest blonde of all all ass and breast, hardly anything else went to the payoff window with me.

that night I couldn't destroy her although the springs shot sparks and they pounded on the walls. later she sat there in her slip drinking Old Grandad and she said what's a guy like you doing living in a dump like this?

and I said I'm a poet

and she threw back her beautiful head and laughed.

you? you...a poet?

I guess you're right, I said, I guess you're right.

but still she looked good to me, she still looked good, and all thanks to an ugly horse who wrote this poem.

II

Crucifix in a Deathhand

Poems 1963-1965

the dark is empty; most of our heroes have been wrong

view from the screen

I cross the room to the last wall the last window the last pink sun with its arms around the world with its arms around me I hear the death-whisper of the heron the bone-thoughts of sea-things that are almost rock; this screen caved like a soul and scrawled with flies, my tensions and damnations are those of a pig, pink sun pink sun I hate your holiness crawling your gilded cross of life as my fingers and feet and face come down to this sleeping with the whore of your fancy wife you must some day die for nothing as I have lived.

crucifix in a deathhand

ves, they begin out in a willow, I think the starch mountains begin out in the willow and keep right on going without regard for pumas and nectarines somehow these mountains are like an old woman with a bad memory and a shopping basket. we are in a basin, that is the idea. down in the sand and the alleys, this land punched-in, cuffed-out, divided, held like a crucifix in a deathhand, this land bought, resold, bought again and sold again, the wars long over, the Spaniards all the way back in Spain down in the thimble again, and now real estaters, subdividers, landlords, freeway engineers arguing. this is their land and I walk on it, live on it a little while near Hollywood here I see young men in rooms listening to glazed recordings and I think too of old men sick of music sick of everything, and death like suicide I think is sometimes voluntary, and to get your hold on the land here it is best to return to the Grand Central Market, see the old Mexican women, the poor...I am sure you have seen these same women many years before arguing with the same young Japanese clerks witty, knowledgeable and golden among their soaring store of oranges, apples avocados, tomatoes, cucumbers and you know how these look, they do look good as if you could eat them all light a cigar and smoke away the bad world. then it's best to go back to the bars, the same bars wooden, stale, merciless, green with the young policeman walking through scared and looking for trouble,

and the beer is still bad it has an edge that already mixes with vomit and decay, and you've got to be strong in the shadows to ignore it, to ignore the poor and to ignore yourself and the shopping bag between your legs down there feeling good with its avocados and oranges and fresh fish and wine bottles, who needs a Fort Lauderdale winter? 25 years ago there used to be a whore there with a film over one eye, who was too fat and made little silver bells out of cigarette tinfoil. the sun seemed warmer then although this was probably not true, and you take your shopping bag outside and walk along the street and the green beer hangs there just above your stomach like a short and shameful shawl, and you look around and no longer see any old men.

grass

at the window I watch a man with a power mower the sounds of his doing race like flies and bees on the wallpaper, it is like a warm fire, and better than eating steak, and the grass is green enough and the sun is sun enough and what's left of my life stands there checking glints of green flying; it is a giant disrobing of care, stumbling away from doing.

suddenly I understand old men in rockers bats in Colorado caves tiny lice crawling into the eyes of dead birds.

back and forth he follows his gasoline sound. it is interesting enough, with the streets flat on their Spring backs and smiling.

fuzz

3 small boys run toward me blowing whistles and they scream you're under arrest! you're drunk! and they begin hitting me on the legs with their toy clubs. one even has a badge. another has handcuffs but my hands are high in the air.

when I go into the liquor store they whirl around outside like bees shut out from their nest. I buy a fifth of cheap whiskey and 3 candy bars.

no lady godiva

she came to my place drunk riding a deer up on the front porch: so many women want to save the world but can't keep their own kitchens straight, but *me...* we went inside where I lit three red candles poured the wine and I took notes on her:

latitude behind, longitude in front. and the rest. amazing. a woman such as this could find a zinnia in Hot Springs Arkansas.

we ate venison for three weeks. then she slept with the landlord to help pay the rent. then I found her a job as a waitress. I slept all day and when she came home I was full of the brilliant conversation that she so much adored.

she died quickly one night leaving the world much the way it had been.

now I get up early and go down to the loading docks and wait for cabbages oranges potatoes to fall from the trucks or to be thrown away.

by noon I have eaten and am asleep dreaming of paying the rent with numbered chunks of plastic issued by a better world.

the workers

they laugh continually even when a board falls down and destroys a face or distorts a body they continue to laugh, when the color of the eye becomes a fearful pale because of the poor light they still laugh; wrinkled and imbecile at an early age they joke about it: a man who looks sixty will say I'm 32, and then they'll laugh they'll all laugh; they are sometimes let outside for a little air but are chained to return by chains they would not break if they could; even outside, among free men they continue to laugh, they walk about with a hobbled and inane as if they'd lost their senses; outside they chew a little bread, haggle, sleep, count their pennies, gaze at the clock and return;

sometimes in the confines they even grow serious a moment, they speak of Outside, of how horrible it must be to be shut Outside forever, never to be let back in; it's warm as they work and they sweat a bit, but they work hard and well, they work so hard the nerves revolt and cause trembling, but often they are praised by those who have risen up out of them like stars, and now the stars watch watch too for those few who might attempt a slower pace or show disinterest or falsify an illness in order to gain rest (rest must be earned to gain strength for a more perfect job).

sometimes one dies or goes mad and then from *Outside* a new one enters and is given opportunity.

I have been there many years; at first I believed the work monotonous, even silly but now I see it all has meaning, and the workers without faces I can see are not really ugly, and that the heads without eyes— I know now that those eyes can see and are able to do the work. the women workers are often the best, adapting naturally, and some of these I made love to in our resting hours; at first they appeared to be like female apes but later with insight I realized that they were things as real and alive as myself.

the other night an old worker grey and blind no longer useful was retired to the *Outside*.

speech! speech! we demanded.

it was hell, he said.

we laughed all 4000 of us: he had kept his humor to the end.

beans with garlic

this is important enough: to get your feelings down, it is better than shaving or cooking beans with garlic. it is the little we can do this small bravery of knowledge and there is of course madness and terror too in knowing that some part of you wound up like a clock can never be wound again once it stops. but now there's a ticking under your shirt and you whirl the beans with a spoon, one love dead, one love departed another love... ah! as many loves as beans yes, count them now sad, sad your feelings boiling over flame, get this down.

mama

```
here I am
  in the ground
      my mouth
      open
      and
  I can't even say
      mama,
      and
the dogs run by and stop and piss
on my stone; I get it all
except the sun
and my suit is looking
bad
and yesterday
      the last of my left
arm gone
very little left, all harp-like
without music.
at least a drunk
in bed with a cigarette
might cause 5 fire
      engines and
      33 men.
I can't
    do
      any
        thing.
but p.s.—Hector Richmond in the next
tomb thinks only of Mozart and candy
caterpillars.
    he is
           very bad
             company.
```

machineguns towers & timeclocks

I feel gypped by dunces as if reality were the property of little men with luck and a headstart, and I sit in the cold wondering about purple flowers along a fence while the rest of them stack gold and Cadillacs and ladyfriends, I wonder about palmleaves and gravestones and the preciousness of a cocoon-like sleep; to be a lizard would be bad enough to be scalding in the sun would be bad enough but not so bad as being built up to Man-size and Man-life and not wanting the game, not wanting machineguns and towers and timeclocks, not wanting a carwash a toothpull a wristwatch, cufflinks a pocket radio tweezers and cotton a cabinet full of iodine, not wanting cocktail parties a front lawn sing-togethers new shoes, Christmas presents life insurance, Newsweek 162 baseball games a vacation in Bermuda. not wanting not wanting, and I judge the purple flowers

better off than I the lizard better off the dark green hose the ever grass the trees the birds, the cats dreaming in the butter sun are better off than I, getting into this old coat now feeling for my cigarettes car keys a roadmap back, going out down the walk like a man to be executed walking toward it surely, going into it without guards driving toward it racing at it 70 miles per hour, jockeying cussing dropping ashes deadly ashes of every deadly thing burning, the caterpillar knows less horror the armies of ants are braver the kiss of a snake less ravenous, I only want the sky to burn me more and more burn me out so that the sun begins at 6 in the morning and goes past midnight like a drunken door always open, I drive toward it not wanting it getting it getting it as the cat stretches yawns and rolls over into another dream.

something for the touts, the nuns, the grocery clerks and you...

we have everything and we have nothing and some men do it in churches and some men do it by tearing butterflies in half and some men do it in Palm Springs laying it into butterblondes with Cadillac souls Cadillacs and butterflies nothing and everything, the face melting down to the last puff in a cellar in Corpus Christi. there's something for the touts, the nuns, the grocery clerks and you... something at 8 a.m., something in the library something in the river, everything and nothing. in the slaughterhouse it comes running along the ceiling on a hook, and you swing it one

two

three

and then you've got it, \$200 worth of dead meat, its bones against your bones something and nothing. it's always early enough to die and it's always too late, and the drill of blood in the basin white it tells you nothing at all and the gravediggers playing poker over 5 a.m. coffee, waiting for the grass to dismiss the frost... they tell you nothing at all.

we have everything and we have nothing—days with glass edges and the impossible stink of river moss—worse than shit; checkerboard days of moves and countermoves,

fagged interest, with as much sense in defeat as in victory; slow days like mules humping it slagged and sullen and sun-glazed up a road where a madman sits waiting among bluejays and wrens netted in and sucked a flakey grey.

good days too of wine and shouting, fights in alleys, fat legs of women striving around your bowels buried in moans, the signs in bullrings like diamonds hollering Mother Capri, violets coming out of the ground telling you to forget the dead armies and the loves that robbed you.

days when children say funny and brilliant things like savages trying to send you a message through their bodies while their bodies are still alive enough to transmit and feel and run up and down without locks and paychecks and ideals and possessions and beetle-like opinions.

days when you can cry all day long in a green room with the door locked, days when you can laugh at the breadman because his legs are too long, days of looking at hedges...

and nothing, and nothing. the days of the bosses, yellow men with bad breath and big feet, men who look like frogs, hyenas, men who walk as if melody had never been invented, men who think it is intelligent to hire and fire and profit, men with expensive wives they possess like 60 acres of ground to be drilled or shown-off or to be walled away from the incompetent, men who'd kill you because they're crazy and justify it because it's the law, men who stand in front of windows 30 feet wide and see nothing, men with luxury yachts who can sail around

the world and yet never get out of their vest pockets, men like snails, men like eels, men like slugs, and not as good...

and nothing. getting your last paycheck at a harbor, at a factory, at a hospital, at an aircraft plant, at a penny arcade, at a barbershop, at a job you didn't want anyway.

income tax, sickness, servility, broken arms, broken heads—all the stuffing come out like an old pillow.

we have everything and we have nothing. some do it well enough for a while and then give way. fame gets them or disgust or age or lack of proper diet or ink across the eyes or children in college or new cars or broken backs while skiing in Switzerland or new politics or new wives or just natural change and decay the man you knew yesterday hooking for ten rounds or drinking for three days and three nights by the Sawtooth mountains now just something under a sheet or a cross or a stone or under an easy delusion, or packing a bible or a golf bag or a briefcase: how they go, how they go!—all the ones you thought would never go.

days like this. like your day today. maybe the rain on the window trying to get through to you. what do you see today? what is it? where are you? the best days are sometimes the first, sometimes the middle and even sometimes the last. the vacant lots are not bad, churches in Europe on postcards are not bad. people in

wax museums frozen into their best sterility are not bad, horrible but not bad. the cannon, think of the cannon. and toast for breakfast the coffee hot enough you know your tongue is still there. three geraniums outside a window, trying to be red and trying to be pink and trying to be geraniums. no wonder sometimes the women cry, no wonder the mules don't want to go up the hill. are you in a hotel room in Detroit looking for a cigarette? one more good day, a little bit of it, and as the nurses come out of the building after their shift, having had enough, eight nurses with different names and different places to go—walking across the lawn, some of them want cocoa and a paper, some of them want a hot bath, some of them want a man, some of them are hardly thinking at all. enough and not enough. arcs and pilgrims, oranges gutters, ferns, antibodies, boxes of tissue paper.

in the most decent sometimes sun there is the softsmoke feeling from urns and the canned sound of old battleplanes and if you go inside and run your finger along the window ledge you'll find dirt, maybe even earth. and if you look out the window there will be the day, and as you get older you'll keep looking keep looking sucking your tongue in a little ah ah no no maybe

some do it naturally some obscenely everywhere.

sway with me

sway with me, everything sad madmen in stone houses without doors, lepers streaming love and song frogs trying to figure the sky; sway with me, sad thingsfingers split on a forge old age like breakfast shells used books, used people used flowers, used love I need you I need you I need you: it has run away like a horse or a dog, dead or lost or unforgiving.

lack of almost everything

the essence of the belly like a white balloon sacked is disturbing like the running of feet on the stairs when you don't know who is there. of course, if you turn on the radio you might forget the fat under your shirt or the rats lined up in order like old women on Hollywood Blvd waiting on a comedy show. I think of old men in four dollar rooms looking for socks in dresser drawers while standing in brown underwear all the time the clock ticking on warm as a cobra. ah, there are some decent things, maybe: the sky, the circus the legs of ladies getting out of cars, the peach coming through the door like a Mozart symphony. the scale says 198. that's what I weigh. it is 2:10 a.m. dedication is for chess players. the glorious single cause is waiting on the anvil while smoking, pissing, reading Genet or the funny papers; but maybe it's early enough yet to write your aunt in Palm Springs and tell her what's wrong.

no. 6

I'll settle for the 6 horse on a rainy afternoon a paper cup of coffee in my hand a little way to go, the wind twirling out small wrens from the upper grandstand roof, the jocks coming out for a middle race and the easy rain making everything at once almost alike, the horses at peace with each other before the drunken war and I am under the grandstand feeling for cigarettes settling for coffee, then the horses walk by taking their little men awayit is funereal and graceful and glad like the opening of flowers.

don't come round but if you do...

veah sure, I'll be in unless I'm out don't knock if the lights are out or you hear voices or then I might be reading Proust if someone slips Proust under my door or one of his bones for my stew, and I can't loan money or the phone or what's left of my car though you can have yesterday's newspaper an old shirt or a bologna sandwich or sleep on the couch if you don't scream at night and you can talk about yourself that's only normal; hard times are upon us all only I am not trying to raise a family to send through Harvard or buy hunting land, I am not aiming high I am only trying to keep myself alive just a little longer, so if you sometimes knock and I don't answer and there isn't a woman in here maybe I have broken my jaw and am looking for wire or I am chasing the butterflies in my wallpaper, I mean if I don't answer I don't answer, and the reason is that I am not yet ready to kill you or love you, or even accept you, it means I don't want to talk I am busy, I am mad, I am glad or maybe I'm stringing up a rope; so even if the lights are on and you hear sound like breathing or praying or singing a radio or the roll of dice or typinggo away, it is not the day
the night, the hour;
it is not the ignorance of impoliteness,
I wish to hurt nothing, not even a bug
but sometimes I gather evidence of a kind
that takes some sorting,
and your blue eyes, be they blue
and your hair, if you have some
or your mind—they cannot enter
until the rope is cut or knotted
or until I have shaven into
new mirrors, until the world is
stopped or opened
forever.

startled into life like fire

in grievous deity my cat walks around he walks around and around with electric tail and push-button eyes

he is alive and plush and final as a plum tree

neither of us understands cathedrals or the man outside watering his lawn

if I were all the man that he is cat if there were men like this the world could begin

he leaps up on the couch and walks through porticoes of my admiration.

stew

stew at noon, my dear; and look: the ants, the sawdust, the mica plants, the shadows of banks like bad jokes; do you think we'll hear *The Bartered Bride* today? how's your tooth?

I should wash my feet and clean my nails not that I'd feel more like Christ but less like a leper— which is important when poverty is a small game you play with your time.

let's see: first the mailman then yesterday's copy of the *Times*. we might this way get blown up a day too late.

then there's the library or a walk down the boulevards.

many great men have walked down the boulevards but it's terrible to be a great man

like a monkey carrying a 5 pound sack of potatoes up a 40 foot hill.

Paris can wait.

more salt?

after we eat let's sleep, let's sleep.

we can't make any money awake.

lilies in my brain

the lilies storm my brain by god by god like nazi storm troopers! do you think I'm going tizzy?

your blue sweater with tits hanging loose, and I think vaguely of Christ on the cross, I don't know why, and icecream cones. this July day lilies storm my brain, I'll remember this if only I had a camera or a big dog walking beside me. big dogs make things concrete don't they? a big dog to wrinkle his snot-nose like this lake gypped of clear surface by a quick and clever wind.

you're here, yet I'm sad again. I feel my porkchop ribs over my lambchop heart *ugh* gullible hard-working intestines, dejected penis chewing-gum bladder liver turning to fat like a penny-arcade trout ashamed buttocks practical ears

moth-like hands spearfish nose rock-slide mouth and the rest. the rest: lilies in my brain hoping good times thinking old times: Capone and the diamonds Charlie Chaplin Laurel and Hardy Clara Bow the rest.

it never happened but it *seemed* like there were times when rot stopped waited like a streetcar at a signal.

now I
like a movie punk
(lilies up there)
take your hand
and we walk forward
to rent a boat
to drown in. I breathe the wind, flex my muscles
but only my belly
wiggles.

we get in the motor churns the slime. the city buildings come down like ostrich mouths and hollow out our brains yet the sun comes in zap! zap! zap! brilliant germs crawl our chapped flesh. my I feel as if I were in church: everything stinks. I hold the rubber sides of everywhere my balls are snowballs I see stricken bells of malaria old men getting into bed, into model-T Fords as the fish swim below us full of dirty words and macaroni and crossword puzzles and the death of me, you and the Katzenjammer kids.

i am dead but i know the dead are not like this

the dead can sleep they don't get up and rage they don't have a wife.

her white face like a flower in a closed window lifts up and looks at me.

the curtain smokes a cigarette and a moth dies in a freeway crash as I examine the shadows of my hands.

an owl, the size of a baby clock rings for me, *come on come on* it says as Jerusalem is hustled down crotch-stained halls.

the 5 a.m. grass is nasal now in hums of battleships and valleys in the raped light that brings on the fascist birds.

I put out the lamp and get in bed beside her, she thinks I'm there mumbles a rosy gratitude as I stretch my legs to coffin length get in and swim away from frogs and fortunes.

like a violet in the snow

```
in the earliest possible day
      in the blue-headed noon
      I will telegraph you
a
boney hand
           decorated with
sharkskin
large boy with
yellow teeth and an epileptic
father
         will bring it
           to your
door
         smile
           and
             accept
it is better than
             the
alternative
```

letter from too far

she wrote me a letter from a small room near the Seine. she said she was going to dancing class, she got up, she said at 5 o'clock in the morning and typed at poems or painted and when she felt like crying she had a special bench by the river.

her book of *Songs* would be out in the Fall.

I did not know what to tell her but I told her to get any bad teeth pulled and be careful of the French lover.

I put her photo by the radio near the fan and it moved like something alive.

I sat and watched it until I had smoked the 5 or 6 cigarettes left.

then I got up and went to bed.

man in the sun

she reads to me from the New Yorker which I don't buy, don't know how they get in here, but it's something about the Mafia one of the heads of the Mafia who ate too much and had it too easy too many fine women patting his walnuts, and he got fat sucking at good cigars and young breasts and he has these heart attacks—and so one day somebody is driving him in this big car along the road and he doesn't feel so good and he asks the boy to stop and let him out and the boy lays him out along the road in the fine sunshine. I don't know whether it's Crete or Sicily or Italy proper but he's lying there in the sunshine and before he dies he says: how beautiful life can be, and then he's gone.

sometimes you've got to kill 4 or 5 thousand men before you somehow get to believe that the sparrow is immortal, money is piss and that you have been wasting your time.

woman

this head like a saucer decorated with everything as lip to lip we hang in mechanical joy; my hands blaze with arias but I think of books on anatomy, and I fall from you as nations burn in anger...

to recover from most pitiful error and rebuild, this is it loss and mending until they take us in.

the glory of a Saturday afternoon like biting into an old peach and you walk across the room heavy with everything except my love.

like all the years wasted

yesterday drunken Alice gave me a jar of fig jam and today she whistles for her cat but he will not come he is with the horses tub of beer or in room 21 at the Crown Hill Hotel or he is at the Crocker Citizens National Bank or he arrived in New York City at 5:30 p.m. with paper suitcase and \$7.

next to Alice in her yard a paper goose walks upside down on a carton that says: California Oranges.

drunken Alice whistles.

no good. no good. work slowly. everybody tries hard but the gods.

Alice goes in for a drink, comes out.
whistles again all the way to a park bench in El Paso— and her love comes running out of the bushes bright-eyed as a color film and not waiting for Monday.

we go in together.

they, all of them, know

ask the sidewalk painters of Paris ask the sunlight on a sleeping dog ask the 3 pigs ask the paperboy ask the music of Donizetti ask the barber ask the murderer ask the man leaning against a wall ask the preacher ask the maker of cabinets ask the pickpocket or the pawnbroker or the glass blower or the seller of manure or the dentist ask the revolutionist ask the man who sticks his head in the mouth of a lion ask the man who will release the next atom bomb ask the man who thinks he's Christ ask the bluebird who comes home at night ask the peeping Tom ask the man dying of cancer ask the man who needs a bath ask the man with one leg ask the blind ask the man with the lisp ask the opium eater ask the trembling surgeon ask the leaves you walk upon ask a rapist or a streetcar conductor or an old man pulling weeds in his garden ask a bloodsucker ask a trainer of fleas ask a man who eats fire ask the most miserable man you can find in his most miserable moment ask a teacher of judo

ask a rider of elephants ask a leper, a lifer, a lunger ask a professor of history ask the man who never cleans his fingernails ask a clown or ask the first face you see in the light of day ask your father ask your son and his son to be ask me ask a burned-out bulb in a paper sack ask the tempted, the damned, the foolish the wise, the slavering ask the builders of temples ask the men who have never worn shoes ask Jesus ask the moon ask the shadows in the closet ask the moth, the monk, the madman ask the man who draws cartoons for The New Yorker ask a goldfish ask a fern shaking to a tapdance ask the map of India ask a kind face ask the man hiding under your bed ask the man you hate the most in this world ask the man who drank with Dylan Thomas ask the man who laced Jack Sharkey's gloves ask the sad-faced man drinking coffee ask the plumber ask the man who dreams of ostriches every night ask the ticket-taker at a freak show ask the counterfeiter ask the man sleeping in an alley under a sheet of paper ask the conquerors of nations and planets ask the man who has just cut off his finger

ask a bookmark in the bible ask the water dripping from a faucet while the phone rings ask perjury ask the deep blue paint ask the parachute jumper ask the man with the bellyache ask the divine eye so sleek and swimming ask the boy wearing tight pants in the expensive academy ask the man who slipped in the bathtub ask the man chewed by the shark ask the one who sold me the unmatched gloves ask these and all those I have left out ask the fire the fire ask even the liars ask anybody you please at anytime you please on any day you please whether it's raining or whether the snow is there or whether you are stepping out onto a porch yellow with warm heat ask this ask that ask the man with birdshit in his hair ask the torturer of animals ask the man who has seen many bullfights in Spain ask the owners of new Cadillacs ask the famous ask the timid ask the albino and the statesman ask the landlords and the poolplayers ask the phonies ask the hired killers ask the bald men and the fat men and the tall men and the short men ask the one-eyed men, the oversexed and undersexed men

ask the men who read all the newspaper editorials ask the men who breed roses ask the men who feel almost no pain ask the dying ask the mowers of lawns and the attenders of football games ask any of these or all of these ask ask and they'll all tell you:

a snarling wife on the balustrade is more than a man can bear.

a nice day

the virus holds the concepts give way like rotten shoelaces toothache and bacon dance on the I open a drawer to dirty stockings a stockbroker's universe steel balls flutter like butterflies I can feel doom like something under the sheets with bristles that stinks and moves toward me the mailman is insane and hands me a bagful of snails eaten inside 011t by some rat of decay in the madhouse a man kisses the walls and dreams of sailboating down some cool Nile I read about the bullfights the ballgames the boxing matches things continue to fight and in the churches they play at parlor games and peek at legs I go outside to absolutely nothing a square round of orange zero headpieces over obscene mouths that form at me like suckerfish good morning, nice day isn't it? a fat woman says I am unable to answer and down the sidewalk I go shamed unable to tell her of the knife inside me I do notice though the sun is shining that the flowers are pulled up on

their strings and I on mine: belly, bellybutton, buttocks, bukowski waving walking teeth of ice with the taste of tar tear ducts propagandized shoes acting like shoes I arrive on time in the blazing midday of mourning.

III

At Terror Street and Agony Way

Poems 1965-1968

it was a splendid day in Spring and outside we could hear the birds that hadn't been killed by the smog

beerbottle

a very miraculous thing just happened: my beerbottle flipped over backwards and landed on its bottom on the floor, and I have set it upon the table to foam down, but the photos were not so lucky today and there is a small slit along the leather of my left shoe, but it's all very simple: we cannot acquire too much: there are laws we know nothing of, all manner of nudges set us to burning or freezing; what sets the blackbird in the cat's mouth is not for us to say, or why some men are jailed like pet squirrels while others nuzzle in enormous breasts through endless nights—this is the task and the terror, and we are not taught why. still, it's lucky the bottle landed straightside up, and although I have one of wine and one of whiskey, this foretells, somehow, a good night, and perhaps tomorrow my nose will be longer: new shoes, less rain, more poems.

the body

I have been hanging here headless for so long that the body has forgotten why or where or when it happened

and the toes walk along in shoes that do not care

and although the fingers slice things and hold things and move things and touch things such as oranges apples onions books bodies I am no longer reasonably sure what these things are

they are mostly like lamplight and fog then often the hands will go to the lost head and hold the head like the hands of a child around a ball a block air and wood no teeth no thinking part

and when a window blows open to a church hill woman dog or something singing

the fingers of the hand are senseless to vibration because they have no ears senseless to color because they have no eyes senseless to smell without a nose

the country goes by as nonsense the continents

the daylights and evenings shine

on my dirty fingernails

and in some mirror my face a block to vanish scuffed part of a child's ball

while everywhere moves worms and aircraft fires on the land tall violets in sanctity my hands let go let go let go

k.o.

he was easy, fat as a hummingbird and I had him blowing, I jabbed and crossed and took my time: everybody was waiting for the main event, drinking beer, and I was thinking how we were going to furnish the house, I needed a workbench and some tools, and then he came over with the right—I had been looking at the lights and the next thing I knew everybody was howling, and I was down on my knees like praying, and when I got up he was strong and I was weak; well, I thought, I'll go back to the farm, I always was a poor winner.

sunday before noon

spinach, Gabriel, all fall down, all fall down and blow, barbados, barbados, where are yr toes?

the branches break, the birds fall, the buildings burn, the whores stand straight, the bombs stack, evening, morning, night, peanutbutter, peanutbutter falcons, rain breathing like lilies from the top of my head, pincers pincers kisses like steel clamps mouths full of moths, hydra-headed cocksuckers, Florida in full moon, shark with mouthful of man man with mouthful of peanutbutter, rain rain peeking into the guts of grey hours, horses dreaming of horses, flowers dreaming of flowers, horses running with greyhour pieces of my lovely flesh, bread burning, all Spain on fire and cities dreaming of craters, bombs bigger than the brains of anything, going down are the clocks cocks roosters? the roosters stand on the fence the roosters are peanutbutter crowing, the FLAME will be high, the flame will be big, kiss kiss kiss everything away, I hope it rains today, I hope the jets die, I hope the kitten finds a mouse, I hope I don't see it, I hope it rains, I hope

anything away from here, I hope a bridge, a fish, a cactus somewhere strutting whiskers to the noon, I dream flowers and horses the branches break the birds fall the buildings burn, my whore walks across the room and smiles at me.

7th race when the angels swung low and burned

I watched the board and the 6 dropped to 9 after a first flash of 18 from a morning line of 12...two minutes to post and a fat man kept jamming against my back, but I made it, I bet 20 to win and walked out to the deck looking down at my program: purple and cerise quarters, cerise sleeves and cap; b.f.3., Indian Red—Impetuous, by Top Row, and people kept walking into me although there was no place to go, they were putting them in the gate and the people were walking like ants over spilled sugar, the machine had cranked them up to die and they were blind with it, and now by the 7th race stinking sweating broke ugly reamed there was no way back to the dream, and the horses came out of the gate and I looked for my colors— I saw them, and the boy seemed to be riding sideways he had the horse running in and was pulling his head back toward the outer rail, and I could tell by the way the horse was striding that he was out of it; the action had been all wrong and I walked to the bar while the winners turned into the stretch, and they were making the final calls as I ordered my drink, and I leaned there thinking I once knew places that sweetly cried their walls' voices where mirrors showed me chance, I was once saddened when an evening became finally a night to sleep away.

—the bartender said, I hear they are going to send in the 7 horse in the next one.

I once sang operas and burned candles in a place made holy by nothing but myself and whatever there was.

—I never bet mares in the summer, I told him.

then the crowd came on in complaining explaining bragging thinking of suicide or drunkenness or sex, and I looked around like a man waking up in jail and whatever there was became that, and I finished my drink and walked away.

on going out to get the mail

the droll noon where squadrons of worms creep up like stripteasers to be raped by blackbirds.

I go outside and all up and down the street the green armies shoot color like an everlasting 4th of July, and I too seem to swell inside, a kind of unknown bursting, a feeling, perhaps, that there isn't any enemy anywhere.

and I reach down into the box and there is nothing—not even a letter from the gas co. saying they will shut it off again.

not even a short note from my x-wife bragging about her present happiness.

my hand searches the mailbox in a kind of disbelief long after the mind has given up.

there's not even a dead fly down in there.

I am a fool, I think, I should have known it works like this.

I go inside as all the flowers leap to please me.

anything? the woman asks.

nothing, I answer, what's for breakfast?

i wanted to overthrow the government but all i brought down was somebody's wife

30 dogs, 20 men on 20 horses and one fox and look here, they write, you are a dupe for the state, the church, you are in the ego-dream, read your history, study the monetary system, note that the racial war is 23,000 years old.

well, I remember 20 years ago, sitting with an old Jewish tailor, his nose in the lamplight like a cannon sighted on the enemy; and there was an Italian pharmacist who lived in an expensive apartment in the best part of town; we plotted to overthrow a tottering dynasty, the tailor sewing buttons on a vest, the Italian poking his cigar in my eye, lighting me up, a tottering dynasty myself, always drunk as possible, well-read, starving, depressed, but actually a good young piece of ass would have solved all my rancor, but I didn't know this; I listened to my Italian and my Jew and I went out down dark alleys smoking borrowed cigarettes and watching the backs of houses come down in flames, but somewhere we missed: we were not men enough,

large or small enough,

or we only wanted to talk or we were bored, so the anarchy fell through,

and the Jew died and the Italian grew angry because I stayed with his

wife when he went down to the pharmacy; he did not care to have his *personal* government overthrown, and she overthrew easy, and I had some guilt: the children were asleep in the other bedroom; but later I won \$200 in a crap game and took a bus to New Orleans, and I stood on the corner listening to the music coming from bars and then I went inside to the bars, and I sat there thinking about the dead Jew, how all he did was sew on buttons and talk, and how he gave way although he was stronger than any of us—he gave way because his bladder would not go on, and maybe that saved Wall Street and Manhattan and the Church and Central Park West and Rome and the Left Bank, but the pharmacist's wife, she was nice,

she was tired of bombs under the pillow and hissing the Pope, and she had a very nice figure, very good legs, but I guess she felt as I: that the weakness was not Government but Man, one at a time, that men were never as strong as their ideas

and that ideas were governments turned into men; and so it began on a couch with a spilled martini and it ended in the bedroom: desire, revolution, nonsense ended, and the shades rattled in the wind, rattled like sabres, cracked like cannon, and 30 dogs, 20 men on 20 horses chased one fox across the fields under the sun, and I got out of bed and yawned and scratched my belly and knew that soon very soon I would have to get very drunk again.

the girls

I have been looking at the same lampshade for 5 years and it has gathered a bachelor's dust and the girls who enter here are too busy to clean it but I don't mind I have been too busy to notice until now that the light shines badly through 5 years' worth.

a note on rejection slips

it is not very good to not get through whether it's the wall the human mind sleep wakefulness sex excretion or most anything you can name or can't name.

when a chicken catches its worm the chicken gets through and when the worm catches you (dead or alive) I'd have to say, even through its lack of sensibility, that it enjoys it.

it's like when you send this poem back I'll figure it just didn't get through.

either there were fatter worms or the chicken couldn't see. the next time I break an egg I'll think of you.

scramble with fork

and then turn up the flame

if I have one.

true story

they found him walking along the freeway all red in front he had taken a rusty tin can and cut off his sexual machinery as if to say—see what you've done to me? you might as well have the rest.

and he put part of him in one pocket and part of him in another and that's how they found him, walking along.

they gave him over to the doctors who tried to sew the parts back on but the parts were quite contented they way they were.

I think sometimes of all the good ass turned over to the monsters of the world.

maybe it was his protest against this or

his protest against everything.

a one man
Freedom March
that never squeezed in
between
the concert reviews and the
baseball
scores.

God, or somebody, bless him.

x-pug

he hooked to the body hard took it well and loved to fight had seven in a row and a small fleck over one eye, and then he met a kid from Camden with arms thin as wiresit was a good one, the safe lions roared and threw money; they were both up and down many times, but he lost that one and he lost the rematch in which neither of them fought at all, hanging on to each other like lovers through the boos, and now he's over at Mike's changing tires and oil and batteries, the fleck over the eye still young, but you don't ask him, you don't ask him anything except maybe you think it's going to rain? you think the sun's gonna come out? to which he'll usually answer hell no, but you'll have your important tank of gas and drive off.

class

these boys have got class they ought to make kings out of old men rolling cigarettes in rooms small enough to recognize a single shadow; for them all has gone away like a light under the door vet they recognize and bear the absence; tricked and slugged to zero they wait on death with the temperate patience of a mother teaching her child to eat; for them, everything has run away like a rose in the mouth of a hog; the burning of cities must have been like this. but like trucks of garbage shaking with love these boys might rise like Lorca out of the road with one more poem, rise like Lazarus to gaze upon the still living female, and then get drunk drunk

until it all falls apart so sad again.

living

I mean, I just slept I awoke with a fly on my elbow and I named the fly Benny then I killed him and then I got up and looked in the mailbox and there was some kind of warning from the government but since there wasn't anybody standing in the bushes with a bayonet I tore it up and went back to bed and looked up at the ceiling and I thought, I really like this, I'm just going to lie here for another ten minutes and I lay there for another ten minutes and I thought, it doesn't make sense, I've got so many things to do but I'm going to lie here another half hour, and I stretched stretched and I watched the sun through the small leaves of a tree outside, and I didn't have any wonderful thoughts, I didn't have any immortal thoughts, and that was the best part and it got a little hot and I threw the blankets off and slept but a damned dream: I was on the train again on that same 5 hour round-trip to the track, sitting by the window, past the same sad ocean, China out there mouthing peculiarities in the back of my brain, and then somebody sat next to me and talked about horses mothballs of talk that ripped me apart like death, and then I was there again: the horses running like something shown on a screen and the jockeys very white in the face and it didn't matter who finally

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won and everybody knew
it, the ride back in the dream was the same as the ride
back in reality:
black tons of night around
the same mountains ashamed of being
there, the sea again, again,
the train heading like a cock through a needle's
and I had to get up and go to the urinal
and I hated to get up and go to the urinal
because somebody had thrown paper, some loser had thrown paper
into the toilet again and it wouldn't
flush, and when I came back out
everybody had nothing to do but look at my
face
and I am so tired
that they know when they see my face
that I hate
them
and then they hate me
and want to
kill me
but don't.
      I woke up but since there wasn't anybody
      over my bed
      to tell me I was doing
      wrong
      I slept some
      more.
when I woke up this time
it was almost
evening. people were coming in from work.
I got up and sat in a chair and watched them
coming in. they didn't look so good.
even the young girls didn't look so good as when they
and the men came in: hatchet men, killers, thieves, con-men,
the whole bunch, and their faces were more horrible than any
halloween masks ever devised.
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I found a blue spider in the corner and killed him with a broom.

I looked at the people a while more and then I got tired and stopped looking and fried myself a couple of eggs and sat down and had some tea and bread with it.

I felt fine.

then I took a bath and went back to bed.

the intellectual

she writes continually like a long nozzle spraying the air, and she argues continually; there is nothing I can say that is really not' something else, so, I stop saying; and finally she argues herself out the door saying something like-I'm not trying to impress myself upon you.

but I know she will be back, they always come back.

and at 5 p.m. she was knocking at the door.

I let her in.

I won't stay long, she said, if you don't want me.

it's all right, I said, I've got to take a bath.

she walked into the kitchen and began on the dishes.

it's like being married: you accept everything as if it hadn't happened.

shot of red-eye

I used to hold my social security card up in the air, he told me, but I was so small they couldn't see it, all those big guys around.

you mean the place with the big green screen? I asked.

yeah. well, anyhow, I finally got on the other day picking tomatoes, and Jesus Christ, I couldn't get anywhere it was too hot, too hot and I couldn't get anything in my sack so I lay under the truck in the shade and drank wine. I didn't make a dime.

have a drink, I said.

sure, he said.

two big women came in and I mean BIG and they sat next to us.

shot of red-eye, one of them said to the bartender.

likewise, said the other.

they pulled their dresses up around their hips and swung their legs.

um, umm. I think I'm going mad, I told my friend from the tomato fields.

Jesus, he said, Jesus and Mary, I can't believe what I see.

it's all there, I said.

you a fighter? the one next to me asked.

no, I said.

what happened to your face?

automobile accident on the San Berdoo freeway. some drunk jumped the divider. I was the drunk.

how old are you, daddy?

old enough to slice the melon, I said, tapping my cigar ashes into my beer to give me strength.

can you buy a melon? she asked.

have you ever been chased across the Mojave and raped?

no, she said.

I pulled out my last 20 and with an old man's virile abandon ordered four drinks.

both girls smiled and pulled their dresses higher, if that was possible.

who's your friend? they asked.

this is Lord Chesterfield, I told them.

pleased ta meetcha, they said.

hello, bitches, he answered.

we walked through the 3rd street tunnel to a green hotel. the girls had a key.

there was one bed and we all got in. I don't know who got who.

the next morning my friend and I were down at the Farm Labor Market on San Pedro Street holding up and waving our social security cards.

they couldn't see his.

I was the last one on the truck out. a big woman stood up against me. she smelled like port wine.

honey, she asked, whatever happened to your face?

fair grounds, a dancing bear who didn't.

bullshit, she said.

maybe so, I said, but get your hand out from around my balls. everybody's looking.

when we got to the fields the sun was really up and the world looked terrible.

i met a genius

I met a genius on the train today about 6 years old, he sat beside me and as the train ran down along the coast we came to the ocean and then he looked at me and said, it's not pretty.

it was the first time I'd realized that.

poverty

it is the man you've never seen who keeps you going, the one who might arrive someday.

he isn't out on the streets or in the buildings or in the stadiums, or if he's there I've missed him somehow.

he isn't one of our presidents or statesmen or actors.

I wonder if he's there.

I walk down the streets past drugstores and hospitals and theatres and cafes and I wonder if he is there.

I have looked almost half a century and he has not been seen.

a living man, truly alive, say when he brings his hands down from lighting a cigarette you see his eyes like the eyes of a tiger staring past into the wind.

but when the hands come down it is always the other eyes

that are there always.

and soon it will be too late for me and I will have lived a life with drugstores, cats, sheets, saliva, newspapers, women, doors and other assortments, but nowhere a living man.

to kiss the worms goodnight

kool enough to die but not kill I take my doctor's green pill drink tea as the sharks swim through vases of flowers ten times around they go twenty searching for my sissy heart in a freak May night in Los Angeles Sunday somebody playing Beethoven

I sit behind pulled shades in ambush as ambitious men with new automobiles and new blondes command the streets I sit in a rented room carving a wooden rifle drawing pictures of naked ladies bulls love affairs old men on the walls with children's crayons it is up to each of us to live in whatever way we can as the generals, doctors, policemen warn and torture 118

I bathe once a day am frightened by cats and shadows sleep hardly at all when my heart stops the whole world will get quicker better warmer summer will follow summer the air will be lake clear and the meaning too

but meanwhile the green pill these greasy floors off the avenue and down there a plot of worms of worms of worms and up here no nymph blonde to love me to sleep while I am waiting.

john dillinger and le chasseur maudit

it's unfortunate, and simply not the style, but I don't care: girls remind me of hair in the sink, girls remind me of intestines and bladders and excretory movements; it's unfortunate also that ice-cream bells, babies, engine-valves, plagiostomes, palm trees, footsteps in the hall...all excite me with the cold calmness of the gravestone; nowhere, perhaps, is there sanctuary except in hearing that there were other desperate men: Dillinger, Rimbaud, Villon, Babyface Nelson, Seneca, Van Gogh, or desperate women: lady wrestlers, nurses, waitresses, whores poetesses...although, I do suppose the breaking out of ice-cubes is important or a mouse nosing an empty beercantwo hollow emptinesses looking into each other, or the nightsea stuck with soiled ships that enter the chary web of your brain with their lights, with their salty lights that touch you and leave you for the more solid love of some India; or driving great distances without reason sleep-drugged through open windows that tear and flap your shirt like a frightened bird, and always the stoplights, always red, nightfire and defeat, defeat... scorpions, scraps, fardels: x-jobs, x-wives, x-faces, x-lives, Beethoven in his grave as dead as a beet; red wheel-barrows, yes, perhaps, or a letter from Hell signed by the devil or two good boys beating the guts out of each other in some cheap stadium full of screaming smoke, but mostly, I don't care, sitting here with a mouthful of rotten teeth, sitting here reading Herrick and Spenser and Marvell and Hopkins and Bronte (Emily, today); and listening to the Dvorak Midday Witch or Franck's Le Chasseur Maudit. actually I don't care, and it's unfortunate: I have been getting letters from a young poet (very young, it seems) telling me that some day I will most surely be recognized as one of the world's great poets. *Poet!*

a malversation: today I walked in the sun and streets of this city: seeing nothing, learning nothing, being nothing, and coming back to my room I passed an old woman who smiled a horrible smile; she was already dead, and everywhere I remembered wires: telephone wires, electric wires, wires for electric faces trapped like goldfish in the glass and smiling, and the birds were gone, none of the birds wanted wire or the smiling of wire and I closed my door (at last) but through the windows it was the same: a horn honked, somebody laughed, a toilet flushed, and oddly then I thought of all the horses with numbers that have gone by in the screaming, gone by like Socrates, gone by like Lorca, like Chatterton... I'd rather imagine our death will not matter too much except as a matter of disposal, a problem, like dumping the garbage, and although I have saved the young poet's letters, I do not believe them but like at the diseased palm trees and the end of the sun, I sometimes look.

the flower lover

in the Valkerie Mountains among the strutting peacocks I found a flower as large as my head and when I reached in to smell it

I lost an ear lobe part of my nose one eye and half a pack of cigarettes.

I came back the next day to hack the damned thing down but found it so beautiful I killed a peacock instead.

traffic ticket

I walked off the job again and the police stopped me for running a red light at Serrano Ave. my mind was rather gone and I stood in a patch of leaves ankle-deep and kept my head turned so they couldn't smell the liquor and I took the ticket and went to my room and got a good symphony on the radio, one of the Russians or Germans, one of the dark tough boys but still I felt lonely and cold and kept lighting cigarettes and I turned on the heater and then down on the floor I saw a magazine with my photo on the cover and I walked over and picked it up but it wasn't me because vesterday is gone and today is only catsup and racing hounds and sickness and women some women momentarily as beautiful as any of the cathedrals, and now they play Bartok who knew what he was doing which meant he didn't know what he was doing, and tomorrow I suppose I will go back to the fucking job like a man to a wife with four kids if they'll have me but today I know that I have gotten out of some kind of net, 30 seconds more and I would have been dead, and it is important to recognize one should recognize that type of moment

if he wants to continue to avail the gut and the sacked skull of a flower a mountain a ship a woman the code of the frost and the stone everything lapsing into a sense of moment that cleans like the best damn soap on the market and brings Paris, Spain, the groans of Hemingway, the blue madonna, the new-born bull, a night in a closet with red paint right down in on you, and I hope to pay the ticket even though I did not (I think) run the red light but they said I did.

a little sleep and peace of stillness

if you're a man, Los Angeles is where you hang it up and battle; or if you're a woman, and you've got enough leg and the rest, you sail it against a mountain backdrop so when you grow grey you can hide in Beverly Hills in a mansion so nobody can see how you've decayed. so we moved here—and what do we come up against except a religious maniac in the next shack who drinks cheap wine and has visions and plays his radio as loudly as possible, my god! I know all the spirituals now! I know how very much I have sinned and I realize I must die

and I've got to get ready... but I could use a little sleep first

but I could use a little sleep first just a little sleep and peace of silence.

I open the window and there he is out on the lawn dancing to a hymn a spiritual a whatever. he has on a pair of red bathing trunks he's well-tanned and drunk on wine but his movements are hard and awkward—he's too fat a walnut-like man, distorted and shapeless at 55. and he waves his arms in the sun and the birds fly up frightened and then he whirls back into his doorway.

but the view from the street here is good—
there are Japanese and old women and young girls and
beggars.
we have large palms
plenty of birds
and the parking's not bad...
but our religious maniac does not work
he's too clever to work
and so we both lie around

listen to his radio drink and I wonder which of us will get to hell first—him with his bible or me with my Racing Form but if I've got to hear him down there I know I'm going to have to have some help, and the next dance will be mine.

right now I wish I had something to sell so I could hide in a place with walls twelve feet high with moats and high-yellow mamas. but it looks like some long days and nights ahead, as always. at the least I can only hope for the weakening of a radio tube, and at the most for his death, which we are both praying and ready for.

he even looked like a nice guy

he packaged it up neatly in different sections sending the legs to an aunt in St. Louis the head to a scoutmaster in Brooklyn the belly to a cross-eyed butcher in Des Moines, the female organs were sent to a young priest in Los Angeles; the arms he threw to his dog and he kept the hands to use as nut-crackers, and all the leftover and assorted parts like breasts and buttocks he boiled into a soup which strangely tasted better than she ever had.

he spent the money in her purse he bought good French wine, frijoles, a pound of grass and two parakeets; he bought the collected works of Keats, a 5 foot square red bandana, a scissors with ivory handles, and a box of candy for his landlady.

then he drank and ate and slept for three days and nights and when the police came he seemed very friendly and calm and all the way to the station house he talked of the weather, the color of the mountains, various things like that, he didn't seem like that kind of killer at all.

it was very strange.

children in the sky

the boys come up the boys climb up the brown pole as the waterheater gurgles in Spanish the boys climb the brown pole—

Charlemagne fought for this *Il Duce* was tilted from his car skinned like a bear and hung upsidedown for this—

the boys climb up the brown pole 3 or 4 of them; we have just moved in this building, the paintings still unpacked, the letters from England and Chicago and Cheyenne and New Orleans. but the beer's on and there are 5 oranges and 4 pears on the table so life's not except somebody wanted \$15 to turn on the gas; the boys climb the phonepole to leap onto the bluegreen garage roofs and I stand naked behind a curtain, smoking a cigar,

and impressed impressed as I can be as if the Virgin Mary was dancing outside; and through the window to the North I can see 2 men feeding 45 pigeons and the pigeons walk in separate circles of 8 or 10 as if tied together by a revolving string, and it is 3 o'clock in the afternoon and a good cigar.

Cicero fought for this, Jake LaMotta and Waslaw Nijinsky, but somebody stole our guitar and I haven't taken my vitamins for weeks.

the boys run on the greenblue roofs as to the North the pigeons rise; it is desperately holy and I blow out grey and quiet smoke. then a woman in a red coat, evidently an official, some matron of learning decides that the sky needs cleaning:

Hey!!! you boys get

DOWN

from there!

it is beautiful as deer running from the hunter.

Agrippina fought for this, even Mithridates, even William Hazlitt.

there is nothing to do now but unpack.

the weather is hot on the back of my watch

the weather is hot on the back of my watch which is down at Finkelstein's who is gifted with 3 balls but no heart, but you've got to understand when the bull goes down or the whore, the heart is laid aside for something else, and let's not over-rate obvious decency for in a crap game you may be cutting down some wobbly king of 6 kids and a hemorrhoid butt on his last unemployment check, and who is to say the rose is greater than the thorn? not I, Henry, and when your love gets flabby knees and prefers flat shoes, maybe you should have stuck it into something else like an oil well or a herd of cows. I'm too old to argue, I've gone with the poem and been k.o.'d with the old sucker-punch round after round, but sometimes I like to think of the Kaiser or any other fool full of medals and nothing else, or the first time we read Dos or Eliot with his trousers rolled: the weather is hot on the back of my watch which is down at Finkelstein's, but you know what they say: things are tough all over, and I remember once on the bum in Texas I watched a crow-blast, one hundred farmers with one hundred shotguns

jerking off the sky with a giant penis of hate and the crows came down half-dead, half-living, and they clubbed them to death to save their shells but they ran out of shells before they ran out of crows and the crows came back and walked around the pellets and stuck out their tongues and mourned their dead and elected new leaders and then all at once flew home to fuck to fill the gap. you can only kill what shouldn't be there,

and Finkelstein should be there and my watch and maybe myself, and I realize that if the poems are bad they are supposed to be bad and if they are good they are likewise supposed to be—although there is a minor fight to be fought, but still I am sad because I was in this small town somewhere in the badlands, way off course, not even wanting to be there, two dollars in my wallet, and a farmer turned to me and asked me what time it was and I wouldn't tell him, and later they gathered them up for burning as if they were no better than dung with feathers, feathers and a little gasoline, and from the bottom of one pile a not-quite-dead crow smiled at me.

it was 4:35 p.m.

note to a lady who expected rupert brooke

wha', what did you expect? a schoolboy lisping Donne? or some more practical lover filling you with the stench of Life? I'm a fool and no gentleman: I walked the Brooklyn Bridge with Crane in pajamas, but suicide fails as you get older: there's less and less to kill.

so among the skin and lambchops, the sick neckties of other closets, I scheme schemes round as oranges filled with the music of my crafty mumbling.

Brooke? no. I am a monkey with an olive lost in the circus sand of your laughter, circus apes, circus tigers, circus madmen of finance screwing their secretaries before the 5:15...and what did *you* expect?

a pink-cheek dribbling Picasso colors on your dry brain?

so, the room was blue with the smoke of my boiling, hell, a senseless sea and I fell fingers sotted to the last pinch of your juice, fell through the thorned vines cursing your name, no gentleman no gentleman, kissed-off love like snake-bite, the veranda buzzed with flies, buzzed with flies and lies, and your red mouth screamed, your lamps screamed breaking like overdue bills:

DRUNK! DRUNK AGAIN! O, YOU IDIOT!

so, Yeats, Keats, teats...nothing but an apricot!

wha', what happened to Spain? my boy Lorca? the revolution? must join the brigade! lemme outa here!

the difference between a bad poet and a good one is luck

I suppose so.

I was living in an attic in Philadelphia

it became very hot in the summer and so I stayed in the

bars. I didn't have any money and so with what was almost left

I put a small ad in the paper and said I was a writer

looking for work...

which was a god damned lie; I was a writer

looking for a little time and a little food and some

attic rent.

a couple of days later when I finally came home

from somewhere

the landlady said, there was somebody looking for

you. and I said,

there must be some mistake. she said,

no, it was a writer and he said he wanted you to help him write a history book.

oh, fine, I said, and I knew with that I had another week's

rent—I mean, on the cuff—

so I sat around drinking wine on credit and watching the

hot pigeons

suffer and fuck on my hot roof.

I turned the radio on real loud

drank the wine and wondered how I could make a history book interesting but true.

but the bastard never came back,

and I had to finally sign on with a railroad track gang

going West

and they gave us cans of food but no

openers

and we broke the cans against the seats and sides of

railroad cars a hundred years old with dust

the food wasn't cooked and the water tasted like

candlewick

and I leaped off into a clump of brush somewhere in

Texas

all green with nice-looking houses in the

distance

1 found a park

slept all night

and then they found me and put me in a cell

and they asked me about murders and robberies. they wanted to get a lot of stuff off the books to prove their efficiency but I wasn't *that* tired and they drove me to the next big town fifty-seven miles away the big one kicked me in the ass and they drove off. but I lucked it:

two weeks later I was sitting in the office of the city hall half-asleep in the sun like the big fly on my elbow and now and then she took me down to a meeting of the council and I listened very gravely as if I knew what was happening as if I knew how the funds of a halfass town were being dismantled.

later I went to bed and woke up with teethmarks all over me, and I said, Christ, watch it, baby! you might give me cancer! and I'm rewriting the history of the Crimean War! and they all came to her house—all the cowboys, all the cowboys: fat, dull and covered with dust. and we all shook hands.

I had on a pair of old bluejeans, and they said oh, you're a writer, eh? and I said: well, some think so. and some still think so... others, of course, haven't quite wised up yet. two weeks later they ran me out of town.

the curtains are waving and people walk through the afternoon here and in Berlin and in New York City and in Mexico

I wait on life like a pregnancy, put the stethoscope to the gut but all I hear now is the piano slamming its teeth through areas of my brain

(somebody in this neighborhood likes

Gershwin which is too bad

me)

and the woman sits behind me sits there sits there and keeps lighting cigarettes and now the nurses leave the hospital near here and they wear dresses that are naked in the sun to cheer the dead and the dying and the doctors but it does not help me

> if I could rip them with moans of delight it would neither add or take away anything

now now

a horn blows a tired summer like a gladiola given up and leaning against a house and the bottles we have emptied would strangle the sensibilities...of God

now I look up and see my face in the mirror: if I could only kill the man who killed the man

more than coffeepots and cheroots have done me in more than myself has done me

in

madness comes like a mouse out of the cupboard and they hand me a photograph of the moon

the woman behind me has a daughter who falls in love with men in beards and sandals and berets who smoke pipes and carefully comb their hair and play chess and talk continually of the soul and of Art

this is good enough: you've got to love something

now the landlord waters outside dripping the plants with false rain Gershwin is finished now it sounds like Greig

o, it's all so common and hard! impossible! I do wish somebody would go blackberry wild

but no
I suppose it will be the
same: a beer and then another
beer and then another
beer

maybe then a halfpint of scotch three cigars—smoke smoke yes smoke under the electric sun of night hidden here in these walls with this woman and her life while the police are taking the drunks off the streets I do not know how much longer I can but I keep thinking ow! my god! the gladiola will straighten hard and full of color like an arrow pointing at the Christ will shudder like marmalade my cat will look like Gandhi once looked everything everything even the tiles in the men's room at the Union Station will be true all those mirrors there finally with faces in them roses forests no more policemen no more

me.

for the mercy-mongers

it is justified all dying is justified all killing all death all passing, nothing is in vain not even the neck of a fly,

and a flower passes through the armies and like a small boy bragging, lifts up its color.

IV

Burning In Water Drowning In Flame

Poems 1972-1973

if you think I have gone crazy try picking a flower from the garden of your neighbor

now

I had boils the size of tomatoes all over me they stuck a drill into me down at the county hospital, and just as the sun went down everyday there was a man in a nearby ward he'd start hollering for his friend Joe. JOE! he'd holler, OH JOE! JOE! J O E! COME GET ME, JOE!

Joe never came by.
I've never heard such mournful sounds.

Joe was probably working off a piece of ass or attempting to solve a crossword puzzle.

I've always said if you want to find out who your friends are go to a madhouse or jail.

and if you want to find out where love is not be a perpetual loser.

I was very lucky with my boils being drilled and tortured against the backdrop of the Sierra Madre mountains while that sun went down; when that sun went down I knew what *I* would do when I finally got that drill in my hands like I have it now.

the trash men

here they come these guys grey truck radio playing

they are in a hurry

it's quite exciting: shirt open bellies hanging out

they run out the trash bins roll them out to the fork lift and then the truck grinds it upward with far too much sound...

they had to fill out application forms to get these jobs they are paying for homes and drive late model cars

they get drunk on Saturday night

now in the Los Angeles sunshine they run back and forth with their trash bins

all that trash goes somewhere

and they shout to each other

then they are all up in the truck driving west toward the sea

none of them know that I am alive

REX DISPOSAL CO.

Z00

the elephants are caked with mud and tired and the rhinos don't move the zebras are stupid dead stems and the lions don't roar the lions don't care the vultures are overfed the crocodiles don't move and there was a strange type of monkey, I forget the name, he was on a shelf up there, this male, he topped the female and worked one off, finished, fell on his back and grinned, and I said to my girlfriend, let's go, at last something's happened.

back at my place we talked about it.

the zoo is a very sad place, I said, taking my clothes off.

only those 2 monkeys seemed happy, she said, getting out of her clothes.

did you see that look on the male monkey's face? I asked.

you look just like that afterwards, she

later in the mirror I saw a strange type of monkey. and wondered about the giraffes and the rhinos, and the elephants, especially the elephants.

we'll have to go to the zoo again.

tv

I went to this place to see a movie on tv Alexander the Great, and here come the armies ta ta ta horses, spears, knives, swords, shields, men falling... then turn to a roller derby here's a girl strangling another, then back to Alexander a guy jumps out and assassinates Alex's father, Alex kills the guy, Alex is king, back to the roller derby a man is down across the track and another man rams his head with his skatesand here come the armies they appear to be fighting in a cave, there's smoke and flame, swords, men fallingthe Thunderbirds are behind, one girl dives under another girl's ass, throws her into the rail— Alexander stands there listening to a guy who is holding a glass of wine in his hand, and this boy is really telling Alex wherehow, you know, and he turns his back to walk away and Alex spears him the Thunderbirds are behind, they send out Big John ta ta ta, here come the armies they are splashing through water through forests, they are going to get it all ta ta ta-Big John didn't make it, the girls are out again now— Alexander is dying Alexander the Great is dying and they pass by his pallet in the open he is dressed in fancy black garb and looks like Richard Burton the boys have their helmets off as they pass

and there's Alex's love by the pallet, and then Alex begins to go, some men rush up, one asks, Alex, who do you turn the rule over to? who will rule now? they wait. he says, the strongest, and he dies we are shown the clouds, the heavens, way up there, and the Thunderbirds pull it out in the last 12 seconds, they win it 112 to 110, the crowd is consumed with Joy, mercury bleeds into the light, good night, sweet prince, hail Mary, Jesus Christ, what a night.

lost

no

we can't we can't win it

I've decided we can't win it

just for a while we thought we could but that was just for a while

now we know we can't win it

we can't stand still and win it or run and win it

or do right and win it

or do wrong and win it

somebody else is going to win it

that's why somebody else is there and we are here

it is terrible to be defeated in what seems to count

it will happen

to accept it is impossible

to know it is more important than doves or switchbrakes or love.

hot

she was hot, she was so hot I didn't want anybody else to have her, and if I didn't get home on time she'd be gone, and I couldn't bear that—I'd go mad... it was foolish I know, childish, but I was caught in it, I was caught.

I delivered all the mail and then Henderson put me on the night pickup run in an old army truck, the damn thing began to heat halfway through the run and the night went on me thinking about my hot Miriam and jumping in and out of the truck filling mailsacks the engine continuing to heat up the temperature needle was at the top HOT HOT like Miriam.

I leaped in and out
3 more pickups and into the station
I'd be, my car
waiting to get me to Miriam who sat on my blue couch
with scotch on the rocks
crossing her legs and swinging her ankles
like she did,
2 more stops...
the truck stalled at a traffic light, it was hell
kicking it over
again...

I had to be home by 8, 8 was the deadline for Miriam.

I made the last pickup and the truck stalled at a signal 1/2 block from the station...

it wouldn't start, it couldn't start...

I locked the doors, pulled the key and ran down to the station...

I threw the keys down.... signed out... your god damned truck is stalled at the signal,

I shouted, Pico and Western...

...I ran down the hall, put the key into the door, opened it.... her drinking glass was there, and a note:

sun of a bitch:
I wated until 5 after ate
you don't love me
you sun of a bitch
somebody will love me
I been wateing all day
Miriam

I poured a drink and let the water run into the tub there were 5,000 bars in town and I'd make 25 of them looking for Miriam

her purple teddy bear held the note as he leaned against a pillow

I gave the bear a drink, myself a drink and got into the hot water.

love

love, he said, gas kiss me off kiss my lips kiss my hair my fingers my eyes my brain make me forget

love, he said, gas he had a room on the 3rd floor, rejected by a dozen women 35 editors and half a dozen hiring agencies, now I'm not saying he was any good

he turned on all the jets without lighting them and went to bed

some hours later a guy on his way to room 309 lit a cigar in the hall

and a sofa flew out the window one wall shivered down like wet sand a purple flame waved 40 feet high in the air

the guy in bed didn't know or care but I'd have to say he was pretty good that day.

burn and burn and burn

I used to know a dutchman in a Philly bar he'd take 3 raw eggs in his beer, 71, still working, strong, and there I sat down from him 4 or 5 barstools away in my 20's frightened suicidal unloved. well, you know, sorrows beget burn and burn and burn, then something else takes place. Î'm not saying it's as good but it's certainly more comfortable, and often nights now I think of that old dutchman— I can look back on almost a lifetime-

yet still remember him there my master, then and now.

the way

murdered in the alleys of the land frost-bitten against flagpoles pawned by females

educated in the dark for the dark

vomiting into plugged toilets in rented rooms full of roaches and mice

no wonder we seldom sing day or noon or night

the useless wars the useless years the useless loves

and they ask us, why do you drink so much?

well, I suppose the days were made to be wasted the years and the loves were made to be wasted.

we can't cry, and it helps to laugh it's like letting out dreams, ideals, poisons

don't ask us to sing, laughing is singing to us, you see, it was a terrible joke

Christ should have laughed on the cross, it would have petrified his killers

now there are more killers than ever and I write poems for them.

out of the arms...

out of the arms of one love and into the arms of another

I have been saved from dying on the cross by a lady who smokes pot writes songs and stories, and is much kinder than the last, much much kinder, and the sex is just as good or better.

it isn't pleasant to be put on the cross and left there, it is much more pleasant to forget a love which didn't work as all love finally doesn't work...

it is much more pleasant to make love along the shore in Del Mar in room 42, and afterwards sitting up in bed drinking good wine, talking and touching smoking

listening to the waves...

I have died too many times believing and waiting, waiting in a room staring at a cracked ceiling waiting for the phone, a letter, a knock, a sound... going wild inside while she danced with strangers in nightclubs...

out of the arms of one love and into the arms of another

it's not pleasant to die on the cross, it's much more pleasant to hear your name whispered in the dark.

death of an idiot

he spoke to mice and sparrows and his hair was white at the age of 16. his father beat him every day and his mother lit candles in the church. his grandmother came while the boy slept and prayed for the devil to let loose his hold upon him while his mother listened and cried over the bible.

he didn't seem to notice young girls he didn't seem to notice the games boys played there wasn't much he seemed to notice he just didn't seem interested.

he had a very lárge, ugly mouth and the teeth stuck out and his eyes were small and lusterless. his shoulders were slumped and his back was bent like an old man's.

he lived in our neighborhood.
we talked about him when we got bored and then
went on to more interesting things.
he seldom left his house. we would have liked to
torture him
but his father
who was a huge and terrible man
tortured him for
us.

one day the boy died. at 17 he was still a boy. a death in a small neighborhood is noted with alacrity, and then forgotten 3 or 4 days later.

but the death of this boy seemed to stay with us all. we kept talking about it in our boy-men's voices at 6 p.m. just before dark just before dinner. and whenever I drive through that neighborhood now decades later
I still think of his death while having forgotten all the other deaths and everything else that happened then.

tonalities

the soldiers march without guns the graves are empty peacocks glide in the rain

down stairways march great men smiling

there is food enough and rent enough and time enough

our women will not grow old

I will not grow old

bums wear diamonds on their fingers

Hitler shakes hands with a Jew

the sky smells of roasted flesh

I am a burning curtain

I am steaming water

I am a snake I am an edge of glass that cuts I am blood

I am this fiery snail crawling home.

hey, dolly

she left me 5 weeks ago and went to Utah. that is, I think she left. the other day I went out to mail her a letter and I saw her sitting on the bus stop bench, it was her hair there from behind and all the pounding started in me again I walked up quickly and looked at the face—it was somebody else. freckles, pugnose, greeneyes, nothing, nothing.

then I was on Western Avenue going from bar to bar and I saw her in front of me again.
I saw those tight pants, I knew that ass, and there was the hair again, and the way she walked,
I walked faster to catch her,
I got even with her and saw her face—
an Indian's nose, blue eyes, a mouth like a frog—
nothing, nothing, nothing.

then there was a girl in a bar playing piano. it wasn't her but when the hair fell in a certain way, for a moment, it was. and the hair was the same length and the lips were similar but not the same, and she saw me looking while she was singing, I was drunk, of course, it helped the delusion, and she said, is there anything special you want to hear? Dolly, I said, and she sang—

Hey, Dolly...

just now I looked up and she was across the street. she walked out of the apartment across the street with a young blond man and she stood there in sun glasses, and I thought, what's she doing across the street in sun glasses, and she smiled at me through the window but she didn't wave and then she got in the car with the young man, it was a new car, small and red, expensive, and they drove away toward the west. I'm sure it was her, this time.

a poorly night

you came out, she said, and then you kicked this guy's car and then you threw yourself into a bush you crushed the whole bush, I don't know what your agony is all about but don't you think you should see a shrink? I've got an awful good shrink, you'd like him.

answer me, she said, I get worried about the police when you act like that, I'm very paranoid about the police.

answer me, she said, why do you act like that?

listen, she said, do you want me to leave?

after she left I picked up a chair and threw it out the window, there was much glass and the screen was broken too.

how many dead beasts float and walk from Wales to Los Angeles?

looking for a job

it was Philly and the bartender said what and I said, gimme a draft, Jim, got to get the nerves straight, I'm going to look for a job. you, he said, a job? yeah, Jim, I saw something in the paper, no experience necessary. and he said, hell, you don't want a job, and I said, hell no, but I need money, and I finished the beer and got on the bus and I watched the numbers and soon the numbers got closer and then I was right there and I pulled the cord and the bus stopped and I got off. it was a large building made of tin the sliding door was stuck in the dirt I pulled it back and went in and there wasn't any floor, just more ground, lumpy, wet, and it stank and there were sounds like things being sawed in half and things drilled and it was dark and men walked on girders overhead and men pushed trucks across the ground and men sat at machines doing things and there were shots of lightning and thunder and suddenly a bucket full of flame came swinging at my head, it roared and boiled with flame it hung from a loose chain and it came right at me and somebody hollered, HEY, LOOK OUT! and I just ducked under the bucket feeling the heat go over me, and somebody asked, WHAT DO YOU WANT? and I said, WHERE IS YOUR NEAREST CRAPPER? and I was told and I went inside then came out and saw silhouettes of men moving through flame and sound and I walked to the door, got outside, and took the bus back to the bar and sat down

and ordered another draft, and Jim asked, what happened? I said, they didn't want me, Jim. then this whore came in and sat down and everybody looked at her, she looked fine, and I remember it was the first time in my life I almost wished I had a vagina and clit instead of what I had, but in 2 or 3 days I got over that and I was reading the want ads again.

the 8 count

this one always arrives at the wrong time

a basically good sort I suppose an honest man

but he doesn't take the 8 count well

we're all beaten but somehow it's the manner in which he takes the count

after a visit from him I am sickened for 3 or 4 days

I give him board and shelter and sometimes money

but how he snarls and bitches sucking at my cans of beer

if he expects deliverance in return for what he gives he isn't going to get deliverance because he doesn't give anything

no light no love no laughter no learning nothing to remember

the way of this one sickens me he brings me sorrow when I have sorrow he brings me madness when I have madness

I am a selfish man

over his last sweaty handshake I told him I could carry him no longer now when my soul has to puke it will puke of its own volition and not from a knock upon the door.

dogfight

he's a runt he snarls and scratches chases cars groans in his sleep and has a perfect star above each eyebrow

we hear it outside: he's ripping the shit out of something out there 5 times his size

it's the professor's dog from across the street that educated expensive bluebook dog o, we're all in trouble

I pull them apart and we run inside with the runt bolt the door flick out the lights and see them crossing the street immaculate and concerned

it looks like 7 or 8 people coming to get their dog

that big bag of jelly with hair he ought to know better than to cross the railroad tracks.

letters

she sits on the floor going through a cardboard box reading me love letters I have written her while her 4 year old daughter lies on the floor wrapped in a pink blanket and three-quarters asleep

we have gotten together after a split I sit in her house on a Sunday night

the cars go up and down the hill outside when we sleep together tonight we will hear the crickets

where are the fools who don't live as well as I?

I love her walls I love her children I love her dog

we will listen to the crickets my arm curled about her hip my fingers against her belly

one night like this beats life, the overflow takes care of death

I like my love letters they are true

ah, she has such a beautiful ass! ah, she has such a beautiful soul!

yes yes

when God created love He didn't help most when God created dogs He didn't help dogs when God created plants that was average when God created hate we had a standard utility when God created me He created me when God created the monkey He was asleep when He created the giraffe He was drunk when He created narcotics He was high and when He created suicide He was low

when He created you lying in bed He knew what He was doing He was drunk and He was high and He created the mountains and the sea and fire at the same time

He made some mistakes but when He created you lying in bed He came all over His Blessed Universe.

eddie and eve

you know I sat on the same barstool in Philadelphia for 5 years

I drank canned heat and the cheapest wine I was beaten in alleys by well-fed truck drivers for the amusement of the ladies and gentlemen of the night

I won't tell you of my life as a child it's too sickening unreal

but what I mean I finally went to see my friend Eddie after 30 years

he was still in the same house with the same wife

you guessed it: he looked worse than I did

he couldn't get out of his chair

a cane arthritis

what hair he had was white

my god, Eddie, I said.

I know, he said, I've had it, I can't breathe.

then his wife came out. the once slim Eve I used to flirt with.

210 pounds squinting at me.

my god, Eve, I said. I know, she said.

we got drunk together. it was several hours later Eddie said to me, take her to bed, do her some good, I can't do her any good any more.

Eve giggled.

I can't Eddie, I said, you're my buddy.

we drank some more. endless quarts of beer.

Eddie began to vomit.
Eve brought him a dishpan
and he vomited into the
dishpan
telling me between spasms
that we were men
real men
we knew what it was all about
by god
these young punks
didn't have it.

we carried him to bed undressed him and he was soon out, snoring.

I said goodbye to Eve. I got out and got into my car and sat there staring at the house. then I drove off. it was all I had left to do.

the fisherman

he comes out at 7:30 a.m. every day with 3 peanut butter sandwiches, and there's one can of beer which he floats in the baitbucket. he fishes for hours with a small trout pole three-quarters of the way down the pier. he's 75 years old and the sun doesn't tan him, and no matter how hot it gets the brown and green lumberjack stays on. he catches starfish, baby sharks, and mackerel; he catches them by the dozen, speaks to nobody. sometime during the day he drinks his can of beer. at 6 p.m. he gathers his gear and his catch walks down the pier across several streets where he enters a small Santa Monica apartment goes to the bedroom and opens the evening paper as his wife throws the starfish, the sharks, the mackerel into the garbage

he lights his pipe and waits for dinner.

warm asses

this Friday night the Mexican girls at the Catholic carnival look especially good their husbands are in the bars and the Mexican girls look young hawk-nosed with cruel strong eyes, asses warm in tight bluejeans they have been taken somehow, their husbands are tired of those warm asses and the young Mexican girls walk with their children, there is real sorrow in their cruel strong eyes, as they remember nights when their handsome men not now any longer handsome said such beautiful things to them beautiful things they will never hear again, and under the moon and in the flashing of the carnival lights I see it all and I stand quietly and mourn for them. they see me lookingthe old goat is looking at us he's looking at our eyes; they smile at each other, talk, walk off together, laugh, look at me over their shoulders. I walk over to a booth put a dime on number eleven and win a chocolate cake with 13 colored suckers stuck in the that's fair enough for an ex-Catholic and an admirer of warm and young and no-longer used mournful Mexican asses.

what's the use of a title?

they don't make it the beautiful die in flame suicide pills, rat poison, rope, whatever... they rip their arms off, throw themselves out of windows, they pull their eyes from the sockets, reject love reject hate reject, reject.

they don't make it the beautiful can't endure, they are the butterflies they are the doves they are the sparrows, they don't make it.

one tall shot of flame while the old men play checkers in the park one flame, one good flame while the old men play checkers in the park in the sun.

the beautiful are found at the edge of a room crumpled into spiders and needles and silence and we can never understand why they left, they were so beautiful.

they don't make it, the beautiful die young and leave the ugly to their ugly lives.

lovely and brilliant: life and suicide and death as the old men play checkers in the sun in the park.

the tigress

terrible arguments.
and, at last, lying peacefully
on her large bed
which is
spread in red with cool patterns of flowers,
my head and belly down
head sideways
sprayed by shaded light
as she bathes quietly in the
other room,
it is all beyond me,
as most things are,
I listen to classical music on the small radio,
she bathes, I hear the splashing of water.

the catch

crud, he said, hauling it out of the water, what is it?

a Hollow-Back June Whale, I said.

no, said a guy standing by us on the pier, it's a Billow-Wind Sand-Groper.

a guy walking by said, it's a Fandango Escadrille without stripes.

we took the hook out and the thing stood up and farted. it was grey and covered with hair and fat and it stank like old socks.

it began to walk down the pier and we followed it. it ate a hot dog and bun right out of the hands of a little girl. then it leaped on the merry-go-round and rode a pinto, it fell off near the end and rolled in the sawdust.

we picked it up.

grop, it said, grop.

then it walked back out on the pier. a large crowd followed us as we walked along.

it's a publicity stunt, said somebody, it's a man in a rubber suit.

then as it was walking along it began to breathe very heavily, it fell on its back and began to thrash.

somebody poured a cup of beer over its head.

grop, it went, grop.

then it was dead.

we rolled it to the edge of the pier and pushed it back into the water. we watched it sink and vanish.

it was a Hollow-Back June Whale, I said.

no, said the other guy, it was a Billow-Wind Sand-Groper.

no, said the other expert, it was a Fandango Escadrille without stripes.

then we all went our way on a mid-afternoon in August.

wax job

man, he said, sitting on the steps your car sure needs a wash and wax job I can do it for you for 5 bucks, I got the wax, I got the rags, I got everything I need.

I gave him the 5 and went upstairs. when I came down 4 hours later he was sitting on the steps drunk and offered me a can of beer. he said he'd get the car the next day.

the next day he got drunk again and I loaned him a dollar for a bottle of wine, his name was Mike a world war II veteran. his wife worked as a nurse.

the next day I came down and he was sitting on the steps and he said, you know, I been sitting here looking at your car, wondering just how I was gonna do it, I wanna do it real good.

the next day Mike said it looked like rain and it sure as hell wouldn't make any sense to wash and wax a car when it was gonna rain.

the next day it looked like rain again. and the next. then I didn't see him anymore. a week later I saw his wife and she said, they took Mike to the hospital, he's all swelled-up, they say it's from the drinking.

listen, I told her, he said he was going to wax my car, I gave him 5 dollars to wax my car.

he's in the critical ward, she said, he might die...

I was sitting in their kitchen drinking with his wife when the phone rang. she handed the phone to me. it was Mike. listen, he said, come on down and get me, I can't stand this place. I drove on down there, walked into the hospital, walked up to his bed and said, let's go Mike.

they wouldn't give him his clothes so Mike walked to the elevator in his gown.

we got on and there was a kid driving the elevator and eating a popsicle. nobody's allowed to leave here in a gown, he said.

you just drive this thing, kid, I said, we'll worry about the gown.

Mike was all puffed-up, triple size but I got him into the car somehow and gave him a cigarette.

I stopped at the liquor store for 2 six packs then went on in. I drank with Mike and his wife until 11 p.m. then went upstairs...

where's Mike? I asked his wife 3 days later, you know he said he was going to wax my car.

Mike died, she said, he's gone.

you mean he died? I asked.

yes, he died, she said.

I'm sorry, I said, I'm very sorry

it rained for a week after that and I figured the only way I'd get the 5 back was to go to bed with his wife but you know she moved out 2 weeks later

an old guy with white hair moved in there and he had one blind eye and played the French Horn. there was no way I could make it with him.

some people

some people never go crazy.
me, sometimes I'll lie down behind the couch
for 3 or 4 days.
they'll find me there.
it's Cherub, they'll say, and
they pour wine down my throat
rub my chest
sprinkle me with oils.

then, I'll rise with a roar, rant, rage—
curse them and the universe as I send them scattering over the lawn.
I'll feel much better, sit down to toast and eggs, hum a little tune, suddenly become as lovable as a pink overfed whale.

some people never go crazy. what truly horrible lives they must lead.

father, who art in heaven—

my father was a practical man.
he had an idea.
you see, my son, he said,
I can pay for this house in my lifetime,
then it's mine.
when I die I pass it on to you.
now in your lifetime you can acquire a house
and then you'll have two houses
and you'll pass those two houses on to your
son, and in his lifetime he acquires a house,
then when he dies, his son—

I get it, I said.

my father died while trying to drink a glass of water. I buried him. solid mahogany casket. after the funeral I went to the racetrack, met a high yellow. after the races we went to her apartment for dinner and goodies.

I sold his house after about a month. I sold his car and his furniture and gave away all his paintings except one and all his fruit jars (filled with fruit boiled in the heat of summer) and put his dog in the pound. I dated his girlfriend twice but getting nowhere I gave it up.

I gambled and drank away the money.

now I live in a cheap front court in Hollywood and take out the garbage to hold down the rent.

my father was a practical man. he choked on that glass of water and saved on hospital bills.

nerves

twitching in the sheets—
to face the sunlight again,
that's clearly
trouble.
I like the city better when the
neon lights are going and
the nuclies dance on top of the
bar
to the mauling music.

I'm under this sheet thinking.
my nerves are hampered by history—
the most memorable concern of mankind is the guts it takes to face the sunlight again.

love begins at the meeting of two strangers. love for the world is impossible. I'd rather stay in bed and sleep.

dizzied by the days and the streets and the years I pull the sheets to my neck. I turn my ass to the wall. I hate the mornings more than any man.

the rent's high too

there are beasts in the salt shaker and airdromes in the coffeepot. my mother's hand is in the bag drawer and from the backs of spoons come the cries of tiny tortured animals.

in the closet stands a murdered man wearing a new green necktie and under the floor, there's a suffocating angel with flaring nostrils.

it's hard to live here. it's very hard to live here.

at night the shadows are unborn creatures. beneath the bed spiders kill tiny white ideas.

the nights are bad the nights are very bad I drink myself to sleep I have to drink myself to sleep.

in the morning over breakfast I see them roll the dead down the street (I never read about this in the newspapers).

and there are eagles everywhere sitting on the roof, on the lawn, inside my car. the eagles are eyeless and smell of sulphur. it is very discouraging.

people visit me sit in chairs across from me and I see them crawling with vermin—green and gold and yellow bugs they do not brush away.

I have been living here too long. soon I must go to Omaha.

they say that everything is jade there and does not move. they say you can stitch designs in the water and sleep high in olive trees. I wonder if this is true?

I can't live here much longer.

laugh literary

listen, man, don't tell me about the poems you sent, we didn't receive them, we are very careful with manuscripts we bake them burn them laugh at them vomit on them pour beer over them but generally we return them they are so inane. ah, we believe in Art, we need it surely, but, you know, there are many people (most people) playing and fornicating with the who only crowd the stage with their generous unforgiving vigorous mediocrity.

our subscription rates are \$4 a year. please read our magazine before submitting.

deathbed blues

if you can't stand the heat, he says, get out of the kitchen. you know who said that? Harry Truman.

I'm not in the kitchen, I say, I'm in the oven.

my editor is a difficult man. I sometimes phone him in moments of doubt.

look, he answers, you'll be lighting cigars with ten dollar bills, you'll have a redhead on one arm and a blonde on the other.

other times he'll say, look, I think I'm going to hire V.K. as my associate editor. we've got to prune off 5 poets here somewhere. I'm going to leave it up to him. (V.K. is a very imaginative poet who believes I've knifed him from N.Y.C. to the shores of Hawaii.)

look, kid, I phone my editor, can you speak German? no, he says.
well, anyhow, I say, I need some good new tires, cheap. so you know where I can get some good new tires, cheap? I'll phone you in 30 minutes, he says, will you be in in 30 minutes?
I can't afford to go anywhere, I say. he says, they say you were drunk at that reading in Oregon.
ugly gossips, I answer.

were you?

I don't remember.

one day he phones me: you're not hitting the ball anymore. you are hitting the bottle and fighting with all these women. you know we got a good kid on the bench, he's aching to get in there

he hits from both sides of the plate
he can catch anything that ain't hit over the wall
he's coached by Duncan, Creeley, Wakoski
and he can rhyme, he knows
images, similes, metaphors, figures, conceits,
assonance, alliteration, metrics, yes
metrics like, you know—
iambic, trochaic, anapestic, spondaic,
he knows caesura, denotation, connotation, personification,
diction, voice, paradox, rhetoric, tone and
coalescence...

holy shit, I say, hang up and take a good hit of Old Grandad. Harry's still alive according to the papers. but I decide rather than getting new tires to get a set of retreads instead.

charles

92 years old his tooth has been bothering him had to get it filled

he lost his left eye 40 years ago

- —a butcher, he says, he just wanted to operate to get the money. I found out later it coulda been sayed.
- —I take the eye out at night, he says, it hurts. they never did get it right.
- —which eye is it, Charles?
- —this one here, he points, then excuses himself. he has to get up and go into the kitchen, he's baking cookies in the oven.

he comes out soon with a plate.

-try some.

I do. they're good.

- —want some coffee? he asks.
- —no, thanks, Charles, I haven't been sleeping nights.

he got married at 70 to a woman 58. 22 years ago. she's in a rest home now.

—she's getting better, he says, she recognizes me. they let her get up to go to the bathroom.

- —that's fine, Charles.
- —I can't stand her damned daughter, though, they think I'm after her money.
- —is there anything I can do for you, Charles? need anything from the store, anything like that?
- —no, I just went shopping this morning.

his back is as straight as the wall and he has the tiniest pot belly. as he talks he keeps his one eye on the tv set.

- —I'm going now, Charles, you got my phone number?
- -yeh.
- —how are the girls treating you, Charles?
- —my friend, I haven't thought about girls for some years now.
- -goodnight, Charles.
- -goodnight.

I go to the door open it close it

outside the smell of freshly-baked cookies follows me.

on the circuit

it was up in San Francisco after my poetry reading. it had been a nice crowd I had gotten my money I had this place upstairs there was some drinking and this guy started beating up on a fag I tried to stop him and the guy broke a window deliberately. I told them all to get out and she started hollering down to the guy who had beat on the fag and he kept calling her name back up and then I remembered she had vanished for an hour before the reading. she did those things. maybe not bad things but consistently careless things and I told her we were through and to get out and I went to bed then hours later she walked in and I said, what the hell are you doing here? she was all wild, hair down in her face, you're too callous, I said, I don't want you. it was dark and she leaped at me: I'll kill you, I'll kill you! I was still too drunk to defend myself and she had me down on the kitchen floor and she clawed my face and bit a hole in my arm.

then I went back to bed and listened to her heels going down the hill.

my friend, andre

this kid used to teach at Kansas U. then they moved him out he went to a bean factory then he and his wife moved to the coast she got a job and worked while he looked for a job as an actor. I really want to be an actor, he told me, that's all I want to be. he came by with his wife. he came by alone. the streets around here are full of guys who want to be actors. I saw him yesterday. he was rolling cigarettes. I poured him some white wine. my wife is getting tired of waiting, he said, I'm going to teach karate. his hands were swollen from hitting bricks and walls and doors. he told me about some of the great oriental fighters. there was one guy so good he could turn his head 180 degrees to see who was behind him. that's very hard to do, he said. further: it's more difficult to fight 4 men properly placed than to fight many more. when you have many more they get in each other's way, and a good fighter who has strength and agility can do well. some of the great fighters, he said, even suck their balls up into their bodies. this can be done—to some extent—because there are natural cavities in the body.... if you stand upsidedown

I gave him a little more white wine, then he left. you know, sometimes making it with a typewriter isn't so painful after all.

you will notice this.

i was glad

I was glad I had money in the Savings and Loan Friday afternoon hungover I didn't have a job

I was glad I had money in the Savings and Loan I didn't know how to play a guitar Friday afternoon hungover

Friday afternoon hungover across the street from Norm's across the street from The Red Fez

I was glad I had money in the Savings and Loan split with my girlfriend and blue and demented I was glad to have my passbook and stand in line

I watched the buses run up Vermont I was too crazy to get a job as a driver of buses and I didn't even look at the young girls

I got dizzy standing in line but I just kept thinking I have money in this building Friday afternoon hungover

I didn't know how to play the piano or even hustle a damnfool job in a carwash I was glad I had money in the Savings and Loan

finally I was at the window it was my Japanese girl she smiled at me as if I were some amazing god

back again, eh? she said and laughed as I showed her my withdrawal slip and my passbook as the buses ran up and down Vermont

the camels trotted across the Sahara she gave me the money and I took the money Friday afternoon hungover

I walked into the market and got a cart

and I threw sausages and eggs and bacon and bread in there I threw beer and salami and relish and pickles and mustard in there

I looked at the young housewives wiggling casually I threw t-bone steaks and porterhouse and cube steaks in my cart and tomatoes and cucumbers and oranges in my cart

Friday afternoon hungover split with my girlfriend and blue and demented I was glad I had money in the Savings and Loan.

trouble with spain

I got in the shower and burned my balls last Wednesday.

met this painter called Spain, no, he was a cartoonist, well, I met him at a party and everybody got mad at me because I didn't know who he was or what he did.

he was rather a handsome guy and I guess he was jealous because I was so ugly. they told me his name and he was leaning against the wall looking handsome, and I said: hey, Spain, I like that name: Spain. but I don't like you. why don't we step out in the garden and I'll kick the shit out of your ass?

this made the hostess angry and she walked over and rubbed his pecker while I went to the crapper and heaved.

but everybody's angry at me.
Bukowski, he can't write, he's had it.
washed-up. look at him drink.
he never used to come to parties.
now he comes to parties and drinks everything up and insults real talent.
I used to admire him when he cut his wrists and when he tried to kill himself with gas. look at him now leering at that 19 year old girl, and you know he can't get it up.

I not only burnt my balls in that shower last Wednesday, I spun around to get out of the burning

water and burnt my bunghole too.

wet night

the rag. she sat there, glooming. I couldn't do anything with her. it was raining. she got up and left. well, hell, here it is again, I thought I picked up my drink and turned the radio up, took the lampshade off the lamp and smoked a cheap black bitter cigar imported from Germany. there was a knock on the door and I opened the door a little man stood in the rain and he said, have you seen a pigeon on your porch? I told him I hadn't seen a pigeon on my porch and he said if I saw a pigeon on my porch to let him know. I closed the door sat down and then a black cat leaped through the window and jumped on my lap and purred, it was a beautiful animal and I took it into the kitchen and we both ate a slice of ham. then I turned off all the lights and went to bed and that black cat went to bed with me and it purred and I thought, well, somebody likes me, then the cat started pissing, it pissed all over me and all over the sheets, the piss rolled across my belly and slid down my sides and I said: hey, what's wrong with you? I picked up the cat and walked him to the door and threw him out into the rain and I thought, that's very strange, that cat pissing on me his piss was cold as the rain. then I phoned her and I said, look, what's wrong with you? have you lost your god damned mind? I hung up and pulled the sheets off the bed and got in and lay there listening to the rain. sometimes a man doesn't know what to do about things and sometimes it's best to lie very still and try not to think at all about anything.

that cat belonged to somebody it had a flea collar. I don't know about the woman.

we, the artists—

in San Francisco the landlady, 80, helped me drag the green Victrola up the stairway and I played Beethoven's 5th until they beat on the walls. there was a large bucket in the center of the room filled with beer and winebottles; so, it might have been the d.t.'s, one afternoon I heard a sound something like a bell only the bell was humming instead of ringing, and then a golden light appeared in the corner of the room up near the ceiling and through the sound and light shone the face of a woman, worn but beautiful, and she looked down at me and then a man's face appeared by hers, the light became stronger and the man said: we, the artists, are proud of you! then the woman said: the poor boy is frightened, and I was, and then it went away. I got up, dressed, and went to the bar wondering who the artists were and why they should be proud of me. there were some live ones in the bar and I got some free drinks, set my pants on fire with the ashes from my corncob pipe, broke a glass deliberately, was not rousted, met a man who claimed he was William Saroyan, and we drank until a woman came in and pulled him out by the ear and I thought, no, that can't be William, and another guy came in and said: man, you talk tough, well, listen, I just got out for assault and battery, so don't mess with me! we went outside the bar, he was a good boy, he knew how to duke, and it went along fairly even, then they stopped it and we went back in and drank another couple of hours. I walked back up to my place, put on Beethoven's 5th and when they beat on the walls I beat back.

I keep thinking of myself young, then, the way I was, and I can hardly believe it but I don't mind it. I hope the artists are still proud of me but they never came back again.

the war came running in and next I knew I was in New Orleans walking into a bar drunk after falling down in the mud on a rainy night. I saw one man stab another and I walked over and put a nickle in the juke box. it was a beginning. San Francisco and New Orleans were two of my favorite towns.

i can't stay in the same room with that woman for five minutes

I went over the other day to pick up my daughter. her mother came out with workman's overalls on. I gave her the child support money and she laid a sheaf of poems on me by one Manfred Anderson. I read them. he's great, she said. does he send this shit out? I asked. oh no, she said, Manfred wouldn't do that. why? well, I don't know exactly. listen, I said, you know all the poets who don't send their shit out. the magazines aren't ready for them, she said, they're too far advanced for publication. oh for christ's sake, I said, do you really believe that? yes, yes, I really believe that, she answered. look, I said, you don't even have the kid ready yet. she doesn't have her shoes on. can't you put her shoes on? your daughter is 8 years old, she said, she can put her own shoes on. listen, I said to my daughter, for christ's sake will you put your shoes on? Manfred never screams, said her mother. OH HOLY JESUS CHRIST! I yelled you see, you see? she said, you haven't changed. what time is it? I asked. 4:30. Manfred did submit some poems once, she said, but they sent them back and he was terribly you've got your shoes on, I said to my daughter, let's go. her mother walked to the door with us. have a nice day, she said. fuck off, I said.

when she closed the door there was a sign pasted to the outside. it said:

SMILE.

I didn't.

we drove down Pico on the way in.

I stopped outside the Red Ox.

I'll be right back, I told my daughter.

I walked in, sat down, and ordered a scotch and water. over the bar there was a little guy popping in and out of a door holding a very red, curved penis

in his hand.

can't

can't you make him stop? I asked the barkeep.

can't you shut that thing off?

what's the matter with you, buddy? he asked.

I submit my poems to the magazines, I said.

you submit your poems to the magazines? he asked.

you are god damned right I do, I said.

I finished my drink and got back to the car.

I drove down Pico Boulevard.

the remainder of the day was bound to be better.

charisma

this woman keeps phoning me even though I tell her I am living with a woman I love.

I keep hearing noises in the environment, she phones, I thought it was you.

me? I haven't been drunk for several days.

well, maybe it wasn't you but I felt it was somebody who was trying to help me.

maybe it was God. do you think He's there?

yes, He's a hook from the ceiling.

I thought so.

I'm growing tomatoes in my basement, she says.

that's sensible.

I want to move, where shall I move?

north is obvious, west is the ocean. the east is the past. south is the only way.

south?

yes, but not past the border. it's death to gringos.

what's Salinas like? she asks.

if you like lettuce go to Salinas.

suddenly she hangs up. she always does that. and she always phones back in a day or a week or a month. she'll be at my funeral with tomatoes and the yellow pages of the phonebook stuck into the pockets of her mince-brown overcoat in 97 degree heat, I have a way with the ladies.

the sound of human lives

strange warmth, hot and cold females, I make good love, but love isn't just sex, most females I've known are ambitious, and I like to lie around on large comfortable pillows at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I like to watch the sun through the leaves of a bush outside while the world out there holds away from me, I know it so well, all those dirty pages, and I like to lie around my belly up to the ceiling after making love everything flowing in: it's so easy to be easy—if you let it, that's all that's necessary. but the female is strange, she is very ambitious—shit! I can't sleep away the day! all we do is eat! make love! sleep! eat! make love!

my dear, I say, there are men out there now picking tomatoes, lettuce, even cotton, there are men and women dying under the sun, there are men and women dying in factories for nothing, a pittance...

I can hear the sound of human lives being ripped to pieces...
you don't know how lucky we are...

but you've got it made, she says, your poems...

my love gets out of bed. I hear her in the other room. the typewriter is working.

I don't know why people think effort and energy have anything to do with creation.

I suppose that in matters like politics, medicine, history and religion

they are mistaken also.

I turn on my belly and fall asleep with my ass to the ceiling for a change.

save the pier

you shoulda been at this party, I know you hate parties but you seem to be at most of them. anyhow, I took my girl, you know her—

Java Jane?

yes, this party was at the merry-go-round where they are trying to tear the pier down, you know where that is?

yes, the red paint, the broken windows—

yes, anyhow, my girl lives in a room just above the merry-go-round. it's a birthday party for the woman who owns the merrry-go-round. she's trying to save the pier she's trying to save the merry-go-round—plenty of drinks for everybody, my girl lives in the room right above the merry-go-round.

sounds great.

I phoned. you weren't in.

it's all right.

well, there was plenty to drink and they turned the merry-go-round on, it was free, music and everything.

sounds great.

my girlfriend and I got into an argument, all the drinking—

of course.

I'm standing apart from her she's standing apart from me. she's got a glass of wine in her hand. I give her a dark green deathly stare, she's stricken she steps back the thing is whirling a horse's hoof kicks her in the ass. she drops down upon the spinning. it all happens so fast but I do notice that all the time she's circling to the music under those horses she's holding her glass upright in order not to spill a drop.

brave.

sure. only all the time her panties are showing. glowing and glistening. pink.

wonderful. how do they do it?

they conspire.

the glistening pink?

yes. so her panties are showing and I think well, that's all right but it probably looks a hell of a lot better to them than it does to me, so I moved a step forward and said, Jane.

what happened?

she kept spinning around holding her drink up showing her pink bottom...there seemed something tenuous about it, deliciously inane...

stunted glory finally comes forth hollering...

exactly. she kept gliding around legs outspreaddizzied with lifevengefulshe must have cared for me to show her panties to all those people. anyhow, she kept sliding around until her leg hit one of this guy's legs he'd stepped forward for a closer look. he was 67 years old and with his wife and they were both eating spaghetti off paper plates, anyhow, my girl's leg hit his she came bouncing off on her ass still holding the glass of wine upright. I walked over and picked her up and she still held it level, then she lifted it and drank it.

sounds like it was a fine party.

I phoned. you weren't

spiderwebs of dripping wet-dew sex like badbreath dreams.

exactly. you should have been there.

sorry.

burned

the kid went back to New York City to live with a woman he met in a kibbutz. he left his mother at the age of 32, a well-kept fellow, sense of humor and never wore the same pair of shorts more than one day. there he was in the Puerto Rican section, she had a job. he wanted iron bars on the windows and ate too much fried chicken at 10 a.m. in the morning after she went to work. he had some money saved out of the years and he fucked but he was really afraid of pussy.

I was sitting with Eileen in Hollywood and I said:
I ought to warn the kid so that when she turns on him he'll be ready.

no, she said, let him be happy.

I let him be happy.

now he's back living with his mother, he weighs three hundred and ten pounds and eats all the time and laughs all the time but you ought to see his eyes... the eyes are sitting in the center of all that flesh...

he bites into a chicken leg: I loved her, he says to me, I loved her.

hell hath no fury...

she was in her orange Volks waiting as I walked up the street with 2 six packs and a pint of scotch and she jumped out and began grabbing the beerbottles and smashing them on the pavement and she got the pint of scotch and smashed that too, saying: ho! so you were going to get her drunk on this and fuck her! I walked in the doorway where the other woman stood halfway up the stairs, then she ran in from the street and up the stairs and hit the other woman with her purse, saying: he's my man! he's my man! and then she ran out and jumped into her orange Volks and drove away. I came out with a broom and began sweeping up the glass when I heard a sound and there was the orange Volks running on the sidewalk and on me— I managed to leap up against a wall as it went by. then I took the broom and began sweeping up the glass again, and suddenly she was standing there; she took the broom and broke it into three pieces, then she found an unbroken beerbottle and threw it at the glass window of the door. it made a clean round hole and the other woman shouted down from the stairway: for God's sake, Bukowski, go with her!

I got into the orange Volks and we drove off together.

pull a string, a puppet moves...

each man must realize that it can all disappear very quickly: the cat, the woman, the job, the front tire, the bed, the walls, the room; all our necessities including love, rest on foundations of sandand any given cause, no matter how unrelated: the death of a boy in Hong Kong or a blizzard in Omaha... can serve as your undoing. all your chinaware crashing to the kitchen floor, your girl will enter and you'll be standing, drunk, in the center of it and she'll ask: my god, what's the matter? and you'll answer: I don't know, I don't know...

tougher than corned beef hash-

the motion of the human heart: strangled over Missouri; sheathed in hot wax in Boston; burned like a potato in Norfolk; lost in the Allegheny Mountains; found again in a 4-poster mahogany bed in New Orleans; drowned and stirred with pinto beans in El Paso; hung on a cross like a drunken dog in Denver; cut in half and toasted in Kalamazoo; found cancerous on a fishing boat off the coast of Mexico; tricked and caged at Daytona Beach; kicked by a nursery maid in a green and white ghingham dress, waiting table at a North Carolina bus stop; rubbed in olive oil and goat-piss by a chess-playing hooker in the East Village; painted red, white, and blue by an act of Congress; torpedoed by a dyed blonde with the biggest ass in Kansas; gutted and gored by a woman with the soul of a bull in East Lansing; petrified by a girl with tiny fingers, she had one tooth missing, upper front, and pumped gas in Mesa; the motion of the human heart goes on and on and on and on for a while.

voices

1.

my moustache is pasted-on and my wig and my eyebrows and even my eyes... then something stuns me... the lampshades swing, I hear simmering and magic and incredible sounds.

2.

I know I went mad, almost as an act of theory: the lost are found the sick are healthy the non-creators are the creators.

3.

even if I were a comfortable, domesticated sophisticate I could never drink the blood of the masses and call it wine.

4.

why did I have to lift that pretty girl's car by the bumper because the jack got stuck? I couldn't straighten up and they took me away like a pretzel and straightened me but I still couldn't move... it was the hospital's fault, the doctors' fault. then those two boys dropped me on the way to the x-ray room...I hollered LAWSUIT! but I guess it was that girl's fault—

she shouldn't have shown me all that leg and haunch.

5.

listen, Isten, SPACESHIT LOVE, TORN IN DRIP OUT, SPACESHIT LOVE, LOVE, KILL, LEARN TO USE A WEAPON; OPEN AREAS, REALIZE, BE DIVINE, SPACESHIT LOVE, IT'S approaching...

6.

I did a take-off of E.H. in my first novel, been living green ever since. I'm probably the best journalist America ever had, I can bullshit on any subject, and that counts for something. you admire me much more than the first man you meet on the street in the morning, basically, though, it's a fact, I've lived during an era of no writers at all, so I've earned a position because nothing else appeared. o.k., it's a bad age. I suppose I am number one. But it's hardly the same as when we had giants turning us on. forget it: I'm living green.

7.

I was a bad writer, I killed N.C. because I made more of him than there was, and then the *ins* made more of my book than there was. there have been only 3 bad writers in acceptable American literature. Drieser, of course, was the worst. then we had Thomas Wolfe, and then we had me. but when I try to choose between me and Wolfe, I've got to take Wolfe. I mean as the worst. I like to think of what Capote, another bad writer said

about me: he just typewrites. sometimes even bad writers tell the truth.

8.

my problem, like most, is artistic preciousness. I exist, full of french fries and glory and then I look around, see the Art-form, pop into it and tell them how fine I am and what I think. this is the same tiresomeness that has almost destroyed art for centuries. I made a record once of myself reading my poems to a lion at the zoo. he really roared, as if he were in pain, all the poets play this record and laugh when they get drunk.

9.

remember my novel about jail where photos of heroes and lovers floated against the rock walls?
I got famous. I came over here.
I got hot for the black motorcyclists of Valley West and Bakersfield who took my fame and jammed it and made me suck their loneliness and dementia and their dream of Cadillac white soul and Cadillac black soul and they creamed up my ass and into my nostrils and into my ears while I said, Communism, Communism and they grinned and knew I didn't mean it.

straight on through

I am
hung by a nail
the sun melts my heart
I am
cousin to the snake
and am afraid of waterfalls
I am
afraid of women and green walls

the police stop me and tell me while the trees whirl in the wind (I am hungover) that my muffler is shot and my windshield wiper doesn't work and the lens on my back-up light is broken. I don't have a back-up light, sign the citation and am thankful, inside, that they don't take me in for what I'm thinking

sadness drips like water beads in a half-poisoned well, I know that my chances have narrowed down to almost nothing—
I'm like a bug in the bathroom when you flick on the lightswitch at 3 a.m.

love, finally, with a washrag stuffed down its throat, pictures of joy turned to paperclips, you know you know you know. once you understand this process (what you must understand is that most things just won't work, so you don't try to save

them, and by the time you learn this you've run out of years)—once you understand this process you need only get burned 2 or 3 more times before they stuff you away, and it's good to know thatstop being so fucking quick with your rejoinders and relax you're about finished, too, just like I am. no shame there. I can walk into any bar and order a scotch and water, and put my hand around the glass, they don't know, they won't know, either about you or about me, they'll talk about football and the weather and the energy crisis, and our hands will reach up the mirror watching the hands and we'll drink it down-

Jane, Barbara, Frances, Linda, Liza, Stella, father's brown leather slipper upsidedown in the bathroom, nameless dead dogs, tomorrow's newspaper, water boiling out of the radiator on a Thursday afternoon, burning your arm halfway to the elbow, and not even being angry at the pain, grinning for the winners grinning for the guy who fucked your girl while you were drunk or away and grinning for the girl who let him. the roses howl in the dim wind, we have said the necessary things, and getting out is next, only I'd like

to say no matter what they've said, I've never been mad at anything.

dreamlessly

old grey-haired waitresses in cafes at night have given it up, and as I walk down sidewalks of light and look into windows of nursing homes I can see that it is no longer with them. I see people sitting on park benches and I can see by the way they sit and look that it is gone.

I see people driving cars and I see by the way they drive their cars that they neither love nor are loved nor do they consider sex. it is all forgotten like an old movie.

I see people in department stores and supermarkets walking down aisles buying things and I can see by the way their clothing fits them and by the way they walk and by their faces and their eyes that they care for nothing and that nothing cares for them.

I can see a hundred people a day who have given up entirely.

if I go to a racetrack or a sporting event I can see thousands that feel for nothing or no one and get no feeling back.

everywhere I see those who crave nothing but food, shelter, and clothing; they concentrate on that, dreamlessly.

I do not understand why these people do not vanish
I do not understand why these people do not expire
why the clouds
do not murder them
or why the dogs
do not murder them
or why the flowers and the children
do not murder them,
I do not understand.

I suppose they are murdered yet I can't adjust to the fact of them because they are so many.

each day, each night, there are more of them in the subways and in the buildings and in the parks

they feel no terror at not loving or at not being loved so many many many of my fellow creatures.

palm leaves

at exactly 12:00 midnight 1973-74 Los Angeles it began to rain on the palm leaves outside my window the horns and firecrackers went off and it thundered.

I'd gone to bed at 9 p.m. turned out the lights pulled up the covers—their gaiety, their happiness, their screams, their paper hats, their automobiles, their women, their amateur drunks...

New Year's Eve always terrifies me

life knows nothing of years.

now the horns have stopped and the firecrackers and the thunder... it's all over in five minutes... all I hear is the rain on the palm leaves, and I think, I will never understand men, but I have lived it through.

About the Author

CHARLES BUKOWSKI is one of America's best-known contemporary writers of poetry and prose, and, many would claim, its most influential and imitated poet. He was born in Andernach, Germany, to an American soldier father and a German mother in 1920, and brought to the United States at the age of three. He was raised in Los Angeles and lived there for fifty years. He published his first story in 1944 when he was twenty-four and began writing poetry at the age of thirty-five. He died in San Pedro, California, on March 9, 1994, at the age of seventy-three, shortly after completing his last novel, *Pulp* (1994).

During his lifetime he published more than forty-five books of poetry and prose, including the novels *Post Office* (1971), *Factotum* (1975), *Women* (1978), *Ham on Rye* (1982), and *Hollywood* (1989). Among his most recent books are the posthumous editions of *What Matters Most Is How Well You Walk Through the Fire* (1999), *Open All Night: New Poems* (2000), *Beerspit Night and Cursing: The Correspondence of Charles Bukowski and Sheri Martinelli*, 1960-1967 (2001), and *Night Torn Mad with Footsteps: New Poems* (2001).

All of his books have now been published in translation in more than a dozen languages and his worldwide popularity remains undiminished. In the years to come Ecco will publish additional volumes of previously uncollected poetry and letters.

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