

# Love is a Dog from Hell

**Charles Bukowski**



**LOVE IS A DOG FROM HELL**

**CHARLES BUKOWSKI**

**Poems 1974-1977**

 HarperCollins e-books

*to Carl Weissner*

## *table of contents*

### ONE

Sandra

you

the 6 foot goddess

I've seen too many glazed-eyed bums

sexpot

sweet music

numb your ass and your brain and your heart—

one of the hottest

ashes

fuck

me

another bed

trapped

tonight

the escape

the drill

texan

the spider

the end of a short affair

moaning and groaning

an almost made up poem

blue cheese and chili peppers

problems about the other woman

T.M.

Bee's 5th

103 degrees

pacific telephone

225 pounds

turnabout

one for old snaggle-tooth

communion

trying to get even:

Chicago

quiet clean girls in gingham dresses...

we will taste the islands and the sea

**TWO**

this poet

winter

what they want

Iron Mike

guru

the professors

for Al—

how to be a great writer

the price

alone with everybody

the 2nd novel



Chopin Bukowski

gloomy lady

cockroach

who in the hell is Tom Jones?

defeat

traffic signals

462-0614

photographs

social

one to the breastplate

the worst and the best

coupons

luck

dog

trench warfare

the night I fucked my alarm clock

when I think of myself dead

Christmas eve, alone

there once was a woman who put her head into an oven

beds, toilets, you and me—

this then—

imagination and reality

stolen

the meek have inherited

the insane always loved me

Big Max

trapped

it's the way you play the game

on the continent

12:18 a.m.

yellow cab

how come you're not unlisted?

weather report

clean old man

something

a plate glass window

junkies

99 to one

the crunch

a horse with greenblue eyes

**THREE**

Scarlet

red up and down

like a flower in the rain

light brown

huge ear rings

she came out of the bathroom

a killer

longshot

the promise

waving and waving goodbye

liberty

don't touch the girls

dark shades

prayer in bad weather

melancholia

a stethoscope case

eat your heart out

the retreat

I made a mistake

## **FOUR**

girls in pantyhose

up your yellow river

artists:

I have shit stains in my underwear too

Hawley's leaving town

an unkind poem

the bee

the most

ah...

the girl on the bus stop bench

I'm getting back to where I was

a lovely couple

the strangest sight you ever did see—

in a neighborhood of murder

private first class

love is a dog from hell

my groupie

now, if you were teaching creative writing

the good life

the Greek

my comrades

soul

a change of habit

\$\$\$\$\$\$

sitting in a sandwich joint

doom and siesta time

as crazy as I ever was

sex

dead now

twins

the place didn't look bad

the little girls

rain or shine

cold plums

girls coming home

some picnic

bedpans

the good loser

an art

the girls at the green hotel

a good one

shit time

[madness](#)

[a 56 year old poem](#)

[the beautiful young girl walking past the graveyard—](#)

[beer](#)

[artist](#)

[my old man](#)

[fear](#)

[little tigers everywhere](#)

[after the reading:](#)

[about cranes](#)

[a gold pocket watch](#)

[beach trip](#)

[one for the shoeshine man](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Other books by Charles Bukowski](#)

[Cover](#)

[Copyright](#)

## About the Publisher



*one more creature*  
*dizzy with love*

## Sandra

is the slim tall ear-ringed  
bedroom damsel dressed in a long gown

she's always high in heels  
spirit  
pills  
booze

Sandra leans out of her chair  
*leans*  
toward  
Glendale

I wait for her head to hit the closet doorknob  
as she attempts to light  
a new cigarette on an almost burnt-out one

at 32 she likes young neat  
unscratched boys with faces like the bottoms of new saucers

she has proclaimed as much to me  
has brought her prizes  
over for me to view: silent blonde zeros of young flesh  
who  
a) sit  
b) stand  
c) talk  
at her command

sometimes she brings one sometimes two sometimes three for me to

view

Sandra looks very good in long gowns  
Sandra could probably break a man's heart

I hope she finds one.

you

you're a beast, she said your big white belly and those hairy feet.  
you never cut your nails and you have fat hands paws like a cat  
your bright red nose and the biggest balls I've ever seen.  
you shoot sperm like a whale shoots water out of the hole in its back.

beast beast beast, she kissed me,  
what do you want for breakfast?

## *the 6 foot goddess*

I'm big  
I suppose that's why my women always seem small  
but this 6 foot goddess who deals in real estate and art  
and flies from Texas to see me  
and I fly to Texas to see her— well, there's plenty of her to grab hold  
of and I grab hold of it of her,  
I yank her head back by the hair, I'm real macho, I suck on her upper  
lip her cunt  
her soul  
I mount her and tell her, "I'm going to shoot white hot juice into you. I  
didn't fly all the way to Galveston to play chess."

later we lay locked like human vines my left arm under her pillow my  
right arm over her side I grip both of her hands, and my chest belly  
balls  
cock  
tangle into her and through us  
in the dark  
pass rays  
back and forth back and forth until I fall away and we sleep.

she's wild  
but kind  
my 6 foot goddess makes me laugh the laughter of the mutilated who  
still need love,  
and her blessed eyes run deep into her head like mountain springs far  
in  
and  
cool and good.

she has saved me from everything that is not here.

*I've seen too many glazed-eyed bums sitting  
under a bridge drinking cheap wine*

you sit on the couch with me  
tonight  
new woman.

have you seen the animal-eater documentaries?

they show death.

and now I wonder which animal of us will eat the other first physically  
and last  
spiritually?

we consume animals and then one of us consumes the other, my love.

meanwhile  
I'd prefer you go first the first way

since if past performance charts mean anything I'll surely go first the  
last way.

## sexpot

“you know,” she said, “you were at the bar so you didn’t see but I danced with this guy.  
we danced and we danced close.  
but I didn’t go home with him because he knew I was with you.”

“thanks a bunch,” I said.

she was always thinking of sex.  
she carried it around with her like something in a paper bag.  
such energy.  
she never forgot.  
she stared at every man available in morning cafes over bacon and eggs or later  
over a noon sandwich or a steak dinner.

“I’ve modeled myself after Marilyn Monroe,” she told me.

“she’s always running off to some local disco to dance with a baboon,” a friend once told me, “I’m amazed that you’ve stood for it as long as you have.”  
she’d vanish at racetracks then come back and say, “three men offered to buy me a drink.”

or I’d lose her in the parking lot and I’d look up and she’d be walking along with a strange man.  
“well, he came from this direction and I came from that and we kind of walked together. I didn’t want to hurt his feelings.”

she said that I was a very jealous man.

one day she just fell down  
inside of her sexual organs and vanished.

it was like an alarm clock dropping into the Grand Canyon.  
it banged and rattled and rang and rang  
but I could no longer see or hear it.

I'm feeling much better now.  
I've taken up tap-dancing and I wear a black felt hat pulled down low  
over my right  
eye.



## *sweet music*

it beats love because there aren't any wounds: in the morning she turns on the radio, Brahms or Ives or Stravinsky or Mozart. she boils the eggs counting the seconds out loud: 56, 57, 58...she peels the eggs, brings them to me in bed. after breakfast it's the same chair and listen to the classical music. she's on her first glass of scotch and her third cigarette. I tell her I must go to the racetrack. she's been here about 2 nights and 2 days. "when will I see you again?" I ask. she suggests that might be up to me. I nod and Mozart plays.

## numb your ass and your brain and your heart—

I was coming off an affair that had gone badly.  
frankly, I was sliding down into a pit really feeling shitty and low  
when I lucked into this lady with a large bed covered with a jeweled  
canopy plus  
wine, champagne, smokes, pills and color tv.  
we stayed in bed and  
drank wine, champagne, smoked, popped pills by the dozens  
as I (feeling shitty and low) tried to get over this affair that had gone  
bad.  
I watched the tv trying to dull my senses, but the thing that really  
helped was this very long  
(specially written for tv) drama about spies— American spies and  
Russian spies, and they were all so clever and cool— even their  
children didn't know their wives didn't know, and in a way  
they hardly knew— and I found out about counter-spies, double-spies:  
guys who worked both sides, and then this one who was a double-spy  
turned into a triple-spy, it  
got nicely confusing—  
I don't even think the guy who wrote the script knew what was  
happening— it went on for hours!  
seaplanes rammed into icebergs, a priest in Madison, Wisc. murdered  
his brother, a block of ice was shipped in a casket to Peru in lieu of the  
world's largest diamond, and blondes walked in and out of rooms  
eating creampuffs and walnuts;  
the triple-spy turned into a quadruple-spy and everybody loved  
everybody  
and it went on and on  
and the hours passed and  
it all finally vanished like a paperclip in a bag of trash and I  
reached over and flicked off the set and slept well for the first time in a

week and a half.

## *one of the hottest*

she wore a platinum blond wig and her face was rouged and powdered and she put the lipstick on making a huge painted mouth and her neck was wrinkled but she still had the ass of a young girl and the legs were good.

she wore blue panties and I got them off raised her dress, and with the TV flickering I took her standing up.

as we struggled around the room (I'm fucking the grave, I thought, I'm bringing the dead back to life, marvelous so marvelous

like eating cold olives at 3 a.m.

with half the town on fire) I came.

you boys can keep your virgins give me hot old women in high heels with asses that forgot to get old.

of course, you leave afterwards or get very drunk

which is the same

thing.

we drank wine for hours and watched tv and when we went to bed.

to sleep it off.

she left her teeth in all night long.

## ashes

I got his ashes, she said, and I took them out to sea and I scattered his ashes and they didn't even look like ashes and the urn was weighted with green and blue pebbles...

he didn't leave you any of his millions?

nothing, she said.

after having to eat all those breakfasts and lunches and dinners with him? after listening to all his bullshit?

he was a brilliant man.

you know what I mean.

anyhow, I got the ashes. and you fucked my sisters.

I never fucked your sisters.

yes, you did.

I fucked one of them.

which one?

the lesbian, I said, she bought me dinner and drinks, I had very little choice.

I'm going, she said.

don't forget your bottle.

she went in and got it.

there's so little to you, she said, that when you die and they burn you they'll have to add almost all green and blue pebbles.

all right, I said.

I'll see you in 6 months! she screamed and slammed the door.

well, I thought, I guess in order to get rid of her I'll have to fuck her other sister. I walked into the bedroom and started looking for phone numbers. all I remembered was that she lived in San Mateo and had a very good job.

*fuck*

she pulled her dress off over her head and I saw the panties indented  
somewhat into the crotch.

it's only human.  
now we've got to do it.  
I've got to do it after all that bluff.  
it's like a party— two trapped  
idiots.

under the sheets after I have snapped off the light her panties are still  
on. she expects an opening performance.  
I can't blame her. but wonder why she's here with me? where are the  
other guys? how can you be lucky? having someone the others have  
abandoned?

we didn't have to do it yet we had to do it.  
it was something like establishing new credibility with the income tax  
man. I get the panties off. I decide not to tongue her. even then  
I'm thinking about after it's over.

we'll sleep together tonight  
trying to fit ourselves inside the wallpaper.

I try, fail, notice the hair on her head  
mostly notice the hair on her  
head  
and a glimpse of nostrils  
piglike

I try it

again.



me

women don't know how to love, she told me.  
you know how to love but women just want to leech.  
I know this because I'm a woman.

hahaha, I laughed.

so don't worry about your breakup with Susan  
because she'll just leech onto somebody else.

we talked a while longer then I said goodbye hungup  
went into the crapper and took a good beershit mainly thinking, well,  
I'm still alive and have the ability to expell wastes from my body.  
and poems.  
and as long as that's happening I have the ability to handle betrayal  
loneliness  
hangnail  
clap  
and the economic reports in the financial section.

with that  
I stood up  
wiped  
flushed  
then thought: it's true:  
I know how to love.

I pulled up my pants and walked into the other room.

## *another bed*

another bed  
another woman

more curtains  
another bathroom another kitchen

other eyes  
other hair  
other  
feet and toes.

everybody's looking.  
the eternal search.

you stay in bed she gets dressed for work and you wonder what  
happened to the last one and the one before that...  
it's all so comfortable— this love-making this sleeping together the  
gentle kindness...

after she leaves you get up and use her bathroom,  
it's all so intimate and so strange.  
you go back to bed and sleep another hour.

when you leave it's with sadness but you'll see her again whether it  
works or not.  
you drive down to the shore and sit in your car. it's almost noon.

—another bed, other ears, other ear rings, other mouths, other slippers,  
other dresses  
colors, doors, phone numbers.

you were once strong enough to live alone.  
for a man nearing sixty you should be more sensible.

you start the car and shift, thinking, I'll phone Jeanie when I get in, I  
haven't seen her since Friday.

## trapped

don't undress my love you might find a mannequin; don't undress the  
mannequin you might find my love.

she's long ago forgotten me.

she's trying on a new hat  
and looks more the coquette  
than ever.

she is a  
child  
and a mannequin and  
death.

I can't hate that.

she didn't do anything  
unusual.

I only wanted her to.

## tonight

“your poems about the girls will still be around 50 years from now  
when the girls are gone,”  
my editor phones me.

dear editor:  
the girls appear to be gone already.

I know what you mean

but give me one truly alive woman tonight  
walking across the floor toward me

and you can have all the poems

the good ones  
the bad ones  
or any that I might write after this one.

I know what you mean.

do you know what I mean?

## *the escape*

escape from the black widow spider is a miracle as great as art.  
what a web she can weave slowly drawing you to her she'll embrace  
you then when she's satisfied she'll kill you still in her embrace and  
suck the blood from you.

I escaped my black widow because she had too many males in her web  
and while she was embracing one and then the other and then another  
I worked free  
got out  
to where I was before.

she'll miss me— not my love  
but the taste of my blood, but she's good, she'll find other blood;  
she's so good that I almost miss my death, but not quite; I've escaped.  
I view the other webs.

## *the drill*

our marriage book, it says.  
I look through it.  
they lasted ten years.  
they were young once.  
now I sleep in her bed.  
he phones her:  
“I want my drill back.  
have it ready.  
I’ll pick the children up at ten.”  
when he arrives he waits outside the door.  
his children leave with him.  
she comes back to bed and I stretch a leg out place it against hers.  
I was young once too.  
human relationships simply aren’t durable.  
I think back to the women in my life.  
they seem non-existent.

“did he get his drill?” I ask.

“yes, he got his drill.”

I wonder if I’ll ever have to come back for my bermuda shorts and my record album by The Academy of St. Martin in the Fields? I suppose I will.

## texan

she's from Texas and weighs 103 pounds  
and stands before the mirror combing oceans of reddish hair  
which falls all the way down her back to her ass.  
the hair is magic and shoots sparks as I lay on the bed and watch her  
combing her hair. she's like something out of the movies but she's  
actually here. we make love at least once a day and she can make me  
laugh any time she cares to. Texas women are always healthy, and  
besides that she's cleaned my refrigerator, my sink, the bathroom, and  
she cooks and feeds me healthy foods and washes the dishes too.

“Hank,” she told me, holding up a can of grapefruit juice, “this is the  
best of them all.”  
it says: Texas unsweetened PINK grapefruit juice.

she looks like Katherine Hepburn looked when she was in high school,  
and I watch those 103 pounds  
combing a yard and some change of reddish hair  
before the mirror  
and I feel her inside of my wrists and at the backs of my eyes, and the  
toes and legs and belly of me feel her and the other part too, and all of  
Los Angeles falls down and weeps for joy, the walls of the love parlors  
shake— the ocean rushes in and she turns to me and says, “damn this  
hair!”  
and I say,  
“yes.”



## *the spider*

then there was the time in New Orleans  
I was living with a fat woman, Marie, in the French Quarter and I got  
very sick.  
while she was at work I got down on my knees in the kitchen  
that afternoon and  
prayed. I was not a religious man  
but it was a very dark afternoon and I prayed:  
“Dear God: if you will let me live, I promise You I’ll never take  
another drink.”  
I kneeled there and it was just like a movie— as I finished praying the  
clouds parted and the sun came through the curtains and fell upon me.  
then I got up and took a crap.  
there was a big spider in Marie’s bathroom but I crapped anyhow.  
an hour later I began feeling much better. I took a walk around the  
Quarter and smiled at people.  
I stopped at the grocery and got a couple of 6 packs for Marie.  
I began feeling so good that an hour later I sat in the kitchen and  
opened one of the beers.  
I drank that and then another one and then I went in and  
killed the spider.  
when Marie got home from work I gave her a big kiss, then sat in the  
kitchen and talked as she cooked dinner.  
she asked me what had happened that day and I told her I had killed  
the spider. she didn’t get angry. she was a good sort.

## *the end of a short affair*

I tried it standing up this time.  
it doesn't usually work.  
this time it seemed to...

she kept saying "o my God, you've got beautiful legs!"

it was all right until she took her feet off the ground and wrapped her  
legs around my middle.

"o my God, you've got beautiful legs!"

she weighed about 138  
pounds and hung there as I worked.

it was when I climaxed that I felt the pain fly straight up my spine.

I dropped her on the couch and walked around the room.  
the pain remained.

"look," I told her, "you better go. I've got  
to develop some film in my dark room."

she dressed and left and I walked into the kitchen for a glass of water. I  
got a glass full in my left hand.  
the pain ran up behind my ears and  
I dropped the glass which broke on the floor.

I got into a tub full of hot water and epsom salts.  
I just got stretched out when the phone rang.  
as I tried to straighten my back

the pain extended to my neck and arms.  
I flopped about gripped the sides of the tub got out  
with shots of green and yellow and red light flashing in my head.

the phone kept ringing.  
I picked it up.  
“hello?”

“I LOVE YOU!” she said.

“thanks,” I said.

“is that all you’ve got to say?”  
“yes.”

“eat shit!” she said and hung up.

love dries up, I thought as I walked back to the bathroom, even faster  
than sperm.

## *moaning and groaning*

she writes: you'll be moaning and groaning in your poems about how I fucked those 2 guys last week.

I know you.

she writes on to say that my vibe machine was right— she had just fucked a third guy

but she knows I don't want to hear who, why or how. she closes her letter, "Love."

rats and roaches have triumphed again.

here it comes running with a slug in its mouth, it's singing old love songs.

close the windows moan

close the doors groan.

## *an almost made up poem*

I see you drinking at a fountain with tiny  
blue hands, no, your hands are not tiny  
they are small, and the fountain is in France where you wrote me that  
last letter and  
I answered and never heard from you again.  
you used to write insane poems about  
ANGELS AND GOD, all in upper case, and you  
knew famous artists and most of them  
were your lovers, and I wrote back, it's all right, go ahead, enter their  
lives, I'm not jealous because we've never met. we got close once in  
New Orleans, one half block, but never met, never touched. so you  
went with the famous and wrote about the famous, and, of course,  
what you found out is that the famous are worried about  
their fame—not the beautiful young girl in bed with them, who gives  
them *that*, and then awakens in the morning to write upper case poems  
about ANGELS AND GOD. we know God is dead, they've told us,  
but listening to you I wasn't sure. maybe it was the upper case. you  
were one of the  
best female poets and I told the publishers, editors, "print her, print  
her, she's mad but she's magic. there's no lie in her fire." I loved you  
like a man loves a woman he never touches, only writes to, keeps little  
photographs of. I would have loved you more if I had sat in a small  
room rolling a cigarette and listened to you piss in the bathroom, but  
that didn't happen. your letters got sadder.  
your lovers betrayed you. kid, I wrote back, all lovers betray. it didn't  
help. you said  
you had a crying bench and it was by a bridge and the bridge was over  
a river and you sat on the crying bench every night and wept for the  
lovers who had hurt and forgotten you. I wrote back but never  
heard again. a friend wrote me of your suicide 3 or 4 months after it  
happened. if I had met you I would probably have been unfair to you

or you to me. it was best like this.

## *blue cheese and chili peppers*

these women are supposed to come and see me  
but they never  
do.

there's the one with the long scar along her belly.

there's the other who writes poems and phones at 3 a.m., saying, "I  
love you."

there's the one who dances with a boa constrictor  
and writes every four weeks, she'll  
come, she says.

and the 4th who claims she sleeps always  
with my latest book under her  
pillow.

I whack-off in the heat and listen to Brahms and eat blue cheese with  
chili peppers.

these are women of good mind and body, excellent in or out of bed,  
dangerous and deadly, of course— but why do they all have to live up  
north?

I know that someday they'll arrive, but two or three on the same day,  
and  
we'll sit around and talk and then they'll all leave together.

somebody else will have them and I will walk about in my floppy  
shorts smoking too many cigarettes and trying to make drama out of  
no damned progress at all.

## *problems about the other woman*

I had worked my charms on her for a couple of nights in a bar— not that we were new lovers, I had loved her for 16 months but she didn't want to come to my place "because that other woman has been there," and I said, "all right, all right, what will we do?"

she had come in from the north and was looking for a place to stay meanwhile rooming with her girlfriend, and she went to her rent-a-trailer and got out some blankets and said, "let's go to the park."

I told her she was crazy the cops would get us

but she said, "no, it's nice and foggy,"

so we went to the park

spread out the equipment and began working and here came headlights — a squad car—

she said, "hurry, get your pants on! I've got mine on!"

I said, "I can't. they're all twisted-up."

and they came with flashlights and asked what we were doing and she said, "kissing!" one of the cops looked at me and said, "I don't blame you," and after some small talk they left us alone.

but she still didn't want the bed where that woman had been,

so we ended up in a dark hot motel room sweating and kissing and working but we made it all right; but I mean, after all that suffering...

we were at my place finally that next afternoon

doing the same thing.

those weren't bad cops though that night in the park— and it's the first time I ever said that about cops,

and,

I hope,

the last time I ever have to.



## T.M.

she lived in Galveston and was into T.M.  
and I went down to visit her and we made love continually even  
though it was very warm weather  
and we took mescaline  
and we took the ferry to the island and drove 200 miles to the nearest  
racetrack.  
we both won and sat in a redneck bar— disliked and distrusted by the  
natives— and then we went to a redneck motel and came back a day or  
two later and I stayed another week painted her a couple of good  
paintings— one of a man being hanged and another of a woman being  
fucked by a wolf.  
I awakened one night and she wasn't in bed and I got up and walked  
around saying, "Gloria, Gloria, where are you?"  
it was a large place and I walked around opening door after door, and  
then I opened what looked like a closet door and there she was on her  
knees surrounded by photographs of 7 or 8 men  
heads shaved  
most of them wearing rimless spectacles.  
there was a small candle burning and I said, "oh, I'm sorry."  
Gloria was dressed in a kimono with flying eagles on the back of it.  
I closed the door and went back to bed.  
she came out in 15 minutes.  
we began kissing,  
her large tongue sliding in and out of my  
mouth.  
she was a large healthy Texas girl.  
"listen, Gloria," I finally managed to say, "I need a night off."

the next day she drove me to the airport.  
I promised to write. she promised to write.  
neither of us has written.

## Bee's 5th

I heard it first while screwing a blonde who had the biggest box in Scranton.

I listened to it again as I wrote a letter to my mother asking for 5,000 dollars and she mailed back 3 bottle tops and the stems of grandpop's forefingers.

The 5th will kill you in the grass or at the track, the kitten said, walking across the popinjay rug.

if the 5th don't kill you the tenth will,  
said the Caliente hooker.  
as they ran up the beautiful catsup red flag 93 thieves wept in the purple dust.

the 5th is like an ant in a breakfastnook full of swaggersticks and june bugs  
sucking  
dawn's orange juice coming.

and I took the 3 bottle tops from my mother and  
ate them  
wrapped in pages from Cosmopolitan  
magazine.

but I *am* tired of the 5th  
and I told this to a woman in Ohio once. I  
had just packed coal up 3 flights of stairs  
I was drunk and  
dizzy, and she said:

how can you say you don't care for something greater than you'll ever be?

and I said:

that's easy.

and she sat in a green chair and I sat in a red chair and after that we never made love again.

## 103 degrees

she cut my toenails the night before, and in the morning she said, “I think I’ll just lay here all day.”

which meant she wasn’t going to work.

she was at my apartment—which meant another day and another night.

she was a good person

but she had just told me that she wanted to have a child, wanted marriage, and it was 103 degrees outside.

when I thought of *another* child and *another* marriage I really began to feel bad.

I had resigned myself to dying alone in a small room— now she was trying to reshape my master plan.

besides she always slammed my car door too loud and ate with her head too close to the table.

this day we had gone to the post office, a department store and then to a sandwich place for lunch.

I already felt married. driving back in I almost ran into a Cadillac.

“let’s get drunk,” I said.

“no, no,” she answered, “it’s too early.”

and then she slammed the car door.

it was still 103 degrees.

when I opened my mail I found my auto insurance company wanted \$76 more.

suddenly she ran into the room and screamed, “LOOK, I’M TURNING RED! ALL BLOTCHY! WHAT’LL I DO!”

“take a bath,” I told her.

I dialed the insurance company long distance and demanded to know why.

she began screaming and moaning from the bathtub and I couldn’t hear and I said, “just a

moment, please!”

I covered the phone and screamed at her in the bathtub: “LOOK! I’M

ON LONG DISTANCE! HOLD IT DOWN, FOR CHRIST'S  
SAKE!"

the insurance people still maintained that I owed them \$76 and would  
send me a letter explaining why.

I hung up and stretched out on the bed.

I was already married, I felt married.

she came out of the bathroom and said, "can I stretch out beside you?"  
and I said, "o.k."

in ten minutes her color was normal.

It was because she had taken a niacin tablet.

she remembered that it happened every time.

we stretched out there sweating: nerves. nobody has soul enough to  
overcome nerves.

but I couldn't tell her that.

she wanted her baby.

what the fuck.

## *pacific telephone*

you go for these wenches, she said, you go for these whores, I'll bore you.

I don't want to be shit on anymore, I said,  
relax.

when I drink, she said, it hurts my bladder, it burns.

I'll do the drinking, I said.

you're waiting for the phone to ring, she said,  
you keep looking at the phone.  
if one of those wenches phones you'll run right out of here.

I can't promise you anything, I said.

then—just like that—the phone rang.

this is Madge, said the phone. I've got to see you right away.

oh, I said.

I'm in a jam, she continued, I need ten bucks—fast.

I'll be right over, I said, and hung up.

she looked at me. it was a wench, she said, your whole face lit up.  
what the hell's the matter with you?

listen, I said, I've got to leave.  
you stay here. I'll be right back.

I'm going, she said. I love you but you're crazy, you're doomed.

she got her purse and slammed the door.

it's probably some deeply-rooted childhood fuckup that makes me  
vulnerable, I thought.

then I left my place and got into my volks.  
I drove north up Western with the radio on.  
there were whores walking up and down both sides of the street and  
Madge looked more vicious than any of them.

## 225 pounds

we were in bed and  
she started to fight: “you son of a bitch! you just wait a minute, I’ll get you!”

I began laughing:  
“what’s the matter? what’s the matter?”

“you son of a bitch!” she screamed.

I held her hands as she squirmed.

she was a couple of decades younger than I a health food freak.  
she was very strong.

“you son of a bitch! I’ll get you!”  
she screamed.

I rolled on top of her with my 225 pounds and just layed it there on her.

“uugg, oooo, my God, that’s not *fair*, oooo, my God!”

I rolled off and walked into the other room and sat on the couch.

“I’ll get you, bastard,” she said, “you just wait!”

“just don’t bite it off,” I said, “or you’ll make a half dozen women very unhappy.”



she climbed up on the headboard of my bed (it did have a flat though narrow surface)  
and sat perched there watching the news on tv.  
the tv faced the bedroom and it illuminated her as she sat up there on the headboard.

“I thought you were sane,” I said, “but you’re just as crazy as the rest of them.”

“be quiet,” she said, “I want to watch the news!”

“look,” I said, “I’ll...”

“SHUSH!” she said.

and there she was up on the headboard of my bed really watching the news. I accepted her that way.

## turnabout

she drives into the parking lot while I am leaning up against the fender of my car.

she's drunk and her eyes are wet with tears: "you son of a bitch, you fucked me when you didn't want to. you told me to keep phoning you, you told me to move closer into town, then you told me to leave you alone."

it's all quite dramatic and I enjoy it.

"sure, well, what do you want?"

"I want to talk to you, I want to go to your place and talk to you..."

"I'm with somebody now. she's in getting a sandwich."

"I want to talk to you...it takes a while to get over things. I need more time."

"sure. wait until she comes out. we're not inhuman. we'll all have a drink together."

"shit," she says, "oh shit!"

she jumps into her car and drives off.

the other one comes out: "who was that?"

"an ex-friend."

now *she's* gone and I'm sitting here drunk and my eyes seem wet with tears.

it's very quiet and I feel like I have a spear rammed into the center of my gut.

I walk to the bathroom and puke.

mercy, I think, doesn't the human race know anything about mercy?

## *one for old snaggle-tooth*

I know a woman who keeps buying puzzles Chinese  
puzzles  
blocks  
wires  
pieces that finally fit into some order.  
she works it out mathematically she solves all her puzzles  
lives down by the sea puts sugar out for the ants and believes  
ultimately  
in a better world.  
her hair is white she seldom combs it her teeth are snagged and she  
wears loose shapeless coveralls over a body most women would wish  
they had.  
for many years she irritated me with what I considered her  
eccentricities— like soaking eggshells in water (to feed the plants so  
that they'd get calcium).  
but finally when I think of her life  
and compare it to other lives more dazzling, original and beautiful  
I realize that she has hurt fewer  
people than anybody I know (and by hurt I simply mean hurt).  
she has had some terrible times, times when maybe I should have  
helped her more for she is the mother of my only child  
and we were once great lovers, but she has come through like I said  
she has hurt fewer people than anybody I know, and if you look at it  
like that, well,  
she has created a better world.  
she has won.

Frances, this poem is for you.

## communion

horses running with her miles away laughing with a fool

Bach and the hydrogen bomb and her miles away laughing with a fool

the banking system bumper jacks gondolas in Venice and her miles  
away laughing with a fool

you've never quite seen a stairway before (each step looking at you  
separately) and outside the newsboy looking immortal

as the cars go by under a sun like an enemy and you wonder why it's  
so hard to go crazy— if you're not already crazy

until now

you've never seen a  
stairway that looked like a stairway  
a doorknob that looked like a doorknob  
and sounds like these sounds

and when the spider comes out and looks at you finally  
you don't hate it finally  
with her miles away laughing with a fool.

## *trying to get even:*

we'd had any number of joints and some beer and I was on the bed stretched out and she said, "look, I've had 3 abortions in a row, real fast, and I'm sick of abortions, I don't want you to stick that thing in me!"

it was sticking up there and we were both looking at it.

"ah, come on," I said, "my girlfriend fucked 2 different guys this week and I'm trying to get even."

"don't get me involved in your domestic horseshit! now what I want you to do is to BEAT that thing OFF while I WATCH!

I want to WATCH while you beat that thing OFF! I want to see it shoot JUICE!"

"o.k. get your face closer."

she got it closer and I spit on my palm and began working.

it got bigger. just before I was ready I stopped, I held it at the bottom stretching it,  
the head throbbed purple and shiny.

"oooh," she said.

she ducked her mouth over it, sucked at it and pulled away.

"finish it off," I said.

"no!"

I whacked away and then stopped again at the last moment and held it

at the bottom and waved it all around the bedroom.

she eyed it  
fell upon it again sucked  
and pulled away.

we alternated the process back and forth

again and again.

finally I just pulled her off the chair  
onto the bed  
rolled on top of her stuck it in  
worked it  
worked it  
and came.

when she walked back out of the bathroom she said, “you son of a bitch, I love you, I’ve loved you for a long time.  
when I get back to Santa Barbara I’m going to write you. I’m living with this guy but I hate him, I don’t even know what I’m doing with him.”

“o.k.,” I said, “but you’re up now. can you get me a glass of water? I’m dry.”  
she walked into the kitchen and I heard her remark that all my drinking glasses were dirty.

I told her to use a coffee cup. I  
heard the water running and I thought, one more fuck I’ll be even  
and I can be in love with my girlfriend again— that is  
if she hasn’t slipped in an extra  
and she probably  
has.

## Chicago

“I’ve made it,” she said, “I’ve come through.” she had on new boots, pants and a white sweater. “I know what I want now.” she was from Chicago and had settled in L.A.’s Fairfax district.

“you promised me champagne,”  
she said.  
“I was drunk when I phoned. how about a beer?”  
“no, pass me your joint.”  
she inhaled, let it out: “this isn’t very good stuff.”  
she handed it back.

“there’s a difference,” I said, “between making it and simply becoming hard.”

“you like my boots?”  
“yes, very nice.”  
“listen, I’ve got to go. can I use your bathroom?”  
“sure.”

when she came out she had on a large lipstick mouth. I hadn’t seen one of those since I was a boy.  
I kissed her in the doorway feeling the lipstick rub off on my lips.

“goodbye,” she said.  
“goodbye,” I said.

she went up the walk toward her car.  
I closed the door.  
she knew what she wanted and it wasn’t me.  
I know more women like that than any other kind.



## *quiet clean girls in gingham dresses...*

all I've ever known are whores, ex-prostitutes, madwomen. I see men with quiet, gentle women—I see them in the supermarkets, I see them walking down the streets together, I see them in their apartments: people at peace, living together. I know that their peace is only partial, but there is peace, often hours and days of peace.

all I've ever known are pill freaks, alcoholics, whores, ex—prostitutes, madwomen.

when one leaves  
another arrives  
worse than her predecessor.

I see so many men with quiet clean girls in gingham dresses  
girls with faces that are not wolverine or predatory.

“don't ever bring a whore around,” I tell my few friends, “I'll fall in love with her.”

“you couldn't stand a good woman, Bukowski.”

I need a good woman. I need a good woman more than I need this typewriter, more than I need my automobile, more than I need Mozart; I need a good woman so badly that I can taste her in the air, I can feel her at my fingertips, I can see sidewalks built for her feet to walk upon,

I can see pillows for her head, I can feel my waiting laughter,

I can see her petting a cat,

I can see her sleeping,

I can see her slippers on the floor.

I know that she exists  
but where is she upon this earth as the whores keep finding me?

## *we will taste the islands and the sea*

I know that some night  
in some bedroom  
soon  
my fingers will  
rift  
through  
soft clean  
hair

songs such as no radio  
plays

all sadness, grinning  
into flow.

*me, and  
that old woman:  
sorrow*

this  
poet

this poet he'd been drinking 2 or 3 days and he walked out on the stage and looked at that audience and he just knew he was going to do it. there was a grand piano on stage and he walked over and lifted the lid and vomited inside the piano. then he closed the lid and gave his reading.

they had to remove the strings from the piano and wash out the insides and restring it.

I can unders tand why they never invited him back. but to pass the word on to other universities that he was a poet who liked to vomit into grand pianos was unfair.

they never considered the quality of his reading. I know this poet: he's just like the rest of us: he'll vomit anywhere for money.

## winter

big sloppy wounded dog hit by a car and walking toward the curbing  
making enormous sounds  
your body curled red blowing out of ass and mouth.

I stare at him and drive on  
for how would it look for me to be holding a dying dog on a curbing in  
Arcadia, blood seeping into my shirt and pants and shorts and socks  
and shoes? it would just look dumb.  
besides, I figure the 2  
horse in the first race and I wanted to hook him with the 9  
in the second. I figured the daily to pay around \$140  
so I had to let that dog die alone there just across from the shopping  
center with the ladies looking for bargains  
as the first bit of snow fell upon the Sierra Madre.

## *what they want*

Vallejo writing about loneliness while starving to death;  
Van Gogh's ear rejected by a whore;  
Rimbaud running off to Africa to look for gold and finding an  
incurable case of syphilis; Beethoven gone deaf; Pound dragged  
through the streets in a cage;  
Chatterton taking rat poison; Hemingway's brains dropping into the  
orange juice; Pascal cutting his wrists in the bathtub; Artaud locked up  
with the mad; Dostoevsky stood up against a wall; Crane jumping into  
a boat propeller; Lorca shot in the road by Spanish troops;  
Berryman jumping off a bridge; Burroughs shooting his wife; Mailer  
knifing his.  
—that's what they want: a God damned show a lit billboard in the  
middle of hell.  
that's what they want, that bunch of  
dull  
inarticulate  
safe  
dreary  
admirers of  
carnivals.

## *Iron Mike*

we talk about this film: Cagney fed this broad grapefruit faster than she could eat it and then she loved him.

“that won’t always work,” I told Iron Mike.

he grinned and said, “yeh.”

then he reached down and touched his belt.  
32 female scalps dangled there.

“me and my big Jewish cock,” he said.

then he raised his hands to indicate the size.

“o, yeh, well,”  
I said.

“they come around,” he said, “I fuck ’em, they hang around, I tell ’em, ‘it’s time to leave.’”

“you’ve got guts, Mike.”

“this one wouldn’t leave so I just got up and slapped her...she left.”

“I don’t have your nerve, Mike. they hang around washing dishes, rubbing the shit-stains out of the crapper, throwing out the old Racing Forms...”

“they’ll never get me,”  
he said,



“I’m invincible.”

look, Mike, no man is invincible.

some day

you’ll be sent mad by eyes like a child’s crayon drawing. you won’t be able to drink a glass of water or walk across a room. there will be the walls and the sound of the streets outside, and you’ll hear machineguns and mortar shells. that’ll be when you want it and can’t have it.

the teeth

are never finally the teeth of love.

## *guru*

big black beard tells me that I don't feel terror

I look at him my gut rattles gravel

I see his eyes look upward

he's strong

has dirty fingernails

and upon the walls: scabbards.

he knows things:

books

the odds the best road home

I like him but I think he lies

(I'm not sure he lies)

his wife sits in a dark **corner**

when I first met her she was the most beautiful woman

I had ever seen

now she has become

his twin

perhaps not his fault:

perhaps the thing does us all like that

yet after I leave their house I feel terror

the moon looks diseased

my hands slip on the  
steering wheel

I get my car out  
and down the hill

almost crash it into a  
blue-green parked car  
clod me forever, Beatrice

wavering poet, ha haha

dinky dog of terror.

## *the professors*

sitting with the professors we talk about Allen Tate and John Crow  
Ransom the rugs are clean and the coffeetables shine and there is talk  
of budgets and works in progress  
and there is a fireplace.  
the kitchen floor is well-waxed  
and I have just eaten dinner  
after drinking until 3 a.m.  
after reading the night before

now I'm to read again at a nearby college.  
I'm in Arkansas in January  
somebody even mentions Faulkner  
I go to the bathroom and vomit up the dinner  
when I come out they are all in their coats and overcoats waiting in the  
kitchen.  
I 'm to read in 15 minutes.  
there'll be a good crowd  
they tell me.

## for Al—

don't worry about rejections, pard, I've been rejected before.

sometimes you make a mistake, taking the wrong poem more often I  
make the mistake, writing it.

but I like a mount in every race even though the man who puts up the  
morning line

tabs it 30 to one.

I get to thinking about death more and more

senility

crutches

armchairs

writing purple poetry with a dripping pen

when the young girls with mouths like barracudas bodies like lemon  
trees bodies like clouds bodies like flashes of lightning stop knocking  
on my door.

don't worry about rejections, pard.

I have smoked 25 cigarettes tonight and you know about the beer.

the phone has only rung once: wrong number.

## *how to be a great writer*

you've got to fuck a great many women beautiful women and write a few decent love poems.

and don't worry about age and/or freshly-arrived talents.

just drink more beer more and more beer

and attend the racetrack at least once a week

and win  
if possible.

learning to win is hard— any slob can be a good loser.

and don't forget your Brahms and your Bach and your **beer**.

don't overexercise.

sleep until noon.

avoid credit cards or paying for anything on time.

remember that there isn't a piece of ass in this world worth over \$50 (in 1977).

and if you have the ability to love love yourself first but always be aware of the possibility of total defeat  
whether the reason for that defeat seems right or wrong—

an early taste of death is not necessarily a bad thing.

stay out of churches and bars and museums, and like the spider be  
patient— time is everybody's cross, plus  
exile  
defeat  
treachery

all that dross.

stay with the beer.

beer is continuous blood.

a continuous lover.

get a large typewriter and as the footsteps go up and down outside your  
window

hit that thing  
hit it hard

make it a heavyweight fight

make it the bull when he first charges in

and remember the old dogs who fought so well: Hemingway, Celine,  
Dostoevsky, Hamsun.  
if you think they didn't go crazy in tiny rooms  
just like you're doing now

without women  
without food  
without hope

then you're not ready.

drink more beer.  
there's time.  
and if there's not that's all right too.



## the price

drinking 15 dollar champagne— *Cordon Rouge*—with the hookers.

one is named Georgia and she doesn't like pantyhose: I keep helping her pull up her long dark stockings.

the other is Pam-prettier but not much soul, and we smoke and talk and I play with their legs and stick my bare foot into Georgia's open purse. it's filled with bottles of pills. I take some of the pills.

"listen," I say, "one of you has soul, the other looks. Can't I combine the 2 of you? take the soul and stick it into the looks?"

"you want me," says Pam, "it will cost you a hundred."

we drink some more and Georgia falls to the floor and can't get up.

I tell Pam that I like her earrings very much. Her hair is long and a natural red.

"I was only kidding about the hundred," she says.

"oh," I say, "what will it cost me?"

she lights her cigarette with my lighter and looks at me through the flame:

her eyes tell me.

"look," I say, "I don't think I can ever pay that price again."

she crosses her legs inhales on her cigarette

as she exhales she smiles and says, “sure you can.”

## *alone with everybody*

the flesh covers the bone and they put a mind in there and sometimes a  
soul, and the women break vases against the walls and the men drink  
too much  
and nobody finds the one  
but they keep looking crawling in and out of beds.  
flesh covers the bone and the flesh searches for more than flesh.

there's no chance at all: we are all trapped by a singular fate.

nobody ever finds the one.

the city dumps fill the junkyards fill the madhouses fill the hospitals  
fill the graveyards fill  
nothing else fills.

## the 2nd novel

they'd come around and they'd ask "you finished your 2nd novel yet?"

"no."

"whatsamatta? whatsamatta that you can't finish it?"

"hemorrhoids and insomnia."

"maybe you've lost it?"

"lost what?"

"you know."

now when they come around I tell them, "yeh. I finished it. be out in Sept."

"you *finished* it?"

"yeh."

"well, listen, I gotta go."

even the cat here in the courtyard won't come to my door anymore.

it's nice.

## *Chopin Bukowski*

this is my piano.

the phone rings and people ask, what are you doing? how about getting drunk with us?

and I say,  
I'm at my piano.

what?

I'm at my piano.

I hang up.

people need me. I fill them. if they can't see me for a while they get desperate, they get sick.

but if I see them too often I get sick. it's hard to feed without getting fed.

my piano says things back to me.

sometimes the things are scrambled and not very good.  
other times  
I get as good and lucky as Chopin.

sometimes I get out of practice out of tune. that's all right.  
I can sit down and vomit on the keys  
but it's my  
vomit.

it's better than sitting in a room with 3 or 4 people and their pianos.

this is my piano and it is better than theirs.

and they like it and they do not like it.

## *gloomy lady*

she sits up there drinking wine while her husband is at work.  
she puts quite some importance upon getting her poems published in  
the little magazines.  
she's had two or three of her slim volumes of poems done in mimeo.  
she has two or three children between the ages of 6 and 15.  
she is no longer the beautiful woman she was. she sends photos of  
herself sitting upon a rock by the ocean alone and damned.  
I could have had her once. I wonder if she thinks I could have saved  
her?

in all her poems her husband is never mentioned.  
but she does  
talk about her garden  
so we know that's there, anyhow, and maybe she fucks the rosebuds  
and finches before she writes her poems

## cockroach

the cockroach crouched against the tile while I was pissing and as I turned my head he hauled his butt into a crack.

I got the can and sprayed and sprayed and sprayed and finally the roach came out and gave me a very dirty look.

then he fell down into the bathtub and I watched him dying with a subtle pleasure because I paid the rent and he didn't.

I picked him up with some greenblue toilet paper and flushed him away. that's all there was to that, except around Hollywood and Western we have to keep doing it.

they say some day that tribe is going to inherit the earth but we're going to make them wait a few months.



## *who in the hell is Tom Jones?*

I was shackled with a 24 year old girl from New York City for two weeks—about the time of the garbage strike out there, and one night my 34 year old woman arrived and she said, “I want to see my rival.” she did and then she said, “o, you’re a cute little thing!” next I knew there was a screech of wildcats— such screaming and scratching, wounded animal moans, blood and piss...

I was drunk and in my shorts. I tried to separate them and fell, wrenched my knee. then they were through the screen door and down the walk and out in the street.

squadcars full of cops arrived. a police helicopter circled overhead.

I stood in the bathroom and grinned in the mirror.  
it’s not often at the age of 55 that such splendid things occur.  
better than the Watts riots.

the 34 year old  
came back in. she had pissed all over herself and her clothing was torn and she was followed by 2 cops who wanted to know why.

pulling up my shorts I tried to explain.

## defeat

listening to Bruckner on the radio wondering why I'm not half mad  
over the latest breakup with my latest girlfriend

wondering why I'm not driving the streets drunk  
wondering why I'm not in the bedroom in the dark  
in the grievous dark pondering  
ripped by half-thoughts.

I suppose  
that at last  
like the average man: I've known too many women and instead of  
thinking, I wonder who's fucking her now?  
I think  
she's giving some other poor son of a bitch much trouble right now.

listening to Bruckner on the radio seems so peaceful.

too many women have gone through.  
I am at last alone without being alone.

I pick up a Grumbacher paint brush and clean my fingernails with the  
hard sharp end.

I notice a wall socket.

look, I've won.

## *traffic signals*

the old folks play a game in the park overlooking the sea shoving  
markers across cement with wooden sticks.

four play, two on each side and 18 or 20 others sit in the sun and watch  
I notice this as I move toward the public facility as my car is being  
repaired.

an old cannon sits in the park rusted and useless.  
six or seven sailboats ride the sea below.

I finish my duty  
come out  
and they are still playing.

one of the women is heavily rouged wearing false eyelashes and  
smoking a cigarette.  
the men are very thin very pale  
wear wristwatches that hurt their wrists.

the other woman is very fat and giggles  
each time a score is made

some of them are my age.

they disgust me  
the way they wait for death  
with as much passion as a traffic signal.

these are the people who believe advertisements these are the people  
who buy dentures on credit these are the people who celebrate  
holidays these are the people who have grandchildren these are the

people who vote these are the people who have funerals

these are the dead the smog  
the stink in the air the lepers.

these are almost everybody finally.

seagulls are better seaweed is better dirty sand is better

if I could turn that old cannon on them  
and make it work  
I would.

they disgust me.

## 462-0614

I get many phonecalls now.  
They are all alike.  
“are you Charles Bukowski, the writer?”  
“yes,” I tell them.  
and they tell me that they understand my writing,  
and some of them are writers or want to be writers and they have dull  
and horrible jobs and they can’t face the room the apartment the walls  
that night—  
they want somebody to talk to,  
and they can’t believe that I can’t help them that I don’t know the  
words.  
they can’t believe that often now I double up in my room grab my gut  
and say  
“Jesus Jesus Jesus, not *again!*”  
they can’t believe that the loveless people the streets  
the loneliness the walls  
are mine too.  
and when I hang up the phone  
they think I have held back my secret.

I don’t write out of knowledge.  
when the phone rings I too would like to hear words that might ease  
some of this.

that’s why my number’s listed.

## photographs

they photograph you on your porch and on your couch  
and standing in the courtyard or leaning against your car

these photographers women with big asses which look better to you  
than do their eyes or their souls

—this playing at author it's real Hemingway James Joyce  
stageshit

but look—  
there are the books you've written them you haven't been to Paris but  
you've written all those books there behind you  
(and others not there, lost or stolen)

all you've got to do is look like Bukowski for the cameras  
but

you keep watching  
those  
astonishingly big asses and thinking— somebody else is getting it  
“look into my eyes,”  
they say and click their cameras and flash their cameras

and fondle their cameras Hemingway used to box or go fishing or to  
the bullfights but after they leave you jerk-off into the sheets and take  
a hot bath

they never send the photos like they promise to send the photos and  
the astonishingly big asses are gone forever  
and you've been a fine literary fellow— now alive

dead soon enough  
looking into and at their eyes and souls and more.

## social

the blue pencil of the wave shots of yellow road

a steering wheel an insane woman sitting next to you

complaining as the ocean creams-off

and people in yellow and white  
campers

block your way a frantic time  
as you listen guilty of this and guilty of that

you admit this and that but it's not enough

she wants splendid conquest  
and you're weary of splendid  
conquest

getting there she climbs out walks toward the house  
you piss across the fender of your car drunk on beer

little spots of you dripping down into the dust  
the dry  
dust

zipping up you march in to meet her  
friends.



## *one to the breastplate*

I have a saying, “the tough ones always come back.”

but Vera was kinder than most, and so I was surprised when she arrived that night and said, “let me in.”

“no, no, I’m working on a sonnet.”

“I’ll just stay a minute, then I’ll leave.”

“Vera, if I let you in you’ll be here for 3 or 4 days.”

it was night and I hadn’t turned the porch light on so I couldn’t see it coming

but

she threw a right that exploded in the center of my chest.

“baby, that was a beautiful punch.  
now move off.”

then I closed the door.

she was back again in 5 minutes: “Hank, I can’t find my car, I swear I can’t find my car. help me find my car!”

I saw my friend Bobby-the-Riff walking by. “hey, Bobby, help this one find her car. we’ll even it up later.”

they went off together.

later Bobby said they found her car parked on somebody’s front lawn,

lights on and motor running.

I haven't heard from Vera since  
unless she's the one who keeps phoning at 2 and 3 and 4 a.m. in the  
morning  
and doesn't answer when I say "hello."

but Bobby says he can handle her  
so I've decided to turn her over to Bobby.

she lives on a side street somewhere in Glendale  
and I help him unfold the roadmap as we sip our diet Schlitz.

## *the worst and the best*

in the hospitals and jails it's the worst in madhouses  
it's the worst in penthouses  
it's the worst in skid row flophouses it's the worst at poetry readings at  
rock concerts at benefits for the disabled it's the worst at funerals  
at weddings  
it's the worst at parades  
at skating rinks at sexual orgies it's the worst at midnight  
at 3 a.m.  
at 5:45 p.m.  
it's the worst

falling through the sky firing squads  
that's the best

thinking of India looking at popcorn stands watching the bull get the  
matador that's the best

boxed lightbulbs an old dog scratching  
peanuts in a celluloid bag that's the best

spraying roaches a clean pair of stockings natural guts defeating  
natural talent that's the best

in front of firing squads throwing crusts to seagulls slicing tomatoes  
that's the best

rugs with cigarette burns cracks in sidewalks waitresses still sane that's  
the best

my hands dead

my heart dead

silence

adagio of rocks the world ablaze that's the best for me.

## [coupons](#)

cigarettes wetted with beer from the night before you light one  
gag  
open the door for air and on your doorstep is a dead sparrow his head  
and breast chewed away.

hanging from the doorknob is an ad from the All American Burger  
consisting of several coupons which  
say  
that with the purchase of a burger  
from Feb. 12 thru Feb. 15  
you can get a free regular size bag of french fries and one  
10 oz. cup of coca cola.

I take the ad  
wrap the sparrow carry him to the trash bin and dump him  
in.

look:  
forsaking fries and coke to help keep  
my city  
clean.

## luck

what's bad about all this  
is watching people drinking coffee and waiting. I would douse them all  
with luck. they need it. they need it worse than I do.

I sit in cafes and watch them waiting. I suppose there's not much else  
to do. the flies walk up and down the windows and we drink our coffee  
and pretend not to look at each other. I wait with them.  
between the movement of the flies  
people walk by.

*dog*

a single dog  
walking alone on a hot sidewalk of  
summer  
appears to have the power  
of ten thousand gods.

why is this?

## trench warfare

sick with the flu drinking beer my radio on loud enough to overcome  
the sounds of the stereo people who have just moved into the court  
across the way.

asleep or awake they play their set at top volume leaving their doors  
and windows open.

they are each 18, married, wear red shoes, are blonde, slim.

they play everything: jazz, classical, rock, country, modern as long as  
it is loud.

this is the problem of being poor: we must share each other's sounds.

last week it was my turn:

there were two women

in here

fighting each other and then they ran up the walk screaming.

the police came.

now it's their turn.

now I am walking up and down in my dirty shorts, two rubber earplugs  
stuck deep into my ears.

I even consider murder.

such rude little rabbits!

walking little pieces of snot!

but in our land and in our way there has never been a chance; it's only  
when things are not going too badly for a while that we forget.

someday they'll each be dead someday they'll each have a separate  
coffin and it will be quiet.



but right now it's Bob Dylan Bob Dylan Bob Dylan all the way.

## *the night I fucked my alarm clock*

once

starving in Philadelphia I had a small room

it was evening going into night and I stood at my window on the 3rd floor in the dark and looked down into a kitchen across the way on the 2nd floor and I saw a beautiful blonde girl embrace a young man there and kiss him with what seemed hunger and I stood and watched until they broke away.

then I turned and switched on the room light.

I saw my dresser and my dresser drawers and my alarm clock on the dresser.

I took my alarm clock

to bed with me and

fucked it until the hands dropped off.

then I went out and walked the streets until my feet blistered.

when I got back I walked to the window and looked down and across the way and the light in their kitchen was out.

## *when I think of myself dead*

I think of automobiles parked in a parking lot

when I think of myself dead I think of frying pans

when I think of myself dead I think of somebody making love to you  
when I'm not around

when I think of myself dead I have trouble breathing

when I think of myself dead I think of all the people waiting to die

when I think of myself dead I think I won't be able to drink water  
anymore

when I think of myself dead the air goes all white

the roaches in my kitchen tremble

and somebody will have to throw my clean and dirty underwear away.

## *Christmas eve, alone*

Christmas eve, alone, in a motel room down the coast  
near the Pacific— hear it?

they've tried to do this place up Spanish, there's tapestry and lamps,  
and the toilet's clean, there are tiny bars of pink soap.

they won't find us here:  
the barracudas or the ladies or the idol  
worshippers.

back in town  
they're drunk and panicked running red lights breaking their heads  
open in honor of Christ's birthday. that's nice.

soon I'll finish this 5th of Puerto Rican rum.  
in the morning I'll vomit and shower, drive back in, have a sandwich  
by 1 p.m., be back in my room by 2,  
stretched on the bed, waiting for the phone to ring,  
not answering,  
my holiday is an evasion, my reasoning is not.

*there once was a woman who put her head  
into an oven*

terror finally becomes almost bearable  
but never quite

terror creeps like a cat crawls like a cat  
across my mind

I can hear the laughter of the masses

they are strong  
they will survive

like the roach

never take your eyes off the roach

you'll never see it again.

the masses are everywhere they know how to do things: they have sane  
and deadly angers for sane and deadly things.

I wish I were driving a blue 1952 Buick or a dark blue 1942 Buick or a  
blue 1932 Buick over a cliff of hell and into the sea.

## *beds, toilets, you and me—*

think of the beds used again and again to fuck in to die in.

in this land some of us fuck more than we die  
but most of us die better than we fuck,  
and we die piece by piece too— in parks  
eating ice cream, or in igloos of dementia, or on straw mats or upon  
disembarked loves  
or  
or.

:beds beds beds :toilets toilets toilets

the human sewage system is the world's greatest invention.

and you invented me and I invented you and that's why we don't get  
along  
on this bed any longer.  
you were the world's greatest invention until you flushed me away.

now it's your turn to wait for the touch of the handle.  
somebody will do it to you,  
bitch,  
and if they don't you will— mixed with your own green or yellow or  
white or blue  
or lavender goodbye.

## this then—

it's the same as before or the other time or the time before that.  
here's a cock and here's a cunt and here's trouble.

only each time you think  
well now I've learned: I'll let her do that and I'll do this, I no longer  
want it all, just some comfort and some sex  
and only a minor love.

now I'm waiting again and the years run thin.  
I have my radio and the kitchen walls are yellow.  
I keep dumping bottles and listening for footsteps.

I hope that death contains less than this.

## *imagination and reality*

there are many single women in the world with one or two or three  
children and one wonders where the husbands have gone or where the  
lovers have gone  
leaving behind  
all those hands and eyes and feet and voices.  
as I pass through their homes I like opening cupboards and looking in  
or under the sink  
or in a closet—

I expect to find the husband or lover and he'll tell me: "hey, buddy,  
didn't you notice her stretch-marks, she's got stretch-marks and floppy  
tits and she eats onions all the time and farts...but *I'm* a handy man. I  
can fix things, I know how to use a turret-lathe and I make my own oil  
changes. I can shoot pool, bowl, and I can finish 5th or 6th in any  
cross-country marathon anywhere. I've got a set of golf clubs, can  
shoot in the 80's. I know where the clit is and what to do about it. I've  
got a cowboy hat with the brim turned straight up at the sides.  
I'm good with the lasso and the dukes and I know all the latest dance  
steps."

and I'll say, "look, I was just leaving."  
and I *will* leave before he can challenge me to arm-wrestling  
or tell a dirty joke  
or show me the dancing tattoo on his right bicep.

but really  
all I find in the cupboards are coffee cups and large cracked brown  
plates and under the sink a stack of hardened rags, and in the closet—  
more coathangers than clothes, and it's not until she shows me the  
photo album and the photos of him— nice enough like a shoehorn, or a  
cart in the supermarket whose wheels aren't stuck— that the self-doubt  
leaves, and the pages turn and there's one child on a swing wearing a



red outfit and there's the other one  
chasing a seagull in Santa Monica.  
and life becomes sad and not dangerous and therefore good enough: to  
have her bring you a cup of coffee in one of those coffee cups without  
*him*  
jumping out.

## stolen

I keep thinking it will be outside now  
waiting for me  
blue  
front bumper twisted Maltese cross hanging from the mirror.  
rubber floormat  
twisted under the pedals.  
20 m.p.g.  
good old TRV 491  
the faithful love of a man, the way I put her into second while taking a  
corner the way she could dig from a signal with any other around.  
the way we conquered large and small spaces  
rain  
sun  
smog  
hostility  
the crush of things.

I came out of last Thursday night's fights at the Olympic and my 1967  
Volks was gone with another lover to another place.

the fights had been good.  
I called a cab at a Standard station and sat eating a jelly doughnut with  
coffee in a cafe and waited,  
and I knew that if I found the man who stole her I would kill him.

the cab came. I waved to the driver, paid for the coffee and doughnut,  
got out into the night, got in, and told him, "Hollywood and Western,"  
and that particular night was just about over.

## *the meek have inherited*

if I suffer at this typewriter think how I'd feel among the lettuce-pickers of Salinas?

I think of the men I've known in factories  
with no way to get out— choking while living choking while laughing  
at Bob Hope or Lucille Ball while 2 or 3 children beat tennis balls  
against the walls.

some suicides are never recorded.

## *the insane always loved me*

and the subnormal.  
all through grammar school junior high high school junior college the  
unwanted would attach themselves to me.  
guys with one arm guys with twitches guys with speech defects guys  
with white film over one eye, cowards  
misanthropes killers  
peep-freaks and thieves.  
and all through the factories and on the bum  
I always drew the unwanted. they found me right off and attached  
themselves. they still do.  
in this neighborhood now there's one who's found me.  
he pushes around a shopping cart filled with trash: broken canes,  
shoelaces, empty potato chip bags,  
milk cartons, newspapers, penholders...  
"hey, buddy, how ya doin'?"  
I stop and we talk a while.  
then I say goodbye but he still follows me  
past the beer parlours and the love parlours...  
"keep me *informed*, buddy, keep me *informed*, I want to know what's  
going on."  
he's my new one.  
I've never seen him talk to anybody else.  
the cart rattles along a little bit behind me  
then something falls out.  
he stops to pick it up.  
as he does I walk through the front door of the green hotel on the  
corner  
pass down through the hall  
come out the back door and  
there's a cat shitting there in absolute delight, he grins at me.

## Big Max

in junior high school Big Max was a problem.

we'd be sitting during lunch hour eating our peanut butter sandwiches and potato chips.

he was hairy of nostril and of eyebrow, his lips glistened with spittle.

he already wore size ten and a half shoes. his shirts stretched across a massive chest. his wrists looked like two by fours. and he walked up through the shadows behind the gym where we sat, my friend Eli and I.

"you guys," he stood there, "you guys sit with your shoulders slumped!

you walk around with your shoulders slumped! how are you ever going to make it?"

we didn't answer.

then Max would look at me.

"stand up!"

I'd stand up and he'd walk around behind me and say, "square your shoulders like this!"

and he'd snap my shoulders back.

"there! doesn't that feel *better*?"

"yeah, Max."

then he'd walk off and I'd resume a normal posture.

Big Max was ready for the world. it made us sick to look at him.

## trapped

in the winter walking on my  
ceiling my eyes the size of streetlamps.  
I have 4 feet like a mouse but  
wash my own underwear—bearded and hungover and a hard-on and  
no lawyer. I have a face like a washrag. I sing love songs and carry  
steel.

I would rather die than cry. I can't stand hounds can't live without  
them.

I hang my head against the white refrigerator and want to scream like  
the last weeping of life forever but I am bigger than the mountains.

## *it's the way you play the game*

call it love  
stand it up in the failing light  
put it in a dress pray sing beg cry laugh turn off the lights turn on the  
radio add trimmings: butter, raw eggs, yesterday's newspaper;  
one new shoelace, then add paprika, sugar, salt, pepper, phone your  
drunken aunt in Calexico;  
call it love, you skewer it good, add cabbage and applesauce, then heat  
it from the left side,  
then heat it from the right side,  
put it in a box give it away  
leave it on a doorstep vomiting as you go into the  
hydrangea.

## *on the continent*

I'm soft. I  
dream too.

I let myself dream. I dream of being famous. I dream of walking the streets of London and Paris. I dream of sitting in cafes drinking fine wines and taking a taxi back to a good hotel.

I dream of  
meeting beautiful ladies in the hall and  
turning them away because I have a sonnet in mind that I want to write before sunrise. at sunrise I will be asleep and there will be a strange cat curled up on the windowsill.

I think we all feel like this now and then.

I'd even like to visit Andernach, Germany, the place where I began. then I'd like to fly on to Moscow to check out their mass transit system so I'd have something faintly lewd to whisper into the ear of the mayor of Los Angeles upon my return to this fucking place.

it could happen.

I'm ready.

I've watched snails climb over ten foot walls and vanish.

you mustn't confuse this with ambition.

I would be able to laugh at my good turn of the cards—

and I won't forget you.

I'll send postcards and snapshots, and the finished sonnet.



12:18 a.m.

beheaded in the middle of the night  
scratching my sides I am covered with bites kick my white legs out of  
the sheets as the sirens scream there is a gun blast.

I go to the kitchen for a glass of water destroy the reverie of a roach  
destroy the roach.  
a gale comes from the North as the man in the apartment across from  
me  
inserts his penis into the rump of his 4 year old  
daughter.

I hear the screams light a cigar stick it into the lips of my beheaded  
head.  
it is half a cigar stale  
a *Medalist Naturáles*, No. 7.

I walk back to the bedroom with a spray can.  
I press the button.  
it hisses. I gag,  
think of ancient wars loves dead.  
so much happens in the dark yet tomorrow the sun will move up and  
on, you'll get a ticket if you park on the south side of the street on  
Thursday  
or the north side on Friday.

the efficiency of the sun and the law  
bulwarks sanity.

something bites me.  
I madden  
spray half my bedsheets.

I turn  
see the dark mirror— the cigar  
the loose belly me  
old.

I laugh.

it's good they don't know.

I take my head

put it back on my neck

get between the sheets and

can't sleep.

## *yellow cab*

the Mexican dancer shook her fans at me and her ass at me, I  
didn't ask her to and  
my woman got mad and ran out of the cafe and it began raining and  
you could hear it on the roof and I didn't have a job and I had 13 days  
left on the rent.  
sometimes when a woman runs out on you like that you wonder if it's  
not economics, you can't blame them— if I had to get fucked I'd  
rather get fucked by somebody with money.  
we're all scared but when you're ugly and you don't have much left  
you get strong, and I called the waiter over and I said, I think I am  
going to turn this table over, I'm bored, I'm insane, I need  
action, call in your goon, I'll piss on his collarbone.

I got  
thrown out swiftly. it was raining. I picked myself up in the rain and  
walked down the empty street cotton candy sweet  
dumb shit for sale, all the little stores locked with 67¢ Woolworth  
locks.

I reached the end of the street in time to see her get into the yellow cab  
with another guy.

I fell down by a garbage can, stood up and pissed against it, feeling sad  
and not sad, knowing there was only so much they could do to  
you, piss sliding down the corrugated tin, the philosophers must have  
had something to say about this. women. their luck against your  
destiny. winner take Barcelona. next bar.

## *how come you're not unlisted?*

the men phone and ask me that.

are you really Charles Bukowski the writer? they ask.

I'm a sometimes writer, I say, most often I don't do anything.

listen, they ask, I like your stuff—do you mind if I come over and  
bring a couple of 6  
packs?

you can bring them, I say if *you* don't come in...

when the women phone, I say, o yes, I *write*, I'm a writer only I'm not  
writing right now.

I feel foolish phoning you, they say, and I was surprised to find you  
listed in the phone book.

I have reasons, I say, by the way why don't you come over for a beer?

you wouldn't mind?

and they arrive

handsome women

good of mind and body and eye.

often there isn't sex but I'm used to that yet it's good

very good just to look at them— and some rare times I have  
unexpected good luck otherwise.

for a man of 55 who didn't get laid until he was 23

and not very often until he was 50

I think that I should stay listed via Pacific Telephone until I get as much as the average man has had.

of course, I'll have to keep writing immortal poems but the inspiration is there.

## *weather report*

I suppose it's raining in some Spanish town now  
while I'm feeling bad like this;  
I'd like to think so now.  
let's go to a Mexican hamlet— that sounds nice: a Mexican hamlet  
while I'm feeling bad like this  
the walls yellow with age— that rain  
out there,  
a pig moving in his pen at night disturbed by the rain, little eyes like  
cigarette-ends, and his damned tail: see it?  
I can't imagine the people.  
it's hard for me to imagine the people.  
maybe they are feeling bad like this, almost as bad as this.  
I wonder what they do when they feel bad?  
they probably don't mention it.  
they say,  
“look, it's raining.”  
that's the best way.

## *clean old man*

here I'll be 55 in a week.

what will I write about when it no longer stands up in the morning?

my critics will love it when my playground narrows down to tortoises  
and shellstars.

they might even say  
nice things about me

as if I had finally come to my senses.

## *something*

I'm out of matches.  
the springs in my couch  
are broken.  
they stole my footlocker.  
they stole my oil painting of  
two pink eyes.  
my car broke down.  
eels climb my bathroom walls.  
my love is broken.  
but the stockmarket went up  
today.



## *a plate glass window*

dogs and angels are not very different.

I often go to this place to eat

about 2:30 in the afternoon because all the people who eat there are particularly addled simply glad to be alive and eating baked beans near a plate glass window which holds the heat and doesn't let the cars and sidewalks inside.

we are allowed as much free coffee as we can drink and we sit and quietly drink the black strong coffee.

it is good to be sitting someplace in a world at 2:30 in the afternoon without having the flesh ripped from your bones. even being addled, we know this.

nobody bothers us we bother nobody.

angels and dogs are not very different at 2:30 in the afternoon.

I have my favorite table and after I have finished I stack the plates, saucers,

the cup, the silverware neatly— my offering to the luck— and that sun working good

all up and

down

inside the

darkness

here.

## junkies

“she shoots up in the neck,” she told me. I told her to stick it into my ass and she tried and said, “oh oh,”  
and I said, “what the hell’s the matter?”  
she said, “nothing, this is New York style,” and she jammed it in again and said, “oh shit.” I took it and put it into my arm, I got part of it.  
“I don’t know why people  
fuck with the stuff, there’s not that much to it. I think they’re all losers and they want to lose real bad. there’s no other way, it’s like they can’t get where they’re going or want to go and there’s no other way.  
this has got to be it.  
she shoots up in the neck.”

“I know,” I said. “I phoned her, she could hardly talk, said it was laryngitis. have some of this wine.”

it was white wine and 4:30 a.m. and her daughter was sleeping in the bedroom. she had cable tv with no sound and a large screen young John Wayne watched us, and we neither kissed nor made love and I left at 6:15 a.m.

after the beer and wine were gone so her daughter wouldn’t awaken for school and find me sitting in bed with her mother  
with John Wayne and the night gone and not much chance for anybody

---

## 99 to one

the blazing shark  
wants my balls  
as I walk through the meat section looking for salami and cheese

purple housewives  
fingering 75 cent avocados know my shopping cart is an oversized  
cock

I am a man with a switchball watch standing in a honky-tonk  
phonebooth sucking strawberry red titty upsidedown in a Philadelphia  
crowd.

suddenly all about me are screams of RAPE RAPE RAPE RAPE  
RAPE  
and I am stiffing it to something beneath me dyed red hair, bad breath,  
blue teeth

I used to like Monet  
I used to like Monet very much it was funny, I thought, the way he did  
it with colors

women are so expensive  
dog leashes are expensive I am going to start selling air in dark orange  
bags marked: moon-blooms

I used to like bottles full of blood young girls in camel-hair coats  
Prince Valiant  
Popeye's magic touch  
the struggle is in the struggle like a corkscrew  
a good man doesn't get cork in the wine

the thought has occurred to millions of men while shaving  
the removal of life might be preferred to the removal of hair

spit out cotton and clean your rearview mirror, run like you mean it,  
drunk jock, the whores will win, the fools will win, but break like a  
horse out of the gate.

## *the crunch*

too much  
too little

too fat  
too thin  
or nobody.

laughter or  
tears

haters  
lovers

strangers with faces like the backs of  
thumb tacks  
armies running through streets of blood waving winebottles  
bayoneting and fucking virgins.

or an old guy in a cheap room with a photograph of M. Monroe.

there is a loneliness in this world so great that you can see it in the  
slow movement of the hands of a clock.

people so tired  
mutilated  
either by love or no love.

people just are not good to each other one on one.  
the rich are not good to the rich the poor are not good to the poor.

we are afraid.

our educational system tells us that we can all be big-ass winners.

it hasn't told us about the gutters or the suicides.

or the terror of one person aching in one place alone

untouched  
unspoken to

watering a plant.

people are not good to each other.  
people are not good to each other.  
people are not good to each other.

I suppose they never will be.  
I don't ask them to be.

but sometimes I think about it.

the beads will swing the clouds will cloud and the killer will behead  
the child like taking a bite out of an ice cream cone.

too much  
too little  
too fat  
too thin  
or nobody

more haters than lovers.

people are not good to each other.  
perhaps if they were our deaths would not be so sad.

meanwhile I look at young girls stems  
flowers of chance.

there must be a way.

surely there must be a way we have not yet thought of.

who put this brain inside of me?

it cries  
it demands  
it says that there is a chance.

it will not say  
“no.”

## *a horse with greenblue eyes*

what you see is what you see: madhouses are rarely on display.

that we still walk about and scratch ourselves and light cigarettes

is more the miracle than bathing beauties

than roses and the moth.

to sit in a small room and drink a can of beer and roll a cigarette while  
listening to Brahms on a small red radio

is to have come back from a dozen wars  
alive

listening to the sound of the refrigerator

as bathing beauties rot

and the oranges and apples roll away.



***Scarlet***

## Scarlet

I'm glad when they arrive and I'm glad when they leave

I'm glad when I hear their heels approaching my door and I'm glad  
when those heels walk away

I'm glad to fuck I'm glad to care and I'm glad when it's over

and  
since it's always either starting or finishing I'm glad  
most of the time

and the cats walk up and down and the earth spins around the sun and  
the phone rings:

"this is Scarlet."

"who?"

"Scarlet."

"o.k., get it on over."

and I hang up thinking maybe this is it

go in  
take a quick shit shave  
bathe

dress

dump the sacks and cartons of empty bottles

sit down to the sound of heels approaching more an army approaching  
than victory

it's Scarlet  
and in my kitchen the faucet keeps dripping needs a washer.

I'll take care of it later.

## red up and down

red hair  
real  
she whirled it and she asked  
“is my ass still on?”

such comedy.

there is always one woman to save you from another

and as that woman saves you she makes ready to destroy.

“sometimes I hate you,”  
she said.

she walked out and sat on my porch and read my copy of Catullus, she  
stayed out there for an hour.

people walked up and down past my place  
wondering where such an ugly old man could get such beauty.

I didn't know either.

when she walked in I grabbed her and pulled her to my lap.  
I lifted my glass and told her, “drink this.”  
“oh,” she said, “you’ve mixed wine with Jim Beam, you’re gonna get  
nasty.”

“you henna your hair, don’t you?”

“you don’t *look*,” she said and stood up and pulled down her slacks

and panties and the hair down there was the same as the hair up there.

Catullus himself couldn't have wished for more historic or wondrous  
grace; then he went  
goofy

for tender boys not mad enough to become  
women.

## *like a flower in the rain*

I cut the middle fingernail of the middle finger  
right hand  
real short  
and I began rubbing along her cunt as she sat upright in bed spreading  
lotion over her arms face  
and breasts  
after bathing.  
then she lit a cigarette: “don’t let this put you off,”  
and smoked and continued to rub the lotion on.  
I continued to rub the cunt.  
“you want an apple?” I asked.  
“sure,” she said, “you got one?”  
but I got to her— she began to twist then she rolled on her side, she  
was getting wet and open like a flower in the rain.  
then she rolled on her stomach and her most beautiful ass looked up at  
me  
and I reached under and got the cunt again.  
she reached around and got my cock, she rolled and twisted, I mounted  
my face falling into the mass of red hair that overflowed from her head  
and my fattened cock entered into the miracle.  
later we joked about the lotion and the cigarette and the apple.  
then I went out and got some chicken and shrimp and french fries and  
buns and mashed potatoes and gravy and cole slaw, and we ate. she  
told me how good she felt and I told her how good I felt and we ate the  
chicken and the shrimp and the french fries and the buns and the  
mashed potatoes and the gravy and the cole slaw too.

## *light brown*

light brown stare

that dumb blank marvelous light brown stare

I'll take care of it.

you needn't carry me anymore  
with your Cleopatra movie star  
tricks

do you realize that if I were an adding machine I might break down  
tabulating  
how many times you've used that light brown stare?

not that you're not the best with your light brown stare.

someday some crazy son of a bitch is going to murder you

and you'll cry out my name you'll finally know what you should have  
known

so very long  
ago.

## huge ear rings

I go to pick her up.  
she's on some errand.  
she always has errands many things to do.  
I have nothing to do.

she comes out of her apartment I see her move toward my car

she is barefooted  
dressed casually  
except for huge ear rings.

I light a cigarette and when I look up she is stretched out on the street

a quite busy street

all 112 pounds of her as beautiful as anything you might imagine.

I switch on the radio and wait for her to get up.

she does.

I flip the car door open.  
she gets in. I drive away from the curb. she likes the song on the radio  
she turns the radio up.

she seems to like all the songs she seems to know all the songs  
each time I see her she looks better and better

200 years ago they would have burned her at the stake



now she puts on her mascara as we  
drive along.

*she came out of the bathroom* with her  
*flaming red hair and said—*

the cops want me to come down and identify some guy who tried to rape me.

I've lost the key to my car again; I've got the key to open the door but not the one to start it.

those people are trying to take my child away from me but I won't let them.

Rochelle almost o.d.'d, then she went at Harry with something, and he punched her.

she's had those cracked ribs, you know, and one of them punctured her lung. she's down at the county under a machine.

where's my comb?

your comb has all that guck in it.

I told her,

I haven't seen your comb.

## *a killer*

consistency is terrific: shark-mouth  
grubby interior with an almost perfect body, long blazing hair— it  
confuses me and others

she runs from man to man offering endearments

she speaks of love

then breaks each man to her will

shark-mouthed  
grubby interior

we see it too late: after the cock gets swallowed the heart follows

her long blazing hair, her almost perfect body walks down the street as  
the same sun falls upon flowers.

## longshot

she's not for you, man, she's not your type, she's erased  
she's been used she's got all the wrong habits,  
he told me  
in between races.

I'm going to bet the 4  
horse, I told him.  
well, it's only that I'd like to turn her around in mid-stream,  
save her, you might say.

you can't save her, he said, you're 55, you need kindness.  
I'm going to bet the 6 horse.  
you're not the one to save her.

who can save her? I asked.  
I don't think the 6 has a chance, I like the 4.

she needs somebody to beat her from wall to wall, he said, kick her  
ass, she'd love it. She'd stay home and wash the dishes.  
the 6 horse will be in the running.

I'm no good at beating women, I said.  
forget her then, he said.

it's hard to, I said.

he got up and bet the 6  
and I got up and bet the 4.  
the 5 horse won by 3 lengths  
at 15 to one.

she's got red hair like lightning from heaven, I said.

forget her, he said.

we tore up our tickets and stared at the lake in the center of the track.

it was going to be a long afternoon for both of us.

## *the promise*

she bent over the side of the bed and opened the portfolio along the side of the wall.

we were drinking.

she said, “you promised me these paintings once, don’t you remember?”

“what? no, no, I don’t remember.”

“well, you did,” she said, “and you ought to keep your promises.”

“leave those fucking paintings alone,”

I said.

then I walked into the kitchen for a beer. I paused to vomit and when I came out I saw her through my window going down the court walk toward her place in back.

she was trying to hurry and balanced on top of her head were 40 paintings: oils

black and whites

acrylics

water colors.

she stumbled once and almost fell on her ass.

then she ran up her steps and was gone through her door to her place upstairs running with all those paintings on top of her head.

it was one of the funniest damned things I ever did see.

well, I guess I’ll just have to paint 40 more.

## waving and waving goodbye

I paid this one's fare all the way from Houston to San Francisco then flew up to meet her at her brother's house and I got drunk and talked all night about a redhead, and she finally said, "you sleep up there," and I climbed the ladder up into a bunk and she slept down there.

the next day they drove me to the airport and I flew back, thinking, well, there's still the redhead and when I got back in I phoned the redhead and said, "I'm back, baby, I flew up to see this woman and I talked about you all night, so here I am..."

"well, why don't you fly back up and finish the job?" she said and hung up.

then I got drunk and the phone rang and they said they were two ladies from Germany and they'd like to see me.

so they came over and one was 20 and the other was 22. I told them that my heart had been smashed for the last time and that I was giving up women. they laughed at me and we drank and smoked and went to bed together.

I got this thing in front of me and first I grabbed one and then I grabbed the other.

I finally settled on the 22 year old and ate her up.

they stayed 2 days and 2 nights but I never got to the 20 year old, she was on tampax.

I finally drove them to Sherman Oaks and they stood at the foot of a long driveway

waving and waving goodbye as I backed my Volks out.

when I got back there was a letter from a lady in Eureka. she said that she wanted me to fuck her until she couldn't walk anymore.

I stretched out and whacked-off thinking about a little girl I had seen on a red bicycle about a week ago.

then I took a bath and put on my green terrycloth robe just in time to get the fights on tv from the Olympic.

there was a black and a Chicano in there.  
that always made a good fight.

and it was a good idea too: put them in there and let them kill each other.

I watched the whole fight thinking about the redhead all the time.

I think the Chicano won  
but I'm not sure.



## liberty

she was sitting in the window of room 1010 at the Chelsea in New York,

Janis Joplin's old room.

it was 104 degrees and she was on speed and had one leg over the sill, and she leaned out and said, "God, this is great!"

and then she slipped and almost went out, just catching herself.

it was very close.

she pulled herself in walked over and stretched on the bed.

I've lost a lot of women in a lot of different ways but that would have been the first time that way.

then she rolled off the bed landed on her back and when I walked over she was asleep.

all day she had been wanting to see the Statue of Liberty.  
now she wouldn't worry me about that for a while.

## *don't touch the girls*

she's up seeing my doctor trying to get some diet pills; she's not fat,  
she needs the speed.

I go down to the nearest bar and wait.  
at 3:30 in the afternoon of a tuesday.  
they have a dancer.

there's only one other man in the bar.

she works out  
looking at herself in the mirror.  
she's like a monkey dark  
Korean.

she's not very good, skinny and obvious and she sticks her tongue out  
at me then at the other man.

times must be truly hard, I think.

I have a few more beers then get up to leave.  
she waves me over.  
“you go?” she asks.  
“yes,” I say, “my wife has cancer.”

I shake her hand.

she points to a sign behind her: DON'T TOUCH THE GIRLS.

she points to the sign and says, “the sign says, ‘DON'T TOUCH THE  
GIRLS’.”

I go back to the parking lot and wait.

she comes out.  
“did you get the pills?” I ask.  
“yes,” she says.  
“then it’s been a successful day.”

I think of the dancer walking across my kitchen. I can’t visualize it. I  
am going to die alone  
just the way I live.

“take me to my place,” she says, “I’ve got to get ready for night  
school.”

“sure,” I say and drive her on in.

## dark shades

I never wear dark shades but this red head went to get a prescription  
filled on Hollywood Blvd.  
and she kept haggling and working at me, snapping and snarling.  
I left her at the prescription counter and walked around and got a large  
tube of Crest and a giant bottle of Joy.  
then I walked up to  
the dark shade display rack and bought the most vicious pair of shades  
I could find.  
we paid for our things walked down to a Mexican place and she  
ordered a taco she couldn't eat and sat there  
haggling and snapping and snarling at me and after eating I ordered 3  
beers drank them down  
then put on my shades.  
"o my God," she said, "o my God shit!"  
and I ripped her up both sides most excellent riposte snarling stinking  
marmalade shots shit blows  
farts from hell,  
then I got up  
paid  
she following me out  
both of us in shades  
and the sidewalks split.  
we found her car  
got in and drove off  
me sitting there  
pushing the shades back against my nose  
ripping out her backbone and waving it out the window like a broken  
Confederate flagpole...  
dark and vicious shades help.  
"o my God shit!" she said, and the sun was up

and I didn't know it.  
they were a bargain for \$4.25  
even though I had left the Crest and the Joy behind  
at the taco place.

## *prayer in bad weather*

by God, I don't know what to do.  
they're so nice to have around.  
they have a way of playing with the balls  
and looking at the cock very seriously  
turning it  
tweeking it  
examining each part as their long hair falls on your belly.

it's not the fucking and sucking alone that reaches into a man and  
softens him, it's the extras, it's all the extras.

now it's raining tonight and there's nobody they are elsewhere  
examining things in new bedrooms in new moods  
or maybe in old bedrooms.

anyhow, it's raining tonight, one hell of a dashing, pouring rain....

very little to do.  
I've read the newspaper paid the gas bill the electric co.  
the phone bill.  
it keeps raining.

they soften a man and then let him swim in his own juice.

I need an old-fashioned whore at the door tonight closing her green  
umbrella, drops of moonlit rain on her purse, saying, "shit, man, can't  
you get better music than *that* on your radio?  
and turn up the heat..."

it's always when a man's swollen with love and everything else

that it keeps raining splattering  
flooding  
rain  
good for the trees and the grass and the air...  
good for things that live alone.

I would give anything for a female's hand on me tonight.  
they soften a man and then leave him  
listening to the rain.

## *melancholia*

the history of melancholia includes all of us.

me, I writhe in dirty sheets while staring at blue walls and nothing.

I have gotten so used to melancholia that  
I greet it like an old friend.

I will now do 15 minutes of grieving for the lost redhead, I tell the  
gods.

I do it and feel quite bad quite sad,  
then I rise CLEANSED  
even though nothing is solved.

that's what I get for kicking religion in the ass.

I should have kicked the redhead in the ass  
where her brains and her bread and butter are  
at...

but, no, I've felt sad about everything:  
the lost redhead was just another smash in a lifelong loss...

I listen to drums on the radio now and grin.

there is something wrong with me besides  
melancholia.



## *a stethoscope case*

my doctor has just come into his office from surgery.

he meets me in the men's john.

"God damn," he says to me, "where did you find her? oh, I just like to *look* at girls like that!"

I tell him: "it's my specialty: cement hearts and beautiful bodies. If you can find a heart-beat, let me know."

"I'll take good care of her," he says.

"yes, and please remember all the ethical codes of your honorable profession," I tell him.

he zips up first then washes.

"how's your health?" he asks.

"physically I'm sound as a tic. mentally I'm wasted, doomed, on my tiny cross, all that crap."

"I'll take good care of her."

"yes. and let me know about the heart-beat."

he walks out.

I finish, zip up and also walk out.

only I don't wash up.

I'm far beyond all that.

## *eat your heart out*

I've come by, she says, to tell you that this is it. I'm not kidding, it's over. this is it.

I sit on the couch watching her arrange her long red hair before my bedroom mirror.

she pulls her hair up and piles it on top of her head— she lets her eyes look at my eyes— then she drops the hair and lets it fall down in front of her face.

we go to bed and I hold her speechlessly from the back my arm around her neck I touch her wrists and hands feel up to her elbows  
no further.

she gets up.

this is it, she says, eat your heart out. You got any rubber bands?

I don't know.

here's one, she says, this will do. well, I'm going.

I get up and walk her to the door

just as she leaves she says,

I want you to buy me some high-heeled shoes with tall thin spikes,  
black high-heeled shoes.

no, I want them

red.

I watch her walk down the cement walk under the trees

she walks all right and as the poinsettias drip in the sun I close the door.

## *the retreat*

this time has finished me.

I feel like the German troops whipped by snow and the communists  
walking bent  
with newspapers stuffed into worn boots.

my plight is just as terrible.  
maybe more so.

victory was so close victory was there.

as she stood before my mirror younger and more beautiful than any  
woman I had ever known combing yards and yards of red hair as I  
watched her.

and when she came to bed she was more beautiful than ever and the  
love was very very good.

eleven months.

now she's gone  
gone as they go.

this time has finished me.

it's a long road back  
and back to where?

the guy ahead of me falls.

I step over him.

did she get him too?

## *I made a mistake*

I reached up into the top of the closet and took out a pair of blue panties and showed them to her and asked “are these yours?”

and she looked and said,  
“no, those belong to a dog.”

she left after that and I haven’t seen her since. she’s not at her place. I keep going there, leaving notes stuck into the door. I go back and the notes are still there. I take the Maltese cross cut it down from my car mirror, tie it to her doorknob with a shoelace, leave a book of poems. when I go back the next night everything is still there.

I keep searching the streets for that blood-wine battleship she drives with a weak battery, and the doors hanging from broken hinges.

I drive around the streets an inch away from weeping, ashamed of my sentimentality and possible love.

a confused old man driving in the rain wondering where the good luck went.

*popular melodies*  
*in the last of*  
*your mind*

## *girls in pantyhose*

schoolgirls in pantyhose sitting on bus stop benches looking tired at 13  
with their raspberry lipstick.

it's hot in the sun and the day at school has been dull, and going home  
is dull, and

I drive by in my car peering at their warm legs.

their eyes look

away—

they've been warned about ruthless and horny old studs; they're just  
not going to give it away like that.

and yet it's dull

waiting out the minutes on the bench and the years at home, and the  
books they carry are dull and the food they eat is dull, and even the  
ruthless, horny old studs are dull.

the girls in pantyhose wait, they await the proper time and moment,  
and then they will move and then they will conquer.

I drive around in my car peeking up their legs pleased that I will never  
be part of their heaven and their hell. but that scarlet

lipstick on those sad waiting mouths! it would be nice to kiss each of  
them once, fully, then give them back.

but the bus will

get them first.



## *up your yellow river*

a woman told a man when he got off a plane that I was dead.  
a magazine printed the fact that I was dead and somebody else said  
that they'd heard that I was dead, and then somebody wrote an article  
and said our Rimbaud our Villon is dead. at the same time an old  
drinking buddy published a piece stating that I could no longer write. a  
real Judas job. they can't wait for me to go, these farts. well, I'm  
listening to Tchaikovsky's piano concerto number one and the  
announcer said Mahler's 5th and 10th symphonies are coming up via  
Amsterdam,  
and the beerbottles are on the floor and ash from my cigarettes covers  
my cotton underwear and my gut, I've  
told all my girlfriends to go to hell, and even this is a better poem than  
any of those gravediggers could write.

## artists:

she wrote me for years.  
“I’m drinking wine in the kitchen.  
it’s raining outside. the children are in school.”

she was an average citizen worried about her soul, her typewriter and  
her  
underground poetry reputation.

she wrote fairly well and with honesty but only long after others had  
broken the road ahead.

she’d phone me drunk at 2 a.m.  
at 3 a.m.  
while her husband slept.

“it’s good to hear your voice,” she’d say.

“it’s good to hear your voice too,” I’d say.

what the hell, you know.

she finally came down. I think it had something to do with *The  
Chapparal Poets Society of California*.  
they had to elect officers. she phoned me from their hotel.

“I’m here,” she said, “we’re going to elect officers.”  
“o.k., fine,” I said, “get some good ones.”  
I hung up.

the phone rang again.

“hey, don’t you want to see me?”

“sure,” I said, “what’s the address?”

after she said goodbye I jacked-off changed my stockings drank a half bottle of wine and drove on out.

they were all drunk and trying to fuck each other.

I drove her back to my place.

she had on pink panties with ribbons.

we drank some beer and smoked and talked about Ezra Pound, then we slept.

it’s no longer clear to me whether I drove her to the airport or not.

she still writes letters and I answer each one viciously hoping to make her stop.

someday she may luck into fame like Erica Jong. (her face is not as good but her body is better) and I’ll think, my God, what have I done?  
I blew it.  
or rather: I didn’t blow it.

meanwhile I have her box number and I’d better inform her that my second novel will be out in September.  
that ought to keep her nipples hard while I consider the possibility of Francine du Plessix Gray.

## *I have shit stains in my underwear too*

I hear them outside: “does he always type this late?”

“no, it’s very unusual.”

“he shouldn’t type this late.”

“he hardly ever does.”

“does he drink?”

“I think he does.”

“he went to the mailbox in his underwear yesterday.”

“I saw him too.”

“he doesn’t have any friends.”

“he’s old.”

“he shouldn’t type this late.”

they go inside and it begins to rain as 3 gun shots sound half a block away and

one of the skyscrapers in downtown L.A. begins burning  
25 foot flames licking toward doom.

## *Hawley's leaving town*

this guy  
he's got a crazy eye and he's brown  
a dark brown from the sun the Hollywood and Western sun the  
racetrack sun he sees me and he says, "hey, Hawley's leaving town for  
a week. he messes up my handicapping. now I've got a chance."

he's grinning, he means it: with Hawley out of town he's going to  
move toward that castle in the Hollywood Hills; dancing girls  
six German Shepherds a drawbridge,  
ten year old  
wine.

Sam the Whorehouse Man walks up and I tell Sam that I am clearing  
\$150 a day at the track.

"I work right off the toteboard," I tell him.

"I need a girl," he tells me, "who can belt-buckle a guy without  
coming out with all this Christian moral bullshit afterwards."

"Hawley's leaving town,"  
I tell Sam.

"where's the Shoe?"

he asks.

"back east," says an old man who's standing there.

he has a white plastic shield over his left eye with little holes punched  
into it.

"that leaves it all to Pinky,"  
says dark brown.

we all stand looking at each other.  
then  
a silent signal given we turn away  
and start walking, each  
in a different direction: north south east west.

we know something.

## an unkind poem

they go on writing  
pumping out poems—  
young boys and college professors wives who drink wine all afternoon  
while their husbands work, they go on writing  
the same names in the same magazines everybody writing a little  
worse each year, getting out a poetry collection and pumping out more  
poems it's like a contest  
it is a contest  
but the prize is invisible.

they won't write short stories or articles or novels  
they just go on  
pumping out poems  
each sounding more and more like the others and less and less like  
themselves, and some of the young boys weary and quit but the  
professors never quit and the wives who drink wine in the afternoons  
never ever ever quit  
and new young boys arrive with new magazines and there is some  
correspondence with lady or men poets and some fucking  
and everything is exaggerated and dull.

when the poems come back  
they retype them  
and send them off to the next magazine on the list, and they give  
*readings*  
all the readings they can  
for free most of the time  
hoping that somebody will finally know finally applaud them  
finally congratulate and recognize their talent  
they are all so sure of their genius there is so little self-doubt, and most  
of them live in North Beach or New York City, and their faces are like

their poems: alike,  
and they know each other and gather and hate and admire and choose  
and discard and keep pumping out more poems more poems  
more poems  
the contest of the dullards: tap tap tap, tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap...



## the bee

I suppose like any other boy I had one best friend in the neighborhood.  
his name was Eugene and he was bigger than I was and one year older.  
Eugene used to whip me pretty good.  
we fought all the time.  
I kept trying him but without much success.

once we leaped off a garage roof together to prove our guts.  
I twisted my ankle and he came up clean as freshly-wrapped butter.

I guess the only good thing he ever did for me was when the bee stung  
me while I was barefoot and while I sat down and pulled the stinger  
out he said,  
“I’ll get the son of a bitch!”

and he did  
with a tennis racket plus a rubber hammer.

it was all right  
they say they die  
anyway.

my foot swelled up double-size and I stayed in bed praying for death

and Eugene went on to become an Admiral or a Commander or  
something large in the United States Navy  
and he passed through one or two wars without injury.

I imagine him an old man now in a rocking chair  
with his false teeth and glass of buttermilk...

while drunk

I fingerfuck this 19 year old groupie in bed with me.

but the worst part is (like jumping off the garage roof) Eugene wins again

because he's not even thinking about me.

## *the most*

here comes the fishhead singing here comes the baked potato in drag

here comes nothing to do all day long here comes another night of no sleep

here comes the phone ringing the wrong tone

here comes a termite with a banjo here comes a flagpole with blank eyes here comes a cat and a dog wearing nylons

here comes a machinegun singing here comes bacon burning in the pan here comes a voice saying something dull

here comes a newspaper stuffed with small red birds with flat brown beaks

here comes a cunt carrying a torch a grenade  
a deathly love

here comes victory carrying one bucket of blood  
and stumbling over the berrybush

and the sheets hang out the windows

and the bombers head east west north south get lost  
get tossed like salad

as all the fish in the sea line up and form one line  
one long line  
one very long thin line

the longest line you could ever imagine

and we get lost  
walking past purple mountains

we walk lost  
bare at last like the knife

having given  
having spit it out like an unexpected olive seed

as the girl at the call service screams over the phone:  
“don’t call back! you sound like a jerk!”

ah...

drinking German beer and trying to come up with the immortal poem  
at 5 p.m. in the afternoon.

but, ah, I've told the students that the thing to do is not to try.

but when the women aren't around and the horses aren't running  
what else is there to do?

I've had a couple of sexual fantasies had lunch out  
mailed three letters been to the grocery store.

nothing on tv.

the telephone is quiet.

I've run dental floss between my teeth.

it won't rain and I listen to the early arrivals from the 8 hour day as  
they drive in and park their cars behind the apartment next door.

I sit drinking German beer and trying to come up with the big one  
and I'm not going to make it.

I'm just going to keep drinking

more and more German beer and rolling smokes and by 11 p.m.

I'll be spread out on the unmade bed face up

asleep under the electric light

still waiting on the immortal poem.

## *the girl on the bus stop bench*

I saw her when I was in the left lane going east on Sunset.  
she was sitting with her legs crossed reading a paperback.  
she was Italian or Indian or Greek  
and I was stopped at a red signal as now and then a wind would lift her  
skirt, I was directly across from her looking in,  
and such perfect immaculate legs I had never seen.  
I am essentially bashful but I stared and kept staring until the person in  
the car behind me honked.

it had never happened quite like that before.  
I drove around the block and parked in the supermarket lot  
directly across from her in my dark shades I kept staring  
like a schoolboy in his first excitement.

I memorized her shoes her dress  
her stockings  
her face.  
cars came by and blocked my view.  
then I saw her again.  
the wind flipped her skirt high along her thighs and I began rubbing  
myself.  
just before her bus came I climaxed.  
I smelled my sperm felt it wet against my shorts and pants.

it was an ugly white bus and it took her away.

I backed out of the parking lot thinking, I'm a peep-freak but at least I  
didn't expose myself.

I'm a peep-freak but why do they do that?  
why do they look like that?

why do they let the wind do that?

when I got home I undressed and bathed got out  
toweled  
turned on  
the news  
turned off the news and  
wrote this poem.

## *I'm getting back to where I was*

I used to take the back off the telephone and stuff it with rags and when somebody knocked I wouldn't answer and if they persisted I'd tell them in terms vulgar to vanish.

just another old crank with wings of gold flabby white belly plus eyes to knock out the sun.



## *a lovely couple*

I had to take a shit but instead I went into this shop to have a key made.

the woman was dressed in gingham and smelled like a muskrat.

“Ralph,” she hollered and an old swine in a flowered shirt and size 6 shoes, her husband, came out and she said, “this man wants a key.”

he started grinding as if he really didn’t want to.

there were slinking shadows and urine in the air.

I moved along the glass counter, pointed and called to her,

“here, I want this one.”

she handed it to me: a switchblade in a light purple case.

\$6.50 plus tax.

the key cost practically

nothing.

I got my change and

walked out on the street.

sometimes you need people like that.

## *the strangest sight you ever did see—*

I had this room in front on DeLongpre and I used to sit for hours in the daytime  
looking out the front window.  
there were any number of girls who would walk by  
swaying;  
it helped my afternoons, added something to the beer and the cigarettes.

one day I saw something extra.  
I heard the sound of it first.  
“come on, push!” he said.  
there was a long board about 2½ feet wide and 8 feet long;  
nailed to the ends and in the middle were roller skates.  
he was pulling in front two long ropes attached to the board and she  
was in back guiding and also pushing.  
all their possessions were tied to the board:  
pots, pans, bedquilts, and so forth were roped to the board tied down;  
and the skatewheels were grinding.

he was white, red-necked, a southerner—  
thin, slumped, his pants about to fall from his  
ass—  
his face pinked by the sun and cheap wine,  
and she was black and walked upright pushing;  
she was simply beautiful in turban  
long green ear rings yellow dress  
from  
neck to  
ankle.  
her face was gloriously indifferent.

“don’t worry!” he shouted, looking back at her, “somebody will rent us a place!”

she didn’t answer.

then they were gone although I still heard the skatewheels.

they’re going to make it, I thought.

I’m sure they  
did.

## *in a neighborhood of murder*

the roaches spit out paperclips  
and the helicopter circles and circles smelling for blood searchlights  
leering down into our bedroom

5 guys in this court have pistols another a  
machete  
we are all murderers and alcoholics  
but there are worse in the hotel across the street they sit in the green  
and white doorway banal and depraved waiting to be institutionalized

here we each have a small green plant in the window  
and when we fight with our women at 3 a.m.  
we speak  
softly  
and on each porch is a small dish of food always eaten by morning we  
presume  
by the  
cats.

## *private first class*

they took my man off the street the other day  
he wore an L.A. Rams sweatshirt with the sleeves cut off  
and under that an army shirt  
private first class and he wore a green beret walked very straight he  
was black in brown walking shorts hair dyed blonde he never bothered  
anybody he stole a few babies and ran off cackling but he always  
returned the infants unharmed  
he slept in the back of the Love Parlor  
the girls let him.  
compassion is found in strange places.

one day I didn't see him then another.  
I asked around.

my taxes are going to go up again. the state's got to house and feed  
him. the cops took him in. no  
good.

## *love is a dog from hell*

feet of cheese  
coffeepot soul  
hands that hate poolsticks eyes like paperclips I prefer red wine  
I am bored on airliners I am docile during earthquakes I am sleepy at  
funerals I puke at parades  
and am sacrificial at chess and cunt and caring I smell urine in  
churches I can no longer read I can no longer sleep

eyes like paperclips my green eyes  
I prefer white wine

my box of rubbers is getting stale  
I take them out  
Trojan-Enz  
lubricated  
for greater sensitivity I take them out  
and put three of them on

the walls of my bedroom are blue

Linda where did you go?  
Katherine where did you go?  
(and Nina went to England)

I have toenail clippers and Windex glass cleaner  
green eyes  
blue bedroom  
bright machinegun sun

this whole thing is like a seal caught on oily rocks and circled by the

Long Beach Marching Band at 3:36 p.m.

there is a ticking behind me but no clock  
I feel something crawling along the left side of my nose: memories of  
airliners

my mother had false teeth my father had false teeth and every Saturday  
of their lives they took up all the rugs in their house waxed the  
hardwood floors

and covered them with rugs again and Nina is in England and Irene is  
on ATD  
and I take my green eyes and lay down in my blue bedroom.

## my groupie

I read last Saturday in the redwoods outside of Santa Cruz and I was about 3/4's finished when I heard a long high scream and a quite attractive young girl came running toward me long gown & divine eyes of fire and she leaped up on the stage and screamed: "I WANT YOU!

I WANT YOU! TAKE ME! TAKE ME!"

I told her, "look, get the hell away from me."

but she kept tearing at my clothing and throwing herself at me.

"where were you," I asked her, "when I was living on one candy bar a day and sending short stories to the Atlantic Monthly?"

she grabbed my balls and almost twisted them off. her kisses tasted like shitsoup.

2 women jumped up on the stage and carried her off into the woods.

I could still hear her screams as I began the next poem.

maybe, I thought, I should have taken her on the stage in front of all those eyes.

but one can never be sure whether it's good poetry or bad acid.



*now, if you were teaching creative writing,*  
*he asked, what would you tell them?*

I'd tell them to have an unhappy love affair, hemorrhoids, bad teeth  
and to drink cheap wine, avoid opera and golf and chess, to keep  
switching the head of their bed from wall to wall and then I'd tell them  
to have another unhappy love affair and never to use a silk typewriter  
ribbon,

avoid family picnics

or being photographed in a rose garden;

read Hemingway only once, skip Faulkner

ignore Gogol

stare at photos of Gertrude Stein and read Sherwood Anderson in bed  
while eating Ritz crackers, realize that people who keep talking about  
sexual liberation are more frightened than you are.

listen to E. Power Biggs work the organ on your radio while you're  
rolling Bull Durham in the dark in a strange town

with one day left on the rent after having given up friends, relatives  
and jobs.

never consider yourself superior and/

or fair

and never try to be.

have another unhappy love affair.

watch a fly on a summer curtain.

never try to succeed.

don't shoot pool.

be righteously angry when you find your car has a flat tire.

take vitamins but don't lift weights or jog.

then after all this

reverse the procedure.

have a good love affair.

and the thing

you might learn

is that nobody knows anything— not the State, nor the mice the garden  
hose or the North Star.

and if you ever catch me teaching a creative writing class and you read  
this back to me I'll give you a straight A right up the pickle  
barrel.

## *the good life*

a house with 7 or 8 people living in it  
getting up the rent.  
there's a stereo never used and a set of bongos never used  
and there are rugs over the windows  
and you smoke  
as the living roaches stumble over buttons on your shirt and tumble  
off.

it's dark and somebody sends out for food. you eat the food and sleep.  
everybody sleeps at once: on floors, coffeetables, couches, beds, in  
bathtubs. there's even one in the brush outside.

then somebody wakes up and says, "come on, let's roll one!"

a few others wake up.  
"sure. yea. o.k."

"all right. come on, somebody roll a couple. let's get it on!"

"yeah! Let's get it on!"

we smoke a few joints and then we're asleep again  
except we reverse positions: bathtub to couch, coffeetable to rug, bed  
to floor, and a new one falls into the brush outside, and they haven't  
yet found Patty Hearst and Tim doesn't want to speak to Allan.

## the Greek

the guy in the front court can't speak English, he's Greek, a rather stupid-looking and fairly ugly man.

now my landlord does some painting, it's not very good.

he showed the Greek one of his paintings.

the Greek went out and purchased paper, brushes, paints.

the Greek started painting in his front court. he leaves the paintings outside to dry.

the Greek had never painted before— here it comes:  
a blue guitar a street a horse.

he's good  
in his mid-forties he's good.  
he's found a  
toy.  
he's happy  
now.

then I think, I wonder if he will get very good?  
and I wonder if I will have to watch the rest?  
the glory and the women and the women and the women and the  
women and the decay.

I can almost smell the bloodsuckers forming to the left.

you see,

I have fastened to him already.

## my comrades

this one teaches  
that one lives with his mother.  
and that one is supported by a red-faced alcoholic father with the brain  
of a gnat.  
this one takes speed and has been supported by the same woman for 14  
years.  
that one writes a novel every ten days but at least pays his own rent.  
this one goes from place to place sleeping on couches, drinking and  
making his spiel.  
this one prints his own books on a duplicating machine.  
that one lives in an abandoned shower room in a Hollywood hotel.  
this one seems to know how to get grant after grant, his life is a filling-  
out of forms.  
this one is simply rich and lives in the best places while knocking on  
the best doors.  
that one had breakfast with William Carlos Williams.  
and this one teaches.  
and that one teaches.  
and this one puts out textbooks on how to do it and speaks in a cruel  
and dominating voice.

they are everywhere.  
everybody is a writer.  
and almost every writer is a poet.  
poets poets poets poets poets poets poets poets poets poets poets

the next time the phone rings it will be a poet.  
the next person at the door  
will be a poet.  
this one teaches  
and that one lives with his mother and that one is writing the story of

Ezra Pound.

oh, brothers, we are the sickest and the lowest of the breed.

## soul

oh, how worried they are about my soul!  
I get letters  
the phone rings...  
“are you going to be all right?”  
they ask.  
“I’ll be all right,” I tell them.  
“I’ve seen so many go down the drain,”  
they tell me.  
“don’t worry about me,” I say.

yet, they make me nervous.  
I go in and take a shower come out and squeeze a pimple on my nose.  
then I go into the kitchen and make a salami and ham sandwich.  
I used to live on candy bars.  
now I have imported German mustard for my sandwich. I might be in  
danger at that.

the phone keeps ringing and the letters keep arriving.

if you live in a closet with rats and eat dry bread  
they like you.  
you’re a genius then.

or if you’re in the madhouse or the drunktank  
they call you a genius.  
or if you’re drunk and shouting obscenities and vomiting your life-guts  
on the floor  
you’re a genius.

but get the rent paid up a month in advance  
put on a new pair of stockings go to the dentist make love to a healthy



clean girl instead of a whore and you've lost your soul.

I'm not interested enough to ask about their souls.

I suppose I  
should.

## *a change of habit*

Shirley came to town with a broken leg and met the Chicano who smoked long slim cigars and they got a place together on Beacon street 5th floor;

the leg didn't get in the way too much and

they watched television together and Shirley cooked, on her crutches and all; there was a cat, Bogey, and they had some friends and talked about sports and Richard Nixon and how the hell to make it.

it worked for some months, Shirley even got the cast off, and the Chicano, Manuel, got a job at the Biltmore, Shirley sewed all the buttons back on Manuel's shirts, mended and matched his socks, then one day Manuel returned to the place, and she was gone— no argument, no note, just gone, all her clothes all her stuff, and Manuel sat by the window and looked out and didn't make his job the next day or the next day or

the day after, he didn't phone in, he lost his job, got a ticket for parking, smoked four hundred and sixty cigarettes, got picked up for common drunk, bailed out, went to court and pleaded guilty.

when the rent was up he moved from Beacon street, he left the cat and went to live with his brother and they'd get drunk every night and talk about how terrible life was.

Manuel never again smoked long slim cigars because Shirley always said how handsome he looked when he did.

\$\$\$\$\$\$

I've always had trouble with money.  
this one place I worked everybody ate hot dogs and potato chips  
in the company cafeteria for 3 days before each payday.  
I wanted steaks,  
I even went to see the manager of the cafeteria and demanded that he  
serve steaks. he refused.

I'd forget payday.  
I had a high rate of absenteeism and payday would arrive and  
everybody would start talking about it.  
“payday?” I'd say, “hell, is this payday? I forgot to pick up my last  
check...”

“stop the bullshit, man...”

“no, no, I mean it...”

I'd jump up and go down to payroll and sure enough there'd be a  
check and I'd come back and show it to them. “Jesus Christ, I forgot  
all about it...”

for some reason they'd get angry. then the payroll clerk would come  
around. I'd have two checks. “Jesus,” I'd say, “two checks.”  
and they were  
angry.  
some of them were working two jobs.

the worst day  
it was raining very hard, I didn't have a raincoat so I put on a very old  
coat I hadn't worn for months and

I walked in a little late while they were working.  
I looked in the coat for some cigarettes  
and found a 5 dollar bill in the side pocket: “hey, look,” I said, “I just  
found a 5 dollar bill I didn’t know I had, that’s funny.”

“hey, man, knock off the shit!”

“no, no, I’m *serious*, really, I remember wearing this coat when I got  
drunk at the bars. I’ve been rolled too often, I’ve got this fear...I take  
money out of my wallet and hide it all over me.”

“sit down and get to work.”

I reached into an inside pocket: “hey, look, here’s a TWENTY! God,  
here’s a

TWENTY I never knew I  
had! I’m  
RICH!”

“you’re not funny, son of a bitch...”

“hey, my God, here’s ANOTHER  
twenty! too much, too too much...I *knew* I didn’t spend all that money  
that night. I thought I’d been rolled again...”

I kept searching the coat. “hey! here’s a ten and here’s a fiver! my  
God...”

“listen, I’m telling you to *sit down*  
*and shut up...*”

“my God, I’m RICH...I don’t even *need*  
this job...”

“man, sit *down...*”

I found another ten after I sat down but I didn’t say  
anything.

I could feel waves of hatred and I was confused,

they believed I had plotted the whole thing just to make them feel bad.  
I didn't want to. people who live on hot dogs and potato chips for  
3 days before payday feel bad  
enough.

I sat down  
leaned forward and began to go to  
work.

outside  
it continued to  
rain.

## *sitting in a sandwich joint*

my daughter is most glorious.  
we are eating a takeout snack in my car in Santa Monica.  
I say, "hey, kid, my life has been good, so good."  
she looks at me.  
I put my head down on the steering wheel, shudder, then I kick the  
door open, put on a  
mock-puke.  
I straighten up.  
she laughs  
biting into her sandwich.  
I pick up four french fries put them into my mouth, chew them.  
it's 5:30 p.m.  
and the cars run up and down past us.  
I sneak a look: we've got all the luck we need: her eyes are brilliant  
with the remainder of the day, and she's grinning.

## *doom and siesta time*

my friend is worried about dying

he lives in Frisco I live in L.A.

he goes to the gym and works with the iron and hits the big bag.

old age diminishes him.

he can't drink because of his liver.

he can do  
50 pushups.

he writes me letters  
telling me  
that I'm the only one who listens to him.

sure, Hal, I answer him on a postcard.

but I don't want to pay all those gym fees.

I go to bed  
with a liverwurst and onion sandwich at one p.m.

after I eat I nap  
with the helicopters and vultures circling over my sagging mattress.

## *as crazy as I ever was*

drunk and writing poems at 3 a.m.

what counts now is one more tight  
pussy

before the light tilts out

drunk and writing poems at 3:15 a.m.

some people tell me that I'm famous.

what am I doing alone drunk and writing poems at 3:18 a.m.?

I'm as crazy as I ever was they don't understand that I haven't stopped  
hanging out of 4th floor windows by my heels— I still do  
right now  
sitting here

writing this down I am hanging by my heels floors up:  
68, 72, 101, the feeling is the same:  
relentless  
unheroic and necessary

sitting here drunk and writing poems at 3:24 a.m.



## sex

I am driving down Wilton Avenue when this girl of about 15  
dressed in tight blue jeans that grip her behind like two hands steps out  
in front of my car I stop to let her cross the street and as I watch her  
contours waving she looks directly through my windshield at me  
with purple eyes and then blows  
out of her mouth the largest pink globe of bubble gum  
I have ever seen while I am listening to Beethoven on the car radio.  
she enters a small grocery store and is gone  
and I am left with Ludwig.

## *dead now*

I always wanted to ball Henry Miller, she said, but by the time I got there it was too late.

damn it, I said, you girls always arrive too late.  
I've already masturbated twice today.

that wasn't his problem, she said. by the way, how come you flog-off so much?

it's the space, I said, all that space between poems and stories, it's intolerable.

you should wait, she said, you're impatient.

what do you think of Celine?  
I asked.

I wanted to ball him too.

dead now, I said.

dead now, she said.

care to hear a little music? I asked.  
might as well, she said.

I gave her Ives.

that's all I had left that night.

## twins

hey, said my friend, I want you to meet Hangdog Harry, he reminds me of you, and I said, all right, and we went to this cheap hotel.

old men sitting around watching some program on the tv in the lobby as we went up the stairway to 209 and there was Hangdog sitting in a straight strawback chair bottle of wine at his feet last year's calendar on the wall, "you guys sit down," he said, "that's the problem: man's inhumanity to man."

we watched him slowly roll a Bull Durham cigarette.

"I've got a 17 inch neck and I'll kill anybody who fucks with me."

he licked his cigarette then spit on the rug.

"just like home here. feel free."

"how you feeling, Hangdog?" asked my friend.

"terrible. I'm in love with a whore, haven't seen her in 3 or 4 weeks."

"what you think she's doing, Hang?"

"well, right now about now I'd say she's sucking some turkeyneck."

he picked up his wine bottle took a tremendous drain.

"look," my friend said to Hangdog, "we've got to get going."

"o.k., time and tide, they don't wait..."

he looked at me:

"whatcha say your name was?"

"Salomski."

“pleased to meet cha, kid.”

“likewise.”

we went down the stairway they were still in the lobby looking at t.v.

“what did you think of him?”  
my friend asked.

“shit,” I said, “he was really all right. yes.”

## *the place didn't look bad*

she had huge thighs and a very good laugh she laughed at everything  
and the curtains were yellow and I finished rolled off  
and before she went to the bathroom she reached under the bed and  
threw me a rag.

it was hard

it was stiff with other men's sperm.

I wiped off on the sheet.

when she came out she bent over and I saw all that behind as she put  
Mozart on.

## *the little girls*

up in northern California he stood in the pulpit  
and had been reading for some time he had been reading poems about  
nature and the goodness  
of man.

he knew that everything was all right and you couldn't blame him: he  
was a professor and had never been in jail or in a whorehouse had  
never had a used car die in a traffic jam;  
had never needed more than 3 drinks during his wildest evening;  
had never been rolled, flogged, mugged,  
had never been bitten by a dog he got nice letters from Gary Snyder,  
and his face was  
kindly, unmarked and  
tender.  
his wife had never betrayed him, nor had his luck.

he said, "I'm just going to read 3 more poems and then I'm going to  
step down and let  
Bukowski read."

"oh no, William," said all the little girls in their pink and blue and  
white and orange and lavender dresses, "oh no, William,  
read some more, read some more!"

he read one more poem and then he said, "this will be the last poem  
that I will read."

"oh no, William," said all the little girls in their red and green see-  
through dresses, "oh no, William," said all the little girls in their tight  
blue jeans with little hearts sewn on them, "oh no, William," said all  
the little girls, "read more poems, read more poems!"

but he was good to his word.

he got the poem out and he climbed down and vanished. as I got up to read the little girls wiggled in their seats and some of them hissed and some of them made remarks to me which I will use at some later date.

two or three weeks later

I got a letter from William saying that he *did* enjoy my reading.  
a true gentleman.

I was in bed in my underwear with a 3 day hangover. I lost the envelope but I took the letter and folded it into a paper airplane such as I had learned to make in grammar school. it sailed about the room before landing between an old Racing Form and a pair of shit-stained shorts.

we have not corresponded since.

## *rain or shine*

the vultures at the zoo (all 3 of them) sit very quietly in their caged  
tree  
and below  
on the ground  
are chunks of rotting meat.  
the vultures are over-full.  
our taxes have fed them well.

we move on to the next cage.  
a man is in there sitting on the ground eating  
his own shit.  
I recognize him as our former mailman.  
his favorite expression had been:  
“have a beautiful day.”

that day, I did.



## *cold plums*

eating cold plums in bed she told me about the German who owned everything on the block except the custom drapery shop and he tried to buy the custom drapery shop but the girls said, no. the German had the best grocery store in Pasadena, his meats were high but worth the price and his vegetables and produce were very cheap and he also sold flowers. people came from all over Pasadena to go to his store but he wanted to buy the custom drapery shop and the girls kept saying, no. one night somebody was seen running out the back door of the drapery shop and there was a fire and almost everything was destroyed— they'd had a tremendous inventory, they tried to save what was left had a fire sale but it didn't work they had to sell, finally, and then the German owned the drapery shop but it just sits there, vacant, the German's wife tried to make a go of it she tried to sell little baskets and things but it didn't work.

we finished the plums.  
“that was a sad story,” I told her.  
then she bent down and began sucking me off.  
the windows were open and you could hear me hollering all over the neighborhood at 5:30 in the evening.

## *girls coming home*

the girls are coming home in their cars and I sit by the window and watch.

there's a girl in a red dress driving a white car there's a girl in a blue dress driving a blue car.

there's a girl in a pink dress driving a red car.

as the girl in the red dress gets out of the white car I look at her legs

as the girl in the blue dress gets out of the blue car I look at her legs as the girl in the pink dress gets out of the red car I look at her legs.

the girl in the red dress who got out of the white car had the best legs

the girl in the pink dress who got out of the red car had average legs

but I keep remembering the girl in the blue dress who got out of the blue car

I saw her panties

you don't know how exciting life can get around here  
at 5:35 p.m.

## some picnic

which reminds me I shacked with Jane for 7 years she was a drunk I loved her

my parents hated her I hated my parents we made a nice foursome

one day we went on a picnic together  
up in the hills and we played cards and drank beer and ate potato salad

they treated her as if she were a living person at last

everybody laughed I didn't laugh.  
later at my place over the whiskey I said to her, I don't like them but  
it's good they treated you nice.

you damn fool, she said, don't you see?

see what?

they kept looking at my beer-belly,  
they think I'm pregnant.

oh, I said, well here's to our beautiful child.

here's to our beautiful child, she said.

we drank them down.

## bedpans

in the hospitals I've been in you see the crosses on the walls with the  
thin palm leaves behind them yellowed and browned

it is the signal to accept the inevitable

but what really hurts are the bedpans  
hard under your ass you're dying  
and you're supposed to sit up on this impossible thing  
and urinate and  
defecate

while in the bed  
next to yours  
a family of 5 brings good cheer to an incurable  
heart-case  
cancer-case  
or a case of general rot.

the bedpan is a merciless rock a horrible mockery because nobody  
wants to drag your failing body to the crapper and back.

you'd drag it  
but they've got the bars up: you're in your crib your tiny death-crib  
and when the nurse comes back an hour and a half later  
and there's nothing in the bedpan she gives you a most intemperate  
look

as if when nearing death one should be able to do the common  
common things again and again.

but if you think that's bad just relax  
and let it go  
all of it  
into the sheets

then you'll hear it not only from the nurse but from  
all the other patients...

the hardest part of dying is that they expect you to go out  
like a rocket shot into the night sky.

sometimes that can be done

but when you need the bullet and the gun you'll look up  
and find  
that the wires above your head connected to the button years ago  
have been cut  
snipped  
eliminated  
been  
made  
useless as  
the bedpan.

## *the good loser*

red face  
Texas  
and age  
he's at an L.A.  
racetrack been talking to a group of folks.  
it's the 4th race and he's ready to leave:  
“well, goodbye, folks and God bless, see you around tomorrow...”

“nice fellow.”  
“yeh.”

he's going to the parking lot to get into a 12 year old car

from there he'll drive to a roominghouse

his room will neither have a toilet nor a bath

his room will have one window with a torn paper shade and outside  
will be  
a crumbling cement wall spray-can graffiti courtesy of a Chicano  
youth gang

he'll take off his shoes and get on the bed

it will be dark but he won't turn on the light

he's got nothing to do.

## an art

all the way from Mexico straight from the fields to 14 wins  
13 by k.o.

he was ranked #3

and in a tune-up fight he was k.o'd by an unranked black fighter who  
hadn't fought in 2 years.

all the way from Mexico straight from the fields the drink and the  
women had gotten to him.

in the rematch he was k.o'd again and suspended for 6 months.

all that way for the bottle and 2 cases of v.d.

he came back in a year swearing he was clean, he'd learned.

and he earned a draw with the 9th ranked in his division.

he came back for the rematch and the fight was stopped in the 3rd  
round because he couldn't protect himself.

and he went all the way back to Mexico  
straight to the fields.

it takes a damned good poet like me

to handle drink and women evade v.d.

write about failures like him

and hold my ranking in the top 10:

all the way from Germany straight from the factories among  
beerbottles and the ringing of the phone.

## *the girls at the green hotel*

are more beautiful than movie stars and they lounge on the lawn  
sunbathing and one sits in a short dress and high heels, legs crossed  
exposing miraculous thighs.  
she has a bandanna on her head and smokes a long cigarette.  
traffic slows almost stops.

the girls ignore the traffic.  
they are half asleep in the afternoon they are whores they are whores  
without souls  
and they are magic because they lie about nothing.

I get in my car wait for traffic to clear,  
drive across the street to the green hotel to my favorite:  
she is  
sunbathing on the lawn nearest the curb.

“hello,” I say.  
she turns eyes like imitation diamonds up at me.  
her face has no expression.

I drop my latest book of poems out the car window.  
it falls by her side.

I shift into low,  
drive off.

there'll be some laughs  
tonight.



## *a good one*

I get too many phone calls.  
they seek the creature out.  
they shouldn't.

I never phoned Knut Hamsun or Ernie or  
Celine.

I never phoned Salinger  
I never phoned Neruda.

tonight I got a call:

“hello. you  
Charles Bukowski?”

“yes.”

“well, I got a house.”

“yes?”

“a bordello.”

“I understand.”

“I’ve read your books. I’ve got a  
houseboat in  
Sausalito.”

“all right.”

“I want to give you my phone number. you ever come to San Francisco  
I’ll buy you a drink.”

“o.k. give me the number.”

I took it down.

“we run a class joint. we’re after lawyers and state senators, upper  
class citizens, muggers, pimps, the like.”

“I’ll phone you when I get up there.”

“lots of the girls read your books. they love you.”

“yeah?”

“yeah.”

we said goodbye.

I liked that  
phone call.

## *shit time*

half drunk

I left her place her warm blankets and I was hungover didn't even know what town it was.

I walked along and I couldn't find my car.

but I knew it was somewhere.

and then I was lost too.

I walked around. it was a Wednesday morning and I could see the ocean to the south.

but all that drinking: the shit was about to pour out of me.

I walked towards the sea.

I saw a brown brick structure at the edge of the sea.

I walked in. there was an old guy groaning on one of the pots.

"hi, buddy," he said.

"hi," I said.

"it's hell out there, isn't it?" the old guy asked.

"it is," I answered.

"need a drink?"

"never before noon."

"what time you got?"

"11:58."

"we got two minutes."

I wiped, flushed, pulled up my pants and walked over.

the old man was still on his pot, groaning.

he pointed to a bottle of wine at his feet

it was almost done and I picked it up and took about half what remained.

I handed him a very old and wrinkled dollar

then walked outside on the lawn and puked it up.

I looked at the ocean and the ocean looked good, full of blues and greens and sharks.

I walked back out of there and down the street determined to find my

automobile.

it took me one hour and 15 minutes and when I found it I got in and drove off pretending that I knew just as much as the next man.

## madness

I don't beat the walls with my fists I just sit  
but it rushes in  
a tide of it.

the woman in the court behind me howls, weeps every night.  
sometimes the county comes and takes her away for a day or two.

I believed she was suffering the loss of a great love  
until one day she came over and told me about it— she had lost 8  
apartment houses to a gigolo who had swindled her out of them.  
she was howling and weeping over loss of property.  
she began weeping as she told me then with a mouth lined with stale  
lipstick and smelling of garlic and onions she kissed me and told me:  
“Hank, nobody loves you if you don't have money.”

she's old, almost as old as I am.

she left, still weeping...

the other morning at 7:30 a.m. two black attendants came with their  
stretcher, only they knocked on my door.

“come on, man,” said the tallest one.  
“wait,” I said, “there's a mistake.”

I was terribly hungover standing in my torn bathrobe hair hanging  
down over my eyes.

“this is the address they gave us, man, this is 5437 and 2/5's isn't it?”

“yes.”

“come on, man, don’t give us no shit.”

“the lady you want is in the back there.”

they both walked around back.

“this door here?”

“no, no, that’s my back door. look go up those steps behind you there.  
it’s the door to the east, the one with the mailbox hanging loose.”

they went up and banged on the door. I watched them take her away.  
they didn’t use the stretcher. she walked between them.  
and the thought occurred to me that they were taking the wrong one  
but I wasn’t sure.

## *a 56 year old poem*

I went with two ladies down to Venice  
to look for antique furniture.  
I parked in back of the store and went in with them.  
\$125 for a clock, \$700 for 6 chairs.  
I stopped looking.

the ladies moved around looking at everything.  
the ladies had class.  
I waved goodbye to one of the ladies and walked out.

it was Sunday and the bar wasn't much better,  
everybody was nervous and young and blonde and pale.  
I finished my drink, got 4 beers at the liquor store  
and sat in my car drinking them.

finishing the 4th beer the ladies came out.  
they asked me if I was all right.  
I told them that every experience meant something  
and that they had pulled me out of my usual murky  
current.

the one I knew best had bought a table with a marble top for \$100.  
she owned her own business and was a civilized person.  
she was civilized enough to know a neighbor who had a van  
and while I sat in her apartment drinking 1974 *Zeller Schwarze Katz*  
they went down and got the table.

later she wanted to know what I thought about the table and I said I  
thought it was all right, sometimes I lost one hundred dollars at the  
racetrack. we watched tv in bed and later that night I couldn't come. I  
think it was because I was thinking about that marble table.

I'm sure it was. I don't have any antique marble tables at my place, I almost never have any sex trouble at my place. sometimes but very seldom.

I don't understand the whole antique business

I'm sure it's a giant con.



## *the beautiful young girl walking past the graveyard—*

I stop my car at the signal I see her walking past the graveyard—

as she walks past the iron fence I can see through the iron fence and I see the headstones and the green lawn.

her body moves in front of the iron fence the headstones do not move.

I think,  
doesn't anybody else see this?

I think,  
does she see those headstones?

if she does  
she has wisdom that I don't have for she appears to ignore them.

her body moving in its magic fluid  
and her long hair is lighted by the 3 p.m. sun.

the signal changes she crosses the street to the west I drive west.

I drive my car down to the ocean get out  
and run up and down in front of the sea for 35 minutes  
seeing people here and there with eyes and ears and toes and various  
other parts.

nobody seems to care.

## beer

I don't know how many bottles of beer I have consumed while waiting  
for things to get better.

I don't know how much wine and whiskey and beer  
mostly beer

I have consumed after splits with women— waiting for the phone to  
ring waiting for the sound of footsteps, and the phone never rings until  
much later

and the footsteps never arrive until much later.

when my stomach is coming up out of my mouth

they arrive as fresh as spring flowers: “what the hell have you done to  
yourself?

it will be 3 days before you can fuck me!”

the female is durable she lives seven and one half years longer than the  
male, and she drinks very little beer because she knows it's bad for the  
figure.

while we are going mad they are out  
dancing and laughing with horny cowboys.

well, there's beer

sacks and sacks of empty beer bottles and when you pick one up the  
bottles fall through the wet bottom

of the paper sack

rolling

clanking

spilling grey wet ash and stale beer,

or the sacks fall over at 4 a.m.

in the morning

making the only sound in your life.

beer

rivers and seas of beer beer beer beer  
the radio singing love songs as the phone remains silent and the walls  
stand straight up and down and beer is all there is.

## artist

all of a sudden I'm a painter.  
a girl from Galveston gives me \$50 for a painting of a man holding a  
candycane while floating in a darkened sky.

than a young man with a black beard comes over  
and I sell him three for \$80.  
he likes rugged stuff where I write across the painting— "shoot shit"  
or "GRATE ART IS  
HORSESHIT, BUY TACOS."

I can do a painting in 5 minutes.  
I use acrylics, paint right out of the tube.  
I do the left side of the painting first with my left hand and then finish  
the right side with my right hand.

now the man with the black beard comes back with a friend whose hair  
sticks out and they have a young blonde girl with them.

black beard is still a sucker: I sell him a hunk of shit— an orange dog  
with the word "DOG" written on his side.

stick-out hair wants 3 paintings for which I ask \$70.  
he doesn't have the money.  
I keep the paintings but he promises to send me a girl called Judy  
in garter belt and high heels.  
he's already told her about me: "a world-renowned writer," he said and  
she said, "oh no!" and pulled her dress up over her head.  
"I want that," I told him.  
then we haggled over terms I wanted to fuck her first

then get head later.

“how about head first and fuck later?” he asked.

“that doesn’t work,” I said.

so we agreed:

Judy will come by and afterwards

I will hand her the 3 paintings.

so there we are:

back to the barter system, the only way to beat inflation.

never the less,

I’d like to

start the Men’s Liberation Movement: I want a woman to hand *me* 3 of her paintings after I have made love to her,

and if she can’t paint she can leave me

a couple of golden earrings or maybe a slice of ear in memory of one who could.

## my old man

16 years old during the depression I'd come home drunk and all my clothing— shorts, shirts, stockings— suitcase, and pages of short stories would be thrown out on the front lawn and about the street.

my mother would be waiting behind a tree: "Henry, Henry, don't go in...he'll kill you, he's read your stories..."

"I can whip his ass..."

"Henry, please take this...and find yourself a room."

but it worried him that I might not finish high school so I'd be back again.

one evening he walked in with the pages of one of my short stories (which I had never submitted to him)

and he said, "this is a great short story."

I said, "o.k.,"

and he handed it to me and I read it.

it was a story about a rich man

who had a fight with his wife and had gone out into the night for a cup of coffee and had observed the waitress and the spoons and forks and the salt and pepper shakers and the neon sign in the window and then had gone back to his stable to see and touch his favorite horse who then

kicked him in the head and killed him.

somehow  
the story held meaning for him though  
when I had written it I had no idea of what I was writing about.

so I told him, "o.k., old man, you can have it."  
and he took it and walked out and closed the door.  
I guess that's as close  
as we ever got.

## fear

he walks up to my Volks after I have parked and rocks it back and forth  
grinning around his cigar.

“hey, Hank, I notice all the women around your place lately...good looking stuff; you’re doing all right.”

“Sam,” I say, “that’s not true; I am one of God’s most lonely men.”

“we got some nice girls at the parlor, you oughta try some of them.”

“I’m afraid of those places, Sam, I can’t walk into them.”

“I’ll send you a girl then, real nice stuff.”

“Sam, don’t send me a whore, I always fall in love with whores.”

“o.k., friend,” he says, “let me know if you change your mind.”

I watch him walk away.

some men are always on top of their game.

I am mostly always confused.

he can break a man in half  
and doesn’t know who Mozart is.

who wants to listen to music  
anyhow  
on a rainy Wednesday night?



## *little tigers everywhere*

Sam the whorehouse man has squeaky shoes  
and he walks up and down the court  
squeaking and talking to the cats.  
he's 310 pounds,  
a killer  
and he talks to the cats.  
he sees the women at the massage parlor and has no girlfriends no  
automobile  
he doesn't drink or dope his biggest vices are chewing on a cigar and  
feeding all the cats in the neighborhood.  
some of the cats get pregnant  
and so finally there are more and more cats and everytime I open my  
door one or two cats will run in and sometimes I'll forget they are  
there and they'll shit under the bed or I'll awaken at night hearing  
sounds  
leap up with my blade sneak into the kitchen and find one of Sam the  
whorehouse man's cats walking around on the sink or sitting on top of  
the refrigerator.  
Sam runs the love parlor around the corner  
and his girls stand in the doorway in the sun  
and the traffic signals go red and green and red and green and all of  
Sam's cats possess some of the meaning as do the days and the nights.

## after the reading:

“...I’ve seen people in front of their typewriters in such a bind that it would blow their intestines right out of their assholes if they were trying to shit.”

“ah hahaha hahaha!”

“...it’s a shame to work *that* hard to try to write.”

“ah hahaha hahaha!”

“ambition rarely has anything to do with talent. luck is best, and talent limps along a little bit behind luck.”

“ah haha.”

he rose and left with an 18 year old virgin, the most beautiful co-ed of them all.

I closed my notebook got up and limped a little bit behind them.

## *about cranes*

sometimes after you get your ass kicked real good by the forces

you often wish you were a crane standing on one leg

in blue water

but there's the  
old up-bringing you know:

you don't want to be a crane  
standing on one leg

in blue water

the distress is not enough

and

the victory limps

a crane can't buy a piece of ass

or

hang itself at noon in Monterey  
those are some of the things

humans can do

besides  
stand on one leg

## *a gold pocket watch*

my grandfather was a tall German with a strange smell on his breath.  
he stood very straight in front of his small house and his wife hated  
him and his children thought him odd.

I was six the first time we met and he gave me all his war medals.

the second time I met him he gave me his gold pocket watch.

it was very heavy and I took it home and wound it very tight and it  
stopped running which made me feel bad.

I never saw him again and my parents never spoke of him nor did my  
grandmother who had long ago

stopped living with him.

once I asked about him and they told me

he drank too much

but I liked him best

standing very straight in front of his house and saying, "hello, Henry,  
you and I, we know each  
other."

## *beach trip*

the strong men the muscle men there they sit down at the beach cocoa  
tans with the weights scattered about them untouched

they sit as the waves go in and out

they sit as the stock market makes and breaks men and families

they sit while one punch of a button could turn their turkeynecks to  
black and shriveled matchsticks

they sit while suicides in green rooms trade it in for space

they sit while former Miss Americas weep before wrinkled mirrors

they sit  
they sit with less life-flow than apes and my woman stops and looks at  
them: “oooh oooh oooh,” she says.

I walk off with my woman as the waves go in and out.

“there’s something wrong with them,” she said, “what is it?”

“their love only runs in one direction.”

the seagulls whirl and the sea runs in and out

and we left them back there wasting themselves time  
this moment the seagulls the sea  
the sand.

## *one for the shoeshine man*

the balance is preserved by the snails climbing the Santa Monica cliffs;  
the luck is in walking down Western Avenue and having the girls in a  
massage parlor holler at you, “Hello, Sweetie!”

the miracle is having 5 women in love with you at the age of 55, and  
the goodness is that you are only able to love one of them.

the gift is having a daughter more gentle than you are, whose laughter  
is finer than yours.

the peace comes from driving a blue 67 Volks through the streets like a  
teenager, radio tuned to The Host Who Loves You Most, feeling the  
sun, feeling the solid hum of the rebuilt motor as you needle through  
traffic.

the grace is being able to like rock music, symphony music, jazz...  
anything that contains the original energy of joy.

and the probability that returns is the deep blue low yourself flat upon  
yourself within the guillotine walls angry at the sound of the phone or  
anybody’s footsteps passing; but the other probability— the lilting  
high that always follows— makes the girl at the checkstand in the  
supermarket look like Marilyn

like Jackie before they got her Harvard lover

like the girl in high school that we all followed home.

there is that which helps you believe in something else besides death:  
somebody in a car approaching on a street too narrow, and he or she  
pulls aside to let you by, or the old fighter Beau Jack shining shoes  
after blowing the entire bankroll on parties

on women

on parasites,

humming, breathing on the leather, working the rag

looking up and saying: “what the hell, I had it for a while. that beats  
the other.”

I am bitter sometimes but the taste has often been sweet, it's only that I've feared to say it. it's like when your woman says, "tell me you love me," and you can't.

if you see me grinning from my blue Volks  
running a yellow light driving straight into the sun I will be locked in  
the arms of a  
crazy life  
thinking of trapeze artists of midgets with big cigars of a Russian  
winter in the early 40's of Chopin with his bag of Polish soil  
of an old waitress bringing me an extra cup of coffee and laughing as  
she does so.

the best of you  
I like more than you think.  
the others don't count except that they have fingers and heads and  
some of them eyes and most of them legs and all of them  
good and bad dreams  
and a way to go.

justice is everywhere and it's working and the machine guns and the  
frogs and the hedges will tell you so.



## 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* (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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