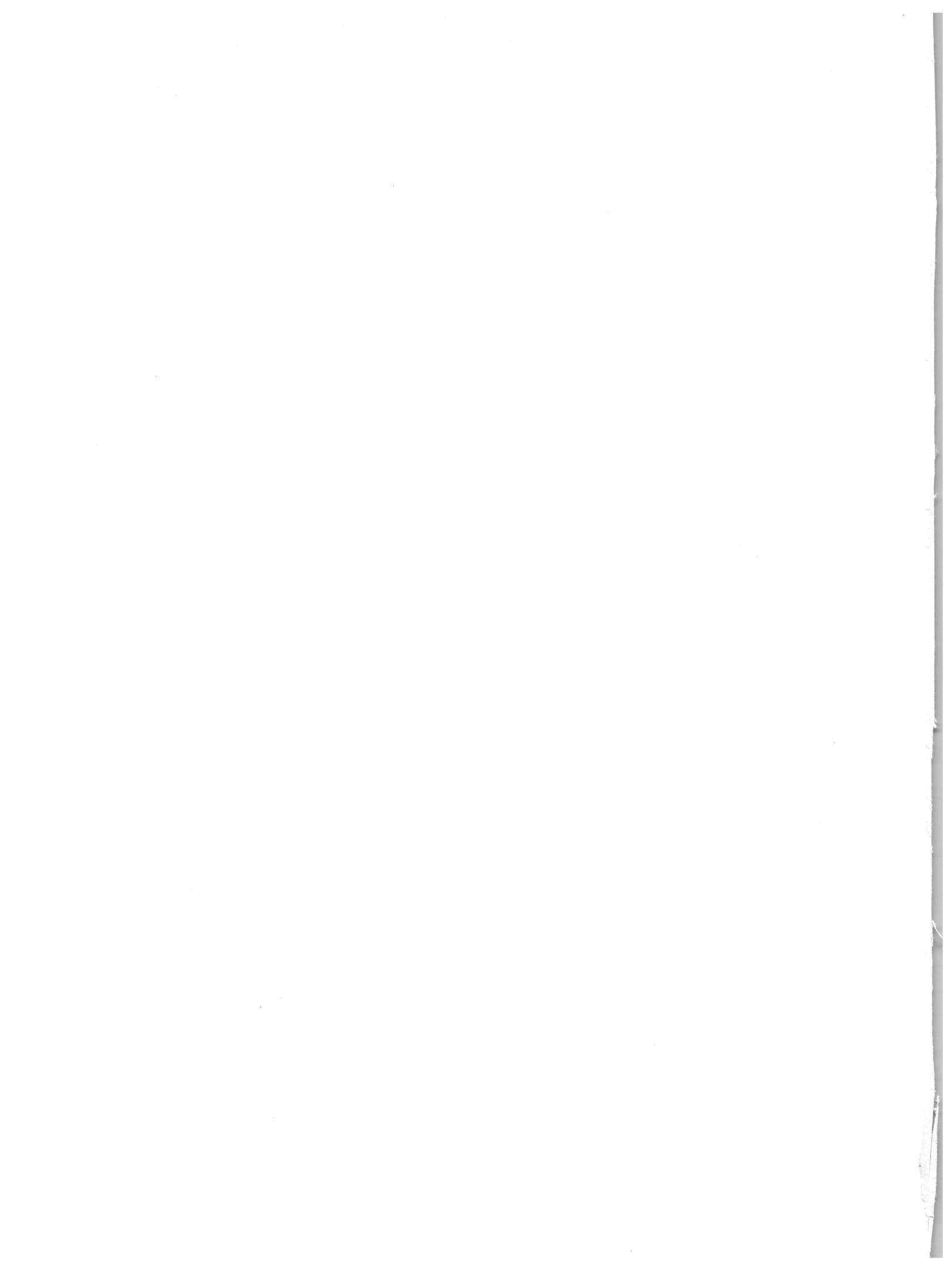


THE NIGHT BEFORE THINKING

Tony Dingman

Introduction by Jack Hirschman





THE NIGHT BEFORE THINKING

Tony Dingman

CC. Marimbo
~Berkeley~

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INTRODUCTION

It's about 37 years that I've known Tony Dingman on the streets of North Beach in San Francisco. I must say, as a native New Yorker who left the Apple in 1955, Dingman is one of the few joes who reminds me of that town, and he's from Westwood, Los Angeles! A Californian! But he's got that down-home working-stiff air about him and indeed he's a teamster, a union bloke, like they say, and for many years he's been the left-hand man of Francis Ford Coppola, driving the godfather-maker, as well as Woody Allen and Philip Kaufman to the sets of their movies when made in San Francisco, but also to sets outside the city. Tony, like other New York workers, is very close to the sports page; he knows the stats, can be quippy, even jokesome and all the elements I've described in the last five lines appear in this book, including snatches of the personalities of cinematic directors and artists. His own catalog of jobs, which poems I've arranged at the very end of the book, is a modest list. Tony's excluded about 25 other films in which he extra'd or had a bit role.

But here's the kicker: Tony Dingman is one of the most prodigious poets in the whole Bay Area. For the past 26 years, he has literally written a poem a day! And each one rarely if ever goes on to a second page!

Many, like some in this book, are written in traditional line-form. Others (a future book) are written as shapes on the page—not visual in the sense of say shaping a horse or a tree, though such images may drop in at any time and feed the pome-palette of this openly inventive imagination.

And Dingman as a poet is a memorial brother to others who played an inspiring part in his life and works. The legendary working-class poet Lew Welch, who disappeared in the Sierra Nevada mountains and with whom Dingman had drunk at Gino and Carlo's Bar in North Beach, is one of his ikons, twice figured in this book. And so is Gene Ruggles remembered, who passed a few years ago, as one of the most superb poets of the lyripolitical dimension, especially in the '70s and '80s around these parts.

These and other poets and painters like Lawrence Ferlinghetti have fed Dingman's imagination with streetwise philosophy and idiom and that's what the reader's going to experience in *The Night Before Thinking*.

It contains Tony's work ethic, his fan-atic, his anecdotal self, and, throughout, the charm of a guy who knows how to handle the language, to keep the poems "tight" and ever entertaining in their revelations of a sort of keeping-on keeping-on worker.

Dingman is not ruled in his poems by an overwhelming visionary passion for language or thorough transformative societal change. He's an extraordinarily avid reader of books, poetry and fiction and historical accounts. But his key mode is listening with demotic ears to what the Joes and Janes are saying and thinking in their daily conversations—even with themselves.

You'll see what I mean in the light you'll feel after reading this wonderful book of poems.

Jack Hirschman, 2013

LEW IS DRIVING

We are on our
way
to The City
and
I say how
glad
I am to see
him again.
I have
all these
pages
I want to
show him.
How long
has
it been?
40 years
later
is
a lot of
catching up
to do
in one
dream.
But the whole
time
I did it
your way,
I had
fun. I didn't
get in my
own way.
And I
wrote
like I
talked
about things
that
came to me.
Any suggestions
for
the road?
Okay
I'll keep
a rubber
band
around the
overhead
visor
for
bridge tolls.

IF BY CHANCE

the auto of my
bio
goes out of its
way

to make things
up
just for the fun
of it

then let it be
said
that it was my
intent.

To bore is to
sin.
To be bored is
fatal.

Rise up with
larceny
and rush on to
theft.

Repeat the bawdy
story,
Tell the good
joke.

Remember what brings
laughs
and forget the
duds.

The best material
is
the tale told on
yourself.

And no apologies
or
faux excuses will
do.

THE OLDER YOU GET

The less you sleep.
I'm not
trying
to disappoint people
but
why not give
folks
a proper warning of
how things are
going to
be.
Trips to the pharmacy
and
aches and pains
that
come and go.
When
the guy on the
street says
Hello pops
and
no one ever
checks your
ID.
You cease to be
Mr. Finger
Popping
Toe Dancing life
of
the party.
When
I go up steps
people
pass me left
and sometimes right.
You live
in
the past
because there is
so much of
it.
So I take my pills
and take it
slow
and take it
one day at a time
and hope
it
doesn't take too
long
for the bus
to come.

BIOSEXUAL

Yes I love
a tree
and
if I had
to
marry one
it
would be
a Bristle
Cone
which lives
to be
4000 years
old.
And who
doesn't
love a
rose?
Or
soft green
moss?
All
the tea
in
China and
all
the coffee
in Brazil
to
begin our
day.
Nature
lover
or tree
hugger
let
the sap
flow
and the
roots
dig deeper.
Sea weed
in the
slip stream.
Bamboo in
the wind.
The chickadee
in the
cotton
woods and
falling
seeds.

HISTORY BITES
(for Dominik and Rosemary)

Save a day.
Hold
that thought.

Looks like
scans like
but
is not
poetry.

For non-
medicinal
purposes
it is
named prose
stack:
Prostak.

A daily
drill
practiced
without
failing to
even once
in 20
years.

That bruise
over
my eye
came from the
backswing
of a fighting
door.

And you could
say
an innocent
automatic
weapon
got carried
away.

If it's evidence
you want
every
page is
dated
and the White
Out
is all
mine.

I FELT IT COME AND GO

Just for a moment
I had it.

All of it. Just
a glimmer

and then it was
gone.

No title. No shape.
An urge.

I guess you could
call it

a poem. It was
some—

how someway to say
something.

Which now I can't
fathom.

A vague longing
for

a non-existent
possible.

How can I remember
what

had yet to come into
being?

There it stays in
my mind

an undreamed chimera
as

a gestatable thing
aborning.

And so it was a
presentiment

that in its passing
passed on.

LESS

Less sleep
Less yak
Less fuck
Less jump

(As you get
older)

Less patience
Less energy
Less appetite
Less limber

(As you get
older)

Less teeth
Less adaptable
Less understanding
Less belief

(As you get
older)

Less eyesight
Less tolerance
Less curiosity
Less exercise

(As you get
older)

Less willing
Less interested
Less friendly
Less digestion

(As you get
older)

Less competitive
Less memory
Less focus
Less satisfied

(As you get
older)

FRANK LOBDELL, FRANK LOBDELL

Harbor pilot in
a buoy patch

Rocking chair for
a carousel

Gyroscope on a
trampoline

Pendulum taking a
holiday

Prayer wheel in a
rubber room

Fourth of July for
a hobbyhorse

Steeplechase through
a bowling alley

Crop duster over
Inca ruins

A p-38 unloading
logarithms

Locomotion in a
toy shop

Semaphore during
a solar flare

Boomerang in an
electric storm

Electrician in a
fossil field

Measuring stick for
a pyramid builder

Storm chaser with
an hourglass

Referee checking
a crop circle

Night watchman for
a boondoggle

THE LOST ART OF TIPPING

Go ahead!
Be somebody!
Get large!

If Marcel
Proust can
tip 100%

why don't
you go
for 30%?

Do it!
Throw your
money around.

What's wrong
with being
remembered?

And give
the busboy
a fiver.

This is
no time
to economize.

Get your
money in
circulation.

Your tip
will make
someone's day

or buy
a kid a
present.

It's a sin
to be a
miser.

Santa knows
when you've
been good

and St Peter
has a
calculator.

PAELLA FOR A DIZZY FRIEND

He told me he
was too
dizzy
to walk down
the stairs
so
we took him an order
of paella
from Alegrias Spanish
restaurant
plus
an order of bread
pudding.
It
seemed only right
a retired
chef
should have a good
dinner and
his
birthday has just
come and gone
so it
wasn't meals on
wheels
but an overdue
gift.
He
collapsed last year
and it
turned out he
hadn't had enough
to eat
and
I hope it will
be solved
by
this food infusion.
For a man
who is
legally blind
and
living below the
poverty line
I
can only admire
his fortitude
and grit
and
his resolve never
to use
a cliche or a cellphone.

BE KIND TO YOUR FINE FEATHERED FRIENDS

That funny looking bird
is about to
take off
so let him go his flighty
way
to warmer climes
or the cool
south.

Meanwhile back on the
ground
I'll be digging in
deeper and
deeper
to get away from
flying objects.
All

God's creatures are
form fitted
to be
where they are meant
to live
an adapted life.

Swim
with the turtles and
run with the
wolves
and don't forget
the sun screen.

It
could be somebody's
brother
many times removed
but propinquity
is all we've
got
so give a helping
hand to
any and all.

The worm
that crawls is no
lower
than the squirrel
that climbs
in our
upside down gymnasium
spinning and
tipping
in centrifugal homage
to the circle
of fire
called Ra.

"GO AHEAD AND MAKE A PIG OUT OF YOURSELF"

said the goofy guy
in front of
Caffe Trieste.

He was
sitting in a chair but
couldn't go in
because he was 86'd for
punching out
their window.
Not dangerous
but mad mad but not
necessarily
at me.

I heard him say
once he
had a portrait of
Kaiser Wilhelm
on the wall over his
bed.

It's true
I'm forty pounds
overweight
but he could have
said it to
anyone.

I
didn't go in
because
of a
long line.
Not unusual on
a Sunday morning.
I left him
laughing at nothing
which might be
a reasonable reaction
in the absurdity
of his world.
Fools in the queue!

Eating
their way into
death!

All
the coffee addicts
coming to
get their fix!

Beatniks,
go home!
Painters, stay in bed!
(I just hope
he stays out of
The Rubber Room).

LAST OMS FOR GENE RUGGLES

1

His hand reached
up for a nest
of words.

2

Keep the fires
burning. Keep the
fires burning.

3

Gene called me to
read a poem.

4

Gene called to
plan a reading
for Iraqi children.

5

Gene called me to
say he loved me.

6

I never forgot
his strong hand-
shake.

7

He grew up on
a Michigan farm.

8

He lost a fight
with a tree (and
the bottle).

9

He had his friends
and he had his
enemies but what
he really had was
a poetic gift.

10

He hated unemploy-
ment lines and he
despised dictators
and he loathed the
polluters.

11

Gene was all heart.

HOW TO WORRY DIFFERENTLY

is what Cezanne
did to us
(I read
Pablo Picasso said)
and how
to end
the end game
or
Better Exit Strategies
on your
way
out of the museum
of art
or
I stand before a Cezanne
“Knitted
by symphonic pushes
and pulls of
color”
or
why do those apples
and oranges
look so
full and round?
or
if the light hits the
side of the
barn
is
it coming or going?
or
was he really
afraid to touch doorknobs?
and if he
was
what about shaking
hands
or
God forbid a
sneeze
in his direction but
those grubby
peasants
playing cards didn’t
seem to bother
him
as he brushed in
roughed cubes
of
squared light
avidly.

A PAINTED ACTOR ON A PAINTED STAGE

let there be wigs
and false
mustaches

lights on wheels

sound booms
swinging

cars in a carousel
of activity

a
singing
typewriter

explosions without
shrapnel

makeup for
make believe

artifice in auto
suggestion

where cats and
dogs
do a raindance

a Cuban cigar
in
Emerald City

resuscitated words
written
to be spoken

from the bottle
comes
the genie

every emotion
has
a carbon date

gypsies never
have to
say goodbye

even a coat
can make
you believe

THE STARVING ARMENIAN

Our parents used to
say,

Finish your food.
There

are starving Armenians.
Starved

by the Turks and
death

marched into the
Ukraine.

Much later in Fresno
when

they were prospering
during

the Depression it
was said

in an ironic fashion.
Vivid

personalities, hard
working

they are also a people
chosen

to be resented and
scapegoated.

With pride they were
early

Christians surrounded
by a

world of Muslims and
infidels.

A daring young man
on the

American flying trapeze
William Saroyan

a face on the U.S.
stamp.

NEIL ARMSTRONG, NEIL ARMSTRONG
(for Don Wilhelm)

There he goes
again

slipping the
pull

of gravity to
be

on his way out
of here.

He'll never need
a passport

just a few moon
rocks

to show St. Peter
his

earthly bona
fides.

As always on
take off

his pulse is
normal

blood pressure
stable

voice calm and
even.

He got his pilot's
license

before his driver's
license.

Out of Ohio he
came and

Upward Ho was the
fascination

with no footprints
in the dust.

A GOOD YEAR FOR SWALLOWS

and an even
better
year
for blackbirds.

Humans aren't do-
ing very well
for all
the known reasons

and for all the
unknown abuses
about
to come our way.

Mother Earth has
taken a beating
for
every fracking reason

that digging for
dollars can
justify.
(Stealing from mom's purse)

Music has always
been good
medicine
and medicine is

the music of opera-
tive good
health.
(The song of surgery)

It's still a good
year for the
meek
who shall learn

to inherit what's
left of the
last of
our surviving earth.

I WISH I HAD A NICKEL

everytime I
heard
“Take Five”
said
my friend
Michael.

Dave Brubeck
died
at 91
but his
quartet
keeps on
swinging.

Gene Wright
Joe Morello
and
the irreplaceable
Paul Desmond
kept it
together.

I heard
them
play at
Mills College
way back
and just
enough times
for 50
years
not to
forget that
tune.

In bars
supermarkets
cars
elevators
in
Viet-nam
bunkers
and golf
course
club houses
forever Brubeck
on
the black
and white
88's.

“SO?”
(for Michael McCourt)

My first job
back in

Limerick was a
kitchen boy

in a hotel. The
chef

was a French
lunatic

who screamed and
threw pots.

One day I heard
a “meow”

and I looked all
around.

They used to keep
a big pot

of soup stock on-
going

and finally I
found the

little guy down in
the pot.

I pulled the poor
thing out

and tried to clean
it up.

When the chef came
in I said

I had some bad
news.

The cat fell in
the pot.

All he said was,
“So?”

OFF THE TETHER

And I sleep sleep
sleep

I read a Victorian
novel

I try not to look
at the clock

No need to get in
an automobile

(I confess my girl
gave me a ride)

I surf my television
channels

I don't go near my
telephone

(again I confess to
carrying my cell)

I do a little walk
to the store

I drop my laundry
to be done

I don't have to call
Southwest Air

I don't have to look
for my gas card

I have a martini at
The Big Four

I go to Fog City
for dinner

I avoid waiting for
anything

I resupply my meds
at Walgreens

I cull the Sunday
paper of ads

I vegetate without
any guilt.

THE END OF THE BEGINNING

Are we well started
or have we
started well?

It
is going to be Day 17
of 46
early signs of
Battle Fatigue are
showing
with work dreams
and
certain crew members
beginning to
irritate.

In the real world
bombs are
falling
in
Libya and president
Obama is
in Brazil.

I
take my pills
and talk to you and me
here at my
desk
glad I didn't commit
suicide when
I was
26
and not famous like
Keats.

After 45 years of film
work I have
arrived
at one rule never
to be broken:
ALWAYS
BE ON TIME!
All sins are forgiven
except
BEING LATE.

And
if you work in
San Francisco
don't forget your coat
and don't make
fun of
the old the fat
or the poor.

Okay, ready when you are.

UNDONE BY A STALKING PHOTOGRAPHER

He followed us from
the house
to the airport or
he was
waiting but he ruined
our day.

A
silver Toyota,
license
plate unknown,
driver
maybe Asian,
invasion
of privacy certain.

A beautiful
goodbye
turned into paranoid
anger.

I
had mad daydreams
of smashing
windows
and breaking headlights.

Blocking his
car
and bringing the
cops.

Fame is not a
game
to
be played lightly.

Children
have to be protected
and sleep to
be had.

Who
are these creeps
with no
lives?

They are bottom
feeders
lurking at the edge of
rich lives
with
insulting opportunism.

Peepers on
wheels
with a telephoto
lens
they scurry away
like the
cockroaches they are.

MY LEADING LADY

went home in
her
bath robe.

Why
bother to change
with so
little time and
besides
who's going to see
through
the tinted windows?

Her
husband called but
even he
couldn't see the
regal miss
Nicole

in white terrycloth.

All day long
in and out of wardrobe
and
now quite late
and after
dark
if
anyone were to see
(no one did)
they
might assume
she was dressed in
Ermine!

Eyes
on the road
and
foot on the pedal of
the Cadillac

I
crossed the city
as
my leading lady
was on the
phone
to Australia.

Dimming
the lights when
we got home

I
only saw a blur
of white
and
a well turned
ankle.

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

I drove by the graffiti
20 times before
I saw it:

GHOST
PISS

on the wall of
the old Amtrak station
in Oakland
in
bold black letters.
It has been
40 years
since passengers came
this way
and
now HBO has transformed
the abandoned
station
into the Hotel Florida
of Madrid circa
1938.

Reduced vision as we
implode into
our
interior lives
without
even looking up at a
world to behold.

I
include myself as
we fail to
see
what we are looking
at.

The blond floozy
remains a
blond
as she empties
your wallet.

As for
the invisible micturator
who has gone
into
the mists of time
only the echo
of the steel on the
rails stays
in the memory of those
railroad days.

DON'T SIT ON MY APRICOTS

which is the
title of

the short story
of

a long day in
the field

traveling to
various

parts of the bay
area.

The car was full.
Three

in back two up
front

and we had lots
of gas

and a list of
places

that our director
had to see.

This short story
is about

the reality of
appearances

and how Woody
Allen

sounds just like
Woody Allen

and he wears a
floppy hat

and after all
these years

knows what he
wants

if he gets to
see it.

MY BOSS IS A BACKSEAT DRIVER

1

Keep your eyes
on the road,
Tony.

2

Both hands on
the wheel, Tony.

3

Don't look at
the GPS, Tony.

4

It's against the
law to talk on
the phone in New
York, Tony.

5

Are we there yet
Tony?

6

Do you know where
we are going,
Tony?

8.august.12

SHAKESPEARE IS KAPUT

The bard is
no more
and Avon has
a new
name.
The Globe is
a garage
and all the
players
have changed
roles.
Hamlet has
a shrink.
Romeo got
a sex change
and Juliet
is in
Vegas.
Falstaff
joined AA
and Iago
is in the
Peace Corps.
Othello
can't be
found
but Desdemona
is in
Pomona.
Prospero got
a tattoo
and Richard the
Third
went to
Samoa.
It's all
so different
now that
Henry is
Hank
and Antony
is Tony.
The revision
continues
with no
ghost
and not
a hint
of jealousy.

I ASK MYSELF

Is this all there is
my friends?
and the answer is
yes

Things are just what
they seem to be
so don't complicate
the obvious

The birds are in
the trees
and the fish are
in the river

Cars go over the bridge
one after another
sometimes with their
lights on

The water on the bay
looks green then
looks blue then looks
a flat grey

I hear the old song
“Is You Is Or
Is You Ain’t My Baby?”
despite the grammar

The big bang at night
is only a noise
but sleep can be got
anyway

I shine my shoes
so I can see
the clouds moving
at my feet

21.oct.09

SPEAKING OF MYSELF

I'm all about
me

said the self
satisfied

self. I talk
about

myself, I think
about

myself, everything
I do

is for me, my-
self

and I. My con-
versation

is full of I,
I, I.

I never do any
thing

for anyone else
because

I'm so busy
taking

care of myself.
If

I take a good
look

in the mirror
I'm

gratified to
see

it's the one
and

only lovely
me

staring back
at me.

FRANK McCOURT, FRANK McCOURT

President Obama sent
the White House

flag that flew on
the day

he died. "For service
to his

country (Air Force)"
and of course

for "the courageous
and honest

account of a painful
Irish childhood."

Michael called and
also said

the president told
Frank at

one time, "I've read
every word

you ever published!"
Me too.

28.july.09

HYMN TO HER

Al Young said it.
Which came
first,

the musician or
the poet.
In

his case a tie,
with a dash
of

humor and a touch
of jazz.
He

was reading at the
Poetry Festival
at

the Palace of Fine
Arts auditorium
along

with poets from
all over the
world.

A Jack Hirschman
production and
airline

tickets paid by
Robert Mailer
Anderson.

Al, an old friend
who I met when
he

was teaching at
Stanford,
is

so very articulate
and poised
and

with a melodious
voice a master
of charm.

SHORT STORIES FULL OF HEAT

Somewhere on the
Caribbean
maybe on the
north coast
of South
America
a coffin
is sweating.
The pirates
are gone now
but the
old parrots
are still
afraid.
A duel is
in the air
and the
banana workers
still have to
worry about
spider bites.
A widow
sits in her
room sewing
with memories
of her
husband
the colonel
who had
a long scar
on his leg.
Late in
the afternoon
a downpour
will turn
the dust
to mud.
Naturally
someone's aunt
has seen
a ghost
and a goat
got lost
near the
harbor.
The wedding
might be
postponed
because
the groom
has caught
the measles.

ACTING CLASS, 1-9
(for Jafar Woods)

1

Bring the drinks.
Don't be a
waiter.

2

When you talk
to me talk to
me.

3

You don't hit
your marks. The
marks hit you.

4

When you remember
don't remember.

5

Motivation is
just another
excuse.

6

Say hello the
same way you
always say hello.

7

The only way
to get out
of yourself
is to leave.

8

Being on time
is not square.

9

On location leave
your agent, your
manager and your
spouse at home.

13.oct.12

THE NIGHT BEFORE THINKING
(after the Ferlinghetti painting)

The boy canaries
were not
singing
the blues
but to
the tune
of running
water.
Meanwhile
fluffing
their feathers
the girls
were chirping
their way
to sleep.
And
all through
the night
while
the cage
was covered
the painter
in a green
mode
made lime
characters
in con-
figuration.
The mannequin
in his
lap
has come
to life
with a
sugar fix
and a
brush
with glory.
With a
herd
of words
riding a
wagon of
colors
he is a
visualist
born to
rectify
a bloodless
joke in
a hyena
night.

NUMB WITH RELIEF

Done with the
work.

Over with the
worries.

Finished off the
job.

No damage to the
car.

Never not once
late.

No foot in the
mouth.

No losing my
way.

Mixups and foulups
nil.

No tickets to be
had.

Receipts all turned
in.

No new enemies
made.

No more cellphone
madness.

End of all dumb
questions.

Everyone got away
safely.

Last check in the
mail.

One more for the
resume.

Scroll the end
credits.

LES MURRAY, & WHY HE WRITES POETRY

For the weird
unemployment.

For the painless
headaches,

that must be tapped
to strike

down along your
writing arm.

For working always
beyond

your own intelligence.

For not needing

to rise and betray
the poor to do it.

For a non-devouring
fame.

9.jan.02

HOW I WORK AS A POET

The title of a Lew Welch
book that I could not
find. Lew always
said it was
better
for a poet to have a
real job in the real
world. Just being
a poet and only
writing poetry
was Dullsville!
He worked
on the waterfront
which gave him
the money
to drink himself
to death
but at least he
heard real talk from
real people and
not academic
yalps.

DON'T GET IN YOUR
OWN WAY
and have a good time
and write like
you talk and maybe
you'll get lucky.

12.nov.09

JOB DESCRIPTION—I'VE BEEN

- A baby sitter, yard boy, box boy,
(Santa Glen Market, 54)
- A bakery worker
 - (on wrapping machine at
Orowheat)
- A kitchen worker
 - (Stern Hall Stanford, EX
house) '56-'60
- A Bekins furniture mover
 - (swamper on trucks)
- A machine operator
 - (Jennings & Bryan
Wheelchair factory)
- A janitor and maintenance worker
 - (Hastings Law School) '64
- A Coldwell Banker
 - (Residential sales)
- A Hartford Insurance
 - (Claims department)
- A fund raiser
 - (Community Service Society,
NY, '66)
- A concession man at Shubert
Theater (soft drinks)
- An English Instructor
 - (Rio de Janeiro, '67-'68,
private & school)
- A Production Assistant
 - (Rain People, THX, Godfather
II, III, Apocalypse Now,
Outsiders, Rumble Fish)
- A teamster/driver
 - (Francis Coppola, Richard
Gere, Robin Williams, etc)
- A drinking coach
 - (for Nicolas Cage, Leaving
Las Vegas)
- A house painter
 - (between pictures)
- A personal assistant
 - (Richard Brautigan,
Montana, '74, '78)
- A shepherd
 - (Dennis Hopper, on Out
of the Blue, Vancouver)
- A truck driver
 - (Set decoration, greens)
- A location assistant
 - (Basic Instinct)
- A stand in
 - (Dead Pool)
- An actor
 - (Rain Maker, Trauma,
Gunfighter)

...poets and painters like Lawrence Ferlinghetti have fed Dingman's imagination with streetwise philosophy and idiom and that's what the reader's going to experience in *The Night Before Thinking*.

It contains Tony's work ethic, his fan-atic, his anecdotal self, and, throughout, the charm of a guy who knows how to handle the language, to keep the poems "tight" and ever entertaining in their revelations of a sort of keeping-on keeping-on worker.

--Jack Hirschman
from the Introduction

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