

Confession of a Coward

God, she thought lying in bed naked and re-reading Aldington's Portrait of a Genius, But... he's an impostor! Not D.H. Lawrence, but her husband-Henry-with his bauble of a belly and all the hair he never combed and the way he stood around in his shorts, and the way he stood naked before the window like an Arabian and howled; and he told her that he was turning into a toad and that he wanted to buy a Buddha and that he wanted to be old and drown in the sea, and that he was going to grow a beard and that he felt as if he was turning into a woman.

And Henry was poor, poor and worthless and miserable and sick. And he wanted to join the Mahler Society. His breath was bad, his father was insane and his mother was dying of cancer.

And besides all this, the weather was hot, hot as hell.

"I've got a new system," he said. "All I need is four or five grand. It's a matter of investment. We could travel from track to track in a trailer."

She felt like saying something blas+ like, "We don't have four or five grand," but it didn't come out. Nothing came out: all the doors were closed and all the windows were down, and it was in the middle of the desert-not even vultures-and they were about to drop the Bomb. She should have stayed in Texas, she should have stayed with Papa-this man is a goon, a gunnysack, a gutless no-nothing in a world of doers. He hides behind symphonies and poetic fancies; a weak and listless soul.

"Are you going to take me to the museum?" she asked.

"Why?"

"They're having an Art Exhibit."

"I know."

"Well, don't you want to see Van Gogh?"

"To hell with Van Gogh! What's Van Gogh to me?"

The doors closed again and she couldn't think of an answer.

"I don't like museums," he continued. "I don't like museum-people."

The fan was going but it was a small apartment and the heat held as if enclosed in a kettle.

"In fact," he said, peeling off his T-shirt and standing in just his shorts, "I don't like any kind of people."

Amazingly, he had hair on his chest.

"In fact," he continued, pulling his shorts down and over the end of one foot, "I'm going to write a book some day and call it Confession of a Coward."

The doorbell rang like a rape, or the tearing of ripe flesh.

"Jesus Christ!" he said like something trapped.

She jumped off the bed, looking very white and unpeeled. Like a candy banana. Aldington and D.H. Lawrence and Taos fell to the floor.

She ran to the closet and began stuffing herself inside the flying cloth of female necessities.

"Never mind the clothes," he said.

"Aren't you going to answer?"

"No! Why should I?"

It rang again. The sound of the bell entered the room and searched them out, scaled and scalded their skins, pummeled them with crawling eyes.

Then it was silent.

And the feet turned with their sound, turning and guiding some monster, taking it back down the stairwell, one two three, 1, 2, 3; and then gone.

"I wonder," he said, still not moving, "what that was?"

"I don't know," she said, bending double at the waist and pulling her petticoat back over her head.

"Here!" she yelled. "Here!" holding her arms out like feelers.

He finished yanking the petticoat off over her head with some distaste.

"Why do you women wear this crap?" he asked in a loud voice.

She didn't feel an answer was necessary and went over and pulled Lawrence out from under the bed. Then she got into bed with Lorenzo and her husband sat on the couch.

"They built a little shrine for him," he said.

"Who?" she asked irritably.

"Lawrence."

"Oh."

"They have a picture of it in that book."

"Yes, I've seen it."

"Have you ever seen a dog-graveyard?"

"What?"

"A dog-graveyard."

"Well, what about it?"

"They always have flowers. Every dog always has flowers, fresh, all in neat little clusters on each grave. It's enough to make you cry."

She found her place in the book again, like a person searching for solitude in the middle of a lake: So the bitter months dragged by miserably, accompanied by Lorenzo's tragic feeling of loss, his-

"I wish I had studied ballet," he said. "I go about all slumped over but that's because my spirit is wilted. I'm really lithe, ready to tumble on spring mattresses of some sort. I should have been a frog, at least. You'll see. Someday I'm going to turn into a frog."

Her lake rippled with the irritating breeze: "Well, for heaven's sake, study ballet! Go at night! Get rid of your belly! Leap around! Be a frog!"

"You mean after WORK?" he asked woefully.

"God," she said, "you want everything for nothing." She got up and went to the bathroom and closed the door.

She doesn't understand, he thought, sitting on the couch naked, she doesn't understand that I'm joking. She's so god-damned serious. Everything I say is supposed to carry truth or tragic import, or insight or something. I've been through all that!

He noticed a pencil-scrawled piece of paper, in her handwriting, on the side table. He picked it up:

My husband is a poet published alongside Sartre and Lorca;
he writes about insanity and Nietzsche and Lawrence,
but what has he written about me?

she reads the funnies
and empties garbage
and makes little hats
and goes to Mass at 8 AM

I too am a poet and an artist, some discerning critics
say, but my husband wrote about me:
she reads the funnies...

He heard the toilet flush, and a moment later, out she came.

"I'd like to be a clown in a circus," he greeted her.

She got back on the bed with her book.

"Wouldn't you like to be a tragicomic clown stumbling about with a painted face?" he asked her.

She didn't answer. He picked up the Racing Form:

POWER 114 B.g.4, by Cosmic Bomb-

Pomayya, by Pompey

Breeder, Brookmeade Stable.

1956 12 2 4 1 \$12,950

July 18-Jam I I/16 1:45 1/5ft. 3 122 2

1/2 3 2h GuerinE'Alw 86

"I'm going to Caliente next Sunday," he said.

"Good. I'll have Charlotte over. Allen can bring her in the car."

"Do you believe she really got propositioned by the preacher in that movie like she claimed?"

She turned the page of her book.

"God damn you, answer me!" he screamed, angry at last.

"What about?"

"Do you think she's a whore and making it all up? Do you think we're all whores? What are we trying to do, reading all these books? Writing all the poems they send back, and working in some dungeon for nothing because we're not really interested in money?"

She put the book down and looked back over her shoulder at him. "Well," she said in a low voice, "do you want to give it all up?"

"Give WHAT all up? We don't have anything! Or, do you mean Beethoven's

Fifth or Handel's Water Music? Or do you mean the SOUL?"

"Let's not argue. Please. I don't want to argue.

"Well, I want to know what we are trying to do!"

The doorbell rang like all the bells of doom sweeping across the room.

"Shhh," he said, "shhh! Be quiet!"

The doorbell rang again, seeming to say, I know you are in there, I know you are in there.

"They know we're in here." she whispered.

"I feel that this is it," he said.

"What?"

"Never mind. Just be quiet. Maybe it will go away."

"Isn't it wonderful to have all these friends?" she took up the joke-cudgel.

"No. We have no friends. I tell you, this is something else!"

It rang again, very short, flat and spiritless. "I once tried to make the Olympic swimming team," he said, getting completely off the point.

"You make more ridiculous statements by the minute, Henry."

"Will you get off my back? Just for that!," he said, raising his voice, "WHO IS IT?"

There was no answer.

Henry rose wide-eyed, as if in a trance, and flung the door open, forgetting his nakedness. He stood there transfixed in thought for some time, but it was obvious to her that nobody was therein his state of undress there would have been quite a commotion or, at the very least, some sophisticated comment.

Then he closed the door. He had a strange look on his face, a round-eyed almost dull look and he swallowed once as he faced her. His pride, perhaps?

"I've decided," he announced, "that I'm not going to turn into a woman after all."

"Well, that will help matters between us considerably, Henry."

"And I'll even take you to see Van Gogh. No wait, I'll let you take me."

"Either way, dear. It doesn't matter."

"No," he said, "you'll have to take me!"

He marched into the bathroom and closed the door.

"Don't you wonder," she said through the door, "who that was?"

"Who what was?"

"Who that was at the door? Twice?"

"Hell," he said, "I know who it was."

"Who was it, then?"

"Ha!"

"What?"

"I said, 'Ha!' I'm not telling!"

"Henry, you simply don't know who it was, anymore than I do. You're simply being silly again."

"If you promise to take me to see Van Gogh, I'll tell you who was at the door."

"All right," she humored him along, "I promise."

"O.K., it was me at the door!"

"You at the door?"

"Yes," he laughed a silly little laugh, "me looking for me! Both times."

"Still playing the clown aren't you, Henry?"

She heard the water running in the basin and knew he was going to shave.

"Are you going to shave, Henry?"

"I've decided against the beard," he answered.

He was boring her again and she simply opened her book at a random page and began reading:

You don't want any more of me?

I want us to break off-you be free of me, I free of you.

And what about these last months?

I don't know. I've not told you anything but what I thought was true.

Then why are you different now?

I'm not-I'm the same-only I know it's no good going on.

She closed the book and thought about Henry. Men were children. You had to humor them. They could take no hurt. It was a thing every woman knew. Henry tried-he was just so-all this playing the clown. All the poor jokes.

She rose from the bed as if in a dream, walked across the floor, opened the door and stared. Against the basin stood a partly soaped shaving brush and his still wet shaving mug. But the water in the basin was cold and at the bottom, against the plug, green and beyond her reach at last and the size of a crumpled glove, stared back the fat, living frog.

Black Sparrow "New Year's Greeting" 1995

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN TOWN

Cass was the youngest and most beautiful of 5 sisters. Cass was the most beautiful girl in town. 1/2 Indian with a supple and strange body, a snake-like and fiery body with eyes to go with it. Cass was fluid moving fire. She was like a spirit stuck into a form that would not hold her. Her hair was black and long and silken and whirled about as did her body. Her spirit was either very high or very low. There was no in between for Cass. Some said she was crazy. The dull ones said that. The dull ones would never understand Cass. To the men she was simply a sex machine and they didn't care whether she was crazy or not. And Cass danced and flirted, kissed the men, but except for an instance or two, when it came time to make it with

Cass, Cass had somehow slipped away, eluded the men.

Her sisters accused her of misusing her beauty, of not using her mind enough, but Cass had mind and spirit; she painted, she danced, she sang, she made things of clay, and when people were hurt either in the spirit or the flesh, Cass felt a deep grieving for them. Her mind was simply different; her mind was simply not practical. Her sisters were jealous of her because she attracted their men, and they were angry because they felt she didn't make the best use of them. She had a habit of being kind to the uglier ones; the so-called handsome men revolted her- "No guts," she said, "no zap. They are riding on their perfect little earlobes and well- shaped nostrils...all surface and no insides..." She had a temper that came close to insanity, she had a temper that some call insanity. Her father had died of alcohol and her mother had run off leaving the girls alone. The girls went to a relative who placed them in a convent. The convent had been an unhappy place, more for Cass than the sisters. The girls were jealous of Cass and Cass fought most of them. She had razor marks all along her left arm from defending herself in two fights. There was also a permanent scar along the left cheek but the scar rather than lessening her beauty only seemed to highlight it. I met her at the West End Bar several nights after her release from the convent. Being youngest, she was the last of the sisters to be released. She simply came in and sat next to me. I was probably the ugliest man in town and this might have had something to do with it.

"Drink?" I asked.

"Sure, why not?"

I don't suppose there was anything unusual in our conversation that night, it was simply in the feeling Cass gave. She had chosen me and it was as simple as that. No pressure. She liked her drinks and had a great number of them. She didn't seem quite of age but they served her anyhow. Perhaps she had forged i.d., I don't know. Anyhow, each time she came back from the restroom and sat down next to me, I did feel some pride. She was not only the most beautiful woman in town but also one of the most beautiful I had ever seen. I placed my arm about her waist and kissed her once.

"Do you think I'm pretty?" she asked.

"Yes, of course, but there's something else... there's more than your looks..."

"People are always accusing me of being pretty. Do you really think I'm pretty?"

"Pretty isn't the word, it hardly does you fair."

Cass reached into her handbag. I thought she was reaching for her handkerchief. She came out with a long hatpin. Before I could stop her she had run this long hatpin through her nose, sideways, just above the nostrils. I felt disgust and horror. She looked at me and laughed, "Now do you think me pretty? What do you think now, man?" I pulled the hatpin out and held my handkerchief over the bleeding. Several people, including the

bartender, had seen the act. The bartender came down:

"Look," he said to Cass, "you act up again and you're out. We don't need your dramatics here."

"Oh, fuck you, man!" she said.

"Better keep her straight," the bartender said to me.

"She'll be all right," I said.

"It's my nose, I can do what I want with my nose."

"No," I said, "it hurts me."

"You mean it hurts you when I stick a pin in my nose?"

"Yes, it does, I mean it."

"All right, I won't do it again. Cheer up."

She kissed me, rather grinning through the kiss and holding the handkerchief to her nose. We left for my place at closing time. I had some beer and we sat there talking. It was then that I got the perception of her as a person full of kindness and caring. She gave herself away without knowing it. At the same time she would leap back into areas of wildness and incoherence. Schitzi. A beautiful and spiritual schitzi. Perhaps some man, something, would ruin her forever. I hoped that it wouldn't be me. We went to bed and after I turned out the lights Cass asked me,

"When do you want it? Now or in the morning?"

"In the morning," I said and turned my back.

In the morning I got up and made a couple of coffees, brought her one in bed. She laughed.

"You're the first man who has turned it down at night."

"It's o.k.," I said, "we needn't do it at all."

"No, wait, I want to now. Let me freshen up a bit."

Cass went into the bathroom. She came out shortly, looking quite wonderful, her long black hair glistening, her eyes and lips glistening, her glistening... She displayed her body calmly, as a good thing. She got under the sheet.

"Come on, lover man."

I got in. She kissed with abandon but without haste. I let my hands run over her body, through her hair. I mounted. It was hot, and tight. I began to stroke slowly, wanting to make it last. Her eyes looked directly into mine.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"What the hell difference does it make?" she asked.

I laughed and went on ahead. Afterwards she dressed and I drove her back to the bar but she was difficult to forget. I wasn't working and I slept until 2 p.m. then got up and read the paper. I was in the bathtub when she came in with a large leaf- an elephant ear.

"I knew you'd be in the bathtub," she said, "so I brought you something to cover that thing with, nature boy."

She threw the elephant leaf down on me in the bathtub.

"How did you know I'd be in the tub?"

"I knew."

Almost every day Cass arrived when I was in the tub. The times were different but she seldom missed, and there was the elephant leaf. And then we'd make love. One or two nights she phoned and I had to bail her out of jail for drunkenness and fighting.

"These sons of bitches," she said, "just because they buy you a few drinks they think they can get into your pants."

"Once you accept a drink you create your own trouble."

"I thought they were interested in me, not just my body."

"I'm interested in you and your body. I doubt, though, that most men can see beyond your body."

I left town for 6 months, bummed around, came back. I had never forgotten Cass, but we'd had some type of argument and I felt like moving anyhow, and when I got back I figured she'd be gone, but I had been sitting in the West End Bar about 30 minutes when she walked in and sat down next to me.

"Well, bastard, I see you've come back."

I ordered her a drink. Then I looked at her. She had on a high-necked dress. I had never seen her in one of those. And under each eye, driven in, were 2 pins with glass heads. All you could see were the heads of the pins, but the pins were driven down into her face.

"God damn you, still trying to destroy your beauty, eh?"

"No, it's the fad, you fool."

"You're crazy."

"I've missed you," she said.

"Is there anybody else?"

"No there isn't anybody else. Just you. But I'm hustling. It costs ten bucks. But you get it free."

"Pull those pins out."

"No, it's the fad."

"It's making me very unhappy."

"Are you sure?"

"Hell yes, I'm sure."

Cass slowly pulled the pins out and put them back in her purse.

"Why do you haggle your beauty?" I asked. "Why don't you just live with it?"

"Because people think it's all I have. Beauty is nothing, beauty won't stay. You don't know how lucky you are to be ugly, because if people like you you know it's for something else."

"O.k.," I said, "I'm lucky."

"I don't mean you're ugly. People just think you're ugly. You have a fascinating face."

"Thanks."

We had another drink.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Nothing. I can't get on to anything. No interest."

"Me neither. If you were a woman you could hustle."

"I don't think I could ever make contact with that many strangers, it's wearing."

"You're right, it's wearing, everything is wearing."

We left together. People still stared at Cass on the streets. She was a beautiful woman, perhaps more beautiful than ever. We made it to my place and I opened a bottle of wine and we talked. With Cass and I, it always came easy. She talked a while and I would listen and then I would talk. Our conversation simply went along without strain. We seemed to discover secrets together. When we discovered a good one Cass would laugh that laugh- only the way she could. It was like joy out of fire. Through the talking we kissed and moved closer together. We became quite heated and decided to go to bed. It was then that Cass took off her high-necked dress and I saw it- the ugly jagged scar across her throat. It was large and thick.

"God damn you, woman," I said from the bed, "god damn you, what have you done?"

"I tried it with a broken bottle one night. Don't you like me any more? Am I still beautiful?"

I pulled her down on the bed and kissed her. She pushed away and laughed, "Some men pay me ten and I undress and they don't want to do it. I keep the ten. It's very funny."

"Yes," I said, "I can't stop laughing... Cass, bitch, I love you...stop destroying yourself; you're the most alive woman I've ever met."

We kissed again. Cass was crying without sound. I could feel the tears. The long black hair lay beside me like a flag of death. We enjoined and made slow and sombre and wonderful love. In the morning Cass was up making breakfast. She seemed quite calm and happy. She was singing. I stayed in bed and enjoyed her happiness. Finally she came over and shook me,

"Up, bastard! Throw some cold water on your face and pecker and come enjoy the feast!"

I drove her to the beach that day. It was a weekday and not yet summer so things were splendidly deserted. Beach bums in rags slept on the lawns above the sand. Others sat on stone benches sharing a lone bottle. The gulls whirled about, mindless yet distracted. Old ladies in their 70's and 80's sat on the benches and discussed selling real estate left behind by husbands long ago killed by the pace and stupidity of survival. For it all, there was peace in the air and we walked about and stretched on the lawns and didn't say much. It simply felt good being together. I bought a couple of sandwiches, some chips and drinks and we sat on the sand eating. Then I held Cass and we slept together about an hour. It was somehow better than lovemaking. There was flowing together without tension. When we awakened we

drove back to my place and I cooked a dinner. After dinner I suggested to Cass that we shack together. She waited a long time, looking at me, then she slowly said, "No." I drove her back to the bar, bought her a drink and walked out. I found a job as a parker in a factory the next day and the rest of the week went to working. I was too tired to get about much but that Friday night I did get to the West End Bar. I sat and waited for Cass. Hours went by . After I was fairly drunk the bartender said to me, "I'm sorry about your girlfriend."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I'm sorry, didn't you know?"

"No."

"Suicide. She was buried yesterday."

"Buried?" I asked. It seemed as though she would walk through the doorway at any moment. How could she be gone?

"Her sisters buried her."

"A suicide? Mind telling me how?"

"She cut her throat."

"I see. Give me another drink."

I drank until closing time. Cass was the most beautiful of 5 sisters, the most beautiful in town. I managed to drive to my place and I kept thinking, I should have insisted she stay with me instead of accepting that "no." Everything about her had indicated that she had cared. I simply had been too offhand about it, lazy, too unconcerned. I deserved my death and hers. I was a dog. No, why blame the dogs? I got up and found a bottle of wine and drank from it heavily. Cass the most beautiful girl in town was dead at 20. Outside somebody honked their automobile horn. They were very loud and persistent. I sat the bottle down and screamed out: "GOD DAMN YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH ,SHUT UP!" The night kept coming and there was nothing I could do.

===

****A Lovely Love Affair****

I went broke --- again --- but this time in the French Quarter, New Orleans, and Joe Blanchard, editor of the underground paper OVERTHROW took me down to this place around the corner, one of those dirty white buildings with green storm windows, steps that ran almost straight up. It was Sunday and I was expecting a royalty, no, and advance from a dirty book I had written for the Germans, but the Germans kept writing me this bullshit about the owner, the father, being a drunk, they were deep in the red because the old man had withdrawn their funds from the bank, no, overdrawn them for his drinking and fucking bouts and therefore, they were broke but they were kicking the old man out and as soon as-

Blanchard rang the bell.

This old fat girl came to the door, and she weighed about between 250 and 300 pounds. She kind of wore this vast sheet as a dress and her eyes were very small. I guess that was the only small thing about her. She was Marie Glaviano, owner of a caf+ in the French Quarter, a very small caf+. That was another thing that was not very big about her --- her caf+. But it was a nice caf+, red and white tablecloths, expensive menus and no people about. One of those old-time black mammy dolls standing near the entrance. The old black mammy doll signified good times, old times, good old times, but the good old times were gone. The tourists were walkers now. They just liked to walk around and look at things. They didn't go into the cafes. They didn't even get drunk. Nothing paid anymore. The good times were over. Nobody gave a shit and nobody had any money and if they had any, they kept it. It was a new age and not a very interesting one. Everybody kind of watched the revolutionaries and the pigs rip at each other. That was good entertainment and it was free and they kept their money in their pockets, if they had any money.

Blanchard said, "Hello, Marie. Marie, this is Charley Serkin. Charley, this is Marie."

"Hi," I said.

"Hello," said Marie Glaviano.

"Let us come in a minute, Marie," said Blanchard.

(There are only two things wrong with money: too much or too little. And there I was down at the "too little" stage again.)

We climbed the steep steps and followed her down one fo those long long sideways-built places ---I mean all length and no width, and then we were in the kitchen, sitting at a table. There was a bowl of flowers. Marie broke open 3 bottles of beer. Sat down.

"Well, Marie," said Blanchard, "Charley's a genius. He's up against the knife. I'm sure he'll pull out, but meanwhile- meanwhile, he's got no place to stay."

Marie looked at me. "Are you a genius?"

I took a long drag at the beer. "Well, frankly, it's hard to tell. More often, I feel like some type of subnormal. Rather like all these great big white blocks of air in my head."

"He can stay," said Marie.

It was Monday, Marie's only day off and Blanchard got up and left us there in the kitchen. Then the front door slammed and he was out of there.

"What do you do?" asked Marie.

"Live on my luck," I said.

"You remind me of Marty," she said.

"Marty?" I asked, thinking, my god, here it comes. And it came.

"Well, you're ugly, you know. Well, I don't mean ugly, I mean beat-up, you know. And you're really beat-up, you're even more beat-up than Marty

was. And he was a fighter. Were you a fighter?"

"That's one of my problems: I could never fight worth a damn."

"Anyhow, you got that same look as Marty. You been beat but you're kind. I know your type. I know a man when I see a man. I like your face. You got a good face."

Not being able to say anything about her face, I asked, "You got any cigarettes, Marie?"

"Why sure, honey," she reached down into that great sheet of a dress and pulled a full pack out from between her tits. She could have carried a week's worth of groceries in there. It was kind of funny. She opened me another beer.

I took a good drain, then told her, "I could probably fuck you until I made you cry."

"Now look here, Charley," she said, "I won't have you talking that way. I'm a nice girl. My mother brought me up right. You keep talking that way and you can't stay."

"Sorry, Marie, I was just kidding."

"Well, I don't like that kind of kidding."

"Sure, I understand. You got any whiskey?"

"Scotch."

"Scotch is fine."

She brought out an almost full fifth. 2 waterglasses. We had ourselves some scotch and water. That woman had been around. That was obvious. She's probably been around ten years longer than I. Well, age wasn't any crime. It was only that most people aged badly.

"You're just like Marty," she said again.

"And you're not like anybody I've ever seen," I said.

"Do you like me?" she asked.

"I've got to," I said, and she didn't give me any snot over that one.

We drank another hour or two., Mostly beer but with a bit of scotch here and there, and then she took me down to my bed. And on the way down we passed a place and she was sure to say, "That's my bed." It was quite wide. My bed was next to another one. Very strange. But it didn't mean anything. "You can sleep in either bed," said Marie, "or both of them."

There was something about that that felt like a putdown-

Well, sure, I had a head in the morning and I heard her rattling in the kitchen but I ignored it as any wise man would, and I heard her turn on the tv for the morning news, she had the tv on the breakfast nook table, and I heard the coffee perking, it smelled rather good but the smell of bacon and eggs and potatoes I didn't like, and the sound of the morning news I didn't like, and I felt like peeing and I was thirsty, but I didn't want Marie to know that I was awake, so I waited, mildly pissed (haha, yes), but wanting to be alone, wanting to own the place alone and she kept fucking around fucking around and finally I heard her running past my bed-

"Gotta go, " she said, "I'm late."

"Bye, Marie," I said.

When the door slammed I got up and walked to the crapper and I sat there and I pissed and I crapped and I sat there in New Orleans, far from home, wherever my home was, and then I saw a spider sitting in a web in the corner, looking at me. Now that spider had been there a long time, I knew that. Much longer than I had. First, I thought of killing him. But he was so fat and happy and ugly, he owned the joint. I'd have to wait some time, until it was proper. I got up and wiped my ass and flushed. As I left the crapper, the spider winked at me.

I didn't want to play with what was left of the 5th, so I sat in the kitchen, naked, wondering, how can people trust me so? Who was I? People were crazy, people were simple. That gave me an edge. Hell yes, it did. I'd lived for ten years without a trade. People gave me money, food, places to stay. Whether they thought I was an idiot or a genius, that didn't matter. I knew what I was. I was neither. What made people give me gifts didn't concern me. I took the gifts and I took them without a feeling of victory or/and coercion. My only premise was that I couldn't ask for anything. On top of it all, I rather had this little phonograph record spinning around on top of my brain and it kept playing the same tune: don't try don't try. It seemed like an all right idea.

Anyhow, after Marie left I sat in the kitchen and drank 3 cans of beer I found in the refrigerator. I never cared much for food. I'd heard of people's love for food. But food only bored me. Liquid was o.k. but bulk was a dragdown. I liked shit, I liked to shit, I liked turds but it was such terrible work creating them.

After the 3 cans of beer I noticed this purse on the seat next to me. Of course, Marie had taken another purse to work. Would she be foolish enough or kind enough to leave money? I opened the purse. There at the bottom was a ten dollar bill.

Well, Marie was testing me and I'd prove worthy of her test.

I took the ten, walked back to my bedroom and dressed. I felt good. After all, what did a man need to survive? Nothing. It was true. And I even had the key to the place.

So I stepped outside and locked the door to keep out the thieves, hahaha, and there I was out on the streets, the French Quarter, and what a stupid place that was, but I had to make it do. Everything had to serve me, that's the way it went. So-oh yes, I was walking down the street, and the trouble with the French Quarter was that there just weren't any liquor stores around like in other decent parts of the world. Maybe it was deliberate. One had to guess that it helped those horrible shit holes on every corner that were called bars. The first thing I ever thought of when walking into one of those "quaint" French Quarter bars was vomiting. And I

usually did, running back to some urine-stinking pisspot and letting go -- tons and tons of fried eggs and half-cooked greasy potatoes. And walking back in, after heaving, and looking upon them: the only thing more lonely and inane than the patrons was the bartender, especially if he also owned the place. O.k., so I walked around, knowing that the bars were the lie, and you know where I found my 3 six packs? A little grocery with stale bread and all about it, even peeling into the paint, this half-sex smile of loneliness-help me, help me, help me-terrible, yes, and they can't even light the place up, electricity costs money, and here I was, the first guy to buy three six packs in 18 years, and my god, she almost came across the top of the cash register-It was too much. I grabbed my change and 18 tall cans of beer and ran out into the stupid French Quarter sunlight-

I placed the remainder of the change back in the purse in the breakfastnook and then left the purse open so Marie could see it. Then I sat down and opened a beer.

It was good being alone. Yet, I wasn't alone. Each time I had to piss I'd see that spider and I thought, well, spider, you've got to go, soon. I just don't like your looks in that dark corner, catching bugs and slies and sucking the blood out of them. You see, you're bad, Mr. Spider. And I'm o.k. At least, that's the way I like to see it. You're nothing but a frigging dark brainless wart of death, that's what you are. Suck shit. You've had it.

I found a broom in the backporch and came back in there and I crashed him out of his web and brought him his own death. All right, that was all right, he was out there ahead of me, somewhere, I couldn't help that. But how could Marie put her big ass down on the rims of that lid and shit and look at that thing? Did she even see it? Perhaps not.

I went back in the kitchen and had some more beer. Then I turned on the tv. Paper people. Glass people. I felt as if I were going insane and turned the thing off. I drank some more beer. Then I boiled 2 eggs and fried two strips of bacon. I managed to eat. You forgot about food sometimes. The sun came through the curtains. I drank all day. I threw the empties in the trash. Time went. Then the door opened. It flew open. It was Marie.

"Jesus Christ!" she screamed, "you know what happened?"

"No, no, I don't."

"Oh, god damn it!"

"Whatssa matta, honey?"

"I burned the strawberries!"

"Oh, yes?"

She ran around the kitchen in little circles, that big ass bobbing. She was crazy. She was out of it. Poor old fat cunt.

"I had this pot of strawberries going in the kitchen and one of these tourists came in, rich bitch, first customer of the day, and she likes the little hats I make, you know-Well, she's kinda cute and all the hats look

good on her and so she's got a problem, and then we get to talking about Detroit, she knew somebody in Detroit that I knew, you know, and we're talking and then all of a sudden I SMELL IT!!! THE STRAWBERRIES ARE BURNING! I ran into the kitchen, but it's too late-.what a mess! The strawberries have boiled over and they are everywhere and it stinks, it's burned, it's sad, and nothing can be saved, nothing! What hell!"

"I'm sorry. But did you sell her a hat?"

"I sold her two hats. She couldn't make up her mind."

"I'm sorry about the strawberries. And I killed the spider."

"What spider?"

"I didn't think you'd know."

"Know what? What's this spiders? They're just bugs."

"They tell me a spider isn't a bug. Something to do with the number of legs- I really don't know or care."

"A spider ain't a bug? What kinda shit is that?"

"Not an insect. So they say. Anyhow, I killed the damn thing."

"Sure. You left it there. I had to have beer."

"You have to have beer all the time?"

"Yes."

"You're going to be a problem. You had anything to eat?"

"2 eggs, 2 slices of bacon."

"You hungry?"

"Yes. But you're tired. Relax. Have a drink."

"Cooking relaxes me. But first I gotta have a hot bath."

"Go ahead."

"O.k.," she reached over and turned on the tv and then went to the bathroom. I had to listen to tv. A news broadcast. Perfectly ugly bastard. 3 nostrils. Perfectly hateful bastard dressed like a little inane doll, sweating, and looking at me, saying words I hardly understood or cared about. I knew that Marie would be looking at tv for hours, so I had to adjust to it. When Marie came back I was looking directly into the glass, which made her feel better. I looked as harmless as a man with a checkerboard and the sports page.

Marie had come out, dolled in another outfit. She might have even looked cute, but she was so god damned fat. Well, anyhow, I wasn't sleeping on a park bench.

"You want me to cook, Marie?"

"No, it's all right. I'm not so tired now."

She began preparing the food. When I got up for the next beer, I kissed her behind the ear.

"You're a good sport, Marie."

"You got enough drink for the rest of the night?" she asked.

"Sure, kid. And there's still that 5th. Everything's fine. I just want to sit here and look at the set and listen to you talk. O.k?"

"Sure, Charley."

I sat down. She had something going. It smelled good. She was evidently a fine cook. The whole walls crawled with this warm smell of cooking. No wonder she was so fat: good cook, good eater. Marie was making a pot of stew. Every now and then she'd get up and add something to the pot. An onion. A piece of cabbage. A few carrots. She knew. And I drank and looked at that big sloppy old gal and she sat there making these most magic hats, her hands working into a basket, picking up first the color, then that, this length of ribbon, then that, and then twisting it so, sewing it so, placing it against the hat, and that 2 bit straw was just more magic. Marie created masterpieces that would never be discovered --- walking down the street on top of bitches' heads.

As she worked and tended stew, she talked.

"It's not like it used to be. People don't have any money. Everything's Traveler's checks and checkbooks and credit cards. People just don't have money. They don't carry it. Credit's everything. A guy gets a paycheck and it's already taken. They mortgage their whole lives away to buy one house. And then they've got to fill that house with shit and have a car. They're hooked on house and the legislators know this and tax them to death with property taxes. Nobody has any money. Small businesses just can't last."

We sat down to the stew and it was perfect. After dinner we brought out the whiskey and she brought me two cigars and we looked at tv and didn't talk much. I felt as if I had been there for years. She kept working on the hats, talking now and then, and I'd say, yeh, that's right, or, is that so? And the hats kept flying off of her hands, masterpieces.

"Marie," I told her, "I'm tired. Got to go to bed."

She told me to take the whiskey with me, so I did. But instead of going down to my bed, I threw back the cover of Marie's bed and crawled in. After undressing, of course. It was a fine mattress. It was a fine bed. It was one of those old-fashioned highpost jobs with a wooden roof, or whatever they call them. I guess if you fucked until the roof came down, you made it. I'd never bring that roof down without help from the gods.

Marie kept looking at tv and making hats. Then I heard her turn off the set, switch out the kitchen light and she came into the bedroom, right past the bedroom and she didn't see me, she went right n down to the crapper. She was in there a while and then I watched her switch out of her clothes and into this big pink nightie. She fucked with her face a bit, gave up, put on a couple of curlers, then turned around and walked toward the bed and saw me.

"My god, Charley, you're in the wrong bed."

"Uh, uh."

"Listen, honey, I'm not that kind of woman."

"O, cut the horseshit and climb in."

She did. My god, she was nothing but meat. Actually, I was a bit

frightened. What did you do with all that stuff? Well, I was trapped.

Marie's whole side of the bed sank down.

"Listen, Charley--"

I grabbed her head, turned it, and she seemed to be crying, and then my lips were on hers. We kissed. Damn it, my cock was getting hard. Good god. What was it?

"Charley," she said, "you don't have to."

I took one of her hands and placed it around my cock.

"O shit," she said, "o shit!"

Then she kissed me, tongued me. She had a small tongue ---at least that was small ---and it ripped in and out, rather full of saliva and passion. I pulled away.

"Whatza matta?"

"Wait uh minute."

I reached over and got the fifth and took a good long pull, then I sat it down again and I reached on under and lifted that huge pink nightie. I got to feeling and I didn't know what I had but it seemed to be it, very small though, but in the right place. Yes, it was her cunt. I poked at it with my pecker. Then she reached down and guided me in. Another miracle. That thing was tight. It almost ripped the skin off of me. We started working. I was looking for the long ride but I didn't care. She had me. It was one of the best fucks of my life. I moaned and hollered, then finished, rolled off. Unbelievable. When she came back from the bathroom we talked a while, then she went to sleep. But she snored. SO I had to go down to my own bed. And I awakened the next morning as she went to work.

"Gotta hurry, Charley," she said.

"Sure, baby."

As soon as she left I went to the kitchen and drank a glass of water. She'd left her purse there. Ten dollars. I didn't take it. I walked back to the bathroom and took a good crap, without the spider. Then I took a bath. I tried to brush my teeth, vomited a bit. I dressed and walked into the kitchen. I'd gotten hold of a piece of paper and pen:

Marie:

I love you. You are very good to me. But I must leave. And I don't know exactly why. I'm crazy, I guess. Goodbye.

Charley

I propped the note up against the television set. I didn't feel good. I felt like crying. It was quiet in there, it was quiet in there the way I liked it. Even the stove and the refrigerator looked human, I mean good human --- they seemed to have arms and voices and they said, hang around, kid, it's good here, it can be very good here. I found what was left of the 5th in the bedroom. I drank that. Then I found a can of beer in the

refrigerator. I drank that. Then I got up and made the long walk down that narrow place, it seemed like A hundred yards. I got to the door and then I remembered I had the key. I walked back and put the key with the note. Then I looked at the ten in the purse again. I left it there. I made the walk again. When I got to the door, I knew that when I closed it there would be no going back. I closed it. It was final. Down those steps. I was alone again and nobody gave a damn. I walked south, then took a right. I walked along, I walked along and got out of the French Quarter. I crossed Canal Street. I walked along for some blocks and then I turned this way and then I crossed another street and turned that way. I didn't know where I was going. I passed a place to my left and a man was standing in the doorway and he said,

"Hey, man, you want a job?"

And I looked into the doorway and here were these rows of men lined up at wooden tables and they had hammers and they were hitting at things in shells, they looked like clam shells and they broke the shells and did something with the meat, and it was dark in there; it seemed as if the men were beating at themselves with hammers and tossing away what was left of them, and I told the man,

"No, I don't want a job."

I was facing the sun as I walked.

I had 74 cents.

The sun was all right.

===

****My Big-Assed Mother****

they were tow good girls, Tito and Baby. they both looked near 60 but they were close to 40. all that wine and worry. I was 29 and looked closer to 50. all that wine and worry. I had gotten the apartment first and then they had moved in. it worried the apartment house manager who kept sending the cops up when we made the least bit of noise. it was jumpy. I was afraid to piss in the center of the bowl.

the best time was the MIRROR, watching myself, bloated belly, with Baby and Tito, drunk and sick for nights and days, all of us, the cheap radio playing, tubes all worn-out sitting there on that worn-down rug, ah my, the MIRROR, and I'd be watching, and I'd say:

"Tito, it's in your ass. feel it?"

"oh yes, oh my yes - SHOVE! hey! where ya GOING?"

"now, Baby, you got it in front here, umm? feel it? big purple head, like a snake singing arias! feel me love?"

"ooh, dahling, I think I'm gonna c-..HEY! where ya GOING?"

"Tito, I am back in your rumble seat. I am parting you in two. you don't have a chance!"

"ooh god ooooh, HEY where ya GOING? get back in there!"

"I dunno."

"I dunno who I want to catch it. what can I do? I want you both, I can't HAVE you both! And while trying to make up my mind I am in a terror of demise and agony trying to hold it! doesn't anybody understand my suffering?"

"no, just give it to me!"

"no, me, me!"

THEN THE BIG FIST OF THE LAW.

"bang! BanG! BANG!"

"hey, what's going on in there?"

"nuttin'."

"nothing? what's all that moaning and hollering and screaming? it's 3:30 a.m. you've got four floors of people wide awake and wonderin-"

"please go away. my mother has a bad heart. you are terrorizing her. and she's down to her last pawn."

"and YOU are too, buddy! In case you don't know, this happens to be the Los Angeles Police Department-"

"christ, I'd have never guessed-"

"now you've guessed. o.k. open up or we'll kick it down!"

Tito and Baby ran into the far corner of the dining room, crouched and shivering, holding, hugging their aging wrinkled and wino and insane bodies. they were stupidly lovely.

"open up here, buddy, we been up here four times in the past week and a half on the same call. you think we like to go around just throwing people in jail just because it makes us feel good?"

"yeah."

"Captain Bradley says he doesn't care whether you are black or white."

"you tell Captain Bradley that I feel the same way."

I kept quiet. the two whores shivering and clutching their wrinkled bodies by the corner lampshade. the bland and smothering silence of willow leaves in a chickenshit and unkind winter.

they had gotten the key from the manager and the door was open 4 inches but it was being held by the chain which I had on there. one of the cops talked to me while the other pushed with a screwdriver, trying to work the chain out of the slot-holder. I'd let the cop get it almost out, then I'd push the end of the chain all the way back in. while standing there naked with this hard-on.

"you are violating my rights. you need a search warrant to enter here. you can't force entry just on your own behest. What the hell's wrong with you guys."

"which one of those is supposed to be our mother."

"the one with the biggest ass."

the other cop almost had the chain off again. I pushed it back with my finger.

"come on, let us in, we'll just talk."

"what about? the wonders of Disneyland?"

"no, no, you sound like an interesting man. we just want to come in and talk."

"you must think I'm subnormal. if I ever get queer enough for bracelets I'll buy them at Thrifty's. I'm not guilty of a damn thing but a hard-on and a loud radio and you haven't asked me to shut either of them off."

"just let us in. all we want to do is talk."

"listen, you are attempting to break and enter without a permit. now, I've got the best lawyer in town--"

"a lawyer? whatta you got a lawyer for?"

"I've used him for years - draft dodging, indecent exposure, rape, drunk driving, disturbing the peace, assault and battery, arson ---all bad raps."

"he won all those cases?"

"he's the best. now look, I'm giving you three minutes. either you stop trying to force the door and leave me in peace or I'm getting him on the phone. he won't like to be awakened at this time of the morning. he'll have your badges."

the cops stepped back, a little way down the hall. I listened.

"you think he knows what he's talking about?"

"yes, I think he does."

They came back.

"your mother sure has a big ass."

"too bad you can't have it, eh?"

"all right, we're leaving, but you keep it quiet in there. we want that radio off and all that moaning and hollering stopped."

"all right, we'll turn off the radio."

they left. what a pleasure to hear them leave. what a pleasure it was to have a good lawyer. what a pleasure it was to stay out of jail.

I closed the door.

"all right, girls, they're gone. 2 nice young boys on the wrong path. And now look!"

I looked down. "it's gone, all gone away."

"yes, it's all gone." said Baby. "where does it go? it's so sad."

"shit," said Tito, "it looks like a dad little vienna sausage."

I walked over and sat in a chair, poured a wine. Baby rolled us 3 cigarettes.

"how's the wine?" I asked.

"down to 4 bottles."

"fifths or gallons?"

"fifths."

"jesus, we gotta get lucky."

I picked up a 4 day old newspaper. read the funnies. then went to the sports section. while I was reading, Tito came on over, dropped down to the rug. I felt her working. she had a mouth like one of those toilet plungers that unstopped toilets. I drank my wine and puffed at my cigarette.

they'd suck your brains out if you let them. I think they did it to each other when I wasn't around.

I got to the horse page. "look here," I told Tito, "this horse cut fractions of 22 and one fifth for the quarter, he's 44 and 4/5ths for the half, then one o nine for 6 furlongs, he must have thought it was a 6 furlong race---"

vurp virp slooom

vissaaa ooop

vop bop vop bop vop

"---it's a mile and a quarter, he's trying to sprint away from these routers, he's got 6 lengths turning the last curve and backing up, the horse is dying, he wants to be back in the stable---"

sllllurrrp

sllurrrr vip vop vop

vip vop vop

"now check the jock --- if it's Blum he'll win by a nose; if it's Volske he'll win by 3/4's of a length. it's Volske. he wins by 3/4's a bet down from 12 to 8. all stable money, the public hates Volske. they hate Volske and Harmatz. so the stables use these guys 2 or 3 times a meet on the goodies to keep the public off. if it weren't for these two great riders, at the right time, I'd be down on East 5th Street ---"

"ooh, you bastard!" Tito lifted her head and screamed, knocked the newspaper out of my hand. then went back to work. I didn't know what to do. she was really angry. then Baby walked over. Baby had very good legs and I lifted her purple skirt and looked at the nylons. Baby leaned over and kissed me, gave me the tongue down the throat. I got my palm on her haunch. I was trapped. I didn't know what to do. I needed a drink. 3 idiots locked together. o moaning and the flight of the last bluebird into the eye of the sun, it was a child's game, a stupid game.

first quarter, 22 and 1/4, the half in 44 and 1/5, she smoked it out, victory by a head, Calif. Rain of my body. figs broken lovely open like great red guts in the sun and sucked loose while your mother hated you and your father wanted to kill you and the backyard fence was green and belonged to the Bank of America. Tito smoked it out while I fingered Baby.

then we seperated, each waiting the bathroom's turn to wipe the snot from our sexual noses. I was always last. I came out and took one of the winebottles and went over to the window and looked out.

"Baby, roll me another smoke."

we were on the top floor, the 4th. Floor, high up on a hill. but you can look out on Los Angeles and get nothing, nothing at all. all those people down there sleeping, waiting to get up and go to work. it was stupid. Stupid, stupid and horrible. we had it right: eye, say, blue on green staring deeply through shreds of beanfields, into each other, come.

Baby brought me the cigarette. I inhaled and watched the sleeping city. we sat and waited on the sun and whatever there was to be. I did not like the world, but at cautious and easy times you could almost understand it.

I don't know where Tito and Baby are now, if they are dead or what, but those nights were good, pinching those high-heeled legs, kissing nylon knees. all that color of dresses and panties, and making the L.A. Police Force earn the green.

Spring or flowers or Summer will never be like that again.

-charles bukowski -

from the books: The Most Beautiful Woman in Town and Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness

===

POLITICS IS LIKE TRYING TO SCREW
A CAT IN THE ASS

"Dear Mr. Bukowski:
Why don't you ever write about politics or world affairs?"
M.K.

"Dear M.K.:
What for? Like, what's new? --- everybody knows the bacon is
burning."

our raving takes place quite quietly while we are staring down at the hairs of a rug --- wondering what the shit went wrong when they blew up the trolley full of jellybeans with the poster of Popeye the Sailor stuck on the side.

that's all that matters: the good dream gone, and when that's gone it's all gone. the rest is horseshit games for the Generals and money-makers, speaking of which --- I see where another U.S. bomber full of H-bombs fell out of the sky again --- THIS time into the sea while SUPPOSEDLY protecting

my life. the State Dept. says the H-bombs were "unarmed," whatever that means. then we continue to read where one of the H-bombs (lost) had split open and was spreading radioactive shit everywhere while supposedly protecting me WHILE I hadn't even asked for protection. the difference between a Democracy and a Dictatorship is that you don't have to waste your time voting.

getting back to the H-bomb dropout --- a little while back the same thing happened off the coast of SPAIN. (we are everywhere, protecting me.) again the bombs get lost --- careless little toys. it took them 3 months --- if I remember properly --- to find and lift that last bomb out of there. it may have been 3 weeks but to the people in that coast town it must have seemed 3 years. that last bomb --- the god damned thing had gotten itself wedged on the edge of a sandhill far down in the sea. and everytime they tried to hook the thing, so tenderly, it would shake loose and roll a little further down the hill. meanwhile, all the poor people in that coast town were tossing in their beds at night wondering if they'd be blown to hell, courtesy of the Stars and Stripes. of course, the U.S. State Dept. issued a state ment saying the H-bomb had no detonation fuse, but meanwhile the rich had left for other parts and the American sailors and townspeople looked very nervous. (after all, it the things couldn't blow up what were they flying them around for? might as well carry 2-ton salamis. fuse means "spark" or "trigger," and "spark" can come from any where, and "trigger" means "jolt" or any similar action that will set off the firing mechanism. NOW the terminology is "unarmed," which sounds safer but is the same thing.) anyhow, they hooked at the bomb but as the saying goes, the thing seemed to have a mind of its own. then a few undersea storms came about and our lovely little bomb rolled further and further down its hill. the sea is very deep, much deeper than our leadership.

finally, special equipment was designed just to haul bomb-ass and the thing was pulled from the sea. Palomares. yes, that's where it happened: Palomares. and you know what they did next? ---

the American Navy had a BAND CONCERT in the town park in celebration of finding the bomb - if the thing wasn't dangerous they were really cutting loose. yes, and the sailors played the music together, one big sexual and spiritual release. whatever happened to the bomb they pulled out of the sea, I don't know, nobody (except the few) knows, and the band played on. while 1,000 tons of radio- active Spanish topsoil was shipped to Aiken, S.C. in sealed containers. I'll be the rent is cheap in Aiken, S.C.

so now our bombs are swimming and sinking, chilled and "un- armed" about Iceland.

so what do you do when you've got the people's minds on something not so good? easy, you get their minds on something else. they can only think about one thing at a time. like, all right, head line of Jan. 23, 1968: B-52

CRASHES OFF GREENLAND WITH H-BOMBS; DANES IRKED. Danes irked? oh, mother!

anyhow, suddenly, Jan. 24, headline: NORTH KOREANS SEIZE U.S. NAVY SHIP.

oh boy, patriotism is back! why, those dirty bastards! I thought THAT war was over! ah ha, I see --- the REDS! Korean puppets!

it says under the A.P. wirephoto, something like this --- the U.S. intelligence ship Pueblo --- formerly an army cargo ship, now converted into one of the Navy's secret spy ships equipped with electric monitoring gear and oceanographic equipment was forced into Wonsan Harbor off the coast of North Korea.

those dirty Red bastards, always fucking around!

but I DID notice that the lost H-bomb story got shoved into a small space: "Radiation Detected at B-52 Crash Site; Split Bomb hinted."

we are told that the president was awakened between 2 a.m. and 2:30 a.m. and told of the capture of the Pueblo.

I presume he went back to sleep.

the U.S. says the Pueblo was in international waters; the Koreans say the ship was in territorial waters. one country is lying, one is not.

then one wonders, what good is a spy ship in international waters? it's like wearing a raincoat on a sunny day.

the closer you can get on in, the better your instruments pick up.

headline: Jan. 26, 1968: U.S. CALLS UP 14,700 AIR RESERVISTS.

the lost H-bombs off Iceland have completely disappeared from print as if it had never happened.

meanwhile:

Sen. John C. Stennis (D.-Miss.) said Mr. Johnson's decision (the call-up of Air Reserves) was "necessary and justified" and added, "I hope he will not hesitate to mobilize ground reserve components as well."

Senate minority leader, Richard B. Russell (D.-Ga.): "In the last analysis, this country must get the return of that ship and the men that were seized. after all, great wars have started from much less serious incidents than this."

House Speaker John W. McCormack (D.-Mass.): "The American people have to wake up to the realization that communism is still bent on world domination. there is too much apathy about it."

I think that if Adolph Hitler were around now he would pretty much enjoy the present scene.

what's there to say about politics and world affairs? the Berlin Crisis, the Cuban crisis, spy planes, spy ships, Vietnam, Korea, lost H-bombs, riots in American cities, starvation in India, purge in Red China? are there good guys and bad guys? some that always lie, some that never lie? are there good governments and bad governments? no, there are only bad governments and worse governments. will there be a flash of light and heat that rips us apart one night while we are screwing or crapping or reading the comic strips or pasting blue-chip stamps into a book? instant death is

nothing new, nor is mass instant death new. but we've improved the product; we've had these centuries of knowledge and culture and discovery to work with; the libraries are fat and crawling and overcrowded with books; great paintings sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars; medical science is transplanting the human heart; you can't tell a madman from a sane one upon the streets, and suddenly we find our lives, again, in the hands of the idiots. the bombs may never drop; the bombs might drop. eeney, meeney, miney, mo-

now if you'll forgive me, dear readers, I'll get back to the whores and the horses and the booze, while there's time. if these contain death, then, to me, it seems far less offensive to be responsible for your own death than the other kind which is brought to you fringed with phrases of Freedom and Democracy and Humanity and/or any of all that Bullshit.

first post, 12:30. first drink, now. and the whores will always be around. Clara, Penny, Alice, Jo-
eeney, meeney, miney, mo-

===

swastika

The President of the United States of America entered his car, surrounded by his agents. He sat in the back seat. It was a dark and unimpressive morning. Nobody spoke. They rolled away and the tires could be heard on a street still wet from the preceding night's rain. The silence was more unusual than it had ever been before.

They drove along a while and then the President spoke:

"Say, this isn't the way to the airport."

His agents didn't answer. A vacation had been scheduled. Two weeks at his private home. His plane was waiting at the airport.

It began to drizzle. It looked as if it might rain again. The men, including the President, were dressed in heavy overcoats; hats; it made the car seem very full. Outside, the cold wind was steady.

"Driver," said the President, "I believe you're on the wrong course."

The driver didn't answer. The other agents stared straight ahead.

"Listen," said the President, "will somebody tell that man the way to the airport?"

"We're not going to the airport," said the agent to the President's left.

"We're not going to the airport?" the President asked.

The agents were again quiet. The drizzle became rain. The driver turned the wipers on.

"Listen, what is it?" asked the President. "What's going on here?"

"It's been raining for weeks," said the agent next to the driver. "It gets depressive. "I'll certainly be glad to see a little sunshine."

"Yes, me too," said the driver.

"Something's wrong here," said the President, "I demand to know-"

"You are no longer in a position to demand," said the agent to the President's right.

"You mean?-"

"We mean," said the same agent.

"Is it to be an assassination?" asked the President.

"Hardly. That's old-fashioned."

"Then what-"

"Please. We have orders not to discuss anything."

They drove for some hours. It continued to rain. Nobody spoke.

"Now," said the agent to the President's left, "circle again, then turn in. We're not being followed. The rain has been very helpful."

The car circled the area, then turned up a small dirt road. It was muddy and now and then the tires spun, slipped, then gripped again and the car went on. A man in a yellow raincoat held a flashlight and directed them into an open garage. It was an isolated area with many trees. A small farmhouse sat to the left of the garage. The agents opened the car doors.

"Get out," they told the President. The President did so. The agents kept the President carefully between them, although there wasn't a human within miles except for the man with the flashlight and the yellow raincoat.

"I don't see why we couldn't have done the whole thing here," said the man in the yellow raincoat. "It certainly seems much riskier the other way."

"Orders," said one of the agents. "You know how it is. He's always gone a lot on intuition. He does so now, more than ever."

"It's very cold. Do you have time for a cup of coffee? It's ready."

"That's good of you. It's been a long drive. I presume the other car is all ready to go?"

"Of course. It's been checked again and again. Actually, we're about ten minutes ahead on the timetable. That's one reason I suggested the coffee. You know how he is about precision."

"O.K., then, let's go in."

Keeping the President carefully between them, they entered the farmhouse.

"You sit there," one of the agents told the President.

"It's good coffee," said the man in the yellow raincoat, "hand-ground."

He walked around with the pot. He poured himself one, then sat down, still in the yellow raincoat, only the headpiece thrown on the stove.

"Ah, it is good," said one of the agents.

"Cream And sugar?" one of them asked the President.

"All right," he said-

There wasn't much room in the old car but they all managed to get in, with the President again in the back seat-The old car also slipped in the mud and ruts but made it to the road. Again, it was a silent ride most of the way. Then one of the agents lit a cigarette.

"Damn it, I just can't stop smoking!"

"Well, it's a hard thing to do, that's all. Don't worry about it."

"I'm not worried about it. Just disgusted with myself."

"Well, forget all that. This is a great day in History."

"I'll say so!" said the one with the cigarette.

Then he inhaled-

They parked outside an old roominghouse. It continued to rain. They sat there some moments.

"Now," said the agent next to the driver, "get him out. It's clear. Nobody on the streets."

They walked the President between them, first through the front door, then up 3 flights of steps, always keeping the President between them. They stopped and knocked at 306. The signal: one knock, pause, two knocks-

The door was opened and the men quickly pushed the President inside. The door was then locked and bolted. Three men were waiting inside. Two were in their 50's. The other sat in an outfit that consisted of an old laborer's shirt, 2nd-hand trousers that were too large and ten dollar shoes, scuffed and unpolished. He sat in a rocker in the center of the room. He was in his 80's but he smiled-and the eyes were those same eyes; the nose, the chin, the forehead hadn't changed much.

"Welcome, Mr. President. I've waited a long time on History and Science and You, and all have arrived, on schedule, today-"

The President looked at the old man in the rocker. "Great God! You're-you are-"

"You've recognized me! Others of your citizens have made jokes about the similarity! Too stupid to even realize that I was-"

"But it was proven that-"

"Of course, it was proven. The bunkers: April 30th, 1945. We wanted it that way. I've been patient. Science was with us but at times I had to speed-up History. We wanted the right man. You are the right man. The others were too impossible --- too alienated from my political philosophy- You are far more ideal. By working through you it will be easier. But as I said, I had to speed-up the reel of History a bit-my age-I had to-"

"You mean-?"

"Yes. I had your president Kennedy assassinated. And then, his brother-

"

"But why the 2nd assassination?"

We had information that that young man would have won the presidential

election."

"But what are you going to do with me? I've been told that I'm not to be assassinated-"

"May I introduce Drs. Graf and Voelker?"

The two men nodded at the President and smiled.

"But what is going to happen?" asked the President.

"Please. Just a moment. I must question my men. Karl, how did it go with The Double?"

"Fine. We phoned from the farm. The Double arrived at the airport on schedule. The Double announced, that due to weather conditions, he was canceling the flight until tomorrow. Then The double announced that he would take a pleasure drive-that it pleased him to be driven about in the rain-"

"And the rest?" asked the old man.

"The Double is dead."

"Fine. Let's get on with it then. History and Science have arrived on Time."

The agents began walking the President toward one of the two operating tables. They asked him to disrobe. The old man walked to the other table. Drs. Graf and Voelker climbed into their medical gowns and made ready for the task-

The young-looking of the 2 men arose from one of the operating tables. He dressed himself in the President's clothing, then walked to the full-length mirror on the north wall. He stood for a good 5 minutes. Then he turned.

"It is miraculous! Not even any operating scars-no recuperating period. Congratulations, gentlemen! How do you do it?"

"Well, Adolph," answered one of the doctors, "we've come a long way since-"

"WAIT! I am never to be addressed as 'Adolph' again-until the proper time, until I say so!-Until then, there will be no German spoken-I am now the President of the United States of America!"

"Yes, Mr. President!"

Then he reached and touched above his upper lip:

"But I do miss the old mustache!"

They smiled.

Then he asked:

"And the old man?"

"We've placed him in the bed. He will not awaken for 24 hours. At this moment-everything-all appendages of the operation have been destroyed, dissolved. All we need do is walk out of here," said Dr.Graf. "But-Mr. President, it is my suggestion that this man be-"

"No, I tell you, he's helpless! Let him suffer as I have suffered!"

He walked over to the bed and looked down at the man. A white-haired old man in his 80's.

"Tomorrow I'll be in his private home. I wonder how his wife will enjoy my lovemaking?" he gave a small laugh.

"I'm sure, mein Fuhrer-I'm sorry! Please! I'm sure, Mr. President, that she will enjoy your love-making very much."

"Let's leave this place, then. The doctors first, to go their way, then the rest of us-one or two at a time-a transfer of cars, then a good night's sleep at the White House."

The old man with the white hair awakened. He was alone in the room. He could escape. He got out of the bed in search of his clothing and as he walked across the room he saw an old man in a full-length mirror.

No, he thought, oh my god, no!

He raised an arm. The old man in the mirror raised an arm. He moved forward. The old man in the mirror enlarged. He looked down at his hands --- wrinkled, and not his hands! And he looked down at his feet! They weren't his feet! It wasn't his body!

"My God!" he said aloud, "OH MY GOD!"

Then he heard his voice. It wasn't even his own voice. They'd transferred the voice box also. He felt his throat, his head with his fingers. No scars! No scars anywhere. He got into the old man's clothing and ran down the stairway. At the first door he knocked on the door was marked "Landlady."

The door opened. An old woman.

"Yes, Mr. Tilson?" she asked.

"Mr. Tilson? Lady, I am the President of the United States of America! This is an emergency!"

"Oh, Mr. Tilson, you're so funny!"

"Look, where's your telephone?"

"Right where it has always been, Mr. Tilson. Just to the left of the entrance door."

He felt in his pockets. They had left him change. He looked into the wallet. \$18. He put a dime in the phone.

"Lady, what's the address here?"

"Now, Mr. Tilson, you know the address. You've lived here for years! You're acting very strange today, Mr. Tilson. And I want to tell you something else!"

"Yes, yes- what is it?"

"I want to remind you that your rent is due today!"

"Oh, lady, please tell me the address here!"

"As if you didn't know! It's 2435 Shoreham Drive."

"Yes," he said into the phone, "cab? I want a cab at 2435 Shoreham Drive. I'll be waiting on the first floor. My name? My name? All right, my name is Tilson-"

It's no use going to the White House, he thought, they have that covered-I'll go to the largest newspaper. I'll tell them. I'll tell the editor everything, everything that happened-

The other patients laughed at him. "See that guy? The guy that kinda looks like that dictator-fellow, what'-his-name, only a lot older. Anyhow, when he came in here a month ago he claimed that he was the President of the United States of America. That was a month ago. He doesn't say it too much now. But he sure likes to read the newspapers. I never saw a guy who was so eager to read a newspaper. He does know a lot about politics, though. I guess that's what drove him crazy. Too much politics."

The dinner bell rang. All the patients responded. Except one.

A male nurse walked up to him.

"Mr. Tilson?"

There wasn't any answer.

"MR. TILSON?"

"Oh-yes?"

"It's time to eat, Mr. Tilson!"

The old white-haired man rose and walked slowly toward the patients' dining room.

-charles bukowski -

from the books: The Most Beautiful Woman in Town and Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness

===

Trouble with a Battery

I bought her a drink and then another drink and then we went up the stairway behind the bar. there were several large rooms there. she had me hot. sticking her tongue out at me. and we played all the way up the stairway. I took the first one, standing up, inside the door. she just slid back her panties and I put it in.

then we went into the bedroom and there was some kid in the other bed, there were two beds, and the kid said, "hello."

"it's my brother," she said.

the kid looked real thin and vicious, but then almost everybody in the world looked vicious when you thought about it.

there were several bottles of wine along the headboard. they opened a bottle and I waited until they both drank from the bottle, then I tried some.

I threw a ten on the dresser.

the kid really drank at the wine.

"his big brother is the great bullfighter, Jaime Bravo."

"I've heard of Jaime Bravo, he fights mostly out of T.," I said,

"but you don't have to give me any bullshit."

"o.k.," she said, "no bullshit."

we drank and talked for some time, just small easy talk. and then she turned out the lights and with the brother there in the other bed, we did it again. I had my wallet under her pillow.

when we finished she hit the light and went to the bathroom while her brother and I passed the bottle. while the brother wasn't looking I wiped off on the sheet.

she came out of the bathroom and she still looked good, I mean after two shots at it, she still looked good. her breasts were small but firm; what there was of them really jutted. and her ass was big, big enough.

"why did you come to this place?" she asked, moving toward the bed. she slid in beside me, pulled up the sheet, pulled from the bottle.

"I had to get my battery charged across the street."

"after that one," she said, "you'll need a charge."

we all laughed. even the brother laughed. then he looked at her:

"is he all right?"

"sure he's all right," she said.

"what's all that?" I asked.

"we have to be careful."

"I don't know what you mean."

"one of the girls was almost murdered up here last year. some guy gagged her so she couldn't scream and then took a pen knife and cut these crosses all over her body. she almost bled to death."

the brother dressed very slowly, then left. I gave her a five. she threw it on the dresser with the ten.

she passed the wine. it was good wine, French wine. you didn't gag.

she put her leg up against mine. we were both sitting up in bed. it was very comfortable.

"how old are you?" she asked.

"damn near half a century."

"you can sure go, but you look real beat-up."

"I'm sorry. I'm not very pretty."

"oh no, I think you're a beautiful man. didn't anybody ever tell you?"

"I'll bet you say that to all the men you fuck."

"no, I don't."

we sat there a while, passing the bottle. it was very quiet except that you could hear a little music from the bar downstairs. I passed into a kind of dream-trance.

"HEY!" she yelled. she jammed a long fingernail into my bellybutton.

"ow! god damn!"

"LOOK at me!"

I turned and looked at her.

"what do you see?"

"a fine-looking Mexican-Indian girl."

"how can you see?"

"what?"

"how can you see? you don't open your eyes. you keep your eyes in little slits. why?"

it was a fair question. I took a good pull at the French wine.

"I don't know. maybe I'm afraid. afraid of everything. I mean, people, buildings, things, everything. mainly people."

"I'm afraid too," she said.

"but your eyes are open. I like your eyes."

she was hitting the wine. hard. I knew those Mexican-Americans. I was waiting for her to get nasty.

then there was a rapping on the door that damn near shitted me out. it was flung open, viciously, American-style, and there was the bartender - big red brutal banal bastard.

"ain't you through with that son of a bitch yet?"

"I think he wants some more," she said.

"do you? asked Mr. Banal.

"I think so," I said.

his eyes eagled over to the money on the dresser and he slammed the door. a money society. THEY thought it was magic.

"that was my husband, sort of," she said.

"I don't think I want to go again," I said.

"why not?"

"first, I'm 48. second, it's kind of like fucking in the waiting room of a bus station."

she laughed. "I'm what you guys call a 'whore.' I must fuck 8 or ten guys a week, at least."

"that sure doesn't help my cause."

"it helps mine."

"yeh."

we passed the bottle back and forth.

"you like to fuck women?"

"that's why I'm here."

"how about men?"

"I don't fuck men."

she pulled at the bottle. she must have taken a good one-quarter of it.

"maybe you'd like it in the ass? maybe you'd like a man to fuck you in the ass?"

"you're talking crazy now."

she looked straight ahead. there was a little silver Christ on the further wall. she kept looking at the little silver Christ on his cross. he was very pretty.

"maybe you've been hiding it. maybe you want somebody to fuck you in the ass."

"o.k., have it your way - maybe that's what I really want."

I got the corkscrew and pulled out the top of a new French wine, meanwhile getting a bunch of cork and shit into the wine as I always did. only a waiter in the movies could open a French wine without that trouble.

I took the first good gulp. cork and all. I handed her the bottle. her leg had dropped away. she had a fish-like look on her face. She took a good swallow.

I took the wine back from her. the little splints of cork didn't seem to know where to go in the bottle. I got rid of some of them.

"you want me to fuck you in the ass?" she asked.

"WHAT?"

"I can DO it!"

she got out of bed and went to the top drawer of the dresser and strapped this belt around her waist and then faced me ---and there, looking at me, was this BIG celluloid cock.

"ten inches!" she laughed, pushing out her belly, jutting the thing toward me, "and it never gets soft and it never wears out!"

"I liked you better the other way."

"you don't believe my big brother is Jaime Bravo the great bullfighter?"

there she was standing there with this celluloid cock on, asking me about Jaime Bravo.

"I don't think Bravo could cut it in Spain," I said.

"could you cut it in Spain?"

"hell, I can't cut it in Los Angeles. Now please take that ridiculous artificial cock off-"

she unhooked the thing and put it back in the top dresser drawer.

I got out of bed and sat in a straight-backed chair, drinking the wine. she found another chair, and there we sat across from each other, naked, passing the wine.

"this reminds me somehow of an old Leslie Howard movie, although they wouldn't shoot this part. wasn't Howard in the Somerset Maugham thing? OF HUMAN BONDAGE?"

"I don't know those people."

"that's right. you're too young."

"did you like this Howard, this Maugham?"

"they both had style. plenty of style. but, somehow, with both of them, hours or days or years later, you felt gypped, finally."

"but they had this thing you call 'style'?"

"now you're learning."

then I got back into bed. she came on in. I tried it again. I couldn't make it.

"you suck?" I asked.

"sure."

she took it in her mouth and got it out of me.

I gave her another five, dressed, took another drink of wine, and made it down the stairway, across the street to the gas station. the battery was fully-charged. I paid the attendant and then backed on out, hit up 8th ave. a cop on the bike finally gave up and tailed after a Jap who made a sudden left turn without blinkers or hand signal on Wilshire blvd. they deserved each other.

when I got to my place the woman was asleep and the little girl wanted me to read to her from a book called BABY SUSAN'S CHICKEN. it was terrible. Bobby found a cardboard carton for the chicks to sleep in. he set it in a corner behind the kitchen stove. and Bobby put some of Baby Susan's cereal in a little dish and set it carefully in the carton, so the little chicks could have some dinner, and Baby Susan laughed and clapped her fat little hands.

it turns out later that the 2 other chicks are roosters and Baby Susan is a hen, a hen who lays a most wondrous egg. I'll say. I put the little girl down and went into the bathroom and let the hot water run into the tub. then I got into the tub and thought, the next time I get a dead battery I'll go to a movie. then I stretched out into the hot water and forgot everything. almost.

===

THE COPULATING MERMAID OF VENICE, CALIFORNIA

The bar had closed and they still had to make the walk to the rooming house, and there it was --- the hearse had driven up across the street where the Stomach Hospital was.

"I think this is THE night," said Tony "I can feel it in my blood, I really can!"

"The night for what?" asked Bill.

"Look," said Tony, "we know their operation well by now. Let's get one! What the fuck? You got the guts?"

"Whatsa matta? You think I'm coward because that runtysailor whipped my ass?"

"I didn't say that, Bill."

"You're the coward! I can whip you, easy-"

"yeah. I know. I'm not talking about that. I say, let's grab a stiff

just for laughs."

"Shit! Let's grab TEN stiffs!

"Wait. You're drunk now. Let's wait. We know the operation. We know how they operate. We been watching every night."

"And you're not drunk, eh? You wouldn't have the GUTS otherwise!"

"Quiet now! Watch! Here they come. They've got a stiff. Some poor guy. Look at that sheet pulled over his head. It's sad."

"I am looking. And it is sad-"

"Okay, we know the operation: if it's just one stiff, they toss him in, light their cigarettes and drive off. But if it's two stiffs, they don't bother locking the hearse door twice. They're real cool boys. It's just old stuff with them. If it's two stiffs, they just leave the guy on the roller there behind the hearse, go in and get the other stiff, then toss them in together. How many nights have we watched it?"

"I dunno," said Bill, "sixty, at least."

"Okay, now there's the one stiff. If they go back for another --- that stiff belongs to us. You game for grabs if they go in for another stiff?"

"I'm game! I got double your guts!"

"okay, then, watch. We'll know in a minute-Oops, there they go! They're going in for another stiff!" said Tony. "You game?"

"Game," said Bill.

They sprinted across the street and grabbed the corpse by the head and feet. Tony had the head, that sad head wrapped so tight in the sheet, while Bill grabbed the feet.

Then they ran across the street, the pure white sheet of the corpse floating in the momentum --- sometimes you could see an ankle, an elbow, a thigh of flesh, and then they ran it up the room- ing house front steps, got to the door and Bill said, "Jesus Christ, who's got the key? Look, I'm scared!"

"We don't have much time! Those bastards are gonna be out soon with the other stiff! Throw him in the hammock! Quick! We gotta find a goddamned key!"

They tossed the stiff into the hammock. It rocked back and forth in the hammock under the moonlight.

"Can't we take the body back?" asked Bill. "Good God oh Mother o Mighty, can't we take the body back?"

"No time! Too late! They'd see us. HEY! WAIT!" yelled Tony. "I found the key!"

"THANK JESUS!"

They unlocked the door, then grabbed the thing on the hammock and ran up the stairway with it. Tony's room was closest. second floor. There was quite a bit of bumping with the corpse along the stairway wall and railing.

Then they had it outside Tony's door and stretched it out while Tony looked for his door key. They got the door open, plopped the stiff on the

bed and then went to the refrigerator and got hold of Tony's cheap gallon of muscatel, had half a waterglass full each, then refilled, came back to the bedroom, sat down and

looked at the stiff.

"Do you suppose anybody saw us?" asked Bill.

"If they had, I think the cops would be up here by now."

"Do you think they'll search the neighborhood?"

"How can they? How can they go knocking on doors at this time of the morning, asking, 'Do you have a dead body?'"

"Shit, I guess you're right."

"Sure, I'm right," said Tony, "still, I can't help wondering how those two guys felt when they came back and saw the body gone? It must have been kind of funny."

"Yeah," said Bill, "it musta been."

"Well, funny or not, we've got the stiff. There he is, right on the bed."

They looked at the thing under the sheet, had another drink.

"I wonder when they begin to stiffen up? I wonder when they begin to stink?"

"That rigor mortis takes a bit of time, I think," said Tony.

"But he'll probably begin to stink pretty soon. It's just like garbage left in the sink. I don't think they drain the blood until they reach the mortuary."

So, two drunks, they went on drinking the muscatel; they even forgot at times about the body, and they spoke of those vague and important other things in their rather inarticulate way. Then it was back to the body again.

The body was still there.

"What we gonna do with it?" asked Bill.

"Stand it up in the closet after it stiffens up. It seemed pretty loose when we were carrying it. Probably died about a half and hour ago or so."

"So, okay, we stand it up in the closet. Then what do we do when it starts to stink?"

"I never thought about that part," said Tony.

"Think about it," said Bill, pouring a good one.

Tony tried to think about it. "You know, we might go to jail for this. If we get caught."

"Sure, so?"

"Well, I think we made a mistake, but it's too late."

"Too late," repeated Bill.

"So," said Tony, pouring a tall one, "if we are stuck with this stiff we might as well have a look at him."

"Look at him?"

"Yeah, look at him."

"You got the guts?" asked Bill.

"I dunno."

"You scared?"

"Sure. No training in this sort of thing," said Tony.

"All right. You pull the sheet back," said Bill, "only fill my glass first. Fill my glass, then pull the sheet back."

"Okay," said Tony.

He filled Bill's glass. Then walked over.

"All right," said Tony, "here GOES!"

Tony pulled the sheet straight back over the body. He kept his eyes closed.

"Good GOD!" said Bill, "it's a woman! A young woman!"

Tony opened his eyes. "Yeah. Was young. Christ, look at that long blonde hair, goes way down past her asshole. But she's DEAD! terribly and finally dead, forever. What a shame! I don't understand it."

"How old you figure she was?"

"She doesn't look dead to me," said Bill.

"She is."

"But look at those breasts! Those thighs! That pussy! That pussy: it still looks alive!"

"Yeah," said Tony, "the pussy, they say: it's the first thing to come and the last thing to go."

Tony walked over to the pussy, touched it. then he lifted a breast, kissed the damned dead thing. "It's so sad, everything is so sad --- that we live all our lives like idiots and then finally die."

"You shouldn't touch the body," said Bill.

"She's beautiful," said Tony, "even dead, she's beautiful."

"Yeah, but if she were alive she wouldn't even look at a bum like you twice. You know that, don't you?"

"Sure! And that's just the point! Now she can't say, 'NO!'"

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"I mean," said Tony, "that my cock is hard. VERY HARD!"

Tony walked over and poured a glassful from the jug. Drank it down.

Then he walked over to the bed, began kissing the breasts, running his hands through her long hair, and then finally kissing that dead mouth in a kiss from the living to the dead. And then he mounted.

It was GOOD. Tony rammed and jammed. Never such a fuck as this in all his days! He came. Then rolled off, towed himself with the sheet.

Bill had watched the whole thing, lifting the gallon muscatel jug in the dim lamplight.

"Christ, Bill, it was beautiful, beautiful!"

"You're crazy! You just fucked a dead woman!"

"And you've been fucking dead women all your life --- deadwomen with dead souls and dead pussies --- only you didn't know it!"

I'm sorry, Bill, she was a beautiful buck. I have no shame."

"Was she that good?" asked Bill.

"You'll never believe it."

Tony walked to the bathroom to take a piss.

When he got back, Bill had mounted the body. Bill was going good. Moaning and groaning a bit. Then he reached over, kissed that dead mouth, and came.

Bill rolled off, hit the edge of the sheet, wiped off.

"You're right. Best fuck I ever had!"

Then they both sat in their chairs and looked at her.

"Wonder what her name was?" asked Tony. "I'm in love."

Bill laughed. "Now I know you're drunk! Only a damn fool falls in love with a living woman; now you gotta get hooked on a dead one."

"Okay, I'm hooked," said Tony.

"All right, you're hooked," said bill, "whatta we do now?"

"Get her the hell outa here!" answered Tony.

"How?"

"Same way we got her in --- down the stairway."

"Then?"

"Then into your car. We drive her down to Venice Beach, throw her into the ocean."

"That's cold."

"She won't feel it any more than she felt your cock."

"And how about your cock?" asked Bill.

"She didn't feel that either," answered Tony.

There she was, double-fucked, dead-laid on the sheets.

"Let's make it, baby!" screamed Tony.

Tony grabbed the feet and waited. Bill grabbed the head. As they rushed out of Tony's room the doorway was still open. Tony kicked it shut with his left foot as they moved toward the top of the stairway, the sheet no longer wound about the body but, more or less, flopped over it. Like a wet dishrag over a kitchen faucet. And again, there was much bumping of her head and her thighs and her big ass against the stariway walls and stairway railings.

They threw her into the back seat of Bill's car.

"Wait, wait, baby!" screamed Tony.

"What for?"

The muscatel jug, asshole!"

"Oh, sure."

Bill sat waiting with the dead cunt in the back seat.

Tony was a man of his word. He came running out with the jug of muski.

They got on the freeway, passing the jug back and forth, drinking good mouthfuls. It was a warm and beautiful night and the Moon was full, of course. But it wasn't exactly night. By then it was 4:15 a.m. A good time anyhow.

They parked. Then had another drink of the good muscatel, got the body out and carried it that long sandy dandy walk toward the sea. Then they got down to that part of the sand where the sea reached now and then, that part of the sand that was wet, soaked, full of little sand crabs and airholes. They put the body down and drank from the jug. Now and then an excessive wave rolled a bit over all of them: Bill, Tony, the dead Cunt.

Bill had to get up to piss and having been taught nineteenth century morals he walked a bit up the shore to piss. As his friend did so, Tony pulled back the sheet and looked at the dead face in the seaweed twist and swirl, in the salty morning air. Tony looked at the face as Bill was pissing offshore. A lovely kind face, nose a little too sharp, but a very good mouth, and then with her body stiffening already, he leaned forward and kissed her very gently upon the mouth and said, "I love you, dead bitch."

Then he covered her with the sheet.

Bill finished pissing, came back. "I need another drink."

"Go ahead. I'll take one too."

Tony said, "I'm going to swim her out."

"Can you swim good?"

"Not too well."

"I'm a good swimmer. I'll swim her out."

"NO! NO!" screamed Tony.

"Goddamn it, stop yelling!"

"I'm going to swim her out!"

"All right! All right!"

Tony took another drink, pulled the sheet aside, picked her up and carried her step by step toward the breakers. He was drunker than he figured. Several times the big waves knocked them both down, knocked her out of his arms, and he had to get to his feet, run, swim, struggle to find the body. Then he'd see her --- that long long hair. She was just like a mermaid. Maybe she was a mermaid. finally Tony floated her out beyond the breakers. It was quiet. halfway between moon and sunrise. He floated with her some moments. It was very quiet. A time within time and a time beyond time.

Finally, he gave the body a little shove. She floated off, half underwater, the strands of long hair whirling about the body. She was still beautiful, dead or whatever she was. She began to float away from him, caught in some tide. The sea had her.

Then suddenly he turned from her, tried to swim back toward the shore. It seemed very far away. He made it in with the last stroke of his strength, rolling in with the force of the last breaker. He picked himself up, fell, got up, walked forward, sat down beside Bill.

"So, she's gone," said Bill.

"Yeh. Shark meat."

"Do you think we'll ever be caught?"

"No. Give me a drink."

"Go easy. We're getting close to the bottom."

"Yeah."

They got back to the car. Bill drove. They argued over the final drinks on the way home, then Tony thought about the mermaid. He put his head down and began to cry.

"You were always chickenshit," said Bill, "always chickenshit."

They made it back to the rooming house.

Bill went to his room. Tony to his. The sun was coming up. The world was awakening. Some were awakening with hangovers. some were awakening with thoughts of church. Most were still asleep. A Sunday morning. And the mermaid, the mermaid with that dead sweet tail, she was well out to sea. While somewhere a pelican dove, came up with a glittering, guitar-shaped fish.

-charles bukowski -

from the books: The Most Beautiful Woman in Town and Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness

===

ALL THE GREAT WRITERS

Mason had her on the phone. "yeh, well, listen, I was drunk. I don't remember WHAT I said to you! maybe it was true and maybe it wasn't! no, I'm NOT sorry, I'm tired of being sorry-you what? you won't? well, god damn you then!"

Henry Mason hung up. it was raining again. even in the rain there was always trouble with women, there was always trouble with -

it was the intercom buzzer. he picked up the phone.

"there's a Mr. Burkett, a James Burkett-"

"will you tell him that his manuscripts have been returned? we mailed them back yesterday. so sorry, all that."

"but he insists on seeing you personally."

"you can't get rid of him?"

"no."

"all right, send him in."

a bunch of damned extroverts. they were worse than clothing salesmen, brush salesmen, they were worse than-
in came James Burkett.

"sit down, Jimmy."

"only my friends call me 'Jimmy.'"

"sit down, Mr. Burkett."

you could tell by looking at Burkett that he was insane. a great self-love covered him like a neon paint. there was no scrubbing it off. truth wouldn't do it. they didn't know what truth was.

"listen," said Burkett, lighting a cigarette and smiling around his cigarette like a temperamental & goofy bitch, "how come ya didn't like my stuff? your secretary out there sez ya sent it back?"

then Mr. Burkett gave him the direct, the so direct look in the eye, playing at having SOUL. you were supposed to LOVE to do, so very hard to do, and only Mr. Burkett didn't realize this.

"it just wasn't any good, Burkett. that's all."

Burkett tapped his cigarette out in the ashtray. now, he rammed it out, jamming it and twisting it in the tray. then he lit another cigarette, and holding the match out in front of him, flaming, he said:

"hey, listen, man, don't give me that SHIT!"

"it was terrible writing, Jimmy."

"I said only my FRIENDS call me 'Jimmy'!"

"it was shitty writing, Mr. Burkett, in our opinion, only, of course."

"listen, man, I KNOW this game! you SUCK up right and you're in! but you've got to SUCK! and I don't SUCK, man! my work stands alone!"

"it certainly does, Mr. Burkett."

"if I were a Jew or a fag or a commy or black it would be all over, man, I'd be in."

"there was a black writer in here yesterday who told me that if his skin were white he'd be a millionaire."

"all right, how about the fags?"

"some fags write pretty good."

"like Genet, huh?"

"like Genet."

"I gotta suck dick, huh? I gotta write about sucking dick, huh?"

"I didn't say that."

"listen, man, all I need is a little promotion. a little promotion and I'll go. people will LOVE me! all they gotta do is SEE my stuff!"

"listen, Mr. Burkett, this is a business. if we published every writer who demanded that we do so because his stuff was so great, we wouldn't be here very long. we have to make the judgment. if we're wrong too many times we're finished. It's as simple as that. we print good writing that sells and we print bad writing that sells. we're in the selling market. we're not a charity, and frankly, we don't worry too much about the betterment of the soul or the betterment of the world."

"but my stuff will GO, Henry-"

" 'Mr. Mason,' please! only my friends-"

"what are trying to do, get SHITTY with me?"

"look, Burkett, you're a pusher. as a pusher, you're great. why don't

you sell mops or insurance or something?"

"what's wrong with my writing?"

"you can't push and write at the same time. only Hemingway was able to do that, and then even he forgot how to write."

"I mean, man, what don't you like about my writing? I mean, be DEFINITE! Don't give me a lot of shit about Hemingway, man!"

"1955."

"1955? whatcha mean?"

"I mean, you were good then, but the needle's stuck. you're still playing 1955 over and over again."

"hell, life is life and I'm still writing about LIFE, man! there isn't anything else! what the hell you giving me?"

Henry Mason let out a long slow sigh and leaned back. artists were intolerably dull. and near-sighted. if they made it they believed in their own greatness no matter how bad they were. if they didn't make it they still believed in their greatness no matter how bad they were. if they didn't make it, it was somebody else's fault. it wasn't because they didn't have talent; no matter how they stank they always believed in their genius. they could always trot out Van Gogh or Mozart or two dozen more who went to their graves before having their little asses lacquered with Fame. but for each Mozart there were 50,000 intolerable idiots who would keep on puking out rotten work. only the good quit the game - like Rimbaud or Rossini.

Burkett lit another cigarette, once again holding the flaming match in front of him as he spoke:

"listen, you print Bukowski. and he's slipped. you know he's slipped. admit it, man! hasn't Bukowski slipped, huh? hasn't he?"

"so, he's slipped."

"he writes SHIT!"

"if shit sells then we'll sell it. listen, Mr. Burkett, we aren't the only publishing house. why don't you try somebody else? just don't accept our judgment."

Burkett stood up. "what the hell's the use? you guys are all alike! you can't use good writing! the world has no use for REAL writing! you couldn't tell a human being from a fly! because you're dead! DEAD, ya hear? ALL YOU FUCKERS ARE DEAD! FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU! FUCK YOU!"

Burkett threw his burning cigarette on the rug, turned about, walked to the door, SLAMMED it and was gone.

Henry Mason got up, picked up the cigarette, put it in the tray, sat down, lit one of his own. no way of giving up smoking on a job like this, he thought. He leaned back and inhaled, so glad that Burkett was gone --- those guys were dangerous --- absolutely insane and vicious --- especially those who were always writing about LOVE or SEX or the BETTER WORLD. Jesus, Jesus. he exhaled. the inter- come buzzer rang.

he picked up the phone.

"a Mr. Ainsworth Hockley to see you?"

"what's he want? we sent him his check for LUSTS AND BUSTS ON THE CAMPUS."

"he says he has a new story."

"fine. tell him to leave it with you."

"he says he hasn't written it."

"o.k., have him leave the outline. I'll check it out."

"he says he doesn't have an outline."

"wutz he want, then?"

"he wants to see you personally."

"you can't get rid of him?"

"no, he just keeps staring at my legs and grinning."

"then, for Christ's sake. pull your dress down!"

"it's too short."

"all right. send him in."

in came Ainsworth Hockley.

"sit down," he told him.

Hockley sat down. then jumped up. lit a cigar. Hockley carried dozens of cigars. he was afraid of being a homosexual. that is, he didn't know whether he was a homosexual or not, so he smoked the cigars because he thought it was manly and also dynamic, but he still wasn't sure of where he was. he thought he liked women too. it was a mix-up.

"listen," said Hockley, "I just sucked a 36 inch COCK! gigan- tic!"

"listen, Hockley, this is a business. I just got rid of one nut. what do you want with me?"

"I want to suck your COCK, man! THAT'S what I want!"

"I'd rather you didn't."

the room was already smoggy with cigar smoke. Hockley really shot it out. he jumped out of the chair. walked around. sat down. jumped out of the chair. walked around.

"I think I'm going crazy." said Ainsworth Hockley. "I keep thinking of cock. I used to live with this 14 year old kid. huge COCK! god. HUGE! he beat his meat right in front of me once, I'll never forget it! and when I was in college, all these guys walking around the locker rooms, real cool-like ya know? why one guy even had BALLS down to his KNEES! we used to call him BEACH- BALLS HARRY. after BEACHBALLS HARRY came, baby it was all OVER! like a waterhose spurting curdled cream! when that stuff dried- why, man in the morning he'd have to beat the sheets with a baseball bat, shake the flakes off before he sent it to the laun- dry-"

"you're crazy, Ainsworth."

"I know, I know, that's what I'm telling YA! have a cigar!"

Hockley poked a cigar at his lips.

"no, no, thank you."

"maybe you'd like to suck MY cock?"

"I don't have the slightest desire. now what do you want?"

"I've got this idea for a story, man."

"o.k., write it."

"no, I want you to hear it."

Mason was silent.

"all right," said Hockley, "this is it."

he walked around shooting smoke. "a spaceship, see? 2 guys and 4 women and a computer. here they are shooting through space, see? days, weeks go by. 2 guys, 4 women, the computer. the women are getting real hot. they want it, see? got it?"

"got it."

"but you know what happens?"

"no."

"the two guys decide that they are homosexuals and begin to play with each other. they ignore the women entirely."

"yeah, that's kind of funny. write it."

"wait. I'm not done yet. these two guys are playing with each other. it's disgusting. no. it isn't disgusting! anyhow, the women walk over to the computer and open the doors. and inside this computer there are 4 HUGE cock and balls."

"crazy. write it."

"wait. wait. but before they can get at the cocks, the machine shows up with assholes and mouths and the whole damned machine goes into an orgy with ITSELF. god damn, can you imagine?"

"all right. write it. I think we can use it."

Ainsworth lit another cigar, walked up and down. "how about an advance?"

"one guy already owes us 5 short stories and 2 novels. he keeps falling further and further behind. if it keeps up, he'll own the company."

"give me half then, what the hell. half a cock is better than none."

"when can we have the story?"

"in a week."

Mason wrote a check for \$75.

"thanks, baby," said Hockley, "you're sure now that we don't want to suck each other's cocks?"

"I'm sure."

then Hockley was gone. Mason walked out to the receptionist. her name was Francine.

Mason looked at her legs.

"that dress is pretty short, Francine."

he kept looking.

"that's the style, Mr. Mason.

"just call me 'Henry.' I don't believe I ever saw a dress quite that short."

"they get shorter and shorter."

"you keep giving everybody who comes in here rocks. they come into my office and talk like crazy."

"oh, come on, Henry."

"you even give me rocks, Francine."

she giggled.

"come on, let's go to lunch," he said.

"but you've never taken me to lunch before."

"oh, is there somebody else?"

"Oh, no. but it's only 10:30 a.m."

"who the hell cares? I'm suddenly hungry. very hungry."

"all right. just a moment."

Francine got out the mirror, played with the mirror a bit. then they got up and walked to the elevator. they were the only ones on the elevator. on the way down, he grabbed Francine and kissed her. she tasted like raspberry with a slight hint of halitosis. he even pawed one of her buttocks. she offered a token resistance, pushing against him lightly.

"Henry! I don't what's gotten into you!" she giggled.

"I'm only a man, after all."

in the lobby of the building there was a stand which sold candy, newspapers, magazines, cigarettes, cigars-

"wait a moment, Francine."

Mason bought 5 cigars, huge ones. he lit one and let out an immense spray of smoke. they walked out of the building, looking for a place to eat. It has stopped raining.

"do you usually smoke before lunch?" she asked.

"before, after and in between."

Henry Mason felt as if he were going just a bit insane. all those writers. what the hell was wrong with them?

"hey, here's a place!"

he held the door open and Francine walked in. he followed her.

"Francine, I sure like that dress!"

"you do? why thank you! I've got a dozen similar to this one"

"you have?"

"umm hummm."

he pulled up her chair and looked at her legs as she sat down. Mason sat down. "god, I'm hungry. I keep thinking of clams, I wonder why?"

"I think you want to fuck me."

"WHAT?"

"I said, I think you want to fuck me."

"oh."

"I'll let you. I think you're a very nice man, a very nice man, really."

the waiter came up and waved the smoke away with his menu cards. he

handed one to Francine and one to Mason. and waited. and got rocks. how come some guys got nice dolls like that while he had to beat his meat? the waiter took their orders, wrote them down,

walked through the swinging doors, handed the orders to the cook.

"hey," said the cook, "whatcha got there?"

"whadya mean?"

"I mean, ya got a horn! In front there! stay away from ME with that thing!"

"it's nothing."

"nothing? you'll kill somebody with that thing! go throw some cold water on it! it just don't look nice!"

the waiter walked into the men's room. some guys got all the broads. he was a writer. he had a whole truck full of manuscripts. 4 novels. 40 short stories. 500 poems. nothing published. a rotten world. they couldn't recognize talent. they kept talent down. you have to have an "in," that's all there was to it. rotten cocksucking world. waiting on stupid people all day.

the waiter took his cock out, put it in the hand basin and began splashing cold water on it.

===

Life and Death in the Charity Ward

The ambulance was full but they found me a place on top and away we went. I had been vomiting blood from the mouth in large quantities and I was worried that I might vomit upon the people below me. We rode along listening to the siren. It sounded far off, it sounded as if the sound weren't coming from our ambulance. We were on the way to the county hospital, all of us. The poor. The charity cases. There was something different wrong with all of us and many of us would not be coming back. The one thing we had in common was that we were all poor and didn't have much of a chance. We were packed in there. I never realized that an ambulance could hold so many people.

"Good Lord, oh good Lord," I heard the voice of a black woman below me, "I never thought this would happen to ME! I never thought nothing like this would Lord-"

I didn't feel that way about it. I had been playing with death for some time. I can't say we were the best of friends but we were well acquainted. He had moved a little close a little fast on me that night. There had been warnings: pains like swords stuck in my stomach but I had ignored them. I had thought I was a tough guy and pain to me was just like bad luck: I ignored it. I just poured whiskey on top of the pain and went about my business. My business was getting drunk. The whiskey had done it; I should

have stayed on the wine.

Blood that comes from the inside is not the bright red color that comes, say, from a cut on the finger. The blood from inside is dark, a purple, almost black, and it stinks, it stinks worse than shit. All that life giving fluid, it smelled worse than a beer shit.

I felt another vomiting spasm coming on. It was the same feeling as throwing up food and when the blood came out, one felt better. But it was only an illusion-each mouthful out brought one closer to Pappa Death.

"O good Lord God, I never thought-"

The blood came up and I held it in my mouth. I didn't know what to do. Up there on the upper tier I would have wetted my friends down quite good. I held the blood in my mouth trying to think about what to do. The ambulance turned a corner and the blood began to dribble out the corners of my mouth. Well, a man had to maintain decencies even while he was dying. I got myself together, closed my eyes and swallowed my blood back down. I was sickened. But I had solved the problem. I only hoped we got some- place soon where I could let the next one go.

Really, there wasn't any thought of dying; the only thoughts I had were (was) one: this is a terrible convenience, I am no longer in control of what is happening. They narrowed down your choices and pushed you around.

The ambulance got there and then I was on a table and they were asking me questions: what was my religion? Where was I born? did I owe the country any \$\$\$ from earlier trips to the hospital? when was I born? Parents alive? Married? all that, you know. They talk to a man as if he had all his faculties; they don't even pretend that you are dying. And they are hardly in a hurry. It does have a calming effect but that's not their reason: they are simply bored and they don't care whether you die, fly or fart. No, they rather you didn't fart.

Then I was on an elevator and the door opened into what appeared to be a dark cellar. I was rolled out. They placed me on a bed and left. An orderly appeared out of nowhere and gave me a small white pill.

"Take this," he said. I swallowed the pill and he handed me a glass of water and then vanished. It was the kindest thing that had happened to me in some time. I leaned back and noticed my surroundings. There were 8 or ten beds, all occupied by male Americans. We each had a tin bucket of water and a glass on the night stand. The sheets seemed clean. It was very dark in there and cold, much the feeling of an apartment house cellar. There was one small light bulb, unshaded. Next to me was a huge man, he was old, in his mid fifties, but he was huge; although much of the hugeness was fat, he did give off the feeling of much strength. He was strapped down in his bed. He stared straight up and spoke to the ceiling.

"-and he was such a nice boy, such a clean nice boy, he needed the job, he said he needed the job, and I said, 'I like your looks, boy, we need a

good fry cook, a good honest fry cook, and I can tell an honest face, boy, I can tell character, you work with me and my wife and you got a job here for life, boy-' and he said, 'All right, sir,' just like that he said it and he looked happy about getting' that job and I said, 'Martha, we got us a good boy here, a nice clean cut boy, he ain't gonna tap the till like the rest of those dirty sons of bitches.' Well, I went out and got a good buy on chickens, a real good buy on chickens. Martha can do more things with a chick- en, she's got that magic touch with chicken. Col. Sanders can't touch her with a 90 foot pole. I went out and bought 20 chickens for that weekend. We are going to have a good weekend, a chicken special. 20 chickens I went out and got. We were going to put Col. Sanders out of business. A good weekend like that, you can pull 200 bucks clear profit. That boy even helped us pluck and cut those chickens, he did it on his own time. Martha and I didn't have no children. I was really taking a liking to that boy. Well, Martha fixed the chicken in the back, she got all that chicken ready-we had chicken 19 different ways, we had chicken coming out of our assholes. All the boy had to do was cook up the other stuff like burgers and steak and so forth. The chicken was set. And by god, we had a big weekend. Friday night, Saturday and Sunday. That boy was a good worker, and pleasant too. He was nice to be around. He made these funny jokes. He called me Col. Sanders and I called him son. Col. Sanders and Son, that's what we were. When we closed Saturday night we were all tired but happy. Every damned bit of chicken was gone. The place had been packed, people waitin' on seats, you never saw anything like it. I locked the door and got out a 5th of good whiskey and we sat there, tired and happy, having a few drinks. The boy washed all the dishes and swept the floor. He said, 'All right, Col. Sanders, when do I report tomorrow?' He smiled. I told him 6:30 a.m. and he got his cap and left. 'That's a hell of a nice boy, Martha,' I said and then I walked over to the till to count the profits. The till was EMPTY! That's right, I said, 'The til was EMPTY!' And the cigar box with the other 2 days profit, he found that too. Such a clean cut boy-I don't understand it-I said he could have a job for life, that's what I told him. 20 chickens-Martha really knows her chickens-And that boy, that dirty chickenshit, he ran off with all that damned money, that boy-"

Then he screamed. I've heard a great many people scream but I've never heard anybody scam like that. He rose up against his straps and screamed. It looked as if those straps were going to break. The whole bed rattled, the wall roared the scream back at us. The man was in total agony. It wasn't a short scream. It was a long one and it went on and on. Then he stopped. We 8 or ten male Ameri- cans, ill, stretched in our beds and enjoyed the silence.

Then he began talking again. "He was such a nice boy, I liked his looks. I told him he could have the job for life. He made these funny jokes, he was nice to be around. I went out and got those 20 chickens. 20 chickens. On a good weekend you can clear 200. We had 20 chickens. The boy called me

Col. Sanders-

I leaned out of bed and vomited out a mouthful of blood-

The next day a nurse came out and got me and helped me on a rolling platform. I was still vomiting up blood and was quite weak. She rolled me on the elevator.

The technician got behind his machine. They poked a point into my belly and told me to stand there. I felt very weak.

"I'm too weak to stand up," I said.

"Just stand there," said the technician.

"I don't think I can," I said.

"Hold still."

I felt myself slowly beginning to fall over backwards.

"I'm falling." I said.

"Don't fall." He said.

"Hold still," said the nurse.

I fell over backwards. I felt as if I were made of rubber. There was no feeling when I hit the floor. I felt very light. I probably was.

"Oh god damn it!" said the technician.

The nurse helped me up and stood me up against the machine with this point jamming into my stomach.

"I can't stand it," I said, "I think I'm dying. I can't stand up. I'm sorry but I can't stand up."

"Stand still," said the technician, "just stand there."

"Stand still," said the nurse.

I could feel myself falling. I fell over backwards.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"God damn you!" the technician screamed, "you made me waste two films! Those god damned films cost money!"

"I'm sorry," I said.

"Take him out of here," said the technician.

The nurse helped my up and put me back on the roller. The humming nurse rolled me back to the elevator, humming.

They did take me out of that cellar and put me into a large room, a very large room. There were about 40 people dying in there. The wires to the buttons had been cut and large wooden doors, thick wooden doors coated with slabs of tin on both sides closed up away from the nurses and the doctors. They had put the sides up around my bed and I was asked to use the bedpan but I didn't like the bedpan, especially to vomit blood into and far less to shit into. If a man ever invents a comfortable and usable bedpan he will be hated by doctors and nurses for eternity and beyond.

I kept having a desire to shit but not much luck. Of course, all I was getting was milk and the stomach was ripped open so it had offered me some tough roast beef with half-cooked carrots and half-mashed potatoes. I

refused. I knew they just wanted another empty bed. Anyhow, there was still this desire to shit. Strange. It was my second or third night in there. I was very weak. I managed to unattach one side and get out of bed. I made it to the crapper and sat there. I strained and sat there and strained. Then I got up. Nothing. Just a little whirlpool of blood. Then a merry-go-round started in my head and I leaned against the wall with one hand and vomited up a mouthful of blood. I flushed the toilet and walked out. I got halfway to my bed and another mouthful came up. I fell. Then on the floor I vomited up another mouthful of blood. I didn't know that there was so much blood inside of people. I let go another mouthful.

"You son of a bitch," an old man hollered at me from his bed, "shut up so we can get some sleep."

"Sorry, comrade," I said, and then I was unconscious-

The nurse was angry. "You bastard," she said, "I told you not to take down the sides of your bed. You fuckin' creeps sure make my night a drag!"

"your pussy stinks," I told her, "you belong in a Tijuana whore house."

She lifted my head by the hair and slapped me hard across the left side of my face and then backhanded me across the right.

"Take that back!" she said. "Take that back!"

"Florence Nightingale," I said, "I love you."

She put my head back down and walked out of the room. She was a lady of true spirit and fire; I liked that. I rolled over into my own blood, getting my smock wet. That'd teach her.

Florence Nightingale came back with another female sadist and they put me in a chair and slid the chair across the room toward my bed.

"Too much god damned noise!" said the old man. He was right.

They got me back into bed and Florence put the bed side back up. "Son of a bitch," she said. "stay in there now or next time I'm gonna lay on you."

"Suck me off," I said, "suck me off before you leave."

She leaned over the railing and looked into my face. I have a very tragic face. It attracts some women. Her eyes were wide and passionate and looked into mine. I pulled the sheet down and pulled up my smock. She spit into my face, then walked out-

Then the head nurse was there.

"Mr. Bukowski," she said, "we can't let you have any blood. You don't have any blood credit."

She smiled. She was letting me know that they were going to let me die.

"All right," I said.

"Do you want to see the priest?"

"What for?"

"We have on your admissions card that you are a Catholic."

"I just put that down."

"Why?"

"I used to be. You put down 'no religion', people always ask a lot of questions."

"We have you down as Catholic, Mr. Bukowski."

"Listen, it's hard for me to talk. I'm dying. All right, all right, I'm a Catholic, have it your way."

"We can't let you have any blood, Mr. Bukowski."

"Listen, my father works for the county. I think they have a blood program. L.A. County Museum. A Mr. Henry Bukowski. He hates me."

"We'll check it out."

There was something about my papers going down while I was upstairs. I didn't see a doctor until the fourth day and by then they found that my father who hated me was a good guy who had a job and who had a drunken dying son without a job and the good guy had given blood to the blood program and so they hooked up a bottle and poured it to me. 13 pints of blood and 13 pints of glucose without stop. The nurse ran out of places to stick the needle-

I awakened once and the priest was standing over me.

"Father," I said, "please go away. I can die without this."

"You want me to leave, my son?"

"Yes, Father."

"Have you lost the faith?"

"Once a Catholic always a Catholic, my son."

"Bullshit, Father."

An old man in the next bed said, "Father, Father, I'll talk to you. You talk to me, Father."

The priest went over there. I waited to die. You know god damned well I didn't die then or I wouldn't be telling you this now-

They moved me into a room with a black guy and a white guy. The white guy kept getting fresh roses every day. He raised roses which he sold to florists. He wasn't raising any roses right then. The black guy had busted open like me. The white guy had a bad heart, a very bad heart. We lay around and the white guy talked about breeding roses and raising roses and how he could sure use a cigarette, my god, how he needed a cigarette. I had stopped vomiting blood. Now I was just shitting blood. I felt like I had it made. I had just emptied a pint of blood and they had taken the needle out.

"I'll get you some smokes, Harry."

"God, thanks, Hank."

I got out of bed. "Give me some money."

Harry gave me some change.

"If he smokes he'll die," said Charley. Charley was the black guy.

"Bullshit, Charley, a couple of little smokes never hurt anybody."

I walked out of the room and down the hall. There was a cigarette machine in the waiting lobby. I got a pack and walked back. Then Charley and

Harry and I lay there smoking cigarettes. That was morning. About noon the doctor came by and put a machine on Harry. The machine spit and farted and roared.

"You've been smoking, haven't you?" the doctor asked Harry.

"No doctor, honest, I haven't been smoking."

"Which one of you guys bought him these smokes?"

Charley looked at the ceiling. I looked at the ceiling.

"You smoke another cigarette and you're dead," said the doctor.

Then he took his machine and walked out. As soon as he left I took the pack out from under the pillow.

"Lemme have one," said Harry.

"You heard what the doctor said," said Charley.

"Yeah," I said, exhaling a sheath of beautiful blue smoke, "you heard what the doctor said: 'You smoke another cigarette and you're dead.'"

"I'd rather die happy than live in misery," said Harry.

"I can't be responsible for your death, Harry," I said, "I'm going to pass these cigarettes to Charley and if he wants to give you one he can."

I passed them over to Charley who had the center bed.

"All right, Charley," said Harry, "let's have 'em."

"I can't do it, Harry, I can't kill you Harry."

Charley passed the cigarettes back to me.

"Come on, Hank, lemme have a smoke."

"No, Harry."

"Please, I beg you, man, just one smoke just one!"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!"

I threw him the whole pack. His hand trembled as he took one out.

"I don't have any matches. Who's got matches?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake," I said.

I threw him the matches-

They came in and hooked me to another bottle. About ten minutes my father arrived. Vicky was with him, so drunk she could hardly stand up.

"Lover!" she said, "Lover boy!"

She staggered up against the edge of the bed.

I looked at the old man. "You son of a bitch," I said, "you didn't have to bring her up here drunk."

"I warned you not to get involved with a woman like that." "She's broke. You bastard, you bought her whiskey, got her drunk and brought her up here."

"I told you she was no good, Henry. I told you she was a bad woman."

"Don't you love me anymore, lover boy?"

"Get her out of here- NOW!" I told the old man.

"No, no, I want you to see what kind of a woman you have."

"I know what kind of woman I have. Now get her out of here now, or so

help me Christ I'm going to pull this needle out of my arm and whip your ass!"

The old man moved her out. I fell back on my pillow.

"She's a looker," said Harry.

"I know," I said, "I know."

I stopped shitting blood and I was given a list of what to eat and I was told that the first drink would kill me. They had also told me that I would die without an operation. I had had a terrible argument with a female Japanese doctor about operation and death. I had said "No operation" and she had walked out, shaking her ass at me in anger. Harry was still alive when I left, nursing his cigarettes. I walked along in the sunlight to see how it felt. It felt all

right. The traffic went by. The sidewalk was as sidewalks had always been. I was wondering whether to take a bus in or try to phone somebody to come and get me. I walked into this place to phone. I sat down first and had a smoke.

The bartender walked up and I ordered a bottle of beer.

"What's new?" he asked.

"Nothing much," I said. He walked off. I poured the beer into a glass, then I looked at the glass a while and then I emptied half of it. Somebody put a coin in the juke box and we had some music. life looked a little better. I finished that glass, poured another and wondered if my pecker would ever stand up again. I looked around the bar: no women. I did the next best thing: I picked up the glass and drained it

-charles bukowski -

from the books: The Most Beautiful Woman in Town and Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness

====

BEER AND POETS AND TALK

it was a hell of a night. Willie had slept in the weeds outside Bakersfield the night before. Dutch was there, and a buddy, the beer was on me. I made sandwiches. Dutch kept talking about literature, poetry; I tried to get him off it but he laid right in there. Dutch runs a bookshop around Pasadena or Glendale or somewhere. then talk about the riots came up. they asked me what I thought about the riots and I told them that I was waiting, that the thoughts would have to come by themselves. it was nice to be able to wait. Willie picked up one of my cigars, took the paper off, lit it.

Somebody said, "how come you're writing a column? you used to laugh at

Lipton for writing a column, now you're doing the same thing."

"Lipton writes a kind of left-wind Walter Winchell thing. I create Art. There's a difference."

"hey, man, you got any ore of these green onions?" asked Willie.

I went into the kitchen for more green onions and beer. Willie was one right out of the book---a book that hadn't been written yet. he was a mass of hair, head and beard. bluejeans with patches. one week he was in Frisco. 2 weeks later he was in Albuquerque. then, somewhere else. He carried with him, everywhere, this batch of poems he had accepted for his magazine. whether the crazy maga zine ever evolved or not was anybody's guess. Willie the Wire, slim, bouncy, immortal. he wrote very well. even when he put the knock on somebody it was a kind of without hatred knock. he just laid the statement down, then it was yours. a graceful carelessness.

I cracked some new beers. Dutch was still on literature. he had just published "18th Dynasty Egyptian Automobile Turnon" by D. R. Wagner. and a nice job too. Dutch's young buddy just listened --- he was the new breed: quiet but very much there.

Willie worked on an onion. "I talked to Neal Cassady. he's gone completely crazy."

"yeah, he's begging for busts. it's stupid. building a forced myth. being in Kerouac's book screwed up his mind."

"man," I said, "there's nothing like a bit of dirty literary gossip, is there?"

"sure," said Dutch, "let's talk shop. everybody talks shop."

"listen, Bukowski, do you think that there's any poetry being written now? by anybody? Lowell made time, you know."

"almost all the great names have died recently --- Frost, cum- mings, Jeffers, W.C. Williams, T.S. Eliot, the rest. a couple of nights ago, Sandburg. in a very short period, they all seemed to die to- gether, throw in Vietnam and the ever-riots and it has been a very strange and quick and festering and new age. look at those skirts now, almost up around the ass. we are moving quickly and I like it, it is not bad. but the Establishment is worried about its culture. culture is a steadier. there's nothing as good as a museum, a Verdi opera or a stiff-neck poet to hold back progress. Lowell was rushed into the breach, after a careful check of credentials. Lowell is interesting enough not to put you to sleep but diffuse enough so as not to be dangerous. the first thoughts you have after reading his work is, this baby has never missed a meal or even had a flat tire or toothache. Creeley is a near similarity, and I imagine the Establish- ment balanced Creeley and Lowell for some time but had to finally come up with Lowell because Creeley just didn't seem like such a very good dull guy, and you couldn't trust him as much --- he might even show up at the president's lawn party and tickle the guests with his beard, so, it had to be Lowell, and so it's Lowell we've got."

"so who's writing it? where are they?"

"not in America. and there are only 2 that I can think of. Harold Norse who is nursing his melancholia-hypochondria in Switzerland, taking handouts from rich backers, and having the running shits, fainting spells, the fear of ants, so forth. and writing very little now, kind of going crazy like the rest of us. but then WHEN he writes, it's all there. the other guy is Al Purdy. not Al Purdy the novelist, I mean Al Purdy the poet. they are not the same people. Al Purdy lives in Canada and grows his own grapes which he squeezes into his own wine. he is a drunk, an old hulk of a man who must now be somewhere in his mid-forties. his wife supports him so he can write his poetry, which, you've got to admit, is some wonderful kind of wife. I've never met one like that or have you. but, anyhow, the Canadian government is always laying some kind of grant on him, \$4,000 here and there, and they send him up to the Pole to write about life there, and he does it, crazy clear poems about birds and people and dogs. god damn, he wrote a book of poems once called "Songs for All the Annettes" and I almost cried all the way through the book reading it. it's nice to look up sometimes, it's nice to have heroes, it's nice to have somebody else carrying some of the load."

"don't you think you write as well as they?"

"only at times. most of the time, no."

the beer ran out and I had to take a shit. I gave Willie a five and told him it'd be good if he got 2 six packs, tall, Schlitz (this is an advertisement), and all 3 of them left and I went in and sat down. it wasn't bad to be more or less asked questions of the age. it was better yet to be doing what I was doing. I thought about the hospitals, the racetracks, some of the women I used to know, some of the women I had buried, outdrunk, outfucked but not outargued. the alcoholic madwomen who had brought love to me especially and in their own way. then I heard it through the wall:

"listen, Johnny, you ain't even kissed me in a week. what's wrong, Johnny? listen, talk to me, I want you to talk to me."

"god damn you, get away from me. I don't want to talk to you. LEAVE ME ALONE, WILL YOU? GOD DAMN YOU, LEAVE ME ALONE!"

"listen, Johnny, I just want you to talk to me, I can't stand it. you don't have to touch me, just talk to me, jesus christ Johnny I can't stand it, I CAN'T STAND IT, JESUS!"

"GOD DAMN IT, I TOLD YOU TO LEAVE ME ALONE! LEAVE ME ALONE, GOD DAMN YOU, LEAVE ME ALONE, LEAVE ME ALONE, LEAVE ME ALONE, WILL YOU?"

"Johnny-"

he hit her a good one, a real good one. open hand. I almost fell off the stool. I heard her choking the crap and walking off.

then Dutch and Willie and crew were back. they ripped open the cans. I finished my business and walked back in.

"I'm gonna get up an anthology," said Dutch, "an anthology of the best living poets, I mean the real best."

"sure," said Willie, "why not?" then he saw me: "enjoy your crap?"

"not too much."

"no?"

"no."

"you need more roughage. you ought to eat more green onions."

"you think so?"

"yeah."

I reached over and got 2 of them, jammed them down. maybe next time would be better. meanwhile there were riots, beer, talk, literature, and the lovely young ladies were making the fat million-aires happy. I reached over, got one of my own cigars, took off the paper, took off the cigar band, jammed the thing into my screwed-up and complex face, then lit it, the cigar. bad writing's like bad women: there's just not much you can do about it.

===

THE GREAT ZEN WEDDING

I was in the rear, stuck in with the Rumanian bread, liverwurst, beer, soft drink; wearing a green necktie, first necktie since the death of my father a decade ago. Now I was to be best man at a Zen wedding, Hollis driving 85 m.p.h., Roy's four-foot beard flowing into my face. It was my '62 Comet, only I couldn't drive--- no insurance, two drunk-driving raps, and already getting drunk. Hollis and Roy had lived unmarried for three years, Hollis support- ing Roy. I sat in the back and sucked at my beer. Roy was explain- ing Hollis' family to me one by one. Roy was better with the intel- lectual shit. Or the tongue. The walls of their place were covered with these many photos of guys bending into the muff and chewing.

Also a snap of Roy reaching climax while jacking off. Roy had done it alone. I mean, tripped the camera. Himself. String. Wire. Some arrangement. Roy claimed he had to jackoff six times in order to get the perfect snap. A whole day's work: there it was: this milky glob: a work of art. Hollis turned off the freeway. It wasn't too far. Some of the rich have driveways a mile long. This one wasn't too bad: a quarter of a mile. We got out. Tropical gardens. Four or five dogs. Big black woolly stupid slobbering-at-the-mouth beasts. We never reached the door---there he was, the rich one, standing on the veranda, looking down, drink in hand. And Roy yelled, "Oh, Har-vey, you bastard, so good to see you!"

Harvey smiled the little smile: "Good to see you too, Roy."

One of the big black woollies was gobbling at my left leg. "Call your dog off, Harvey, bastard, good to see you!" I screamed.

"Aristotle, now STOP that!"

Aristotle left off, just in time.

And.

We went up and down the steps with the salami, the Hungarian pickled catfish, the shrimp. Lobstertails. Bagels. Minced dove ass- holes.

Then we had it all in there. I sat down and grabbed a beer. I was the only one with a necktie. I was also the only one who had bought a wedding gift. I hid it between the wall and the Aristotle- chewed leg.

"Charles Bukowski-"

I stood up.

"Oh, Charles Bukowski!"

"Uh huh."

Then:

"This is Marty."

"Hello, Marty."

"And this is Elsie."

"Hello, Elsie."

"Do you really, she asked, "break up furniture and windows, slash your hands, all that, when you're drunk?"

"Uh huh."

"You're a little old for that."

"Now listen, Elsie, don't give me any shit-"

"And this is Tina."

"Hello, Tina."

I sat down.

Names! I had been married to my first wife for two-and-one- half years. One night some people came in. I had told my wife: "This is Louie the half-ass and this is Marie, Queen of the Quick Suck, and this is Nick, the half-hobble." Then I had turned to them and said, "This is my wife- this is my wife-this is-" I finally had to look at her and ask: "WHAT THE HELL IS YOUR NAME ANYHOW?"

"Barbara."

"This is Barbara," I had told them-

The Zen master hadn't arrived. I sat and sucked at my beer.

Then here came more people. On and on up the steps. All Hollis' family. Roy didn't seem to have a family. Poor Roy. Never worked a day in his life. I got another beer.

They kept coming up the steps: ex-cons, sharpies, cripples, Dealers in various subterfuges, Family and friends. Dozens of them. No wedding presents. No neckties.

I pushed further back into my corner.

One guy was pretty badly fucked-up. It took him 25 minutes to get up the stairway. He had especially-made crutches, very powerful looking things with round bands for the arms. Special grips here and there. Aluminum and rubber. No wood for that baby. I figured it: watered-down stuff or a bad

payoff. He had taken the slugs in the old barber chair with the hot and wet shaving towel over his face. Only they'd missed a few vital spots.

There were others. Somebody taught class at UCLA. Somebody else ran in shit through Chinese fishermen's boats via San Pedro Harbor.

I was introduced to the greatest killers and dealers of the century.

Me, I was between jobs.

Then Harvey walked up.

"Bukowski, care for a bit of scotch and water?"

"Sure, Harvey, sure."

We walked toward the kitchen.

"What's the necktie for?"

"The top of the zipper on my pants is broken. And my shorts are too tight. End of necktie covers stinkhairs just above my cock."

I think that you are the modern living master of the short story. Nobody touches you."

"Sure, Harvey. Where's the scotch.

"I always drink this kind since you always mention it in your short stories."

"But I've switched brands now, Harv. I found some better stuff."

"What's the name of it?"

"Damned if I can remember."

I found a tall water glass, poured in half scotch, half water.

"For the nerves," I told him. "You know?"

"Sure, Bukowski."

I drank it straight down.

"How about a refill?"

"Sure."

I took the refill and walked to the front room, sat in my corner. Meanwhile there was a new excitement: The Zen master had ARRIVED!

The Zen master had on this very fancy outfit and kept his eyes very narrow. Or maybe that's the way they were.

The Zen master needed tables. Roy ran around looking for tables.

Meanwhile, the Zen master was very calm, very gracious. I downed my drink, went in for a refill. Came back. A golden-haired kid ran in. About eleven years old. "Bukowski, I've read some of your stories. I think that you are the greatest writer I have ever read!"

Long blond curls. Glasses. Slim body.

"Okay, baby. You get old enough. We'll get married. Live off of your money. I'm getting tired. You can just parade me around in a kind of glass cage with little airholes in it. I'll let the young boys have you. I'll even watch."

"Bukowski! Just because I have long hair, you think I'm a girl! My name is Paul! We were introduced! Don't you remember?"

Paul's father, Harvey, was looking at me. I saw his eyes. Then I knew

that he had decided that I was not such a good writer after all. maybe even a bad writer. Well, no man can hide forever.

But the little boy was all right: "That's okay, Bukowski! You are still the greatest writer I have ever read! Daddy has let me read some of your stories-"

Then all the lights went out. That's what the kid deserved for his big mouth-

But there were candles everywhere. Everybody was finding candles, walking around finding candles and lighting them.

"Shit, it's just a fuse. Replace the fuse," I said.

Somebody said it wasn't the fuse, it was something else, so I gave up and while all the candle-lighting went on I walked into the kitchen for more scotch. Shit, there was Harvey standing there.

"Ya got a beautiful son, Harvey. Your boy, Peter-"

"Paul."

"Sorry. The Biblical."

"I understand."

(The rich understand; they just don't do anything about it.)

Harvey uncorked a new fifth. We talked about Kafka. Dos. Turgenev, Gogel. All that dull shit. Then there were candles every-where. The Zen master wanted to get on with it. Roy had given me the two rings. I felt. They were still there. Everybody was waiting on us. I was waiting for Harvey to drop to the floor from drinking all that scotch. It wasn't any good. He had matched me one drink for two and was still standing. That isn't done too often. We had knocked off half a fifth in the ten minutes of candle-lighting. We went out to the crowd. I dumped the rings on Roy. Roy had communicated, days earlier, to the Zen master that I was a drunk --- unreliable --- either faint-hearted or vicious ---therefore, during the ceremony, don't ask Bukowski for the rings because Bukowski might not be there. Or he might lose the rings, or vomit, or lose Bukowski.

So here it was, finally. The Zen master began playing with his little black book. It didn't look too thick. Around 150 pages, I'd say.

"I ask," said the Zen, "no drinking or smoking during the ceremony."

I drained my drink. I stood to Roy's right. Drinks were being drained all over the place.

Then the Zen master gave a little chickenshit smile. I knew Christian wedding ceremonies by the sad note of experience. And the Zen ceremony actually resembled the Christian, with a small amount of horseshit thrown in. Somewhere along the way, three small sticks were lit. Zen had a whole box of the things --- two or three hundred. After the lighting, one stick was places in the center of a jar of sand. That was the Zen stick. Then Roy was asked to place his burning stick upon one side of the Zen stick, Hollis asked to place hers on the other.

But the sticks weren't quite right. The Zen master, smiling a bit, had

to reach forward and adjust the sticks to new depths and elevations.

Then the Zen master dug out a circle of brown beads.

He handed the circle of beads to Roy.

"Now?" asked Roy.

Damn, I thought, Roy always read up on everything else. Why not his own wedding?

Zen reached forward, placed Hollis' right hand within Roy's left. And the beads encircled both hands that way.

"Do you-"

"I do-"

(This was Zen? I thought.)

"And do you, Hollis-"

"I do-"

Meanwhile, in the candlelight, there was some asshole taking hundreds of photos of the ceremony. It made me nervous. It could have been the F.B.I.

"Plick! Plick! Plick!"

Of course, we were all clean. But it was irritating because it was careless.

Then I noticed the Zen master's ears in the candlelight. The candlelight shone through them as if they were made of the thinnest of toilet paper.

The Zen master had the thinnest ears of any man I had ever seen. That was what made him holy! I had to have those ears! For my wallet or my tomcat or my memory. Or for under the pillow.

Of course, I knew that it was all the scotch and water and all the beer talking to me, and then, in another way, I didn't know that at all.

I kept staring at the Zen master's ears.

And there were more words.

"-and you Roy, promise not to take any drugs while in your relationship with Hollis?"

There seemed to be an embarrassing pause. Then, their hands locked together in the brown beads: "I promise," said Roy, "not to-"

Soon it was over. Or seemed over. The Zen master stood straight up, smiling just a touch of a smile.

I touched Roy upon a shoulder: "Congratulations." Then I leaned over. Took hold of Hollis' head, kissed her beautiful lips.

Still everybody sat there. A nation of subnormals.

Nobody moved. The candles glowed like subnormal candles.

I walked over to the Zen master. Shook his hand: "Thank you. you did the ceremony quite well."

He seemed really pleased, which made me feel a little better. but the rest of those gangsters --- old Tammany Hall and the Mafia: they were too proud and stupid to shake hands with an Oriental. Only one other kissed Hollis. Only one other shook the hand of the Zen master. It could have been

a shotgun wedding. All that family! Well, I'd be the last to know or the last to be told.

Now that the wedding was over, it seemed very cold in there. They just sat and stared at each other. I could never comprehend the human race, but somebody had to play clown. I ripped off my green necktie, flipped it into the air:

"HEY! YOU COCKSUCKERS! ISN'T ANYBODY HUNGRY?"

I walked over and started grabbing at cheese, pickled-pigs' feet and chicken cunt. A few stiffly warmed up, walked over and grabbed at the food, not knowing what else to do.

I got them to nibbling. Then I left and hit for the scotch and water.

As I was in the kitchen, refilling, I heard the Zen master say, "I must leave now."

"Oooh, don't leave-" I heard an old, squeaky and female voice from among the greatest gangland gathering in three years. And even she didn't sound as if she meant it. What was I doing in with these? Or the UCLA prof? No, the UCLA prof belonged there.

There must be a repentance. Or something. Some action to humanize the proceedings.

As soon as I heard the Zen master close the front door, I drained my waterglass full of scotch. Then I ran out through the candlelit room of jabbering bastards, found the door (that was a job, for a moment), and I opened the door, closed it, and there I was- about 15 steps behind Mr. Zen. We still had 45 or 50 steps to go to get down to the parking lot.

I gained upon him, lurching, two steps to his one.

I screamed: "Hey, Masta!"

Zen turned. "Yes, old man?"

Old man?

We both stopped and looked at each other on that winding stairway there in the moonlit tropical garden. It seemed like a time for a closer relationship.

Then I told him: "I either want bother your motherfucking ears or your motherfucking outfit --- that neon-lighted bathrobe you're wearing!"

"old man, you are crazy!"

"I thought Zen had more moxie than to make unmitigated and offhand statements. You disappoint me, Masta!"

Zen placed his palms together and looked upward.

I told him, "I either want you motherfucking outfit or your motherfucking ears!"

He kept his palms together, while looking upward.

I plunged down the steps, missing a few but still flying forward, which kept me from cracking my head open, and as I fell downward toward him, I tried to swing, but I was all momentum, like something cut loose without direction. Zen caught me and straightened me.

"My son, my son-"

We were in close. I swung. Caught a good part of him. I heard him hiss. He stepped one step back. I swung again. Missed. Went way wide left. Fell into some imported plants from hell. I got up. Moved toward him again. And in the moonlight, I saw the front of my own pants --- splattered with blood, candle-drippings and puke.

"You've met you master, bastard!" I notified him as I moved toward him. He waited. The years of working as a factotum had not left muscles entirely lax. I gave him one deeply into the gut, all 230 pounds of my body behind it.

Zen let out a short gasp, once again supplicated the sky, said something in the Oriental, gave me a short karate chop, kindly, and left me wrapped within a series of senseless Mexican cacti and what appeared to be, from my eye, man-eating plants from the inner Brazilian jungles. I relaxed in the moonlight until this purple flower seemed to gather toward my nose and began to delicately pinch out my breathing.

Shit, it took at least 150 years to break into the Harvard Classics. There wasn't any choice: I broke loose from the thing and started crawling up the stairway again. Near the top, I mounted to my feet, opened the door and entered. Nobody noticed me. They were still talking shit. I flopped into my corner. The karate shot had opened a cut over my left eyebrow. I found my handkerchief.

"Shit! I need a drink!" I hollered.

Harvey came up with one. All scotch. I drained it. Why was it that the buzz of human beings talking could be so senseless? I noticed the woman who had been introduced to me as the bride's mother was now showing plenty of leg, and it didn't look bad, all that long nylon with the expensive stiletto heels, plus the little jewel tips down near the toes. It could give an idiot the hots, and I was only half-idiot.

I got up, walked over to the bride's mother, ripped her skirt back to her thighs, kissed her quickly upon her pretty knees and began to kiss my way upward.

The candlelight helped. Everything.

"Hey!" she awakened suddenly, "whatcha think you're doing?"

"I'm going to fuck the shit out of you, I am going to fuck you until the shit falls outa your ass! Whatch thinka that?"

She pushed and I fell backwards upon the rug. Then I was flat upon my back, thrashing, trying to get up.

"Damned Amazon!" I screamed at her.

Finally, three or four minutes later I managed to get to my feet. Somebody laughed. The, finding my feet flat upon the floor again, I made for the kitchen. Poured a drink, drained it. Then poured a refill and walked out.

There they were: all the goddamned relatives.

"Roy or Hollis?" I asked. "Why don't you open your wedding gift?"

"Sure," said Roy, "why not?"

The gift was wrapped in 45 yards of tinfoil. Roy just kept unrolling the foil. Finally, he got it all undone.

"Happy marriage!" I shouted.

They all saw it. The room was very quiet.

It was a little handcrafted coffin done by the best artisans in Spain. It even had the pinkish-red felt bottom. It was the exact replica of a larger coffin, except perhaps it was done with more love.

Roy gave me his killer's look, ripped off the tag of instructions on how to keep the wood polished, threw it inside the coffin and closed the lid.

It was very quiet. The only gift hadn't gone over. But they soon gathered themselves and began talking shit again.

I became silent. I had really been proud of my little casket. I had looked for hours for a gift. I had almost gone crazy. Then I had seen it on the shelf, all alone. Touched the outsides, turned it up-side-down, then looked inside. The price was height but I was paying for the perfect craftsmanship. The wood. The little hinges. All. At the same time, I needed some ant-killer spray. I found some Black Flag in the back of the store. The ants had built a nest under my front door. I took the stuff to the counter. There was a young girl there, I set the stuff in front of her. I pointed to the casket.

"You know what that is?"

"What?"

"That's a casket!"

I opened it up and showed it to her.

"These ants are driving me crazy. Ya know what I'm going to do?"

"What?"

"I'm going to kill all those ants and put them in this casket and bury them!"

She laughed. "You've saved my whole day!"

You can't put it past the young ones anymore; they are an entirely superior breed. I paid and got out of there-

But now, at the wedding, nobody laughed. A pressure cooker done up with a red ribbon would have left them happy. Or would it have? Harvey, the rich one, finally, was kindest of all. Maybe because he could afford to be kind? Then I remembered something out of my readings, something from the ancient Chinese:

"Would you rather be rich or an artist?"

"I'd rather be rich, for it seems that the artist is always sitting on the doorsteps of the rich."

I sucked at the fifth and didn't care anymore. Somehow, the next thing

I knew, it was over. I was in the back seat of my own car, Hollis driving again, the beard of Roy flowing into my face again. I sucked at my fifth.

"Look, did you guys throw my little casket away? I love you both, you know that! Why did you throw my little casket away?"

"Look, Bukowski! Here's your casket!"

Roy held it up to me, showed it to me.

"Ah, fine!"

"You want it back?"

"No! No! My gift to you! Your only gift! Keep it! Please!"

"All right."

The remainder of the drive was fairly quiet. I lived in a front court near Hollywood (of course). Parking was mean. Then they found a space about a half a block from where I lived. They parked my car, handed me the keys. Then I saw them walk across the street toward their own car. I watched them, turned to walk toward my place, and while still watching them and holding to the remainder of Harvey's fifth, I tripped one shoe into a pantscuff and went down. As I fell backwards, my first instinct was to protect the remainder of that good fifth from smashing against the cement (mother with baby), and as I fell backwards I tried to hit with my shoulders, holding both head and bottle up. I saved the bottle but the head flipped back into the sidewalk, BASH!

They both stood and watched me fall. I was stunned almost into insensibility but managed to scream across the street at them: "Roy! Hollis! Help me to my front door, please I'm hurt!"

They stood a moment, looking at me. Then they got into their car, started the engine, leaned back and neatly drove off.

I was being repaid for something. The casket? Whatever it had been --- the use of my car, or me as clown and/or best man-my use had been outworn. The human race had always disgusted me. essentially, what made them disgusting was the family-relationship illness, which included marriage, exchange of power and aid, which neighborhood, your district, your city, your county, your state, your nation-everybody grabbing each other's assholes in the Honeycomb of survival out of a fear-animalistic stupidity.

I got it all there, I understood it as they left me there, pleading.

Five more minutes, I thought. If I can lay here five more minutes without being bothered I'll get up and make it toward my place, get inside. I was the last of the outlaws. Billy the Kid had nothing on me. Five more minutes. Just let me get to my cave. I'll mend. Next time I'm asked to one of their functions, I'll tell them where to put it. Five minutes. That's all I need.

Two women walked by. They turned and looked at me.

"Oh, look at him. What's wrong?"

"He's drunk."

"He's not sick, is he?"

"No, look how he holds to that bottle. Like a little baby."

Oh shit. I screamed up at them:

"I'LL SUCK BOTH YOUR SNATCHES! I'LL SUCK BOTH YOUR SNATCHES DRY, YOU CUNTS!"

"Ooooooh!"

They both ran into the high-rise glass apartment. Through the glass door. And I was outside unable to get up, best man to some-thing. All I had to do was make it to my place --- 30 yards away, as close as three million light years. Thirty yards from a rented front door. Tow more minutes and I could get up. Each time I tried it, I got stronger. An old drunk would always make it, given enough time. One minute. One minute more. I could have made it.

Then there they were. Part of the insane family structure of the World. Madmen, really, hardly questioning what made them do what they did. They left their double-red light burning as they parked. Then got out. One had a flashlight.

"Bukowski," said the one with the flashlight, "you just can't seem to keep out of trouble, can you?"

He knew my name from somewhere, other times.

"Look," I said, "I just stumbled. Hit my head. I never lose my sense of my coherence. I'm not dangerous. Why don't you guys help me to my doorway? It's 30 yards away. Just let me fall upon my bed and sleep it off. Don't you think, really, that would be the really decent thing to do?"

"Sir, two ladies reported you as trying to rape them."

"Gentlemen, I would never attempt to rape two ladies at the same time."

The one cop kept flashing his stupid flashlight into my face. It gave him a great feeling of superiority.

"Just 30 yards to Freedom! Can't you guys understand that?"

"You're the funniest show in town, Bukowski! Give us a better alibi than that."

"Well, let's see - this thing you see sprawled here on the pavement is the end-product of a wedding, a Zen wedding."

"You mean some woman really tried to marry you?"

"Not me, you asshole-"

The cop with the flashlight brought it down across my nose.

"We ask respect toward officers of the law."

"Sorry. For a moment I forgot."

The blood ran down along my throat and then toward and upon my shirt. I was very tired - of everything.

"Bukowski," asked the one who had just used the flashlight, "why can't you stay out of trouble?"

"Just forget the horseshit," I said, "let's go off to jail."

They put on the cuffs and threw me into the back seat. Same sad old scene.

They drove along slowly, speaking of various possible and in- sane things - like, about having the front porch widened, or a pool, or an extra room in the back for Granny. And when it came to sports - these were real men - the Dodgers still had a chance, even with the two or three other teams right in there with them. Back to the family - if the Dodgers won, they won. If a man landed on the moon, they landed on the moon. But let a starving man ask them a dime - no identification, fuck you, shithead. I mean, when they were in civvies. There hasn't been a starving man yet who ever asked a cop for a dime. Our record is clear.

Then I was, once again, in this type of long line of the some- how guilty. The young guys didn't know what was coming. They were mixed up with this thing called THE CONSTITUTION and their RIGHTS. The young cops, both in the city tank and the coun- ty tank, got their training on the drunks. They had to show they had it. While I was watching they took one guy in an elevator and rode him up and down, up and down, and when he got out, you hardly knew who he was, or what he had been - a black screaming about Human Rights. Then they got a white guy, screaming something about CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS; four or five of them got him, and they rushed him off his feet so fast he couldn't walk, and when they brought him back they leaned him against a wall, and he just stood there trembling, these red welts all over his body, he stood there trembling and shivering.

I got my photo taken all over again. Fingerprinted all over again.

They took me down to the drunk tank, opened that door. After that, it was just a matter of looking for floorspace among the 150 men in the room. One shitpot. Vomit and piss everywhere. I found a spot among my fellow men. I was Charles Bukowski, fea- tured in the literary archives of the University of California at Santa Barbara. Somebody there thought I was a genius. I stretched out on the boards. Heard a young voice. A boy's voice.

"Mista, I'll suck your dick for a quarter!"

They were supposed to take all your change, bills, ident, keys, knives, so forth, plus cigarettes, and then you had the property slip. Which you either lost or sold or had stolen from you. But there was always still money and cigarettes about.

"Sorry, lad," I told him, "They took my last penny."

Four hours later I managed to sleep.

There.

Best man at a Zen wedding, and I'd bet they, the bride and groom, hadn't even fucked that night. But somebody had been.

===

AN EVIL TOWN

Frank walked down the steps. He didn't like elevators. He didn't like many things. He disliked steps less than he disliked elevators.

The desk clerk called to him: "Mr. Evans! Would you step over here, please?"

The desk clerk's face looked like cornmeal mush. It was all Frank could do to keep from hitting him. The desk clerk looked about the lobby, then leaned very close.

"Mr. Evans, we've been watching you."

The desk clerk again looked about the lobby, saw that there wasn't anybody near, then leaned forward again.

"Mr. Evans, we've been watching you and we believe that you're losing your mind."

The desk clerk leaned back then and looked right at Frank.

"I feel like going to a movie," said Frank. "You know of any good movies in town?"

"Let's stick to the subject, Mr. Evans."

"O.k., I'm losing my mind. Anything else?"

The clerk reached under the counter and came up with something wrapped in cellophane.

"Here it is, Mr. Evans."

Frank dropped it in his coat pocket and walked outside. It was a cool autumn night and he walked down the street, west. He stopped at the first alley, stepped in. He reached into his coat and got the wrapped-up thing, peeled the cellophane off. It looked like cheese. It smelled like cheese. He took a bite. It tasted like cheese. He ate it all, then stepped out of the alley and walked down the street again.

He turned into the first movie house he saw, bought his ticket and walked into the darkness. He took a seat in the back. There weren't many people in there. The whole place smelled like urine. The women on the screen dressed as they did in the '20's and the men wore vaseline on their hair, combed it back hard and straight. Their noses seemed very long and the men also seemed to have mascara under their eyes. It wasn't even a talkie. Words showed under the film: **BLANCHE WAS NEW IN THE BIG CITY.** A guy with straight greasy hair was making Blanche drink from a bottle of gin. Blanche appeared to be getting drunk. **BLANCHE GREW DIZZY. SUDDENLY HE KISSED HER.**

Frank looked around. Everywhere heads seemed to be bobbing. There weren't any women in the place. The guys seemed to be sucking each other off. They went at it and at it. They never seemed to get tired. The men sitting alone seemed to be jacking-off. The cheese had been good. He wished the clerk had given him more cheese.

HE BEGAN TO DISROBE BLANCHE.

And every time he looked around this guy was getting nearer to him. Then when Frank looked back at the movie the guy would move 2 or 3 seats

nearer to him.

HE MADE LOVE TO BLANCHE WHILE SHE WAS HELP- LESSLY INTOXICATED.

He looked again. The guy was 3 seats away. Breathing heavily. Then the guy was in the seat next to him.

"Oh shit," the guy said, "O, mys shit, ooo,ooo,oooo. ah, ah! eeeyew! oh!"

WHEN BLANCHE AWAKENED THE NEXT MORNING SHE REALIZED THAT SHE HAD BEEN RAVISHED.

The guy smelled as if he had never wiped his ass. The guy was leaning toward him, bits of spit drooling from the sides of his mouth.

Frank hit the button of the switchblade:

"Careful!" he told the guy. "You get any closer you might hurt yourself on this!"

"Oh, my god!" said the guy. He got up and ran down the row of seats to the aisle, then walked quickly down the aisle to the front row. Two guys were at it. One guy was jacking-off the other guy as the guy went down on him. The guy who had been bothering Frank sat there and watched them.

SOON AFTER, BLANCHE WAS IN A HOUSE OF PROSTITUTION.

Then Frank had to urinate. He got up and walked toward the sign: MEN. He went in. It really stank in there. He gagged, opened the toilet door, went in. He took out his penis and started to piss. Then he heard some sounds.

"Ooooh ooooh, you filthy fuck!" said the guy. "ooh you beasly fiendish piece of shit!"

He heard the guy ripping off toilet paper and wiping his face. Then the guy began to cry. Frank stepped out of the toilet, washed his hands. He didn't want to see any more of the movie. Then he was out on the street, walking back toward his hotel. Then he was in the lobby. The desk clerk nodded him over.

"Yeah?" asked Frank.

"Look, Mr. Evans, I'm sorry. I was just kidding you."

"About what?"

"You know."

"No, I don't know."

"Well, about losing your mind. I've been drinking, you know. Don't tell anybody or I'll lose my job. But I've been drinking. I know that you're not losing your mind. I was just joking."

"But I am losing my mind," said Frank, "and thanks for the cheese."

Then he turned and walked up the stairway. When he got to his room he sat down at the writing desk. He took out the switchblade, hit the button, looked at the knifeblade. It was well sharpened down one entire side. It could stab or slice. He hit the button and put the knife back in his pocket. Then Frank found pen and paper and began to write:

"Dear Mother:

This is an evil town. The Devil is in control. Sex is everywhere and it is not being used as an instrument of Beauty as God meant it to be, but as an instrument of Evil. Yes, it has most certainly fallen into the devil's hands, into Evil hands. Young girls are forced to drink gin, then they are deflowered by these beasts and forced into houses of prostitution. It is terrible. It is unbelievable. My heart is torn.

I walked along the shore yesterday. Not along the shore, real-ly, but up along on top of cliffs and then I stopped and sat there while breathing in the Beauty. The sea, the sky, the sand. Life became the Eternal Bliss. Then a most miraculous thing happened. 3 small squirrels saw me from way down below and they began to climb the cliffs. I saw their little faces peeking at me from behind rocks and crevices in the cliffs as they climbed toward me. Finally they were at my feet. Their eyes looked at me. Never, Mother, have I seen more beautiful eyes - undiluted by Sin: the whole sky, the whole sea, Eternity was in those eyes. Finally I moved and they-"

There was a knock on the door. Frank got up, walked over, opened it. It was the desk clerk.

"Mr. Evans, please, I must speak to you."

"All right, come in."

The desk clerk closed the door and stood in front of Frank. The desk clerk smelled like wine.

"Mr. Evans, please don't tell management about our misunder- standing."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You're a great guy, Mr. Evans. You know, I've been drink- ing."

"You are forgiven. Now go."

"Mr. Evans, there's something I've got to tell you."

"Very well. What is it?"

"I'm in love with you, Mr. Evans."

"Oh, you mean my spirit, eh, my boy?"

"No, your body, Mr. Evans."

"What?"

"Your body, Mr. Evans. Please don't be offended, but I want you to ream me!"

"REAM ME, Mr. Evans! I've been reamed by half the United States Navy! Those boys know what's good, Mr. Evans. There's nothing like a bit of clean round-eye!"

"You will leave my room immediately!"

The desk clerk threw his arms about Frank's neck, then his mouth was on Frank's mouth. The desk clerk's mouth was very wet and cold, it stank. Frank pushed him away.

"You rotten bastard! YOU KISSED ME!"

"I love you, Mr. Evans!"

"You filthy swine!"

Frank had the knife, hit the button, the blade jumped out and he stuck it into the desk clerk's stomach. Then pulled it out.

"Mr. Evans- my god-"

The clerk fell to the floor. He was holding both hands over the wound trying to stop the blood.

"You bastard! YOU KISSED ME!"

Frank reached down and unzipped the desk clerk's fly. Then he got the clerk's penis, pulled it straight up toward him and sliced it off three-quarters of the way down.

"Oh, my god my god my god my god-" said the clerk.

Frank walked to the bathroom, took the thing and threw it into the toilet. Then he flushed the toilet. Then he washed his hands very well with soap and water. He came out, sat down to the desk again. He picked up the pen.

"-ran away but I had seen Eternity.

Mother, I must move from this city, from this hotel - the Devil is in control of almost all the bodies. I will write you again from the next city - perhaps San Francisco, Portland or Seattle. I feel like moving north. I think of you continually and hope that you are happy and in good health, and may the Lord be with you always.

love,
your son,
Frank"

He wrote the address on the envelope, sealed it, added stamp and then walked over and put it in the inside pocket of his coat which was hanging in the closet. Then he took a suitcase from the closet, put it on the bed, opened it and began to pack.

===

TWELVE FLYING MONKEYS WHO WON'T COPULATE PROPERLY

The bell rings and I open the side window by the door. It is night. "Who is it?" I ask.

Somebody walks up to the window but I can't see the face. I have two lights over the typewriter. I slam the window but there is

talking out there. I sit down to the typewriter but there is still talking out there. I get up and rip open the door and scream:

"I TOLD YOU COCKSUCKERS NOT TO BOTHER ME!"

I look around and there is one guy standing on the bottom of the steps and another guy standing on the porch, pissing; He is pissing into a bush to the left of the porch, standing on the edge of the porch, his piss arching in a heavy swath, upward and then down into the bush.

"Hey, this guy is pissing into my bush," I say.

the guy laughs and keeps pissing. I grab him by the pants, pick him up and throw him, still pissing, over the top of the bush and into the night. He doesn't return. The other guy says, "What did you do that for?"

"I felt like it."

"Drunk?" I ask.

He walks around the corner and is gone. I close the door and sit down to the typer again. All right, I have this mad scientist, he's taught monkeys to fly, he's got eleven monkey's with these wings. The monkeys are very good. The scientist has even taught them to race. Race around these pylons, yes. Now let's see. Gotta make it good. To get rid of a story you gotta have fucking, lots of it, if possible. Better make it twelve monkeys, six male and six of the other kind. All right now. Here they go. There they go around the first pylon. How am I going to get them to fucking? I

haven't sold a story in two months. I should have stayed in the goddamned post office. All right. There they go. Around the first pylon. Maybe they just fly off. Suddenly. How about that? They fly to Washington, D.C. and hang around the Capitol dropping turds on the public, pissing on them, smearing their turds across the White House. Can I have one drop a turd on the President? No, that's asking too much. Okay, make it a turd on the Secretary of State. Orders are given to shoot them out of the sky. That's tragic, isn't it? But what about the fucking? All right. All right. Work it in. Let's see. Okay, ten of them are shot out of the sky, poor little things. There are only two others. A male and one other kind. They can't seem to be found. Then a cop is walking through the park one night, and there they are, the last two of them, wings strapped on, fucking like the devil. The cop walks up. The male hears, turns his head, looks up, gives a silly little monkey-grin, never missing a stroke,

then

turns his head and goes back to banging. The cop blows his head off. The monkey's head, that is. The female flips the male off in disgust and stands up. For a monkey, she is a pretty little thing. For a moment the cop thinks of, thinks of - But no, it would be too tight,

maybe, and she might bite, maybe. While he's thinking this, the bullet, she falls. He runs up. She is wounded but not dead. The cop looks around, lifts her up, takes it out, tries to work it in. No good. Just room for the head. Shit. He drops her to the ground, puts his gun to her brain and B A M! it's over.

The bell rings again.

I open the door.

Three guys walk in. Always these guys. A woman never pisses on my porch, a woman hardly ever comes by. How am I going to get any sex ideas? I have almost forgotten how to do it. But they say it's like riding a bicycle, you never forget. It's better than riding a bicycle.

It's Crazy Jack and two guys I don't know.

"Look, Jack," I say, "I thought I was rid of you."

Jack just sits down. The other two guys sit down. Jack has promised me never to come by again but he is on the wine most of the time, so promises don't mean much. He lives with his mother and pretends to be a painter. I know four or five guys living with or supported by their mother, and the guys pretend to genius. And all the mothers are alike: "Oh, Nelson has a painting hanging at the Warner-Finch Galleries this week. His genius is being recognized at last! He's asking \$4,000 for the work. Do you think that's too much?" Nelson, Jack, Bidy, Norman, Jimmy and Ketya, Fuck.

Jack has on blue jeans, is barefooted, no shirt, undershirt, just a brown shawl thrown over him. One guy has a beard and grins and blushes continually. The other guy is just fat. Some kind of leech.

"Have you seen Borst lately?" Jack asks.

"No."

"Let me have one of your beers."

"No. You guys come around, drink all my shit, split and leave me on a dry shore."

"All right."

He leaps up, runs out and gets his wine bottle which he has hidden under the cushion on the porch chair. He comes back, takes off the lid, takes a suck.

"I was down at Venice with this chick and one hundred rainbows. I thought I spotted the heat and I ran up to Borst's place with this chick and the hundred rainbows. I knocked on the door and told him, "Quick, let me in! I've got one hundred rainbows and the heat is right behind me!" Borst closed the door, I kicked it in and ran in with the chick. Borst was on the floor, jacking off some guy. I ran into the bathroom with the chick and locked the door. Borst knocked. I said, "Don't you dare come in here!" I stayed in there with the chick for about an hour. We knocked off two pieces of ass

to amuse ourselves. Then we came out."

"Did you dump the rainbows?"

"Hell no, it was a false alarm. But Borst was very angry."

"Shit," I say, "Borst hasn't written a decent poem since 1955.

His mother supports him. Pardon me. But I mean, all he does is look at TV, eat these delicate little celeries and greens and jog along the beach in his dirty underwear. He used to be a fine poet when he was living with those young boys in Arabia. But I can't sympathize. A winner goes wire to wire. It's like Huxley said, Aldous, that is, 'Any man can be a-'"

"How you doing?" Jack asks.

"Nothing but rejects," I say.

The one guy begins playing the flute. The leech just sits there Jack lifts his wine bottle. It is a beautiful night in Hollywood, California. Then the guy who lives in the court behind me falls out of bed, drunk. It makes quite a sound. I'm used to it. I'm used to the whole court. All of them sit in their places, shades drawn. They get up at noon. Their cars sit out front dust-covered, tires going down, batteries weakening. They mix drink with dope and have no visible means of support. I like them. They don't bother me.

The guy gets into bed again, falls out.

"You silly damn fool," you hear him say, "get back into that bed."

"What's all that noise?" Jack asks.

"Guy behind me. He's very lonely. Drinks a beer now and then. His mother died last year and left him twenty grand. He sits around and masturbates and looks at baseball games and cowboy shootums on TV. Used to be a gas station attendant.

"We've got to split," says Jack, "want to come with us?"

"No," I say.

They explain that it is something to do with the House of Seven Gables. They are going to see somebody who had something to do with the House of Seven Gables. It isn't the writer, the producer, the actors, it is somebody else.

"Well, no," I say, and they all run out. It is a beautiful sight.

Then I sit down to the monkeys again. Maybe I can juggle those monkeys up. If I can get all twelve of them fucking at once! That's it! But how? And why? Check the Royal Ballet of London. But why? I'm going crazy. Okay, the Royal Ballet of London has this idea. Twelve monkeys flying while they ballet. Only before the performance somebody gives them all the Spanish Fly. Not the ballet. The monkeys. But the Spanish Fly is a myth, isn't it? Okay, enter another mad scientist with a real Spanish Fly! No, no, oh my God, I just can't get it right!

The phone rings. I pick it up. It's Borst:

"Hello, Hank?"

"Yeah?"

"I have to keep it short. I'm broke."

"Yes, Jerry."

"Well, I lost my two sponsors. The stock market and the tight dollar."

"Uh huh."

"Well, I always knew it was going to happen. So I'm getting out of Venice. I can't make it here. I'm going to New York City."

"What?"

"I thought that's what you said."

"Well, I'm broke you see, and I think I can really make it there."

"Sure, Jerry."

"Losing my sponsors is the best thing that ever happened to me."

"Really?"

"Now I feel like fighting again. You've heard about people rotting along the beach. Well, that's what I've been doing down here: rotting. I've got to get out of here. And I'm not worried. Except for the trunks."

"I can't seem to get them packed. So my mother's coming back here."

"All right, Jerry."

"But before I go to New York I'm going to stop off at Switzerland and perhaps Greece. Then I'm coming back to New York."

"All right, Jerry, keep in touch. Always good to hear."

Then I am back to the monkeys again. Twelve monkeys who can fly, fucking. How can it be done? Twelve bottles of beer are gone. I find my reserve half-pint of scotch in the refrigerator. I mix one-third glass scotch with two-thirds water. I should have stayed in the goddamned post office. But even here, like this, you have a minor chance. Just get those twelve monkey's fucking. If you'd been born a camel boy in Arabia you wouldn't even have this chance. So get your back up and get those monkeys at it. You've been blessed with a minor talent and you're not in India where probably two dozen boys could write you under if they knew how to write. Well, maybe not two dozen, maybe just a round dozen.

I finish the half-pint, drink half bottle of wine, go to bed, forget it.

The next morning at nine a.m. the doorbell rings. There is a young black girl standing there with a stupid-looking white guy in rimless glasses. They tell me that I have made a promise to go boat-

ing with them at a party three nights ago. I get dressed, get into the car with them. They drive to an apartment and a black-haired kid met him at a party. He passes out little orange life-belts. Next I know we're down at the pier. I can't tell the pier from the water. They help me down a swinging wooden contraption that leads to a floating dock. The bottom of the contraption and the dock are about three feet apart. They help me down.

"What the fuck is this?" I ask. "Does anybody have a drink?"

I am with the wrong people. Nobody has a drink. Then I am in a small rowboat, rented, and somebody has attached a half-horse-power motor. The bottom of the boat is filled with water and two dead fish. I don't know who the people are. They know me. Fine, fine. We head out to sea. I vomit. We pass a suckerfish wrapped around a flying monkey. No, that's terrible. I vomit again.

"How's the great writer?" asks the stupid-looking guy in the prow of the boat, the guy with the rimless galsses.

"What a great writer?" asks the stupid-looking guy in the prow of the boat, the guy with the rimless glasses.

"What great writer?" I ask, thinking he is talking about Rimbaud, although I never thought Rimbaud a great writer.

"You," he says.

"Me?" I say, "Oh, fine. Think I'm going to Greece next year."

"Grease?" he says. "You mean up your ass?"

"No," I answer, "up yours."

We head out to sea where Conrad made it. To hell with Conrad. I'll take coke with bourbon in a dark bedroom in Hollywood in 1970, or whatever year you read this. The year of the monkey-orgy that never happened. The motor flits and gnashes at the sea; we plunge on toward Ireland. No, it's the Pacific. We plunge on toward Japan. To hell with it.

===

10 jackoffs

old Sanchez is a genius but I am the only one who knows it and it's always good to go see him. there are very few people I can stay in a room with more than 5 minutes without feeling gutted. Sanchez passes my tests, and I am very test, hehehehe, oh my god, anyhow, I go to see him now and then in his hand-built two story shack. he installed his own plumbing, has a free-feed line from a high-power voltage line, has connected himself up a telephone which feeds underground from a neighbor's installation, but he explains to

me that he cannot call long distance or out of the city without exposing his sycophancy. he even lives with a young woman who says very little, paints, walks about looking sexy and makes love to him and him to her, of course. he bought the ground for very little and although the place is some distance from Los Angeles, you might call this an advantage. he sits among wires, popular mechanics magazines, tape recording sets, shelves and shelves of books on all subjects. he is concise, never rude; he is humorous and magic, he writes very well but is not interested in fame, once in a great while he will come out from his cave and read his poetry at some university,

and

it is said that the walls and the ivy tremble and shake for weeks afterwards along with the co-eds, he has taped 10,000 tapes of conversation, sounds, music-dull and undull, usual and otherwise. the walls are covered with photos, advertisements, drawings, hunks of rock, snake skins, skulls, dried rubbers, soot, silver and spots of gold dust.

"I'm afraid I'm cracking," I tell him, "eleven years on the same job, the hours dragging over me like wet shit, wow, and all the faces melted down to zeros, yapping, laughing at nothing. I'm no snob, Sanchez, but sometimes it gets to be a real horror show and the only end is death or madness."

"sanity is an imperfection," he says, dropping a couple of pills into his mouth. "jesus, I mean, I'm taught at several universities,

some prof is

writing a book on me- I've been translated into several languages-

"we all have. you're getting old, Bukowski, you're weakening. keep your moxie. Victory or Death."

"Adolph."

"Adolph."

"large gamble, large loss."

"right, or invert it for the common man."

"well, fuck."

"yeah."

"it gets quiet for a while, then he says, "you can come live with us."

"thanks, sure, man. but I think I'll try a little more moxie first."

"your game."

"Over his head is a black sign upon which he has pasted in white type:

"A BOY HAS NEVER WEPT, NOR DASHED A THOUSAND

KIM."

-Dutch Schultz, on his deathbed.

WITH ME, GRAND OPERA IS THE BERRIES."

-Al Capone

"NE CRAIGNEZ POINT, MONSIEUR, LE TORTURE."

-Leibnetz.

"THERE IS NO MORE."

-Motto of Sitting Bull

"THE POLICEMAN'S CLIENT IS THE ELECTRIC CHAIR."

-George Jessel.

"FAST AND LOOSE IN ONE THING,
FAST AND LOOSE IN EVERYTHING.
I NEVER KNEW IT FAIR. NO MORE
WILL YOU, NOR NO ONE.

-Detective Bucket.

"AMEN IS THE INFLUENCE OF NUMBERS."

-Pico Della Mirandola,

in his kabbalistic conclusions

"SUCCESS AS THE RESULT OF INDUSTRY IS A PEAS-
ANT IDEAL."

-Wallace Stevens

"TO ME, MY SHIT STINKS BETTER EXCEPT THAN A
DOG'S."

-Charles Bukowski.

"NOW THE PORNOGRAPHERS WERE ASSEMBLED WITH
IN THE CREMATORIUM."

-Anthony Bloomfield.

"ADAGE OF SPONTANEITY - THE BACHELOR GRINDS
HIS CHOCOLATE HIMSELF."

-Marcel Duchamp.

"KISS THE HAND YOU CANNOT SEVER."

-Taureg saying.

"WE ALL, IN OUR DAY, WERE SMART FELLOWS."

-Admiral St. Vincent.

"MY DREAM IS TO SAVE THEM FROM NATURE."

-Christian Dior.

"OPEN SESAME - I WANT OUT."

-Stanislas Jerzy Lec.

"A YARDSTICK DOES NOT SAY THAT
THE OBJECT TO BE MEASURED
IS ONE YARD LONG."

-Ludwig Wittgenstein.

I am a bit gone on beer. "Say, I like that last one: "the object
to be murdered does not have to be a yard long."

"I think that's even better but it's not what is said."

"all right. how's Kaakaa? that's baby-language for shit, and a more sexy woman I've never seen.

"I know. and it started with Kafka. she used to like Kafka and I called her that. then she changed it herself." he gets up and walks to a photo. "come 'ere, Bukowski." I flip my beercan into the trashcan and walk on over. "what's this?" asks Sanchez.

I look at the photo. it is a very good photo.

"well, it looks like a cock."

"what kind of cock?"

" a stiff cock, a big one."

"it's mine."

"so?"

"don't you notice?"

"what?"

"the sperm."

"yes, I see it. I didn't want to say-"

"why not? what the hell's wrong with you?"

"I don't understand."

"I mean, do you see the sperm or don't you?"

"what do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm JACKING OFF, can't you understand how hard that is to do?"

"it's not hard, Sanchez, I do it all the time-"

"oh, you ox! I mean I had the camera rigged-up with a string.

Do you realize what an enactment it was to remain quietly in focus, ejaculate and trigger the camera at the same time?"

"I don't use a camera."

"how many men do? you miss the point, as usual. who the hell you are translated into the German, the Spanish, the French and so forth, I'll never know! look, do you realize that it took me THREE DAYS to make this SIMPLE photograph? do you know how many times I had to JACKOFF?"

"4 times?"

"TEN TIMES!"

"oh, Lord! how about Kaakaa?"

"she liked the photo."

"I mean-"

"good god, boy, I don't have the tongue to answer your simplicity."

He goes on around back there and plops himself in his chair again. among his wires and pliers and translations and his huge BITTER-LEAP notebook, Adolph's nose glued to the black front with edgeworks of the Berlin bunker in the background.

"I'm working on something now," I tell him, "short about me walking in to interview the great composer. he's drunk. I get drunk, there's a maid. we're on the wine. he leans forward and tells me, "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth,"-

"yeah?"

"and then he says, 'translated that means that the stupid have the greatest persistency.'"

"kind of lousy." he says, "but it's all right for you."

"but I don't know what to do with the story. I've got the maid walking around in a very short thing and I don't know what to do with it. I thought I might save the story by whiplashing the maid with my belt buckle and then sucking the composer's dick. but I've never sucked dick, never felt like it, I'm square, so I left the story

in

the center and never finished it."

"every man is a homo, a dick-sucker; every woman is a dyke, why do you worry so much?"

"because if I'm happy I'm no good and I don't want to be no good."

We sit there a while and then she comes from upstairs, the flaxen straight string hair.

it's the first woman I could eat, I think.

but she walks past Sanchez and his tongue licks his lips just a bit, she walks past me like separate ball-bearings of magic wavering crazy flesh, may the heavens kiss my balls if it is not so, and she waves through it all glorious as avalanche smashed by sun-

"hello, Hank," she says.

"Kaakaa," I laugh.

she goes behind her table and begins her bits of painting and he sits there, Sanchez, beard blacker than black power, but calm calm, no claims. I begin to get drunk, say nasty things, say anything. then I begin to get dull. I mumble, I murmur. "Oh, sorry- ta spoil yr evening-so sorry, fuckers- ya-I'm a killer but I won't kill anybody. I got class. I'm Bukowski! translated into SEVEN LANGUAGES! I AM the ONE! BUKOWSKI!"

I fall forward trying to look at the jackoff picture again, pitch over something. it is one of my own shoes. I have this god damn bad habit of taking off my own shoes.

"Hank," she says, "be careful."

"Bukowski?" he asks, "You all right?"

he lifts me up. "man, I think you better stay here tonight."

"NO GOD DAMN IT, I'M GOING TO THE WOOD-CHOPPERS BALL!"

next thing I know he's got me over his shoulder, Sanchez has

and he's carrying me to his upstairs pad, you know, where he and his woman do the thing, and then I'm down on the bed, he's gone. door closed, and then I hear some kind of music downstairs, and laughter, the both of them, but kind laughter, no malice, and I did not know what to do, one did not expect the best, luck or people everybody failed you finally, well, and then the door opened, a pop of light, and there was Sanchez -

"hey, Bubu, a bottle of good French wine-sip it slowly, do you most good. you'll sleep. be happy. I won't say we love you, that's too easy. and if you want to come downstairs, dance and sing, talk, o.k. do what you want. here's the wine."

he hands me the bottle. I lift it like some crazy cornet, again and again. through a ripped curtain a part of the worn moon leaps. it is a perfectly good night; it is not jail; it is far from that- in the morning when I awaken, go down to piss, come out from pissing, I find them both asleep on that narrow couch hardly enough for one body, but they are not one body and their faces together and asleep their bodies together and asleep, why be corny??? I only feel the tiny clutch at the throat, the automatic transmission blues of loveliness, that somebody has it, that they don't even hate me-that they even wish me what?-

I walk out staunching and grieving and feeling and sick and blue and bukowski, old, starlit sun, my god, reaching into the final corner, the last midnight blast, cold Mr. C., big H, Mary Mary, clean as a bug on the wall, the heat of December a brainweb across my everlasting spine, Mercy like Kerouac's dead baby sprawled across Mexican railroad tracks in the everlasting July of suck-off tombs, I maybe writing this down by myself, leaving a few things out (I have been threatened by various powerful forces for doing things that are only normal and gaga gladful to do)

and I get into my eleven year old car

and now I have driven away

find myself here

and write you here a little illegal story of

love

beyond myself

but, perhaps, understandable to

you.

yours truly,

Sanchez and Bukowski

p.s. - this time the Heat missed. don't keep more than you can swallow: love, heat or hate.

3chickens

Vicki was all right, but we had our troubles. we were on the wine. port, that woman would get drunk and get to talking and she would make up some of the vilest imaginable stuff about me. and that tone of voice. shoddy and lisping and grating and insane. it would get to any man. it got to me.

once she was screaming these insanities from the fold-down bed in our apartment. I begged her to stop. but she wouldn't. finally, I just walked over, lifted up the bed with her in it and folded everything into the wall.

then I went over and sat down and listened to her scream. but she kept screaming so I walked over and pulled the bed out of the wall again there she lay, holding her arm, claiming it was broken.

"your arm can't be broken," I said.

"it is, it is. oh, you slimy jackoff bastard, you've broken my arm!"

I had some more drinks but she just kept holding her arm and whining. I finally had enough and telling her I'd be right back I went downstairs and outside and found some old wooden boxes behind a grocery store. I found good sturdy slats, ripped them off, pulled out the nails, got back on the elevator and rode back to our apartment. it took about 4 slats. I bound them around her arm with rippings from one of her dresses. she quieted down for a couple of hours. then she started in again. I couldn't take it anymore. so I called a taxi, we went to the General Hospital, as soon as the taxi

left

I took the boards off and threw them into the street. then they x-rayed her CHEST and put her arm in a cast. can you imagine that? I suppose if she broke her head they'd x-ray her ass. anyhow, she used to sit in the bars after that and say, "I am the only woman who has been folded into a wall in a wall bed." and I wasn't so sure of THAT either, but I let her go on saying it. now, another time she angered me and I slapped her but it was across the mouth and it broke her false teeth.

I was surprised that it broke her false teeth. and I went out and got this super cement glue and I glued her teeth together for her. it worked for a while and then one night as she sat there drinking her wine she suddenly had a mouthful of broken teeth.

that wine was so strong it undid the glue. it was disgusting. we had to get her some new teeth. how we did it, I don't quite remem-

ber, but she claimed they made her look like a horse.
we'd usually always have these arguments after we drank
awhile, and Vicki claimed I'd get very mean when I was drunk but I
think that she was the one who was mean. anyhow, sometime during
the argument she'd get up, slam the door and run outside to some
bar. "looking for a live one," as the girls would say.
it always made me feel bad when she left. I've got to admit it.
sometimes she wouldn't come back for 2 or 3 days. and nights. it
wasn't a very nice thing to do.
one time she ran out and I sat there drinking the wine, think-
ing about it. then I got up and found the elevator and rode on down
to the streets too. I found her in her favorite bar. she sat there
holding a kind of purple scarf. I'd never seen the purple scarf before.
holding out on me. I walked up to her and said quite loudly:
"I've tried to make a woman out of you but you're nothing
but a god damned whore!"
the bar was full. every seat taken. I lifted my hand. I swung. I
backhanded her off that god damned stool. she fell to the floor and
screamed.
this was at the back end of the bar. I didn't even turn to look
at her. I walked the length of the bar to the exit. then I turned and
faced the crowd. it was very quiet.
"now," I said to them, "if there's anybody here who doesn't
LIKE what I just did, just SAY something-"
it was quieter than quiet.
I turned around and walked out the doorway. the moment I
hit the street I could hear them babbling and buzzing in there, buzzing
and babbling.
the SHITS! not a man in the boatload!
- but, of course, she came back, and, well, anyhow to get on,
this one night lately we are sitting around drinking the wine and the
same old arguments started. this time I decided to go.
I'M GONNA GET THE FUCK OUTA THIS HOLE!" I yelled
at Vicki. "I CAN'T STAND NO MORE OF YOUR GOD DAMNED
ABUSE!"
she jumped in front of the door.
"over my dead body, that's the only way you are getting out
of here!"
"o.k., if that's the way it's gotta be."
I slammed her a good one and she fell down in front of the
doorway. I had to move her body to get out.
I took the elevator down. feeling rather good. a good jaunty
4-floor ride down. the elevator was kind of a cage-like contraption
and smelled like old stockings, old gloves, old dustmops, but it gave

me a feeling of security and power - somehow - and the wine rode all through me.

but then I got outside and had a change of mind. I went to the liquor store. bought 4 more bottles of wine and went back to my place and rode the elevator back up. the same feeling of security and power. I walked into my place. Vicki was sitting in a chair crying.

"I've come back to you, you lucky darling," I told her.

"you bastard, you hit me. YOU HIT ME!"

"umm, I said, opening a new bottle. "and you give me any more shit and I'll hit you again."

"YEAH!" she screamed, "YOU'D HIT ME BUT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE ENOUGH GUTS TO HIT A MAN!"

"HELL NO!" I screamed back, "I WOULDN'T HIT A MAN! YOU THINK I'M CRAZY? WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH IT?"

that settled her for a bit and we sat for a bit and we sat drinking down the waterglassfuls of wine, port.

then she started in on her abusive stuff again, mostly claiming I jacked off while she was asleep.

well, even if it were true I figured that was my business and if it wasn't, then she was REALLY crazy. she claimed I jacked off in the bathtub, in the closet, in the elevator, everywhere.

everytime I got out of the tub she'd run into the bathroom, like:

"there! I SEE IT! LOOK AT IT!"

"you crazy bat, that's just the dirt-ring."

"no, that's "COME! that's COME!"

or she'd run in while I was bathing under the arms or between the legs and say, "see, see, SEE! you're DOING IT!"

"doing WHAT? can't a man wash his BALLS? those are MY balls, god damn you! can't a man wash his own balls?"

"what's that thing sticking up there?"

"my left index finger. now get the HELL OUT OF HERE!!!"

or in bed, I'd be sound asleep and all of a sudden this hand grabbing my string and nuggets, man, sound asleep in the middle of the night, these FINGERNAILS!

"AH HA! I CAUGHT YOU! I CAUGHT YOU!"

"you crazy bat, the next time you do that I SWEAR I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!"

"for christ's sake, go to sleep-"

so this night she just sat there screaming her jackoff accusations. I just sat there and drank my wine and didn't deny anything.

this made her angry, angrier.

and angrier.

finally she couldn't stand it, all her talk about jackingoff, I mean ME supposedly jackingoff and me just sitting there smiling at her, and she jumped up and ran out the door.

I let her go. I sat there and drank my wine, port. same old stuff.

I thought it over, umm, umm, well.

then very leisurely I got up and took the elevator down, same old feeling of power. I was not angry. I was very calm. it was just the same old war.

I walked on down the street but I didn't go to her favorite bar. why repeat the same play? you are a whore; I tried to make a woman out of you. balls. after a while a man could get to sounding pretty silly. so I went to another bar and sat down on a stool near the door. I ordered a drink and took a slug, set the timing down, and then I saw her. Vicki. she was at the other end of the bar. for some reason she looked scared shitless.

but I didn't go on down. I just stared at her as if I didn't know her.

then I noticed something next to me in one of those old fashioned fox furs. the dead fox's head hung down over her breast looking at me. the breast looked at me.

"your fox looks like it needs a drink, sweetie" I told her.

"it's dead; it don't need a drink. I need a drink or I'm gonna die."

well, a nice guy like me. who am I to spread death? I bought her a drink, her name, she told me, was Margy. I told her that I was Thomas Nightengale, shoemaker. Margy. all these women with names, drinking, crapping, having monthlies. fucking men. getting folded into walls. it was too much.

we had a coupla more, and already she was in her purse, flashing the photo of her children, an ugly demented boy and a girl without any hair, they were in some dull place in Ohio, the father had understanding. oh, one of THOSE? and he brought these women in the house and screwed them in front of her with all the lights on.

"ah, I see, I see," I said. "yes, of course, most men are beasts, they simply do not understand. and you're SUCH a sweetie, what the hell, it ain't right."

I suggested we go to another bar. Vicki's ass was twitching and she was half Indian.

we left her there. we went around the corner. we had one around the corner.

then I suggested we go to my place. do a little eating. I mean, get something to cook, bake, fry.

I didn't tell her about Vicki, of course. but Vicki always

prided herself on her god damned baked chickens. maybe it was because she looked like one. a baked chicken with horse teeth. so I suggested we get a chicken, bake it, bathe it in whiskey. she did not demur.

so. liquor store. 5th of whiskey. 5 or 6 quarts of beer. we found an all night market. the place even had a butcher.

"we wanta bake a chicken," I said.

"oh, christ," he said.

I dropped one of the quarts of beer. it really exploded.

"christ," he said.

I dropped another to see what he would say.

"oh, jesus," he said.

"I want THREE CHICKENS," I said.

"THREE CHICKENS?" "jesus christ, yes," I said.

the butcher reached in and got three very white-yellow chickens with a few long black unplucked hairs that looked like human hairs on them and he wrapped them all up a big big bundle, all in pink tough paper with this real gripping tape, and I paid him and we got out of there.

I dropped 2 more quarts of beer on the way.

I rode up the elevator, feeling my power rising. when we got inside my door I lifted Margy's dress to see what was holding her stockings up. then I gave her a big chummy whiskey-goose with long-finger right hand. she screamed and dropped the big pink bundle. it fell on the rug and the 3 chickens came out. those 3 chickens, all white-yellow with their 29 or 30 drooling drooping murdered human hairs sticking to them looked very strange gaping there on that worn rug of yellow and brown flowers and trees and Chinese dragons, under electric lights in los angeles at the end of the world near 6th street under Union.

"oooh, the chickens."

"fuck the chickens."

her garter belt was dirty. it was perfect. I goosed her again.

well, shit, so I sat down and peeled the whiskey bottle, poured a couple of tall waterglasses full, took off my shoes stockings pants shirt, took one of her cigarettes. sat in my underwear. I always do that, right away. I like to be comfortable.. if the broad don't like

it,

fuck her. she can go. but they always stay. I got a manner. some broads say I should have been a king. others say other things. fuck 'em.

she drank most of her drink and started for her purse. "I have some children in Ohio. they're lovely children-"

"forget that. we've been through that stage. tell me, do you

suck dick?"

"what do you mean?"

"OH, BALLS!" I smashed my glass against the wall.

then I got another one, filled it up, and we drank some more.

I don't know how long we worked on the whiskey but it must have gotten to me because the next thing I know I was laying on the bed naked. staring up at the electric light and Margy was standing there naked and she was rubbing my penis quite rapidly with her fox fur. and while she was rubbing she was saying over and over, "I am going to fuck you, I am going to fuck you-"

"listen," I said. "I don't know if you can fuck me. I jacked-off in the elevator earlier this evening. I think it was about 8 o'clock."

"I will fuck you anyhow."

she really speeded up that fox fur. it was all right. maybe I could get one for myself. I once knew a guy who put raw liver in a long drinking glass and screwed that. me, I didn't like to stick my thing into anything that could break or slice. imagine going to a doctor with a bloody cock and saying it happened while screwing a water glass. once while I was bumming in a small town in Texas I saw this well-built wonderful fuck of a young broad married to this little shriveled up old dwarf with a nasty disposition and some kind of malady that made him trembly all over. she supported him and pushed him around in a wheelchair, and I used to think of him pouncing on all that good meat. I'd get a picture of it, you know, and then finally I got the story. when she had been a younger girl she had gotten this coke bottle stuck all the way into her snatch and just couldn't get the thing out and had to go to a doctor. he got it out, and somehow the story got out. she was ruined in that town after that, and didn't have sense enough to get out. nobody wanted her except the nasty dwarf with the shakes. he didn't give a damn - he had the best piece of ass in town.

where was I? oh, yeah.

her fox fur went faster and faster and I finally got something going just as I heard a key go into the door. oh, shit, it was probably Vicki!

well, it's simple, I thought. I'll just boot her ass out and go about my business.

the door opened and there stood Vicki with 2 cops standing behind her.

"GET THAT WOMAN OUT OF MY HOUSE!" she screamed.

COPS! I couldn't believe it. I pulled the sheet over my pulsating and throbbing and giant sexual organ and pretended to be asleep. it looked like I had a cucumber under there.

Margy was screaming back: "I know you, Vicki, this ain't your

god damned house! this guy EARNs his way by licking your asshole hairs! he gets you babbling to heaven in Morse code with that long sandpaper tongue of his, you're nothing but a WHORE, a true blue turdy-gulping 2-dollar whore. and THAT went out with Franky D., and you were 48 THEN!"

hearing that, my cucumber went down. both of these broads must have been 80 years old. singly, that is, together they might have reached back to suck-off Abe Lincoln, something like that. suck-off General Robert E. Lee, Patrick Henry. Mozart. Dr. Samuel Johnson. Robespierre. Napoleon. Machiavelli? wine preserves. God endures. the whores blow on.

and Vicki screamed back: "WHO'S A WHORE? WHO'S A WHORE, HUH? YOU'RE A WHORE, THAT'S WHO! YOU'VE BEEN SELLING THAT CLAPPED HOLE OF YOURS UP AND DOWN ALVARADO STREET FOR 30 YEARS! A BLIND RAT WOULD BACK UP 4 TIMES IF HE RAN INTO THERE ONCE! AND YOU HOLLERING 'POW! POW!' WHEN YOU'RE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET A GUY TO COME! AND THAT WENT OUT WHEN CONFUCIUS FUCKED HIS MOTHER!"

"WHY YOU CHEAP BITCH. YOU'VE GIVEN OUT MORE BLUE BALLS THAN A SILVER CHRISTMAS TREE IN DISNEY-LAND. WHY YOU-"

"listen, ladies," said one of the cops. "I will have to ask you to watch your remarks and lower the volume. understanding and kindness are the keynotes of Democratic thought. oh, I just DO love the way Bobby Kennedy wears that tickling blobbing knot of raunchy hair over one side of his darling head don't you just?"

"why you fuckin' queer," said Margy, "is that why you wear them tight pants, to make your asshole sweeter? god, it DOES look NICE! I'd kinda like to do you in myself. I see you shits bending over into car windows giving out tickets on the freeways and I always feel like pinching your tight little asses."

the cop suddenly got a brilliant flare in his dead eyes, he unhitched his club and tapped Margy along the side of the neck with it. she fell to the floor.

then he slipped the bracelets on her. I could hear those clicks, and the bastards ALWAYS snapped them too tight. but they felt almost GOOD once you got them on. kind of forceful and heavy and you felt like Christ or something dramatic.

I kept my eyes closed so I couldn't see whether they threw a robe or something over her.

then the cop who snapped the bracelets said to the other cop,

"I'll take her on the elevator. we'll go on the elevator."

and I couldn't hear very well, but I listened as they went

down, and I heard Margy screaming, "oooooh, oooooooh, you bastard. let go of me, let go of me!"

and he kept saying, "shut up, shut up, shut up! you're only getting what you deserve! and you haven't seen ANYTHING yet! this-is just the-beginning!"

then she really screamed.

then the other cop walked over to me. through one narrowed eye I could see him put his big black shiny shoe up on the mattress, up on the sheet.

he looked down at me.

"is this guy a fag? he looks like a fag, sure as hell."

"I don't' THINK he is. he might be. he can sure ball a broad, though."

"you want me to run him in?" he asked Vicki.

I had my eyes closed. it was a long wait. god, it was a long wait. that big foot there on my sheets. the electric light shining down.

then she spoke. finally. "no, he's-.o.k. leave him there."

the cop took his foot down. I heard him walk across the room, then wait at the door. he spoke to Vicki:

"I'm going to have to charge you 5 bucks more for your protection next month. you're getting a bit harder to watch out for."

then he was gone. I mean, out into the hall. I waited for him to get into the elevator. I heard it go down to the first floor. I counted to 64. then, I LEAPED OUT OF BED.

my nostrils were flaring like Gregory Peck in heat.

"YOU ROTTEN BITCH. YOU EVER DO THAT AGAIN AND I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!"

"NO, NO, NO!!!"

I raised my hand to give her the old backhand.

"I TOLD HIM NOT TO TAKE YOU!" she screamed at me.

"ummm. that's right. I've got to consider that."

I lowered my hand.

then there was some whiskey left and some wine too. I got up and put the chain on the door.

we turned off the lights and sat there and drank and smoked and talked about things. this, and that, easy and casual, then, like old times, we looked at the same red horse that flew and flew in red neon on the side of a building just downtown to our east. it flew and flew on the side of this building all night. no matter what happened. you know what it was, a kind of red horse with red wings of neon. but I told you that. a winged horse. anyhow, like always, we counted: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven. the wings always flapped 7

times. then the horse, everything, stood still, then, it started again. our whole apartment would be in this red glow. then when the horse stopped flying, somehow things would get white for a flash. I don't know why. I think that it was caused by an advertisement beneath the red winged horse. it said, some kind of product, buy this or buy that, in this WHITE. anyhow.

we sat and talked and drank and smoked.

later we went to bed together. she kissed very nicely, her tongue was kind of an apologetic sadness.

then we fucked. we fucked as the red horse flew.

7 times the wings flapped.. and in the center of the rug the 3 chickens were still there. watching. the chickens turned red, the chickens turned white. 14 times they turned red. then they turned white. 21 times they turned red. then they turned white. 28 times-

it had ended a better night than most.

===

3women

we lived right across from McArthur park, Linda and I, and one night while drinking we saw a man's body fall past our window. it was an odd sight, something like a joke, but it wasn't any joke when his body hit the pavement. "jesus christ," I told Linda, "he plopped right apart like an old tomato! we are just made of guts and shit and slimy stuff!come 'ere! come 'ere! look at 'im!" Linda came to the window, then ran to the bathroom and vomited. she came out. I turned and looked at her. "honest ta christ, baby, he's just

like

a big spilled bowl of rotten meat and spaghetti, dressed in a ripped suit and shirt!" Linda ran back in and heaved again.

I sat and drank the wine. soon I heard the siren. what they really needed was the Sanitation Dept. well, what the fuck, we all had our troubles. I never knew where our rent was coming from and we were too sick from drinking to look for work. everytime we worried, all we could do about our worries was to fuck. that made us forget for a while. we fucked a lot, and lucky for me, Linda was a good lay.that whole hotel was full of people like us, drinking wine and fucking and not knowing what next.now and then one of them jumped out of the window.but the money always seemed to arrive for us from somewhere, just when all seemed like we'd have to eat our own shit, once \$300 from a dead uncle, another time, a delayed,

income tax refund. another time I was riding on a bus and on the seat in front of me where these 50 cent pieces. what it meant or who had done it, I didn't know, still don't understand. I moved one seat up and began stuffing the half bucks into my pockets. when the pockets got full, I pulled the cord and got off at the next stop. nobody said anything or tried to stop me. I mean, when you're drunk, you've got to be lucky, even if you're not one, you've got to be lucky.

part of each day we would spend in the park looking at the ducks. you've got to believe me, that when your health is down from continual drinking and lack of decent food, and you're tired of fucking while trying to forget, you can't beat the ducks. I mean, you've got to get out of your place, because you can get the deep blue blues and it soon might be you out the window. it is easier to do than you might imagine. so Linda and I would sit on a bench and watch the ducks. the ducks didn't worry worth a damn - no rent, no clothes, plenty of food - just float around shitting and quacking. nobbling, nibbling, eating all the time. once in a while one of those from the hotel would catch a duck at night, kill the thing, take it to their room, clean it and cook it. we thought about it but never did it. besides they were very hard to catch; you just get so close and SLUUUSH!!! a spray of water and the motherfuckers would be gone! most of the time we ate small pancakes made of flour and water, or now and then we would steal some corn from somebody's garden - one guy specialized in a corn garden - I don't believe he got to eat a one of them, then there was always a bit of stealing from an outdoor market - I mean there was a vegetable stand in front of a grocery store - this meant an occasional tomato or two or a small cucumber, but we were petty thieves, small time, and we needed mostly luck. the cigarettes were easiest - a walk at night - somebody always left a car window down and a pack or half-pack of smokes on the dashboard. of course, the wine and the rent were the real problems and we fucked and worried about it.

and like all the days of final desperation, ours arrived. no more wine, no more luck, no more anything. no more credit with the landlady or the liquor store. I decided to set the alarm clock for 5:30 a. m. and walk down to the Farm Labor Market, but even the clock didn't work right. it had broken and I had opened it to repair it. it was a broken spring and the only way I could get the spring to work again was to break a portion of it off, hook it up again, lock up the works and wind it up. now if you want to know what a short spring does to an alarm clock or I guess any kind of clock, I'll tell you. the shorter the spring is, the faster the minute and hour hands go around. it was some crazy clock, I'll tell you, and when we were

worn out with fucking to stop from worrying we used to watch that clock and try to tell what time it really was. you could see that minute hand moving - we used to laugh at it.

then one day - it took us a week to figure it - we found that the clock moved thirty hours for each actual twelve hours of time also it had to be wound every 7 or 8 hours or it would stop. sometimes we'd wake up and look at the clock and wonder what time it was. "well, shit, baby," I'd say, "can't you figure out the thing? the clock moves 2 and one half times as fast as it should. it's simple."

"yeah, but what time did it say when we last set the clock?"

she'd ask.

"damned if I know, baby, I was drunk."

"well, you better wind it or it'll stop."

"o.k."

I'd wind it, then we'd fuck.

so the morning I decided to go to the Farm Labor Market I couldn't set the clock. we got hold of a bottle of wine from somewhere and drank it slowly. I watched that clock, not knowing what it meant, and being afraid of missing the early morning, I just lay in bed and didn't sleep all night. then I got up, dressed and walked around waiting. there were quite a few tomatoes lying in the windows and I picked up two or 3 of them and ate them. there was a large blackboard: COTTENPICKERS NEEDED FOR BAKERSFIELD. FOOD AND LODGING. what the hell was that? cotton in Bakersfield, Calif? I thought Eli Whitney and the cotton gin had put all that out of the way. then a big truck drove up and it turned out they needed tomato-pickers. well, shit, I hated to leave Linda in that bed all alone like that. she could never stay in bed too long alone by herself like that. but I decided to try it. everybody started climbing into the truck. I waited and made sure that all the ladies were on board, and there were some big ones. everybody was in, and then I started to crawl up. a large Mexican, evidently the foreman, started putting in the tailgates - "sorry, senior, full up!" they drove off without me.

it was almost 9 p.m. by then and the walk back to the hotel took an hour. I passed all the well-dressed stupid-looking people and was almost run over once by an angry man in a black Caddy. I don't know what he was angry about. maybe the weather. it was a hot day. when I got back to the hotel I had to walk up the stairway because the elevator was right by the landlady's door and she was always fucking with the elevator, shining the brass, or just plain-ass snooping.

it was 6 floors up and when I got there, I heard laughing from my room. that bitch Linda hadn't waited too long to get started.

well, I'd whip her ass and his too. I opened the door.
it was Linda and Jeanie and Eve. "Sweetie!" said Linda, she
came up to me. she was all dressed in highheels. she gave me a lot of
tongue when she kissed. "Jeanie just got her first unemployment
check and Eve is on the dole! we're celebrating!"
there was plenty of port wine. I went in and took a bath and
then came out in my shorts. I always like to show off my legs. I had
the biggest most powerful legs I had ever seen on any man. the rest
of me wasn't too much. I sat in my torn shorts and put my legs up
on the coffee table.

"shit! look at those legs!" said Jeanie.

"yeah, yeah," said Eve.

Linda smiled. I was poured a wine.

you know how such things go. we drank and talked, talked
and drank. the girls went out for more bottles. more talk. the clock
went round and round. soon it was dark. I was drinking alone, still in
my torn shorts. Jeanie had gone to the bedroom and passed out in
the bed. Eve had passed out on the couch and Linda had passed out
on a smaller leather couch in the hall that led to the bathroom. I

still

couldn't understand that Mexican closing those tailgates on me. I
was unhappy.

I went into the bedroom and got into bed with Jeanie. she was
a large woman, and naked. I began kissing on her breasts, sucking at
them. "hey, what you doing?"

"doin? I'm going to fuck you!"

I put my finger into her cunt and moved it back and forth.

"I'm going to fuck you!"

"no! Linda would kill me!"

"she'll never know!"

I mounted and then very SLOWLY SLOWLY QUIETLY so
the springs wound not rattle, so there would not be a sound. I slid it
in and out in and out EVER SO SLOWLY and when I came I
thought I would never stop. it was one of the best fucks of my life.
as I wiped off on the sheets the thought occurred to me - it could
be that Man has been fucking improperly for centuries.
then I went, sat down in the dark, drank some more. I don't
remember how long I sat there. I drank quite a bit. then I went over
to Eve. Eve of the dole. she was a fat thing, a little wrinkled, but

had

very sexy lips, obscene sexy ugly lips. I began kissing that terrible
and beautiful mouth. she didn't protest at all. she opened her legs
and I entered. she was a little female pig, farting and grunting and
sniffing, wiggling, when I came it wasn't like with Jeanie - long and

trembling - it was just splot splot and then over. I got off. and before I could get back to my chair I could hear her snoring again. amazing - she fucked like she breathed - nothing to it. each woman fucked just a bit differently, and that's what kept a man going, that's what kept a man trapped.

I sat and drank some more thinking of what that dirty son of a bitch in control of the tailgate had done to me. it didn't pay to be polite. then I began to think about the dole. could an unmarried man and woman get on the dole? of course not. they were supposed to starve to death. and love was a kind of dirty word. but that was something of what it was between Linda and I - love. that's why we starved together, drank together, lived together. what did marriage mean? marriage meant a sanctified FUCK and a sanctified FUCK that's what the world wanted: some poor son of a bitch, trapped and unhappy, with a job to do. well, shit, I'd move down to skidrow and move Linda in with Big Eddie. Big Eddie was an idiot but at least he'd buy her some clothes and put some steaks in her belly which was more than I was able to do.

Elephant Legs Bukowski, the social failure.

I finished off the bottle and decided I needed some sleep. I wound up the alarm clock and crawled in with Linda. she awakened and began rubbing up against me. "oh shit, oh shit," she said, "I don't know what's the matter with me!"

"whatza matta, baby? you sick?you want me to call the General Hospital?"

"oh no, shit, I'm just HOT! HOT! I'M SO HOT!"

"what?"

"I said, I'm burning up hot! FUCK ME!"

"Linda-"

"what? what?"

"I'm so tired. no sleep for two nights. that long walk to the Labor Market and back, 32 blocks in the hot sun-useless. no job. fucking-ass tired."

"I'll HELP you!"

"whatcha mean?"

she crawled halfway down the couch and began licking at my penis. I groaned in weariness. "honey, 32 blocks in the hot sun-I'm burned out."

she kept working. she had a sandpaper tongue and knew what to do with it.

"honey," I told her, "I'm a social zero! I don't deserve you! please relent!"

like I say, she was good. some can, some can't. most just know the old-time headbob. Linda began with the penis, lift off, went to

the balls, then off the balls, back to the penis again, barberpole, a wonderful amount of energy. ALWAYS LEAVING THE HEAD OF THE COCK, ITSELF, UNTOUCHED. finally, she had me moaning to the ceiling telling her all various sorts of lies about what I would do for her when I finally got my ass straightened out and stopped being a bum.

then she came and took the head, put her mouth about a third of the way down, gave this little nip-suck of tooth pressure on, the wolf-nip and I came AGAIN - which made four times that night and I was completely done. some women know more than medical science.

when I awakened they were all up and dressed - looking good - Linda, Jeanie and Eve. they poked at me under the covers, laughing. "hey, Hank, we're going down to look for a live one! and we need an eye opener! we'll be down at Tommi-Hi's!"

"o.k., o.k., goodbye!"

they all left, wiggling out the door.

all Mankind was doomed forever.

I was just about asleep when the extension phone rang.

"yeah?"

Mr. Bukowski?"

"yeah?"

"I saw those women! they came from your room!"

"how do you know? you have 8 floors and about ten or twelve rooms to a floor."

"I know all my roomers, Mr. Bukowski! we have all respectable working people here!"

"yeah?"

"yes, Mr. Bukowski. I've been running this place for twenty years and never, never have I seen such goings on as at your place! we've always had respectable people here, Mr. Bukowski."

"yes, they're so respectable that every two weeks some son of a bitch climbs up onto the roof and takes a header straight into your cement entranceway between those phony potted plants."

"you've got until noon to get out, Mr. Bukowski!"

"what time is it now?"

"8 a.m."

"thank you."

I hung up. found an alka-seltzer, drank it out of a dirty glass.

then found a touch of wine. I opened the curtains and looked out at the sun. it was a hard world, no news there, but I hated skidrow. I like little rooms, little places to make some kind of fight from. a woman, a drink, but no day by day job. I couldn't put it together. I was not clever enough. I thought of jumping out the window but

couldn't do it. I got dressed and went down to Tommi-Hi's. the girls were laughing down at the end of the bar with two guys. Marty the bartender knew me. I waved him off. no money. I sat there.

a scotch and water arrived in front of me. a note.

"meet me at the Roach Hotel, room 12, at midnight. I'll have the room for us.

love, Linda."

I drank the drink, got out of the way, tried the Roach Hotel at Midnight. the desk clerk said, "nothing doing. no room 12 reserved for a Bukowski." I came at one a.m. I'd been in the park all day, all night, sitting. same thing. "no room 12 reserved for you, sir."

"any room reserved for m under that name or under the name of Linda Bryan?"

"nothing sir."

"do you mind if I look into room 12?"

"there's nobody there, sir. I told you, sir."

"I'm in love, man. I'm sorry. please let me have a look!"

he gave me one of those looks reserved for 4th class idiots, tossed me the doorkey.

"be back within 5 minutes or you're in trouble."

I opened the door, switched on the lights - "Linda!" - the roaches, seeing the light, all ran back under the wallpaper. there were thousands of them. when I put out the light you could hear them all crawling back out. the wallpaper, itself, seemed to be just a large roachskin.

I took the elevator back down to the desk clerk.

"thanks," I said, "you were right. nobody in room 12."

for the first time his voice seemed to take on some kind of kindness.

"I'm sorry, man."

"thanks," I said.

when I got outside the hotel I turned left, which was east, which was skidrow, and as my feet moved me slowly toward there I wondered, why do people lie? now I no longer wonder but I still remember, and now when they lie I almost know about it while they are doing it, but I'm stil lnot as wise as that desk clerk in the roach

hotel

who knew that the lie was everywhere, or the people who dove past my window while I was drinking port on warm afternoons in Los Angeles across from McArthur park, where they still catch, kill, eat the ducks, and, the people.

the hotel is still there and the room we stayed in and if you care to come by some day I will show it to you. but there's hardly sense in that, is there? let's just say that one night I fucked or got

fucked by 3 women. and let that be story enough.

====

The Gut Wringing Machine

Danforth hung the bodies up one by one after they had been wrung through the wringer. Bagley sat by the phones. "how many we got?"

"19, looks like a good day."

"shit, yeah, yeah. that sounds like a good day. how many did we place yesterday?"

"14."

"fair, fair. we-ll make it good if the way keeps up. I keep worrying they might quit the thing in Viet," said Bagley of the phones.

"don-t be foolish - too many people profit depend on that war."

"but the Paris Peace Conference-"

"you just ain-t yourself today, Bag. you know they just sit around and laugh all day, draw their pay and then make the Paree nightclubs each night. those boys are living good. they don-t want the Peace Conference to end anymore than we want the war to end.

we-re all getting fat, and not a scratch. It-s sweet. and if they settle

the thing somehow by accident, there-ll be others. they keep hot points glowing all over the globe."

"yeah, I guess I worry too much." one of the three phones on the desk rang. Bagley picked it up. "SATISFACTORY HELP AGENCY. Bagley speaking."

he listened. "yeh, yeh. we got a good cost accountant. salary? \$300 the first two weeks, I mean a week. we get the first two weeks- pay. then cut him to 50 a week or fire him. If you fire him after the first two weeks, we give YOU one hundred dollars. why? well, hell, don-t you see, the whole idea is to keep things moving. It-

s

all psychological, like Santa Claus. when? yeah, we-ll send him right over. what-s the address? fine, fine, he-ll be there pronto, remember all the terms. we send him with a contract. bye."

Bagley hung up. hummed to himself, underlined the address.

"get one down, Danforth, a tired, thin one, no use shipping out the best on the first shot."

Danforth walked over to the wire clothesline and took the

clamps off the fingers of a tired, thin one.

"walk him over here. what-s his name?"

"Herman. Herman Telleman."

"shit, he don-t look so good. looks like he still got a little blood in him, and I can see some color in his eye-I think. listen, Danforthm you got these wringers running good and tight? I want all the guts squeezed out, no resistance at all, you understand? you do your job and I-ll do mine."

"some of these guys came in pretty tough, some men have more guts than others, you know that. you can-t always tell by looking."

"all right, let-s try him. Herman. hey, sonny!"

"what-s up pops?"

"how-d you like a nice little job?"

"ah, hell no!"

"what? you don-t want a nice little job?"

"what the fuck for? my old man, he was from Jersey, he worked all his damn life and after that we buried him with his own money, ya know what he had left?"

"what?"

"15 cents and the end of a drab dull life."

"but don-t you want a wife, a family, a home, respectability" a new car every 3 years?"

"I don-t want no grind, daddy-o, don-t put me in no flip-out cage. I just want to laze around. what the shit."

"Danforth, run this bastard through the wringer and make those screws tight!"

Danforth grabbed the subject but not before Telleman yelled "up your old mother-s bunghole-"

"and squeeze ALL THE GUTS OUT OF HIM, ALL OF THE GUTS! do you hear me?"

"aw right, aw right!" answered Danforth. "shit, sometimes I think you got the easy end of the stick!"

"forget sticks! squeeze the guts out of him. Nixon might end the war-"

"there you go talking that nonsense again! I don-t think you been sleeping good, Bagley. something wrong with you."

"yeah, yeah, you-re right! insomnia. I keep thinking we should be making soldiers! I toss all night! what a business that would be!"

"Bag, we do the best with what we can, that-s all."

"aw right, aw right, you run him through the wringer yet?"

Danforth brought Herman Telleman back. he did look a bit different. all the color was gone from his eyes and he had on this utterly false smile. it was beautiful.

"Herman?" asked Bagley.

"yes, sir?"

"what do you feel? or how do you feel?"

"I don-t feel anything, sir."

"you like cops?"

"not cops, sir - policemen. they are the victims of our vicious-ness even though they at times protect us by shooting us, jailing us, beating us and fining us. There is no such thing as a bad cop. Policeman, pardon me. do you realize that if there were no policemen, we-d have to take the law into our own hands?"

"and then what would happen?"

"I never thought of that, sir."

"excellent, do you believe in God?"

"oh, yes sir, in God and Family and State and Country and honest labor."

"jesus christ!"

"what, sir?"

"sorry, now, here, do you like overtime on a job?"

"oh, yes sir! I would like to work 7 days a week if possible, and 2 jobs if possible."

"why?"

"money, sir, money for color tv, new autos, down payment on a home, silk pajamas, 2 dogs, an electric shave, life insurance, medical insurance, oh all kinds of insurance and college educations for my children if I have children and automatic doors on the garage and fine clothes and 45 dollar shoes, and cameras, wrist watches, rings, washers, refrigerators, new chairs, new beds, wall-to-wall carpeting, donations to the church, thermostat heating and-"

"all right. stop. when are you going to use all this stuff?"

"I don-t understand, sir."

"I mean, when you are working night and day and overtime, when are you going to enjoy these luxuries?"

"oh, there-ll be a day, there-ll be a day, sir!"

"and you don-t think your kids will grow up some day and just think of you as an asshole?"

"after I-ve worked my fingers to the bone for them, sir! of course not!"

"excellent. now just a few more questions."

"yes, sir."

"don-t you think that all this constant drudgery is harmful to the health and the spirit, the soul, if you will-?"

"oh hell, if I weren-t working all the time I-d just be sitting around drinking or making oil paintings or fucking or going to the circus or sitting in the park watching the ducks. things like that."

"don-t you think sitting around in the park watching the ducks is nice?"

"I can-t make any money that way, sir."

"o.k., fuck-off."

"sir?"

"I mean, I-m through talking to you."

"o.k., this one-s ready. Dan. fine job. give him the contract, make him sign it, he won-t read the fine print. he thinks we-re nice. trot him down to the address. they-ll take him. I ain-t sent out a better cost accountant in months."

"Danforth had Herman sign the contract, checked his eyes again to make sure that they were dead, put the contract and the address in his hand, led him to the door and gave him a gentle push down the stairway.

Bagley just leaned back with an easy smile of success and watched Danforth run the other 18 through the wringer. where the guts went it was hard to see but almost every man lost his guts somewhere along the line. the ones labeled: "married with family" or "over 40" lost their guts easiest. Bagley leaned back as Danforth ran them through the wringer, he heard them talking:

"it-s hard for a man as old as I am to get a job, oh, it-s so hard!"

"another one said::

"oh, baby, it-s cold outside."

another:

"I get tired of booking and pimping, getting busted, busted, busted. I need something secure, secure, secure, secure, secure-"

another:

"all right, I-ve had my fun, now-"

another:

"I don-t have a trade. every man should have a trade. I don-t have a trade. what am I going to do?"

another:

"I-ve been all over the world - in the army - I know things."

another:

"if I had it to do all over again, I-d be a dentist or a barber."

another:

"all my novels and short stories and poems keep coming back.

Shit, I can-t go to New York and shake the hands of the publishers! I have more talent than anybody but you-ve got to have the inside! I-ll take any kind of job but I am better than any kind of job that I take because I am a genius."

another:

"see how pretty I am? look at my nose? look at my ears? look

at my hair? my skin? the way I act! see how pretty I am? see how pretty I am? see how pretty I am? why doesn't anybody like me? because I'm so pretty. they're jealous, jealous, jealous-"
the phone rang again.

"SATISFACTORY HELP AGENCY. Bagley speaking. you what? you need a deep-sea diver? motherfucker! what? oh, pardon. sure, sure, we got dozens of unemployed deep-sea divers. his first 2 weeks- pay is ours. 500 a week, dangerous, you know, really dangerous - barnacles, crabs, all that- seaweed, maidens on rocks. octopi, bends. head-colds. fuck, yes. first 2 weeks- pay is ours. if you

fire

him after 2 weeks we give you \$200. why? why? if a robin laid an egg of gold in your front room chair would you ask WHY? would you? we'll send you a deep-sea diver in 45 minutes! the address? fine, fine, ah, yes, fine, that's near the Richfield Building. yes, I know. 45 minutes. thank you. goodbye."

Bagley hung up. he was tried already and the day was just beginning.

"Dan?"

"yeah, mother?"

"bring me a deep-sea diver type. bit fat around the belly. blue eyes, medium hair on chest, balding before his time, slightly stoical, cancer of the throat. that's a deep-sea diver. anybody knows what a deep-sea diver is. now bring one, mother."

"o.k., shithead."

Bagley yawned. Danforth unclamped one. brought him forth, stood him before the desk.. his tag said, "Barney Anderson."

"hello, Barney," said Bag.

"where am I?" asked Barney.

"SATISFACTORY HELP AGENCY."

"boy, if you two ain't a couple of greasy-looking motherfuckers, I ain't never ever seen none!"

"what the fuck, Dan!"

"I ran him through 4 times."

"I told you to tighten those screws!"

"and I told you some men have more guts than others!"

"it's all a myth, you damn fool!"

"who's a damn fool?"

"you're both damn fools," said Barney Anderson.

"I want you to run his ass through the wringer three times," said Bagley.

"o.k., o.k., but first let's you and me get straight."

"aw right, for instance-ast this Barney guy who his heroes are."

"Barney, hoose yr herows?"

"well, lemme see - Cleaver, Dillinger, Che, Malcolm X, Gandhi, Jersey Joe Walcott, Grandma Barker, Castro, Van Gogh, Villon, Hemingway."

"ya see, he i-dentifies with all LOSERS. that makes him feel good. he-s getting ready to lose. we-re going to help him. he-s been conned on this soul-shit and that-s how we get their asses, there ain-t no soul. it-s all con. there ain-t no heroes. it-s all con. there ain-t

no

winners - it-s all con and horseshit. there ain-t no saints, there ain-t

t

no genius - that-s all con and fairytale, it makes the game go. each man jut tries to hang on and be lucky - if he can. all else is bullshit."

"aw right, aw right, I dig your losers! but what about Castro? he looked pretty fat, last photo I saw of him."

"he subsists because the U.S. and Russia have decided to leave him in the middle. but suppose they really put the pack on the deck? what can he draw to? man, he don-t hold enough chips to get into a decaying Egyptian whorehouse."

"fuck you two guys! I like who I like!" said Barney Anderson.

"Barney, when a man gets old enough, trapped enough, hungry enough, weary enough - he-ll suck dick, tit, eat shit to stay alive; either that or suicide. the human race ain-t got it, man. it-s a bad crowd."

"so we-re gonna change it, man. that-s the trick. if we can make it to the moon we can clean the shit out of the shitbowl, we just been concentrating on the wrong things."

"you-re sick, kid, and a little fat around the belly. and balding. Dan, shape him up."

Danforth took Barney Anderson and rang and wrung and screamed him through the wringer three times, then brought him back.

"Barney?" asked Bagley.

"yes sir!"

"Who are your heroes?"

"George Washington, Bob Hope, Mae West. Richard Nixon, the bones of Clark Gable and all the nice people I-ve seen at Disneyland. Joe Louis, Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra, Babe Ruth, the Green Berets, hell the whole United States Army and Navy and especially the Marine Corps, and even the Treasury Dept., the CIA, the FBI, United Fruit, the highway Patrol, the whole god damned L.A. Police Dept., and the County Cops too. and I don-t mean -cops,- I mean -policemen.- then there-s Marlene Dietrich, with this slit up the side

of her dress, she must be near 70 now? - dancing up at Vegas, my dick got big, what a wonderful woman. the good American life and the good American money can keep us young forever, don-t you see?"

"Dan?"

"yeah, Bag?"

"this one-s really ready! I ain-t got much feeling left, but he even makes me sick. make him sign his little contract and send him out. they-ll love him. god, what a man-s gotta do to just stay alive. sometimes I even hate my own job. that-s bad, ain-t it, Dan?"

***** "sure, Bag, and as soon as I send this asshole on his way, I got just

the little thing for you - a touch of the good ol- tonic."

"ah, fine, fine-what is it?"

"just a little quarter-turn through the wringer."

"WHAT?"

"oh, it-s fine for the blues or for extemporaneous thinking stuff like that."

"will it work?"

"it beats aspirin."

"o.k., get rid of the asshole."

Barney Anderson was sent down the stairway. Bagley got up and walked toward the nearest wringer. "these old gals - West and Dietrich, still flashing tits and legs, hell t don-t make sense, they were doing that when I was 6 years old."

"nuttin-. stretchers, girdles, powder, lights, false flesh coverings, padding, pudding, straw, horseshit, they could make your grandmother look like a 16 year old."

"my grandmother-s dead."

"they could still do it."

"yeah, yeah, I guess you-re right." Bagley walked toward the wringer.

"just a quarter turn now. can I trust you?"

"you-re my partner, ain-t you, Bag?"

"sure, Dan."

"how long we been in business together?"

"25 years."

"so, o.k., when I say a QUARTER-TURN, I mean a QUARTER-TURN."

"whatta I do?"

"just slip your hands in the rollers, it-s like a washing machine."

"in there?"

"yeah, here we go! whoopee!"

"hey, man, remember, just a quarter of a turn."

"sure, Bag, don-t you trust me?"

"I gotta now."

"you know, I been fucking your wife on the sly."

"you rotten son of a bitch! I-ll kill you!"

Danforth left the machine running, sat down behind Bagley-s desk, lit a cigarette. he hummed a little tune, "lucky lucky me, I can live in luxury, because I-ve got a pocket full of dreams-I-ve got a pocketful of dreams-

he got up and walked over to the machine and Bagley.

"you said a quarter-turn," said Bagley. "it-s been a turn and a half."

"don-t you trust me?"

"more than ever, somehow."

"still, I been fucking your wife on the sly."

"well, I guess it-s all right. I get tired of fucking her. every man gets tired of fucking his own wife."

"but I want you to want me to fuck your wife."

"well, I don-t care but I don-t know if I exactly want you to."

"I-ll be back in about 5 minutes."

Danforth went back, sat in Bagley-s swivel chair, put his feet up on the desk and waited. he liked to sing. he sang songs: "I got plenty of nuthin- and nuthin-s plenty for me. I got the stars, I got the sun, I got the shining sea-

Danforth smoked two cigarettes and went back to the machine.

"Bag, I been fucking your wife on the sly."

"oh, I want you to, man! I want you to! and ya know what?"

"what?"

I-d kinda like to watch."

"sure, that-d be o.k."

Danforth went to the phone, dialed a number.

"Minnie? yeah, Dan. I-m comin- over ta fuck ya again. Bag?

oh, he-s comin- too. he wants ta watch. no, we-re not drunk. I just decided to close shop for the day. we-ve made it already. with the Israel-Arab thing and all the African wars, there-s nothing to worry about. Biafra is a beautiful word. anyhow, we-re coming over. I want to bunghole you. you got those big cheeks, jesus. I might even bunghole Bag. I think his cheeks are bigger than yours. keep tight, sweetie, we-re on our way!"

Dan hung up. another phone rang. he picked it up. "jam it you rotten motherfucker, even the points of your tits smell like wet dogturds in a Westerly wind." he hung up and smiled. walked over and took Bagley out of the machine. they locked the office door and

walked down the steps together. when they walked outside the sun was up and looking good. you could see through the thin skirts of the women. you could almost see their bones. death and rot was everywhere. it was Los Angeles, near 7th and Broadway, the intersection where the dead snubbed the dead and didn-t even know why it was a taught game like jumprope or dissecting frogs or pissing in the mailbox or jacking-off your pet dog.

"we got plenty a nuthin-," they sang, "and nuthin-s plenty for we-"

arm and arm they made the underground garage, found Bag-s 69 Caddy, got in, each lit a dollar cigar, Dan driving, got it out of there, almost hit a bum coming out of Pershing Square, turned West toward the freeway, toward freedom, Vietnam, the army, fucking large areas of grass and nude statues and French wine, Beverly Hills-

Bagley leaned over and ran down Danforth-s zipper as he drove.

I hope he leaves some for his wife, Danforth thought.

it was a warm Los Angeles morning, or maybe it was afternoon, he checked the dashboard clock - it read 11:37 a.m. just as he came. he ran the Caddy up to 80. the asphalt slipped underneath like the graves of the dead. he turned on the dash t.v., then reached for the telephone, then remembered to zip up. "Minnie, I love you."

"I love you too, Dan," she answered. "is that slob with you?"

"right beside me. he just caught a mouthful."

"oh, Dan, don-t waste it!"

he laughed and hung up. they almost hit a nigger in a pickup truck. he wasn-t black at all, he was a nigger, that-s all he was.

there

wasn-t a nicer city in the world when you had it made, and only one worse when you didn-t have it made - the Big A. Danforth hit it up to 85. a motorcycle smiled at him as he drove by. maybe he-d call Bob later that night. Bob was always so funny. his 12 writers always gave him those good lines. and Bob was just as natural as horseshit. it was wonderful!

he threw out the dollar cigar, lit another, ran the Caddy up to 90, straight at the sun like an arrow, business was good and life, and the tires whirled over the dead and the dying and the dying-to-be.

ZYAAAAAUUUM!

===

THE FUCK MACHINE

it was a hot night in Tony's. you didn't even think of fucking.
just drink cool beer. Tony coasted a couple down to me and Indian
Mike, and Mike had the money out. I let him buy the first round.
Tony rang it up, bored, looked around - 5 or six others staring into
their beers, dolts, so Tony walked down to us.

"what's new, Tony?" I asked.

"ah, shit," said Tony.

"at ain't new."

"shit," said Tony.

"ah, shit," said Indian Mike.

we drank at our beers.

"what do you think of the moon?" I asked Tony.

"shit," said Tony.

"yeah," said Indian Mike, "guy's an asshole on earth he's an
asshole on the moon, makes no difference."

"they say there's probably no life on Mars," I said.

"so what?" asked Tony.

"oh shit," I said, "2 more beers."

Tony coasted them down, then walked down for his money.
rang it up. walked back. "shit it's hot. I wish I were deader than
yesterday's Kotex."

"where do men go when they die, Tony?"

"shit, who cares?"

"don't you believe in the Human Spirit?"

"a bagga bullshit!"

"how about Che? Joan of Arc? Billy the Kid? all those?"

"a bagga bullshit!"

we drank our beers, thinking about it.

"look," I said, "I gotta take a piss."

I walked back to the urinal and there, as usual, was Petey the
Owl.

I took it out and began to piss.

"you sure got a little dick," he told me.

"when I'm pissing or meditating, yeh, but I'm what you call
the super-stretch type. when I'm ready to go, each inch I got now
equals six."

"that's good then, if you ain't lying, cause I see two inches
showing."

" I just show the head."

"I'll give you a dollar to suck your cock."

"that ain't much."

"you're showing more than head. you're showing every bit of
string you got."

"fuck you, Pete."

"you'll be back when you run out of beer money."

I walked back on out.

"2 more beers," I ordered.

Tony went through his routine, came back.

"it's so hot, I think I'm going crazy," he said.

"the heat just makes you realize your true self," I told Tony.

"wait a minute! you calling me a nut?"

"most of us are. but it's kept a secret."

? "all right, saying your bullshit is straight, how many sane men are there on earth? are there any?"

"a few."

"how many?"

" out of the billions?"

"yeh, yeh."

"well, I'd say 5 or 6."

"5 or 6?" said Indian Mike. "well, suck my cock!"

"look," said Tony. "how do you know I'm nuts? how do we get away with it?"

"well, since we are all insane there are only a few to control us, far too few, so they just let us run around insane. that's all they can do at this moment. for a while I thought they might find some place to live in outer space while they destroyed us. but now I know that the insane control space also."

" how do you know?"

"because they planted an American flag on the moon."

"suppose the Russians had planted a Russian flag on the moon?"

"same thing," I said.

"then you're impartial?" Tony asked.

"I am impartial to all degrees of madness."

we became quiet. kept drinking. and Tony too, began pouring himself scotch and waters. he could. he owned the place.

"jesus, it's hot," said Tony.

"shit, yeh," said Indian Mike.

then Tony began talking. "insanity," said Tony, "ya know, there's something very insane going on at this very minute!"

"sure," I said.

"no, no, no-I mean right HERE at my place!"

"yeh?"

"yeh. It's so crazy, sometimes I get scared."

"tell me all about it, Tony," I said, always ready for somebody else's bullshit.

Tony leaned real close. "I know a guy's got a fuck-machine. no crazy sex magazine shit. like you see in the ads. hot water bottles

with replaceable cornbeef pussies, all that nonsense. this guy has really put it together. a German scientist, we got to him, I mean our govt. did before the Russians could grab him. now keep it quiet."

"sure, Tony, sure-

"Von Brashlitz. our govt. tried to get him interested in SPACE. no go. a brilliant old guy, but he just has this FUCK MACHINE in mind. at the same time he thinks he's some kind of an artist, calls himself Michelangelo at times-they pensioned him off at \$500.00 a month to kind of keep him alive enough to stay outa the nuthouses. they watched him a while, then got a little bored or forgot, but they kept the checks coming, and now and then an agent would talk to him ten or twenty minutes a month, write a report that he was crazy, then leave, so he just drifted around from town to town, dragging this big red trunk behind him. finally one night he come in here and begins drinking. tells me that he is just a tired old man, needs a real quiet place to do his research. I kept putting him off. lotta nuts come in here, ya know."

"yeh," I said.

"then, man, he kept getting drunker and drunker, and he laid it down to me. he had designed a mechanical woman who could give a man a better fuck than any woman created throughout the centuries! plus no Kotex, no shit, no arguments!"

"I been looking," I said, "for a woman like that all my life."

Tony laughed. "every man has. I thought he was crazy, of course, until one night after closing I went down to his rooming house with him and he took the FUCK MACHINE out of the red trunk."

"and?"

"it was like going to heaven before you died."

"let me guess the rest," I asked Tony.

"guess."

Von Brashlitz and his FUCK MACHINE are upstairs at your place right now."

"uh huh," said Tony.

"how much?"

"twenty bucks a piece."

"20 bucks to fuck a machine?"

"he's outdone whatever Created us. you'll see."

"Petey the Owl will blow me for a buck."

"Petey the Owl is o.k. but he ain't no invention that beats the gods."

I shoved over my 20.

"so help me, Tony, if this is some crazy kind of hot-weather gag, you've lost your best customer!"

"like you said earlier, we're all crazy anyhow. It's up to you."

"right," I said.

"I only get 50 percent, ya gotta understand. the rest goes to Von Brashlitz. 500 buck pension ain't much with inflation and taxes, and Von B. drinks schnapps like crazy."

"let's make it," I said, "you've got 40 bucks. where's this immortal FUCK MACHINE?"

Tony lifted a partition of the bar, said, "come through here.

take the stairway to the back rear, just go up there, knock, say,

"Tony sent us'."

"any door #?"

"door #69."

"oh, hell yes," I said, "what else?"

we found the stairway. walked up. "Tony will do anything for a gag," I said.

we walked along, there it was: door #69.

I knocked: "Tony sent us."

"ah, do come in, gentleman!"

here was this old horny-looking freak, glass of schnapps in his hand, double-lensed glasses. just like the old-timed movies. he appeared to be having a visitor, a young thing, almost too young, looking flimsy and strong at the same time.

she crossed her legs, flashing all the bit: nylon knees, nylon thighs, and just that tiny part there where the long stockings ended and just that touch of flesh began. she was all ass and breast, nylon legs, clean blue laughing eyes-

"gentleman, ---my daughter, Tanya-"

"what?"

"ah, yes, I know, I am so-old- but like the myth of the black man with the ever-huge cock, there is also the myth of dirty old Germans who never stop fucking, you may believe what you wish to. this is my daughter, Tanya, anyhow-"

"hello, boys," she laughed.

then we all looked toward the door which was labeled: FUCK MACHINE STORAGE ROOM.

he finished off his schnapps.

"and so- you boys came over for the best FUCK ever, ya?"

"Daddy!" said Tanya, "must you always be so crude?"

Tanya recrossed her legs, higher this time, and I almost came.

then the professor finished another schnapps, then got up and walked over to the door labeled FUCK MACHINE STORAGE ROOM. he turned and smiled at us, then very slowly opened the door. he walked on in and came out rolling this thing on what looked like a hospital bed on wheels.

it was NAKED, a clod of metal.

the prof rolled the damn thing right out in front of us, then began humming some rotten song, probably something from the German.

a clod of metal with this hole in the center. the professor had an oil can in his hand, poked it into the hole and began punching in quite a quantity of this oil, meanwhile humming this insane German song.

he kept punching the oil in, then looked back over his shoulder and said, "nice, ya?" then he went back to work, pumping in the oil.

Indian Mike looked at me, tried to laugh, said, "god damn-we've been taken again!"

"yeah." I said, "it seems like it's been 5 years since I been laid, but I'll be damned if I'll stick my cock into that mound of hard lead!"

Von Brashlitz laughed. walked over to his liquor cabinet, found another 5th. of schnapps, poured a goody, sat down facing us. "as we in Germany began knowing that the war was lost, and the net began to tighten---down to the final battle of Berlin-we knew that the war had taken on a new essence---the real war then became who was to grab the most German scientists. If Russia got well, I don't know how it really came out- numerically or in terms of scientific brain-power. I only know that the Americans got to me first, snapped me up, took me away in a car, gave me a drink, put pistols to my head, made promises, talked madly. I signed everything-

"all right," I said, "so much for history. but I'm still not going to stick my dick, my poor little dick into that hunk of sheetmetal or whatever it is! Hitler must have really been a madman to nursemaid you. I wish the Russians had gotten to your ass first! I want my 20 bucks back!"

Von Brashlitz laughed, "heeeheeeheeehe-it is just my little joke, nien? heeeheeeheeehe!"

he shoved that mound of lead back into the closet.slammed the door. "oh, heheeehee!" had a bit more schnapps.

Von B. poureed another schnapps. he really put them down.

"gentlemen, I am an artist and an inventor! my FUCK MACHINE is really my daughter, Tanya-

"more little jokes, Von?" I asked.

"joke nothing! Tanya! go over and sit in the gentleman's lap."

Tanya laughed, got up, walked over and sat in my lap. a FUCK MACHINE? I couldn't believe it! her skin was skin, or so it seemed, and her tongue as it worked into my mouth as we kissed, it was not

mechanical - each movement was different, responding to my own. I was busy at it, ripping her blouse from her breasts, working tangled; we somehow got to standing - and I took her standing up, my hands reaching down, spreading her asshole as I pumped, she came - I could feel the throbbing, and I joined.

it was the best fuck I had ever had!

Tanya went to the bathroom, cleaned-up and showered, dressed-up again for Indian Mike. I guess.

"man's greatest invention," Von Brashlitz said quite seriously. he was quite right.

then Tanya came out and sat on MY lap.

"NO! NO! TANYA! IT'S THE OTHER MAN'S TURN! YOU JUST FINISHED FUCKING THAT ONE!"

she didn't seem to hear. and it was strange, even for a FUCK MACHINE, because, really, I had never been a very good lover.

"do you love me?" she asked.

"yes."

"I love you. and I am so happy. and- I'm not supposed to be alive. you know that, don't you?"

"god damn it!" screamed the old man, "this FUCKING MACHINE!" he walked over to this varnished box with the word TANYA printed on the side. there were these little wires sprouting out of it; there were dials, and needles that quivered, and many colors, lights that blinked on and off, things that ticked-Von B. was the craziest pimp I had ever met, he kept playing with the dials, then he looked at Tanya:

"25 YEARS! damn near a lifetime to build you! I even had to hide you from HITLER! and now- you try to turn into a mere and ordinary bitch!"

"I'm not 25," said Tanya, "I'm 24." "you see? you see? just like a common bitch!"

he went back to his dials.

"you've put on a different shade of lipstick," I said to Tanya.

"you like it?"

"oh, yes!"

she leaned over and kissed me.

Von B. kept playing with the dials. I felt that he would win.

Von Brashlitz turned to Indian Mike. "it's just a minor kink in the machine. trust me. I'll get it straight in a minute, ya?"

"I hope so," said Indian Mike, "I've got 14 inches waiting and am twenty bucks down.

"I love you," Tanya told me, "I will never fuck any other man. If I can't have you, I won't have anybody."

"I'll forgive you, Tanya, for anything that you do."

the prof was getting pissed. he kept turning the dials but nothing was happening. "TANYA! It is time for you to FUCK the OTHER man! I am- getting tired-must have a bit of schnapps-be off to sleep-Tanya-

"ah," said Tanya, "you rotten old fuck! you and your schnapps, and then nibbling at my tits all night, so I can't even sleep while you can't even raise a decent hard! you're disgusting!"

"VAS?"

"I SAID, 'YOU CAN'T EVEN RAISE A DECENT HARD!'"

"you, Tanya, will pay for this! you are MY creation, I am not yours!"

he kept turning his magic knobs, I mean, on the machine. he was quite angry, and you could see that, somehow, the anger gave him a vital brilliance beyond himself, "just wait, Mike. all I have to do it to adjust the electronics! Wait! a short! I see it!"

then he leaped up. this guy they had saved from the Russians. he looked at Indian Mike. "it's straight now! the machine is in order! have fun!"

then he walked over to his schnapps bottle, poured another goody, sat down to watch.

Tanya got off of my lap and walked over to Indian Mike. I watched Tanya and Indian Mike embrace.

Tanya worked Indian Mike's zipper down, got his cock out, and man he had plenty of cock! he'd said 14 inches but it looked more like 20.

then Tanya put both her hands around Mike's cock.

he moaned in glory.

then she ripped the whole cock right out of and off of his body. threw it to the side.

I saw the thing roll along the rug like an insane sausage, dribbling little sad trailets of blood. It rolled up against a wall. then stayed there like something with a head but no legs and no place to go-which was true enough.

next, here came the BALLS flying through the air. a heavy, looping sight. they simply landed upon the center of the rug and didn't know what to do but bleed.

so, they bled.

Von Brashlitz, the hero of the America-Russ invasion took a hard look at what was left of Indian Mike, my old beer-drinking buddy, very red on the floor, flowing from the center - Von B took the highroad, down the stairway-room 69 had done everything but that.

and then I asked her: "Tanya, the heat will be here very quickly. shall we dedicate the room number to our love?"

"of course, my love!"

we made it, just in time, and the stupid heat ran in.

one of the learned then pronounced Indian Mike dead.

and since Von B. was a kind of U.S.Govt. product, there was a hell of a lot of people around - various chickenshit officials - firemen, reporters, the cops, the inventor, the C.I.A., the F.B.I., and various other forms of human shit.

Tanya came over and sat in my lap. "they will kill me now.

please try not to be sad." I didn't answer.

then Von Brashlitz was screaming, pointing to Tanya - "I TELL YOU, GENTLEMEN, SHE HAS NO FEELING! I SAVED THE DAMN THING FROM HITLER! I tell you, it is nothing but a MACHINE!"

they all just stood there, nobody believed Von B.

it was simply the most beautiful machine, and so-called woman, they had ever seen.

"Oh shit! You idiots! Every woman is a fucking machine, can't you see that? They play for the highest bidder! THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS LOVE! THAT IS A FAIRY-TALE MIRAGE LIKE CHRISTMAS!"

they still wouldn't believe.

"THIS is only a machine! have FEAR! WATCH!"

VonBrashlitz grabbed one of Tanya's arms.

ripped it completely off her body.

and inside - inside the hole of her shoulder - you could see it - there was nothing but wire and tubes - coiled and running things - plus some minor substance that faintly resembled blood.

I saw Tanya standing there with this coil of wire hanging from her shoulder, where the arm used to be, she looked at me:

"please, for me to! I asked you to try not to be too sad."

I watched as they ganged her, and ripped and raped and tore.

I couldn't help it. I put my head down between my legs and cried-

also, Indian Mike never got his 20 bucks worth.

some months went by. I never went back to the bar. There was a trial but the govt. exonerated Von B. and his machine. I moved to another town. far away. and one day sitting in a barbershop, I picked up this sex mag. here was an ad: "Blow up your own little dolly! \$29.95. Resistant rubber material, very durable. Chains and whips included in package. A bikini, bras, panties. 2 wigs, lipstick and small jar of love-potion included. Von Brashlitz Co."

I sent him a money order. some box number in Mass. he had moved too.

the package arrived in about 3 weeks. very embarrassing. I

didn't have a bicycle pump, and then I got the hots when I took the thing out of the package. I had to go down to the corner gas station and use their air hose.

it looked better as it blew up. big tits. big ass.

"whatcha got there, pal?" the gas station man asked me.

"look, man, I'm just borrowing a little air. don't I buy a lot of gas here, huh?"

"o.k., that's o.k., you can have the air. I just damn well can't help wondering whatcha got there-"

"just forget it!" I said.

"JESUS! look at those TITS!"

"I AM looking, asshole!"

I left him there with his tongue hanging out, then threw her over my shoulder and made it back to my place. I carried her into the bedroom.

the big question was yet to come?

I spread the legs and looked for some kind of opening.

Von B. hadn't completely slipped.

I climbed on top and began kissing that rubber mouth. now and then I reached for one of the giant rubber tits and sucked upon it. I had put a yellow wig on her and rubbed the love-potion all over my cock. It didn't take much love-potion. maybe he'd sent a year's worth.

I kissed her passionately behind the ears, stuck my finger up her ass, kept pumping. then I leaped off, chained her arms behind her back, there was this little lock and key and then I whipped her ass good with the leather thongs.

god, I gotta be nuts! I thought.

then I flipped her over and put it back in. humped and humped. frankly, it was rather boring. I imagined male dogs screwing female cats; I imagined 2 people fucking through the air as they jumped from the Empire State Building. I imagined a pussy as large as an octopus, crawling toward me, wet and stinking and aching for an orgasm. I remembered all the panties, knees, legs, tits, pussies I had ever seen. the rubber was sweating; I was sweating.

"I love you, darling!" I whispered into one of her rubber ears.

I hate to admit it, but I forced myself to come into that lousy hunk of rubber. It was hardly a Tanya at all.

I took a razor blade and cut the thing all to shit. dumped it out with the beercans.

how many men in America bought those stupid things?

or then you can pass half a hundred fuck machines in a 10 minute walk on almost any main sidewalk of America - the only difference being that they pretended that they were human.

poor Indian Mike. with that 20 inch dead cock.

all the poor Indian Mikes. all the climbers into Space. all the whores of Vietnam and Washington.

poor Tanya, her belly had been a hog's belly. veins the veins of a dog. she rarely shatted or pissed, she had just fucked - heart, voice and tongue borrowed from others - there were only supposed to be 17 possible organ transplants at that time. Von B. was far ahead of them.

poor Tanya, who had only eaten a little - mostly cheap cheese and raisins. she had had no desire for money or property or large new cars or overexpensive homes. she had never read the evening paper. had no desire for colored television, new hats, rain boots, backfence conversation with idiot wives; nor had she desired a husband who was a doctor, a stockbroker, a congressman or a cop. and the guy at the gas station keeps asking me, "hey, what happened to that thing you brought down here one day and blew up with the air hose?"

but he doesn't ask anymore. I buy my gas at a new place. I don't even get my hair cut anymore where I saw that magazine with the Von Brashlitz rubber dolly sex ad. I am trying to forget everything.

what would you do?

===

SIX INCHES

The first three months of my marriage to Sarah were acceptable but I'd say a little after that our troubles began. She was a good cook, and for the first time in years I was eating well. I began to put on weight. And Sarah began to make remarks.

"Ah, Henry, you're beginning to look like a turkey they're plumping for Thanksgiving."

"Ats right, baby," I told her.

I was a shipping clerk in an auto parts warehouse and the pay was hardly sufficient.

My only joys were eating, drinking beer and going to bed with Sarah. Not exactly a

rounded life but a man had to take what he could get. Sarah was plenty. Everything

about her spelled S-E-X. I had really gotten to know her at a Christmas party for the

employees at the warehouse. Sarah was a secretary there. I noticed none of the

fellows got near her at the party and I couldn't understand it. I had never seen a sexier woman and she didn't act the fool either. I got close to her and we drank and talked. She was beautiful. There was something odd about her eyes, though. They just kept looking into you and the eyelids didn't seem to blink. When she went to the restroom I walked over to Harry the truckdriver.

"Listen, Harry," I asked, "how come none of the boys make a play for Sarah?"

"She's a witch, man, a real witch. Stay away."

"There's no such thing as witches, Harry. All that has been disproven. All those women they burned at the stake in the old days, it was a cruel and a horrible mistake. There's no such thing as a witch."

"Well, maybe they did burn a lot of women wrongly, I can't say. But this bitch is a witch, take it from me."

"All she needs, Harry, is understanding."

"All she needs," said Harry, "is a victim."

"How do you know?"

"Facts," said Harry. "Two guys here, Manny, a salesman. And Lincoln, a clerk." "What happened?"

"They just kind of disappeared in front of our eyes, only so slowly--- you could see them going, vanishing..."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want to talk about it. You'd think I was crazy."

Harry walked off. Then Sarah came out of the lady's room. She looked beautiful.

"What did Harry tell you about me?" she asked.

"How did you know I was talking to Harry?"

"I know," she said.

"He didn't say much."

"Whatever he said, forget it. It's bullshit. I won't let him have any and he's jealous. He

likes to badmouth people."

"I'm not concerned with Harry's opinions," I told her.

"You and I are going to make it, Henry," she said.

She went to my apartment with me after the party and I'm telling you I've never been laid like that. She was the woman of all women. It was a month or so later that we were married. She quit her job right off, but I didn't say anything because I was so glad to have her. Sarah made her own clothes, did her own hair. She was a remarkable woman. Very remarkable.

But, as I said, it was after about 3 months that she began making these

remarks about my weight. At first they were just genial little remarks, then she began to get scornful about it. I came home one night and she said, "Take off your damned clothes!"

"What, my darling?"

"You heard me, bastard! Strip!"

Sarah was a little different then than I had ever seen her. I took off my clothes and underwear and threw them on the couch. She stared at me.

"Awful," she said, "what a lot of shit!"

"What, dear?"

"I said you look just like a big tub of shit!"

"Listen, honey, what's wrong? You got the rag on tonight?"

"Shut up! Look at that stuff hanging at your sides!"

She was right. There seemed to be a little pouch of fat on each side, hanging just above the hips. Then she doubled up her fists and hit me hard several times on each of the pouches.

"We've got to punch that shit! Break up the fat tissues, the cells..."

She punched me again, several times.

"Ow! Baby, that hurts!"

"Good! Now, hit yourself!"

"Hit myself?"

"Go ahead, damn you!"

I hit myself several times, quite hard. When I was finished the things were still there, though now they looked quite red.

"We're going to get that shit off of you," she told me.

I figured that it was love and decided to cooperate...

Sarah began counting my calories. She took away my fried foods, bread and potatoes, salad dressing, but I kept my beer. I had to show her who was wearing the pants in our family.

"No, damn it," I said, "I won't give up my beer. I love you very much but the beer stays!"

"All right," said Sarah, "we'll make it work anyway."

"Make what work?"

"I mean, get that shit off you, get you down to a desirable size."

"And what's a desirable size?" I asked.

"You'll see."

Each night when I got home she'd ask me the same question!

"Did you punch your sides today?"

"Oh, hell yes!"

"How many times?"

"400 punches on both sides, hard."

I would walk down the streets punching at my sides. People looked at me but it didn't matter after a while because I knew that I was accomplishing something and they weren't."

Things were working, marvelously. I came down from 225 to 197. Then from 197 to 184. I felt ten years younger. People remarked about how good I looked. Everybody except Harry the truck driver. Of course, he was just jealous because he never got into Sarah's panties. His tough shit.

One night on the scales I was down to 179.

I said to Sarah, "Don't you think we've come down enough? Look at me!" The things on my sides were long gone. My belly hung in. My cheeks looked as if I were sucking them in.

"According to the charts," said Sarah, "according to my charts, you've not yet reached a desirable size."

"Look," I told her, "I'm six feet tall. What is the desireable weight?"

And then Sarah answered me quite strangely.

"I didn't say 'desirable weight'," I said, 'desireable size'. This is the New Age, the Atomic Age, and most important the Age of Overpopulation. I am the Saviour of the World. I have the answer to the Overpopulation Explosion. Explosion. Let others work on Pollution. Solving Overpopulation is the root; it will solve Pollution and many other things too."

"What the hell are you talking about?" I asked, ripping the cap off a bottle of beer.

"Don't worry about it," she answered, "you'll find out."

Then I began to notice, as I stepped on the scales, that although I was still losing weight I didn't seem to be getting any thinner. It was strange. And then I noticed that my pantscuffs were hanging down over my shoes---ever so slightly, and that my shirtcuffs were hanging down a bit over my wrists. When I drove to work I notcied that the steering wheel seemed further away. I had to pull the car seat up a notch.

One night I got on the scales.

155.

"Look here, Sarah."

"Yes, darling?"

"There's something I don't understand."

"What?"

"I seem to be shrinking."

"Shrinking?"

"Oh, you fool! That's incredible! How can a man shrink? Do you really think that your diet is shrinking your bones? Bones melt! Reduction of calories only reduces fat. Don't be an idiot! Shrinking? Impossible!"

Then she laughed.

"All right," I said, "come here. Here's a pencil. Now I'm gonna stand against this wall. My mother used to do this with me as a kid when I was growing. Now put a line right there on the wall where the pencil hits after you place it straight across the top of my head."

"All right, silly," she said.

She drew the line.

A week later I was down to 131. It was happening faster and faster.

"Come here, Sarah."

"Yes, silly boy."

"Now, draw the line."

She drew the line, I turned around.

"Now see here, I've lost 24 pounds and 8 inches in the last week. I'm melting away! I'm now five feet two. This is madness! Madness! I've had enough. I've caught you cutting my pants legs, my shirt sleeves. It won't work. I'm going to begin eating again. I think that you are some kind of witch!"

It was soon after that the boss called me into the office

I climbed into the chair across from his desk.

"Henry Markson Jones II?"

"Of course, sir."

"Well, Jones, we've been watching you carefully. I'm afraid you just don't fit this job anymore. We hate to see you go like this...I mean, we hate to let you go like this, but..."

"Look, sir, I always do my best."

"We know you do, Jones, but you're just not doing a man's job back there anymore."

He let me go. Of course, I knew that I would get my unemployment compensation.

But I thought it was small of him to let me go like that...

I stayed home with Sarah. Which made it worse---she fed me. It got so I couldn't reach the refrigerator door anymore. And then she put me on a small silver chain.

Soon I was two feet tall. I had to use a potty chair to shit. But she still let me have my beer, as promised.

"Ah, my little pet," she said, "you're so small and cute!"

"I'm not a duck, I'm a man!"

"Oh my little sweet man-y-man!"

She picked me up and kissed me with her red lips...

Sarah got me down to being 6 inches tall. She carried me to the store in her purse. I could look out at the people through the little air holes she had poked in her purse. I will say one thing for the woman. She still allowed me to have my beer. I drank it by the thimble. A quart would last me a month. In the old days it was gone in 45 minutes. I was resigned. I knew that if she wished to do so she could make me vanish entirely. Better 6 inches than nothing. Even a little life becomes very dear when you near the end of life. So, I amused Sarah. It was all I could do. She made me little clothes and shoes and put me on top of the radio and turned on the music and said, "Dance, little one! Dance, my dunce! Dance, my fool!"

Well, I couldn't collect my unemployment compensation so I danced on top of the radio while she clapped her hands and laughed.

You know, spiders frightened me terribly and flies were the size of giant eagles, and if a cat ever caught me it would torture me like a small mouse. But life was still dear to me. I danced and sang and hung on. No matter how little a man has he will find that he will always settle for less. When I shit on the rug I would get spanked. Sarah put little pieces of paper around and I shit on them. And I ripped off little pieces of that paper to wipe my butt with. It felt like cardboard. I got hemorrhoids. Couldn't sleep nights. Feelings of inferiority, of being trapped. Paranoia? Anyhow, I felt good when I sang and danced and Sarah let me have my beer. She kept me at an exact six inches for some reason. What the reason was, it was beyond me. As almost everything else was beyond me.

I made up songs for Sarah, that's what I called them: Songs for Sarah:

"o, I'm just a little snot,
that's all right until I get hot,
then there's nothing to stick it in
except the fucking head of a pin!

Sarah would clap her hands and laugh.

"if ya wanna be an admir in the queen's navy
just be a clark for the fuckin' nark,
grow 6 inches tall and when the Queen goes to pee
you can peek up inter drippin' pussy..."

And Sarah would clap her hands and laugh. Well, that was all right. It had to be...

But one night something very disgusting happened. I was singing and dancing and Sarah was on the bed, naked, clapping her hands, drinking wine and laughing. I was putting on a good show. One of my best. But, as always, the top of the radio got hot and started burning my feet. I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Look, baby," I said, "I've had it. Take me down. Gimme a beer. No wine. You drink that cheapass wine. Gimme a thimble of that good beer."

"Sure, sweetie," she said, "you put on a wonderful show tonight. If Manny and Lincoln had acted as nice as you, they'd be here tonight. But they didn't sing or dance, they brooded. And worst of all, they objected to the Final Act."

"And what was the Final Act?" I asked.

"Now, sweetie, just drink your beer and relax. I want you to enjoy the Final Act. You are evidently a much more talented person than Manny or Lincoln. I do believe that we can have the Culmination of the Opposites."

"O, hell yes," I said, draining my beer. "Now give me a refill. And just what is the Culmination of the Opposites?"

"Enjoy your beer, little sweetie, you'll know soon enough."

I finished my beer and then the disgusting thing happened, a most disgusting thing. Sarah picked me up and placed me down between her legs, which she spread open just a bit. Then I was facing a forest of hair. I hardened my back and neck muscles, sensing what was to come. I was jammed into darkness and stench. I heard Sarah moan. Then Sarah began to move me slowly back and forth. As I said, the stench was unbearable, and it was difficult to breathe, but somehow there was air in there---various side-pockets and drafts of oxygen. Now and then my head, the top of my head bumped The Man in the Boat and then Sarah would let out an extra-illuminated moan.

Sarah began moving me faster and faster. My skin began to burn, it became harder to breathe; the stench became worse. I could hear her panting. It occurred to me that the sooner I ended the thing the less I would suffer. Each time I was rammed forward I would arch my back and neck, tilt everything of me into this hooking curve of a thing, bumping The Man in the Boat.

Suddenly I was ripped out of that terrible tunnel. Sarah held me up to her face.

"Come, you damned fiend of a thing! Come!" she demanded.

Sarah was totally drunk on wine and passion. I felt myself being rushed back into the tunnel. She worked me rapidly back and forth. Then suddenly I sucked air into my lungs to increase my size and then I gathered saliva into my jaws and spit it out---once, twice, 3 times, 4, 5, six times, then I stopped...The stench increased beyond all imagination and then, at last, I was lifted out into the air.

Sarah lifted me into the lamplight and began kissing me all over my

head and shoulders.

"O, my darling! o, my precious little cock! I love you!"

Then she kissed me with those horrible red and painted lips. I vomited. Then, spent in a swoon of wine and passion, she placed me between her breasts. I rested there and listened to her heart beat. She had taken me off of her damnd leash, that silver chain, but it didn't matter. I was hardly free. One of her massive breasts had fallen to one side and I seemed to be right over the heart. The heart of the witch. If I were the answer to the Population Explosion then why hadn't she used me as more than a thing of entertainment, a sexual toy? I stretched out there and listened to that heart. I decided that she was a witch. Then I glanced up. Do you know what I saw? A most amazing thing. Up in that little crevice below the headboard. A hat pin. Yes, a hat pin, long with one of those round purple glass things at the end of it. I walked up between her breasts, climbed her throat, got up on her chin(after much trouble), then walked quietly across her lips, and then she stirred a bit as I almost fell and had to grab to a nostril for support. Very slowly I got up by the right eye--- her head was tilted slightly to the left---and then I was up on the forehead, having gone past the temple, and I was up into the hair---very difficult, wading through. Then I stood and stretched---reached up and just managed to grab the hat pin. Coming down was faster but more treacherous. I almost lost my balance several times, carrying that hat pin. One fall and it was over. I laughed several times because it was so ridiculous. The outcome of an office party for the gang, Merry Christmas.

Then I was down under that massive breast again. I laid the hat pin down and listened again. I listened for the exact sound of the heart. I determined it to be at a spot exactly below a small brown birthmark. Then I stood up. I picked up the hat pin with its purple glass end, beautiful in the lamplight. And I thought, will it work? I was 6 inches tall and I judged the hat pin to be half again longer than 1.9 inches. The heart seemed closer than that.

I lifted the pin and plunged it in. Just below the birthmark.

Sarah rolled and convulsed. I held onto the hat pin. She almost threw me to the floor---which by comparative size seemed a thousand feet or more and would have killed me. I hung on. Her lips formed an odd sound.

Then she seemed to quiver all over like a woman freezing.

I reached up and jammed the remaining 3 inches of the pin down into her chest until the beautiful purple glass head of the pin was up against her skin.

Then Sarah was still, I listened.

I heard the heart, one two, one two, one two, one two, one...

It stopped.

And then with my little killer's hands, I clutched and gripped the bedsheet and made my way to the floor. I was 6 inches tall and real and

frightened and hungry. I found a hole in one of the bedroom screens which faced east and ran from ceiling to floor. I grabbed at the branch of a bush, climbed on, clambered along the branch to the inside of the bush. Nobody knew that Sarah was dead but I. But that had no realistic good. If I were to go on, I would have to have something to eat. But I couldn't help wondering how my case would be evolved in a court of law? Was I guilty? I ripped off a leaf and tried to eat it. No good. Hardly. Then I saw the lady in the court to the south set out a plate of catfood for her cat. I crawled out of the bush and worked my way toward the catfood, watching for animals and movements. It tasted worse than anything I had ever eaten but I had no choice. I ate all the catfood I could---death tasted worse. Then I walked over to the bush and climbed back into it.

There I was, 6 inches tall, the answer to The Population Explosion hanging in a bush with a bellyful of catfood.

There are details I don't want to bore you with. Escapes from cats and dogs and rats. Feeling myself growing bit by bit. Watching them carry Sarah's body out of there. Going in there and finding myself too small, still, to open the refrigerator door.

The day the cat almost caught me as I ate at his bowl. I had to break away.

I was then 8 or 10 inches tall, I was growing. I even scared pigeons. When you scare pigeons you know that you are getting there. I simply ran down the street one day, hiding along the shadows of buildings and down beneath hedges and the like. I kept running and hiding until I got outside a supermarket and I hid under a newspaper stand just outside the entrance to the store. Then, as a big woman walked up and the electric door opened, I walked in behind her. One of the clerks at a checkstand looked up as I walked in behind the woman:

"Hey, what the hell's that?"

"What?" a customer asked him.

"I thought I saw something," said the clerk, "maybe not. I hope not."

I somehow sneaked back to the storeroom without being seen. I hid behind some cartons of baked beans. That night I came out and had a fine feed. Potato salad, pickles, ham on rye, potato chips and beer, plenty of beer. It became about the same routine. Each day, all day, I hid in the storeroom and at night I'd come out and have a party. But I was growing and hiding was becoming more difficult. I got to watching the manager put the money in the safe each night. He was the last to leave. I counted the pauses as he put the money away each night. It seemed to be---7 right, 6 left, 4 right, 6 left, 3 right, open. I went over to the safe each night and tried the numbers. I had to make a kind of stairway out of empty cartons in order to get up to the dial. It didn't seem to work but I kept trying. Each night, I mean. Meanwhile I was growing fast. Perhaps I was 3 feet tall. The store had a small clothing section and I had to keep going into the larger sizes.

The population problem was returning. Then one night the safe opened. I had 23 thousand dollars in cash. I must have hit them the night before banking time. I took the key the manager used in order to get out without the burglar alarm ringing. Then I walked down the street and got a week's worth of lodging at the Sunset Motel. I told the lady I worked as a midget in the movies. It just seemed to bore her.

"No television or loud noises after ten p. m. That's our rule here."

She took my money, gave me a receipt and closed her door.

They key said room 103. I hadn't even looked at the room. The doors said 98, 99, 100, 101, I was walking north toward the Hollywood Hills, toward those mountains behind them, with the great and golden light of the Lord shining upon me, growing.

====

** 25 BUMS IN RAGS**

you know how it is with horseplayers. you hit it hot and you think it's all over. I had this place in back, even had my own garden, planted all kinds of tulips, which grew, beautifully and amazingly. I had the green hand. I had the green money. what system I had devised I can no longer remember, but it was working and I wasn't and that's a pleasant enough way to live. and there was Kathy. Kathy had it. the old guy next door would actually slobber at the mouth when he saw her. he was always knocking at the door.

"Kathy! oooh, Kathy! Kathy!"

I'd answer the door, just dressed in my shorts.

"oooooh, I thought-"

"I thought Kathy-"

"Kathy's taking a shit. any message?"

"I-bought these bones for your dog."

he had a big bag of dry chicken bones.

"feeding a dog chicken bones is like putting broken razor blades in a child's cereal. you trying to kill my dog, fucker?"

"oh, no!"

"then jam the bones and split."

"I don't understand."

"stick that bag of chickenbones up your ass and get the hell out of here!"

"I just thought Kathy-"

"I told you, Kathy's taking a SHIT!"

I slammed the back door on him.

"you shouldn't be so hard on the old fart, Hank, he says I remind him of his daughter when she was young."

"all right, so he made it with his daughter. let him screw swiss cheese. I don't want him at the door."

"I suppose you think I let him in after you go to the track?"

"I don't even wonder about that."

"what do you wonder about?"

"all I wonder is which one of you rides topside."

"you son of a bitch. you can leave now!"

I was getting on my shirt and pants, then socks and shoes.

I won't be 4 blocks away before you're locked in embrace."

she threw a book at me. I wasn't looking and the edge of the book hit me over the right eye. a cut started and a spot of blood hit my hand as I tied my right shoe.

"I'm sorry, Hank."

"don't get NEAR me!"

I went out and got into the car, backed out the drive at 35 miles an hour, taking part of the hedge with me, then some of the stucco from the front house with my left rear fender. there were blood on my shirt then and I took out my handkerchief and held it over the eye. it was going to be a bad Saturday at the track. I was mad.

I bet like the atomic bomb was on the way. I wanted to make ten grand. I bet longshots. I didn't cash a ticket. I lost \$500. all I

had

going to be a terrible Saturday night. I parked the car and went in the back door.

"Hank-"

"what?"

"you look like death. what happened?"

"I blew it. I blew the roll. 500."

"jesus. I'm sorry," she said, "it's my fault." she came up to me, put her arms around me. "god damn, I'm sorry, daddy. it was my fault, I know it."

"forget it. you didn't make the bets."

"are you still mad?"

"no, no, I know you're not fucking that old turkey."

"can I get you something to eat?"

"no, no, just get us a fifth of whiskey and the paper."

I got up and went to the hidden money cache. we were down to \$180. well, it had been worse, many times, but I felt that I was on my way back to the factories and the warehouses, if I could get that. I came out with a ten. the dog still liked me. I pulled his ears. he didn't care how much money I had or how little. a real ace dog. yeah. I walked out of the bedroom. Kathy was putting on lipstick in front of the mirror. I pinched her on the ass and kissed her behind

the ear.

"get me some beer and cigars too. I need to forget."

she left and I listened to her heels clicking on the drive. she was as good a woman as I found and I had found her in a bar. I leaned back in the chair and stared at the ceiling. a bum. I was a bum. always this distaste for work, always trying to live off my luck. when Kathy came back I told her to pour a big one. she looked funny, and fine. we'd make love. we'd make love through the sadness. I just hated to see it go: car, house, dog, woman. it had been gentle and easy living.

I guess I was shaken because I opened the paper and looked at the WANT ADS.

"hey, Kathy, here's something. men wanted, Sunday. pay same day."

"oh, Hank, rest up tomorrow. you'll get those horses Tuesday. everything will look better then."

"but shit, baby, every buck counts! they don't run on Sunday. Caliente, yeah, but you can't beat that 25 percent Caliente take and the distance. I can get good and drunk tonight and then pick up this shit tomorrow. those extra bucks might make the difference."

Kathy looked at me funny. she'd never heard me talk like that before. I always acted like the money would be there. that 500 dollar loss had left me in shock. she phoned me another tall one. I drank it right off. shock, shock, lord, lord, the factories. the wasted days, the days without meaning, the day of bosses and idiots, and the slow and brutal clock.

we drank until two a.m., just like at the bar, then went to bed, mad love, slept. I set the alarm for four a.m., was up and in the car and downtown skidrow at 4:30 a.m. I stood on the corner with about 25 bums in rags. they stood there rolling cigarettes and drinking wine.

well, it's money, I thought. I'll get back-some day I'll vacation in Paris or Rome. shit on these guys. I don't belong here. then something said to me, that's what they're ALL thinking I don't belong here. each one of THEM is thinking that about HIM-SELF. and they're right, so?

the truck came along about 5:10a.m. and we climbed in.

god, I could be sleeping along behind Kathy's fine ass about now. but it's money.

guys were talking about just getting off the boxcar. they stank, poor fellows. but they didn't seem miserable. I was the only one who was miserable.

I would be getting up about now, taking a piss. I would be having a beer in the kitchen, looking for the sun, seeing it get

lighter,

peeking at my tulips. then going back to bed with Kathy.

the guy next to me said, "hey, buddy!"

"yeah," I said.

"I'm a Frenchman," he said.

I didn't answer.

"can you use a blowjob?"

"no," I said.

"I saw one guy blowing another in the alley this morning. this one guy had this LONG THIN white dick and the other guy was still sucking and the come was dripping out of his mouth. I watched and watched and god I'm hot as hell. let me suck your dick, buddy!"

"no," I told him, "I don't feel like it right now."

"well, if I can't do that, maybe you can suck mine."

"get the hell out of here!" I told him.

the Frenchman moved further back into the truck. by the time we'd gone another mile his head was bobbing. he was doing it right in front of everybody, to some old guy who looked like an Indian.

"GO, BABY, GET IT ALL!!!" somebody shouted.

some of the bums laughed but most of them were just silent, drinking their wine and rolling their cigarettes. the old Indian acted like it wasn't even happening. by the time we got to Vermont the Frenchman had got it all and we all climbed out, the Frenchman, the Indian, myself and the other bums. they gave us each a little tab of doughnut and a coffee. the waitress held her nose up. we stank. dirty cocksuckers.

then somebody finally hollered, "everybody out!"

I followed them out and we went into a big room and sat in these chairs like they used to have in school, or college rather, say like in Music Appreciation. with the big slab of wood for the right arm so you could open your notebook and write on it there. anyhow, so there we sat for another 45 minutes. then some snot kid with a can of beer in his hand, said, "o.k., get your SACKS!" the bums all leaped up at ONCE and RAN to this large back room. what the hell? I thought. I slowly walked on back and looked in the other room. the bums were in there pushing and fighting for the best paper carriers. it was deadly and senseless battle. when the sack I found on the floor. it was very dirty and full of rips and

holes.

when I walked out into the other room the bums all had their paper carriers on their backs, wearing them. I found a seat and just sat there with mine in my lap. somewhere along the line I think they had gotten our names; I think it was before you get your coffee and doughnut tab you gave your name. so we sat there and were called

out in groups of 5 or 6 or 7. this took, it seemed, another hour.
anyhow, by the time I got into the back of this smaller truck with a few others, the sun was well up. they gave us such a little map. I recognized the streets all right: GOD OH MIGHTY, OUT OF THE WHOLE TOWN OF LOS ANGELES THEY HAD GIVEN ME MY OWN NEIGHBORHOOD!

I had the rep as drinker, gambler, hustler, man of leisure shack-job specialist. how could I be SEEN with that filthy dirty sack on my back? delivering newspapers full of ads?

they put me out on my corner. very familiar surroundings, indeed. there was the flowershop, there was the bar, the gas station, everything- around the corner my little house with Kathy sleep- in her warm bed. even the dog was asleep. well, it's Sunday morning, I thought. nobody will see me. they sleep late. I'll run through the god damned route. and I did.

I ran up and down 2 streets very quickly and nobody saw the great man of class and soft white hands and great soulful eyes. I was going to get by with it.

then up the 3rd street. it was going well until I heard the voice of a little girl. she was in her yard. about 4 years old.

"hey, mister!"

"oh, yes? little girl? what is it?"

"where's your dog?"

"oh, haha, he's still asleep."

"oh."

I always walked the dog up that street. there was a vacant lot there he always shit in. that did it. I took all my remaining newspapers and dumped them into the back of an abandoned car near the freeway. the car had been there for months with all the wheels gone. I didn't know what it meant. but I put all the newspapers on the rear floor. then I walked around the corner and went into my house.

Kathy was still asleep. I awakened her.

"Kathy! Kathy!"

"oh, Hank-everything all right?"

the dog ran on in and I petted him.

"you know what those sons of bitches DID?"

"what?"

"they gave me my own neighborhood to deliver papers in!"

"oh, well, it's not nice but I don't think the people will mind."

"don't you understand? I've built this REP! I'm the hustler! I can't be seen with a bag of shit on my back!"

"oh, I don't think you have that REP! it's just in your head."

"listen, are you going to give me a lot of shit? you've had your

ass in this warm bed while I've been out there with a lot of cock-suckers!"

"don't be angry. I've got to pee. wait a minute."

I waited out there while she took her sleepy female piss. god, they were SLOW! the cunt was a very inefficient pissing machine. dick had it all beat.

Kathy came out.

"please don't worry, Hank. I'll put on an old dress and help you deliver the papers. we'll finish fast. people sleep late on Sundays."

"but I've already been SEEN!"

"you've already been seen? who saw you?"

"that little girl in the brown house with the weeds on Westmoreland st."

"you mean Myra?"

"I don't know her name!"

"she's only 3."

"I don't know how old she is! she asked about the dog!"

"what about the dog?"

"she asked where it WAS!"

"come on, I'll help you get rid of the papers."

Kathy was climbing into an old ripped dress."

"I got rid of them. it's over. I dumped them into the back of that abandoned car."

"will they catch you?"

"FUCK! who cares?"

I went into the kitchen and got a beer. when I got back Kathy was in bed again. I sat in the chair.

"Kathy?"

"uh?"

"you just don't realize who you're living with! I'm class, real class! I'm 34 but I haven't worked 6 or 7 months since I was 18 years old. and no money. look at my hands! I've got hands like a pianist!"

"Class? you OUGHT to HEAR yourself when you're drunk! you're horrible, horrible!"

"are you trying to start some shit again, Kathy? I've kept you in furs and hundred proof since I dug you outa that gin mill on Alvarado st."

Kathy didn't answer.

"in fact," I told her, "I am a genius but nobody knows it but me."

"I'll buy that," she said. then she dug her head into the pillow and went back to sleep.

I finished the beer, had another, then went 3 blocks over and sat on the steps of a closed grocery store that the map said would be the meeting place where the man would pick me up. I sat there from 10 a.m. to 2:30 a.m. It was dull and dry and stupid and torturous and senseless. then the rotten truck came at 2:30 p.m.

"hey. buddy?"

"yum?"

"you finished already?"

"yum."

"you're fast!"

"yep."

"I want you to help this one guy finish his route."

oh, fuck.

I got into the truck and then he let me off. here was this guy. he was CREEPING. he threw each paper with great care upon each porch. each porch got special treatment. and he seemed to enjoy his work. he was on his last block. I finished the whole thing off in 5 minutes. then we sat and waited for the truck. for an hour. they drove us back to the office and we sat in our school chairs again. then two snot-nosed kids came out with cans of beer in their hands. one called off names and the other gave each man his money.

on a blackboard written in chalk behind the heads of the snot-noses was a message:

ANY MAN WHO WORKS FOR US 30 DAYS IN A ROW
WITHOUT MISSING A DAY
WILL BE GIVEN
A FREE
SECOND HAND SUIT.

I kept watching as each man was handed his money. it couldn't be true. it APPEARED that each man was given three one dollar bills. at the time, the lowest basic wage scale by law was one dollar an hour. I had been on that corner at 4:30 a.m. now it was 4:30 p.m. to me, that was 12 hours.

I was one of the last names called. I think I was 3rd from last. not a one of those bums raised hell. they just took the \$3 and went out the door.

"Bukowski!" the snot-nosed kid hollered.

I walked up. the other snot-nosed kid counted out 3 very clean and crisp Washingtons.

"listen," I said, "don't you guys realize that there is a basic wage law? one buck an hour."

the snot-nose raised his beer. "we deduct for transportation,

breakfast and so forth. we only pay for average working time which we figure to be about 3 hours or so."

"I see twelve hours out of my life and I've got to take a bus downtown now to go get my car and drive in back in."

"you're lucky to have a car."

"and you're lucky I don't jam that can of beer up your ass!"

"I don't set company policy, sir, please don't blame me."

"I'm going to report you to the State Labor Board!"

"Robinson!" the other snot-nose hollered.

the next to last burn got p from his seat for his \$3 as I walked out the door and on up to Beverly blvd. to wait for the bus. by the time I got home and got a drink in my hand it was 6 p.m. or so. I really got drunk then. I was so frustrated I banged Kathy 3 times. broke a window. cut my foot on broken glass. sang songs from Gilbert and Sullivan, which I once learned from an insane English teacher who taught an English class which began at 7 a.m. in the morning. L.A.City College. Richardson was his name. and maybe he wasn't insane. but he taught me Gilbert and Sullivan and gave me a "d" in English for showing up no sooner than 7:30 a.m. with hang-over, WHEN I showed. but that's something else. Kathy and I had some laughs that night, and although I broke a few things I was not as nasty and stupid as usual.

and that Tuesday at Hollywood Park I won \$140 at the races and I was once again the quite casual lover, hustler, gambler, reformed pimp and tulip grower. I drove slowly up the driveway, savoring the last of the evening sun. then I strolled in through the back door. Kathy had on some meat loaf with plenty of onions and crap and spices in it just the way I liked it. she was bent over at the stove and I grabbed her from the back.

"ooooo-"

"listen, baby-"

"yeah?"

she stood there with the large dripping spoon in her hand. I slipped ten into the neck of her dress.

"I want you to get me a fifth of whiskey."

"sure, sure."

"and some beer and cigars. I'll watch the food."

she took off her apron and went into the bathroom for a moment. I could hear her humming. a moment later I sat in my chair and listened to her heels clicking down the drive. there was a tennis ball. I took the tennis ball and bounced it on the floor so it hit the wall and zoomed high into the air. the dog who was 5 feet long and 3 feet tall, + wolf, leaped into the air, there was the snap of teeth and he had that tennis ball, up near the ceiling. for a moment he

seemed to hang up there. what a beautiful dog, what a beautiful life. when he hit the floor I got up to check the meatloaf. it was all right. everything was.

===

NON-HORSESHIT HORSE ADVICE

so, the Hollywood Park meet has begun, and naturally I have been out a couple of times, and the scene is not very variable: the horses look the same and the people a little worse, the horseplayer is a combination of extreme conceit, madness and greed. one of Freud's main pupils(I don't recall his name right now, only remember reading the book) said that gambling is a substitute for masturbation. of course, the problem with any direct statement is that it can easily become an untruth, a part truth, a lie or a wilted gardenia. yet, checking out the ladies (between races) I do find the same oddity: before the first race they sit with their skirts down as much as possible, and as each race proceeds the skirts climb higher and higher, until just before the 9th race it takes all one's facilities not to commit rape upon one of the darlings. whether it is a sense of masturbation that causes this or whether the dear little things need rent and bean money, I don't know, probably a combo. I saw one lady leap over 2 or 3 rows of seats after getting a winner, and screaming, screeching, divine as an iced-grapefruit vodka across the top of a hangover. "she's getting hers now," said my girlfriend.

"yeah," I said, "but I wish I had gotten there first."

for those of you unfamiliar with the basic principles of horsewagering, allow me to divert you with a few basics. the difficulty in the average person leaving the track with any money at all is easily propounded if you will follow this - the track and the state take roughly 15% out of each dollar bet, plus breakage. the 15% is divided about in half between the state and the track. in other words, 85 cents out of each dollar is returned to the holders of winning tickets. breakage is the penny difference on the ten cent breakdown of the payoff. in other words, say if the totalizer machine breaks the payoff down to a \$16.84 payoff, then the winning player gets \$16.80, the 4 cents on each winning bet going elsewhere. now I am not sure, because the thing is not publicized but I also believe that on, say, a \$16.89 payoff, the payoff is still \$16.80 and the 9 cents goes elsewhere, but I am not positive of this and "Open City" certainly can't afford a libel suit now or ever and neither can I, so I will not make this a positive presumption, but if any "Open City" reader has the facts on this, I do wish he would write O.C. and advise me, this penny breakage alone could make millionaires out of any of us.

now take the average goof who has worked all week and is looking for a

little bit of luck, entertainment, masturbation, take 40 of them, give them each \$100, and presuming that they are average bettors, the general medium based upon a 15% take, forgetting breakage, would have 40 of them leaving with \$85. but it doesn't work that way 0 35 of them will leave almost completely broke, one or two of them will win \$85 or \$150 by sheer fortune of falling upon the right horses and not knowing why. the 3 or 4 others will break even.

all right, then, who is getting all this money that the little bettor who works a turret lathe or drives a bus all week, losers? easy: the betting stables who send off bad-form horses in a spot that it is profitable for them to win in. stables cannot make it upon purse money alone, that is, most of them can't. give a stable a top handi- cap horse and they are in, but even they must resort to pulls and deliberately bad races in order to get weight off for a top money race. in other words, say a top-weighted horse gifted with 130 pounds by the track handicapper for an early \$25,000 race will tend to lose this race and get weight off on that performance for a later \$100,000 race. now these statements cannot be proven but if you will follow this conjecture you might make a little money or at least save a little. but it is the stables who must race in the lower class races with lower purses who must maneuver their horses for a price. in some cases, the owner of the horse or horses himself is not aware of the maneuvering; this is because trainers and grooms, hot-walkers, exercise jocks are grossly underpaid (in time and effort put in, compared to other industries) and their only way to get out is to put one over. the racetracks are aware of this and attempt to keep the game clean, to give it a holy sheen of honesty, but for all their efforts- barring tough guys, cons, syndicates, operators, from the track, there are still "goodies" put over on the crowd, a so-called pig who "wakes up" and wins by 3 to 10 lengths at odds of 5 to up to 50 to 1. but these are only animals, not machines. so there's an excuse, an excuse to haul away millions in wheelbarrows from the racetrack, tax-free. human greed will not relent, it will continue to feed itself. the communist party be damned.

all right, that's bad enough. let's take something else. besides the public being automatically wrong just by instinct (ask the stock- broker - when you want to know which way to move just move the opposite from the big crowd with the small, 'scared, tight money). but the something else is this: a possible mathematic. taking the dollar base - you invest the first dollar, you get back 85 cents. automatic take. second race, you have to ass 15 cents, then another 15% take. now take 9 races and take a 15% take on a break-even basis - upon your original dollar. is it just 9 times 15% or is it much more? it would take one of these Caltech cats to tell me and I don't know any Caltech cats. anyway, if you have followed me up to here, you must realize that it is very difficult to make a "living" at the racetrack as some starry-eyed dreamers would like to do.

I am a "hard-nose": that is, any given day at any track you just ain't gonna take much money from me; on the other hand, I ain't gonna make much. naturally, I have some good plays and I'd be a damn fool to reveal them to everybody because then they would not work. once the public gets onto something it is dead and it changes. the public is not allowed to win in any game ever invented and that includes the American Revolution. but for "Open City" readers I have a few basics that might save you a little money. take heed.

a/ watch your underlay shots. an underlay is a horse that closes in odds under the trackman's morning line. in other words, the trackman lists the horse 10 to 1 and it is going off at 6 to 1. money is much more serious than anything else. check your underlays carefully, and if the line is just not a careless mistake by the trackman and the horse does not show any recent fast works or a switch to a "name" jockey, and if the horse is not dropping weight and is running against the same class, you will probably get a fairly good run for your money.

b/ lay off the closers. this is a horse, that say closed from 5 to 16 lengths from the beginning call to the last and still did not win and is coming back against the same or similar. the crowd loves the "closer," through fear of tight money and stupidity, but the closer is generally a lard-ass, lazy and only passes tired horses who have been running and fighting for the front end. not only does the crowd love this type of junk-horse but they will consistently bet him down to odds less than 1/3 of his worth. even though this type of horse continually runs out, the crowd out of fear will go to him because they are tight up against the rent money and feel that a closer possesses some kind of super strength. 90% of the races are won by horses on the front end or near the front end of all the running, at plausible and reasonable prices.

c/ if you must bet a "closer" bet him in shorter races, 6 or 7 furlongs, where the crowd believes he does not have time "to get up." here they go for the speed and are stuck again. 7 furlongs is the best closer's race in the business because of only one curve. a speed horse gets the advantage of being out in front and saving ground on the turns. 7 furlongs with one curve and the long backstretch is the perfect closer's race; much better than a mile and a quarter, even better than a mile and one half. I am giving you some good stuff here, I hope you heed it.

d/ watch your toteboard - money in American society is more serious than death and you hardly get anything for nothing. if a horse is listed at 6 to 1 on the morning line and he is going off at 114 to 25 to 1, forget it. either the trackman had a hangover when he made his morning line or the stable just isn't going that race. you don't get anything free in this world; if you don't know anything about racing, do bet horses that go off to their morning line. large overlays are nil and almost impossible. all the little grandmamas go home to eat bitter toast with gummed teeth upon Papa's

retirement death certificate.

e/ only bet when you can lose. I mean without ending up sleeping on a park bench or missing 3 or 4 meals. the main thing, get the rent down first. avoid pressures. you will be luckier. and remember what the pros say, "If you've got to lose, lose in front." in other words, make them beat you. if you're going to lose anyhow, then to hell with it, get you a dancer out of the gate, you've got it won until they beat you, until they pass you. the price is usually generous because the public hates what they call a "quitter" - a horse that opens daylight on the pack and still manages to lose. this looks bad to them. to me a "quitter" is any horse that does not win a race.

f/ any profit-loss venture is not based upon the number of winners you have but upon the number of winners at the price. to basics, you can have three 6 to 5 winners in 9 races and wash out, but you can have one 9 to 1 and one 5 to 1 and get over. this does not always mean that a 6 to 5 is a bad bet, but if you know little or next to nothing about racing, it might be best to hold your bets between 7 to 2 and 9 to 1. or if you must indulge in wild fancies, keep your bets between 11 and 1q9 to 1. in fact, many 18 or 19 to 1's bounce in if you can find the right ones.

but, actually, a man can never know enough about horse racing or anything else. just when he thinks he knows he is just beginning. I remember one summer I won 4 grand at Hollypark and I went down to Del Mar in a new car, cocky, poetic, knowledgeable, I had the world by the nuts, and I rented myself a little motel by the sea and the ladies showed up as the ladies will when you are drinking and laughing and don't care and have some money (a fool and his money are soon parted) and I had a party every night and a new broad every other night, and it was a kind of joke I used to tell them, the place was right over the sea, and I'd say, after much drinking and talking, "Baby, I come with the WOOSH OF THE SEA!"

===

ANOTHER HORSE STORY

the harness racing season has been under way, as they say, for a week or 2 now, and I have been out 5 or 6 times, perhaps breaking even for the course, which is a hell of a waste of time - anything is a waste of time unless you are fucking well or creating well or getting well or looming toward a kind of phantom love-happiness. we will all end up in the crud-pot of defeat - call it death or error. I am not a word-man. I do suppose, tho, as one keeps making adjustments to the tide, we can call it experience even if we are not so sure that it is wisdom. then too, it is possible for a man to live a whole life of constant error in a kind of numb and terrorized state. You've seen the faces. I've seen my own.

so during all the heat wave they are still out there, the bettors,

having gotten a little money somewhere, the hard way, and trying to beat the 15 percent take. I sometimes think of the crowd as hypnotized, a crowd that has nowhere to go. and after the races they get into their old cars, drive to their lonely rooms and look at the walls. Wondering why they did it --- heels run down, bad teeth, ulcers, bad jobs, men without women, women without men. Nothing but shit.

there are some laughs. there have to be. walking into the men's room between races the other day I came upon a young man gagging, then shouting in fury: "god damn son of a bitch, some god damn son of a bitch didn't flush his shit away! HE LEFT IT THERE! the son of a bitch, I walked in and there it WAS! I'll be he does that at home too!"

this boy was screaming. the rest of us were standing there peeing or washing our hands, thinking about the last race or the next one. I know some freaks that would be delighted to come upon a potful of fresh turds. but that's the way it works - the wrong guy gets it.

another day I am sweating, battling, scratching, praying, jacking to stay 10 or 12 bucks ahead, and it is a very difficult harness race, I don't even think the drivers know who is going to win, and this big fat woman, ponderous whale of healthy stinking blubber, walked up to me, put that stinking fat against my body front, and squeezed 2 little eyes, a mouth and the rest into my face and said,

"what are the hands on the first horse?"

"the hands on the first horse?"

"yes, what are the hands on the first horse?"

"god damn you lady, get away from me, and don't bother me. get away! get away!"

she did. the whole track is full of crazy people. some of them come there when the gates open. they stretch out on the seats or on a bench and sleep all through the races. they never see a race. then they get up and go home. others wall around just vaguely aware that a race of some kind is going on. they buy coffee or just stand around looking as if life has been stunned and burned out of them. or sometimes you see one standing in a dark corner, jamming a whole hot dog down the throat, gagging, choking, delighted with the mess of themselves. and at the end of each day you see one or 2 with their heads down between their legs. sometimes they are crying. where do losers go? who wants a loser?

essentially, in one way or another, everybody thinks that he has the key to beating the thing, even if it is only such an unjustified assumption that their luck must change, some play stars, some play numbers, some play strictly time, others play drivers, or closers or speed names or god knows what. almost all of them lose, continually. almost all their income goes directly into the mutual machines. most of these people have unbearably fixed egos - they are tenaciously stupid.

I won a few dollars Sept. 1. let's go over the card. Andy's Dream won

the first at 9/2 from a morning line of 10. good play. unwarranted action on beaten horse running from outside post. 2nd race - Jerry Perkins, 14 year old gelding nobody wants to claim because of age, drops into \$15 claimer. a good horse, consistent within his class, but you had to take 8/5 under a morning line of four. won easy. third race won by Special Product, a horse that broke in his last four races at long odds. he broke stride again this time, pulled up, righted himself and still came on to beat the 3/5 favorite Golden Bill. a possible bet if you are in touch with God and God is interested. ten to one. in the fourth race, Hal Richard a consistent 4 year old gelding won at three to one, beating out two shorter choices that showed better times but no winning ability. a good bet. In the fifth, Eileen Colby wins after Tiny Star and Marsand break and the crowd sends off April Fool at 3/5. April Fool has only been able to win four races out of 32, and one local handicapper tabs him "better than these by five lengths." all this on time effort of last race in better class when April Fool finishes seven lengths out. the crowd is taken again.

then in the sixth race, Mister Honey is given a morning line of 10 but is sent off as second choice of 5/2 and wins easy, having won three out of nine in tougher class at short odds. Newport Buell, a cheaper horse is sent off at even money because he closed ground in last at nine to one. a bad bet. the crowd doesn't understand. in the seventh, Bills Snookums, a winner of seven out of nine in class and with the leading rider Farrington up is made the new 8/5 favorite and justifiably so.

the crowd bets Princess Sampson down to 7/2. this horse has won only 6 races out of 67. naturally, the crowd gets burned again.

Princess Sampson shows the best time in a tougher race but just does not want to win. the crowd is time-happy. they do not realize that time is caused by pace and pace is caused by the discretion - or lack of it - of the lead drivers. in the eighth, Abbemite win gets up in a four or five horse scramble. it was an open race and one I should have stayed out of. In the ninth, they let the public Have one. Luella Primrose. the horse had failed consistently at short odds and today got on its own pace without a challenger. 5/2. one for the ladies, and how they screamed. a pretty name. they'd been losing their drawers on the thing all through the meet.

most of the cards are as reasonable as this, and it would seem possible to make a living at the track against the 15 percent take. but the outside factors beat you. the heat. tiredness. people spilling beer on your shirt. screaming. stepping on your feet. women showing their legs. pickpockets. touts. madmen. I was \$24 ahead going into the ninth race and there wasn't a play in the ninth.

being tired, I didn't have the resistance to stay out. before the race went off I had dropped in \$16, shopping, feeling for a winner that didn't show. then they sent in the public play on me. I was not satisfied with a \$24 day. I once worked for \$16 a week at New Orleans. I was not strong

enough to take a gentle profit, so I walked out \$8 winner. Not worth the struggle: I could have stayed home and written an immortal poem.

a man who can beat the races can do about any thing he makes up his mind to do. he must have the character, the knowledge, the detachment. even with these qualities, the races are tough, especially with the rent waiting and your whore's tongue hanging out for beer. there are traps beyond traps beyond traps. there are days when everything impossible happens. the other day they ran in a 50 to one shot in the first race, a 100 to one in the second, and crapped off the day with an 18 to one in the last race. when you are trying to scrape up pesos for the landlord and potato and egg money, this kind of day can very much make you feel like an imbecile.

but if you come back the next day they will give you six or seven reasonable winners at fair prices. it's there but most of them don't go back. It takes patience and it's hard work: you have to think. It's a battlefield and you can become shell-shocked. I saw a friend of mine out there the other day, glaze-eyed, punched-out. It was late in the day and it had been a reasonable card, but somehow they had gotten past him and I could tell that he had bet too much trying to get out. he walked past me, not knowing where he was. I watched him. he walked right into the women's crapper. they screamed and he came running out. it was what he needed. it pulled him out and he caught the winner of the next race. but I would not advise this system to all losers.

there are laughs and there is sadness. there is an old boy who walked up to me one time. "Bukowski," he said very seriously, "I want to beat the horses before I die."

his hair is white, totally white, teeth gone, and I could see myself there in 15 or 20 years, if I make it.

"I like the six horse," he told me.

"luck," I told him.

he'd picked a stiff, as usual. an odds-on favorite that had only won one race in 15 starts that year. the public handicappers had the horse on top too. the horse had won \$88,000 LAST year. best time. I bet ten win on Miss Lustytown, a winner of nine races this year. Miss Lustytown paid 4/1. the odds-on finished last.

the old man came by, raging. "how the hell! Glad Rags ran 2:01 and 1/5 last time and gets beat by a 2:02 and 1/5 mare! they oughta close this place up!"

he raps his program, snarling at me. his face is so red that he appears to have a sunburn. I walk away from him, go over to the cashier's window and cash in.

when I get home, there is one magazine in the mail, THE SMITH, parodying my prose style, and another magazine, THE SIX- TIES, parodying my poetic style.

writing? what the hell's that? somebody is worried or pissed about my

writing. I look over and sure enough there's a typewriter in the room. I am a writer of some kind, there's another world there of maneuvering and gouging and groups and methods.

I let the warm water run, get into the tub, open a beer, open the racing format phone rings. I let it ring. For me, maybe not for you, it's too hot to fuck or listen to some minor poet. Hemingway had his pulls. Give me a horse's ass - that gets there first.

===

THE BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH OF AN UNDERGROUND NEWSPAPER

There were quite a few meetings at Joe Hyans' house at first and I usually showed drunk, so I don't remember much about the inception of Open Pussy, the underground newspaper, and I was only told later what had happened. Or rather, what I had done.

Hyans: "You said you were going to clean out the whole place and that you were going to start with the guy in the wheelchair. Then he started to cry and people started leaving. You hit a guy over the head with a bottle."

Cherry (Hyans' wife): "You refused to leave and you drank a whole fifth of whiskey and kept telling me that you were going to fuck me up against the bookcase."

"Did I?"

"No."

"Ah, then next time."

Hyans: "Listen, Bukowski, we're trying to get organized and all you do is come around and bust things up. You're the nastiest damn drunk I've ever seen!"

"OK, I quit, Fuck it. Who cares about newspapers?"

"No, we want you to do a column. We think you're the best writer in Los Angeles."

I lifted my drink. "That's a motherfucking insult! I didn't come here to be insulted!"

"OK, maybe you're the best writer in California."

"There you go! Still insulting me!"

"Anyhow, we want you to do a column."

"I'm a poet."

"What's the difference between poetry and prose?"

"Poetry says too much in too short a time; prose says too little and takes too long."

"We want a column for Open Pussy."

"Pour me a drink and you're on."

Hyans did. I was on. I finished the drink and walked over to my skidrow

court thinking about what a mistake I was making. I was almost fifty years old and fucking with these long-haired, bearded kids. Oh God, groovy, daddy, oh groovy! War is shit. War is hell. fuck, don't fight. I'd known all that for fifty years. It wasn't quite as exciting to me. Oh, and don't forget the pot. the stash. Groove, baby!

I found a pint in my place, drank it, four cans of beer and wrote the first column. It was about a three-hundred-pound whore I had once fucked in Philadelphia. It was a good column. I corrected the typing errors, jacked off and went to sleep-

It started on the bottom floor of Hyans' two-story rented house. There were some half-assed volunteers and the thing was new and everybody was excited but me. I kept searching out the women for ass but they all looked and acted the same --- they were all nineteen years old, dirty-blonde, small ass, small breasted, busy dizzy, and, in a sense, conceited without quite knowing why. Whenever I'd lay my drunken hands upon them they were always quite cool. Quite.

"Look, Gramps, the only thing we want to see you raise is a North Vietnamese flag!"

"Ah, your pussy probably stinks anyhow!"

"Oh, you are a filthy old man! You really are-so disgusting!"

And then they'd walk off shaking those little delicious apple buttocks at me, only carrying in their hand --- instead of my lovely purple head --- some juvenile copy about the cops shaking down the kids and taking away their Baby Ruth bars on Sunset Strip. Here I was, the greatest living poet since Auden and I couldn't even fuck a dog in the ass-

The paper got too big. Or Cherry got worried about my lounging about on the couch drunk and leering at her five-year-old daughter. When it really got bad was when the daughter started sitting on my lap and looking up into my face while squirming, saying, "I like you, Bukowski. Talk to me. Let me get you another Beer, Bukowski."

"Hurry back, sweetie!"

Cherry: "Listen, Bukowski, you old leech-"

"Cherry, children love me. I can't help it."

The little girl, Zaza, ran back with the beer, got back into my lap. I opened the beer.

"I like you, Bukowski, tell me a story."

"OK, honey. Well, once upon a time there was this old man and this lovely little girl lost in the woods together-"

"Cherry: "Listen, you old leech-"

"Ta, ta, Cherry, I do believe you have a dirty mind!" Cherry ran upstairs looking for Hyans who was taking a crap. "Joe, Joe, we've just got to move this paper out of here! I mean it!"-

They found a vacant building up front, two floors, and one midnight while drinking port wine, I held the flashlight for Joe while he broke open

the phone box on the side of the house and rear-ranged the wires so he could have extension phones without charge. about this time the only other underground newspaper in L.A. accused Joe of stealing a duplicate copy of their mailing list. Of course, I knew Joe had morals and scruples and ideals --- that's why he quit working for the large metro daily. That's why he quit working for the other underground newspaper. Joe was some kind of Christ. Sure.

"Hold that flashlight steady," he said-

In the morning, at my place, the phone rang. It was my friend Mongo the Giant of the Eternal High.

"Hank?"

"Yeh?"

"Cherry was over last night."

"Yea?"

"She had this mailing list. Was very nervous. She wanted me to hide it. Said Jensen was on the prowl. I hid it in the cellar under a pile of India ink sketches Jimmy the Dwarf did before he died."

"Did you screw her?"

"What for? She's all bones. Those ribs would slice me to pieces while I fucked."

"You screwed Jimmy the Dwarf and he only weighed eighty- three pounds."

"He had soul."

"Yeh?"

"Yeh."

I hung up-

For the next four or five issues, Open Pussy came out with sayings like, "WE LOVE THE L.A. FREE PRESS," "OH, WE LOVE THE L.A. FREE PRESS," "LOVE, LOVE, LOVE THE L.A. FREE PRESS."

They should have. They had their mailing list.

One night Jensen and Joe had dinner together. Joe told me later that everything was now "all right." I don't know who screwed who or what went on under the table. And I didn't care-

And I soon found that I had other readers besides the beaded and the bearded-

In Los Angeles the new Federal Building rises glass-high, insane and modern, with the Kafka-series of rooms each indulged with their own personal frog-jacking-off bit; everything feeding off of every- thing else and thriving with a kind of worm-in-the apple warmth and ther I was given a time ticket for that amount and I walked into the Federal Building, which had downstairs murals like Diego Rivera would have done if nine tenths of his sensibilities had been cut away ---American sailors and Indians and soldiers smiling away, trying to look noble in cheap yellows and retching rotting

greens and pissy blues.

I was being called into personnel. I knew that it wasn't for a promotion. They took the letter and cooled me on the hard seat for forty-five minutes. It was part of the old you-got-shit-in-your-intestines. And we-don't-have-routine. Luckily, from past experience, I read the warty sign, and I cooled it myself, thinking about how Each of the girls who walked by would go on a bed, legs high, or Taking it in the mouth. Soon I had something huge between my legs --well, huge for me --- and had to stare at the floor.

I was finally called in by a very black and slinky and well-dressed and pleasant Negress, very much class and even a spot of soul, whose smile said she knew that I was going to be fucked but who also hinted that she wouldn't mind throwing me a little pee-hole herself. It eased matters. Not that it mattered.

And I walked in.

"Have a seat."

Man behind desk. Same old shit. I sat.

"Mr. Bukowski?"

"Yeh."

He gave me his name. I wasn't interested.

He leaned back, stared at me from his swivel.

I'm sure he expected somebody younger and better-looking, more flamboyant, more intelligent-looking, more treacherous-looking-I was just old, tired, disinterested, hung-over. He was a bit gray and distinguished, if you know the type of distinguished I mean. Never pulled beets out of the ground with a bunch of wet-backs or been in the drunktank fifteen or twenty times. Or picked lemons at six a.m. without a shirt on because you knew that at noon it would be 110 degrees. Only the poor knew the meaning of life; the rich and the safe had to guess. Strangely then, I began thinking of the Chinese. Russia had softened; it could be that only the Chinese knew, digging up from the bottom, tired of soft shit. But then, I had no politics, that was more con: history screwed us all, finally. I was done ahead of time --- baked, fucked, screwed-out, nothing left.

"Mr. Bukowski?"

"Yeh?"

"Well, ah-we've had an informant--"

"Yeh. Go ahead."

"-who wrote us that you are not married to the mother of your child."

I imagined him, then, decorating a Christmas tree with a drink in his hand.

"That's true. I am not married to the mother of my child, aged four."

"Do you pay child support?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"I'm not going to tell you."

He leaned back again. "You must understand that those of us in government service must maintain certain standards."

Not really feeling guilty of anything, I didn't answer.

I waited.

Oh, where are you, boys? Kafka, where are you? Lorca, shot in the dirty road, where are you? Hemingway, claiming he was being tailed by the C.I.A. and nobody believing him but me-

The, old distinguished well-rested non-beetpicking gray turned around and reached into a small and well-varnished cabinet behind him and pulled out six or seven copies of Open Pussy.

He threw them upon his desk like stinking siffed and raped turds. He tapped them with one of his non-lemonpulling hands.

"We are led to believe that YOU are the writer of these col- umns --- Notes of a Dirty Old Man."

"Yeh."

"What do you have to say about these columns?"

"Nothing."

"Do you call this writing?"

"It's the best that I can do."

"Well, I'm supporting two sons who are now taking journalism at the best of colleges, and I HOPE--"

He tapped the sheets, the stinking turd sheets, with the bot- tom of his ringed and un-factoried and un-jailed hand and said:

"I hope that my sons never turn out to write like YOU do!"

"They won't," I promised him.

"Mr. Bukowski, I think that the interview is finished."

"Yeah," I said. I lit a cig, stood up, scratched my beer-gut and walked out.

The second interview was sooner than I expected. I was hard at work --- of course --- at one of my important menial tasks when the speaker boomed: "Henry Charles Bukowski, report to the Tour superintendent's office!"

I dropped my important task, got a treavel form from the local screw and walked on over to the office. The Tour-Soup's male secre- tary, an old gray flab, looked me over.

"Are you Charles Bukowski?" he asked me, quite disappoint- ed.

"Yeh, man."

"Please follow me."

I followed him. It was a large building. We went down several stairways and down around a long hall and then into a large dark room that entered into another large and very dark room. Two men were sitting there at the end

of a table that must have been seventy-five feet long. They sat under a lone lamp. And at the end of the table sat this single chair --- for me.

"You may enter," said the secretary. Then he shorted out.

I walked in. The two men stood up. Here we were under one lamp in the dark. For some reason, I thought of all the assassinations.

Then I thought, this is America, daddy, Hitler is dead. Or is he?

"Bukowski?"

"Yeh."

They both shook hands with me.

"Sit down."

Groovy, baby.

"This is Mr. - - - - from Washington," said the other guy who was one of the local topdogturds.

I didn't say anything. It was a nice lamp. Made of human skin?

Mr. Washington did the talking. He had a portfolio with quite a few papers within.

"Now, Mr. Bukowski--"

"Yeh?"

"Your age is forty-eight and you've been employed by the United States Government for eleven years."

"Yeh."

"You were married to your first wife two and a half years, divorced, and you married your present wife when? We'd like the date."

"No date. No marriage."

"You have a child!"

"Yeh."

"How old?"

"Four."

"You're not married?"

"No."

"Do you pay child support?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"About standard."

Then he leaned back and we sat there. The three of us said nothing for a good four or five minutes.

Then a stack of the underground newspaper Open Pussy appeared.

"Do you write these columns? Notes of a Dirty Old Man?" Mr. Washington asked.

"Yeh."

He handed a copy to Mr. Los Angeles.

"Have you seen this one?"

"No, no, I haven't"

Across the top of the column was a walking cock with legs, a huge HUGE

walking cock with legs. The story was about a male friend of mine I had screwed in the ass by mistake, while drunk, believing that it was one of my girlfriends. It took me two weeks to finally force my friend to leave my place. It was a true story.

"Do you call this writing?" Mr. Washington asked.

"I don't know about the writing. But I thought it was a very funny story. Didn't you think it was humorous?"

"But this-this illustration across the top of the story?"

"The walking cock?"

"Yes."

"I didn't draw it."

"You have nothing to do with the selection of illustrations?"

"The paper is put together on Tuesday nights."

"And you are not there on Tuesday nights?"

"I am supposed to be here on Tuesday nights."

They waited some time, going through Open Pussy, looking at my columns.

"You know," said Mr. Washington, tapping the Open Pussies again with his hand, "you would have been all right if you had kept writing poetry, but when you began writing this stuff-" He again tapped the Open Pussies.

I waited two minutes and thirty seconds. Then I asked: "Are we to consider the postal officials as the new critics of literature?"

"Oh, no no," said Mr. Washington, "we didn't mean that." I sat and waited.

"There is a certain conduct expected of postal employees. You are in the Public Eye. You are to be an example of exemplary behavior."

"It appears to me," I said, "that you are threatening my freedom of expression with a resultant loss of employment. The A.C.L.U. might be interested."

"We'd still prefer you didn't write the column."

"Gentleman, there comes a time in each man's life when he must choose to stand or run. I choose to stand."

Their silence.

Wait.

Wait.

The shuffling of Open Pussies.

Then Mr. Washington: "Mr. Bukowski?"

"Yeh?"

"Are you going to write any more columns about the Post Office?"

I had written one about them which I thought was more humorous than demeaning --- but then, maybe my mind was twisted.

I let them wait this time. Then I answered. "Not unless you make it necessary for me to do so."

Then they waited. It was kind of an interrogation chess game where you hoped the other man would make the wrong move: blurt out his pawns, knights,

bishops, king, his queen, his guts. (And meanwhile, as you read this, here goes my goddamned job. Groovy, baby. Send dollars for beer and wreaths to The Charles Bukowski Rehabilitation Fund at-)

Mr. Washington stood up.

Mr. Los Angeles stood up.

Mr. Washington said: "I think that the interview is over."

Mr. Washington said: "Meanwhile, don't jump off of any bridges-"

(Strange: I hadn't even thought about it.)

"-we haven't had a case like this in ten years." (In ten years? Who was the last poor sucker?) "So?" I asked.

"Mr. Bukowski," said Mr. Los Angeles, "report back to your position."

I really had an unquieting time (or is it disquieting?) trying to find my way back to the work floor from that underground Kafka- esqueish maze, and when I did, here all my subnormal fellow workers (good pricks all) started chirping at me:

"Hey, baby, where ya been?"

"What'd they want, daddieo?"

"You knocked up another black chick, big daddy?"

I gave them the Silence. One learns from dear old Uncle Sammy.

They kept chirping and flipping and fingering their mental assholes. They were really frightened. I was Old Kool and if they could break Old Kool they could break any of them.

"They wanted to make me Postmaster," I told them.

"And what happened, daddieo?"

"I told them to jam a hot turd up their siffed-up snatch."

The foreman of the aisle walked by and they all gave him the proper obeisance but me, but I, but Bukowski, I lit a cigar with an easy flourish, threw the match on the floor and stared at the ceiling as if I were having great and wonderful thoughts. It was con; my mind was blank; I only wanted a halfpint of Granddad and six or seven tall cool beers-

The fucking paper grew, or seemed to, and moved to a place on Melrose. I always hated to go there with copy, though, because everybody was so shitty, so truly shitty and snobby and not quite right, you know. Nothing changed. The history of the Man-beast was very slow. They were like the shifts I'd faced when I first walked into the copy room of the L.A. City College newspaper in 1939 or 1940 ---all these little hoity-toity dummies with little newspaper hats over their heads while writing stale, stupid copy. So very important --- not even human enough to acknowledge your presence. Newspaper people were always the lowest of the breed; janitors who picked up women's cuntrags in the crappers had more soul --- naturally.

I looked at those college freaks, walked out, never went back.

Now. Open Pussy. Twenty-eight years later.

Copy in my hand. There was Cherry at a desk. Cherry was on the telephone. Very important. Couldn't speak. Or Cherry not at the telephone. Writing something on a piece of paper. Couldn't speak. the same old con of always. Thirty years hadn't broken the dish. and Joe Hyans running around, doing big things, running up and down the stairs. He had a little place on top. Rather exclusive, of course. And some poor shit in a back room with him there where Joe could watch him getting copy ready for the printer on the IBM. He gave the poor shit thirty-five a week for a sixty-hour week and the poor shit was glad, grew a beard and lovely soulful eyes and the poor shit hacked out the third-rate piteous copy. With the Beatles playing full volume over the intercom and the phone ringing continually, Joe Hyans, editor, was always RUNNING OFF TO SOME- PLACE IMPORTANT SOMEWHEREA. But when you read the paper the next week you'd wonder where he'd run. It wasn't in there.

Open Pussy went on, for a while. My columns continued to be good, but the paper itself was half-ass. I could smell the death-cunt of it-

There was a staff meeting every other Friday night. I busted up a few of them. And after hearing the results, I just didn't go anymore. If the paper wanted to live, let it live. I stayed away and just slid my stuff under the door in an envelope.

Then Hyans got me on the phone: "I've got an idea. I want you to get me together the best poets and prose writers that you know and we are going to put out a literary supplement."

I got it together for him. He printed it. And the cops busted him for "obscenity."

But I was a nice guy. I got him on the phone. "Hyans?"

"Yeh?"

"Since you done got busted for the thing, I'm a gonna let you have my column for free. That ten bucks you been paying me, it goes for the Open Pussy defense fund."

"Thanks very much," he said.

So there he was, getting the best writing in America for nothing-

Then Cherry phoned me on night.

"Why don't you come to our staff meetings anymore? We all miss you, terribly."

"What? What the hell you saying, Cherry? You on the stuff?"

"No, Hank, we all love you, really. Do come to our next staff meeting."

"I'll think about it."

"It's dead without you."

"And death with me."

"We want you, old man."

"I'll think about it, Cherry."

So, I showed. I had been given the idea by Hyans, himself, that since it was the first anniversary of Open Pussy the wine and the pussy and the life and the love would be flowing.

But coming in very high and expecting to see fucking on the floor and love galore, I only saw all these little love-creatures busily at work. They reminded me very much, so humped and dismal, of the little old ladies working on piecework I used to deliver cloth to, working my way up through rope hand-pulled elevators full of rats and stink, one hundred years old, piecework ladies, proud and dead and neurotic as all hell, working, working to make a millionaire out of somebody-in New York, in Philadelphia, in St. Louis.

And these, for Open Pussy, were working without wages, and there was Joe Hyans, looking a bit brutal and fat, walking up and down behind them, hands folded behind his back, seeing that each volunteer did his (her) duty properly and exactly.

"Hyans! Hyans, you filthy cocksucker!" I screamed as I walked in. "You are running a slave-market, you are a lousy pewking Simon Legree! You cry for justice from the police and from Washington, D.C. and you are the biggest lousiest swine of them all! You are Hitler multiplied by a hundred, you slave-labor bastard! You write of atrocities and then triple them yourself! Who the fuck you think you're fooling, mother? Who the fuck you think you are?"

Luckily for Hyans, the rest of the staff was quite used to me and they thought that whatever I said was foolishness and that Hyans Himself stood for Truth.

Hyans Himself walked up and put a stapler in my hand.

"Sit down, he said, "we are trying to increase the circulation. just sit down and clip one of these green ads to each of newspapers. We are sending out leftover copies to potential subscribers-"

Dear old Freedom Loveboy Hyans, using big business methods to put over his crap. Brainwashed beyond himself.

He finally came up and took the stapler out of my hand.

"You're not stapling fast enough."

"Fuck you, mother. There was supposed to be champagne all over this place. Now I'm eating staples-"

"Hey, Eddie!"

He called over another slave-labor member --- thin-cheeked, wire-armed, pnurious. Poor Eddie was starving. Everybody was starving for the Cause. Except Hyans and his wife, and they lived in a two-story house and sent one of their children to a private school, and there was old Poppa back in Cleveland, one of the head stiffs of the Plain Dealer, with more money than anything else.

So Hyans ran me out and also a guy with a little propeller on the top of a beanie cap, Lovable Doc Stanley I believe he was called, and also Lovable Doc's woman, and as the three of us left out the back door quite calmly, sharing a bottle of cheap wine, there came the voice of Joe Hyans: "And get out of here, and don't any of you ever come back, but I don't mean you Bukowski!"

Poor fuck, he knew what kept the paper going-

Then there was another bust by the police. This time for printing the photo of a woman's cunt. Hyans' at this time, as always, was mixed up. He wanted to hype the circulation, by any means, or kill the paper and get out. It was a vise he couldn't seem to work properly and it drew tighter and tighter. Only the people working for nothing or for thirty-five dollars a week seemed to have any interest in the paper. But Hyans did manage to lay a couple of the younger female volunteers so he wasn't wasting his time.

"Why don't you quit your lousy job and come work for us?"

"How much?"

"Forty-five dollars a week. That includes your column. You will also distribute to the boxes on Wednesday night, your car, I'll pay the gas, and you write up special assignments. Eleven a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays off."

"I'll think about it."

Hyans' old man came in from Cleveland. We got drunk together over at Hyans' house. Hyans and Cherry seemed very unhappy with Pops. And Pops could put away the whiskey. No grass for him. I could put away the whiskey too. We drank all night.

"Now the way to get rid of the Free Press is to bust up their stands, run the peddlers off the streets, bust a few heads. That's what we used to do in the old days. I've got money. I can hire some hoods, some mean sons of bitches. We can hire Bukowski.

"God damn it!" screamed young Hyans, "I don't want to hear your shit, you understand?"

Pops asked me, "What do you think of my idea, Bukowski?"

"I think it's a good idea. Pass the bottle over here."

"Bukowski is insane!" screamed Joe Hyans.

"You print his column," said Pops.

"He's the best writer in California," said young Hyans.

"The best insane writer in California," I corrected him.

"Son," Pops went on, "I have all this money. I want to put your paper over. All we gotta do is bust a few-"

"No. No. No!" Joe Hyans screamed. "I won't have it!" Then he ran out of the house. What a wonderful man Joe Hyans was. He ran out of the house. I

reached for another drink and told Cherry that I was going to fuck her up against the bookcase. Pops said he'd take seconds. Cherry cussed us while Joe Hyans ran off down the street with his soul-

The paper went on, coming out once a week somehow. Then the trial about the photo of the female cunt came up.

The prosecuting attorney asked Hyans: "Would you object to oral copulation on the steps of the City Hall?"

"No," said Joe, "but it would probably block traffic."

Oh, Joe, I thought, you blew that one! You shudda said, "I'd prefer for oral copulation to go on inside the City Hall where it usually does."

When the judge asked Hyans' lawyer what the meaning of the photo of the female sex organ was, Hyans' lawyer answered, "Well, that's just the way it is. That's the way it is, daddy."

They lost the trial, of course, and appealed for a new one. "A roust," said Joe Hyans to the few and scattered news media about, "nothing but a police roust."

What a brilliant man Joe Hyans was-

Next I heard from Joe Hyans was over the phone: "Bukowski, I just bought a gun. One hundred and twelve dollars. A beautiful weapon. I'm going to kill a man!"

"Where are you now?"

"In the bar, down by the paper."

"I'll be right there."

When I got there he was walking up and down outside the bar.

"Come on," he said, "I'll buy you a beer."

We sat down. The place was full, Hyans was talking in a very loud voice. You could hear him all the way to Santa Monica.

I'm going to splatter his brains out against the wall --- I'm going to kill the son of a bitch!"

"What guy, kid? Why do you want to kill this guy, kid?"

He kept staring straight ahead.

"Groovy, baby. Why ya wanna kill this sunabitch, huh?"

"He's fucking my wife, that's why!"

"Oh."

He stared some more. It was like a movie. It wasn't even as good as a movie.

"It's a beautiful weapon," said Joe. "You put in this little clip. It fires ten shots. Rapid-fire. There'll be nothing left of the bastard!"

Joe Hyans.

That wonderful man with the big red beard.

Groovy, baby.

Anyhow I asked him, "How about all these anti-war articles you've printed? How about the love bit? What happened?"

"Oh come on now Bukowski, you've never believed in all that pacifism

shit?"

"Well, I don't know-Well, I guess not exactly."

"I've warned this guy that I am going to kill him if he doesn't stay away, and I walk in and there he is sitting on the couch in my own house. Now what would you do?"

"You're making this a personal property thing, don't you understand? Just fuck it. Forget it. Walk away. Leave them there together."

"Is that what you've done?"

"After the age of thirty - always. And after the age of forty, it gets easier. But in my twenties I used to go insane. The first burns are the hardest."

"Well, I am going to kill the son of a bitch! I'm going to blow his goddamned brains out!"

The whole bar was listening. Love, baby, love.

I told him, "Let's get out of here."

Outside the bar Hyans dropped to his knees and screamed, a long milk-curdling four-minute scream. You could hear him all the way to Detroit. Then I got him up and walked him to my car. As he got to the car door on his side, he grabbed the handle, dropped to his knees and let go another hog-caller to Detroit. He was hooked on Cherry, poor fellow. I got him up, put him in the seat, got in the other side, drove north to Sunset and then east along Sunset and at the signal, red, at Sunset and Vermont, he let go another one. I lit up a cigar. The other drivers stared at the red beard screaming.

I thought, he isn't going to stop. I'll have to knock him out.

But then as the signal turned green he ended it and I shifted it out of there. He sat there sobbing. I didn't know what to say. There wasn't anything to say.

I thought, I'll take him to see Mongo the Giant of the Eternal High. Mongo's full of shit. Maybe he can dump some shit on Hyans. me, I hadn't lived with a woman for four years. I was too far out of it to see it anymore.

Next time he screams, I thought, I've got to knock him out. I Can't stand another one of those.

"Hey! Where we going?"

"Mongo's."

"Oh, no! Not Mongo's! I hate that guy! He'll only make fun of me! He's a cruel son of a bitch!"

It was true. Mongo had a good mind but a cruel one. It wasn't any good going over there. And I couldn't handle it either. We drove along.

"Listen," said Hyans, "I've got a girlfriend around here. Couple blocks

north. Drop me off. She understands me."

I turned it north.

"Listen," I said. "don't shoot the guy."

"Why?"

"Because you are the only one who will print my column."

I drove to the place, let him out, waited until the door opened, then drove off. A good piece of ass might smooth him out. I needed one too-

Next I heard from Hyans, he had moved out of the house.

"I couldn't stand it anymore. Why, the other night I took a shower, I was getting ready to fuck her, I wanted to fuck some life into her bones, but you know what?"

"What?"

"When I walked in on her she ran out of the house. What a bitch!"

"Listen, Hyans, I know the game. I can't talk against Cherry because the next thing you know, you'll be back together again and then you'll remember all the dirty things I said about her."

"I'm never going back."

"Uh huh."

"I've decided not to shoot the bastard."

"Good."

"I'm going to challenge him to a boxing match. Full ring rules. Referee, ring, glove and all."

"OK," I said.

Two bulls fighting for the cow. And a bony one at that. But in America the loser oftentimes got the cow. Mother instinct? Better wallet? Longer dick? God knows what-

While Hyans was going crazy he hired a guy with a pipe and a necktie to keep the paper going. But it was obvious that Open Pussy was on its last fuck. And nobody cared but the twenty-five and thirty-dollar-a-week people and the free help. They enjoyed the paper. It wasn't all that good but it wasn't all that bad either. You see, there was my column: Notes of a Dirty Old Man.

And pipe and necktie got the paper out. It looked the same. and meanwhile I kept hearing: "Joe and Cherry are together again. Joey and Cherry split again. Joe and Cherry are back together again./ Joe and Cherry-

Then on chilly blue Wednesday night I went out to a stand to buy a copy of Open Pussy. I had written one of my best columns and wanted to see if

they had had the guts to run it. The stand contained last week's Open Pussy. I smelled it in the deathblue air: the game was over. I bought two tall six-packs of Schlitz and went back to my place and drank down the requiem. Always being ready for the end I was not ready when it happened. I walked over and took the poster off the wall and threw it into the trash: "OPEN PUSSY. A WEEKLY REVIEW OF THE LOS ANGELES RENAISSANCE."

The government wouldn't have to worry anymore. I was a splendid citizen again.

Twenty thousand circulation. If we could have made sixty --- without family troubles, without police rouses --- we could have made it. We didn't make it.

I phoned the office the next day. The girl at the phone was in tears. "We tried to get you last night, Bukowski, but nobody knew where you lived. It's terrible. It's finished. It's over. The phone keeps ringing. I'm the only one here. We're going to hold a staff meeting next Tuesday night to try to keep the paper going. But Hyans took everything --- all the copy, the mailing list and the IBM machine which didn't belong to him. We're cleaned out. There's nothing left."

Oh, you've got a sweet voice, baby, such a sad sad sweet voice, I'd like to fuck you, I thought.

"We are thinking of starting a hippie paper. The underground is dead. Please show at Lonny's house Tuesday night."

"I'll try." I said, knowing that I wouldn't be there. So there it was -- almost two years. It was over. The cops had won, the city had won, the government had won. Decency was in the streets again. Maybe the cops would stop giving me tickets every time they saw my car. and Cleaver wouldn't be sending us little notes from his hiding place anymore. And you could buy the L.A. Times anywhere. Jesus Christ and Mother in Heaven, Life was Sad.

But I gave the girl my address and phone number, thinking we might make it on the springs. (Harriet, you never arrived.)

But Barney Palmer, the political writer, did. I let him in and opened up the beers.

"Hyans," he said, " put the gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger."

"What happened?"

"It jammed. So he sold the gun."

"It takes a lot of guts just to try it once."

"You're right. Forgive me. Terrible hangover."

"You want to hear what happened?"

"Sure, it's my death, too."

"Well, it was Tuesday night, we were trying to get the paper ready. We had your column and thank Christ it was a long one because we were short of copy. It looked like we couldn't make the pages. Hyans showed, glassy-eyed, drunk on wine. He and Cherry had split again."

"Ugh."

"Yeh. Anyhow, we couldn't make the pages. And Hyans kept getting in the way. Finally he went upstairs and got on the couch and passed out. The minute he left, the paper began to get together. We made it and had forty-five minutes to get to the printer's. I said I'd drive it down to the printer's. Then you know what happened?"

"Hyans woke up."

"I'm that way."

"Well, he insisted on driving the copy to the printer's himself. He threw the stuff in the car but he never made the printer's. The next day we came in and found the note he left, and the place was cleaned out --- the IBM machine, the mailing list, everything--"

"I've heard. Well, let's look at it this way: he started the goddamned thing, so he had a right to end it."

"But the IBM machine, he didn't own it. He might get into a jam over it."

"Hyans is used to jams. He thrives on them. He gets his nuts. You ought to hear him scream."

"But it's all the little people, Buk, The twenty-five-buck-a-week guys who gave up everything to keep the thing going. They guys with cardboard in their shoes. The guys who slept on the floor."

"The little guys always get it in the ass, Palmer. That's his- tory."

"You sound like Mongo."

"Mongo is usually right, even though he is a son of a bitch."

We talked a little more, then it was over.

A big black kitty walked up to me at work that night. "Hey, brother, I hear your paper folded."

"Right, brother, but where did you hear?"

"It's in the L.A. Times, first page of the second section. I guess they are rejoicing."

"I guess they are."

"We liked your paper, man. And your column too. Real tough stuff."

"Thank you, brother."

At lunchtime (10:24 p.m.) I went out and bought the L.A. Times. I took it across the street to the bar over there, bought a dollar pitcher of beer, lit a cigar and walked over to a table under a light:

OPEN PUSSY DEEP IN RED

Open Pussy, the second largest underground newspaper in Los Angeles,

has ceased publication, its editors said Thursday. The newspaper was 10 weeks short of its second anniversary.

Heavy debts, distribution problems and a \$1,000 fine on an obscenity conviction in October contributed to the demise of the weekly newspaper." Said Mike Engel, the managing editor. He placed final circulation of the newspaper at about 20,000.

But Engel and other editorial staff members said they believed That Open Pussy could have continued and that its closing was the decision of Joe Hyans, its 35-year-old-chief-editor.

When the staff members arrived at the paper's office at 4369 Melrose Ave. Wednesday morning they found a note from Hyans which declared, in part:

"The paper has already fulfilled its artistic purpose. Politically, it was never to effective anyway. What's been taking place in its pages recently is no improvement over what we printed a year ago. "As an artist, I must turn away from a work which does not grow-even though it is a work of my own hand and even though it is bringing in bread (money)."

I finished the pitcher of beer and went into my governmental job-

A few days later I found a note in my mailbox:

10:45 a.m., Monday

Hank---

I found a note in my mailbox this morning from Cherry Hyans. (I was away all day Sunday and Sunday night.) She says she has the kids and is sick and in bad trouble at - - - - Douglas Street. I can't find Douglas on the fucking map, but wanted to let you know about the note.

Barney

A couple of days later the phone rang. It wasn't a woman with a hot snatch. It was Barney.

"Hey, Joe Hyans is in town."

"So are you and I," I said.

"Joe's back with Cherry."

"Yeh?"

"They are going to move to San Francisco."

"They ought to."

"The hippie paper thing fell through."

"Yeh. Sorry I couldn't make it. Drunk."

"That's OK. But listen, I'm on a writing assignment now. But as soon as I finish, I want to contact you."

"What for?"

"I've got a backer with fifty grand."

"Fifty grand?"

"Yeh. Real money. He wants to do it. He wants to start another paper."

"Keep in touch, Barney. I've always liked you. Remember the time you and I started drinking at my place at four in the afternoon, talked all night and didn't finish until eleven a.m. the next morning?"

"Yeh."

"So, when I clean this writing up, I'll let you know."

"Yeh. Keep in touch, Barney."

"I will. Meanwhile, hang in."

"Sure."

I went into the crapper and took myself a beautiful beershit. Then I went to bed, jacked off, and slept.

-Charles Bukowski- The Most Beautiful Woman in Town

===

LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT

I walked along in the sun wondering what to do. I kept walking, walking. I seemed to be on the outer edge of something. I looked up and there were railroad tracks and by the edge of the tracks was a little shack, unpainted. It had a sign out:

HELP WANTED

I walked in. A little old guy was sitting there in blue-green suspenders and chewing tobacco.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"I, ah, I ah, I-"

"Yeh, come on, man, spit it out! Whatcha want?"

"I saw-your sign-help wanted."

"Sign on? What?"

"Well, shit, it ain't a spot as a chorus girl!"

He leaned over and spit into his filthy spittoon, then worked at his wad again, drawing his cheeks in over his toothless mouth.

"What do I do?" I asked.

"You'll be told what to do!"

"I mean, what is it?"

"Railroad track gang, someplace west of Sacramento."

"Sacramento?"

"You heard me, god damn it. Now I'm a busy man. You wanna sign or not?"

I signed the list he had on the clipboard. I was # 27. I even signed my own name.

He handed me a ticket. "You show up at gate 21 with your gear. We got a special train for you guys."

I slipped the ticket into my empty wallet.

He spit again. "Now, well, look, kid, I know you're a little goofy.

This line takes care of a lot of guys like you. We help human-ity. We're nice folks. Always remember old - - - - - lines and put in a good word for us here and there. And when you get out on those tracks, listen to your foreman. He's on your side. you can save money out on that desert. God knows, there's no place to spend it. But on Saturday night, kid, on Saturday night-

He leaned to his spittoon again, came back:

"Why hell, on a Saturday night you go to town, get drunk, catch a cheap blowjob from a wetback Mexican seniorita and come back in feeling good. Those blowjobs suck themisery right out of a man's head. I started on the gang, now I'm here. Good luck to you, kid."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now get the hell out of here! I'm busy!-"

I arrived at gate 21 at the time instructed. By my train were all these guys standing there in rags, stinking, laughing, smoking rolled cigarettes. I went over and stood behind them. They needed haircuts and shaves and they acted brave and were nervous at the same time.

Then a Mexican with a knife scar on his cheek told us to get on. We got on. You couldn't see through the windows.

I took the last seat in the back of our car. The others all sat up in front, laughing and talking. One guy pulled out a half pint of whiskey and 7 or 8 of them each had a little suck.

Then they began looking back at me. I began hearing voices and they weren't all in my head.

"What's wrong with that sona bitch?"

"He think he's better than us?"

"He's gonna hafta work with us, man."

"Who's he think he is?"

I looked out the window, I tried to, the thing hadn't been cleaned in 25 years. The train began to move out and I was on there with them. The train began to move out and I was on there with them. There were about 30 of them. They didn't wait very long. I stretched out on my seat and tried to sleep.

"SWOOSH!"

Dust blew up into my face and eyes. I heard somebody under my seat. There was the blowing sound again and a mass of 25 year old dust rose up into my nostrils, my mouth, my eyes, my eyebrows. I waited. Then it happened again. A real good blast. Whoever was under there was getting damned good at it.

I leaped up. And I heard all this sound from under my seat and then he was out from under there and running up toward the front. He threw himself into a seat, trying to be part of the gang, but I heard his voice:

"If he comes up here I want you fellows to help me! Promise to help me if he comes up here!"

I didn't hear any promises, but he was safe: I couldn't tell one from the other.

Just before we got out of Louisiana I had to walk up front for a cup of water. They watched me.

"Look at him. Look at him."

"Ugly bastard."

"Who's he think he is?"

"Son of a bitch, we'll get him when we get him out over those tracks alone, we'll make him cry, we'll make him suck dick!"

"Look! He's got that paper cup upsidedown! He's drinking from the wrong end! Look at him! He's drinking from the little end! That guy's nuts!"

"Wait'll we get him over those tracks, we'll make him suck dick!"

I drained the paper cup, refilled it and emptied it again, wrong Sideup. I threw the cup into the container and walked back. I heard:

"Yeah," he acts nuts. Maybe he had a split-up with his girl friend."

"How's a guy like that gonna get a girl?"

"I dunno. I seen crazier things than that happen."-

We were over Texas when the Mexican foreman came through with the canned food. He handed out the cans. Some of them didn't have any labels on them and were badly dented-up.

He came back to me.

"You Bukowski?"

"Yes."

He handed me a can of Spam and wrote "75" under column "F." I could see that I was charged with "\$45.90" under column "T." Then he handed me a small can of beans. "45" he wrote down under column "F."

He walked back toward the front of the car.

"Hey! Where the hell's a can opener? How can we eat this stuff without a can opener?" somebody asked him.

The foreman swang through the vestibule and was gone.

There were water stops in Texas, bunches of green. At each stop 2 or 3

or 4 guys leaped off. When we got to El Paso there were 23 left out of the 31.

In El Paso they pulled our traincar out and the train went on. the Mexican forman came through and said, "We must stop at El Paso. You will stay at this hotel."

He gave out tickets.

"These are your tickets to the hotel. You will sleep there. In the morning you will take traincoach #24 to Los Angeles and then on to Sacramento. These are your hotel tickets."

He came up to me again.

"You Bukowski?"

"Yes."

"Here's your hotel."

He handed me the ticket and wrote in "12.50" under my "L" column.

Nobody had been able to get their cans of food open. They would be picked up later and given to the next crew across.

I threw my ticket away and slept in the park about two blocks from the hotel. I was awakened by the roaring of alligators, one in particular. I could see 4 or 5 alligators in the pond, and perhaps there were more. There were two sailors dressed in their whites. One sailor was in the pond, drunk, pulling at the tail of an alligator. The alligator was angry but slow and could not turn its neck enough to get at the sailor. The other sailor stood on the shore, laughing, with a young girl. Then while the sailor in the pond was still fighting the alligator, the other sailor and the girl walked away. I truned over and slept.

On the ride to Los Angeles, more and more of them jumped off at the waterstops. When we reached Los Angeles there were 16 left of the 31.

The Mexican foreman came through the train.

"We will be in Los Angeles for two days. You will catch the 9:30 a.m. train, gate 21. Wednesday morning, traincoach 42. It is written upon the cover which goes around your hotel tickets. You are also being issued food-ration coupons which can be honored at French's Caf+, Main Street."

"He handed out 2 little booklets, one labeled ROOM, the other FOOD.

"You Bukowsko?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

He handed me my booklets. And added under my "L" col umn: 12.80 and under my "F" column, 6.00.

I came out of Union Station and while I was cutting across the plaza I noticed 2 small guys who had been on the train with me. They were walking faster than I and cut across to my right. I looked at them.

They both got these big grins on and said, "Hi! How ya doin?"

"I'm doin' all right."

They walked faster and slid across Los Angeles street toward Main-

In the caf+ the boys were using their food coupons for beer. I used my food coupons for beer. Beer was just ten cents a glass. Most of them got drunk very fast. I stood down at the end of the bar. They didn't talk about me anymore.

I drank up all my coupons and then sold my lodging tickets to another bum for 50 cents. I had 5 more beers and walked out.

I began walking. I walked north. Then I walked east. Then north again. Then I was walking along the junkyards where all the broken-down cars were stacked. A guy had once told me, "I sleep in a different car each night. Last night I slept in a Ford, the night before in a Chevy. Tonight I am going to sleep in a Cadillac."

I found a place with the gate chained but the gate door was bent and I was thin enough to slide my body between the chains and the gate and the lock. I looked around until I found a Cadillac. I didn't know the year. I got into the back seat and slept.

It must have been about 6 a.m. in the morning when I heard this kid screaming. He was about 15 years old and had this toy base ball bat in his hand:

"Get out of there! Get out of our car, you dirty bum!"

The kid looked frightened. He had on a white t shirt and tennis shoes and there was a tooth missing from the center of his mouth.

I got out.

"Stand back!" he yelled. "Stand back, stand back!" He pointed the bat at me.

I slowly walked toward the gate, which was then open but not very far.

Then an old guy, about 50, fat and sleepy, stepped out of a tarpaper shack.

"Dad!" The kid yelled, "This man was in one of our cars! I found him in the back seat asleep!"

"Is that right?"

"Yeah, that's right, Dad! I found him asleep in the back seat of one of our cars!"

"What were you doing in our car, Mr.?"

The old guy was nearer to the gate than I was but I kept moving toward it.

"I asked you, 'What were you doing in our car?'"

I moved closer to the gate.

The old guy grabbed the bat from the kid, ran up to me and jammed the end of it into my belly, hard.

"oof!" I went, "god o mighty!"

I couldn't straighten up. I backed away. The kid took courage when he saw that.

"I'll get him, Dad! I'll get him!"

The kid grabbed the bat from the old man and began swinging it. He hit me almost everywhere. On the back, the sides, all along both legs, on the knees, the ankles. All I could do was protect my head. I kept my arms up around my head and he beat me on the arms and elbows. I backed up against the wire fence.

"I'll get him, Dad! I'll get him!"

The kid wouldn't stop. Now and then the bat got through to my head.

Finally the old man said, "O.k., that's enough son."

The kid kept swinging the bat.

"Son, I said, 'That's enough.'"

I turned and held myself up by the wires of the fence. For a moment I couldn't move. They watched me. I finally let go and was able to stand. I limped toward the gate.

"Let me get him again, Dad!"

"No, son."

I got through the gate and walked north. As I began to walk, everything began to tighten. Everything was beginning to swell. My steps became shorter. I knew that I wouldn't be able to move much further. There were only more junkyards. Then I saw a vacant lot between two of them. I walked into the lot and turned my ankle in a hole, right off. I laughed. The lot sloped downwards. Then I tripped Over a hard brush branch which would not give. When I got up again my right palm had been cut by the edge of a piece of green glass. Winebottle. I pulled the glass out. The blood came through the dirt. I brushed the dirt off and sucked against the wound. When I fell the next time, I rolled over on my back, screamed once with pain, then looked up into the morning sky. I was back in my hometown, Los Angeles. Small gnats whirled about my face. I closed my eyes.

===

All The Pussy We Want

Harry and Duke. The bottle sat between in a cheap hotel in downtown L.A. It was Saturday night in one of the cruelest towns in the world. Harry's face was quite round and stupid with just a tip of a nose looking out and you hated his eyes; in fact, you hated Harry when you looked at him, so you didn't look at him. Duke was a little younger, a good listener, with just the slightest of smiles on when he listened. He liked to listen; people were his biggest show and there wasn't any admission charge. Harry was unemployed and Duke was a janitor. They'd both done time and would be in jail again. They knew it. It didn't matter.

The 5th was about one-third finished and there were empty beercans on

the floor. They rolled their cigarettes with the easy calm of men who had lived hard and impossible lives before the age of 35 and were still alive. They knew it was all a bucket of shit but they refused to quit.

"See," said Harry, taking a drag, "I chose you, man. I can trust you. You won't panic. I think your car can make it. We split it right down the middle."

"Tell me about it," said Duke.

"You won't believe it."

"Tell me."

"Well, there's gold out there, laying on the ground, real gold. All you gotta do is walk out and pick it up. I know it sounds crazy, but it's there, I've seen it."

"What's the catch?"

"Well, it's an army artillery grounds. They shell all day, and sometimes at night, that's the catch. It takes guts. But the gold is there. Maybe the shells broke it out of the earth, I don't know. But they usually don't shell at night."

"We go in at night."

"Right. And just pick the stuff up off of the ground. We'll be rich. All the pussy we want. Think of it --- all the pussy we want."

"It sounds good."

"In case they start shelling we leap into the first shell hole. They ain't gonna aim there again. If they hit the target, they're satisfied. If they haven't, the next shot will be somewhere else."

"That sounds logical."

Harry poured some whiskey. "But there's another catch."

"Yeah?"

"There's snakes out there. That's why we need two men. I know you're good with a gun. While I pick up the gold you watch for the snakes and blow their heads off. There are rattlers out there. I think you're the man to do it."

"Why the hell not?"

They sat smoking and drinking, thinking about it.

"All that gold," said Harry, "all that pussy."

"You know," said Duke, "it mighta been that those guns blew open an old treasure chest."

"Whatever it is, there's gold out there."

They thought about it a while longer.

"How do you know," asked Duke, "that after you gather all the gold I won't shoot you out there?"

"Well, I just gotta take that chance."

"Do you trust me?"

"I don't trust any man."

Duke opened another beer, poured another drink.

"Shit, there's no use of me going to work Monday is there?"

"Not now."

"I feel rich already."

"I kind of do too."

"All a man needs is some kind of break," said Duke, "then people treat him like a gentleman."

"Yeah."

"Where's this place at?" asked Duke.

"You'll see when we get there."

"We split down the middle?"

"We split down the middle."

"You're not worried about me shooting you?"

"Why do you keep bringing that up, Duke? I might shoot you."

"Jesus, I never thought of that. You wouldn't shoot a pal, would you?"

"Are we friends?"

"Well, yes, I'd say so, Harry."

"There'll be enough gold and pussy for both of us. We'll be set for life. No more parole officers. No more dish washing gigs. The Beverly Hills whores will be chasing us. Our worries are over."

"Do you really think we can bring it off?"

"Sure."

"Is there really gold down there?"

"Listen, man, I told you."

"O.k."

They drank and smoked some more. They didn't talk. They were both thinking of the future. It was a hot night. Some of the roomers had their doors open. Most of them had a bottle of wine. The men sat in their undershirts, easy and wondering and beaten. Some of them even had women, not too much as ladies but they could hold their wine.

"We better get another bottle," said Duke, "before they close."

"I don't have any money."

"I'll get it."

"O.k."

They got up and walked out the door. They turned right down the hall and went toward the back. The liquor store was down the alley and to the left. At the top of the back steps a man in stained and wrinkled clothing was stretched across the back doorway.

"Hey, it's my old pal Franky Canon. He really hung one on tonight. Guess I'll move him out of the doorway."

Harry picked him up by the feet and dragged him out of the way. Then he bent over him.

"Wonder if anybody's got to him yet?"

"I don't know," said Duke, "check him out."

"Duke pulled all Franky's pockets inside out. Checked the shirt."

Opened his pants, checked him around the waist. All he found was a matchbook that said:

LEARN
DRAFTING
AT HOME

Thousands of top pay
jobs waiting

"I guess somebody got him." said Harry.

They walked down the back steps and into the alley.

"Are you sure that gold is there?" asked Duke.

"Listen," said Harry, "you're pissing me off! You think I'm crazy?"

"No."

"Well, don't ask me that no more then!"

They walked into the liquor store. Duke ordered a fifth of whiskey and a tall six pack of malt beer. Harry stole a bag of mixed nuts. Duke paid for his stuff and they walked out. Just as they got to the alley a young woman walked up; well, young for that area, she was about 30 with a good figure, but her hair was uncombed and she slurred a bit.

"What you guys got in that bag?"

"Cats' tits," said Duke.

She got up near Duke and rubbed against the bag.

"I don't wanna drink no wine. You got whiskey in there?"

"Sure, baby, come on up."

"Lemme see the bottle."

She looked good to Duke. She was slim and her dress was tight, real shit ass tight, god damn. He pulled the bottle out.

"O.k.," she said, "let's go."

They walked up the alley, the girl between them. Her haunch bumped Harry as she walked. Harry grabbed her and kissed her. She broke off.

"You son of a bitch!" she screamed. "lemme alone!"

"You're gonna spoil everything, Harry!" said Duke. "You do that again and I'm gonna punch you out!"

"You can't punch me out."

"Just do it again!"

They walked up the alley and up the stairways, opened the door. The girl looked at Franky Cannon laying there but didn't say anything. They walked on up to the room. The girl sat down and crossed her legs. She had nice legs.

"My name's Ginny," she said.

Duke poured the drinks.

"I'm Duke. He's Harry."

Ginny smiled and took her drink.

"Some son of a bitch I'm stayin' with he kept me naked, kept my clothes locked in the closet. I was in there a week. I waited until he passed out, took the key off him, got this dress and ran off."

"That's a nice dress."

"It's alright."

"It brings out the best in you."

"Thanks. Hey, listen, what do you guys do?"

"Do?" asked Duke.

"Yeah, I mean how do you make it?"

"We're gold prospectors," said Harry.

"Oh, come on, don't give me that shit."

"That's right," said Duke, "we're gold prospectors."

"We've struck it. We're gonna be rich inside a week," said Harry.

Then Harry had to get up to piss. The can was down the hall. When Harry left Ginny said, "I wanna fuck you first, Honey. I'm not too crazy about him."

"That's o.k.," said Duke.

He poured three more drinks. When Harry came back Duke told him.

"She's gonna lay me first."

"Says who?"

"Says us," said Duke.

"That's right," said Ginny.

"I think we ought to take her with us," said Duke.

"Let's see how she lays first," said Harry.

"I drive men crazy," said Ginny. "I make men scream. I've got the tightest pussy in the state of California!"

"All right," said Duke, "let's find out."

"Gimme another drink first," She said, draining her glass.

Duke gave her a refill. "I've got something too, baby, I'll probably rip you wide open!"

"Not unless you stick your foot in there," said Harry.

Ginny just smiled as she drank. She finished her drink.

"Come on," she said to Duke, "let's make it."

Ginny walked over to the bed and pulled her dress off. She had on blue panties and a faded pink brassiere held together by a safety pin in the back. Duke had to undo the safety pin.

"Is he gonna watch?" she asked Duke.

"He can if he wants," said Duke, "what the hell."

"O.k.," said Ginny.

They got into the sheets together. There were some minutes of warmup and maneuvering as Harry watched. The blanket was on the floor. All Harry

could see was movement under a rather dirty sheet.

Then Duke mounted. Harry could see Duke's butt bobbling under the sheet.

Then Duke said, "Oh shit!

"What's the matter?" asked Ginny.

"I slipped out! I thought you said you had a tight box!"

"I'll put you in! I don't think you were in!"

"I was in somewhere!" said Duke.

Then Duke's butt was bobbing again. I never should have told that son of a bitch about the gold, thought Harry. Now we've got this bitch on our hands. They might team against me. Of course, if he happened to get killed, she might like me better. Then Ginny moaned and started talking. "Oh, honey, honey! Oh, Jesus, honey, oh my gawd!"

What a bunch of bullshit, thought Harry.

He got up and walked over to the back window. The back of the hotel was right near the Vermont turnoff on the Hollywood freeway. He watched the headlights and tail lights of the cars. It always amazed him that some people were in such a hurry to go in one direction while other people were in such a hurry to go in another. Somebody had to be wrong, or else it was just a dirty game. Then he heard Ginny's voice. "I'm gonna COME! O, my gawd I'm gonna COME! O, my gawd! I'm :"

Bullshit, he thought and then turned to look at them. Duke was really working. Ginny's eyes did seem glazed; she stared straight up into the ceiling, straight up into an unshaded lightbulb; glazed, seemingly glazed she stared up past Duke's left ear:

I might have to shoot him out on that artillery field, thought Harry. Especially if she's got a tight box.

gold, all that gold.

===

The Great Poet

I went to see him. He was the great poet. He was the best narrative poet since Jeffers, still under 70 and famous throughout the world. Perhaps his two best-known books were *My Grief Is Better Than Your Grief, Ha!* and *The Dead Chew Gum In Languor*. He had taught at many universities, had won all the prizes, including the Nobel Prize. Bernard Stachman.

I climbed the steps of the YMCA. Mr. Stachman lived in Room 223. I knocked. "HELL, COME ON IN!" somebody screamed from inside. I opened the door and walked in. Bernard Stachman was in bed. The smell of vomit, wine, urine, shit and decaying food was in the air. I began to gag. I ran to the bathroom, vomited, then came out.

"Mr. Stachman," I said, "why don't you open a window?"

"That's a good idea. And don't give me any of that 'Mr. Stachman' shit,

I'm Barney."

He was crippled, and after a great effort he managed to pull himself out of the bed and into the chair at his side. "Now for a good talk," he said. "I've been waiting for this."

At his elbow, on a table, was a gallon jug of dago red filled with cigarette ashes and dead moths. I looked away, then looked back. He had the jug to his mouth but most of the wine ran right back out, down his shirt, down his pants. Bernard Stachman put the jug back. "Just what I needed."

"You ought to use a glass," I said. "It's easier."

"Yes, I believe you're right." He looked around. There were a few dirty glasses and I wondered which one he would choose. He chose the nearest one. The bottom of the glass was filled with a hardened yellow substance. It looked like the remains of chicken and noodles. He poured the wine. Then he lifted the glass and emptied it. "Yes, that's much better. I see you brought your camera. I guess you came to photograph me?"

"Yes," I said. I went over and opened the window and breathed in the fresh air. It had been raining for days and the air was fresh and clear.

"Listen," he said, "I been meaning to piss for hours. Bring me an empty bottle." There were many empty bottles. I brought him one. He didn't have a zipper, just buttons, with only the bottom button fastened because he was so bloated. He reached in and got his penis and rested the head on the lip of the bottle. The moment he began to urinate his penis stiffened and waved about, spraying piss all over - on his shirt, on his pants, in his face, and unbelievably, the last spurt went into his left ear.

"It's hell being crippled," he said.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"How did what happen?"

"Being crippled."

"My wife. She ran me over with her car."

"How? Why?"

"She said she couldn't stand me anymore."

I didn't say anything. I took a couple of photos.

"I got photos of my wife. Want to see some photos of my wife?"

"All right."

"The photo album is there on top of the refrigerator."

I walked over and got it, sat down. There were just shots of high-heeled shoes and a woman's trim ankles, nylon-covered legs with garter belts, assorted legs in panty hose. On some of the pages were pasted ads from the meat market: chuck roast, 89¢ a pound. I closed the album. "When we divorced," he said, "she gave me these." Bernard reached under the pillow on his bed and pulled out a pair of high-heeled shoes with long spike heels. He'd had them bronzed. He stood them on the night table. Then he poured

another drink. "I sleep with those shoes," he said, "I make love to those shoes and then wash them out."

I took some more photos.

"Here, you want a photo? Here's a good photo." He unbuttoned the lone button on his pants. He didn't have on any underwear. He took the heel of the shoe and wiggled it up his behind. "Here, take this one." I got the photo.

It was difficult for him to stand but he managed by holding onto the night table.

"Are you still writing, Barney?"

"Hell, I write all the time."

"Don't your fans interrupt your work?"

"Oh hell, sometimes the women find me but they don't stay long."

"Are your books selling?"

"I get royalty checks."

"What is your advice to young writers?"

"Drink, fuck and smoke plenty of cigarettes."

"What is your advice to older writers?"

"If you're still alive, you don't need any advice."

"What is the impulse that makes you create a poem?"

"What makes you take a shit?"

"What do you think of Reagan and unemployment?"

"I don't think of Reagan or unemployment. It all bores me. Like space flights and the Super Bowl."

"What are your concerns then?"

"Modern women."

"Modern women?"

"They don't know how to dress. Their shoes are dreadful."

"What do you think of Women's Liberation?"

"Any time they're willing to work the car washes, get behind the plow, chase down the two guys who just held up the liquor store, or clean up the sewers, anytime they're ready to get their tits shot off in the army, I'm ready to stay home and wash the dishes and get bored picking lint off the rug."

"But Isn't there some logic on their demands?"

"Of course."

Stachman poured another drink. Even drinking from the glass, part of the wine dribbled down his chin and onto his shirt. He had the body odor of a man who hadn't bathed in months, "My wife," he said, "I'm still in love with my wife. Hand me that phone, will you?" I handed the phone to him. He dialed a number. "Claire? Hello, Claire?" He put the receiver down.

"What happened?" I asked.

"The usual. She hung up. Listen, let's get out of here, let's go to a

bar. I've been in this damned room too long. I need to get out."

"But it's raining. It's been raining for a week. The streets are flooded."

"I don't care. I want to get out. She's probably fucking some guy right now. She's probably got her high heels on. I always made her leave her high heels on."

I helped Bernard Stachman get into an old brown overcoat. All the buttons were missing off the front. It was stiff with grime. It was hardly an L.A. overcoat, it was heavy and clumsy, it must have come from Chicago or Denver in the thirties.

Then we got his crutches and we climbed painfully down the YMCA stairway. Bernard had a fifth of muscatel in one of the pockets. We reached the entrance and Bernard assured me he could make it across the sidewalk and into the car. I was parked some distance from the curbing.

As I ran around to the other side to get in I heard a shout and then a splash. It was raining, and raining hard. I ran back around and Bernard had managed to fall and wedge himself in the gutter between the car and the curbing. The water swept around him, he was sitting up, the water rushed over him, ran down through his pants, lapped against his sides, the crutches floating sluggishly in his lap.

"It's all right," he said, "just drive on and leave me."

"Oh hell, Barney."

"I mean it. Drive on. Leave me. My wife doesn't love me."

"She's not your wife, Barney. You're divorced."

"Tell that to the Marines."

"Come on, Barney, I'm going to help you up."

"No, no. It's all right. I assure you. Just go ahead. Get drunk without me."

I picked him up, got the door open and lifted him into the front seat. He was very, very wet. Streams of water ran across the floorboards. Then I went around to the other side and got in. Barney unscrewed the cap off the bottle of muscatel, took a hit, passed the bottle to me. I took a hit. Then I started the car and drove, looking out through the windshield into the rain for a bar that we might possibly enter and not vomit the first time we got the look and smell of the urinal.

====

I shot a man in Reno

Bukowski cried when Judy Garland sang at the N.Y. Philharmonic, Bukowski cried when Shirley Temple sang "I Got Animal Crackers in my Soup"; Bukowski cried in cheap flophouses, Bukowski can't dress, Bukowski can't talk,

Bukowski is scared of women, Bukowski had a bad stomach, Bukowski is full of fears, and hates dictionaries, nuns, pennies, busses, churches, parkbenches, spiders, flies, fleas, freaks; Bukowski didn't go to war. Bukowski is old, Bukowski hasn't flown a kite for 45 years; if Bukowski were an ape, they'd run him out of the tribe...

my friend is so worried about tearing the meat of my soul from my bones that he hardly seems to think of his own existence.

"but Bukowski pukes real neat and I've never seen him piss on the floor."

so I do have charm after all, you see. then he throws open a little door and there in a 3 by 6 room stacked with papers and rags is an out.

"you can always stay here, Bukowski. you'll never want."

no window, no bed, but I'm next to the bathroom. it still looks good to me.

"but you may have to wear earplugs because of the music I keep playing."

"I can pick up a set, I'm sure."

we walk back into his den. "you wanna hear some Lenny Bruce?"

"no, thanks."

"Ginsberg?"

"no, no."

he had just to keep that tape machine going, or the record player. they finally hit me with Johnny Cash singing to the boys at Folsom.

"I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die."

it seems to me that Johnny is giving them a little shit just like I suspect Bob Hope does to the boys at Viet during Xmas, but I have this kind of mind. the boys holler, they are out of their cells but I feel like it's something like tossing meatless bones instead of biscuits to the hungered and the trapped. I don't feel a damn thing holy or brave about it. there's only one thing to do for man in jail: let 'em out. there's only one thing to do for man at war: stop the war.

"turn it off," I asked.

"whatsa matta?"

"it's a trick. a publicity man's dream."

"you can't say that. Johnny's done time."

"a lot of people have."

"we think it's good music."

"I like his voice. but the only man who can sing in jail, really, is a man who is in jail, really."

"we still like it."

his wife is there and a couple of young black man who play combo in some band.

"Bukowski likes Judy Garland. Somewhere over the rainbow."

"I liked her that one time in N.Y. her soul was up. you couldn't beat

her."

"she's overweight and a lush."

it was the same old thing - people tearing meat and not getting anywhere. I leave a little early. as I do, I hear them put J.Cash back on.

I stop for some beer and just make it in as the phone is ringing.

"Bukowski?"

"yeah?"

"Bill."

"oh, hello Billo."

"what are you doing?"

"nothing."

"what are you doing Saturday night?"

"I'm tied then."

"I wanted you to come over, meet some people."

"not this time."

"you know, Charley, I am going to get tired of calling."

"yeah."

"do you still write for that same scurrilous rag?"

"what?"

"that hippie paper..."

" have you ever read it?"

"sure. all tha protest stuff. you're wasting your time."

"I don't always write to the paper's policy."

"I thought you did."

"I thought you had read the paper."

"by the way, what have you heard from our mutual friend?"

"Paul?"

"yes, Paul."

"I haven't heard from him."

"you know, he admires your poetry very much."

"that's all right."

"personally, I don't like your poetry."

"that's all right too."

"you can't make it over Saturday."

"no."

"well, I'm going to get tired of calling. take care."

"yeah, good night."

another meat tearer. what the hell did they want? well, Bill lived in Malibu and Bill made money writing - philosophical sex shit potboilers full of typos and undergraduate Art work - and Bill couldn't write but Bill couldn't stay off the telephone either. He'd phone again. and again. and fling his little scrubby shit turds at me. I was the old man who hadn't sold his balls to the butcher and it drove them screwy. their final victory over me could only be a physical beating and that could happen to any man at any

place.

Bukowski thought Mickey Mouse was a nazi; Bukowski made an ass out of himself at Barney's Beanery; Bukowski made an ass out of himself at Shelly's Manne-Hole; Bukowski is jealous of Ginsberg, Bukowski is jealous of the 1969 Cadillac, Bukowski can't understand Rimbaud; Bukowski wipes his ass with brown hard toilet paper, Bukowski will be dead in 5 years, Bukowski hasn't written a decent poem since 1963, Bukowski cried when Judy Garland... shot a man in Reno.

I sit down. stick the sheet in the typer. open a beer. light a smoke.

I get one or two good lines and the telephone rings.

"Buk?"

"yeah?"

"Marty."

"hello, Marty."

"listen, I just ran across your last 2 columns. it's good writing. I didn't know you were writing so well. I want to run them in book form. have they come back from GROVE yet?"

"yeah."

"I want them. your columns are as good as your poems."

"a friend of mine in Malibu says my poems stink."

"to hell with him. I want the columns."

"they're with ---- ----."

"hell, he's a pornie-man. if you go with me you'll hit the universities, the best book stores. when those kinds find you out, it's all over; they're tired of that involute shit they've been getting for centiries. you'll see; I can see bringing out all your back and unavailable stuff and selling it for a buck, or a buck and a half a copy and going into the millions."

"aren't you afraid that will make a prick out of me?"

"I mean, haven't you always been a prick, especially when you've been drinking... by the way, hoh've you been doing?"

"they say I grabbed a guy at Shelly's by the lapels and shook him up a bit. but it could have been worse, you know."

"how do you mean?"

"I mean, he could have grabbed me by the lapels and shook me up a bit. a matter of pride, you know."

"listen, don't die or get killed untill we get you out in those buck and a half editions."

"I'll try not to, Marty."

"how's the 'Penguin' coming?"

"Stanges says January. I just got the page proofs. and a 50 puond advance which I blew on the horses."

"can't you stay away from the track?"

"you bastards never say anything when I win."

"that's right. well, let me know on the columns."

"right. good night."

"good night."

Bukowski, the big-time writer; a statue of Bukowski in the Kremlin, jacking off; Bukowski and Castro, a statue in Havana in the sunlight covered with birdshit, Bukowski and Castro riding a tandem racing bike to victory - Bukowski in the rear seat; Bukowski bathing in a nest of orioles; Bukowski lashing a 19-years-old high-yellow with a tiger whip, a high-yellow with 38 inch busts, a high-yellow who reads Rimbaud; Bukowski kukoo in the walls of the world, wondering who shut off the luck... Bukowski going for Judy Garland when it was too late for everybody.

then I remember the time and get back in the car. just off Wilshire Boulevard. there's his name on the big sign. we once worked the same shit job. I am not too crazy about Wilshire blvd. but I am still a learner. I don't block out anything. he's half-coloured, from a white mother, black father combo. we fell together on the shit job, something manual. mostly not wanting to wade in shit forever, and although shit was a good teacher there were only so many lessons and then it could drown you and kill you forever.

I parked in back and beat on the back door. he said he'd wait late that night. it was 9:30 p.m. the door opened.

TEN YEARS. TEN YEARS. ten years. ten years. ten. ten fucking YEARS.

"Hank, you son of a bitch!"

"Jim, you lucky mother..."

"come on up."

I followed him in. jesus, so you don't buy all that. but it's nice especially with the secretaries and staff gone. I block nothing. he has 6 or 8 rooms. we go in to his desk. I rip out the two 6 packs of beers.

ten years.

he is 43. I am 48. I look at least 15 years older than he. and feel some shame. the sagging belly. the hang-dog air. the world has taken many hours and ten years from me with their very dull and routine tasks; it tells. I feel shame for my defeat. the best revolutionary is a poor man; I am not even a revolutionary, I am only tired. what a bucket of shit was mine! mirror, mirror on the wall...

he looked good in a light yellow sweater, relaxed and really happy to see me.

"I've been going through hell," he said, "I haven't talked to a real human being in months."

"man, I don't know if I qualify."

"you qualify."

that desk looks twenty feet wide.

"Jim, I been fired from so many places like this. some shit sitting in a swivel. like a dream upon a dream upon a dream, all bad. now I sit here drinking beer with a man behind a desk and I don'y know anymore now than I

did then."

he laughed. "baby, I want to give you your own office, your own chair, your own desk. I know what you're getting now. I want to double that."

"I can't accept it."

"why?"

"I want to know where my value would be to you?"

"I need your brain."

I laughed.

"I'm serious."

then he laid out the plan. told me what he wanted. he had one of those stirring motherfucking brains that dreamed that sort of thing up. it seemed so good I had to laugh.

"it'll take 3 months to set it up," I tell him.

"then a contract."

"o.k. with me. but these things sometimes don't work."

"it'll work."

"meanwhile I've got a friend who'll let me sleep in his broom closet if the walls fall in."

"fine."

we drink 2 or 3 more hours then he leaves to get enough sleep to meet his friend for a yachting next morning (Saturday) and I tool around and drive out of the high rent district and hit the first dirty bar for a closer or two. and son of a bitch if I don't meet a guy I used to know down at a job we both used to have.

"Luke!" I say, "son of a bitch!"

"Hank, baby!"

another coloured (or black) man, (what do the white guys do at night?)

he looks low so I buy him one.

"you still at the place?" he asks.

"yeah."

"man, shit," he says.

"what?"

"I couldn't take it anymore where you're at, you know, so I quit. ma, I got a job right away. wow, a change, you know. that's what kills a man: lack of change."

"I know, Luke."

"well, the first morning I walk up to the machine. it's a fibre glass place. I've got on this open neck shirt with short sleeves and I notice people staring at me. well, hell, I sit down and start pressing the levers and it's all right for a while and next thing you know I start itching all over. I call the foreman over and I say, 'hey, what the hell's this? I'm itching all over! my neck, my arms, everywhere!' he tells me, 'it's nothing, you'll get used to it.' but I notice he has on this scarf buttoned up all the way around his throat and this long-sleeved working shirt. well, I come

in the next day all scarfed-up and oiled and buttoned but it's still no good - this fucking glass is shiving off so fine you can't see it and it's all little glass arrows and it goes right through the clothing and into the skin. then I know why they make me wear the protective glasses for my eyes. could blind a man in half an hour. I had to quit. went to a foundry, man, do you know that men POUR THIS WHITE HOT SHIT INTO MOLDS? they pour it like bacon-grease or gravy. Unbelievable! and hot! shit! I quit. man, how you doing?"

"that bitch there, Luke, she keeps looking at me and grinning and pulling her skirt higher."

"don't pay any attention. she's crazy."

"but she has beautiful legs."

"yes, she has."

I buy another drink, pick up, walk over to her.

"hello, baby."

she goes into her purse, comes out, hits the button and she's got a beautiful 6 inches swivel. I look at the bartender who looks blank-faced. the bitch says, "one step closer and you got no balls!"

I knock her drink over and when she looks at that I grab her wrist, twist the swivel out, fold it, put it into my pocket. the bartender still looks neutral. I go back to Luke and we finish our drinks. I notice it's ten to 2 and get 2 six packs from the barkeep. we go out to my car. Luke's without wheels. she follows us. "I need a ride." "where?" "around Century." "that's a long way." "so what, you motherfuckers got my knife."

by the time I am halfway to Century I see those female legs lifting in the back seat. when the legs come down I pull down a lond dark corner and tell Luke to take a smoke. I hate seconds but when first haven't been for a long time and you're supposed to be a great Artist and an understander of Life, seconds just HAVE to do, and like the boys say, with some, seconds are better. it was good. when I dropped her off I gave her the switchblade back wrapped in a ten. stupid, of course. but I like to be stupid. Luke lives around 8th and Irola so it's not too far in for me.

as I open the door the phone begins ringing. I open a beer and sit in the rocker and listen to it ring. for me, it's been enough - evening, night and morning.

Bukowski wears brown b.v.d's. Bukowski is afraid of airplanes. Bukowski hates Santa Klaus. Bukowski makes deformed figures out of typewriter erasers. when water drips, Bukowski cries. when Bukowski cries, water drips. o, sanctums of fountains, o scrotums, o fountaining scrotums, o man's great ugliness everywhere like the fresh dogturd that the morning shoe did not see again; o, the mighty police, o the mighty weapons, o the mighty dictators, o the mighty damn fools everywhere, o the lonely lonely octopus, o the clock-tick seeping each neat one of us balanced and unbalanced and holy and constipated, o the bums lying in alleys of misery in a golden world, o the

children to become ugly, o the ugly to become uglier, o the sadness and
sabres and the closing of the walls - no Santa Claus, no Pussy, no Magic
Wand, no Cinderella, no Great Minds Ever; kukoo - just shit and the whipping
of dogs and children, just shit and the whipping away of shit; just doctors
without patients just clouds without rain just days without days, o god o
mighty that you put this upon us.

when we break into your mighty KIKE palace and timecard angels I want
to hear Your voice just saying once

MERCY

MERCY

MERCY

FOR YOURSELF and for us and for what we will do to You, I turned off of
Irola until I hit Normandie, that's what I did, and then came in and sat and
listened to the telephone ring.

===

Night streets of madness

the kid and I were the last of a drunkman party at my place, and we
were sitting there when somebody outside began blowing a car horn, loud LOUD
LOUD it was, oh sing loud, but then everything is axed through the head
anyway. the world is done, so I just sat there with my drink, smoking a
cigar, thinking of nothing - the poets were gone, the poets with their
ladies were gone, it was fairly pleasant even with the horn going. a
comparison. the poets had each accused other of various treacheries, of bad
writing, of having slipped; meanwhile, each of them claiming they deserved
better recognition, that they wrote better than so and so and so forth. I
told them all that they needed 2 years in the coal mines or the steel mills,
but on they chattered, finky, precious, barbaric, and most of them rotten
writers. now they were gone. the cigar was good. the kid sat there. I had
just written a foreword to his second book of poems. or his first? well.

"listen," said the kid, "let's go out there and tell them to fuck-off.
tell him to jam that horn up his ass."

the kid wasn't a bad writer, and he had the ability to laugh at
himself, which is sometimes a sign of greatness, or at least a sign that you
have a chance to end up being something else besides a stuffed literary
turd. the world was full of stuffed literary turds talking about the time
they met Pound at Spoleto or Edmund Wilson in Boston or Dali in his
underwear or Lowell in his garden; sitting there in their tiny bathrobes,
letting you have it, and NOW you wew talking to THEM, ah, you see. "... the
last time I saw Burroughs..." "Jimmy Baldwin, jesus, he was drunk, we had to
trot him out on the stage and lean him on the mike..."

"let's go out there and tell them to jam that horn up their ass," said

the kid, influenced by the Bukowski myth (I am really a coward), and the Hemingway thing and Humphrey B. and Eliot with his panties rolled. well. I puffed on my cigar. the horn went on. LOUDE SING KUKOOO.

"the horn's all right. never go out on the streets after you've benn drinking 5 or 6 or 8 or ten hours. they have cages ready for the like us. I don't think I could take another cage, not one more god damned cage of theirs. I build enough of my own."

"I'm going out to tell them to shove it," said the kid.

the kid was under the superman influence, Man and Superman. he liked huge man, tough and murderous, 6-4, 300 pounds, who wrote immortal poetry. the trouble was the big boys were all subnormal and it was the dainty little queers with the fingernail polish on who write the tough-boy poems. the only guy who fit the kid's hero-mold was big John Thomas and big John Thomas always acted as if the kid weren't there. the kid was Jewish and big John Thomas had the mainline to Adolph. I liked them both and I don't like very many people.

"listen," said the kid, "I am going to tell them to jam it."

oh my god, the kid was big a little on the fat side, he hadn't missed too many meals, but he was easy inside, scared and worried and a little crazy like the rest of us, none of us made it, finally, and I said, "kid, forget the horn. it doesn't sound like a man blowing anyway. it sounds like a woman. a man will stop and start with a horn, make musical threats out of it. a woman just leans on it. the total sound, one big female neurosis."

""fuck it!" said the kid. he ran out the door.

what does this have to do with anything? I thought. what does it matter? people keep making moves that don't count. when you make a move, everything must be mathematically set. that's what Hem learned at the bullfights and put to work in his work. that's what I learn at the track and put to work in my life. good old Hem and Buk.

"hello, Hem? Buk calling."

"oh, Buk, so glad you called."

"thought I'd drop over for a drink."

"oh, I'd love it, kid, but you see, my god, you might say I'm kinda out of town right now."

"but why'd you do it, Ernie?"

"you've read the books. they claim I was crazy, imagining things. in and out of the bughouse. they say I imagined the phone was tapped, that I imagined the C.I.A. was on my ass, that I was being tailed and watched. you know, I wasn't really political but I always fucked with the left. the Spanish war, all that crap."

"yeah, most of you literary guys lean left. it seems Romantic, but it can turn into a hell of a trap."

"I know. but really, I had this hell of a hangover, and I knew I had slipped, and when they believed in THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA, I knew that the

world was rotten."

"I know. you went back to your early style. but it wasn't real."

"I know it wasn't real. and I got the PRIZE. and the tail on me. old age on me. sitting around drinking like an old fuck, telling stale stories to anybody who would listen. I had to blow my brains out."

"o.k., Ernie, see you later."

"all right, I know you will, Buk."

he hung up. and how.

I went outside to check on the kid.

it was an old woman in a new '69 car. she kept leaning on the horn. she didn't have any legs. any breasts. any brain. just a '69 car and indignation, great and total indignation. a car was blocking her driveway. she had her own home. I lived in one of the last slum courts on DeLongpre. someday the landlord would sell it for a tremendous sum and I would be bulldozed out. too bad. I threw parties that lasted until the sun came up, ran the typer day and night. a madman lived in the next court. everything was sweet. one block North and ten blocks West I could walk along a sidewalk that had footprints os STARS upon it. I don't know what the names mean. I don't hit the movies. don't have a t.v. when my radio stopped playing I threw it out the window. drunk. me, not the radio. there is a big hole in one of my windows. I forgot the screen was there. I had to open the screen and drop the radio out. later, whilst I was drunken barefoot my foot (left) picked up all the glass, and the doctor while slitting my foot open without benefit of a shot, probing for ballsy glass, asked me, "listen, do you ever walk around not quite knowing what you are doing?"

"most of the time, baby."

then he gave me a big cut that wasn't needed.

I gripped the sides of the table and said, "yes, Doctor."

then he became more kindly. why should doctors be better than I am? I don't understand it. the old medicine man gimmick.

so there I was out on the street, Charles Bukowski, friend of Hemingway, Ernie, I have never read DEATH IN THE AFTERNOON. where do I get a copy?

the kid said to the crazy woman in the car, who was only demanding respectful and stupid property rights, "we'll move the car, we'll push it out of the way."

the kid was talking for me too. now that I had written his foreword, he owned me.

"look, kid, there's no place to push the car. and I really don't care. I'm going in for a drink." it was just beginning to rain. I have a most delicate skin, like an alligator, and soul to match. I walked off. shit, I'd had enough wars.

I walked off and then just as I about got to my front court hole, I heard screaming voices. I turned.

then we had this. a thin kid, insane, in white t-shirt screaming at the fat Jewish poet I had just written a foreword to poems for. what had the white t-shirt to do with it? the white t-shirt pushed against my semi-immortal poet. he pushed hard. the crazy old woman kept leaning against the car horn.

Bukowski, should you test your left hook again? you swing like the old barn door and only win one fight out of ten. when was the last fight you won, Bukowski? you should be wearing women's panties.

well, hell, with a record like yours, one more loss won't be any big shame.

I started to move forward to help the Jewish kid poet but I saw he had white t-shirt backing up. then out of the 20 million dollar highrise next to my slum hole, here came a young woman running. I watched the cheeks of the ass wobble in the fake Hollywood moonlight.

girl, I could show you something you will, would never forget - a solid 3 and one quarter inches of bobbling throbbing cock, oh my, but she never gave me a chance, she asshole-wobbling ran to her little 68 Fiat or however you spell it, and got in, pussy dying for my poetic soul, and she got in, started the thing, got it out of the driveway, almost ran me over, me Bukowski, BUKOWSKI, hummm, and ran the thing into the underground parking of the 20 million buck highrise. why hadn't she parked there to begin with? well.

the guy in the white t-shirt is still wobbling around and insane, my Jewish poet has moved back to my side there in the Hollywood moonlight, which was like stinking dishwater spilling over us all, suicide is so difficult, maybe our luck will change, there's PENGUIN coming up, Norse-Bukowski-Lamantia... what?

now, now, the woman has her clearance for her driveway but she can't make it in. she doesn't even angle her car properly. she keeps backing up and ramming a white delivery truck in front of her. there go the taillights on first shot. she backs up. hits the gas. there goes half a back door. she backs up. hits the gas. there goes all the fender and half the left side, no the right side, that's it the right side. nothing adds. the driveway is clear.

Bukowski-Norse-Lamantia. Penguin books. it's a damn good thing for those other two guys that I am in there.

again chickenshit steel mashing against steel. and in between she's leaning on the horn. white t-shirt dangling in the moonlight, raving.

"what's going on?" I asked the kid.

"I dunno," he finally admitted.

"you'll make a good rabbi some day but you should understand all this."

the kid is studying to be a rabbi.

"I don't understand it," he said.

"I need a drink," I said. "if John Thomas were here he'd murder them

all. but I ain't John Thomas."

I was just about to leave, the woman just kept on ramming the white pickup truck to pieces, I was just about to leave when an old man in a floppy brown overcoat and glasses, a real old guy, he was older than I, and that's old, he came out and confronted the kid in the white t-shirt. confronted? that's the right word ain't it?

anyhow, as they say, the old guy with glasses and floppy brown overcoat runs out with this big can of green paint, it must have been at least a gallon or 5 gallons, I don't know what it means, I have completely lost the plot or the meaning, if there ever was any in the first place, and the old man throws the paint on the insane kid in the white t-shirt circling around on DeLongpre ave. in the chickenshit Hollywood moonlight, and most of it misses him and some of it gets him, mostly where his heart used to be, a smash of green along the white, and it happens fast, like things happen fast, almost quicker than eye or the pulse can add up, and that's why you get such diverent accounts of any action, riot or fist fight or anything, the eye and the soul can't keep up with the frustrating animal ACTION, but I saw the old man go down, fall, I think the first was a push, but I know that the second wasn't. the woman in the car stopped ramming and honking and just sat there screaming, screaming, one total pitch of scream that meant the same thing as her leaning on the honker, she was dead and finished forever in a '69 car and she couldn't fathom it, she was hooked and broken, thrown away, and some small touch inside of her still realized this - nobody ever finally loses their soul - they only piss away 99/100ths of it.

white t-shirt landed goon on the old man on the second shot. broke his glasses. let him flopping and floundering in his own brown overcoat. the old man got up and the kid gave him another shot, knocked him down, hit him against as he got halfass up, the kid in the white t was having a good time of it.

the young poet said to me, "JESUS! LOOK WHAT HE'S DOING TO THE OLD MAN!"

"hummm, very interesting," I said, wishing I had a drink or a smoke at least.

I walked off back toward my place. then I saw the squad car and moved a bit faster. the kid followed me in.

"why don't we go back out there and tell them what happened?"

"because nothing happened except that everybody has been driven insane and stupid by life. in this society there are only two things that count: don't be caught without money and don't get caught high on any kind of high."

"but he shouldn't have done that to the old man."

"that's what old men are for."

"but what about justice?"

"but that is justice: the young whipping the old, the living whipping

the dead. don't you see?"

"but you say these things and you're old."

"I know, let's step inside."

I brought out some more beer and we sat there. through the walls you could hear the radio of the stupid squad car. 2 twentytwo years old kids with guns and clubs were going to be the immediate decision-makers upon 2,000 years of idiotic, homosexual, sadistic Christianity.

no wonder they felt good in their smooth and well-fed stretched black, most policemen being lower-middle class servants given a steak in the frying pan and a wife with halfway decent ass and legs, and a little quiet home in Shitland - they'd kill you to prove Los Angeles was right, we're taking you in, sir, so sorry, sir, but we've got to do this, sir.

2,000 years of Christianity and what do you end up with? squad-car radios trying to hold rotting shit together, and what else? tons of wars, little air raids, muggers in streets, knifings, so many insane that you just forget it, you just let them run the streets in policeman's uniforms or out of them.

so we went inside and the kid kept saying,

"hey, let's go out there and tell the police what happened."

"no, kid, please. if you are drunk you are guilty no matter what happens."

"but they are right outside, let's go to tell them."

"there's nothing to tell."

the kid looked at me as if I were some kind of chickenshit coward. I was. the longest he had ever been in jail was 7 hours under some kind of east L.A. campus protestation.

"kid, I think that the night is over."

I threw him a blanket for the couch and he went to sleep. I took 2 quarts of beer, opened both, set them on the headboard of my rented bed, took a big swallow, stretched out, waited on my death as Cummings must have done, Jeffers, the garbage man, the newspaper boy, the tout...

I finished off the beers.

the kid woke up about 9:30 a.m. I can't understand early risers. Micheline was another early riser. running around ringing doorbells, waking everybody up. they were nervous, trying to push down walls. I always figured a man was a damn fool if he got up before noon. Norse had the best idea - sit around in silk robe and pajamas and let the world go its way.

I let the kid out the door and off he went into the world. the green paint was dry on the street. Maeterlinck's bluebird was dead. Hirschman sat in a dark room with a bloody right nostril.

and I had written another FOREWORD to another book of somebody's poetry. how many more?

"hey, Bukowski, I've got this book of poems here. I thought you might read the poems and say something."

"say something? but I don't like poetry, man."

"that's all right. just say something."

the kid was gone. I had to take a shit. the toilet was clogged; the landlord gone for 3 days. I took the shit and put it in a brown paper bag. then I went outside and walked with the paperbag like a man going to work with his lunch. then when I got to the vacant lot I threw the bag. three forewords. 3 bags of shit. nobody would ever understand how Bukowski suffered.

I walked back toward my place, dreaming of supine women and everlasting fame. the former would be nicer. and I was running out of brown bags. I mean, paper bags. 10 a.m. there was the mailman. a letter from Beiles in Greece. he said it was raining there too.

fine, then, and inside I was alone again, and the madness of the night was the madness of the day. I arranged myself upon the bed, supine, staring upward and listened to the cocksucking rain.

====

Aftermath of a Lengthy Rejection Slip

I WALKED AROUND outside and thought about it. It was the longest one I ever got. Usually they only said, "Sorry, this did not quite make the grade" or "Sorry, this didn't quite work in." Or more often, the regular printed rejection form.

But this was the longest, the longest ever. It was from my story "My Adventures in Half a Hundred Rooming Houses." I walked under a lamppost, took the little slip out of my pocket and reread it -

Dear Mr. Bukowski:

Again, this is a conglomeration of extremely good stuff and other stuff so full of idolized prostitutes, morning-after vomiting scenes, misanthropy, praise for suicide etc. that it is not quite for a magazine of any circulation at all. This is, however, pretty much a saga of a certain type of person and in it I think you've done an honest job. Possibly we will print you sometime, but I don't know exactly when. That depends on you.

Sincerely yours,

Whit Burnett

Oh, I knew the signature: the long "h" that twisted into the end of the "W," and the beginning of the "B" which dropped halfway down the page.

I put the slip back in my pocket and walked on down the street. I felt pretty good.

Here I had only been writing two years. Two short years. It took

Hemingway ten years. And Sherwood Anderson, he was forty before he was published.

I guess I would have to give up drinking and women of ill-fame, though. Whiskey was hard to get anyhow and wine was ruining my stomach. Millie though - Millie, that would be harder, much harder.

...But Millie, Millie, we must remember art. Dostoievsky, Gorki, for Russia, and now America wants an Eastern-European. America is tired of Browns and smiths. The Browns and the Smiths are good writers but there are too many of them and they all write alike. America wants the fuzzy blackness, impractical meditations and repressed desires of an Eastern-European.

Millie, Millie, your figure is just right: it all pours down tight to the hips and loving you is as easy as putting on a pair of gloves in zero weather. Your room is always warm and cheerful and you have record albums and cheese sandwiches that I like. And Millie, your cat, remember? Remember when he was a kitten? I tried to teach him to shake hands and to roll over, and you said a cat wasn't a dog and it couldn't be done, Well, I did it, didn't I, Millie? The cat's big now and he's been a mother and had kittens. We've been friends a long time. But it's going to have to go now, Millie: cats and figures and Tschaikowsky's 6th Symphony. America needs an Eastern-European....

I found I was in front of my rooming house by then and I started to go in. Then I saw a light on in my window. I looked in: Carson and Shipkey were at the table with somebody I didn't know. They were playing cards and in the center sat a huge jug of wine. Carson and Shipkey were painters who couldn't make up their minds whether to paint like Salvador Dali or Rockwell Kent, and they worked at the shipyards while trying to decide.

Then I saw a man sitting very quietly on the edge of my bed. He had a mustache and a goatee and looked familiar. I seemed to remember his face. I had seen it in a book, a newspaper, a movie, maybe. I wondered. Then I remembered.

When I remembered, I didn't know whether to go in or not. After all, what did one say? How did one act? With a man like that it was hard. You had to be careful not to say the wrong words, you had to be careful about everything.

I decided to walk around the block once first. I read someplace that that helped when you were nervous. I heard Shipkey swearing as I left and I heard somebody drop a glass. That wouldn't help me any.

I decided to make up my speech ahead of time. "Really, I'm not a very good speaker at all. I'm very withdrawn and tense. I save it all and put it in words on paper. I'm sure you'll be disappointed in me, but it's the way I've always been."

I thought that would do it and when I finished my block's walk I went right into my room.

I could see that Carson and Shipkey were rather drunk, and I knew they wouldn't help me any. The little card player they had brought with them was also bad off, except he had all the money on his side of the table.

The man with the goatee got up off the bed. "How do you do, sir?" he asked.

"Fine, and you?" I shook hands with him. "I hope you haven't been waiting too long?" I said.

"Oh no."

"Really," I said, "I'm not a very good speaker at all -"

"Except when he's drunk, then he yells his head off. Sometimes he goes to the square and lectures and if nobody listens to him he talks to the birds," said Shipkey.

The man with the goatee grinned. He had a marvelous grin. Evidently a man of understanding.

The other two went on playing cards, but Shipkey turned his chair around and watched us.

"I'm very withdrawn and tense," I continued, "and -"

"Past tense or circus tents?" yelled Shipkey.

That was very bad, but the man with the goatee smiled again and I felt better.

"I save it all and put it in words on paper and -"

"Nine-tenths or pretense?" yelled Shipkey.

"- and I'm sure you'll be disappointed in me, but it's the way I've always been."

"Listen, mister!" yelled Shipkey wobbling back and forth in his chair.

"Listen, you with the goatee!"

"Yes?"

"Listen, I'm six feet tall with wavy hair, a glass eye and a pair of red dice."

The man laughed.

"You don't believe me then? You don't believe I have a pair of red dice?"

Shipkey, when intoxicated always wanted, for some reason, to make people believe he had a glass eye. He would point to one eye or the other and maintain it was a glass eye. He claimed the glass eye was made for him by his father, the greatest specialist in the world, who had, unfortunately, been killed by a tiger in China.

Suddenly Carson began yelling, "I saw you take that card! Where did you get it? Give it here, here! Marked, marked! I thought so! No wonder you've been winning! So! So!"

Carson rose up and grabbed the little card player by the tie and pulled up on it. Carson was blue in the face with anger and the little card player began to turn red as Carson pulled up on the tie.

"What's up, ha! Ha! What's up! What's going on?" yelled Shipkey. "Lemme

see, ha? Gimme tha dope!"

Carson was all blue and could hardly speak. He hissed the words out of his lips with a great effort and held up on the tie. The little card player began to flop his arms about like a great octopus brought to the surface.

"He crossed us!" hissed Carson. "Crossed us! Pulled one from under his sleeve, sure as the Lord! Crossed us, I tell you!"

Shipkey walked behind the little card player and grabbed him by the hair and yanked his head back and forth. Carson remained at the tie.

"Did vou cross us, huh? Did you! Speak! Speak!" yelled Shipkey pulling at the hair.

The little card player didn't speak. He just flopped his arms and began to sweat.

"I'll take you someplace where we can get a beer and something to eat" I said to the man with the goatee.

"Come on! Talk! Give out! You can't cross us!"

"Oh, that won't be necessary," said the man with the goatee.

"Rat! Louse! Fish-faced pig!"

"I insist", I said.

"Rob a man with a glass eye, will you? I'll show you, fish-faced pig!"

"That's very kind of you, and I am a little hungry, thanks," said the man with the goatee.

"Speak! Speak, fish-faced pig! If you don't speak in two minutes, in just two minutes, I'll cut your heart out for a doorknob!"

"Let's leave right away," I said.

"All right," said the man with the goatee.

ALL the eating places were closed at that time of the night and it was a long ride into town. I couldn't take him back to my room, so I had to take a chance on Millie. She always had plenty of food. At any rate, she always had cheese.

I was right. She made us cheese sandwiches with coffee. The cat knew me and leaped into my lap.

I put the cat on the floor.

"Watch, Mr. Burnett," I said.

"Shake hands!" I said to the cat. "Shake hands!"

The cat just sat there.

"That's funny, it always used to do it," I said. "Shake hands!"

I remembered Shipkey had told Mr. Burnett that I talked to birds.

"Come on now! Shake hands!"

I began to feel foolish.

"Come on! Shake hands!"

I put my head right down by the cat's head and put everything I had into it.

"Shake hands!"

The cat just sat there.

I went back to my chair and picked up my cheese sandwich.

"Cats are funny animals, Mr. Burnett. You can never tell. Millie, put on Tchaikovsky's 6th for Mr. Burnett."

We listened to the music. Millie came over and sat in my lap. She just had on a negligee. She dropped down against me. I put my sandwich to the side.

"I want you to notice," I said to Mr. Burnett, "the section which brings forth the marching movement in this symphony. I think it's one of the most beautiful movements in all music. And besides its beauty and force, its structure is perfect. You can feel intelligence at work."

The cat jumped up into the lap of the man with the goatee. Millie laid her cheek against mine, put a hand on my chest. "Where ya been, baby boy? Millie's missed ya, ya know."

The record ended and the man with the goatee took the cat off his lap, got up and turned the record over. He should have found record #2 in the album. By turning it over we would get the climax rather early. I didn't say anything, though, and we listened to it end.

"How did you like it?" I asked.

"Fine! Just fine!"

He had the cat on the floor.

"Shake hands! Shake hands!" he said to the cat.

The cat shook hands.

"Look," he said, "I can make the cat shake hands."

"Shake hands!"

The cat rolled over.

"No, shake hands! Shake hands!"

The cat just sat there.

He put his head down by the cat's head and talked into its ear. "Shake hands!"

The cat stuck its paw right into his goatee.

"Did You see? I made him shake hands!" Mr. Burnett seemed pleased.

Millie pressed tight against me. "Kiss me, baby boy," she said, "kiss me."

"No."

"Good Lord, ya gone off ya nut, baby boy? what's eatin' at ya? Sompin's botherin' ya tonight, I can tell! Tell Millie all about ut! Millie'd go ta hell for ya, baby boy, ya know that. Whats'a matter, huh? Ha?"

"Now I'll get the cat to roll over," said Mr. Burnett.

Millie wrapped her arms tight around me and peered down into my upward eye. She looked very sad and motherish and smelled like cheese.

"Tell Millie what's eatin' ya up, baby boy."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat.

The cat just sat there.

"Listen," I said to Millie, "see that man over there?"

"Yeah, I see him."

"Well, that's Whit Burnett."

"Who's that?"

"The magazine editor. The one I send my stories to."

"Ya mean the one who sends you those little tiny notes?"

"Rejection slips, Millie."

"Well, he's mean. I don't like him."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat. The cat rolled over. "Look!" he yelled. "I made the cat roll over! I'd like to buy this cat! It's marvelous!"

Millie tightened her grip about me and peered down into my eye. I was quite helpless. I felt like a still live fish on ice in a butcher's counter on Friday morning.

"Listen," she said, "I can get him ta print one a ya stories. I can get him ta print alla them!"

"Watch me make the car roll over!" said Mr. Burnett.

"No, no, Millie, you don't understand! Editors aren't like tired business men. Editors have scruples!"

"Scruples?"

"Scruples."

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett.

The cat just sat there.

"I know all about ya scruples! Don't ya worry about scruples Baby boy, I'll get him ta print alla ya stories!"

"Roll over!" said Mr. Burnett to the cat. Nothing happened.

"No, Millie, I won't have it."

She was all wound around me. It was hard to breathe and she was rather heavy. I felt my feet going to sleep. Millie pressed her cheek against mine and rubbed a hand up and down my chest. "Baby boy, ya got nothin' to say!"

Mr. Burnett put his head down by the cat's head and talked into its ear. "Roll over!"

The car stuck its paw right into his goatee.

"I think this cat wants something to eat," he said.

With that, he got back into his chair. Millie went over and sat on his knee.

"Where'd ya get tha cute little goaty?" she asked.

"Pardon me," I said, "I'm going to get a drink of water."

I went in and sat in the breakfast nook and looked down at the flower designs on the table. I tried to scratch them off with a fingernail. It was hard enough to share Millie's love with the cheese salesman and the welder. Millie with the figure right down to the hips. Damn, damn.

I kept sitting there and after a while I took my rejection slip out of my pocket and read it again. The places where the slip was folded were

beginning to get brown with dirt and torn. I would have to stop looking at it and put it between book pages like a pressed rose.

I began to think about what it said. I always had that trouble. In college, even, I was drawn to the fuzzy blackness. The short story instructress took me to dinner and a show one night and lectured to me on the beauties of life. I had given her a story I had written in which I, as the main character, had gone down to the beach at night on the sand and began meditating on the meaning in Christ, on the meaning in death, on the meaning and fullness and rhythm in all things. Then in the middle of my meditations, along walks a bleary-eyed tramp kicking sand in my face. I talk to him, buy him a bottle and we drink. We get sick. Afterward we go to a house of ill-fame.

After the dinner, the short story instructress opened her purse and brought forth the story of the beach. She opened it up about halfway down, to the entrance of the bleary-eyed tramp and the exit of meaning in Christ.

"Up to here," she said, "up to here, this was very good, in fact, beautiful." Then she glared up at me with that glare that only the artistically intelligent who have somehow fallen into money and position can have. "But pardon me, pardon me very much," she tapped at the bottom half of my story, "just what the hell is this stuff doing in here?"

I COULDN'T stay away any longer. I got up and walked into the front room.

Millie was all wrapped around him and peering down into his upward eye. He looked like a fish on ice.

Millie must have thought I wanted to talk to him about publishing procedures.

"Pardon me, I have to comb my hair," she said and left the room.

"Nice girl, isn't she, Mr. Burnett?" I asked.

He pulled himself back into shape and straightened his tie. "Pardon me," he said, "why do you keep calling me 'Mr. Burnett'?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"I'm Hoffman. Joseph Hoffman. I'm from the Curtis Life Insurance Company. I came in response to your postcard."

"But I didn't send a postcard."

"We received one from you."

"I never sent any."

"Aren't you Andrew Spickwich?"

"Who?"

"Spickwich. Andrew Spickwich, 3631 Taylor Street."

Millie came back and wound herself around Joseph Hoffman. I didn't have the heart to tell her.

I closed the door very softly and went down the steps and out into the street. I walked part way down the block and then I saw the lights go out.

I ran like hell toward my room hoping that there would be some wine left in that huge jug on the table. I didn't think I'd be that lucky, though, because I am too much a saga of a certain type of person: fuzzy blackness, impractical meditations and repressed desires.