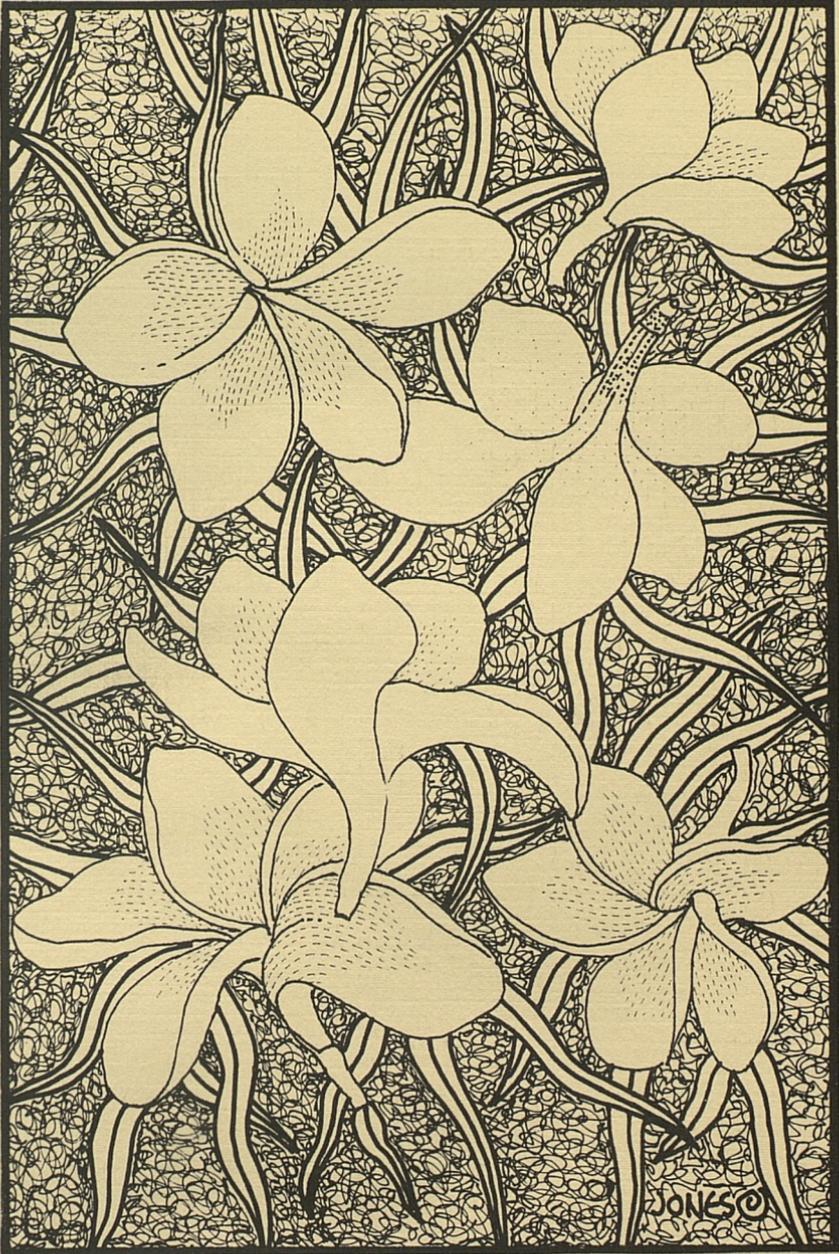


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LENG-TCH'E (AN EXECUTION BY DISMEMBERMENT, 1905)

— Cf. Pekin qui s'en va, Ed. A. Maloine, Paris, 1913

This man is being dismembered like a doll. His skin is pinched up like the rubber skin of a doll, a knife is pressed in, then turned until long or short strips of skin can be removed. Like the joints of a doll, the elbows, the knees, the ankles are taken apart.

The men who dismember this man work hard. When they are not working, they sit at board games or cards and they are preoccupied with turning of cards, the counting of spots on markers. When they win, they are satisfied and they are angry when the spots don't add to advantage. They enjoy company. They joke and laugh, loud and soft. They gossip. When their very young children say things that seem clever, they are startled and proud. Some love beautiful things, some can't and just like pretty things. They are dumbstruck by the beauty of certain persons. They touch their skin, the skin like silk, the silk like still water. They long for the act of physical love. They love comfort. In Winter, they burrow the counterpane. When Summer sweat drips in their eyes, they curse. They feel pain before they pinch the candle.

These men dismember another man. They are disgusted by this work but it's THEIR work. They narrow their eyes and only look at the cut in progress. The detail. They don't look at the man's face (he just looks like a log with a human head attached now). They recoil, but work. Their stomachs tighten, their throats tighten, they struggle to show no emotion but their faces long to twist into something terrible. But they work. To be disgusted without portraying disgust is work. To show emotion less — less than an autistic child silently picking at a doll, the child revenging its own madness, pinching up the rubber skin, twisting apart the joints — for these men to do this work and portray no emotion IS work, hard work.

## PIER

The municipal pier in Deer Beach, Florida, is very long. Here, fishermen catch shark, hammerheads and blues. It's illegal but Everybody Knows Everybody (the fishermen are locals and the pier attendants are afraid of retaliation) so shark fishing goes on.

Sharking is a night occupation, partly because fishing is better at night, partly as a nod to the law. Naturally, the police, mostly local men, know what's going on but they don't interfere. Some of them shark too. And they are responsible to the sheriff, an elected official.

Catching a shark is very dramatic; the blues and hammerheads taken can be bigger than a man. Catching a shark is work too since sharks fight long and hard. When the shark is reeled close enough, gaffs are used to haul it up to the decking. Shark skin is very tough and the fish struggles and the fishermen are excited so the gaffs are used repeatedly. Even after the shark is landed, it continues to fight, snapping and thrashing. The hook and butt end of the gaffs, aimed at the head, are used to kill it. Sometimes the shark is so lively the fishermen will not risk getting close enough to use gaffs so the shark is left to die in its own time. Even people who don't like sharks, or say they don't, rarely stay to the end.

The pier is on the public beach. In season, thousands of tourists swim here. The tourists surf here also. Since the waves are not very good, they surf whenever they can, often at night. Then, the sea is black, opaque. The surfers, in pairs, paddle out, talking to each other. Sometimes, waiting for the waves, bobbing on the ocean illuminated only by the lights of the pier, the surfers sing to each other.

## SHADOW

Perhaps separate vacations are in order, she said. Her husband of twenty-five years sits in the shallows, watches her paddle in the mild surf and thinks, Yes: perhaps Separate is in order — to formalize the accretion of distance. He stands, ready to return to the beach.

There's a shadow under the water near his wife. The shadow moves — flies; it circles her. Very frightened, he yells. She shakes the water from her face and just looks at him. Shrill, he shouts again, then without waiting for a response, without thinking, he runs to her. The shape turns away, then banks in, toward the woman. He reaches his wife, grabs her arm and they flounder to the beach.

Standing on the sand together, breathless, they watch the shadow slowly arc seaward. Close, they embrace, hesitate, then as one, push apart.

— Robert Nagler

Oxford PA

## FORCE OF WIND TABLE: SEA CRITERION

— Cf. Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland, Scotland

0	Calm	Sea like a mirror.
1	Light Air	Ripples with the appearance of scales are formed but without foam crests.
2	Light Breeze	Small wavelets, still short but more pronounced, crests have a glassy appearance and do not break.
3	Gentle Breeze	Large wavelets. Crests begin to break. Foam of glassy appearance. Perhaps scattered white horses.
4	Moderate Breeze	Small waves, becoming longer; fairly frequent white horses.
5	Fresh Breeze	Moderate waves, taking a more pronounced long form; many white horses are formed. (Chance of some spray.)
6	Strong Breeze	Large waves begin to form; the white foam crests are more extensive everywhere. (Probably some spray.)

- |    |               |   |
|----|---------------|---|
| 7  | Near Gale     | Sea heaps up and white foam from breaking waves begins to be blown in streaks along the direction of the wind. (Spindrift begins to be seen.)   |
| 8  | Gale          | Moderately high waves of greater length; edges of crests break into spindrift. The foam is blown in well marked streaks along the direction of the wind.  |
| 9  | Strong Gale   | High waves. Dense streaks of foam along the direction of the wind. Crests of waves begin to topple, tumble and roll over. Spray may affect visibility.  |
| 10 | Storm         | Very high waves with long overhanging crests. The resulting foam in great patches is blown in dense white streaks along the direction of the wind. Or the whole surface of the sea takes a white appearance. The tumbling of the sea becomes heavy and shocklike. Visibility is affected.           |
| 11 | Violent Storm | Exceptionally high waves. (Small and medium sized ships might be for a time lost to view behind the waves.) The sea is completely covered with long white patches of foam lying along the direction of the wind. Everywhere the edges of the wave crests are blown into froth. Visibility affected. |
| 12 | Hurricane     | The air is filled with foam and spray; sea completely white with driving spray. Visibility very seriously affected.   |

FORCE OF WIND TABLE: LAND CRITERION

— Cf. Bird Observatory, Fair Isle, Shetland, Scotland

- |   |              |  |
|---|--------------|--|
| 0 | Calm         | Calm, smoke rises vertically.                                  |
| 1 | Light Air    | Direction of wind shown by smoke drift, but not by wind vanes. |
| 2 | Light Breeze | Wind felt on face, leaves rustle; ordinary vane moved by wind. |

- |    |                 |   |
|----|-----------------|---|
| 3  | Gentle Breeze   | Leaves and small twigs in constant motion; wind extends light flag.                           |
| 4  | Moderate Breeze | Raises dust and loose paper; small branches are moved.  |
| 5  | Fresh Breeze    | Small trees in leaf begin to sway; crested wavelets form on inland waters.                    |
| 6  | Strong Breeze   | Large branches in motion; whistling heard in telegraph wires; umbrellas used with difficulty. |
| 7  | Near Gale       | Whole trees in motion; inconvenience felt when walking against wind.                          |
| 8  | Gale            | Breaks twigs off trees; generally impedes progress.   |
| 9  | Strong Gale     | Slight structural damage occurs. (Pots and slates removed.)                                   |
| 10 | Storm           | Seldom experienced inland; trees uprooted; considerable structural damage occurs.             |
| 11 | Violent Storm   | Very rarely experienced; accompanied by widespread damage.                                    |
| 12 | HURRICANE       | BLOODY HELL! *  |

\* Pencilled in at the Bird Observatory.

— Jean Balderston

New York NY

hanging from a maple branch  
the swing stays twisted  
throughout winter

sleepless,

i reach out to turn the glowing face of the clock away  
but can't reach it

## HELPLESS FISHES

i'm having the neighbors over for dinner tomorrow night so tonight i'm making the tomato sauce and the meatballs. like some people, i believe the sauce is better on the second day. since i rarely eat red meat i lean towards having chicken and fish, so in making the meatballs i use ground chicken, chicken which i picked out at the market myself and which i told the butcher to grind without the skin. soon i want to give up eating even the chicken and fish, and not only for reasons of health, but also simply because eating animals in general does not appeal to me anymore. god forbid i should die with the smell of another animal on my breath. i just don't think that that would be the best way to enter into the next world, no matter what it consists of. even if it's just a dark dreamy state, or if it's nothing at all. but, it's difficult to get away from eating chickens, i find. it seems with everyone cutting down on red meat the chickens are taking a terrible beating, more so than the fish. everywhere i go i find chicken being placed down in front of me. my mother always gives me chicken to take home, even when it was not part of the meal we've had, although most of the time we do have just that: chicken, in every conceivable way imaginable. it's frightening to think of how many chickens i have consumed in my lifetime. if these chickens were to suddenly appear in the field out back it would resemble one very big chicken farm. or if i were to have a dream of these chickens, i'd see them all facing me with agitated legs and agitated feathers, staring at me with a dumb, questioning look in their beady eyes. i'd be capable of doing little else than staring back at them with the same dumb look in my eyes. and in my dream i'd hiccup, of course, and feathers would escape from my mouth and float to the ground. then the chickens would all start stepping slowly towards me. i'd cautiously back away, mumbling, begging for forgiveness, swearing to eat only beans and rice from this day forward. but they would show no mercy. their beady eyes would turn red, blood-red, and they would continue stepping closer and closer until the smell of them would become sickening. being that all this was occurring in my dream, though, i'd be able to come to my own rescue. i'd have certain powers that the chickens would not have. and with these powers i would turn the chickens into loaves of bread and so many helpless fishes. with a smug grin on my face, feet securely planted, i'd drink wine that was gushing freely from a garden hose. listen, this is the way the scene would unfold, like it or not. it's my dream and it certainly is not my fault that chickens can't dream.

## DRY TOAST

she sits at the kitchen table eating an egg sandwich on dry toast, so dry that i can distinctly hear every bite she is taking. and since i am not in the least bit hungry all i can do is sit there sipping my coffee, watching her lips meticulously collecting crumbs, listening to the sandwich i made for her slowly disappearing, as she holds it in both hands just like a harmonica. it is a cool morning, the curtain in the window next to the table brushing up against the small lamp and the tip of one of her elbows. and the breeze, it continues across the kitchen and pushes the calendar, which is hanging on the fridge, closer up against the door which is covered with all kinds of scraps of papers and photos, held there by an assortment of crazy little magnets. her eyes are red, as though she's been crying, but since i know that this is not the case i sit there wondering exactly why her eyes are so red, not asking, knowing that she is in one of those moods which doesn't allow for her to give me a straight answer. i had my egg sandwich hours ago already, at dawn when i got up because i couldn't see struggling to sleep anymore. she's on her first cup of coffee; i'm breathing through my fifth. and i'm lucky she hasn't complained about the coffee, since it's made from some stale beans i've had lying around, and which this morning i was forced into using. i ran out of the good beans yesterday morning. i don't think i've ever seen anyone put so much ketchup on an egg sandwich before, or any kind of sandwich, as far as that goes. and when she's done eating the plate is not so white anymore, thanks to the many monstrous drops of ketchup which managed to squeeze free. i ask her what she is going to do with the remainder of the morning. she tells me she plans on eating another egg sandwich, which she intends returning with to the bed, and she wants to know if i'd be so kind as to make it for her, and would i please make the toast as dry and as black as i did for the first sandwich.

## SERMON TO THE BIRDS

there is a little painting that hangs over the headboard of my bed, about the size of one of those trays a waiter brings to your table with the check on it. the scene is of st. francis of assisi giving a sermon to the birds that have gathered about him. the birds are very attentive, and st. francis is holding his hands in a manner that would signify that he is also giving them his blessing. there is another man in the painting, dressed in similar monk's clothing, but he is without a halo, so apparently he has not reached the status of sainthood, and i assume that if he were alone the birds would scatter in every direction at the sight of him. anyway, since i was given this painting, many years ago now, i've been trying to locate a picture of the original in an art book, but as yet i've had no success. my painting was done by a man who paints copies and sells them for a living. he showed me some of his copies next to pictures of the originals and i can vouch for the fact that he was enormously talented at his craft, and so i'd be tempted to say that the painting i own is without a doubt flawlessly identical. i met this painter one summer while living at a motel, right after my divorce. he was well over six feet tall, with red beard, full head of hair, dazzling blue eyes. one morning he needed a ride to a neighboring town to the west, and so i gave him a lift, and when we were parting he gave me this painting of st. francis. on the back of it he signed his name, along with some brief words of thanks. my friends know that this is a copy, obviously, and this being the case never do they pay much attention to it. but the painting is dear to me, partially because the painter was able to travel about doing these paintings, selling them to people who didn't care that they were copies. in his belongings he had his art history book, and he'd proudly show you the paintings he loved to make copies of, the ones which sold well over and over again. the whole idea didn't bother me in the least. actually i was very impressed with the level of skill he had reached. not only that, but he was living off of these things, traveling the open road, quite free and pleasantly easygoing. i was thrilled when he gave me one of his paintings. i had walked him up to his room at the inn, and before going down to the bar he had taken out a number of his paintings and placed them on the bed. instantly the room was transformed to another age. that of the old masters, and all i could see in them was the possibilities of so much more endless wandering. he had the smile of a simpleton. he was the happiest of painters. i shook with envy.

ON WHAT TO DO WITH MY ASHES

ah, it was smart of me not to have taken off  
from work on good friday, but rather this monday,  
because now it is monday morning and i am off and  
it also feels as though the week ahead of me is  
shorter, and because the week ahead of me is shorter  
my whole life has a feeling of being shorter, and  
that is a soothing feeling at times, considering  
how the daily grind has a way of weighing  
heavily on the soul and personality.

and this morning i was thinking (yes, again)  
that i'd like my ashes, the ashes of my eyes  
and my ears and my mouth, my bones and my hair  
and my fingernails and my heart — all  
these ashes i'd like thrown across the street  
around the mailbox, since it seems to be one of  
my favorite places to go off to every morning,  
or every evening when i come home from work,  
in search of letters from friends or word of what  
has happened to some of my poems.

where else would i want to know my ashes  
were going to be placed? the library  
is out. i know the ladies there  
would never stand for it. they get  
upset with me when they find me just  
snoozing in there. and the drive-in  
theater down on rt. 28 is no good,  
simply because it doesn't exist anymore.  
and forget the cemetery: i've always  
hated crowds. so, yes, across the  
street would be fine. the only other  
place i'd consider is the bird sanctuary.

i like to think i'd be welcome  
there. and as far as that goes,  
don't even reduce my hair to ashes  
if i am to be put there.

some bird might find it useful  
in the building of a nest.

hell, my hair's been accused  
of looking like a bird's nest  
often enough anyway.

— Ronald Baatz

Mt. Tremper NY

DAY AFTER JOHN BERRYMAN'S SUICIDE JANUARY 8, 1972

Some call my brother a brick. He's stable  
all right. He holds up when things are falling apart.  
Anyway, he had always held up until yesterday.  
He came in my house feeling low. I mean lower  
than I had ever seen him. Ordinarily  
he loves freshly perked coffee. He can't wait  
to cool it drinking hot. Yesterday he just sat there  
and stared at the cup. He didn't ask me how I was  
feeling after my doctor's checkup or if Bobby Gene's  
disability check ever came. He sighed and said, "He  
just shouldn't have done that." Bobby Gene asked  
him, "Who shouldn't have done what?" Brother  
looked hard at both of us. "John Berryman  
had no right to walk off that bridge into the cold  
Mississippi River." Bobby Gene wasn't moved  
much about the sad story. "John Berryman  
was old enough to make up his own  
mind wasn't he?" Brother started  
to drink his coffee, didn't say anything  
more.

WIDOWER AND SON - 1926

With the outside world cut off  
by January  
bitter wind piling snow around  
the old farmhouse  
and the Big Ben clock showing  
exactly seven

Pa Hale knocked the ashes  
out of his corncob pipe  
unstrung his boots  
and looked hard at his young  
son Vergil

And tersely warned him  
Boy  
You don't know it yet  
but women means trouble

Then clumped off to his featherbed  
in a cold back room  
leaving Vergil in the lamplight

of the dark-walled kitchen  
with the Sears Roebuck catalog  
for his sole companion

## TWO COUSINS

She had written twice  
but we had never met  
before she visited me  
in the Valley last year.  
My webfoot cousin  
from Washington State  
born and raised on  
the Olympic Peninsula  
a nice woman with  
impeccable John Birch  
credentials  
but she seemed more  
like a stranger from  
another planet  
though she said we  
had poetry in common  
as well as our 1810  
ancestor from Tennessee.  
The poetry part didn't  
set too well with me  
Cousin writes only of  
mist and Douglas firs  
and wet swordleaf fern  
she even said she  
hated the brazen  
California sun  
it had no respect for  
the sensitive soul  
yet she went home  
really happy  
said I must visit her

## NITPICKER

Iris complains about the silliest  
trifles, coffee grounds left in the  
pot. Her Dad boils them over and over.  
Says it gets all the strength out. That  
shouldn't really bother Iris. She  
doesn't live with her Dad anyway. And  
he is good to that woman. Helps make  
her car payment each month. She said  
he can afford to help me. He lives like  
a miser. She is just a born nitpicker  
I guess.

## GENETIC PATTERN

They say Nonie's niece  
is just as crazy as  
Nonie ever dared to be  
about that poetry writing  
maybe even worse  
and her only fourteen  
it has to be something in  
their family genes

## MR. MATSON'S SUPER ABUNDANCE

A tarpapered house  
is good enough for me  
keeps out the rain  
and cold in winter

And the swamp cooler  
works real fine in summer

I've got grub in my fridge  
and on my shelves  
enough for one big family

And in my closet  
I've got three pairs of shoes  
one good Sunday suit  
and seven shirts

God help me  
if I'm not satisfied  
with all of that

Then there's something  
bad wrong with me

— Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Hanford CA

## WAITERS AND GEOPOLITICS

In the left section I seat  
the Europeans, mostly Brits  
and Germans. They expect it  
to be right and if it is  
they tip precisely, if it  
is not they simply go away.

In the right section I seat  
the Japanese who come on  
coupon tours, are grateful  
for the opportunity and bow,  
the exact tip part of the package.

In the middle I seat  
the Americans who demand, cuss  
and are generally disappointed  
by the whole goddamned show.  
Yet, by the time the check  
arrives, they grunt, see ya,  
and, as usual, overtip.

## HUMILITY

Coming back to my wife  
with my hat  
in my hands  
not held out like a beggar  
with a tin cup  
but presented  
swept off to the side  
and then returned  
to the chest  
in a most gentlemanly gesture.

## CHILDREN

Max, at three  
dresses like, The Batman  
and asks me  
if he'll grow big  
and strong

and stop the bad guy.

When he was born  
I stopped drinking  
( temporarily, c'mon )  
partying and carrying  
on.  
I will

kill  
to make sure he  
receives all he  
is entitled to.

Even myself.

#### rites of wrong

Eyeing the bra ads  
like you're supposed to  
you move to  
the dark spaces  
beyond  
mere  
fashion.

— Jeff Parsons

Surrey, B.C., Canada

#### MARY SMOKES: 2

longest I've ever lived in one place  
Jack & Kit Webb my original  
landlords now both dead  
I was living on the Sunshine Coast  
tired of the holiday crowds  
borrowed a car to look  
inland for some secluded spot  
it was just luck I stopped at Woodford Motors  
(since torn down) to ask if they knew  
of any old farmhouses for rent in the area  
"we have one" Jack said (he owned Woodford  
Motors) "\$36 a month including current"  
I was impressed by the way he said "current"  
instead of electricity "where is it?"  
I asked "Mary Smokes creek" he said  
soon as he said MARY SMOKES a book was born  
even before I saw the place I knew  
I'd have to live there at least  
until that book got written  
I had never heard such a magic creek name before  
  
20 years later I'm still here  
6 books published & 8 one-man exhibitions  
if the rent wasn't so cheap (100 a month  
now plus power) I never could have done it

POEM FOR ISAAC SHAMS

what I liked about Isaac Shams  
was he was a world champion  
weightlifter who didn't look  
like a weightlifter

all those photos of him  
in late '50s early '60s  
weightlifting magazines  
pressing  
snatching  
clean & jerking world records  
with legs skinnier than mine

I like poets  
who don't look like poets  
artists who don't look like artists

no games  
no pretense  
no egotism

real champions  
of the soul

LOVE

without question  
the craziest women  
have been the best fucks  
& in most cases  
the worst people  
I have ever known

too bad  
love is love  
I love with all  
I am when I love  
& have been loved back  
with equal intensity but  
sooner or later things go wrong

your writing comes first  
the most common complaint  
your writing more important than me

I wonder how long I have this time  
before I'm on my own again?

LOOKS LIKE RAIN

I like the feeling  
of having a stack  
of framed pictures  
for sale leaning  
against bedroom wall  
I like lying in bed  
in the mornings  
with a cup of tea  
& a joint reading  
what I'm reading  
writing what I'm writing  
looking out the window  
listening to the road  
wondering where my next  
buck is coming from

LOVE POEMS

the trouble with writing love poems  
is when another love reads them  
they tend to think they aren't  
as loved as the former love

love poems are written with a fire  
that burns away all sense of caution  
what hurts & distorts & confounds  
is when these poems are used  
as some kind of irrefutable proof  
of ties that no longer exist

the danger with writing love poems  
is new loves never understand  
why you ever wrote them

17: From 50:50

what I thought  
was a big  
pink & black butterfly  
turned out to be a label  
tied to the bottom of a bush  
gardenia augusta it says  
or golden magic

9: From 50:50

sitting on her porch  
in late afternoon sun  
with ASK THE DUST &  
a cup of tea immersed  
in neighborhood bird songs  
it's a dead-end street  
quiet except when someone  
turns up the music loud  
three houses often do this  
as if the whole block  
desperate to hear  
their brand of sound  
seldom is anything heard  
worth hearing  
but for the varied  
& beautiful bird calls

just a piece of paper  
fluttering in the wind

sometimes poetry is  
a beautiful mistake

I kill my first spring mosquito  
slapping my thigh much harder  
than I meant to

## DRINKING WITH SPARROWS

he sits alone drinking  
in the beergarden in Caboolture  
across the street from the railroad station  
8 1/2 years away from the 21st century

6 sparrows land  
on a nearby table  
all the tables are empty but his  
he likes drinking alone with sparrows  
likes watching the myriad red glints  
dancing in the domes  
of their tiny  
black  
eyes

## CONSERVATION FRAMING CO.

Simon my framer  
is going broke  
too many hours  
for too little return  
all-rag acid-free mats  
museum mounting boards & backing  
plexiglass that filters out  
the u.v. rays that fade ink & paint  
cellulose tape & glue  
a good eye  
a big heart  
the right mat  
the exact molding  
the perfect touch  
the joint  
cup of tea  
friendship  
confidence & trust

one of the things I dislike most  
about society is the best  
people usually go bust

## MAKING UP

she looks so tragic  
when we fight  
I feel like the wolfman

later making up  
making love the goddess  
returns to her face  
to her being

cuming  
becomes her

— Billy Jones

Upper Caboolture, Australia

WILD IRIS AND TIGER LILY

55, Billie Sacks  
owns a trailer  
on a hundred feet  
of lake front property,  
spends summers  
in it with her lover  
Kate Bowers.

Morning, as is  
her pleasurable custom,  
once again Billie walks  
amid and inspects  
her broad garden of wild iris  
and tiger lily.

WITNESS

Oak Hill, Florida.  
A single storey,  
paint-faded,  
concrete block house.  
Within, his panama hat  
tilted back on his head,  
his briefcase held in his lap,  
dressed in a green summer jacket,  
blue summer trousers,  
cream-colored shirt  
wrapped about by a string tie:  
Joe Barnes,  
83,  
disappointment marking him.

— Tom Baer

New Smyrna Beach FL

HOT GREEN PEPPER

she usually  
gives me a  
pepper but last  
time she  
didn't give  
me a pepper  
today she gave  
me the  
largest pepper  
ever

COME HERE

i have a  
picture of three  
fingers in a  
cunt that has  
fascinated me for  
years but perhaps  
you don't need  
to see it

have a  
good day i  
said but i  
didn't mean  
it wanted them  
to fall into  
the pit immediately  
if not sooner

— Les Cammer

Santa Barbara CA

POINTE SHOES

like some  
relationships  
once they start  
to be comfortable  
they start to  
wear out

IT'S BEEN SO LONG

the poems about  
you are in  
print and that  
only happens  
when what happened  
is over

DEPRESSED, SHE

said it was  
ruining her diary  
how could she  
get thru deal  
with be ok  
with getting  
only 25 million  
a 45 room Greek  
cottage listed  
at 145 million  
The Plaza Hotel  
a turbo jet

BROKEN REFRIGERATOR MADONNA

loses her cool  
in August when  
you need her

MADONNA OF THE OVER REACTIONS

one phone call  
and her blood  
pressure sky  
rockets one  
black look  
and she writes  
500 poems

MADONNA OF THE CONFIDENCES

knows "bitch"  
is a tag  
men put on  
women they  
can't control

CRYSTAL MADONNA

has many facets

and, you can  
wear her, keep  
her close to  
your skin or

on a chain

EATING DISORDER MADONNA

eats to rid  
herself of  
what is  
eating her

MADONNA OF THE PROVOCATIONS

wants to be  
as exciting  
as she can  
be without  
being arrested

COW GIRL MADONNA

mounts whatever  
moves, likes  
to feel what  
she's spread  
her legs over  
buck and whinny

BIG GREEN SEA TURTLE MADONNA

flaps wildly,  
when out of  
her element

TWISTED CORD MADONNA: 1

any outlet  
is enough  
to get her  
kinky

TWISTED CORD MADONNA: 4

what's electric  
in her never  
connects smoothly

DANCES WITH SHEEP MADONNA: 1

just wants  
to fleece you

BORED AND ADORED MADONNA

can't help  
not saying  
no when she  
doesn't have  
to

PLASTIC SURGERY MADONNA

gets nipped  
tucked and sucked  
and lifted. If  
you put red

and green arrows  
over what was  
tightened or

changed, she'd  
look like a road  
map of New Jersey

A PLUS MADONNA

knows how to get  
good grades how  
to please how to  
figure out how  
to she can  
psych out what  
the one in con  
trol wants is  
good at being a  
good and a caring  
bends back  
wards twists  
herself into  
shapes she can't  
get out of  
trying to do  
what she has to  
so others may let  
her know she's  
ok

MARCH 4TH MADONNA

always commands

HYDROPONIC MADONNA

sucks all the  
nutrients out  
of your water  
invisibly she  
roots easy can  
move without  
tearing pieces  
of herself  
off and  
leaving them  
behind

WHALE WATCH MADONNA

likes to  
just look  
out into  
the dis  
tance

DIAMOND MADONNA

knows she's  
valuable but  
feels flawed

fragmented  
off color  
with hidden  
dark spots

she's sure you'll  
throw her aside  
because of

MADONNA WHO LIVES IN TERROR  
OF TAXES AND MEN

as if both are  
going to get  
what she wanted  
to hold on to

THE BOWLS FROM BAVARIA

in my mother's china  
closet. For years  
she said one's for  
you, one's for your  
sister. Wedding  
presents from Nanny  
and Gramp, for years  
she asked me to  
choose — "The  
rooster's better,  
Honey, I think,  
more valuable.  
Take the numbers,  
I wish you'd find  
out." She said  
she knew the flowers  
were pretty wanted  
me to have what  
ever's best even  
if it was ugly

CARS AND MEN

always let you down  
especially when you're  
most in need they

won't say what's  
wrong conk out across  
your driveway your  
skin. I've always been  
attracted to the ones  
that aren't practical  
aristocrats, Daimlers  
exotic, flashy but  
falling apart and

having to be dragged  
home in my arms at  
great expense the  
ones that dazzle you  
the ones you shouldn't  
marry

— Lyn Lifshin

Washington DC

WHEN THINGS END SOMETIMES  
THEY GO BACK TO THE BEGINNING

I wonder if Johnny &  
Lois will get back together  
now that his  
second marriage is  
all fucked-up.

I wonder if John will want  
his girl back again  
the one he fell in love  
with when he was  
17.

I remember her  
photo glued to the dash  
of his GTO. I remember  
him on her heels  
like a guard dog through  
the high school halls  
ensuring no other guy  
would touch her or  
even look at her.

I remember talking  
him down after  
her inspection  
at the gynecologist's  
he's a doctor, John,  
for Christ's sake, a doctor,  
he's just doing his job.

OPINIONLESS

Bill. a plastics engineer in his 30s.  
(skin pasty-textured. suits threadbare.)  
is opinionless:

likes every kind of music  
eats anything

likes no particular color or  
season or type of car or TV show  
fencing or football's all  
the same to him

can go to church or not  
see a movie or skip it  
his favorite expression is:

"whatever you want"

so when he told me  
his wife was pregnant.  
I wondered how the hell he managed that.

DRIED  
OUT  
PLANTS

being  
the last  
one  
left  
in the  
dorm  
after  
everyone  
s  
gone  
home  
for the  
holiday  
s  
is  
eerie:  
  
alone  
in the  
dusk  
only  
echoes (  
) ( ) (  
) ( )  
in the  
dusty  
halls (  
) ( ) ( )  
( ) ( ) &  
dried  
out  
plants (  
) ( )  
( ) ( ) (  
) (in  
the lobby.  
) ( )

COWS

lines  
of  
lighten  
ing  
rods  
leaning  
. .  
across  
the  
roof  
peaks  
of  
barns  
. .  
and in  
one  
weather  
ed  
brown  
cow  
pasture  
. .  
one  
cow  
running  
. .  
its  
hooves  
splatter  
ing  
mud  
toward  
the  
other  
cows  
lying  
down

— Michael Estabrook

Acton MA

JETHRO MARTIN, ELVIS IMPERSONATOR

Somehow you've got to make money.  
What I do's impersonate Elvis,  
and maybe you think that is funny  
singing and swinging your pelvis

and sure it is in a way —  
you get hired to perk up a party,  
some gal's sixtieth birthday.  
I always was kind of arty —

gold buttons, gold heads of lions,  
red bellbottoms, shirt down to here,  
and of course that Elvis-like hair.  
I don't use a guitar.

I sing to a tape and you know  
those old gals can really be sexy —  
take my leg and don't want to let go.  
You'd think they'd get apoplexy

but they wink right along with the show,  
this one last week, anyway —  
sat on my knee and oh wow! —  
her hormones still working I'd say.

I keep it this side of outrageous.  
Here's my card. I'm Jethro Martin.  
Come to see me next month at Vegas.  
My girlfriend does Dolly Parton.

WHY JOHN SANDERSON WON'T GO BACK  
TO WHERE HE CAME FROM OR ANYWHERE ELSE

I saw that program says San Andreas  
could slip at any time, the coast might crack  
and slide off in the sea, and here I sit  
nineteen stories up. Why don't I pack  
and drive off somewhere steadier than this?

Well, hell, you tell me where. Where I come from  
it's blizzards or tornadoes — you can be  
watching TV sometime and there you are  
and your whole family whirled to the next county —  
no life, no wife, no kids, no house, no car.

Florida or other paradises  
the hurricanes'll hurl you in the drink.  
There's Mount St. Helens up in Washington,  
a fiery bubbling smoky lava sink —  
the ones in Hawaii also aren't much fun.

Besides which, sooner or later driving'll get you —  
any way you go's a Vegas gamble.  
Amtrak's tracks are full of lethal twists.  
You take a plane and either you crash or whammo —  
get gunned down by a bunch of terrorists.

#### THE ODD COUPLE

They kept that place a picture  
from Sunset magazine —  
birds of paradise,  
lawn a velvet green

and never any trouble —  
we've had cops around  
to parties on the block —  
they didn't make a sound

except sometimes some music  
classical, not rock —  
then when the big one died,  
the other still in shock,

here comes the family —  
sells everything they can,  
dishes, silver, sofas  
out there on the grass

and that poor man kept crying —  
"Some of this is mine."  
I bought a chair myself  
and gave it back to him.

Now it's more rundown,  
loud voices in the air,  
tan splotches on the lawn --  
normal people there.

— Harold Witt

Orinda CA

## Flaws Of The Flawless

Fred Astaire was always self-conscious about his hands. They were huge, and he often danced with them clasped behind his back, or in his pockets. This most graceful of men was convinced the audience would focus only on this major physical flaw he imagined in himself. Until I heard him mention this during his final TV interview, I'd never really noticed his hands. His elegant movements and Ginger-twirling were what I concentrated on. But now, having heard his comment about his hands, how uncomfortable they made him and how he never knew what to do with them, having heard that, now I can't watch his movies without zooming in on his hands. They're as big as a brick-layer's on that slender body. It makes me wonder if Michaelangelo didn't secretly think he never used green correctly when painting Florentine dignitaries, or if the Wright brothers, deep down, wondered if the simple strength of the wind that day had more to do with lifting their plane off the beach than any of their painstaking aeronautical calculations.

## Peter Morris

## WARPED CURVES

This is one of those mirrors that distorts you for amusement purposes. I'm shorter and bulgier. My belt is up around my neck. No legs to speak of, yet my shoes are huge and floppy, like a clown's. When I smile at my freaky reflection, my teeth look two feet long. Others of all sizes and shapes join me to stare at their images in the glass. There's a lot of giggling at first, but it grows more subdued as we realize the good-looking people still look better than those who were less than attractive to begin with.

## GRINDSTONE COWBOY

Hating your job eventually becomes a vital part of doing it. You reach a point where you literally can't do it unless you hate it. Say for instance you're a benefits administrator. You can't be really effective unless you hate the idea of people "plotting" to get the benefits they deserve. Or suppose you're in insurance. There's no way you're going to be a good insurance agent unless you see a scam in every claim form. Hating the idea of being in insurance helps you be a better, more ruthless insurance person. Even if you work in the zoo, cleaning cages, you're going to be better at it if you hate animals, and your hate frightens them into silence at feeding time, preventing them from biting your head off and using it as a plaything. This country wouldn't function half as well if people liked their jobs. Hatred of being a fisherman makes you take it out on the fish with sophisticated sonar equipment no fair man would ever use. Back on land, your wife runs a day-care center. She hates kids. It's a Nazi prison camp with grape juice. Enrollment continues to grow.

## FRANKLIN W. DIXON

Hearing that the Hardy Boy books were ghostwritten by a factory of hacks, that was as bad as finding out there was no Santa Claus. Well, maybe not that bad. But close. I'd see the byline on the books, Franklin W. Dixon, and imagine this handsome, urbane man in a velvet smoking jacket. He was gray around the temples. There were trophies of fabulous animals over the fireplace. His years-younger wife would bring him a pitcher of martinis every night at 6 p.m., and he'd make a point of saying something charming and encouraging to her, sensitive to her need for recognition even as his own career soared into the stratosphere. Then the news that the original Franklin W. Dixon never existed, or, if he did, gave up the actual writing of the books soon after their popularity warranted mass production! I wonder what he'd think of the new, updated series where Frank and Joe jump on their jet-skis to pursue crack dealers, and the formerly obese Chet is finally a real participant, having successfully completed Weight Watchers.

## THE GHOST OF GUY LOMBARDO

As the red ball drops down on Times Square, the crowd begins to roar in rowdy anticipation. What will the new year bring? For now, only good things. Chronology deserves a clean slate. There's plenty of tooting and kissing, everybody sharing champagne with the cops. The giddy celebrants barely notice the icy wind blowing through their bones, as the ghost of Guy Lombardo makes his way to the Waldorf. It's downright invigorating! The mob psychology of hope seems to have cramped the style of those who would normally be out here stabbing and raping. On any other night, the thousands assembled here would be afraid to walk through this area alone.

## PRECARIOUS PLUNGES

The man who designed this rollercoaster knew exactly how far he could push my fear threshold without sending me over the edge.

He knew I'd be able to endure the sickening descent, even though, when I was down by the kiddie rides looking up at the precarious plunges, I'd had my doubts.

He knew I'd feel nauseous when we crested 200 feet above the midway, but that somehow I'd be able to gulp it back.

And I imagine he knew that the car in front of me would be occupied by two kids in faded Guns 'n' Roses tee-shirts for whom this shuddering shriekfest would be a mere prelude to the more thrilling amusements in other parts of the park.

In designing this rollercoaster, he had to factor people like me into the equation. Much as it probably pained him, he had to consider the limits of my tolerance.

He pictures me clearly now, unstrapping myself like a man reprieved by the governor, my legs no steadier than a colt's at birth.

"You milquetoast," he thinks. "You're the one who's holding me back. You're the one who's keeping me from achieving everything I'm capable of ...."

## KICKBOXING

As I watch the kickboxing on the TV tonight, I feel myself growing more and more uneasy with some aspect of it I can't define. It's not the violence — the violence is why I'm watching. I'm afraid — no, it's something else ... it's ... well, okay, it's the kicking. The fact that they're kicking while they're boxing. When I was a kid, there was an unwritten rule that you didn't kick someone during a fight. It was just something you didn't do. I lost many a battle simply because I observed this simple rule. Anyway, here's this guy landing kicks a mule would be proud of on another guy who's kicking right back. They're kicking each other's faces in. I guess I'll learn to like this sport eventually but in doing so I'll have to give up a code whose gentleness seems evident only now.

## KNOWING AND JUMPING

I was watching the cliff divers and thinking how crazy they were to do it, while feeling, at the same time, jealous of them for having the guts to do it. Several of Hawaii's more vocal volcanoes were burping pink ash into the sky. I kept wondering how the divers could crawl up the face of the cliff without cutting their bare feet. They obviously had to start with smaller, softer cliffs. And they obviously needed a flawless knowledge of the ocean's movements, which waves would come all the way in and which were only faking it. Then it occurred to me that knowing is one thing and jumping is another.

## MONA AND THE MASSES

She was protected by so many layers of lacquer and glass that she didn't seem quite real when I finally reached the front of the line.

I'd been waiting all morning with a crowd that stretched halfway through the gallery. Guards everywhere. Real guards, rent-a-guards, avant guards.

And a cumbersome early version of the metal detector.

The Dutch couple in front of me kept talking babytalk to their baby. Babytalk sounds the same in any language, and it bothered me just as much coming from a Dutch couple. They were sharing an orange despite thousands of dollars in camera equipment.

I'd worked myself up to a state of impossible expectation, and that was my mistake. The colors were a dull dove-gray, and the famous enigmatic smile was neither tragic nor comic, more like someone who's just had a successful dental exam after expecting an ordeal.

I couldn't study her face as long as I wanted because the throng behind me kept pressing. One quick eyeballing, in that situation, was all that propriety allowed. But I'd seen it. I'd seen the Mona Lisa.

At least I'd never have to go through that again.

## HEATHER IN HOT WEATHER

Why would anyone do what this poor man is doing? Play the bagpipes on a sweltering New York street? Nobody wants to hear bagpipes. Nobody wants to see him sweating in his green woolen kilt. Nobody gives him any money. And it isn't just that they won't give him any money, they really wish he'd stop. They walk by with their hands over their ears, grimacing at him. He doesn't care. He keeps breathing into the bagpipes. They sound like sheep with emphysema. Inflating. Collapsing. His blue eyes, beneath his sandy eyebrows, are distant and determined, as if he's convinced most of them secretly adore his music but won't say so because of peer pressure. Finally an elderly woman comes up and drops a quarter onto the blanket next to him. He nods his thanks with an almost imperceptible motion, adding the tiniest flourish to his notes while pretending to look the other way. Then it's back to scorn, rejection, and all the other indignities he seems to thrive on.

## BIG BABIES

Why do we act like such big babies when the waitress doesn't get our order right, or when the car won't start in the morning? Why do our cars act like such big babies too, just because there's been a mild frost overnight? Call Triple A and the tow truck guy acts like a big baby when you tell him you want to give him a personal check. It's against company policy. He'll get in trouble if he makes an exception with you. "Oh don't be such a big baby," you want to say, but don't, because you need the car to get to work. You have a wife and baby to support, a baby growing bigger by the day. Will he turn out to be a big baby too? He's standing up in his crib by the window, listening to you blast the garbage men for tossing the cans in your favorite flowerbed. The pacifier works back and forth in his mouth as he draws his first key conclusion.

## PLEDGES

I always make pledges, but I never send the money. Something happens between the time I hang up and the time I sit down to write the check. The victims seem less sick, less crippled, they're probably running the 200-yard dash by now. The reminder notice comes, but it only reminds me of what I pledged, not what I felt at the time I pledged. I need some reminder of how I felt, some proof that it was the right way to feel, that I wasn't simply being manipulated and duped. But the buisnesslike tone of the letter says, in effect, if you were duped, you were duped. You still owe the money.

## THE RECLINER

I tilt the recliner back and it keeps going, right through the carpet and floor to the center of the earth. The layers of frost and rock look exactly the way they do in science books. Cross-sections. Layers of pebbly material folding over each other in gray and charcoal waves. What a mistake to buy a recliner when I'm still a relatively young man, at least in terms of the age of the earth. And to choose maroon, the oldest of all colors. I don't clash with anything down here, which probably means there's less chance of getting out.

## THE REGINALD DENNY CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

Maybe tomorrow the curfew will be lifted, and we can go outside and sit in the shade again. Just about every public building has been set on fire. There are even people trying to set the fires on fire. If they come here, I'll probably have to hand over the last of my board games to appease them. The books went days ago, including all my manuals on how to play the games. It's going to be a strange new beginning for me. I already have some interesting things growing in my root cellar. All I have to do now is not starve or surrender before I can eat them.

## A MILLION LAUGHS

Coming out of one of the comedy clubs downtown I feel sadder than I ever have in my entire life. It isn't that the comedians were so terrible. Some of their jokes were hysterical. Sidesplittingly so. But the realization that I actually paid a \$10.00 cover charge just to be cheered up by people I've never heard of, the knowledge that nothing in my everyday existence is capable of performing this same function, that's not the kind of feeling that makes me grin from ear to ear. I walk through the fog of the wharf district and think to myself how nice it would be to find an after-hours tragedy club right about now.

## FOR STALIN AND SHIRLEY TEMPLE

The wax museum, last attraction before the beach, the only place Stalin and Shirley Temple stand beside each other, on velvet pedestals. His mustache, her lollipop, his uniform, her pinafore, all the same in the chilled gray light that throws a scary sparkle on her ringlets, on his medals, on the tourists with tickets, and the guards who worry about fire more than thieves, about flames making puddles of these symbols of a century, nobody knowing who will come to take their place.

## A FIFTIES FLOWER

Who knows if buttercups grow anymore? Well, the prejudiced botanists, of course. But you and I would be hard-pressed to point out a buttercup patch if called to the task. Even if we could, they're not as yellow as they used to be. And we certainly can't identify them on sight the way we could in the old days, when we held them under each other's chins to see if a light flashed. All I really remember is how small and delicate they were. They were a fifties flower, determined to stay in the background, like Mamie Eisenhower on state occasions. In the sixties they started to disappear with the crass ascendancy of daisies. By the seventies you had a phlox pox. And everyone you knew seemed a little shakier.

## THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY

I've always wanted to watch an exorcism  
but no one's ever invited  
except Inside Edition and the immediate family.

The church keeps it all hush hush.  
Priests slip in and out  
through breaks in the hedges, dark red oils  
concealed in the folds of their clothes.

Even if you're standing across the street  
you won't hear much of a scream  
before it's muffled.

Neighbors gather. Coolers, cameras. A portable TV  
on a cardtable so everyone can watch the interview.  
The mother with soot-rings for eyes.  
Dad with his discipline  
and distance.

When it's over you realize  
they were less concerned about you seeing  
this latest incarnation of evil  
than about you seeing  
these people who remove all cause for doubt.

## COMPANY CAR

My company car is maroon and shiny

I'm expected to have it washed every week  
so the clients who ride with me  
will have a good impression of the car, and me

I'm not supposed to take it to the shore on weekends  
but I do, and the sea-mists  
on the chrome don't go unnoticed

it doesn't have any guts in highway confrontations  
would rather let other cars cut it off  
than cause trouble

I can't seem to get the radio  
off the easy-listening station  
it's Kenny Rogers morning noon and night

my personality changes when I turn the key  
I feel the hooks they have in me  
I don't think I've ever used the horn.

## NIETZCHE KNEW

You live through stuff you thought  
was going to kill you  
and in a way it does, except  
the person it killed was a different you.  
Someone willing to offer himself up for sacrifice.  
Everybody has one of those.  
But most of us have  
at least one person left after that.  
And this person's different.  
This one's brave enough  
to bang the glass at the Baltimore Aquarium,  
a practice strictly forbidden  
because the vibrations drive the hammerheads half-crazy.  
Slip your hand back in your pocket  
and glance around accusingly.  
Pretend somebody else did it  
even as bubbles slide up  
the sides of the tanks in reproach.

## HAPPILY EVER AFTER

Over the p.a. system comes the announcement that there's  
a lost little boy wearing bright pink sneakers and a  
windbreaker. Would his parents please come to the  
courtesy booth, or contact their nearest security person.  
The crowd listens for awhile, then returns to the bears  
riding bicycles in the center ring. They're balancing  
little red balls on their noses. The p.a. interrupts  
again to say there's a Mazda in the parking lot with its  
lights on. They repeat the license number twice.

Jugglers, sword swallows, then a high-wire act involving  
thirteen chairs and a ten-year-old Rumanian sexpot.

A repeat of the announcement about the Mazda. Then, almost  
as an afterthought, the news that the lost little boy is  
still unclaimed.

Because I'm at the circus, my mood is dangerously upbeat.  
I imagine that when the owners of the Mazda pass the  
courtesy booth on their way to turn out the lights, they  
see the little boy. Their little boy! They didn't even  
realize he was missing! They hug him! Buy him cotton  
candy! Live happily ever after!

— Peter Morris

Lansdale PA

## KEY LIME PIE

He sits down to a rich cultural menu of menudo & Dos Equis beer in a little chili cafe hidden in dunes & sea oats with a blackboard menu that changes with the cooks. He listens to Tampa Red's Hokum Band wondering if it's his hangover or Tampa Red has added a guitéron to kazoo & guitar; but all sound seems to meld melodiously with female laughter & the whir of the grease-trap fan & the shrimpers' cosmic head-down appetites ending with a chorus of Darbukka toothpick percussion. Outside the window shrimp are running & kids are playing on the public dock where brown pelicans wait for hand-outs from the tourists & he's thinking of a yesteryear when smugglers pushed madeira & put claret out of business & he's wondering if the smile of the waitress is sincere as his slice of home-made key lime pie as he points out to her the antics of a Luna moth trying to mate on the ceiling with a Monarch butterfly.

## ON AN ISLAND IN THE SILENCE OF THE STREAM

"She is the young lady that observes long silences," said the hotel porter, "sometimes for weeks and months in a row."

Next time he'd choose an island without the competition of dogs and roosters; only a woman like this one, hauteur of a wet cat looking back at him as he sat on the veranda fanning his face with his white Panama hat in the soft warm rain; odeurs that stirred strange hungers coming from beyond the mangroves that could be goat meat roasting on the oil-drum fires, something to remember when he is half a globe way listening for a silence in the stream.

## THE COLLECTOR

1960, in detroit, he drove a cadillac el dorado convertible, unashamed of its elongated fins; then flushed out a business deal for a '65 ferrari 275 gtb that stood out in motor city like a sore metallic thumb. when things got bad he wangled a '69 camaro, a mustang convertible & a pontiac gto. in a succession of slow trades he again climbed the economic ladder to a stretch limo, a big

thirsty beauty he called hussein, the oil hound.  
it's been over a year now, hussein still shows  
an arrogant power, burning oily loops of 50 wt.  
as it idles by the curb.

#### DIACRITIC

I knew she was literary.  
She even had diacritic marks  
Over the tattoos on her arms  
With acute & grave accents  
As well as the cidilla & circum-  
Flex. I swore she wore  
The very flesh of poetry & once  
Aroused to indignation by my stare  
She dropped her Levis & mooned me.  
No big deal. I was only going to ask her  
To a poetry reading at the American  
Sunbathing Association, plenty of time  
To know each other because that would be  
Sometime late next summer.

#### BARBARA BY THE SEA

— for Barbara at 92,  
Avila Beach, California

When a new taco stand  
Pops up in Avila Beach  
Miss Barbara tastes  
Each offering  
Like Minerva strolling  
Through the Parthenon.  
"If I want it hot  
I'll sit on my stove,"  
She says to an anxious  
Chef, "but your enchilada,  
Honey, was made for the gods."

#### BE PROUD YOU ARE AN INTELLECTUAL

When the old Russian poet visiting our school  
told us about Stalin, long Siberian nights  
and fellow prisoners leaching salt  
from the guard's beating canes  
for their rations of frozen potatoes  
we stopped badgering our parents  
for more all-day burritos and double-orders  
of fries  
washed down with perplexing decisions  
between coke, pepsi, mountain dew and doctor

pepper.

He told us to go to the library because they are all over our great country, warm in winter, cool in summer, librarians wearing pretty dresses — spend time there, he said, learn something interesting to you as an individual, be like I am, he said, stand up for things you believe in, be proud you are an intellectual.

— Ray Clark Dickson

Shell Beach CA

#### HOW CAN I WHINE?

How can I whine when Floyd Patterson, knocked down seven times in three rounds, says, "I'm the only guy to get up seven times in a championship fight"?

How can I whine when everyday I see the same guy running on the side of the road — in the cold, in the rain — looking down at his watch?

How can I whine with Mother Teresa bathing the wounds of lepers in Calcutta and shunning interviews?

How can I whine when I see mad wheelchair racers in the Olympics trying to break records?

How can I whine when Bob Gibson, his leg broken by a Roberto Clemente line drive, still manages to throw two pitches to the next batter before he collapses?

How can I whine when my grandfather is separated from his family for seven years while he makes enough money in America to send for them from across the sea?

How can I whine when the first time my grandfather sees my father is when my father is seven years old?

How can I whine when my uncle and father are told by my grandfather when they are in the eighth grade: "Whaddya gonna do — go to school all your life?"

How can I whine when the young Beatles play 8-10 hours a day in sleazy Hamburg bars — taking turns sleeping on stage while the others play?

How can I whine when Larry Bird scores thirty points in a playoff game, then checks into a hospital with his bad back to have himself put in traction until the next game two days later?

How can I whine when Truman Capote spends six years roaming around Kansas doing research for In Cold Blood, not knowing if he even has a book?

How can I whine when Jack Kerouac gets it all down in a matter of a few weeks (single-spaced) on hundred foot teletype rolls?

How can I whine when Bukowski hand prints his stories and poems (having hocked his typewriter), has them returned and rejected, then throws them out and immediately writes more?

How can I whine, how can I wish, how can I want when there is the job, always the job before me?

#### REAR-VIEW MIRROR

Oh, I know, the state of modern poetry is shit. What else? Kids are dumber. Never mind about miraculous electronic invention after invention, or new medicines, new treatments, and eradicated illnesses — look at the sinking SAT scores. What else? Oh yeah, violence. Society is much more violent today. Tell me, class, how many wars were there, and how many people died in Europe because of them, during the hundred-year period beginning in .... What else? Discontent — people are much more unhappy now. Believe me, they'd rather be slaving 14 hours a day out in the fields, maybe sacrificing an animal or a person, hoping it'd help the crops grow. What else? Divorce — people get divorces today and don't even care. Sure, just go talk to somebody with kids who got a divorce; they'll tell you what a lark it was. Anyway, it's better that two people live together and hate each other — like my grandmother and grandfather. I never heard them talk to each other and not curse each other out. What else? TV — people watch too much TV today. No one reads long, boring, sappy Victorian novels anymore — books with page-long sentences where it takes someone twenty paragraphs to walk across a room. What else? You know what I miss? Those wonderfully comic civil rights marches down South where the governor would unleash dogs, firehoses, and clubs on non-violent protestors. And all because of separate bathrooms. So who's the next great lamentor of contemporary culture who'll quote that damn poem by Yeats saying that "The center cannot hold"? Ah, but that was when poetry had structure, and meaning, and everyone read it and enjoyed it.

## JOB

I'm lying on the couch watching TV. I'm getting drowsy. I should brush and floss, but I'd rather just hit the OFF button on the channel-changer and go to sleep. I should go upstairs to the bathroom to brush and floss.

Then, suddenly, I'm hit with one of those flashes of vision and clarity that come along only a few times during a lifetime; a moment that can forever change the course of a life. Conveniently, my moment comes during a commercial.

In that moment, I see a vision of Joe Frazier, the former boxer. I see Joe weaving forward in the 120<sup>0</sup> heat, humidity, and hot TV lights of Manila, fighting his way through Ali's jabs and crosses — just to land one hook to the body. Ali grabs Joe, holds him. Ali is five inches taller than Joe and has much longer arms. But Joe keeps coming. Joe is undaunted. Ali hits him with three of his best, and Joe always answers with one of his. Ali goes back to his corner after the 12th round and says to his trainer, "He's CRAZY!" By the end of the 14th round, both of Joe's eyes are swollen shut. Ali is unloading on him. Joe staggers in two-legged wounded-bull hops; but he won't go down. Joe's trainer won't let him come out for the 15th — he literally can't see.

Ali wins, but pisses blood for the next two weeks.

Joe never forgives his trainer for not letting him come out for that last round — still hasn't spoken to him to this day.

"What were you thinking, Joe?" announcer asks on 15-year anniversary of the fight.

"I wasn't thinking anything, I had a job to do and just wanted to get the job done."

"But Joe, the heat ...."

"I was there to do a job. That's all I was thinking about."

I'm startled from my sleep by a loud TV noise. I jump off the couch. I jab the OFF button. I bob-and-weave up the stairs toward the bathroom.

## MAYBE IF

- Maybe if we knocked down this wall and built a new room,  
we'd have more space to store our happiness in.
- Maybe if we filled the room with deep-piled carpet and  
expensive furniture, they would soak up the happiness  
— like radiation.
- Maybe if we got a new car
- Maybe if we went to Florida
- Maybe if we found a new husband, a new wife, a new job,  
bought a new veg-o-matic
- Maybe if we found a purer drug
- Maybe if we didn't drink so much
- Maybe if we drank more
- Maybe if we went out more
- Maybe if we stayed in more, saved money, and rented videos
- Maybe if we didn't rent so many videos, cancelled our  
cable, and watched some of the new shows in the  
fall line-up
- Maybe if we went to Florida
- Maybe if we played more board games
- Maybe if we worked out
- Maybe if we didn't eat so much
- Maybe if we found the perfect man or woman
- Maybe when the kids grow up and are on their own
- Maybe if we took it easy
- Maybe if we took some time off
- Maybe if we went to Florida
- Maybe if we went back to school
- Maybe if we got our Ph.D.
- Maybe if we took out a loan
- Maybe if we got out of debt
- Maybe if we got a new haircut
- Maybe if we got some more clothes, some more clothes
- Maybe if we fixed up the house
- Maybe if we knocked down this wall and built a new room,  
we'd have more space.

— Paul Agostino

Holbrook NY

## DOES ANYONE EVER LEARN ANYTHING?

when he calls his mother on easter sunday  
she wants to know what his kids received  
from the easter bunny.

he relates a few things, such as the ant  
farm that they're crazy about, and she  
says, "you mean they didn't get any candy?"

he gazes about the apartment, which could  
easily double for a see's shop, or a  
fanny farmer's. "they got plenty  
of candy," he says. "probably too much."

"oh now," she says, "children have to  
have some candy on easter."

he is tempted to say, why? so they can  
grow up with blood sugar problems like  
yours, or die at fifty of diabetes,  
like my father did?

but instead he says, "i've never noticed  
any shortage of sweets around here."

"well, children deserve a little treat  
on the holidays," she says.

he changes the subject, but eventually  
she gets around to, "i certainly wish  
you could be here with me today."

"oh well," he says. "oh well."

## I WAS BORN BEFORE HOMOGENIZED MILK

you used to have to go to paris  
for a scotch and perrier.  
i used to look forward to a  
tucson trip for green corn tamales.

people flew to madrid for roast  
suckling pig at botin's and even  
to london for, at simpson's on  
the strand, roast beef and yorkshire  
pudding.

everyone agreed that guinness did not  
travel well, not even to london,  
and lowenbrau had not become  
azusabrau.

people used to save for years to  
give their kids that once-in-a-  
lifetime trip to disneyland. old  
men, like mooses, refused to die  
until their eyes had discerned the  
unique configurations of fenway,  
wrigley, or the house that ruth built.

now you can probably see more african  
wildlife in san diego than africa

you don't even have to drive to westwood  
for a first-run movie.

and the croissant and the quiche?  
isn't there some way to deport them  
and renew their romance?

can you imagine bothering to smuggle  
back a dirty book from denmark?

i heard a guy order pernod in the reno room.

today, wherever you are, you are everywhere,  
yet no place special.

#### LIKE SLEEPING ON A GYMNASIUM FLOOR ON AN ISLAND IN A TYPHOON

when my wife refers to anything  
as "an adventure," my children  
blanch, because, from past  
experience, "adventure" has become  
synonymous with "ordeal."

#### THERE ARE MORE WHERE THAT ONE CAME FROM

i am reading good morning, midnight, by  
jean rhys, when a moth alights on  
the table, just to the right of  
the book.

i think of moths in history and  
literature, the gypsy moth, for  
instance, the moth and the flame,  
virginia woolf, emily dickinson,  
sylvia plath, ann sexton ...

I smash the moth.

i return to the novel pleased  
to have discovered that i have  
retained one of my few physical  
gifts: fast hands.

"WHY," THEY ASKED SIR EDMUND HILLARY, "DID YOU WANT TO SCALE MONS VENERIS?"

"you're over the hill," my little girl says to her mother and me.

"i may be," i say, "but your mother isn't."

"oh yes," she says, "she's over forty too, and once you're over forty, you're over the hill."

to her, at ten, it is a comforting idea.  
it makes us much less formidable obstacles  
to her beeline for independence.

i felt the same way at her age.

and later i received the literary confirmation  
that fitzgerald and faulkner were over  
the hill by forty, and that wolfe and dylan  
thomas were both under it.

i'll avoid naming a girl i know who would  
like to skip her twenties and thirties  
entirely and dominate the field of the forty-  
year-olds, or so she says.

if she stays  
alive, she will.

WALT KUHN'S GOURDS, 1937

pondering this remarkable still life,  
i ask myself if i could write a poem,  
without the imposition of whimsy, narrative,  
symbolism or the pathetic fallacy,  
about a centerpiece of squashes.

then, remembering that there are  
thousands of poets out there looking  
for something to write about,

i bequeath them this vie morte,  
and head for the corner bar.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

## OUT OF PLACE

I always knew that there was something wrong with me.

it got very bad in Jr. High school.  
when I walked into a room  
all the students would begin talking  
at once

it got noisy  
and I would stand and stare at them  
and the sound would heighten  
until the teacher would bang on the  
desk:

"ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! THAT'S ENOUGH  
OF THAT!"

I had no idea of what excited them  
and when I sat down at my desk  
heads would continue to turn and  
look at me.

these occurrences were continuous  
and I never did anything untoward or  
unusual  
so I knew that there was just something  
wrong with me.

the teachers, too, acted strangely:  
"WHAT ARE YOU DOING MR. CHINASKI?"  
and I wouldn't be doing anything.  
"YOU WILL PLEASE REMAIN AFTER CLASS!"

it was usually the female teachers  
who did this  
and I liked all my female teachers  
even though I felt sorry for them  
but they never explained to me  
what I had done  
and I never asked.

on the school grounds it was odd  
also:

boys I didn't know would walk up  
to me

ask, "how you doing?"  
and I would answer,  
"get away from me...."

what it meant.

I never knew.

I had no plans, few desires and  
no impulses toward anything  
but I sensed that there was something

wrong with me  
that I was a freak

and it felt neither good nor  
bad,  
I accepted the situation and  
waited.

ON BEING 20 ...

my mother knocked on my roominghouse door  
and came in  
looked in the dresser drawer:  
"Henry, you don't have any clean  
stockings...  
do you change your underwear?"

"Mom, I don't want you poking around  
here...."

"I hear that there is a woman of the  
streets who comes to your room late at  
night and she drinks with you, she lives  
right down the hall...."

"she's all right...."

"Henry, you can get a terrible  
disease...."

"yeah...."

"I talked with your landlady, she's a  
nice lady, she says you must read a lot  
of books in bed because as you sleep at  
night the books fall to the floor all  
night, they can hear it all over the  
house, heavy books, one at midnight,  
another at one a.m., another at 2 a.m.,  
another at four...."

after she left I took the library books  
back

returned to the roominghouse and  
put the dirty stockings and the dirty  
underwear and the dirty shirts into  
the paper suitcase  
got public transportation downtown  
boarded the Trailways bus to  
New Orleans  
figuring to land with ten dollars  
and let them do with me  
what they would.

P.O. BOX 11946, FRESNO, CALIF. 90731

drove in from the track after losing \$50.  
a hot day out there  
they packed them in on a Saturday  
they could bet the Kentucky Derby;  
my feet hurt and I had pains in the neck  
and about the shoulders --  
nerves: large crowds of people more than  
unsettle me.  
pulled into the driveway and got the  
mail  
moved up and parked it  
went in and opened the IRS letter  
form 525 (SC) (Rev. 9-83)  
read it  
and was informed that I owed  
TWELVE THOUSAND SIXHUNDREDFOUR DOLLARS AND  
SEVENTY-EIGHT CENTS  
on my 1981 income tax plus  
TWO THOUSAND EIGHTHUNDREDEIGHTYTHREE DOLLARS  
AND TWELVE CENTS interest  
and that further interest was being  
COMPOUNDED  
DAILY.  
I went into the kitchen and poured a  
drink.  
life in America is a curious  
thing.  
well, I could let the interest  
build  
that's what the government  
did  
but after a while they would  
come for me  
or whatever I had  
left.  
at least that \$50 loss at the  
track didn't look so  
bad anymore.  
I'd have to go tomorrow and  
win \$15,487.90 plus  
daily compounded  
interest.  
I drank to that,  
wishing I had purchased a  
Racing Form  
on the way  
out.

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

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