

The Wormwood Review



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AN L.A. CURSE

On the old man in his blue Dodge Dart
doing 40 on the 405,
face tensed against a fusillade as I blast by;

On the tiny woman from Elsewhere,
stretching to see over her wheel, strained
forward as if hoping to win by a nose;

On the tourist, map in hand, slowing
to squint at every street sign when I'm late,
and the slightest touch of fenders
will rocket my insurance rates into deep space;

On the maniac whose jacked-up Mustang
blinds me with its brights, then burns by
on the left shoulder, threading through traffic
like Crazy Legs Hirsch while I howl for the cops
and pray to pass him spun out, his hot car in flames;

On the average driver who would queue up
dutifully behind the blaze, banging
his steering wheel, cursing the government,
the freeway system, and all other drivers
stuck and going nowhere just like me.

—Charles H. Webb

Los Angeles, CA

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE

I read this article in the newspaper
about obsessive compulsive people.
it gave all the symptoms:
checking and rechecking door locks,
checking electrical outlets,
other
repetitive meaningless acts,
being overly concerned for
the safety of self
and others.

I had every one of them.
I was kind of proud of that. it
wasn't something I wanted to be cured of.
the article said that if you know someone
with one or more of these telltale
symptoms, you should insist they
seek immediate medical treatment. I never
thought any of these things were problems.
a little strange, perhaps, but not
all that terrible. I can think of
worse forms of mental illness:
delusions, irresistible urges
to commit violent acts,
pyromania, necrophilia.
it doesn't seem all that crazy to me
to fear burglars, fires, abductions.
not if you read the papers.

SLOW DAY ON THE STATE PAYROLL

had my radio on all day at work today
and didn't listen to it for one minute.
that happens quite often lately,
and I'm not all that busy, either,
so it's not like I'm too engrossed in
what I'm doing or something. maybe
I should change it to a better
station.

THE MAN WHO LOVED BEGINNINGS

he had real initiative,
was a self-starter
but he never seemed to
finish anything.

IT'S NOT LIKE I'M IN A RUT, BUT

every day I eat my lunch
in this order:
cookies first
then bagel
then banana
then sandwich
then carrots
then dried prunes.
a big lunch,
but I spread it out
over the day:
cookies with morning coffee
bagel at 10 am
banana at 11
sandwich with coffee at noon
carrots at 2 pm
prunes at 4. never
planned it this way, it just
happens. another
meaningless pattern
in a life composed of
pointless routines.

some day I may
reverse the order and
really shake things up.

—David Barker

Salem, OR

CUSTOM-FITTED

Machinists

discard as soon as they can those legal
snub-nosed 35-lbs.-of-air-pressure air nozzles,
and take up those illegal
105 or 110-lbs.-of-air-pressure smuggled-through-the-shop
air nozzles and fit them with 3-foot-long barrels
and stick their trigger handles down into the slot-like ways
at the edges of their machine tables
so that their barrels stick up in the air like rifles.
These air guns
can blow razor-sharp chips twenty feet through the air
or drive them into the flesh of the hands
or face,
and they can fire
missiles made out of cardboard tubing 50 feet
through the air THWACK
into the tin wall of the building or the back
of another machinist,
whereas all the legal air guns can do
is clean off machine tables.

Why have something merely functional
when you can have something illegal and dangerous
and fun?

SOCIABLE

I was never able to really talk to my fellow machinists
in the Goodstone Aircraft Company machine shop.
I would notice groups of 3 or 4 or 5 machinists
gathered at various machines
shooting the shit a mile a minute for 10 or 15 minutes
every day
but whenever I tried to go over to a machinist's machine and talk to him
or a group of machinists the conversation always seemed to die
almost immediately.
I tried talking about work and I tried not talking about work.
I tried being humorous.
I tried talking about politics.
I tried complaining about work and Goodstone Aircraft Company.
Nothing worked.

Until I finally tried
badmouthing my fellow machinists.
Immediately eyes lit up
and lengthy enthusiastic conversations began
that lasted 10 or 15 minutes or virtually as long as I wanted,
all kinds of other machinists and even supervisors wandering over
to join in and skewer and ridicule and character assassinate.

Being popular
just requires a little effort.

—Fred Voss

Long Beach, CA

SUGGESTIONS

On Monday I am told to punch out and go to conference room b. In there I sit down in air conditioned comfort with my boss, his boss, and a guy I don't know and I am told that the company is buying two brand new Pfauter PE 320 numerically controlled gear cutting machines, and do I have any suggestions for tooling them up? In the 15 years I have been employed here no one has ever asked me a question. I look at the invoice for the machines. \$642,348.15. I look at the color brochure with a picture of the machine. Then I look at the new floor plan for the gear department, and notice that someone has very neatly scratched off the old Gould & Eberhard gear cutting machine that I have been running for 15 years, the most accurate and the most reliable machine in there, and drawn in the two new machines. I stand up, look at these men, pick up a pencil and redraw the old G&E machine back into the floor plan, and put in the price, "paid for one hundred times, keep it," sign my name, turn and walk out of there and go back to say good-bye to the G&E.

—Gary Goude

Riverside, CA

SERVICE

Heading across the street
from the construction site
to Mickey D's for lunch,
I notice a guy kneeling on the sidewalk
in the ninety-degree heat,
his head bowed, almost touching the ground.
I figure he's a Muslim
until I see the blood coming
from his nose.

I sprint past him and through
the doors raising my hand to a girl
behind the counter.

An old skin-and-bones man is saying,
"Give me a cheeseburger," as he lays
his change on the counter and starts to count it.
"And I don't want one of them cold dried-up
sons-of-bitches either."

The girl smiles at me and says,
"Can I help you?"

"There's a guy outside bleeding on the sidewalk,"
I tell her. "Just a minute," she says, and then,
looking over my shoulder at a fat woman behind me,
says, "Ma'am, can I take your order?"

HIGH & ROSE

I'm standing at the bar
drinking a beer, minding
my own business.

A guy a couple of stools
down is staring at me.

He looks like a cross
between Charlie Manson
and a monkey.

"Are you a narc?" he says
when I look over at him.

"No, I'm not a narc," I say.

"Well, you could be," he replies,
"you've got short hair like a cop."

"Look, man," I say,
glancing over at the bartender
and rolling my eyes,

"if I were a narc, I'd look
just like you.

That's how they work.
They drink beer with you,
smoke your dope,
eat your old lady's cooking
and play with your kids.
Then they turn you in
and look down their nose at you
when your stupid ass
is dragged off to jail."
He looks at me for a moment
with a vacant expression
and says, "You wanna go outside
and burn one?"

EXORCISM

I'm living in this roach-
infested broiler oven
down in central Florida.
There's a fool
next door who's either
praying out in the hall
with one of the brethren
from his fundamentalist church
or waking me up at 3 or 4
in the morning screaming
at his wife about how
she's fucking up her life.
Her parents came by today
while he was at work.
They took her, the baby
and a few of her things
and drove off.
He trashed the apartment
when he found them gone
and cried and carried on
something pitiful
when the cops hauled
his ass off to jail.
The old man who lives below
laughed and yelled
as they pulled away,
"The Lord works in mysterious ways."

RAINEY BETHEA

A coal truck roars and wheezes, straining uphill in low gear. I'm riding in a Ford Econoline van with three other construction workers. We're heading to a building site in Hazard, Kentucky. The motel where we're staying is out of town on the interstate. In the morning the fog is thick, so we got up early to make the time-consuming drive to the job.

Just outside of town, spray-painted over a traffic sign, are the words "no niggers allowed beyond this point."

I just read somewhere about a man named Rainey Bethea, hanged before a crowd of ten thousand in Owensboro, Kentucky, back in 1936. It was the last legal event of its kind in the United States. Vendors worked the throng, that drank all night waiting for the main event. A brawl ensued afterward over pieces of the black hood he wore.

One of the members of our crew is a black man I've worked with off and on for ten years. He just shakes his head as we pass the sign. A little guy, that I had written off as a worthless redneck, says, "Don't worry, man. Anybody gives you any shit, we'll kick their ass."

TORNADO WARNING (for Karen)

sparse raindrops like grains
of salt strike the windshield
forming ragged circles
like craters on the moon

the woman that is my
best friend in life
steers us through the streets
with authority

her dark Mediterranean hair
blowing about her face and shoulders
like storm clouds
changing shape

we're listening to Voodoo Lounge
the Dionysian rhythms
the wind
the impending danger

the power she has over me
and the strange light in the sky
work in concert
life is good

—Daryl Rogers

Lexington, KY

DEAR JILL

Too tired to work tonight, so took a nap and dreamed I told you I'd learned a secret known only to our people: that if you press the top of a mushroom just the right way you can know everything about its past and present nature.

Thus, any mushroom, fresh, dried, cooked, or raw, if simply pressed twice quickly, would show pictures of its true previous states of being and eventually reveal if it is wholesome, signified by the image of a clean, white, young mushroom, or poisonous, by a goblet of green liquid.

Just before I woke, we were sitting together at my kitchen table with you smiling warmly at me, tenderly pressing the mushrooms in a full bowl I'd picked, while we watched each one show a true, clear image of itself, for both of us to see.

—Cyril A. Dostal

Sagamore Hills, OH

THE LAST KISS ON EARTH

Although she could hardly walk anymore
even to the door or answer the telephone
my mother still liked to dance, jiggle
a gentle jitterbug in her pajamas to
Glenn Miller's "In the Mood" and liked to
tell me how she used to jitterbug in
World War 2 with soldiers and sailors
at the Starlight Ballroom after her shift
as hatcheck girl and then she'd sneak
out before she had to tell them she was
married to a medic stationed in Algeria
but one night a sailor followed her and
grabbed her in the park and kissed her,
and when she slapped and kicked him he
wept, said he was sorry, but tomorrow he
was shipping out for the war and she might be
the last girl he'd ever kiss in his life.

How sad, I said, how romantic, and my
mother said, oh, honey, he was just drunk
and those sailors could sure hand you
a line.

ARTHUR, WRITE US

Although it'd been more than forty years
since she lived in Texas, my mother
still had a bit of a drawl, said wrench
for rinse, Arthur, write us, for arthritis,
used localisms like dob and scrooch
so I dobed her itchy spots with witch hazel,
I scrooched her pillow just right
beneath her head, I helped her wrench
after her meals, and I wished that
there were really an Arthur someplace
who would write us, send us his love,
maybe some money to buy roses
to tide us over until he caught his
flight on a jet plane to rush to us
and make everything okay.

RASPBERRY SOAP

After a while she had to be
helped to the shower where she
sat on a little metal chair
while her granddaughter, wearing
a bathing suit, washed her
close-cropped Auschwitz hair,
then gave to her the raspberry soap
so she could wash her private parts
and face herself, quickly, before
the pain came again, then after her
shower, quickly again, her granddaughter
had to tote what was left of her little
bag of bones back to bed where her
granddaughter dried her gently,
gently as if she were already dust
that might poof away, then dressed her
in clean cotton things, combed her
hair and then for a week my mother'd
lie there, white upon her sheets, a
ghost of a prisoner of war from some
very old war in the snow, the musk
and sour brandy of her living death
rising around her a halo of angel
aroma that only that raspberry soap
fragrance of a rainbow rain from
springtime forests could wash away.

—Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach, CA

ONCE AGAIN MY VIPER-OF-A-PEN BITES BACK

on my week's list
i have written
"buy pants."

but even i have so much trouble
reading my handwriting
that at first i read it
"big pants."

well, yes, that too.

MAYBE THIS WILL DO THE TRICK

a couple of months ago, i let
a salesgirl sell me a blue
ink refill for my ballpoint
pen instead of the black ink
refill that i really wanted.

today, being near the stationery
shop, i went in and replaced the
blue ink cartridge with a black
ink cartridge, even though there
was still a little blue ink left.

this raised my spirits.

i believe that,
for the time being,
i will resist any impulses
to make further changes
in my life.

THE INGREDIENT

my uncle virgil
was an uncle by marriage,
the husband of my father's sister,
a great beauty who died young
of tuberculosis.

every year virgil renewed my subscription
to the *national geographic*.
the issues accumulated, many
unopened, as in, i suspect, most families.

he lived in pennsylvania,
an engineer at sylvania electronics,
and he married the housekeeper, roseanne,
not long after his wife was buried.

roseanne was not beautiful,
just helpful and warm and good-natured.
their marriage was a success.

my parents were never critical
of virgil and roseanne.
i thought it strange to marry
a plain woman after having had the glory
of a beautiful one, but my parents seemed
to understand.

i'm beginning to also.

MUMMY MASK, PTOLEMAIC PERIOD

such large gentle eyes
and modest mundane features.
you think: this woman would have
made a good wife.
you also think: certainly this is but
another aspect of the immortality
art can bestow: that your image, at
least, can remain lovable, more than
two thousand years after your death:
no wonder the wiser potentates not
only honored their artists but made sure
that they were well liked by them.

finally, though (and it's the stuff of
science fiction), you think that it
is an awful long trip back in
time to have to make just to find
a woman that you might be able to
live in harmony with.

—Gerald Locklin

Long Beach, CA

RHAPSODY IN BLUE

listening to Mozart
quite by accident
on a Sunday afternoon

I can look out the
window
& suddenly
it's Spring

the kind of Spring
that I remember
as a boy

A Shelby sort of
Spring w/ a

Tracy sort of
breeze

& suddenly
I am the cosmos
again

& all the doors
are open

I live for times
like this

& I don't care
what anybody else
lives for.

YOU'RE RIGHT, CHARLES

sometimes you can die
a thousand deaths in one sitting
& you can get so alone
that it makes good sense
to lie in bed all day
& think about brushing
your teeth

BOOK REVIEW

"I want to write a
novel someday"
she says running
her hands through
her red so red hair

& if she does
write that novel
I'll read it

& after every page
I'll think
"that page was written
by the woman
w/ the beautiful
red so red hair"
I'll think

"what a piece
of work!"

& then sooner or later
you might get up & make some
coffee or something
but you're still always hungry
& hunger is always
a reminder that everyone
& everything is unsatisfied

so be it you might say
but you know don't you
that you're only beautiful
by association?

& you know don't you
that it doesn't matter how many
poems you write because the
beautiful people are all busy
being beautiful & so naturally

they're too busy
making love to read about
the lack thereof.

—Erik Campbell

Bellevue, NE

W. C. WILLIAMS

He loved
driving through the streets of
Rutherford, New Jersey,

in the early morning hours
and smiling at the young house-
wives standing in their doorways

in flimsy nightgowns.
It was almost like eating those
plums he'd stolen from the icebox.

—Gene Mahoney

Vineyard Haven, MA

THE POEM MAKING ITS COMEBACK
OVER THE NOVEL
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS

This poem won't hurt you.
It doesn't bite, have rabies,
piss on the carpet
or shit behind the couch.

This poem won't run you over
or flip you the finger
for pulling out too slow.

This poem certainly
won't pull up behind you
with flashing red lights
and give you a ticket for speeding
or having one too many.

It won't tell you
to get back to work,
cut short your coffee break
or lay you off
because of a bad economy.

But
this poem just might
want to get drunk with you.

It might tell you
a few of its problems.

This poem might have too many
and want to fight you outside
but don't pay it any attention.
It'll sober up.

A poem like this
might even hit on you.
It'll try to be tactful
but after that many beers,
who can say?

You might even like this poem,
want to take it home.
Being drunk yourself,
you might even fuck this poem
half naked on the couch.

And even if you consider it a mistake,
it still took less time to read
than a Sidney Sheldon or Tom Clancy
best-seller.

PENCIL DICK PAT
AND THE EXERCISE FOR ENDOWMENT

Pat has been thinking
about losing weight.
He sits home and eats
and thinks
about losing weight.

Tuesday
he had to visit
his accountant
to take care
of some personal business.

During small talk
Pat mentions
he'd like to lose
some weight.

The accountant replies
off the cuff
that he just read
where excess weight
decreases penis size.

At home that night
Pat starts a diet
and exercise regimen

beginning
with 11 situps
and a bowl of low fat
frozen yogurt.

—David Newman
Pittsburgh, PA

IN THE HARDWARE STORE

Bald men
admiring
the heads
of mops.

THE STARS

Our humility returns
when we try
to count them.

ORGASM

Over the waterfall
in our
boat of skin.

AFTER RAIN

The wind
rushing through
the alley,
making each puddle
frown.

DURING YOGA

While
standing on my head
I hear a plane
overfeet.

THE PIGEON-FEEDER

The pigeons
carry away
his bread,
never
his
loneliness.

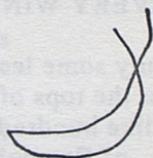
—Peter Bakowski

Richmond, Australia

Ronald Baatz: Every Winter

VERTICAL PERCHES

while she's upstairs taking a morning bath
i walk into town to the deli, and knowing
how long she can take bathing i'm in no hurry
to return to her house. at the deli
i take a newspaper and a coffee and sit at one
of the tables in the rear. i open the newspaper
to the sports section, which is always my appetizer
when it comes to making my way through the other
sections. usually this is a gathering place for many
carpenters and plumbers in the morning, but today
there are only two men at a table in a corner, perhaps
because it is a sunday and most men are home with
their families. i cannot tell what they are talking
about, for the most part, but i certainly can tell what
they are eating: the aroma of egg sandwiches is damn
near overwhelming, to the point where i'm tempted to
order one for myself. i resist, though, expected as
i am to have breakfast with haldora. she is big on
sunday breakfast, and in all likelihood what she'll
prepare will be far more ambitious than a mere egg
sandwich. autumn has come to a rapid conclusion, what
with the intense rains and treacherous winds
this past week sweeping trees clean of remaining
leaves. out the back window of the deli i can see
the towering bare branches of the poplar trees, which
when in leaf easily hide the house situated on the other
side of them. by the way their branches all point
directly up towards the sky, you'd think the birds
would find them unsuitable branches, but as i sip
the first sip of my coffee i see many sparrows
using these branches to come to rest on.
the older of the two men, whose facial expression
seems to have been totally defeated by the forces
of gravity, is reading the obituaries, and in a loud,
laughing voice he remarks that people are dying
to get their names in the newspaper. the other man
makes no response to this, probably because this
same old man makes this same observation every
sunday morning. then, after a brief pause,
the old man squeezes some ketchup onto his egg
sandwich, and with that the other man suddenly
grunts in agreement, as he turns his eyes upwards
to look out at the sparrows
mysteriously continuing to choose
vertical perches.



EVERY WINTER

only some leaves at the far end of the field,
at the tops of some thin trees, yellow leaves,
like hundreds of miniature yellow flags on top
of flag poles that are crooked and waiting
for the worst. it's surprising there is even
one leaf left to be found on any tree, so reckless
has the wind come through the valley these
past nights of this past week. and, yes, the wind,
it seems to always choose night to go about making
its passage through these mountains.
just now i found myself standing by the stove,
after taking the kettle off to pour hot
water into my teacup, soaking up the
warmth of the still-glowing-orange electric
coil. every winter i swear that i won't
spend another winter in this place,
but without fail such thoughts evaporate
during the summer. i'll forget about
the hostile months of winter, relax into
another beautiful autumn, and
then suddenly it's as though my fingers
and toes were violently cut off and
thrown across the hard ground for
the crows to come and feed on.
even as i scribble here in my old
swollen notebook, i can hear rain
drumming at the back door,
cold rain which can age the face
perhaps more viciously
than the sun. last night
i heard myself sniffing in bed,
like some sad stupid man
who had just lost a faithful dog.
this morning when i came down
from the upstairs bedroom i saw deer
in the back field, and i was
shocked at how black they had turned.
and whether this was
for reasons of camouflage
or sheer anticipation
of death, i don't pretend
to know.

DUST AND ASHES

i am losing the eternal battle against dust and ashes
here at the farmhouse, where it is going on seven
years that i've been living, longer than at
any other place in my forty-seven years, outside
of living with my parents as a child. dust
accumulates on the long wooden floors, and
just when i think i have made some headway
with it, it shows me how very wrong i am
by parading out new armies of dust i could never
even imagine existing. but i should be
used to all this by now; it has always been
this way. and the ashes, the ashes from
the fireplace, somehow they escape
from the fireplace itself and they start
migrating to neighboring rooms, threatening
to permanently settle in them.
i just have to remember to clean the
fireplace out often, taking the ashes out
to the edge of the woods in a large
brown shopping bag. and then there are
the really fine ashes from the constant
burning of incense. these are especially
tricky to pick up. it's a royal pain,
i have to admit. and for some obscure
reason the room where i have the typewriter
in the window facing west towards
phoenicia, in this room very little
cleaning is done whatsoever.
dust and ashes seem appropriate here.
usually in the ashtray, for
instance, there are large turd-shaped
ashes which were knocked off
my cigars. i like to smoke when
at the typewriter. a dirty habit,
i know. it's just that
the cigar does such a good job
of absorbing the tension
between my teeth, when i realize
again that i have nothing
to say, that perhaps
only dust and ashes are worth
any mention.

FAREWELL

a light frosting of snow
this morning. threw some
apples out for the deer, not
from the kindness of my heart,
but because i didn't care
to eat them myself. actually
i haven't seen a deer out back
since late autumn, some
three weeks ago. a gnawing
sensation of depression
in my gut. don't want to
push off for work this morning.
i feel like a child being
sent to school, and this
child does not want to go there.
this child wants nothing more
than just to remain home
and play with his tin castle
and tiny knights. to
this day i can remember
the last day i did play
with them. the sad
realization that
i was getting too old.
i can still feel it.
this i can never see
happening with poetry,
since the writing
of poetry has
always been, for me,
the simple rehearsal
of writing
that last note
of farewell,
on my
deathbed.

A BLESSING

years ago i gave my mother a green
grasshopper, and this christmas she gave me
a green grasshopper. the one i had given her
was made of rubber, while the one
she gave me was made of a much heavier material,
which, at the moment, heavenly relaxed on
christmas beer, i cannot identify.
so, i am nearing fifty, and my mother and i
are exchanging grasshoppers. what
does this say about the nature of things?
nothing, i'm sure. just as my reading
dickens at this time in my life says nothing,
or my father moaning from
the excruciating pain of shingles
says nothing. i think of last year's
poems and i have the suspicion that
they were written by someone other
than myself, and that this someone
had nothing to say. my sweet love haldora
has nothing to say. this
is evident. but she of the splendid
blue icelandic eyes says nothing
with the magnificent sex
of her body, and that nothing
transforms me, and because of this
they don't recognize me
in town anymore. this is
more than nothing. this
is a blessing.

MRS. PIERRE

at some time during the christmas holidays the woman who
owned the jewelry store in town used to pay my parents
a visit, not so much because she was a dear friend of my
parents, but because she was very close with my fat
aunt helen who also ran a business in town, a toy and
furniture store. so the visit she would make was always
with my aunt and my uncle. her name was mrs. pierre,
and that was the name of her store: mrs. pierre's.
whether that was her true name or not i am unsure, but
that's what everyone referred to her as. she was

a rather handsome woman: striking figure; golden blonde hair swept up into a dramatic bun; radiant, intoxicating smile which made her eyes glitter and squint like stars successfully peeping through a dawn's mist. there wasn't a time when i wasn't struck dumb by her beauty, and i'd often catch myself staring at her, and not always safely from a distance so that no one would notice me. at the age when i still played with my toy cars on the floor i would religiously do precisely that whenever mrs. pierre came for a visit. i'd position myself so that from where my cars were wheeling and spinning around i'd have a clear view of her very lengthy, shapely legs perhaps crossed in cheerful christmas conversation. truthfully, much of my wretched boyhood was spent spying on women. mrs. pierre might've been my favorite, but certainly there were many others. the thing about mrs. pierre was that she appeared to be so outrageously dazzling. i cannot conjure her up in my mind without seeing her in heels and nylons, finely tapered black dress and with soft pearl oval earrings. she wasn't like any of the other women in the neighborhood where i lived. she was an otherworldly creature who had been sent into my tiny realm in order to tempt me to abandon the notion and confines of boyhood as soon as i was able, and to me there was nothing disagreeable in this. i had looked upon that time, foolishly or not, as being a prison of unfair dimensions. it was forever just a matter of tapping patiently with some hard object, maybe a penknife, on its gray and suffocating walls, searching with the undying stubbornness of youth for that hollow point of vulnerability where i'd be able to break through. in this effort mrs. pierre was a godsend, a wealth of inspiration and my very special cheerleader. may her beauty be remembered during some of the darker moments on the road ahead.

THE MARCH SUN

the greatest pleasure these winter days
seems to come from simply standing in
the shower and allowing hot water
to rain down over me. and it is best
to allow the bathroom to get so
outrageously steamy that it's a real challenge
just locating the doorknob when
showering is done and i'm ready to step out

into the cold of the rest of the house.
yesterday i did what i've been doing
every so often recently: taking two
showers during the course of the day,
one in the morning and one when i come in
from my walk in the afternoon.
a bit excessive, sure, but the heat is so
comforting, especially on my neck,
which of late has been murderously
painful from simply sleeping the wrong way.
talking to my friend al, last night, he
disclosed to me that he has all but
given up attempting sleep on either side
of his body, so much pain is brought on
by doing so. and it struck me, when
he said this, that i cannot do much else
than sleep on my back too.
sleeping on my stomach: this has never
been an option for me. and
sleeping on either side causes pain
in my arms, hands and neck, which
is unfortunate since i like to
curl up in a fetal position
when i'm cold at night.
when haldora came back from morocco
i cannot tell you the level
of amazement i felt when my eyes fell
upon her tan. i could only
stare at it with mouth hanging
open, wondering at a sun which
could bring about such a
transformation. here
the sun crosses the sky shrouded
by clouds, usually undetected,
and when it is detected
it is largely ignored:
a god
without a people.

THE CLAY PIG AND REMEMBERED PRAYERS

i put the clay pig she brought me from morocco
up on the mantelpiece with the other pigs which
have come to me over the years. this new pig
is especially striking, so exquisitely crude
and bold is it. perhaps it is
because i was born in the year of the pig

that all these pigs come to me.
i don't know. from what i hear
the pig is supposed to bring good luck,
and so i guess it is fortunate that i have
as many as i have now. soon
i will be on the wrong side of fifty,
without a penny in the bank, still making
a paltry salary, so, you can plainly
see i'm going to need all the good luck
that these pigs can possibly supply.
i noticed that after h gave me this pig
she became very ill, unable to
get out of bed for days.

she could barely speak, her voice
was so fraught with tiredness. i had to
bring soup to her house, which i
trucked over the bridge which spans
the wide river between us.
and i suggested to her that maybe i should
bring the pig back to her, that
maybe her giving it up to me was just
too much of a blow to her fragile psyche
and thin, vulnerable frame.
after all, she was born in the year
of the pig, just as i was.

but she refused my offer to return
it, while at the same time looking
at me as though i were a wee bit
crazy. but the soup: she loved the soup,
a navy bean and potato concoction,
having been in the works for over
two days. i was considering flavoring it
with a ham bone, just to
give it some badly needed muscle,
which i figured she could use,
but i abandoned this idea, afraid
she might detect the taste of it,
perhaps causing her to be repulsed
by it, such a thoroughly committed
vegetarian i've come to know her
as being. so instead, i just
dunked the clay pig in the pot
a couple of times, and i
mumbled the few remembered parts
of some old, but hopefully
still useful, prayers
from my catholic school
days.

CHERRY PIE

no sleep two nights in a row
or almost no sleep, and now i
have to sit next to my supervisor
in a diner, listening to her
monotonous chatter while we
have toast and coffee.

and this morning her voice
seems extra jarring, if
that is at all possible, and
what she chooses to talk about
holds zero interest for me,
or for anyone else in the world,
for that matter.

her makeup is thick and
pasty, and her skin
is exhausted, no doubt from
the innumerable cigarettes
she smokes. i don't know
why she asked me to come on
this drive. i feel like
telling her that the job
is killing me, that

i cannot stomach the
routine anymore, that
the people back at
the office are
incurable nitwits,
the lot of them.

but, i don't say anything
of the sort.

instead i just sit
quiet, faking listening,
studying my
reflection in the glass
pie cabinet.

my nose
is situated smack
in the middle
of a half-eaten
cherry pie.

THIS WOMAN

over breakfast she has this habit of wanting to talk about
exactly how sex was the night before between us. we spend
many mornings during our week just so involved, believe me

when i say this. not that i'm complaining, hell no. if the truth must be told: such a topic of concern blasts me off into the day in a very solid and confident demeanor. seldom do these private talks hold any criticism directed at me, and i certainly have none to level at her. the one problem we have encountered, at least in my mind, is that now with it being springtime the bedroom window is constantly open, and with two elderly people living right next door i have this fear that they can hear all that is going on between us. i'm afraid that they can hear her moaning and gasping, and frequent screaming from the sheets she is solely responsible for. i feel as though i am not showing proper respect for the ancients in our society. never have i been with such a noisy woman, never. at times it's thoroughly unnerving, and yes, i have voiced this one minor complaint to her, but she merely shrugged it off and suggested that perhaps her sounds of ecstasy might just be like music to the old people's ears. but this does next to nothing when it comes to quieting my fears, and since i am the one who is most often on the top of our pile of lovemaking bodies, i find myself every now and then, even in the wildest throes, peering out the window to see if the neighbors are out on their porch in their rockers, plainly in earshot. fortunately, i have never seen them there, especially when our lovemaking sessions break free after dark.

this morning when i was in the upstairs bathroom, brushing my teeth, i happened to spot the woman on the side of her house watering flowers, and i couldn't help noticing just how very old she really is. this caused me some relief, i'm ashamed to say, thinking that it very well could be the case that her hearing is not what it used to be. to test this out i coughed in the window, and just as i suspected she didn't budge her head an inch. and so i coughed again, this time louder, and still nothing, no acknowledgment on her part was evident whatsoever. then i screamed, a horrifying scream meant to curdle the blood, and expressly aimed at old blood. i screamed at her out the bathroom window as though i had just accidentally shaved off a precious piece of my nose. but not even this was capable of eliciting any response. this woman, watering flowers in the timid warmth of an early morning hour, watering so methodically and so lovingly, falling deeper and deeper into her own very heavenly silence—this woman was beginning to interest me.

EVEN THE LOWLIEST OF SAINTS

feeling sick
for a few
days

nothing serious
but still she
couldn't do

the things
she normally
does

we couldn't make
love
that was out

and this
she felt bad
about

so bad that
she insisted
upon at least

kissing my penis
this helped her
to feel close

to our lovemaking
life
i didn't resist

even the lowliest
of saints
was always kind

to the sick

LOST

during the
night a gentle
sound next

to the bed
the sound of
what

i cannot tell
so i flick
the light

on and
discover fallen
petals

large ones from
the peonies
picked

just this
afternoon
but so old now

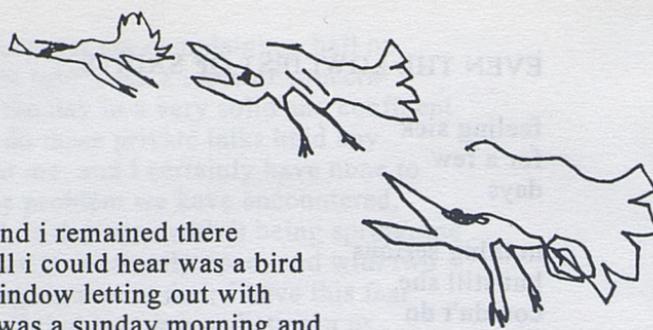
that even in
the fresh cold
water

they cannot
hold themselves
together

anymore
forming a
ring

around the
vase
of

exquisite
pinkness
lost



THE LAST APRIL

i put myself in her and i remained there
and for a moment all i could hear was a bird
outside the open window letting out with
a solitary cry. it was a sunday morning and
the last day in april, and for the most part
for me it had been a sleepless night after
a very lengthy dinner, a wild lovemaking
session and a walk downstairs alone
to take a peek at the end of a ball game
while sipping cognac. it was sunday morning,
as i said before, and i remained still,
actually listening closely to the bird,
wondering exactly what kind of bird it was,
suspecting that she knew i was wondering
what kind of bird it was. but
i also could not believe the quiet thrill
of lying there inside of her.
my penis was painfully rigid, and i
listened to the bird, the one of
a sunday morning, the morning of the last
day, the day that came at the final
moments of april. it wasn't
the crow outside, this much
i knew. the crow has its own sound
which i could not confuse with
another kind of sound.
it drove her out of her mind
with pleasure, my not moving.
we have this strong and silent
rapport which manifests itself
sometimes in such unhurried moments.
especially on a day
which was the last day,
of an april which was
the last april
of all known aprils.

—Ronald Baatz

Mt. Tremper, NY

THE JEWELS OF STORYTELLERS

The gang was waiting for
me
in our sagging gazebo
all the section-eight
storytellers
their tongues lubricated
with the oil of gladness

How vulnerable they are
how loving
their very faults are
rough jewels
little white lies
big bravado rubies

Pearls of great price in every
telling
heaped around me
so greedy—
I gather up all of them
and carry them home

PATTERN OF MEN

His parents can't really afford to
show off their credit card
travels
but they make two trips a year
My grand-nephew Brent
rushed in here after Easter
his skinny kid chest
lost in a wild jungle of color

Look here, Auntie
I bought this mola in
the San Blas Islands
Cool, ain't it
which gave me a headache
Is this the way they teach English
at Robert Louis Stevenson
Private School

in a grove of trees
along Carmel Seven Mile Drive
his daddy squeezes out nice money
to send him there
Why do I remember his grandfather
hoed cotton to buy the type of shirt
Rudolph Valentino wore

—Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel
Tulare, CA

THE MUSTY FAMILIAR

Ten days after their breakup, she takes an armful of things that remind her too much of him to the local thrift store. As she enters the building, the smell of sweat, mothballs, and old age reminds her that she, too, is now a discard. She hates that smell. His whole house smelled like that; they had gone to several thrift stores before she made the connection. Trying to ignore the tightness in her throat, she goes to the back of the store to the glassware, where she finds two more juice glasses she's been collecting and a lid for an orphaned casserole dish. On her way to the checkout, a pin-striped vest, exactly what she's wanted for months, catches her eye; the vest is a perfect color and fit. She puts her money on the counter and inhales deeply. Not once. Several times. And she leaves with more than she brought in.

—Sandra Spencer
Denton, TX

THRUWAY LADIES ROOM

sometimes in the harsh light without makeup or in glasses, I don't recognize myself. Paler than almost anybody at the sinks. Without lip gloss, I'm a stranger. As long as I've shades on it's ok. Still, I'm glad such harsh light only goes from my face to my neck, that I'm

not nude in front of 7 sinks and a backdrop of toilets flushing with everything exposed. I was sure at 6 I had fat legs and all through college said I was so allergic to chlorine to get out of swimming on weekends at pools. Even with 10 ballet classes, body sculpture

twice a week I'm not sure I have much chance of being the me I'd choose, long hard legs like close to 6 ft tall Sally Smith in front of me at 8 in Mrs. Berge's beginner ballet class. Sally, discovered on a ferry in NYC, a model at 18, on Today and Tonight and then at 21 told she

was over the hill, an old lady

CEREBRAL, ACERBIC, TOTALLY NONPHYSICAL MADONNA

is into
pumping irony

SAFE SEX MADONNA

has, tattooed at
every way into her
body, "enter at
your own risk"

BAD CROQUET MADONNA

is into
wicket ways

HAWAIIAN MADONNA
is all guava
and lava

TERMITE MADONNA

won't live alone.
She's social, likes
the time underground
but with a lot of
others. She prefers
an elaborate house
with lots of back
stairways and little
coves, a well main-
tained nest. She's
vegetarian, an egg-
laying machine, Her
ovaries are so big
her whole body swells
into a large sausage.
She loves to have
crowds of workers,
insists her house
point north and south
with broad faces to
east and west to get
the heat from the sun

THE HOTEL LIFSHIN IS NOT TAKING ON MORE

She's sick of changing
beds, or cleaning.
She's sick of being
down on her knees,

scrubbing your foot
prints off tiles,
sweeping up the
crumbs you've left,

getting your smell
out of the rugs and
pillows. She doesn't
want anyone to come

thru the door, the
open sign is off and
she is about to smash
it. She's had it,

making coffee on the
hour, making nice,
making witty. The only
thing she wants around

her house is a moat

—Lyn Lifshin

Vienna, VA

SANTA FE REDUX

end of a long day shopping
the turistas are bumping
into one another, hungry
in Old Town Plaza exhausted
as sparrows & pigeons pick at scraps
bicycle cops bust a carload
of lowriders drinking beer & whiskey
popcorn clouds frame the bare
darkened cottonwood trees
this last day of winter.

HAVING PRETTY LADIES FOR HOUSE GUESTS

it was 11 a.m. before i
could ever get in there

some days i forgot
entirely

to brush my teeth.

I PUT DOWN WILMA'S BOOK

big crash somewhere
out there
something fell down
i'm only one here
reading in bathtub
startled
hopefully only one here
be hell to defend myself
in the altogether.

14MAR94

the asparagus
& mushroom sauce
like haiku
upon the rice

a slender red pequin pepper
to make it jump

FOUND POEM, TYPED, FOLDED, STUCK INSIDE USED BORGES BOOK *IN PRAISE OF DARKNESS* I BOUGHT TODAY

1. income tax
2. pay bills, check up at bank on balance and new checks
Dianne Carter, hospitals, others?
3. Robin's stuff
4. drop-add
5. letter to Buz
6. letter to Atlantic Monthly
7. glasses fixed
8. reading for my class—figure out where we stand on that.

—Mark Weber

Albuquerque, NM

INTO HIS TERRITORY

Next week I'll take Heidi,
hunting gear & search
for black bear in sierras.
I learned to hunt with
bow & arrow when growing
up. This time I'll carry
a beefed up handgun.
Heidi, a doberman, is
no bear dog. I'll take
her to ward off spooks
that cluster around me
when I'm alone in wild
country. I doubt a bear
will allow us closer
than yesterday's meal,
which is ok. A deeper
calling is luring me
into his territory.

BACK TO BEAR FLATS

September, in company
of a lifelong friend,
returned to Bear Flats
after 48 years & searched
until we found my Dad's
old deer camp. Aspens
were down, no ring of
campfire rocks, but a
spring tucked in clump
of willows hadn't moved.
We took each other's picture
at the site & flooded
with memories of family
& friends lost I had
a bittersweet cry.

LESSONS

In a recent questionnaire
I was asked to name
my favorite poets.
I wrote I no longer
have favorites, which
is true, but I'm
indebted to a few.
WCW taught me to trust
my voice, the every
day words I use.
Bukowski taught me
to trust my life.
It's the raw material.
Snyder taught me
wilderness doesn't stop
at forest edge.
It continues in me.

—Phil Weidman

N. Highlands, CA

DOLORIS AND MARVIN

Quickly she undresses, pulls down the sheet and gets into bed. "Jump in, sweetheart, jump right in," she calls while smoothing the sheet with her hand.

Ever so slowly, he loosens his belt, unsnaps his trousers, lowers the zipper and empties his pockets of wallet, handkerchief, two quarters and a few pennies before he shakes his pelvis gently to allow his pants to slip down to the floor.

She slides her naked body across the sheets while watching his dance.

After matching one pant leg to the other, he folds the trousers and places them on the chair across the room. With studied, calculated steps, he approaches the bed, positioning himself on the edge where he begins to undo his shirt, first the right sleeve, then the left. Then he raises his hands to his collar to push the top button through the buttonhole and works his way down, one round white plastic fastener at a time. When done, he carries his folded shirt to the chair across the room.

Doloris turns from her side to her back to her stomach, massaging her silky body with the many cool fibers of the sheet. Occasionally, a strand of her hair leaves its moist pore for the bed. "I'm ready for ya, Marv."

"Me, too, dear. Me, too."

He lowers himself onto the bed beside her and guides his naked feet beneath the covers to the end of the mattress. Before setting the rest of his body down, he grabs the remote for the tv and fingers the proper button: "On." With this accomplished, he rolls over and goes to sleep.

ON SECOND THOUGHT

Now you are here although unsure where here is. You feel confused and try to order the confusion into something definable. The metal and human debris falling several feet away, you don't recognize as such. This your mind will not process. Then you hear screams and, in looking for the source, you discover several people with their arms and legs spread wide apart, their hair and clothing in what seems to be an ironed, uniform direction. You're not sure why they look the way they do. Their position and expression, you conclude, is highly unusual.

Then, fortunately or unfortunately, it begins to come back to you. You were on an airplane. And, fortunately or unfortunately, you define the present situation. You are falling. You are falling to the earth. You are going to be dead.

You've never gone through a series of thoughts like this before. What do you do? What choices do you have? You look at others falling with you. One woman's mouth is locked open in a perpetual scream. She looks pained. A man upside down is vomiting. He turns your stomach. Another woman appears to be praying and yet another is clinging onto what appears to be a blanket.

You need to go to the bathroom and realize you'll have to hold it in. You're not sure if you're successful or not.

Your mouth is dry. You have mint Life Savers in your pocket and with difficulty pull them out, but before you get one into your mouth, the wind grabs it away.

Your blouse has become untucked and you try to tuck it in. This feat proves to be impossible. Every time you push the material inside your pants, the wind pulls it out. You soon give up.

You want to talk to someone and the first few attempts to formulate words don't work. Or maybe the sound of the wind drowns out your voice. You try again and feel your lips to make sure they're moving. As your hands near your eyes, you see they're full of blood. This makes you recall that something's amiss. You've almost forgotten. You'd like to forget. You are forgetting. You've forgotten where you just were—on a plane. You've forgotten that you were waiting impatiently for the steward to bring a Bloody Mary, your husband asleep beside you. You're beginning to forget every thought you ever identified with yourself.

Then, for the first time, you look down. You are approaching a green and brown marble something—you're not sure what. Then you figure it out. You know exactly. You're going to be dying soon. By tomorrow, you will be dead. The reality of the situation finally hits you: these are your last living moments.

Suddenly, you begin to sing. You've always envied Liza Minnelli and you bellow the lyrics from *Cabaret* as loud as possible. You begin to kick your legs. You've always wanted to be a Broadway star. Only your girlfriend from sixth grade knew and because she laughed when you told her, you've told no one about it since. Now you feel great. You think you are really talented. Your voice resonates beautifully. You believe, in fact, that you may be more talented than Liza Minnelli. Your open arms invite in the audience. The movement comes to you naturally. Yes, you *are* talented. For the first time in your life, you are happy. You hope to land on Broadway.

—Cheryl Pallant

Richmond, VA

THE CHILD IS THE FATHER IS THE CHILD . . .

I sit in a chair made for five year olds
and talk to the kindergarten teacher.
She has a soft voice and kind eyes.
Gentle hands hold the information sheet
I have filled out for my youngest son.
I have answered questions about his
background, medical history, likes and
dislikes. Where it asked what I wanted
him to learn I answered,

"That the world is a wasteland
and that each individual is on a quest
and that it is only through the recognition
of myth that truth and beauty will be
discovered."

She laughs softly and suggests that
perhaps that is best taught at home.
I too softly laugh but I want to say
that my wife has left me and taken up
with another man. That at 37 I am
locked into a dead-end job and that
despair hangs on me like black oil.
That my children cry at night yet
my arms hang at my side, that my eyes
are cast down. That I want her to
close her arms about me and say,
"Hush, child, Daddy will be here
soon."

THE GARDEN

The driveway hasn't been swept
in months and the lawn grass
is overgrown.
In the windowboxes I built
the wild flowers droop
as if in mourning.

They only need water.

I've returned home to care
for the house
while my ex and my children
are on vacation.
The key in the lock clicks and
I step in. It is very strange
as if time is emulsified. Pictures
still hang on the wall, the couch
against the wall, the bookcase
silent. I move amid the silence
looking for clues.

There are no new snapshots
on the fridge. Her panties
in the laundry are not torn
by fresh, hot hands.
The dishes from the last meal
are stacked in the drying rack.
I step onto the back porch
to smoke a cigarette and look
at the garden I planted
for the family last spring.

It is uncared for.

Weeds shoot up
and fruit, ripe and heavy on the vine,
lies fallen, twisted,
rotting with disinterest.
Too much. Too much growth
unchecked. Too much color,
vitality and the past.

I snuff the smoke.

Inside I pour a glass of red wine
from a bottle on the kitchen counter.
In her bedroom I find
a vase filled with a bouquet
of roses that I could have never
sent, could have never grown.

I leave the key under the mat.

—Jeff Parsons

Surrey, British Columbia

I MUST

finally admit
to being jealous
of the crowds of
people i see
talking about nothing
as i sit alone
and read.

THE POWER OF CLICHE

I believe
every one
I hear.

I PEEL

the dead skin off my chest and arms
and place it in the ashtray to my
right,
as I smoke my cigarettes I dump the
ashes there as well, then putting
them out I burn the bits of
skin,
my own little holocaust.

LAZARUS

so I'm dead and up
in heaven. I'm talking to
Gabriel, who I'd heard of
many times before. there
seemed to be some confusion
about my being there. I was
anxious to get inside, but
Gabriel kept me at the
gates. every once in
a while another angel, or
less important page,
would come up and whisper
into his ear. a few times
he got on the big gold
phone and argued with some-
one on the other end.
with me he talked small
talk; asked me about
my wife and kids, how work
was, the weather and what
all.

I asked if there was a
problem and he just told
me to be patient.
I asked him nervously
if I was to be
sent to some other place.
he shook his head.
I asked him when I'd be
let in, when I could
see God, there were
a lot of questions I
had.
he told me to have a
seat, that everything
would be worked out
shortly.
I did what he said and
began thumbing idly
through a magazine.
Gabriel got on the phone
again and then disappeared.
after what seemed like an
eternity he came back
and mumbled something to me.
I asked him to repeat what
he'd said but just as he did
I felt a sucking sensation
through my body and heard
a loud POP!
I awoke in my death clothes,
the stink of days still on me,
disappointed to be back.

DANIEL

down there in the den
with all those lions and
all i could think
about was a nice fat
roast beef sandwich
and a beer, and to this day i am
still unsure why God spared me.
we have discussed it but
He just tells me, "I liked you
Daniel," and i guess

that
has to be enough. when
i met those three brothers
also spared from a similar
yet different fate, they
said they got the
same answer.
it's good to be liked by God
it seems. since then, on this
circuit, the tours and speeches,
and conventions,
i tell people what God told me
and they find it hard to believe.
they ask,
"what did you pray in the den?"
i tell them,
"nothing, i thought of roast beef
and beer."
they ask,
"what did you promise God in
return for your life?"
again i say,
"nothing, He chose to save me
based on some simple design."
"then what is your advice
to us?" they plead.
"i have none, i know
not the mind of God."
i have nothing more to tell
them.
the promoters are tired of my
vague answers and inability
to perform miraculous feats,
attendance is starting to wane,
soon i'm sure
i'll have to look for other
work, not having a trade or
education this will be hard.
maybe a deli owner, or a lion
tamer, or insurance like
my father.

—Mark Begley

Fresno, CA

LIVING IN A GREAT BIG WAY

nothing ever happened in the Mexican bar, I went there night after night and nobody tried to kill me and I got tired of that and found a Chinese bar hidden behind tall trees and I drank away the nights trying to forget that I was a stockboy for the May Company. after the bar closed I'd go back to my room and drink in bed, in the dark.

each day I arrived at the department store, put on my brown smock and took supplies to the various areas, rolling along behind my green truck, I was always deathly hungover but nobody noticed, the other stockboys never spoke to me.

it was always the same, some bar at night and my green truck during the day.

I had the feeling that I could break anybody in half, just pick them up and snap their backbones but I was always polite, excessively so.

then it happened, I got into a fist fight in the candy room with a stockboy they called Charles Atlas and he beat the hell out of me.

then that night I got into a fight with a Chinaman and he beat the hell out of me too.

I took the bus to Houston, got a job in a gas station and switched from wine to vodka.

THE INTERLUDE

it's been raining forever here
and I haven't had a drink in
a week and a half.

I must be going crazy.

I just sit in these green pajamas
smoke cigars and stare at the
walls.

I read the newspapers but
the print jumbles and I can't
make any sense out of
it.

I note the second hand
going around on my
watch.

I am waiting on the ghosts
of tomorrow.

I look at the telephone and
thank it for not
ringing.

my life has been lived
out of key.

I should have been a
shortstop, a race car driver,
a matador.

I sit in this room, I sit in this
room,
rub my left hand along my
face.

my whiskers are sharp,
feel good.

I think tomorrow I'll get
dressed, go outside.

I'll go to Thrifty's,
buy a roll of scotch tape,
a bag of orange slices,
a flashlight and a
pocket comb.

then I'll snap out of it.
maybe.

BREAKFAST

waking up all those mornings in the drunk tank,
busted lower lip, loose tooth, head whirling in
a cacophony that is not yours,
and those strange bodies there in rags, quiet
now in their madness, stuck within the walls, no
glory, nothing but a stopped-up toilet and
somebody else's
law.

and there was always one voice, a loud voice:
"BREAKFAST!"

you usually didn't want it
but if you did
before you could get to your legs
the cell door was slammed
shut.

now each morning it's like a slow-motion
dream, I find my slippers, put them on,
do the bathroom bit, then walk down the
stairway to the whirling of fur bodies, I am
the feeder, the god, I clean the bowls, open
the cans and talk to them and they get excited,
make their sounds.
I put the bowls down and each cat moves toward
its bowl, then I refill the water bowl, then
look down, all five of them are eating
peacefully.

I walk back up the stairway to the bedroom
where my wife is still asleep, I crawl beneath
the sheets with her, place my back to the sun
and am soon asleep again.
you have to die a few times before you
live.

—Charles Bukowski
San Pedro, CA

The edition of this issue has been limited to 600 numbered copies with the first 70 being signed by Ronald Baatz. The copy now in your hand is number: 193

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