

poetess

— for S. S. V.

she lived in a small room by the freeway and she wrote like a man — somebody who worked on the dock — and I tapped on her window and she let me in, I climbed through the window and I sat down as the stupid fingers of my mind reached around the room, I told her I had been on a drunk and that I had to cut my toenails (they hurt) and I told her that there were a lot of people getting on my nerves like a broken glove compartment, and she walked over and kissed me, asked if I wanted coffee and if I had been eating, and then she told me her radio was broken — she had dropped it on the floor. and I took a knifeblade and worked at the screws in the back.

be careful, she said, it says
there is danger of shock, and I told
her: I am immortal, I can't get er
be killed.

she sat a cheesesandwich and a cup of coffee in front of me and I straightened up the loose tubes, there seemed to be no broken ones, but it was getting to be time for the first race and I told her, Jesus, I don't have time!

if you're immortal, she said,
you have plenty of time.

I ate the cheese sandwich and drank the coffee.
see you tonight, I said, I'll
put the god damned thing together
tonight.

I climbed out the window and into my car. the sun came down in the dust and dirt of the parking lot making everything a good soft yellow and brown, and the vines on the fence smelled green the way green smells, and I drove out backing up, waving to her through the windshield and she stood in the window waving and smiling, and I backed up the alley and around into the street, put it in forward and ran along the pavement toward the freeway, out of there,

thinking about what I had done or hadn't done to
the radio (or her), feeling as if I had left an
army in trouble during battle, but then some kid
in a Volks

cut across me without a signal
and I forgot about all the rest
and I pushed the pedal down and
moved after him.

The Literary Life:

There is this long still knife somehow like a
cossack...

and C. writes that Ferlinghetti has written
a poem about Castro. well, all the boys
are doing poems on Castro, only
Castro's not that good
or that bad — just a small horse
in a big race.

I see this knife on the stove and I move it to
the breadboard...

after a while it is time to look around and
listen to the engines and wonder if it's
raining; after a while writing won't help
anymore, and drinking won't help anymore, or
even a good piece of ass won't.

I see this knife on the breadboard and I move it
to the sink...

this wallpaper here: how many years was it here
before I arrived? ... this cigarette in my hand
it is like a thing itself, like a donkey walking
uphill ... somebody took my candle and candle-
holder: a lady with red hair and a white face
standing near the closet, saying, "Can I have
this? can I really have this?"

The edge of this knife is not as sharp as it should
be ... but the point, the point fascinates, the way
they bring it down like that — symmetry, real Art,

and I pick up this breadknife and walk into the dining room ...

Larsen says we mustn't take ourselves so seriously. Hell, I've been telling him that for 8 years!

There is this full length mirror in the hall. I can see myself in it and I look, at last, as if I could do anything. It hasn't rained in 175 days and it is as quiet as a sleeping peacock. a friend of mine shoots pool in a hall across from the university where he teaches English, and when he gets tired of that, he drags out a .357 magnum and splits the rocks in half BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! while figuring just where the word will fit real good.

In front of the mirror I cut swift circles in the air, dividing sides of light. I am hypnotized, unsettled, embarrassed. my nose is pink, my cheeks are pink, my throat is white, my god the night, the shoe fits good, the wood, the wood ... the phone rings like a wall sliding down and ... "nothing," I answer, "no, I'm not doing anything..."

it is a dull conversation but it is soon over. I walk to the window and open it. the cars go by and a bird turns on the wire and looks at me. I think 3 centuries ahead, of myself dead that long and life seems very odd ... like a crevice of light in a buried tomb.

the bird flies away and I walk to the machine and sit down:

Dear Willie:

I got your letter, everything fine here ...

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When You Wait For The Dawn To Crawl Through
The Screen Like A Burglar
To Take Your Life Away --

the snake had crawled the hole,
and she said,
tell me about
yourself.

and
I said,
I was beaten down
long ago
in some alley
in another
world.

and she said,
we're all
like
pigs
slapped down some lane,
our
grassbrains
singing
toward the
blade.

by
god,
you're an
odd one,
I said.

we
sat there
smoking
cigarettes
at
5
in the morning.

sleeping woman

I sit up in bed at night and listen to you
snore

I met you in a bus station
and now I wonder at your back
sick white and stained with
children's freckles
as the lamp divests the unsolvable
sorrow of the world
upon your sleep.

I cannot see your feet
but I must guess that they are
most charming feet.

who do you belong to?
are you real?
I think of flowers, animals, birds
they all seem more than good
and so clearly
real.

yet you cannot help being a
woman. we are each selected to be
something. the spider the cook.
the elephant. it is as if we were each
a painting and hung on some
gallery wall.

— and now the painting turns
upon its back, and over a curving elbow
I can see 1/2 a mouth, one eye and
almost a nose.

the rest of you is hidden
out of sight
but I know that you are a
contemporary, a modern living
work
perhaps not immortal
but we have
loved.

please continue to
snore.

the new place

I type at a window that faces the street
on ground level and
if I fall out
the worst that can happen is a dirty shirt
under a tiny banana tree.

as I type people go by
mostly women
and I sit in my shorts
(without top)
and going by they
can't be sure I am not entirely
naked. so

I get these faces
which pretend they don't see
anything
but I think they do:
they see me as I
sweat the poem like beating an
ugly hog to death
as the sun begins to fail over
Sunset Blvd.

over the motel sign
where hot sweaty people from
Arkansas and Iowa
pay too much to sleep while
dreaming of movie stars.
there is a religionist next door
and he plays his radio loud
and it seems to have
very good tubes
so I am getting the
message.

and there's a white cat
chewed-up and neuretic
who calls 2 or 3 times a day
eats and leaves
but just looking at him
lifts the soul a little
like something on strings.

and the same young man from the nudist
magazine phones and we talk
and I get the idea
that we each hang up
mildly thinking each other
somewhat the fool.

now the woman calls me to dinner.
it's good to have food.
when you've starved enough
food always remains a
miracle.

the rent is a little higher here
but so far I've been able to
pay it
and that's a miracle too
like still maybe being sane
while thinking of guns and sidewalks
and old ladies in libraries.

there are still
small things to do
like rip this sheet from the typer
go in and eat
stay alive this way.
there are lots of curtains here
and now the woman has walked in
she's rocking back and forth
in the rocker behind me
a bit angry
the food is getting cold and
I've got to go
she doesn't understand that
I've got to finish this thing
but it's just a poor little neighborhood
not much place for Art,
whatever that is, and
I hear sprinklers
there's a shopping basket
a boy on roller skates.
I quit I quit

for the miracle of food and
maybe nobody ever angry
again, this place and
all the other places.

— Charles Bukowski
Los Angeles, Calif.

We Are The Blue Ties

we are the white shirts,
blue ties,
shuffling notes and pens,
sharpening ends of calculations,
dreaming figures,
listening to nicotine clocks
going round round round
and smoking into fog,
blinding us in notes, envelopes,
and we do not know if it is real,
nine in morning, five in afternoon,
things close in.

we are in white shirts,
blue ties,
and wait for the world to come
and take us away.

-- neeli cherry

San Bernardino, Calif.

One Of Many Judys

Danced like a Scorpion Queen
but made love like a rich kid
entering a toy shop.

So, kisses were always a problem
of who kissed who
and desires too subtle for lips.

Anyway, the voices seemed too loud,
the laughter too long and brave
for anyone in particular.

"Especially me! Especially me!"
I always thought I heard --
though I was wrong.