

ABOUT MY VERY TORTURED FRIEND, PETER:

he lives in a house with a swimming pool
and says the job is
killing him.
he is 27. I am 44. I can't seem to
get rid of
him. his novel keeps coming
back. "What do you expect me to do?" he screams
"go to New York and pump the hands of the
publishers?"
"No," I tell him, "but quit your job, go into a
small room and do the
thing."
"But I need ASSURANCE, I need something to
go by, some word, some sign!"
"Some men did not think that way:
Van Gogh, Wagner ---"
"Oh hell, Van Gogh had a brother who have him
paints whenever he
needed them!"

"Look, I'm over at this broad's house today and
this guy walks in. a salesman. you know
how they talk. drove up in this new
car. talked about his vacation. said he went to
Frisco -- saw FIDELIO up there but forgot who
wrote it. now this guy is 45 years
old. so I told him: 'FIDELIO is Beethoven's only
opera.' and then I told
him: 'You're a jerk!' 'Whatcha mean?' he
asked. 'I mean, you're a jerk, you're 45 years old and
you don't know anything!' "

"What happened
then?"

"I walked out."

"You mean you left him there with
her?"

"Yes."

"I can't quit my job. I always have trouble getting a
job. I walk in, they look at me, listen to me talk and
they think right away, Ah ha! he's too intelligent for
this job, he won't stay
so there's really no sense in hiring
him.

Now, YOU walk into a place and you don't have any trouble:
you look like an old wino, you look like a guy who needs a
job and they look at you and they think:
Ah ha!: now here's a guy who really needs work! if we hire
him he'll stay a long time and work
HARD!"

"do any of those people know you are a
writer, that you write poetry?"

"no."

"you never talk about
it. not even to
me! if I hadn't seen you in that magazine I'd
have never known."

"that's right."

"still, I'd like to tell these people that you are a
writer!"

"don't."

"I'd still like to
tell them."

"why?"

"well, they talk about you. they think you are just a
horseplayer and a drunk."

"I am both of those."

"well, they talk about you. you have odd ways. you travel alone.
I'm the only friend you
have."

"yes."

"they talk you down. I'd like to defend you. I'd like to tell
them you write
poetry."

"leave it alone. I work here like they
do. we're all the same."

"well, I'd like to do it for myself then. I want them to know why
I travel with
you. I speak 7 languages, I know my music --"

"forget it."

"all right, I'll respect your
wishes. but there's something else --"

"what?"

"I've been thinking about getting a
piano, my fingers just itch for a
piano. but then I've been thinking about getting a
violin too but I can't make up my
mind!"

"buy a piano."

"you think
so?"

"yes."

he walks away
thinking about
it.

I was thinking about it
too: I figure he can always come over with his
violin and more
sad music.

-- Charles Bukowski
Los Angeles, Calif.