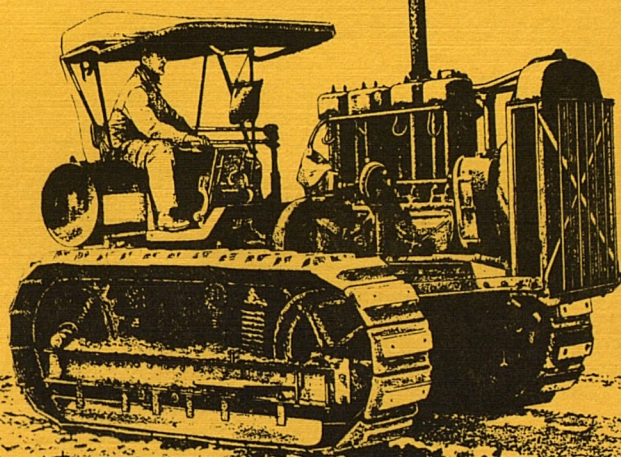
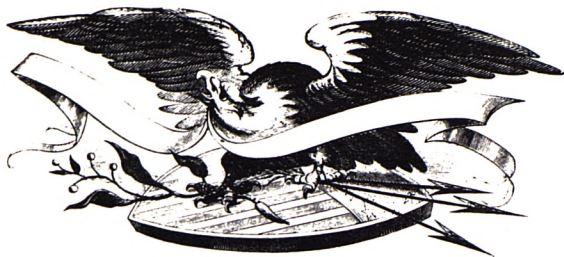


wormwood cats through: 55





The American Flag In Indiana

We were far down a country road when the dog left his farmyard to come after us. The dog seemed afraid, yet continued to approach, barking and baring his teeth as he snarled. I wanted to turn around and walk back the other way but she said no, we should stay. We stood where we had stopped; fear rose in me like the American flag in Indiana. The dog would lunge out, flashing his teeth, then turn back, but return immediately to a position perhaps five feet closer each time. The dog was not ten feet from us when a car coming down the road caused him to run back. We ran down the road in the direction we had come, in the headlight of the car, then alongside the car and then, in a fitful silence, into the darkness.

Today I told her that if the dog had attacked, I would have tried to throw my coat over his face and mouth. I would have tried to pick him up with my right arm under his belly, my left holding the coat over his face and under his neck. Then I would have tried to pull his head back sharply, snapping his neck, killing him. "It's strange to hear you talk like this," she said, but then she smiled.

-- Robert Horan

The Investigation

They led him into a room that felt small and very warm, perhaps it was a thimble or a bottle full of smoke. They told him that there were many women in the room and that they were all undressed. He was supposed to recognize her by touching her. He could touch as many women as he needed in order to recognize her, but the point was that he should find her. This was made very explicit. He was not allowed to make any sound, nor could he attempt to elicit a sound. What they wanted to discover was how well he knew her. They were also curious about how satisfying his knowledge was. For this reason, they placed her nearest him, so he would encounter her first. This way he would have nothing to compare his first sensations with. They were interested in finding out if he would explore the other women even if he did recognize her at first. It was not possible to deceive them.

As they watched, he knelt down before her, moving his hands down her naked back. He brought his hands around to the face of her hips and rested them on her hipbones. It was already clear to everyone that he had recognized her. There appeared to be something curious and revealing about the way her hips disappeared into legs, and then too about the way she carried between her legs the cave of creation. He circled his arms around her hips and pressed his cheek into the soft circles of hair. Then he began to weep. He pressed his face very closely to her stomach. He held her so tightly that everyone in the room began to feel too naked. He was begging forgiveness. This is when they came and took him to another room. A few others came shortly afterward and removed her to a different room. It seemed probable that they would be released.

-- Robert Horan

Bloomington IN

Provisional Ending for a Father and Son Novel

Five days after he
left, my oldest daughter
started putting together
a photo-album of her
baby- and growingup-
pictures.

Four Selections from NATURE OF THE COMMUNITY

Merger

He was 39 (for 5 years), his mother lived in Ponce de Leon West Second Life Community just south of Riverdale (California). Entrance requirements: white, over sixty, pre-second-life income minimum of \$32,000.00 (adjusted to cost of living) -- ten years before it had been \$25,000.00.

They'd gone to visit Doctor Borzoi whose wife was a vegetable with a good heart. Borzoi had the hots for Mom, 79 but still eager and -- as Mom put it -- "I don't think all his sex is just in his head either ... not, of course, that I know from experience...."

"I was just talking to a doctor in Karachi last night," he explained, taking the son out to his radio shack, "this is the same short wave system the Vatican has ..." waited for the son to OOH, then moved out to his nectarine and fig trees, "Take um off by the bushful," stood looking over the palms and oleanders in through the glass patio door into the house where Mom was sitting talking to Borzoi's brother, Randolph, the brilliant criminal lawyer who had turned vegetable the year before ... just sat there, staring and drooling.

"It's wonderful," said Borzoi, "I've got everything I want, the Niggers can't get me out here in the desert. I'm just afraid that I'll end up like Randolph ... my god!"

And he started to cry. Cool breeze, birds in the bushes, a rabbit sneaking around over by the fig tree. Just kept crying. Funny thought the son ... until this year, this minute, he'd always been a Spectator, but suddenly now he was vegetable himself sitting looking at Borzoi crying. Mind blank, staring, drooling, not even wondering why Borzoi was or wasn't crying and not even wondering about wondering ... or not.

Promises

Talk-Time Area 14 at Ponce de Leon West -- which means benches under plastic palms. Two second lifers sitting talking, 2:00 PM, the streets around them deserted. It was an almost universal practice for Deleonians to drink their Spa Water at noon, then siesta until three. Recommendation C -- at the front of the Second Life Handbook.

"I don't see where anyone's right," said the pinched, pale, puny one, "the Right's really a bunch of Neo-Dogmatists, ex-Trotskyites and ex-Catholics. The Left's Anarchy. The

Drippies want hamburgers without cows and French fries without potatoes. The vast majority middle-of-the-roaders don't worry about cows, potatoes or anything else as long as they get their steak and fries"

"Someone's gotta be right anyhow," answered his fat-faced perpetually-dieting friend, sucking on a can of Smacky Strawberry Balanced-Diet Formula.

"Momento Mori," answered Puny, "it was the time of the Black Death. Everywhere you went there was the smoke of burning bodies; everyone breathed, ate, slept with, dreamed about DEATH. There was no other reality. Death was Emperor, King, Pope, Mistress, Old Friend. The only order was the order of the naked skull ... and then came Enlightenment, science, vaccines and everyone mis-thought that the short postponement was actually a reprieve."

All of the People All of the Time

"Look," he said, bald, bristley-moustached and eye-browed, "this country was OK as long as it was PURE. It could have been the perfect melding of Machine and Racial Purity .. in fact, it'll still be, you wait and see"

"But if they're already here?" queried his wife. She was a former nurse, still wore white (albeit super-sheer) stockings.

"Who?" asked the Big (former) Surgeon attacking steak with ferocious dexterity.

"Whoever you're talking about," she said, "I don't know, the ones that aren't pure."

"When you've got your energy," he answered, "you've got it all ..." and walked over to the window and stared out at the scorched umber landscape in front of him stretching to, then curving off over, the horizon. Temperature outside: 125 degrees; inside -- 69.

No Solicitors

She put the Lock-Tite pins into the front and back door-frames, double-locked the door between the study and the kitchen, then the one between the living room and kitchen, three doors down the length of the hall, into her bedroom, locked three doors there. No windows. The walls three thicknesses thick. Sat on the bed staring at the locked

doors, willing to but not feeling sleep.

We float up over the house, a white stone dot in the middle of a dry landscape of dead yellow weeds. Breathing and an irregular, erratic Heartbeat.

-- Hugh Fox

East Lansing MI

THE LIPSTICK GRANDMOTHER

The Lipstick Grandmother puts lipstick on all her grandchildren when they come to see her.

With red mouths agape, they listen to her read The Three Bears.

When they kiss each other goodbye, the imprint of their lips is all over them for the world to see.

When they get home they put polish on their toes and fingers, rouge on their cheeks.

For Christ's sake, say their parents.

They order the little boys to take off their lipstick and fingernail polish. You can keep the toe polish, they say, but wear your socks. Your rouge we can explain as natural coloring inherited from your parents.

But the little girls are allowed to wear everything: lipstick, rouge and polish. They can go to visit their Lipstick Grandmother as often as they wish.

Here they come now, says their Lipstick Grandmother. The little whores.

-- Joseph Nicholson

Flemington PA

A Selection from: ANYTHING IS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY,
BUT THIS WAS A CONVERSATION

Boyd was a cripple from polio clutching crutches and smiling thinly with talk. It was polio put us in fear when the rains came those New Orleans summers my mother screaming, "You'll catch polio I'm telling ya! Sam make them wear shoes! In the rain yet I'll give ya playing you wanna play!" We believed the hand but not the polio part.

One night the mattress in the back downstairs bedroom caught fire; Louis and Jack Morris my cousin were shooting their cap guns. A spark flew. I was watching TV. Bebe and I, we carried buckets and pots of water from the kitchen down the hall slipping against the walls to throw on the mattress. Louis and Jack Morris ran upstairs with white faces screaming "FIRE! FIRE!" and my mother came flying down the stairs screaming "FIRE! FIRE!" slapping at anything in sight which was mostly me carrying a pot of water sending me and the water against the wall. "Playing with matches again!" she yelled and the hand across my face whap whap whap! It wasn't much of a fire and what was she hitting me for anyway? Childhood is a time of great mystery obviously. "I was just watching TV," I yelled. The fire was out with one or two splashes of water. But the EVENT was in progress. Aunt Fanny was already on the phone calling the Fire Department and the National Guard. Then the sirens knifing into the house, black rubber raincoats, men with hoses and big rubber boots and mom still slapping anything she could find hysterically. Shit I said throwing the pot of water into the bathroom put out your own damn fire.

But then it was all over. The house full of neighbors, Boyd on crutches, Mrs. Highbee oooing and ahhhing. Aunt Fanny saying, "Regina, sit down." The fire out but my mother still looking into corners calling "FIRE! FIRE!" Did I ever tell you how crazy my family was? The next morning we took the mattress from the back yard where it had smoldered out and threw it out front for the trash pickup. Mom discovered that her purse was missing. She had left it on the kitchen table the night of the fire. She started waving her hand in the air, "Oh my God, my purse, where's my purse!" Whack! Whack! She starts slapping me around and here we go again. Aunt Fanny screaming, "Regina sit down, please," but Aunt Fanny's a little nutty too and before long, Whack! "Where's your mother's purse!" The slapping lasted into the night with news about President Truman and the war that was going on in Korea. Very thin men walked home with their heads bandaged and bloody. I was eight years old, and the news must have been about terrible things. The grownups looked at the TV set very seriously. I was put to bed the next night after a bubble bath and very soft flannel pajamas under warm covers. We never found the purse. Boyd took it, I know, but no one believed me.

it seems as if i always
knew the word
even before it knew me
tho who kept the better secret
is hard to tell
after so many years.
but there was a time
before it began and after
it had finished
riding down st charles avenue
thru posters of history
and tea-cups of manners
in the back seat of the first
car i remember us having
that maroon mercury built
like a tuba
and me not even knowing then
that its color and its name
were inconsistent parentheses
on our own human condition
when i saw for the first time
the billboard
for RITZ crackers
and i learned to say and spell
it in one swell flap of
tripsy mouthing
testing knowledge like a
musical instrument
ritz all the way home
ritz ritz ritz
at bedtime
ritz by day and ritz by night
and ritz by the harvest moon
oh yeah
gimme an are and an i and a
tea tea zeayeay
cheerleading
myself
that moment and for all time
to becoming
both
a poet
and 30 pounds
overweight

-- marcus j. grapes

Los Angeles CA

MUTTONHEAD SONG

March to the battlefields. March
to the tennis courts. March
to speech therapy. March down
dead-end roads. March to victory,
hallucination and cancer. March
across foreign territory
with your eyes closed. March
in front of the next generation
and disappear like the last.

POEM FOR MUTTONHEADS

What goes better
with your problem
than the knowledge of it
Isn't the perfect remedy
realizing that there is none.
Orphans, down and outers, there's
no point in listening
or talking. We're in a bind. Even
if I gave you
the secret handshake, would you
know how to use it?

SUBVERSIVE TO MUTTONHEADS

On the other foot
is a shoeless monotony.
Ignorance of deep feelings
such as anger, hate and love.
A devil-may-care attitude
towards the betterment of anything
but a kind of reliance
on oneself.

MUTTONHEAD OATH

Worship the sickness.
Be a member
of the holiness
brigade. Salute
the head-turners; kiss
your wounds. Always
inflict yourself. And
don't try to stop thinking
about these things
or you might escape.

OH TROUBLE

My intentions are solid gold
past remembering. Look
where the trolley leads, down
Elm Street, on a mission
for the king. Who's gonna put
good money on an abstract
though fascinating plan. We want
a man with proven ability
so we can say when it's too late,
this guy was all we had, not
an ass-licker, not a brain,
but an ordinary guy like
ourselves. Yet, in all
the disturbance created
by our lack of knowing what to do,
we didn't learn a thing.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

If, on any one occasion, you're starved
for affection, or can't find the time
to do the things you want, does it matter?
I can't get over the way you arrange things.
You have the knack to live several lives,
several full-time positions, without
a mitigating thought. And this sacrifice,
in the interest of your invisible future,
is not a whit less important than the fact
that it's wasted, simply time down the drain,
for the raising of eyebrows, nuclear sub-
marines, and the like.

SUPERMAN BLUES

The turtle lip of doing it.
Fostered on us, holding us
sacred, leaving us no choice
but to constantly do it
and do it well.

The radical science of doing it.
Selectively go around
doing it, putting on the same
small show for others
who need to know
how it's done.

The cosa nostra of doing it.
Fabulous rewards for the burden
of not giving in. Doing it
to death, in front of millions
as if it had to be done.

The blond wig of doing it.
Forever doing it disguised
as someone else, thinking
this excuses the wearer
from being thought of as doing it.

The irony of doing it.
To think a lot
but do it anyway. In
the shadows like a blind man.
The reverse action of
negative doing it. Being aware.

Dying of doing it.
Committing suicide
on the golf course
in the sauna
in the abyss. The handshake
of doing it. Burying oneself.

-- richard snyder

Ossining NY

Dracula

Once, when my wife was a child, her mother smelled sulfur & brimstone, & feared the Evil Presence had locked her in the house. The child of course had been petrified. Telling me the story, however, we had a good laugh over it. How medieval!

Last night we took in a Dracula flick, a British one, & very well made. More than once Mary squirmed & wouldn't open her eyes till I assured her the grisliness was thru.

It was dark when we finally got out. The streets of this unfamiliar tropic port seemed menacing. Back at the hotel we latched the door safely behind us. Before coming to bed, under the influence of the night, of that evil face, & of that lugubrious castle, my wife donned her Egyptian cross. We spent all day on the beach & this evening, just a few moments ago, I watched with amused surprise as she moved toward the shower, darkly beautiful & naked but for that gold cross tied in her hair.

Lord of the Rood, of the Sun, of the Unknowable Name, forgive us our preposterous conceit!

travel note

And the market, not to be missed:
at the entrance the lady
with pocket mirrors, portraits
of Agua Santa & busts
of a tortured Christ
in little gold frames
& in back
on a plate of innards
& pieces of brain
the head of a pig,
its mouth gaping, its face fixed
in a final hideous shriek.

the uncultivated garden

So at this party once
I told them right out
shoot the bastard.
Now what good would that do
they give me the old violence
breeds violence routine.
Screw you I sez
his blood
against the general good --
one life for millions!
Someone quoted Erich Fromm
another took off
on his psychedelic yo-yo
love machine.
Blood of Siam! I screamed,
just who in hell do you smug bunch of goddam purist
bastards think you are anyways?

-- Steve Kowit

Miami Beach FL

gagaku

well, we play basketball
break each others noses
sweat a lot
old men
faking youth
just like it used
to be on the
playground
only this time no
girls watch

we are all too
fat slow and old

ugly beasts
bitching like spoiled
beverly hills youth

then it's to the
showers soak in suana
just like roman senators
all for fifty cents

at the Y
all our sexual energy
gone we are finally
relaxed

able to nap
and being able to nap
is most important

about the demons
they are with us all
the way
beneath our hair
'under our skin
inside our teeth
at the Y

gagaku

to see my own
demons. black greased hair
slicked down
tied in green or blue
or red or yellow orange
purple or beige ribbon in bun
female and male
skin regular flesh color
like cream

eyes with and without iris and pupil
empty and full smiling
and screaming and
weeping tears over
cream flesh cheeks

gagaku

the woman says don't
talk about other
women and I promise
it to her

already a cut in freedom
she calls me
for a dinner
I go to her
idiot cave

she prepares steak &
green beans and
for me each second
is 10 hours

I get up
rush to the meat
raw before she puts it
in oven

I grab it raw
eat it in one gulp
excuse myself and
rush out door

luckily before laying
what I do not
love.

gagaku

again
swirls of color
like taffy
a young girl I
knew in childhood
changing her name
to Stephanie
and becoming what
they call
a Hollywood star.
flocks of midwestern
birds descend on Hollywood
and become rebellious
hookers.

I was lucky
I was raised in Hollwood
I know it
enough to keep away
Hollywood
is no path at all

gagaku

this is my
soul
exercise
I feel good about it
here we don't matter much
here what happens is
experience

I have experience here
I am
a gagaku professional
tuned in to this soul
tuned in to this music
all you can do is
reject I
continue and some of you
hear me pick up these words
immortalize them upon
your thin pages
I am arrogant with my successes
my soul grins

-- Steve Richmond

Santa Monica CA

FIRST & FOREMOST

It's important to know
the names of the people you're
speaking with & more important
yet is to have an interest
in what they're saying at your disposal
Helpful too
is a knowledge of their family
do they believe in yoga
or lean to the other extreme
First & foremost
is what sign they were born under
have they suffered unnecessarily
or do they ever want
for what can't be theirs
The extent of your success
will depend largely
on your willingness to distort
the truth

HOMETOWN BLUES

I live in a den
of iniquity
with no visitors allowed
Smoke fills with air
green visors shade the eyes
sheepskin rugs and
goats in the corral
Private says the man
in charge only
immediate family
with two or less offsprings
Leave your fingerprints
at the door
wraps in the cloakroom
& sign the book
on the table

-- Avron Hoffman

Vancouver, B.C., Canada



John Bennett's MUSIC

When a man with

far above average intelligence
far above average athletic skill
better than average good looks
a decent amount of common sense
an engaging personality
a Toyota car
the governor's pool table
a 38 caliber pistol
a new pair of shoes
a lifetime inheritance & a
brace of good friends
thinks life is not worth
living,

you wonder what it is
he missed.

Uncle Jim

A little kid in New York City
my father away at war
Uncle Jim would come around
late at night
fall on the floor
wrap his arms around his head.
He had migraines
& a drinking habit.
My mother gave him aspirin
wet towels across his head
I'd fall asleep in the easy chair,
curious but not sorry.

Uncle Jim ran little stores
bought them from Italians
& Poles
who couldn't make it work
made it work
made these great ham & cheese
sandwiches
with kosher pickles.

The last store he made work
for five years
then disappeared in New York City.

He surfaced ten years later
skin & bones
covered with bruises & scars
delirious & pleading
to be made a priest.

The relatives
put him in a hospital
with a Catholic sounding name
Saint something or other
gave him glasses
& yanked out his teeth,
put twenty pounds on his bones
before he died.

The Coach

was short & squat
an Indian they said
never spoke a word to me
in the two years I was there,
knew I drank & smoked &
screwed around.

Landing in that
new town with the
wrong foot forward,
never gaining balance,
fights suspensions
midnight cruises,

& then that spring I
ran the mile,
just got on the bus
with the team,
got on the track &
ran, barely moving by the
end, lousey time & I
puked after I
finished but I
finished.

Down in the locker room they
laid it on, for one whole
week they
laid it on,
& then the coach
slammed a locker with his
fist to create silence.
Lay off! he said.

The Place Where I Run

I run along the
Yakima River,
along a dirt road,
thru trees & across a
large meadow dotted with
tiny lakes.

The woods are
full of cows & horses &
jackasses that
peer out at me
from behind trees
as I run by.

At the end of the
meadow is a
hill of gravel.

I run up the hill &
look around me at the
barren hills that
hold the valley,
the snow-capped mountains
further back.

All the animals
in the field
look my way.

Anybody who eats icecream
like you do
must know where it's
at.

I just don't see
the sense, drinking
beer like you do,
I'm happy with this
icecream here,
don't need all that
beer she said sitting
cross-legged on the
floor, holding a
lungful of smoke
from her
mentholated cigarette,
flicking the ashes into the
icecream.

Belsaas brought the wood, a liberal cord he called it, dumped it all over the backyard.

Stood up against his truck & rolled a cigarette, talked about his farm & how he hoped it snowed before the freeze set in, about the state of the nation, how he'd just as soon drive horse & buggy as a car, how the power shortage was a blessing in disguise, people move too fast & want too much, why he'd just read that very morning that they were running out of toilet seats, a turmoil over toilets, ain't that some shit?

A small hard man, leaning up against his truck, smoking roll-yr-owns, in no hurry.

This business of growing, this business of developing from style to style, progress they call it, a poet finding his way.

Dancing to another man's drum I call it, the most terrible of all cons, slamming each door shut behind you, walking a straight line into the trap.

Music

When I was 5
I danced to records
that my
grandmother played.

When I was 8
I sang praise to
God while a
nun with a
yardstick
hovered over
every
sour note.

When I was 10
I was made to
stand before a
class & try to
sing a song I
knew quite well
in some sort of
coded do-re-me.

When I was 12
they gave me
cello lessons.
An old man in a
stuffy blind-pulled
room
gave me sheets of
paper with
cryptic lines &
markings that I was
supposed to
translate into
music

When I was 17 I
dropped out of
school, left
God, stopped taking
lessons &
remembered my
grandmother.

I got a
key of C
harmonica &
began to play.

Old Friends

are like
old cars with
built in
obsolescence

needing
tune-ups &
over-hauls
new tires
spark
plugs & points

& if you
don't take
care of them
service them
charge their
batteries &
check their
oil,

why you may
find yourself
stranded on the
desert or a
mt. pass in
winter or
standing dead still
at midnight on a
slow curve in the
freeway.

The Last Angry Young Man, 1973

Paul has this
big drooping
Hungarian
mustache
& a black felt
saggy beret
that he
puts on his
head like a
signal when he's
getting drunk,
pulls it
down over
one eye &
heads for the
pool hall.

One night he
put an
onion on the
pool table & a
pool shark with a
midget brain
banged it
straight into the
corner pocket.

Paul sat there
straight backed
like a
Cossack
with his
beret hanging
in his
eyes & his
mug of beer
firm in his
fist, exchanging
glares with all the
pool sharks.

Once he sat
eye ball to
eye ball with a
shipping clerk &
exchanged Latin prayers
until the
shipping clerk
faltered &

then Paul went on to
recite 20 poems in
Latin, tugging at his
beret &
mustache.

Another time
after a
5th of Scotch
while
listening to a
rock band at a
biker hangout he
stood on the
table & declared
music was a
giant eraser,
opiate of the
masses.

They were just about to
come for him when he
picked up his
5 string
banjo &
played
10 Woodie Guthrie
songs in a
row, just to
show them
he said,
clutching his
beer,
tugging his
mustache,

angry about
something.

There's something
strange
going on here.

I keep waking up
with loose lines
floating thru my
head.

They repeat themselves
over & over like
fingers
clawing at a
high ledge.

Something strange &
exciting. Like un-
expected
dividends for a
long forgotten
loan.

Almost like a
pension.

Confession

Bless me Father,
for I have sinned
is what you had to say.

It took some doing,
some getting used to.
some time to convince
yourself that it was
really true.

At first I made it up,
I had myself
torture animals,
break into stores,
wish evil on my mother,
think filthy thoughts.

In a few years
it was all true.

The Neighbor Girl

First saw her riding
on her bike when I was
raking leaves,
hello I said as she
went riding by.

Her eyes met mine
demurely lowered
hello & she was gone
leaving a trace of herself
behind, the eternal
imprint on my mind
my senses, the thing
about her eyes, her voice,
her slim body moving
rhythmic on the bike --
the woman thing.

& then I saw her
yesterday, playing with
some children in the
yard, pulling toy cars
over imaginary roads.

She was just a child.

The Magician

Dave was short & stocky
so they put him in tanks
& he drove one from Normandy
to Berlin
with a cigar stuck between
his sour teeth.

Meanwhile back home
his wife Mary
my mother's sister
(a family of 12
with a drunk for a father),
Mary who had dancing slippers
when there wasn't bread to eat,
Mary who had dreams & visions
& tension headaches,
Mary had this other guy's baby.

I remember them coming
to live with us,
remember that tightness
on my mother's face,
remember that the baby was
a girl, tiny as a rat
& ugly, and the guy was
big, really big,
bigger than my father
who was off to war
& six foot one.

This guy wore
suits & overcoats,
white scarves
thick shoes
& silk socks.

He could bounce a quarter
off the wall
& catch a silver dollar.

He could make anyone laugh,
even my mother
who hated his guts.

He disappeared
when Dave came back,
talking war over quarts
of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

That was years ago.
Now Mary is an alcoholic,
the daughter grew up sluggish,
& Dave beats them both.

I've been gone for 20 years,
but I'll never forget that guy
who turned quarters into silver dollars:
It was a dirty trick.

The first time I
played basketball

I was already in the
3rd grade, the 3rd grade &
the third school,
bouncing from New York to
Spokane to
Cheyenne,
the kid said
Do You Want to Play?
& I said
Sure.

I got out there &
took the ball,
knocked over half the
players running with it
to the far end of the
court, made a
touchdown.

When I turned around
everyone was
standing still &
staring.

Then
pandemonium
broke loose.

Santa Cruz Poets

There are these
poets in
Santa Cruz
writing about
sunsets &
sunrises about
rocks heaving up on their
haunches about the
trees & the oceans & the
great slab of
sky
not a word about de-
capitated
girls dis-
membered
boys old men
shot dead on their
lawns &
campers with their
skulls bashed in.

To read these poets,
you'd think it was a
swell place to
live.

We Have Not Yet Sold Out To The Metric System

Him being a math professor
& her being a whirling dervish
you can see why it's coming
unravell'd after 10 years,
but he's not as cut & dry as she
described him & she's not as
big a pile of sentiment as he'd
like to think. I know because of
the way she suffers her own
impression on people & the way he
got so excited talking about
number systems, systems of 10 & 12
& 20, Egyptians & Babylonians
& the Renaissance Man,
slamming his fist into his palm
& exclaiming,
"We have not yet sold out to the
metric system!"
& the puzzled look on her face
across the room.

A Death In The Family

The boy is 18 & sits in the
room all day playing records
& smoking dope.

His mother comes home from work,
pauses in the foyer,
hears the music coming
from his music upstairs.

She puts down her packages
on the hallway table
& goes up the steps,
taking off her gloves
as she does. She is wearing
stockings & heels & her
cheeks are red from the
fresh air. Her husband has been
dead six years.

Our Friend Jane

Our friend Jane
likes Jesus Christ Super Star &
Erik Satie, plays them for us
when we come over,
exhibits the exact same
amount of pleasure every time;
has children's books in by her bed,
Woolworth pictures on the walls,
has never been laid &
works in research,
dopes up dogs &
cuts their kidneys out.

She wears some kind of
chin strap when she
sleeps because she
grinds her teeth together.

Her father is a VP for
Mobile Oil,
found her in an orphanage
when she was 3,
gave her a Mustang & a
case of gin when she
turned 21.

Calls her his baby.
His precious.
His one & only.

What is poetry doing,
getting itself processed
thru so many institutions?

A flash on
wild horses
stretching out across a
mesa, jeeps & helicopters
& radar narrowing the circle.

Marlboro men.
Ready-made disaster.

-- John Bennett

Ellensburg WA

girls coming home in their cars

the girls are coming home in their cars
and I sit by the window and
watch.

there's a girl in a red dress
driving a white car
there's a girl in a blue dress
driving a blue car
there's a girl in a pink dress
driving a red car.

as the girl in the red dress
gets out of the white car
I look at her legs

as the girl in the blue dress
gets out of the blue car
I look at her legs

as the girl in the pink dress
gets out of the red car
I look at her legs.

the girl in the red dress
who got out of the white car
had the best legs

the girl in the pink dress
who got out of the red car
had medium legs

but I keep remembering the girl in the blue dress
who got out of the blue car

I almost saw her panties

you don't know how exciting life can get
around here
at 5:35 p.m.

75 million dollars

now there's Picasso
and now he's gone.
I know. it's in the papers.
there has been much about Picasso
in the papers.
we know he painted.

now there's the division of the estate.
there seem to be many Picassos.
it will go to court, probably.
75 million dollars.

I like to think of how he worked with the brush,
doing it. wet paint, canvas, whatever.
light. him standing there.
the process unwinding and smoking.
there's light and air and smell and the
idea, the smell of the
idea. and something to
eat. and there's a clock there.
don't eat the clock, Pablo. the clock will be
along. it came
along.

the man leaves and his work
remains.
but to me
it's much more splendid when both
the man and the work are
about. yes, I know, I
know. 75 million dollars.

well, Picasso's gone.

immortality and fame are sometimes
different things. Pablo had fame,
now he has the other.

I think of Henry Miller walking up and down
the floor at Pacific Palisades and
waiting.

we're all such good tough creative boys,
why do they let us
die? 75 million dollars.

some picnic

which reminds me
I shacked with Jane for 7 years
she was a drunk
I loved her

my parents hated her
I hated my parents
it made a nice
foursome

one day we went on a picnic
together
up in the hills
and we played cards and drank beer and
ate potato salad and weenies

they talked to her as if she were a living person
at last

everybody laughed
I didn't laugh.

later at my place
over the whiskey
I said to her,
I don't like them
but it's good they treated you
nice.

you damn fool, she said,
don't you see?

see what?

they kept looking at my beer-belly,
they think I'm
pregnant.

oh, I said, well here's to our beautiful
child.

here's to our beautiful child,
she said.

we drank them down.

-- Charles Bukowski

Los Angeles CA

Debt

I borrowed \$65.00
from Bukowski today
bet it on a leadass horse
which didn't show
and I had to borrow \$5.00 more
to eat and feed my kids
and that doesn't count
the \$140.00 I borrowed

from him last week
which I'm to pay back
five dollars a week for
the next six months
I'm getting so far in
debt to him that I can't
afford him anymore

I used to borrow
on the rent he owed me
before he moved out
now I get mad and say
"Go to hell, just try
and get that money."
and we split
I felt good
I forgot about my debt
but I begin to miss him
and I call him
we get back together
he doesn't forget
I owe the money all over again

but ... if he'll loan me
the money tomorrow
there is a sure thing running
in the fifth race
an exacta 5-9 9-5
Yodajo to Prince Dantan
and I can pay him back
in one lump sum

the box

yes, I have this box
and unfortunately the box
comes attached
to arms, legs, feet,
a mouth and desires
not necessarily dominated
by the box
but he can't understand
how the feet like to dance
the arms like to shake
hips and thighs roll
the lips can even
laugh and kiss
without the box
even getting involved
he thinks because
the box starts jumping
when he shakes it

that it also jumps
for every other man
he imagines it is
like mexican beans
jumping all the time
and he tried to destroy
it with choice names
but I am afraid
the arms, legs, feet,
mouth and active desires
will still go on
not necessarily
dominated by the box.

The Last Hold Outs

these two aged sisters
own their old family home
located downtown Hollywood Blvd.
and have refused all offers
to sell through the years
as business and commercialism
crowded the street

they both dress
in rags and charge
50¢ daytime parking
\$1 nighttime parking
in their front and backyard
they rent two small stores
on their property
and outdoor spaces along the Blvd.

one sister is
in charge of renting
the other handles parking
which rich business men
driving big cars
who eat and drink for hours
down the street
at the Greek Village
sometimes refuse to pay

last night Grace
stayed up until midnight
and stood in front of
the 73 Lincoln
determined to get her
\$1 parking from four men
but two of them, high from drinking
got out and moved her aside
while they drove off free

these sisters both wear
old tennis shoes on red feet
decaying from bad
circulation or bad wine
and their dresses
are always the same
one sister wears a black hat
but they hold out
and hold out
and talk of when the Blvd.
was lined with houses more
elegant than their own
and of the hardwood floors
in their house still
being in good condition

I see

before the A-bomb hits
Los Angeles there will be
war, much fighting
and so many hurt
that flying in the air
will be a slow moving
blimp-like hospital
and helicopters will
bring the wounded
to this flying aid-station
quickly from the battlefield
and this hospital
marked with a large red cross
will be flying over the city
when the A-bomb hits and
explodes billowing its
deadly barrel of smoke upward
only the lucky
leaving their possessions
might flee fast enough
to save themselves

when these lazy
days of laying
and loving and talking
with you are over
I'll remember
the way you
tilted your head
when you teased me
the way you said

"let's take five"
the curl of your hair
the padding of your hands
the beautiful curve
of your mouth
and the long hours
of making gentle love
our bodies locked
I'll remember you
bringing me coffee
in bed among the
books and papers
then coming to bed wet
a steaming red lobster
after a too hot bath
the way you
could make me laugh
of knowing your face
and body so well
and sleeping so close
turning as one
this and so much
more I will remember
the days passing too fast
and how we lavishly used
hours and days and weeks
just being together

-- Linda King

Los Angeles CA

WHERE DO WE GET ALL THESE BURDENS?

Well, you go to the House of Burdens
and you say
I'll take that one, and that one,
and that one, because they all
look good to you;
and then the Burden Salesman says,
Okay ... they're yours ...

and you have to put them
all on your shoulders and try
to carry them all in one load
because you were greedy
and they are unreturnable.

BREAKING THE HEAT

for days now
i have been listening
to the birds and the dogs of summer

it will rain soon
this has been mentioned
through the static voice of the radio

the man across the street
has been watering the same piece of lawn
for as long as i can remember

green is stubborn under his feet
the birds that come nearer to him
have grown darker and larger

through the heavy of sleep
i have a plausible dream
about the mailman weeping with
great personal tragedy
when i hand him a heavy letter

cloud rumors are lying
in grey lumps in the sky
the trees are discussing this and
telling it to the curtains

there is one curse of thunder far away
and everything goes flat again
against the day

TO THE PEDESTRIANS

the beast in the field
moves like grasses
only his shape shows
made of pale ripple
and the subtle growl of the wind

there is broken glass at his feet
heaven knows he is hungry
but he is superstitious and
just lies there
waiting for luck to feed him

he is tame
but children come to ride his back
and look out at the sidewalk
with wild death in their eyes

every night the shape sighs down
into purple dream
his outline breathing against the sky
(!) do not take
shortcuts then

FROM THE GARDEN

what can i give you
if not food
great sacks of produce
picked from summer

words cannot do

"can't live on words" you say
with one hand around
a black eggplant
the other holding
the biggest zucchini we could find

"this one's for laughter" i said
but you didn't even smile
(your eyes that hungry)
though you did manage "thank you"

well, the sun hangs in silence now
behind the difficult weather
behind the gray polluted sea of sky
large green tomatoes
hang heavily into September

the fair crowd wore sweaters again
the fireworks at night
sputtered into half-hearted patterns

we had beet tops for dinner
strips of carrots
fried green tomato slices
late radishes
and a twelve-ounce package of wieners
that cost over a dollar

WEED BUFFALO

outside in the rain
the weed buffalo
is lying in the field
asleep or patient
waiting for
another quirk of imagination
to free him

he is out of place
in the center of
all that mown yellow
under the landing planes ...
the buses going by ...

he cannot change himself into
another shape
or move
unless the gathering wind
shall come and separate him
from the clumped position:

then what will i conjure
staring through the window

INTERVIEW US, WE HAVE NEWS

interview us we are
sitting in quiet kitchens
we are watching the trees
above houses

(oh rise, then, like
ghosts above roofs,
winter branches)

we are sipping cold coffee
forgotten in brown cups
by scissors and pieces and
pieces of paper.
a red, pen
hurries words on a page

(oh early poems, so
loud with your first say)

come ask us who
we are
and what have we done to make
a story

(we have polished our fingernails
we have combed our hair
we have eaten an apple)

who are we? we are
shadow and mirror
we look at each other all day
we have no feature, we
have no texture

(see us silhouetting
the wall and filling the window,
making predictions)

we think with
the voices of crows
we are watching hopeless trees
with hard yellow eyes

(we are making sunlight
we are melting the snow)

-- Joyce Odam

Sacramento CA

PORTRAIT NR. 31

the teaspoons are electrified today
there is strychnine in the coffee
the cakes have a tinge
of sudden death

the sofa springs are asymmetric
and insanely provided with
land mines by each plate
a piece of plastic marzipan entices

already the doorbell smoulders
suspiciously and the doormat
coughs with static electricity
in the wc bowl an alligator gargles

the small glasses and the vitriol carafe
are set out the invitations
sent off lovingly signed with
explosive pencil

soon our girlfriends will arrive

TO LOVE

Denmark's number one swinger --
that's me now, definitely.
13,800 streetlights in Copenhagen and
Fredericksberg
are witness now of my eternal, undying
patented love

to the woman whom I unblushingly call
my young love
and kiss with the energy of a beetcrusher.

No one awards us a trophy
for our endless evenings' odysseys
with our marathon love.
And our intertwined fingers
are as complicated as birds' nests.

We take terrific pains with everything.
It's a question of loving correctly.
Everyone seems to know how it's done.
We strive energetically to learn.

Saying goodbye takes three hours
and morning comes riding a streetcar
from Lower Fasan Way
and gathers me up into a merciful slumber
after the test of strength.

-- Klaus Rifbjerg

Translated from the Danish by:
Nadia Christensen and
Alexander Taylor

NEW JERSEY THE PINE BARRENS

1. moss in the wet cedar
i go into the woods
most every day with
a bowbar cut down
dead branches i look
70 but i'm really 86
sometimes standing in
the floating bed in
the cranberries i think
how the city's grown
close they think
in the bogs here we
all have pointy ears
pine snakes in the
dark green mink deer
otter raccoon milk
snakes corn snakes
catfish rare tree
frogs that sound like
a state trooper you
can't find them any
where but here

6. one road thru the woods carried
 so much freight that in places
 it divided stage coaches the
 philadelphia to tuckerton run
 still runs thru the branches the
 taverns gone now abandoned mansions
 in the tall ferns wild strawberries
 thru cracked marble men hip deep
 in cranberries who remember this
7. pieces of an old house bricks
 glassy blue slag pebbles
 sad roads that were streets
 washington mount st
 quaker bridge martha
 the last furnace blown out
10. geese in by beever river
 i go regular down to
 reeveston cemetery
 pour whiskey on a friends
 grave just like he asked
 one night with lizzie when
 i passed by and she said
 what ails you i told her
 i was going to john's
 grave and i poured old
 john bower a fifth just
 then an old fashioned
 blue pheasant jumped up
 behind the gravestone my
 hat flew off my head flew
 off from fear elizabeth
 said that once you got
 it fred brown that's
 once you got it

-- Lyn Lifshin

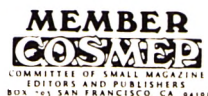
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