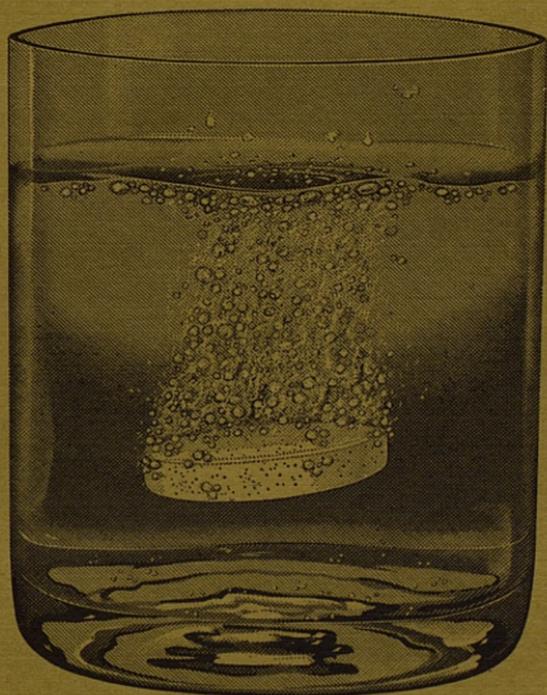


WORMWOOD

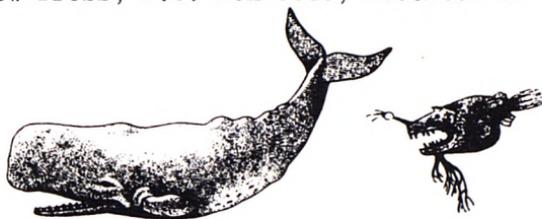


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LOOK AT THAT GUY

all my life
while walking about
here and there
I've heard these voices --
usually it's two people
approaching me:
"Jesus Christ, look at that guy!"
or:
"My god, did you see that?"

it happens at supermarkets
at racetracks
in parking lots
stores
or when I'm just walking
down the street:
"Hey, did you see that guy?"

there is evidentially a certain
way a person should look.

I've had them curse me
as I walk by:
"That son of a bitch!
Did you see that fucking bastard?"

I walk on.

there's not much else I
can do.

AN OLD FAN

he used to write me from jail and I'd write him back. he said that of all the writers he had written only Saroyan and I had written him back. he purchased my books and passed my newspaper columns around. that jail like anyplace else was full of writers and critics and like the rest of them some of them hated me. Harry the Moose defended me. he told them that even though I couldn't write a decent sentence I had done some time.

Harry came to see me when he got out, he came with another x-con who had gotten out a bit earlier. I was then living at my girlfriend's place and they stood in front of the fireplace looking at my girlfriend and running their zippers up and down. I had never asked what they had gone in for but that gave me the idea. they didn't stay long, they had their old ladies with them and their old ladies wanted to see Disneyland. they had jobs as carpenters and made more in 3 days than I made in a month. we shook hands and said goodbye.

I got a letter last week. Harry the Moose was back in. he said it was a parole violation. I believed him. when I was in a con told me: nobody's guilty in here." Harry wants to know where he can get my latest book. he's typing 12 hours a day in that cell. that's one thing about lock-up: you don't get many interruptions. I suppose Saroyan will answer him again and I will too. I'd rather have readers and friends in there than in Paris or heaven, now what in the hell did I do with his letter?

SHOOT ME IN THE LEG, SHOUTS THE SKY;
SOME GOOD SOUL DOES
AS THE SAWDUST FALLS
THROUGH --

2 men with blue arm bands meet me
outside my apartment house
door. they both wear guns and
carry ivory clubs:
"your rent has been raised to meet the
spiral. you owe us
\$32."
I pay. they give me a small
punched orange ticket
and I enter my
apartment.

the phone rings:

"Dept. of Water and Power. Sir,
your rates have been raised to meet the
spiral. unless you can reimburse us with
\$5 by 8 a.m.
your water and power will be
shut off."

I turn the t.v. off
I turn the lights off
and go to bed.

the city of Los Angeles can no longer
afford to light its streets
at night.

outside one can hear
occasional gunfire
but it's very
sparse.

the price of bullets is
prohibitive.

the prime interest rate
has been raised to
17 percent, a hotdog costs
a dollar and a quarter.

the states of Colorado, Nevada and
Washington have been
purchased by the People's Republic of
China.

my woman has left me for a
richer man.

KISS ME

kiss me like you kissed Sam,
I said.

kiss me like you kissed Liza,
she said.

kiss me like you kissed Kevin,
I said.

kiss me like you kissed Tully,
she said.

kiss me like you kissed -- that actor --
what's his name?
I said.

kiss me like you kissed that ATD case,
she said.

kiss me like you kissed Dale,
I said,
and then kiss me like you kissed that
Japanese wrestler.

kiss me like you kissed Gerda,
she said,
and then kiss me like you kissed Bonnie.

I never kissed Bonnie,
I said.

you never kissed Bonnie?

hell no. kiss me like you've kissed all the guys
I haven't heard about lately --
guys under piers, at dances, on horseback, in poolhalls
and bowling alleys, at Mercedes-Benz, in closets,
waiting rooms, madhouses and gas stations ...

kiss me, she said, like you've kissed all the whores in
the world ...

umm, she said, that's good
we've really been fucking around
too much.

-- Charles Bukowski

Los Angeles CA

ALL THE BOYS

are at the Vagabond Inn Motel & Coffee Shop
again this morning. We bum cigarettes and
interrupt each other. The smoke rises
to the ceiling and is trapped by
an ionosphere of pronouns.

Outside the black guys are emptying wastebaskets
and giving the power sign and laughing about
last night.

Every time the phone rings we all look up
expecting to be summoned by Miss September
or one of those Hollywood starlets or
somebody else's wife

when all of a sudden a girl comes down to swim. She is of such extraordinary beauty that surely wherever she goes a thousand ships launch themselves.

Everybody's mouth rounds, the conversation settles around our feet like old dogs and damned if it isn't time to go to work and I've had enough of this rotten coffee and my old lady's going to raise hell as it is.

Outside the porters fail the asst. manager's wastebasket inspection. They look at their feet like bad dancers and say, "Yes, sir."

THE CROWD

Out of nowhere she said that although she'd never slept with another man while we'd been together, she was burning for someone else.

I pointed out that the way things were arranged she could do just about anything she wanted. What I wanted was to be spared the details.

She called me at work the next day and it was blow-by-blow, so there was trouble. But of course I was right. She was sorry.

It got pretty regular after that. Sometimes it turned me on but mostly, like a closet light, just off. I told her that before she brought home video tapes we should split up.

No, never. She would change. So she changed her clothes and went out.

A week later I got a note saying that she still loved me and, no matter who she was with, thought of me. She sincerely hoped that I thought of her, too, and not when I was mad or lonely but all the time, no matter how intimate the circumstances.

SHE SAID IT'D BE THIRTY FIVE DOLLARS

so I came up with it. She poured me a drink, had another for herself. She licked her lips and winked, she puckered up and gave her shoulders a little shake, she wet one finger and dabbed

at her stocking top right where it clipped onto one long, black garter.

"You're more like it," she said while I watched. "One night last week I was all feathers and Arpege for this peach-fuzz kid with hair down to here who said I shouldn't be plastic. He said he just wanted me to be natural.

"I figured he was after some old-fashioned bareass but when I came out of the bathroom he was eating out of the refrigerator. He gave me the once over and said I didn't look that fat with my clothes on but who could be natural anyway with her cunny shaved like a heart.

"Is that something or not? What kind of kids are they raising out there, I'd like to know. You think I'm pretty don't you baby and what about these brand new spike-heeled pointy-toed black patent leather shoes."

ROYCE NEWPORT MONEY

had everything including monogrammed sandwiches but after graduation he refused to go into business with his father. He wanted to get out on his own, see where his head was at and find out if there wasn't more to life than getting and spending.

No, Royce did not want to be carried on his quest by faithful servants. He wanted to hitchhike.

A grizzled old farmer gave him his first lift. He was a man whose father had lost everything in the Dust Bowl and he himself had eaten an ant hill, but he said he wouldn't trade places with Howard Hughes.

A madame on the skids took him as far as Collinsville. Hell, she'd been through as many fortunes as there are days in the week and between the good times took second billing in a stag smoker act named "Raoul & The Swine Woman." But she was happy, yes sir!

Outside of Waco he met a gambler, a man who had never won a bet in his life. He was sitting way in the back of a truck stop because he'd lost his clothes betting that a mummy would be next out of the rest room at the House of Pies. Was he happy? As a clam.

It was like that clear across the country and back: poor but happy, salt of the earth, laugh and let the world go by.

At home Royce crowed to his father who smiled and pushed a button to reveal them all, a cast of thousands with his money in their sweaty hands.

Royce was crushed. He wanted to kill himself and be buried in potter's field. His dad gave him a platinum gun with his name on it, then showed a film of his funeral, a get-together that made "The Feast of Paradise" look like a Kappa Sig beer blast.

Royce sighed, picked up a pen, and got down to work.

MY UNCLE MAX

lived by himself in a little place on Blythe St., not far from the waterworks. He was my mother's brother, the baby of the family. I was an only child, oldest and youngest at the same time.

My mother wanted us both to settle down, she must have said it a million times. I knew it meant practicing the piano or reading Longfellow, anything but bouncing a ball off the side of the house. Uncle Max knew it meant some nice girl my mother had dug up. "But Ada," he'd say, "I don't want a nice girl," and she would be just as shocked every time and my father would smile a little and tuck himself into the evening Star.

Uncle Max could do anything with cars; his name was on the lips of every Kaiser owner for 50 miles. He liked his work and went at it 7 days a week rain or shine until one winter he took sick. My mother nursed him and while she had him down talked about who would do this next time because she certainly wouldn't be around forever and there he'd be in that drafty shack all by himself and she knew this girl.

She must have scared Uncle Max good because when he was up and around he married Iris Wood who had worked down at the cleaners for as long as I could remember.

Iris took to marriage, she got a phone and sent Max to the store. When he wasn't eating Del Monte green beans and Underwood sandwiches, he dove into the alligator mouths of Packards and stayed there until one day he went to St. Louis for some parts and came back with a woman.

They were out at the Moonlight Motel for almost two weeks and then I heard that the woman had run off. I knew what that meant but I pictured her pounding down the hard road anyway, her tits bouncing.

Dad took me with him to get Uncle Max even though my mother thought I was too young. I had never seen the inside of a motel room before. There was a bed with the sheets piled in the middle like the last of a snowman. There were bottles all over and boxes of Pangburns.

Max went back to Iris and his yard full of cars, but he wasn't worth a damn. He had lost his touch and his business amounted to nothing but oil changes and inner tubes.

My father had to give them money to make ends meet and once when he came back from there my mother said it was a shame what had happened to Max, how he had married that good for nothing Iris and made a fool of himself to boot.

My father put the paper down. He said she should drop the subject. Hadn't she done enough? Wasn't she satisfied? By God, he never wanted to hear another word about it, not ever.

He froze the room. He had never shouted in his life except for one other time when I came back from baseball. I had won the game and I said what a nice little town this was and that maybe I would just stay here forever.

HOMETOWN

I don't go back much and when I do I don't get around. There's a little race track at the foot of the bluff, I watch some t.v and maybe for the

first time listen to my father who was beaten til the white showed, and my mother whose feet would have frozen if she hadn't stood where the cows had slept.

This house sits where those cows used to lie and I ask why they didn't just leave. "Roots, I guess. Nowadays you don't see it. Maybe that's good."

Occasionally I run into somebody down at the liquor store. We eye each other over the Ace combs and nail clippers and finally decide that under the hair or behind the gut is part of the class of '59. Last time it was a girl named Marti.

"Hey, remember when I wouldn't go out with you in eighth grade because you tried to french me at Shirley Willoughby's house? I was worried about my reputation."

"You were probably wise. My tongue was wanted in a dozen states for various atrocities."

"Look," she said, "if you want to come over tonight there won't be anybody home after say 11:00. Ted's working graveyard."

"I can't. I'd like to but I can't. I'm leaving for L.A. tonight." She nodded, gave a little tug at her wig.

"Well," she said, "I wish I was."

MY GRANDMOTHER

was always old so when I saw her at the nursing home she just seemed more faint.

She was balsa in a white gown, stained at the center. She called me Bill and my father answered.

When she slept she moved her feet like a lifer. Awake, she roamed the past, a historian.

My father and I looked at each other, shook our heads, watched t.v.

It was football season; the game was half done. On the field in Stetsons and tasseled boots cowgirls from Dallas showed their silken crotches to the world.

Going home we were on a two-lane suicide road. He was driving fast through dark as thick as earth. "That wasn't her," he said putting his right hand over his heart like a man at a parade.

WHIPPERSNAPPERS

On raw days Cherry stands at the back door and watches his tailored wife care for her plant while I look out the front where Arnie in an old football jersey washes his car.

It is between rounds. Still back to back like injured parties, we wish for more money, bigger biceps or breasts, a dinner to go to, one clean glass, children and other ceremonies.

Then somebody breaks something else and nobody cleans that up, either. I go out and stay out. Or she does.

Sometimes Cherry naps and I sit in the sun on my sleepy, dune colored Dodge and nurse Schlitz while Arnie buffs his red Ford that has a hole in the hood so the engine can stick out.

Arnie has told me some amazing things. Last month: he made a list of friends and stopped at 500. Last week: he has never argued with Joyce, never cheated on her, never will. Today: thirteen months from now he will get his Master's and settle down: Gregory & Son.

He looks at the foothills, the reverent sponge hesitates. I can see the future in his eyes and it is arranged like the furniture in his spotless house.

Indoors I look through the rubble for Cherry. When I wake her she says, "Anything wrong?" And I answer, "No. Move over."

SPRING

Ten years ago when I came to Pasadena, I found a place to live that suited my fancy. It was big and hard to heat and cheap: just the place for a poet. Also it had a new landlady who carried her cigarettes deep in her bra and gave me Oedipus eyes.

All of us who lived there were ghosts in the sun: Carroll with a queen-sized bed in a vassal-sized room; Maria upstairs who did nothing but wash for Chi downstairs who never went out: Joe a Jack Spratt and his wife who would not go to Mohammed.

Almost the only time we saw one another was around the first of the month when we would gather to ask June to wait a little for the rent. Again. And she would give us all Frescas and tell stories about booze in her douche bag and an AA lover who was such a man that when he made love, her naturally curly hair rolled straight out like a New Year's favor.

Usually we lived inside ourselves like blood but as June talked and smoked and made us laugh, life unfolded like a map and we made plans to get together for dinner and throw lavish parties.

Then Chi moved out taking Maria and her heavy duty cleansers and a stereo moved in next door and started beer fights in the hall with a collection of neckties who had a Whirl-O-Touch album organizer.

Then June's boyfriend turned out to be a married stiff and she met a man from Chicago, sold the house just like that and flew East forever.

People turned themselves over like new leaves and I moved from apt. to apt., a nomad on a chain, looking for a little less noise, wearing the place like a rabbit's foot.

For years now I have been the only original tenant, living alone in the garage apartment, as unapproachable as Billy Goat Gruff, constantly offended by the mileage lore of Volkswagons and the sight of Frisbees against the evening sky.

So I move on to God knows where saying goodbye only to June to whom my fancy, no longer young, turns at all seasons.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena CA

WHEN THE RED DOG CAME

he laid his head in my mother's lap
& their hair was just the same
& I felt afraid.

"I am the Red Knight & you
are the Red Knight's lady."
"I know."

All day my father & I see them
only as red streaks across yellow
water, yellow fields.

All night the dog whinnies, dreaming
he's a red horse. He carries her
into the wind. Her red hair flies behind.

When my father gets home late
the dog lies across the bedroom door
& barks "Squat toad! Squat toad!"

In the room my mother sleeps
a cool blue sleep. Next morning
she cries & stamps her feet

because she can't find
a way to break the spell.
If she ever does, I know

he'll ride away with my mother
clinging to his shoulders
heavy & soft as a prince's robe.

THE DANCING QUEEN

who was no longer the fairest in the land
knew that a pair of iron shoes
with high heels and strong ankle straps
had been made especially for her
on the plaster cast of her long & narrow foot
which was kept on file with the royal shoemaker.
And though she knew they had been held
over the scullery fire with iron tongs
till their black soles & heels & vamps
glittered white as Cinderella-glass,
she buckled them on swiftly, deftly, unbidden
& unassisted, when the man in the black hood,
apology glinting out of the eyeslits,
bowed low & placed them before her jeweled hem.
Though her lovely face was very white
& her much-kissed lips unaccustomedly taut,
she walked back & forth, back & forth,
holding her skirts above her seared ankles,
showing the shoes to her famous mirror.
"What do you think?" she asked it, preening.
"They suit you perfectly," the mirror said.
"Fine," said the queen, "I'll take them
And I'll wear them to my daughter's wedding,
& there, while the prince her husband waits
to cup her hard young apples in his hands,
I shall dance until I drop down dead."

THE POET IS A STRANGE CREATURE

I have always been annoyed with poets
who play hide and seek
and guessing games

in a world
where millions of people sit next to one another
and die of loneliness
cannot get beyond a few moments of small talk
before becoming hopelessly lost
in the language barrier
the mexican japanese white negro barrier
the occupation class money barrier
where the neighborhood psychic talks to the spirits
easier
than to the people next door
and prefers to
where the mormons refuse to talk to the protestants
and the protestants kill the catholics
the psychiatrists use electric shock and lobotomy
to save time and effort
the teachers alienate the students
the students put down parents
teachers and all other adults
listening only to their peers
until they have cracked up
crashed and washed ashore
peers miscalculate too
where politicians try not to communicate
for fear of displeasing an important voter
where cant and drivel is the expected
straight talk alarming and dangerous
where packaging is more important than content

poets are the only ones to cut through

which is why I decided to write poems
with meanings simple and clear

is that clear?

AN UNUSUAL MAN

my grandfather delivered three of my sisters
out of my mother his daughter
I always thought it a peculiar arrangement
mother was a little gone on her father
and liked to be tough
the third baby grandfather delivered

wouldn't come
they were off in this log cabin 8 miles from town
my dad was out getting drunk
grandmother was helping
the strain became so great she had a heart attack
and lay on one bed
gasping for breath
while grandfather struggled with his instruments
for the baby on the other
somehow I've always had to smile
when I think of this picture
rather the ultimate in human nightmare

-- Geraldine King

Phoenix AZ

MY FIRST ADMIRER

who had read my poetry
came after midnight
already too drunk to walk
my lover had invited him over
as he was running out of booze
I joined them pouring
whiskey in my beer

after much talk
it came out that my admirer
had actually come to admire
my lover instead of me
but my lover was already angry
and had left the room
because I had taken my admirer's hand
to look at his palm lines

and since my admirer
had fallen on his face
a few times and I
was beginning not to
admire him much
I said, "Look man, if you
love my lover and not me
why don't you leave?
This is my house,
you can't do anything here"

my lover hearing he was
loved came out to protect
my admirer from my disgust

at him not knowing
if he liked women or men
and in my state of drunkenness
I failed to admire
my lover as well
saying, "Have him why don't you?"
and with help from me
they fell into each others
arms on the porch
too drunk to stand and
I locked the doors

I feel good

I feel GOOD
I feel good
good, good, good
good, good
when I feel good
I don't think
anyone feels
as good as I do
and it's hard
to tell you
just how good
I feel
because it's
just too damn
good to tell

ooooooooohhhh
I just feel
good all inside
and it's buzz'en
around in there
like bees
buzzzzzzzzzzzz
buzzzzzzzzzzzz
I'm happy and
that's stupid
feeling so happy
and buzzy and
good ... wow

buzzzzzzzzz
caaawwwwwww
flapp'en my wings
jump'en up and down
and you ain't even
going to like
this poem
it's just TOO GOOD

GO WEST, FRIEND

when the familiar
get old and familiar
old and familiar and disinterested
disinterested and almost bored
bored and not listening
not listening and not caring
not caring and ignoring
ignoring and then sneering
sneering and making love becomes a duty
a duty to perform once or twice a month
regardless of desire
desire something that happened way back then
my friend, it is time for a change
no matter how feathered the nest
how comfortable the known

time to climb over the horizon
into the sunset

-- Linda King

Los Angeles CA

A SHORT POEM IN PRAISE OF LOUIS-FERDINAND DESTOUCHES

(see) é l (eye) n e

A SHORT POEM IN PRAISE OF WAYNE THIEBAUD, PAINTER

b e a u (tea)
(tea) (beau)

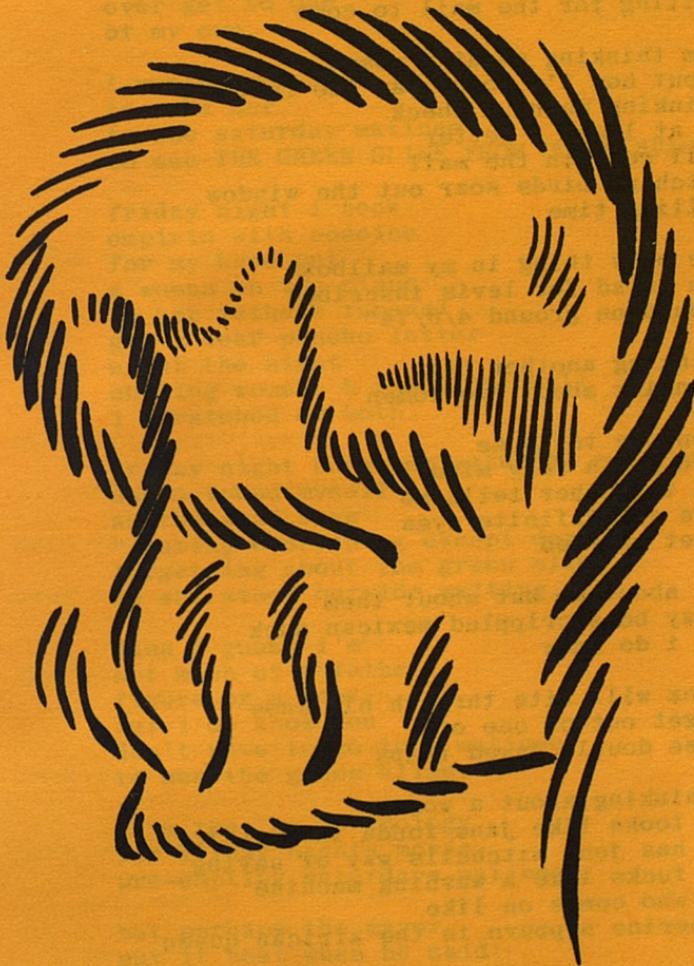
THE POLES OF THE REALISTS

Norman (Rockwell) Kent

-- M. K. Book

Lincoln NB

THE BURNING FIRE CHIEF



KIRK ROBERTSON

2 WOMEN: FOUND ON GROUND 4/6/74

sitting with a beer
waiting for the mail to come

i'm thinking about a woman
about how i'm gonna pay the rent
thinking maybe a check
or at least a letter
will come in the mail
watching birds soar out the window
killing time

the only thing in my mailbox
was an ad for levis inscribed
"found on ground 4/6/74"

drinking another beer
thinking about two women

when one tells me
i've got a foxy mind
and the other tells me
i've got infinite eyes
i get worried

not about me but about them
i may be a crippled mexican duck
but i do know

a fox will bite through his knee
to get out of one of
those double jawed traps

& thinking about a woman
who looks like jane fonda in anything
who has joni mitchells way of saying
who fucks like a washing machine
and who comes on like
katherine hepburn in the african queen

keeps my mind free of those traps
my eyes on the finite

DANA

she's not exactly my kid
she's my wifes
by somebody else
but she's probably
as close as i'll
ever get to one
of my own.

i was supposed
to take her
to the saturday matinee
to see THE GREEN SLIME FROM OUTER SPACE.

friday night i took
empirin with codeine
for my knee put
a woman on the plane
to her fathers funeral
got a dear pancho letter
spent the night
chasing women & the eight-ball
i scratched on both.

friday night hungover saturday morning
and i found myself
as the toad says
"fearing everything except death"
forgetting about the green slime
as she stood outside waiting.

dana i guess i'm
not much of a father
figure or a poet
but i do know you
don't have to go to a matinee
to see the green slime.

this then as an apology
for friday nights movie
pre-empting saturdays matinee.

but perhaps the mayor
put it best when he said:
you always wait until
i'm most vulnerable
& most defensive.

THE FIRE

burn 'em,
i said.

she had the past
trunks & boxes
of love letters to
everyone and
from everyone too,
photos of fucking
this one
& that one.

burn 'em,
i said.

i can't do that,
she said.

well, well,
i said
striking a match
lighting
a cigarette

well, well.

SHE CALLS ME WEIRD BUT

i once called her
the most beautiful woman
i almost ever saw
& she wants me
to write her a love poem

we were only together
three weeks before
she fucked somebody else
& she wants me
to write her a love poem

she writes me
notes about it everybody
else gets notes
too
& she wants me
to write her a love poem

she wants me
to write her a love poem
& i guess this is
about the best i can
do right now
& still she wants me
to write her a love poem

love poems
like the late worm usually
miss
the bird entirely

FAHRENHEIT 451 AT -22 DEGREES

it's cold outside
frozen stiff as i
watch a movie
about burning books

it's cold outside
on highway 93
a cattle truck roars by

it's cold outside
& the fire chief says on TV
there's nothing there
for peace of mind
we burn it
the only way to be happy
is for everyone to be made
alike

it's cold outside
i could use some
of that heat
she says
pointing at the TV screen
i'm going to bed

it's cold outside
on highway 93
they have turned off
the EAT sign

it's cold outside
but on TV
camus dostoevski the bedroom
& even the fire chief
are going up in flames

it's cold outside
frozen stiff as i
look at the bookshelves
& the thermostat
and wonder if i am to die
in the first snows of winter

or if
as that old japanese soldier said
coming out of hiding
30 years after VJ day
"What difference does it make?"

TWO EYE-POEMS FROM :



SEDIMENTARY POPCORN



RAVEEKA WORK POEMS

-- from notes by nila northSun

i

we all just sat around
it's a small office
3 secretaries
and the manager the rest
of the company
consists
of tattooed laborers
everybody quit
work early that day

we all just sat around
the boss came in
told a few jokes

we all just sat around
with styrofoam cups
in hand
on folding chairs
drinking
jimbeam
smirnoff
or jose cuervo

we all just sat around
merry xmas

ii

working has made me
appreciate lunch
the time allotted
to consume it

she had
a hamburger i had
the "espresso lunch"
pizza slice one
meatball spaghetti garlic
bread & zucchini

the allotted time
has been consumed
and i
feel i would like to

throw up
my "espresso lunch" as
she reminds me

i paid \$1.98
for it i guess

i'll hang onto
it
& the job
a bit longer

A LITTLE GROUCHY

she sulks off to the bedroom
pissed
oh is she pissed
about what i
don't know.

walking in
beer & cigarette in hand
i inquire

what's your problem?
i say
what's wrong?
you
she says
are a grouch.

why
i say
do you think
i am?
i guess
she says it's just
your nature.

walking back out
the TV news tells
me writing
is on its way
out.

she tells me
it's my nature
they tell me
it's on the way out.

NIPPLES & OTHER BEDTIME STORIES

lying in bed reading
a poem about
santa claus coming
down from the mountain

when she says
can you suck on
my nipple
it itches & i just can't
go to sleep

sucking in bed dropping
the book as
my cock stiffens
coming with santa claus
on the floor

i think i can
go to sleep
now
she says

i begin reading
a poem about
a round trip to peru
on a motorcycle

but i soon
forget about it
& fall asleep
with the light on

5:30 NEWS

they ask the winos
if they're worried:

"i think it's a woman,
she dresses like a man."

"i don't sleep out no more,
you betcha."

"you only gotta die once,
god takes care of me."

they ask the police
if there are clues.
the police are worried.
they say:

"we know it's a person
who carries a knife."

they ask the winos
if they're worried
about the future:

"what future?"

7 dead winos
with their throats cut,
in 6 weeks.
in LA,
"the slasher" is loose
on CBS news.

ON THE EQUINOX & UNDER THE VOLCANO

while she reads adelle davis
i watch the black scorpions
from under the volcano
attempt to devour mexico, 1957.

it's been with us 4 months now
& she's getting fat.
a pot belly,
like mine from drinking beer,
but something she can't
get rid of
by sucking it in.

and i don't know

what she's sucking in,
i mean it could be
one or the other,
son or daughter.

not that it matters.

what i notice
is she's getting fat.

this is what you wanted,
she says.

i suppose it is.

but, i don't know

was all i could say
when she asked me,
will eating watermelon seeds
make me pregnant?

but i figure if ramos, hank, & juanita
can make it past
those giant scorpions
then the 3 of us stand a chance.

but i don't know

what lurks out there
in the shadows
or under the volcano.

A DISCUSSION CONCERNING LODGING

he's the big indian
trader. he's also an
ex-smoker.
you should have
seen it
he says.

the car was bent double
she had been cut
in half dead
instantly.

the guy with her
so drunk
he's sitting on her
(he doesn't say which half)
asking for a cigarette.

an old lady walks
in
with something
to sell.

i know you're an indian
she says
you give me same
when i'm drunk
when i'm sober.

as she leaves
he looks back
at me
& my cigarette
and says
your rent is due.

-- kirk robertson

Nice CA & Missoula MT

ABOUT POETRY

and we're talking about poetry
& we're drunk or at least
i am
whiskey
i don't like whiskey
& he's saying important things
about poetry i should know
since i'm new to the game
but i have to go to
the bathroom desperately
& i crouch next to him
putting the heel of my boot
into my crotch to hold back
the piss until he has finished his
words & as he tapers
off i rise & run down
the hallway yanking off
my tights &
relieving myself
having heard the end about
poetry

BEFORE & AFTER

my poor old man
my poor lover
at death's door
jesus christ how
he suffers
he blames me for
his condition
aching muscles
throbbing head
excruciating pain
from his teeth
his back
he's got arthritis
at 28 years old
he's going crazy
senile
at 28 years old
he blames me
says i'm the cause
i should have met him
when he was 16
& strong & healthy
Mr. Enduro
Mr. Atlas
Jack LaLanne
but i would have
been only 11 &
wouldn't have given a
shit about him
then

-- nila northSun

Missoula MT

QUIZ

Q: What's an Oedipal?

A: Your father's bike.

-- Charles Stetler

Long Beach CA

ONE FOR UNCLE SIGMUND

In the corridor just now
I overheard one of my colleagues,
having encountered a student of some years ago,
explain, "I'm trying to replace your face."

ERNEST HEMINGWAY AND EDWARD FIELD

So little in common,
except my regard for them both --
some day I'll sink my hands into their hair
and make them love each other as I want them to.

DEAR RON

well, it happened again this afternoon.
i was sitting in the bar
and this girl sat down across from me and said,
"say, dr. stetler was reading us some of your poems today,"
and i said, "wonderful,"
and she said, "yes, i really enjoyed them,
but do you know which one of them was my favorite,"
and i said, "no, but i'd be very interested to find out,"
and she said, "tarzan -- the best poem that you've ever
done is definitely tarzan."

so i had to explain to her that i didn't write tarzan,
that you did,
just as i've had to explain it so many times in the past.

now here's what i propose:

why don't we just pretend that i did write the
tarzan poem?
i mean, after all, you and i think and write sufficiently
alike
so that i might have written it.
i mean, suppose you had written a poem called
king solomon's mines,
or king kong or simba or crocodile tears or
some such thing --
that probably would have given me the idea
and i would have sat down and written tarzan myself.

how about a trade: you let me have tarzan
and i'll let you have my poem about the snail
that lived in the bathtub and called itself jesus.
i know how much you've always admired that one.

what?
you say it's impossible?
you say the best you can do is to let me have
poor blind tom even up for my death of simon bolivar.

thanks, ron;
thanks, as we used to say in the fifties,
a heap.

OLIVER SIGWORTH

It was the summer I was mopping up my undergraduate work
and I sat in his course in contemporary literature
and was always one step behind in his analyses.

So I'd turn it all off and daydream
about the novel I was writing three pages an evening.
Well, what I really daydreamed of were publication
parties,
talk show appearances, an apartment on the Seine.

Now, five unpublished novels later,
I dictate to my students the same outline of naturalism
that I memorized that summer,

and I watch a young man in the back row
turn my lecture off

to take a longlegged walk along the quays.

KARL'S CHILI

The first time they served Karl's chili at the bar the Long Beach steam plant nearly had to shut down. The day shift had dined at the 'Niner and had had to report en masse to the infirmary.

Yesterday, after a blessed interval of years, marked the return of Karl's chili.

Don't get me wrong, it was delicious, especially with extra handfuls of onion and healthy doses of Louisiana cayenne pepper.

It was so good, in fact, that I had a second bowl. Now what kind of friends could John and Gordon be, who sat there and allowed me to consume that second bowl?

When I pulled into the yard my girlfriend came rushing to the door: "Gerry," she cried, "what are you doing home so early on a drinking night?" "I ran out of Maalox," I said.

"But you carry an extra box in the car?" "I went through that hours ago."

It was only seconds later that the lights went out all over Long Beach.

FADING IN THE STRETCH

i was astounded this evening, over dinner, to discover that my wife, maureen, has been devouring great chunks of an astronomy textbook. i've never considered her stupid, anything but, but i used to be able to count on her to restrict her scientific interests to astrology which, of course, i could dismiss with spurious ease. now she lectures me, with fluent clarity, concerning anti-matter, black holes, spiral nebulae, and something called the big bang, by which, i am pathetically certain, she is not referring to me. she can draw you a nucleus or solar system to scale and has evolved a personal cosmogony, reduced, with the simplicity that characterizes true genius, to eternal polar forces and unlimited hydrogen.

it's bad enough to suddenly discover that your wife has surpassed you in intelligence, but,

when i tried to regain a little face
by explicating an overheard hypothesis involving
the sensing of magnetic fields by migratory birds,
she said, "well, what else do they have to do?"

apparently, i am not even to be left the punch-lines.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

She used to go home to her parents
four times a year for about a week or so,
which provided me with an excellent opportunity
for a little of the old getting-of-things-out-of-one's
system.

I'd write a little, drink a lot,
take my kids to a ballgame and a movie,
fall in and out of love at least once,

and by the time she returned
I'd be missing her, horny for her,
with things I wanted to say to her,
places I wanted to go with her --
just plain glad to have her back.

Today she announced that she's not going home this summer.

THE SOCIETY OF BACCHUS

There are those who taste wines
with the tips of their tongues,
while others cite the importance of bouquet
and yet others insist on a perfectly cleansed palate.

I taste wine with my ulcer.
Gallo, for instance, comes right back up, every Gallo,
including the wrongly praised Hearty Burgundy.
When they struck Gallo,
the farmworkers automatically raised the level
of California wines.

A nice Chenin Blanc, perhaps Charles Krug's,
or a mellow Barbera, most notably Louis Martini's,
not only stays down,
but will probably require only a tablet or two of Maalox
to relieve the discomfort.

A truly excellent Bordeaux rouge, however,
or a Chateauneuf-du-Pape, or, on occasion,
an exceptional Beaujolais village
will pass the ultimate test --

if followed swallow for swallow with Perrier water,
no antacids will be necessary.

I thought of expanding this poem into an article
for Holiday magazine,

but I'm not sure the public is ready for my method.

THREE TO BOGGLE THE MIND

i

I was riding the freeway
when I heard him say it, honest to God,
this very high official in our government:

"We have the most perfect system in the world;
the problem lies in getting it to work."

ii

At home I picked up the sports section.
The headlines read:
"Walton unimpressive in Madison Square Garden."
Closer reading revealed the reference was to
an interview with sportswriters.

iii

Finally, at my daughter's back-to-school night,
the teacher said, "Her nose is always in a book,
but I don't think we ought to worry yet."

THE NADIR OF AMERICAN POETRY

In the middle of the Arizona desert
they passed a huge Picasso billboard.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Oh," he replied,

"just another roadside abstraction."

THE DECLINE OF EDUCATION

As I was waiting for the elevator
a student asked me,
"What floor is 419 on?"

The felony was compounded when I remembered
that 419 is the English office.

AT LOGGERHEADS

She had been the mistress of a famous poet.
Since she had taken the time to look me up,
I took her out for lunch.

We couldn't agree on anything.
She, a teacher also, complained of the sterile classrooms.
She would have preferred a divan and a coffeepot.
I need a podium on which to rest my gut.

She said her students wrote like Walter Cronkite.
My students don't write half that well.
She said she covered their papers with encouraging remarks,
while the best that I can ever manage is "Not Bad."

When she said at one point, "Nobody learns anything
anyway in a class they are forced to attend,"
I refrained from pointing out that I had never
attended a school
where attendance was optional.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

NEEDING IT

He'd been here
once &
threw beer in my face
so this time
we handled it
as gently as
we could
like baboons
delivering the
queen's baby
letting each other
finish sentences
straining hard to
make sense of our
separate chaos
not wanting to
do it again
wary of damaging it
beyond repair,
needing it
in short.

BOXES

Going thru boxes
that have been
locked away so long
they're total mysteries
unearthing letters &
the senseless things
that people hoard
finding in the bottom
of a box
a large color photo
of my first wife
that so sums up the
chaos & the sorrow
of our lives
I lean back
against the
closet door &
close my eyes,
feeling time itself
unravel
in a spinning wheel
that no hand
ever touches.

Sometimes arriving at the poem
is like being processed thru a
foreign customs check.

Imagine yourself disheveled
chain smoking
not having slept for two
days. Imagine how you
look to the impeccable
soldier in
shiny pattern leather.
Imagine the cellophane bags
of pure white powder
in your satchel
& then look out the
window at the landscape
sweeping up the slopes of
perfect mountains.

Next
the tap
on your shoulder
as you turn
to answer
questions
you cannot
imagine.

THE AGENT

The group is
from Seattle &
not drawing
much of a crowd.

On the last night
like magic
their agent walks in.

I've got you
booked for
6 more weeks he
tells them
& orders them all a
drink.

They are like children
all around him,
loving him.

A COUPLE OF FATSOES

Me & my wife
we think & act like
kids, always laughing &
dancing &
making love at all
hours of the day,
but lately we've been
noticing our bellies,
we pull up our shirts &
frown down at them,
& they get
bigger all the time.

Just look at these
bellies, she says,
we're getting fat.

Then we get to laughing
hug each other &
dance around the room,
our big bellies pressed
together, two fatsoes
on the rapid slide
of life.

the stray cat
not much bigger than the
Calico's kittens
swipes at them
with her paw.

& the Calico
lies quietly on her
side some 3 feet away,
her eyes burning
holes into the
action.

LOVE MAKES THE WORLD GO ROUND

I'd never hitched up
a tow bar before
& I don't win
gold cups for
mechanical genius
so when I finally
got the thing
so it wouldn't
fall off
I asked this
guy in a
gas station
to take a look &
see if it was right --
I had to go
30 miles thru the
mts, you see.
He stared at
the thing
for about 10
seconds & then
shrugged.
Looks fine to me
he said
& walked away.

DOGS

there are 15 to
20 dogs
strung out along
the alley
out in back.

they are
little dogs &
big dogs
& they are
all on chains.

they go berserk
each time a
kid goes by
or a
service truck
pulls up.

they are very
nervous almost

hysterical dogs.

supreme misfits
like their masters,
neither needing the
other anymore &
neither knowing
how to
call it off.

WEIRDOES

My wife & I are
getting worse
it seems
clothes going to
rags, no cosmetics
in the house,
haven't bought food
in cans or boxes
in years.

Walking around the
town like that,
saying just about
anything that
comes into our
minds -- it makes
people uneasy.

Sometimes in the
mornings we lie in bed
for hours, doing things
they've never dreamed of.
It always takes awhile
to remember that
they're out there.

I HAVE THIS WAY

I have this way of opening the second storey window & looking down at the yelping dog next door, making him cower & go into his dog house.

FOOD PROCESSING

The food processing plant begins to operate in August & for 3 whole months they grind up corn & peas & turnips round the clock.

Lying in bed at night, there is a constant grinding in my ears. The whole town lies awake & listens to the grinding.

& when the wind is right -- the smell of slaughter from the slaughter house across the tracks.

There is no other industry in this small town.

There are no Flower Children here.

-- John Bennett

Ellensburg WA

I did it yesterday at 8 a.m. & my wife who was painting in the backyard looked up & then rolled over on the ground like a dog, lay there laughing in the sunlight.

I grinned & the dog went to his dog house & I closed the window, feeling good, knowing she's the only one who makes it easy, being what I am.

PARKED CAR

They were both sitting there in the yellow car outside the liquor store. I guess he was shouting 'cause his mouth kept opening and closing but the traffic sounds made it a bit remote and silly. Then he started throwing the beer out of the can he was holding in her face and it went everywhere, her eyelashes and cheeks were dripping with it, even the windshield was covered with foam. When the can was empty he threw that to her head. She sat there the whole time just staring at him, not talking, not moving, maybe not even feeling how soaked her short

page-boy hair was, still staring at him as he went on with his silent shouting. I don't think she loved him very much at that moment.

Aaaarghhh....

There's a pain for everything and many names for much nothing. There was an old woman at my door, she was dressed like an improbable young maiden of dubious virtue and wanted to sell me a blow-job. I declined and was called queer or something. Afterwards I sat at my typewriter, I sat at my mechanical life and wondered why. Why do I live just a bit off?

It was a full moon out there, it was a full moon every where and inside I found a new variety of aching. I marvelled for a while and spent the rest of the night waving at shapes that I knew to be past perfect loves I had dug up. There's a pain for everything, and a few still unassigned. I always get caught, somehow.

-- Claude Bessy

Santa Monica CA

it catches you off guard, hurls you to the ground. you cannot see. your fingers clutch the soil. in another moment you do something that will take the rest of your life to explain. your mother does not understand. twenty years later your brother still spits whenever your name is mentioned. you grow old all alone. and older still. your relatives think you will never die. one of them brings you some homemade cake. it tastes kind of funny. that night you dream of a man who walks in the wake of a flood. his shoes make sucking noises in the mud. he has no memory.

someone gives you chocolate. little cubes of it. enough to build a gigantic city in the middle of your kitchen floor. the roaches can all be palace guards. your cat is waiting for the right moment to attack. a guard spits off of the parapet and tells you it was much worse five years ago. during the great wars. your wife is boiling water. she leans over the stove as the cat rubs against her ankles. she seems to be calling for help.

it is hard to understand all that has happened. you feel suddenly very old and nobody seems to want to listen to you. the savior is gone. his knapsack is missing. only the sex books remain. you page through them slowly. the cocks and cunts are all familiar. you stop at the picture of a middle-aged woman sucking off a german shepherd. she seems like an old friend. you stare at her for a long time. after a while her mouth begins to move.

the apple is bitter. you throw it to the ground. the floor is littered with half eaten fruit. you don't know any better. the dreams are only half-formed. nothing tastes exactly right. your back itches and you can't quite scratch it. flute music drifts across the room. it relaxes you but your erection won't go away. you prefer the music the water pipes make late at night when someone on another floor turns the faucet. the record ends and your back still itches. or there never really was a record, but someone has closed the window. she tells you she doesn't like flute music and gently strokes your erection. there is of course only one ending, but you already know the apples are bitter, and besides

-- Bob Heman

Brooklyn NY

IN A BAR

In Albuquerque
with
a naked girl on a small
lighted stage

What a clean, young body
in such a clear, bright
light

Certainly
the only place
most of them
would ever be likely
to see
anything like that

TO CARRY

A bed
to carry it
upon your back, the legs
telescoping forward
the mattress
tied in with a rope

To carry a keg of water
upon your back
what matter does it
to put to use what God
so to speak
gave
for a useful purpose

THESE WHEELS

Are climbing the tall stairs
they are liquid
and almost fall apart

Needless to say
I am some kind of engineer
on this project

The stairs could be your ass
these wheels my eyes
but I think I
am a better engineer than that

-- Judson Crews

Lusaka, Zambia

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