

TWO FROM THE FIRST DAY OF CLASSES

A student comes to my office:

"I have to get into your advanced comp class."

I tell him I can't help him.

"I have to," he says.

"Look," I say, "I can't help you,
but, just out of curiosity,
why can't you take somebody else's class?"

He says, "I can't pass anybody else's."

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I flee the office but am intercepted at the elevator.
The girl says, "I want to take Directed Studies."

"What do you want to study?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want to do a paper?"

"Okay."

"What would you like to do it on?"

She thinks it over for some time.

"I think," she says, "I'd like to do it on a book."

A POEM WITHOUT A POINT

outside the door, this guy pulled up on a fire-breathing
yamaha.

what with his other-worldly helmet,
an american flag decal patched above the ear,
we didn't even recognize him at first.
then someone said, "my god, it's terry!"

he sat with us and drank a fresca.
talked about his bike and changes in the bar.
watched a track meet on t.v.
played a couple games of pool,
shook hands, and went on down the highway.

it had been less than a year
since terry killed his father-in-law.
they'd sat up drinking into the early hours,

arguing some point as silly as it was volatile,
until all of a sudden terry grabbed a bread knife
and struck him.

i don't think it ever went to trial.
he received psychiatric treatment,
is free now on the condition that he doesn't drink.

the whole thing -- i don't know what to make of it:
terry was always a nice guy; he's still a nice guy.
he did drink a lot --
i remember one time he worked a double-shift behind the bar
and on his card he admitted to over a case of beer.

he sure doesn't look like he could kill a guy.

i've always been afraid i'd do something like he did,
although i've never really come close to it.
i guess we all have that fear.
i'd like to ask him if he ever feared it in advance,
but i guess that would be impolitic.

a criminologist friend of mine says the majority
of american killings take place in the kitchen.

ron koertge always told me, "home is where you hang
yourself."
or someone else, i guess.

LARRY THE WELDER

has his own rig,
works his ass off when he works at all,
takes a week off whenever he can,
and won't allow us to buy our own beers.

he's a little guy
but i've seen him stand up to a table of four
who were trying to make mock of a stranger.

larry got married recently,
but it isn't working out.
she won't sleep with him.
she tells him he's coarse and vulgar and insensitive.
he can't afford to leave her
because he shot his wad on nuptial gifts.

he doesn't have a high opinion
of the women's movement.