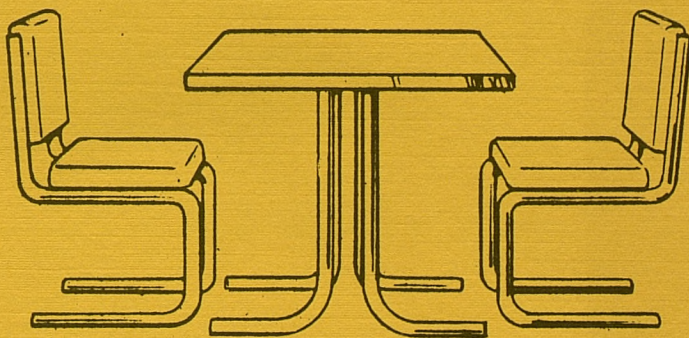
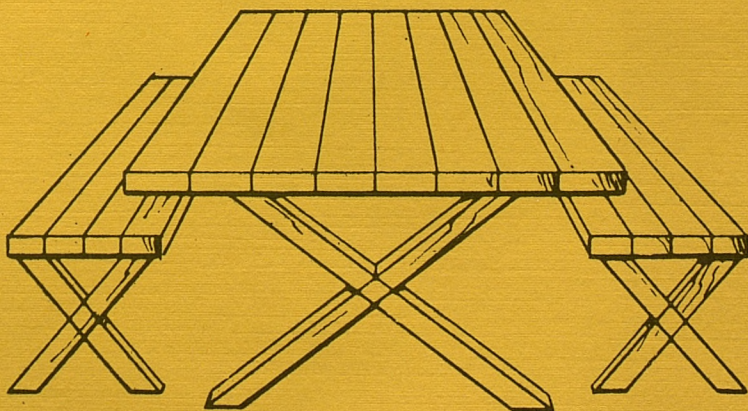


WORMWOOD



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KWITCHERBITCHIN

every once in a while
word leaks out from downtown
that the top brass
is coming
for a surprise visit
next Thursday afternoon
so they clean up the place.
they grade the roads
mop the floors
fix the doors
wash the windows
clean the mirrors
disinfect the toilets
put rolls of paper in the stalls
install new pencil sharpeners
and pick up all the scrap and garbage
out in the yards.
just like in the movies
when the Red Cross would come
to inspect the P.O.W. camps
and they gave everybody
blankets, food, cigarettes
just to make it look good.
when i said how pissed
i was about them
not coming out to our yard
the yardmaster said
"Kwitcherbitchin, kid."

ORDINARY EVERYDAY STUFF

i can see why
all the mediocre teams
in the playoffs
go down
two, three games to none
win one or two
then lose
people just worry
until it's a now or never
i have to do something
situation.
then they respond briefly
before the inevitable occurs.

READING OLD

reading old
poems letters stories
college term papers written
when i thought i was all grown up
i realize
what a little boy
i must still be
how there's really nothing wrong with that.

A HUNDRED

i'm driving down the road
through thick heavy fog.
can't see a damn thing
flying a hundred miles an hour
and navigating by instruments only.
either myself or some
innocent victim of circumstance
is liable to get killed
any minute now
and i don't care
or know why
i don't except maybe
i have this silly pride
that my 71 chevy
can still do
a hundred.

NEPHEW

my poor dog
and woe to the kitties
he can catch.
he discovers the sliding
closet doors which look
cleverly enough
just like the paneling
on the walls so naturally
he tries to open
them too.
unable to solve
this baffling mystery
he pouts in the corner
and doesn't want to draw
any goddamn pictures.

COUP DE VILLE

one day last week
this dude showed up at work
in his brand new cadillac
like a battleship
putting in to port
telling us about the
real leather burgundy interior
and the moon roof i mean
this caddy was loaded
even had these wiper blades
that automatically work
every thirty seconds
for fog and drizzle.

he showed up the next day
crying his brains out about
how he hadn't even made
the first payment yet
and the car is
smashed.

so i told him about how
when i was in seventh grade
i got a brand new pair
of white gym shoes
and everyone jumped
all over my feet
the first day i wore them
and turned them grey.

well fuck him
if he can't take a joke.

SATURDAY NIGHT

i turned on the light
put out the cigarette
took off my sunglasses
put them on the table
locked the doors
turned off the stereo
took a piss
turned off the light
and walked straight into the wall.
split my lip
in 3 different places
on the outside
2 different places
on the inside.
all day long
at work
on sunday
i had to tell this story.
by the time i went off duty
i had it that three big dudes
came over to my house
and i barely escaped.

PARENTHOOD

my dog was sick
and pissed on the living room rug
every day for two weeks.
and i was mean about it
spanked her relentlessly
and sent her to bed without supper.
i'm nice to her again
she's better now
and i'm really sorry
i was too stupid
to realize that
something was wrong.
when i pet her
she can't get close enough
pushes real hard
against my hand
sticks to me
like fly paper
everywhere i go
she's so glad i love her
and bears me no grudge.

BUSINESS TRIPS

not too long before
i quit the finance company
the boss came up to me
and said

"Now what would you think of a guy who called home
and asked to listen to a Grateful Dead album
on the telephone from New Jersey?"

i could see that he was in no mood
for fucking around and that of course
i would be measured
by my reply.

"Well" i lied

"at least i didn't put it
on the expense account."

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

i wouldn't shut up
or stop my loud farting
in the classroom
so the teacher said
"okay stroberg, that's it
let's go out in the hallway."
i'd been through this before.
he would yell and cuss me out
then he'd slap me around a little
and that would be it.
not this time.
i was told
that i was going
to run continuous laps
around the school building
until the t.v. coverage
of america's first space shot was over
or school ended
whichever came first.
naturally
i let the air out of his tires.
what choice did i have?

-- Paul Stroberg

Lombard IL

A LOUSY FIFTY QUID

"If you publish that story
you'll never see your son again
and surely he's worth more to you
than a lousy fifty quid...."

The story eventually appeared
in an Arts Council anthology
edited by Charles Osborne and Margaret Drabble.

My son, Jonathan, is five years old
I imagine he's started school now
his brown hair thicker and eyes bright as topaz
and in his small hand which resembles mine
he's holding a pencil and writing down his name.

I've not seen him for three years
the divorce court has not only given her custody
but barred me from access.

Few people have ever read the story
let alone remember it, the fifty quid was soon spent
and the anthology has been remaindered
I don't know whether it's been worth it
but at the time I had no alternative
and my decision would be the same again.

FROM WARS OF THE ROSES: 48

At Jacob's Well opposite the City Hall
Nick drinks his half of bitter and orders pie and peas.
He edits Little Word Machine and Woolcity Rocker
runs a pop group, Uterior Motives,
and lives in a terrace house high up in Undercliffe
with two dogs and a cat, a sweeping view of the bowl of
Bradford.

At thirty, his hair receding slightly, thin
he's full of energy, planning various projects, an entre-
preneur

bridging the world of rock and literature.

He intends to make it on the media, writing for glossy
magazines,

has visions of himself a star, top of the pops:

once after a mile swim at Windsor Baths

(Victorian result of Chadwick's sanitary reforms)

he told me he intended doing for Bradford

what Hemingway had done for Paris in The Moveable Feast.

MONICA ON POETRY

"So you're a poet," she said,
"well, I afraid I don't like poetry
not all that modern stuff I mean
all about the author's precious soul
and the state of his emotions
it's so self-obsessed and egotistical ..."

"I prefer a book like Jaws
or better still the film. It riveted me
to the seat -- that opening scene
the girl swimming at midnight
the white shark's dorsal fin
slicing through the water ..."

"Or a book like the Story of O
that really turned me on -- those whips
and I love the stories of Roald Dahl
especially his children's books
James and the Giant Peach
or Charlie and the Chocolate Factory ..."

"Why don't you write something like that
or be a mercenary and go off to Africa
or some such place
write about WAR. Make some bread,"
she said.

-- David Tipton

Bradford, England

BITING IRONY

A few blocks from where I live, there's a shop
that deals exclusively in gold. A neatly-painted
sign on the brick wall above the littered alley,
proclaims, in block letters, that they'll pay cash
for gold coins and jewelry, dental gold, and gold-
plated items. Wouldn't it be too chic to have a
necklace strung with the incisor caps of the poor?

-- Greg Boyd

Northridge CA

JERRY

Jerry wanted to win the short story contest in the worst way. Moose, his father, would buy him the .22 rifle he had wanted ever since he had begun Junior High. His English teacher, Mr. Zellar, was the only person in the whole world who understood him. Maybe he would recognize Jerry's story and make him the winner. Something good had to happen in 9th grade. He hadn't made the football team, he hadn't made the basketball team, Donna Fisher sat on red-faced Henry Asher's shoulder but she wouldn't ask Jerry for a date. Every night his mother made him do the dishes. He stared at his face in the dark window above the sink and sang, "Oh Do-onna, Oh Da-nna,/ Oh Do-ona, Oh Do-oona,/ I had a girl, Donna was her name,/ Since she left me,/ I've never been the same,/ but I luuuuv miyy girl,/ go-oone a-way,/ Oh Do-onna, Oh Da-oona." Enough of that shit. Zellar was gonna make him the short story winner. Moose was gonna come up with the .22. He was gonna poke a couple rounds into the back of Moose's brain while he sat reading The Saturday Evening Post in his overstuffed chair. He'd stop by school to thank Mr. Zellar and try to get off a couple of shots at the coaches before going to Donna's house. With motivation like that how could he not win the short story contest? He had finished the dishes. He looked at his image in the dark kitchen window and cracked a wicked grin.

-- Jim Klein

Rutherford NJ

CHOOSING THE CORNERSTONE

The day at the quarry is spent with whips and chains;
Stones that the elephants cannot roll
are forcibly dragged by the naked men.
The sun at the quarry is always orange and hangs low
in powdered air, smoking like a pepper
curled on an iron grill.
The faces of the slaves are folded brown rags
on a kind of skin. Archers stand on the rim
excited with bows and eagles of prey.
There is no escape.

The quartermaster shouts through filed teeth;
he waves his staff of thorns
at a grey dog with a skinny tail.

They swallow poison water together at the well.

Ever dust of the hammers.

Spitting camels pull the carts

when the buffaloes fail.

A jade earring dangles from the elongated lobe

of a clubfooted soldier.

Sand dunes form in gasping lungs

while curious monkeys look up

at the men from the forest.

Wooden logs scrape over sleek granite.

I found the cornerstone. It was tilted, half-dressed

next to a basket of figs and melons

dehydrated in oceanic heat.

Tiny chips were still falling with drops of blood and water

because a creature without a nose was pounding

at it with a mallet of bronze.

No one noticed the blasphemous flaw,

so we called for the iron levels

and the infernal machines of loading.

We strapped the slab with rosettes of pink and green,

the twisted pelt of a diseased leopard,

on a high cart and pointed broken bones

Toward the valley.

Everyone took a hand at lashing with frayed ropes

heavy with the sweat of the day.

It was necessary to do this to make the first turn

of the gigantic wheels.

The passage to the site of the cathedral was filled

with broken vases, the usual polyhedrons

of waste and disgorge.

It was filled with cowering tigers

issuing mold in the darkness.

It was filled with abandoned pieces of armor

and men crying for water, huddled

behind piles of tortoise shells

and glassy beads of trade.

When we finally arrived at the level floor, much brutality

had settled down to the soles of leather

footwear. We presented the cornerstone raw

to the Master Mason for approval.

We found him sitting in the shade of a pavilion covered

with red wedges and pillars of smoke. He was a giant,

(He was an expert at lines going from point A to point B.)

His elegant moustache finally met somewhere below

his waist and was tied there with a thong

Of silk. (He kept a large spider for his muse and companion.

It was said the spider measured the spans

of the rafters. Anything is possible.)

Our cornerstone was summarily placed on a towering pile

previously selected by others for the honor.

(At least it is on the top of the heap.)

I see it shining there like a Moorish virgin in damask
robes. It smiles behind its veil of delirium
at the promise of sacred kisses and prayer.
The configuration on the surface is subtle:
it will only be recognized when the cathedral
is finished,
when a thousand thousand tons
Of carefully laid stone crushes her shriveled breasts.
To remove the abomination
it will be necessary to unbuild the cathedral
Stone by stone.

-- David A. Adams

Bird Island MN

CALLING THE MOON BY NAME

we said he was crazy,
'cause he looked through a telescope
at the moon
then howled,
and howled again.
and the dogs joined in,
the way they do
when the fire trucks
get their sirens going.
and we hear tell,
from a lady who knows,
that he had thirteen,
that's right, thirteen,
pictures and drawings
of the moon in his room,
and a book of black magic
dead in the center of the floor.
he called it his bible,
and cackled like a bundle
of kindling breaking.

he stayed up
all night one hot friday
with a pile of empty cans
in front of him,
and right before god
and everybody,
took a pair of tin shears,
cut those cans
into one-inch squares,
then stitched them bits
into the lining of his coat.

he wore that coat year 'round.
said something 'bout
how they used to drop
tin foil from the bombers
to fuzzy up the radar.
and the kids believed it,
said you couldn't see him
pass in the dark,
though you could hear
the scrape-scrapin' of his coat.

he said he was too ornery to die,
but here's how we found him:
wearing that coat full of tin,
standing on that book of magic,
one crooked finger reaching
for the light socket,
and, godless old goat,
calling the moon by name.

REFRIGERATOR GOTHIC I

she hides her valuables
in the refrigerator
to protect them from fire.
that must make you
the most precious baggage of all,
stuffed into the freezer
like a misplaced, pituitary embryo.

she said she wanted to keep you
just the way you were.
with that tiny, tattooed teardrop
tugging at your profile,
how could she ever let you go?
but you were so untouched,
so complete and self-possessed,
until you woke from that nap
with blood running down your neck.
it was too late for regrets.
your lips were turning blue.

whenever the compressor kicks in,
you find yourself humming
right along with it.
it must be the freon
she injects into your veins.
how you hate the stuff.
that first heady rush
sends you skidding
into frightful shivering spells

followed by slow, protracted dreams
of icebergs sliding
into the Greenland Sea.

but here's your little secret.
a puddle, hardly bigger
than a footprint,
has condensed on the floor.
and you've contrived
a high, chirping noise in your sinuses.
it's just loud enough to wake her.
the floorboards creak
when she comes to investigate,
and the moon collaborates,
dipping into the trees.
you hold your frosty breath
as she opens the door,
slips on the puddle,
and pitches headfirst for your arms,
cast forever
into an abject, falling posture.

-- Chuck Oliveros

Atlanta GA

BUFFER

tugs on discarded
pant leg & growls.
I tug back & growl
but let him dominate.
He's very small &
needs to feel tough.

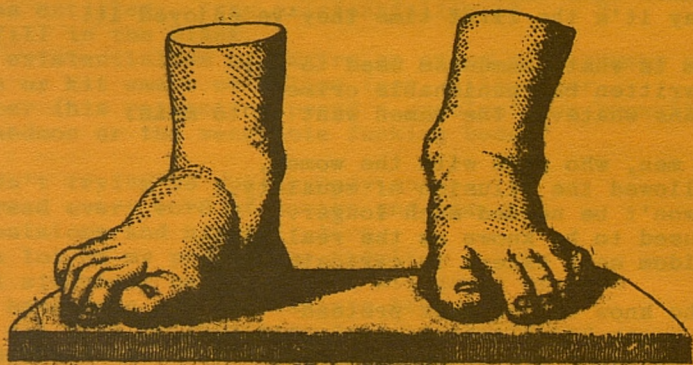
SENSE OF PROPORTIONS

Wool blend shirts are
too wide in shoulders.
Bought extra large to
get sleeves to reach.
Sacrificed sense of
proportions for
Korean price.

-- Phil Weidman

North Highlands CA

gerald locklin's



the women have won

THE WOMEN HAVE WON

they leave their men for weeks at a time
and when they return
they're not only taken back,
they're welcomed.

their men, when they stay out on them,
call home with apologies
and wonder what may happen
in their absence.

when a man speaks out for men,
his job is in jeopardy.

dividing and conquering,
the women fuck their men's friends
and say it's the first time they've enjoyed it.

sexism is what communism used to be,
an unwritten but punishable crime.
it means whatever the women want it to mean.

a few men, who side with the women,
are allowed the illusion of equality.
they won't be needed much longer.
what used to be known as the real man
is seldom seen except in caricature.

men who know better must pretend
every woman has a talent or intelligence.
their opinions are accorded merit,
even where thoroughly uninformed.
they are not to be contradicted, god forbid, interrupted.

i read that women now smoke more than men.

the most assertive take assertiveness courses.
after a drink they are more assertive yet.
their men take sensitivity training.
a man who asserts himself after a drink
has a drinking problem.
if he acts up, he is in the midst
of a mid-life crisis.
where possible, his behavior
is professionally modified.

the men who still ostensibly wield power,
don't dare risk the wrath of the women.

the women have won.

for a while.

THE DEATH OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

of all people, he must have been
the least surprised by death.
i wasn't surprised by his death either,
not that i knew anything about his health,
but because i must, as part of my job,
have about fifteen minutes communicable knowledge
of current intellectual trends,
and so i am aware that existentialism
is a word only uttered today
by norman mailer, me, and a few retarded philosophy majors,
and i doubt either mr. mailer or the philosophy majors
are complimented by my inclusion of myself.

in college and graduate school, you see,
i basically got by with one term paper.
it was entitled: "the existentialism of ... "
you fill in the blank.
"the existentialism of sartre or camus or tennyson or
byron or kit smart or milton (yes, milton) or
chaucer (his retraction posed a problem), or beowulf
or caedmon or the venerable fucking bede."

i wasn't trying to put anybody on --
i'd read every word of sartre and his
commentators and his imitators,
and a lot of my professors hadn't,
and i sincerely believed that all great writers
must have been existentialists because,
like all true believers or true non-believers,
i was convinced that for a writer
not to have been an existentialist
would have disqualified him as great.
all of this no doubt was in reaction
to the catholic schools i had attended
where it was taught that all great writers
were, at the very least, latent or closet catholics.

my standard term paper
received about five hundred a-plusses,
while much more knowledgeable and ingenious students
received Incompletes for their herculean-himalayan
and perpetually unfinished papers on "iconography
in arnold as reflected in victorian furniture."

not only did i preach existentialism,
but i began to live
what i knew to be a distorted, popularized
edition of it.
i'm sure my series of marriages
(perhaps mailer's as well)

owe at least a little to sartre,
although they are neither that simply
explained nor regretted.
and some of my existentialism was,
and i hope still is,
the genuine article.
i lecture once a semester to every class
on sartre's "existentialism is a humanism."
i'd give you the lecture right now,
but, what with declining enrollments,
i'd better hope you'll sign up and pay your tuition.

so sartre is dead now,
along with his vocabulary-world,
and the moral certainties of religion
are alive again and inhabiting the uncrowded humanities
building
(along with structure, necessity, and remedial comp.),
there is also talk, of course, of faculty salaries,
student evaluations, and the inevitability of layoffs.
i am among the loudest of the talkers,
because if i were ever laid-off
i wouldn't be able to afford
to mope around the deux magots --
i doubt i could even afford the polly maggoo anymore --
and moping is becoming a lost art anyhow.

jean-paul, they have cremated your feet,
at which i only metaphorically sat.
strangely enough, however,
my current metaphysical problem remains
whether i am capable of the freedom, the alienation,
responsibility, and angst,

of the either/or

of a marriage/dissolution.

D-DAY, 1980

coming out of the movie, "yanks,"
my little boy asks me,
"did we do something good
in the second world war?"

he's ten years old
and all he's ever heard of our military history
is napalm and radiation, washita
and the little big horn, cuba and
chile, and that george washington

had wooden teeth.
i suspect that it's not good for a little boy
to grow up hearing that his country's always wrong,
even if it usually has been.

this time i'm able to tell him,
"yes, the normandy invasion
was one of the greatest military operations
in history, and not only did we bring it off,
but it's good for the world that we did."

i grew up on "the sands of iwo jima;"
my son is growing up on "coming home."
what adjustments he is having to make!
what adjustments i've made!

ALSO, MY SHOES STILL COME UNTIED

the four of us were walking
along the street, when my girl broke out laughing.
"look!" she said, "chuck's steak house!"
i made the connection and smiled sheepishly.

but the other couple wanted to know
what the joke was,
so my girl told him how we'd been in this same town
a couple of years before

and this nice couple had pulled over
to ask directions to chuck's steak house
and i didn't have any idea where it was,
but i was in such a good mood

from the drinks we'd had together
that i gave them detailed directions anyway
which, as we later learned, must have taken them
several miles out of their way.

"well," the other guy remarked,
"i suppose you've matured since then?"

all my life i've been called immature
by parents, nuns, priests, coaches,
peers, wives, other women, not to mention
literally thousands of students,

and most recently by my kids,
as they reach the age of evaluation.
now i have to hear it
from a little-mag poet.

LAST OF THE BIG SPENDERS

after the matinee
i treat us to a lunch
at musso's.
to hold down the tab
i order only a half a head of lettuce
for myself. then i finish
up my wife's welsh rarebit
and my son's ravioli,
and i wipe up the sauce
from my daughter's spaghetti
with the great sourdough bread.

noticing at a nearby table
four of the actresses
from the play we have just seen,
i rise and approach them:
"excuse me," i say, "we enjoyed
the show very much,"
and i return to the table.

"why did you do that?"
my wife asks me. "you never do
that sort of thing, and besides
i thought you were bored by the play."

"i was hoping," i tell her,
"they might offer me their leftovers."

I SUSPECT OUR FUTURE CONVERSATION WILL BE ALTERED

he's a bright, talented, and interesting guy,
and i've enjoyed running into him
every year or two
and sharing a couple drinks and stories.
it's been eight or nine years
since he was in my classes.

but he's also a hustler, a con-man,
on the golf course or with women,
especially those who have money,
and he thought he had me conned
back in the good old days.

so, after all these years,
and i'm not even sure why,
i picked one particular night
of this particular year,
and i finally said to him,

"you know, when you were taking english 459, i knew all the time you were getting the answers from the pretty, longlegged, skinny, blackhaired girl, who always sat next to you in the back row. i knew it because i was going out with her."

i'm not bluffing,
and he doesn't bother to deny it.

he does a good job of maintaining his composure, even admits he was doing quite a bit of cheating in those days and that he figured there wasn't that much to be learned in school anyway.

"not if you never crack a book," i say.

later he says, "why didn't you flunk me?"

"three reasons," i say: "first of all, hardly anyone, including me, was flunking anyone in those days; secondly, i figured it was no skin off my ass; but most importantly, i considered the evidence inadmissible."

THE ROAR OF THE GREASEPAINT

when my daughter does something praiseworthy, such as counting to five for the first time, we clap for her and she claps for herself. loudly, joyously, unabashedly, she applauds her accomplishment. you and i are not allowed to lead the cheers for ourselves. we are supposed to be unaffected by our successes, practically oblivious to them. it is considered the worst of form to sing one's own praises, to toot one's own horn.

then again, if we were allowed to lead our own cheers, we might discover that there wasn't all that much to cheer for anyway.

GROWING UP ALIVE

dave cherin so fell in love with the movie,
the great santini, that he instituted
bedchecks and reveille
and took to addressing his kids
as "little pukes" and "shitbirds."

i blundered into their living room
an hour before seder
and the kids were running about
calling their parents and each other
shitbirds and little pukes.

one morning dave came down to breakfast
to find the three kids seated before bowls
of sugared nails
because the great santini's kids
"ate nails and shit bricks."

it's a helluva way to bring up kids,
but when i arrived at the surprise birthday party for dave,
the cake was decorated with tanks and howitzers'
and read, "to the great cherini:
happy birthday

the shitbirds love you."

SOMETHING'S HAPPENING

i've never visited her at the school she teaches at.
i've met one or two of her colleagues
once or twice off-campus.
i've never met her principal.
she seems to like him.
maybe she's got something going with him.
she gets pissed off when i suggest it,
so possibly she does.
on the other hand, she's so busy
with the combination of her job and our baby
that i'm not sure she would have the time, literally,
to fit it in.

she talks to me about things that go on at her school,
but a lot of times i don't listen as closely as i should.
i'm too busy rehearsing my recitation of my own day's
events.

and as the baby demands more of each of us,
we legitimately have less to give each other.

it's my sixth child, and i've finally learned not to
fight it --

i let myself enjoy her.
so it's nobody's fault that we have so little time
to hear about each other's schools.

i wonder if she thinks my school is close to what it was
ten years ago when she was going there,
when girls, to my amazement and her rage, sometimes
pursued me.
i know how things have changed, but can she know it?

i don't know if we're growing very close
or very far apart.

SIX OF ONE

t.c. is a broker,
which isn't always a compliment,
but t.c.'s the sort of broker
who devotes the better part of each day
to horses, prizefights, pool, and such pursuits.
i've known him about fifteen years.
i can remember when he tried
to get me to invest in denny's restaurants.
i didn't have any money,
but even if i had
i wouldn't have bought into denny's with it
because i can't stand denny's hamburgers --
i much prefer bob's big boys.
t.c. used to get genuinely angry with me:
"gerry," he'd say, "don't you realize
that denny's charbroils their burgers,
while bob fries his?
fried food causes ulcers!"

and i am sure that fried food does,
but, unfortunately, there's been recent evidence
to suggest that charbroiling is linked to stomach cancer.

anyway, though, i ran into t.c. the other day
for the first time in a long time
at a kentucky derby party.
he didn't mention denny's,
which i must admit are now
on every other block in california,
and i must also admit
he was dressed in a lot more expensive threads
than my penny's jeans.

but we both had to admit
that we've had to cut back a lot on our drinking
because of the poor shape of our stomach linings.

GOLDIE GIRL

for weeks the very nice
and seemingly affectionate couple upstairs
had been regularly beating the shit
out of each other.

he'd be yelling, "you bitch,
you goddamn fucking bitch,"
and she'd be screaming,
"i swear to god if you hit me
one more time i'll get a gun
and shoot you right square
in the balls."

the whole neighborhood could hear them.
if one of them had actually killed the other
we would all have had trouble explaining to the police
why we didn't lift a finger to intervene
or call the cops.
the readers of the newspapers,
and perhaps, if the killing was sufficiently bizarre,
time magazine as well,
would never have understood that this was just one more
of the nightly seal beach marital, premarital,
extramarital, and antimarital quarrels.

but one night they finally did break up,
and they did it with a flair.
after the slammed doors, the flying objects,
and the broken windows, she wandered around
the neighborhood calling for her dog.
"goldie," she sing-songed, "i'm leaving, goldie ...
we're leaving ... come home, goldie, so you and i
can leave the fucker"

and he yelled down at her,
"you see, even the fucking dog
doesn't love your ass anymore!
no one loves you.
you're the world's most completely unloved person!"

and when she yelled back, "you'd better not
lay a hand on my plants,"

he countered with, "are you shitting me --
i'll have every one of those fuckers
ripped to shreds by dawn."

and there hasn't been shit worth watching on t.v.

ON VIOLENCE: A NOTE TO REVIEWERS

neither rhythms nor images nor anything else on the
printed page is violent.

it is violent to have your teeth kicked out, and a
gang rape is violent, and what the freeway killer
has been doing is violent. literature may be the
occasion of violence, but violent people do not
sit down and write about their violence, they go
out and be violent, so let's quit kidding ourselves
that our turns of phrase, our oxymoronic sublimations
are true violence.

in doing so, we do a disservice to the violent and to
their victims.

PATRIOTIC POEM

alexander haig says there are things
americans must be willing to die for.

he is not talking to me;
he is talking to my children.

my children, let me only call to your attention
that no one asking you to sacrifice your lives
has sacrificed his.

THE CIRCUITS ARE IN DANGER OF OVERLOADING

gene dinelli comes to my office door
to ask me, "how do you communicate
with a toad?"

and when i give up, he says, "morse toad."

then he takes the high toad
and i take the low.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

the psychologist toni grant
is usually on talk-radio at the time
i'm driving to work.
i like her: she favors neither men nor women
and she makes people own up to their own bullshit.
she's sometimes a bit conservative, though,
as in her pronouncements on nudity.
she feels the private parts should remain private.

well, in theory, that's all fine and good.
but i'm living in a one-bedroom apartment
with my third wife and my sixth and seventh kids,
and every other weekend my fourth and fifth kids
stay with us and, sometimes in the summer,
my first and second and third kids fly out,
and frankly we are much more concerned
with getting a semblance of sleep
and not tripping over each other
than we are with whether or not
we see each other's whonkers and pussies
and tits and balls.

i just came from my daily shower.
my two-year-old daughter chased me in,
trying to stick her harmonica up my ass.
she may have figured that was the way
i'd play it best.
she also likes to recite,
"mommy has a crotch, daddy has a crotch,
my brother has a crotch, i have a crotch,
et cetera," and she's right,
everybody has a crotch --
even dr. toni grant has a crotch --
it's just that dr. toni grant's crotch
lives in a larger apartment
than my crotch and my wife's crotch,
and the crotches of my various progeny.

i hope the memory of their father's crotch
will not live on in my children's nightmares
as a sort of cross between
an anteater and a tarantula.
if so, there's supposed to exist
in the playgrounds of our archetypes
a mommy crotch that envelopes and vanquishes
the hairy submarine.

RIP

his favorite actor was
rip torn, and his favorite author,
washington irving.

he only entered the ocean
on afternoons when red flags
streamed from the lifeguard towers.

when drunk, he was never described
as "smashed," "blotto," or "polluted."

he never wore holes in the knees or
elbows of his clothing, but always caught
his pockets on a nail.

his favorite proverb was, "as you sew,
so shall you, et cetera."

he loved especially the flora
and the fauna of the river banks.

he mastered parachuting
at an early age.

the logs for his mountain hideaway,
he sawed in the direction of
the grain.

by trade he was a swindler.

his forte was the clever reply.

he was a student of the history
of urban english homicides.

his dreams invariably were of undulations.

for relaxation he attended boisterous westerns.

on his gravestone, the carver abbreviated
requiescat in pace and forgot the periods.

THE PORNOGRAPHER'S FAVORITE ANTACID

sure, rolaids spell relief,
but what do tums spell backwards?

THE LEADER OF THE PACK

in my fantasy i am the leader
of a gang of bikers.

except that we are all middle-aged,
have bad backs, and ride
exercycles in formation.

ROGER HOTSPUR STRIKES BACK

he's the only guy i've ever known
who got even with his employer
by having a hemorrhoidectomy.

he's nearing twenty-five years on the force
and planning to retire
and his superiors were giving him a ration of shit
over schedule or days off or some such thing

so he went to his proctologist
and said, "you remember that butthole operation
you said i should have someday?
can you make sure my insurance will cover it?
if so, how long will it take you
to sharpen your scalpel?

and the doctor said, "i'll reserve
accommodations for you for sunday night."

since he's a motorcycle sergeant,
he figures he can count on a couple of months
at the very least of leave-with-pay
for a service-connected disability.

he admits, however, that the vendetta
was not consummated without temporary, minor
physical discomfort.

incidentally, just to increase my standing
in my neighborhood,
he addressed the card which he sent me
from the hospital to

Gerald Locklin, President
Seal Beach Gay Liberation.

MINDLESSNESS OVER MATTER

in the campus parking lot
i see a bumper sticker that i haven't seen before:
"biology is not destiny."

my first thought is of all those species
for whom biology probably and cruelly
is or was destiny:
the dodo-bird, for instance,
and the snail-darter,
and i wonder if man is all that different.

but i'm not ready to swallow socio-biology whole either,
and it occurs to me, reflecting on something i read
in time magazine, that perhaps we could arrive at
a sort of consensus, compromise bumper sticker,
something like, "biology is only sixty percent
of destiny."

then i get to thinking about what bumper stickers
really signify: the belief that loud, visible,
and repeated statements can transform
or create reality.

i'm teaching a course in short story/short film
(actually i'm taking the course as i teach it)
and i can see that the person who owns the car
that sports the biology/destiny sticker
stands firmly alongside munsterberg and arnheim
and the other formative theorists
in her opposition to kracauer and bazin
and the realists.
she feels that if enough people read her bumper sticker
then, even if biology used to be destiny,
it soon will cease to be.

and maybe she's right, i muse,
and maybe i should take a lesson
from her transformational project.
maybe i should trade my car in on
one with the largest bumper in the world
and start plastering it with such hopeful pronouncements
as:

anything ernest hemingway could do,
gerald locklin can do better!

and, gerald locklin is a credit
to the human race!

if i really want to test the power of words,

i should try, gerald locklin has made
his mother very proud of him.

for starters, however,
it's probably best i try something
a trifle less arrogant,

something like,
please buy gerald locklin's books.

DROWNING THE HATCHET

because i am so much more insecure
than i can afford to let myself seem,
i doubt that any of the women
i have ever been with
realize how important, on their best days,
they have been to my survival.

they are more apt to be aware of how close
they have come, on their worst days, to assisting
me in my destruction,
since i seem to have taken upon myself the mission
of depicting in print woman at her worst.

but there have been innumerable times
that i wanted to tell a woman how she had saved me,
had wanted to publish it to all the world,

but i didn't, for the simple reason that
the moment when it seemed the right thing to do
passed,
after which it seemed the wrong thing.

so here's a toast to all the women i've been with
on their best days, my worst;
may they be blessed for having saved,
my life, my sanity, my sexuality,
in ascending order of importance.

ah hell, i might as well toast those
who nearly did me in as well,
especially since they were so often
the same person.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

DRUMSTICK FOR CODY

first I found a stick
that would do
it was a little longer
than necessary
but you will grow

scrounged up
an old towel
which I cut
into 3-inch strips

I stapled these strips
to the stick and
stitched them down

then I covered them
with white buckskin
stitched that down
with waxed thread
& split the excess
into fringe

I cut more fringe
for the handle
added some brass tacks
and two wing feathers
from a magpie
Uncle Adam shot

and it was done

I hope it gives you songs
that glide
like that hawk
out the kitchen window
with all those clouds
floating like a painting
just above your
line of vision

-- Kirk Robertson

Fallon NV

THE COCK

Is a
clown

He crew
the night
through

Today
he is taken
to town

For a
stew

WHIT-

Suntide
robed like

A bride
of opulence

The power of
many fishes

Flashing
like tongues

PIECES

I've
pasted

To-
gether

Many
I've

Cut a-
part

THE MORE

I think
about
everything

The less
I give
a shit

About
any-
thing

IT IS NOT

As if
I imagined
her ass

Is all
there is --
pro-

Digiously
it would
suffice

WHEN I

Look at
a woman's
cunt

I want
to kiss
her toes

Her nose
and
everything

That's
in
between

-- Judson Crews

Albuquerque NM

LEANING TOWER OR PISA MADONNA

leans toward
you a
way from
you but never
quite goes
all the way

STUCK CAR THERMOSTAT MADONNA

heats up at the
wrong time boils
over leaves
you dry

OLYMPIC FLAME MADONNA

has everyone running after her

MADONNA OF THE COLD HOUSE

BACK DOOR MADONNA

is good enough
to eat but not
take out to eat

keeps some men from
taking off their
clothes others
once in her electric
blanket can't seem
to leave usually
the wrong ones

NYMPHOMANIAC MADONNA OF THE MAILS

puts out
more than
anyone

STUFFED MADONNA

RURAL MADONNA

she gets you down
to the basics

eat, eat he'd
said offering her
juicy peaches
chocolate tomatoes
champagne and
his dripping cock

-- Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY

VALLEY LIVING

It was so hot for early June.
The flies were everywhere, inside
and out. We killed them with
folded newspapers, but more of them
got in, and so we had to kill again.
The slapping sound of death
kept on and on, and later we had
to put on our sandals so we wouldn't step
all over the corpses.
The women drank coffee and water.
The men drank beer and got very drunk
(it was so hot). Finally, as they say,
the day was over and we all went
to bed. In the morning when we got up
all of us looked at the dead flies
and empty bottles and glasses
and everything looked like hell, but
we were quite proud.

OLD TIMES

When I was very young
there was a terrible war
and lots of people died.
I didn't understand too much.
I went to school and loved
to mix the orange powder
into the white margarine.
My family was scattered.
My parents divorced.
And when the war was over
I remember bells ringing
everywhere. I knew I was
supposed to be happy, so
I smiled and said, "horrah."
And Mama said we should be
grateful, and I tried to be.

THE MARATHON MAN & THE AGING POET

I'm getting involved
with a runner.
He's up to 10 miles a day,
working on doing
a marathon in 6 more months.
I walk a 16-minute mile.

I'm falling
for the athletic type.
Worse, he has Ralph Nader
type dreams
of saving a small
section of the globe.
His new job doesn't
pay much
but it involves ethics
& makes him happy.

He's 8 years younger
& likes to get drunk
once a week.
He bares his firm young chest.
I bare my soul.
Drinking may be all
we have in common.

PAUL F.

paul is home with poison oak,
his wife, and his thoughts.
he sits around in his shorts
and itches everywhere.
i write and say, paul, have
you written any new poems?
he says, shove sand.
i think it must be some new
style he has contributed
to poetry. but i can't find
any examples.

REALIZATION

still afraid to fly
after all these years.
something about
being locked up in that machine
even with movies, music,
and drinks.
no sense of freedom.
maybe it isn't the plane.

MANUSCRIPTS

it's harder
for poets
who love
to say the sweet things
they feel
for one another;
instead they go home
& write letters,
or remember
what they were
thinking of saying
& touch their mouths
sensibly
while they type
a manuscript.

-- Ann Menebroker

Elk Grove CA

THE WIDOW

She was an artist and always dated
Older men because she felt they were
Wiser, more mature and serious.

She married a man who was thirty years
Her senior. When he died,
She painted his portrait from memory
At the wake. The painting had an uncanny
Resemblance to her father.

NAMES

When she married him,
She wanted to keep her identity
By retaining her last name.

The years passed and he died.
She felt a part of him was still
With her so she changed
Her last name to his.

-- d. h. lloyd

Long Beach CA

PRETTY BOY

we drank together
I was 59 and he was 29
and he could catch girls
like a spider catches flies
only faster than that:
he didn't have to wait.

he was a pretty boy,
well, he wasn't pretty to
me,
just to the girls --
slim body, tightly-fitting
clothes,
blue eyes, blonde locks,
perfectly-shaped
ears, nose, chin and so
forth.
also, one of his x-wives
told me he had a
big cock.
besides that, he had a
private income.

he held a mixed drink
while I sucked upon
beer after beer.

"when my old lady
goes out to fuck somebody,"
he said,
"I just put on my pajamas,
pull up the covers and
go to sleep."

"I can't do that,"
I said.

"it's just a hole,"
he said,
"you worry too much
about it."

he got up and
changed the record
on his stereo.
he moved like a gazelle.
there were no wrinkles
in his pants,
no spots or stains.
he was like something

off a drawing board.

with my pants
the pockets ripped open
the zipper didn't run
to the top
the belt curled,
cigarette holes appeared.
the pants were either
too long and
I stepped on them
with my heels
or they were too short
and showed stockings
which didn't cling.

he turned the stereo up
loud,
came back and
sat down.

"with women," I told him,
"I get attached,
I get sentimental."

he grinned at me
showing even white teeth.

"you know," I said,
"her pillow next to my
pillow; my car pushing
her stalled car down the
street; and when it rains,
you know, we listen to the
same rain from the same
bed. I could make you
a long list"

his grin increased.
he knew my women;
he managed to get into bed
with most of them.

"I don't like your women,"
he told me.

he got up
moved into his kitchen
and mixed himself a
new drink.
he had seltzer bottles,
and machinery which
hummed and clicked and
whirled.

he stood a moment under the kitchen light his hair looking more golden than ever. then he walked out with a glass tube sticking out of his drink. the tube had little colored veins running through it. he sat down and stirred his drink with the glass tube.

"o.k.," he said, sipping at his drink, "first, you don't dress right: you got to wear tight pants so your cock shows."

"wait a minute," I said, "I'm almost 60 years old"

"just listen to me," he said, "they got to see the cock, they like to see it, and if you don't have a big cock you wear a dildo: lots of guys do it. and it doesn't matter because once you get into them it's too late for them. and you've got to learn to dance good because women relate dancing to fucking. they think if you can dance good you can screw good."

"is there," I asked, "some truth in that?"

"of course not," he told me, "but truth has nothing to do with this thing."

"is there any more beer?" I asked.

"down by your leg," he said "you brought down three six-packs, remember?"

I said, "this beer is kind of warm."

"with a woman," he continued, "you must always make yourself seem to be unavailable. you must act disinterested; once she's solved you she's done with you; she needs a problem to work on."

"maybe," I suggested, "if they think they can control the man they can raise the child?"

he smiled gracefully, "no, they have the child to control the man."

"why don't you turn that god damned stereo down a bit?" I asked.

"just remember," he said, "there are 6,000 boats down at Marina del Rey with at least two beautiful whores on each of them and you'll never meet any of them."

"I've got to go," I told him.

"o.k.," he said,
"be cool, man"

I walked down toward
my court and
before I could get
to my door I had to
stop and vomit in the
bushes.

I finished
opened my door
and I went inside
and there was the bed
and there were the walls
hello
and the problem was
that it had happened before.
I went to the refrigerator
and found
a cold beer,
cracked it.

if you got up
in the morning
and if you had a
car on the street
and if that car
hadn't been stolen
and if you
got into it
and it started
then that was
miracle enough.

I drank the
cold beer.

I CAN'T STOP

people keep telling me
you know,
you ought to stop writing
those race track poems,
you have no idea
how boring they are.

well, I was at the track
the other day
and I had to go in
and take a piss.
I unzipped and stood there
grabbing and groping
and tugging;
I tugged and I groped and
I grabbed
and the guy next to me
said:

"my god, you must really
have a lot of it"
and I told him,
"nothing like that, sir,
I've got my shorts on
backwards."

I got it out
from underneath
and pissed half of it
down my leg.
then I went out
and caught a
six to one shot
who won
by four lengths.

this is
just another
boring poem.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED////////////////////////////////////

A Hard Row To Hoe: Working People Anthology, \$3.75 fm.
Art Cuelho, Box 249, Big Timber MT 59011. ¶ Leslie Woolf Hedley's On My Way To The Cemetery, \$7 fm. Ampers-
and Editions, Suite 218, 109 Minna St., San Francisco CA
94105. ¶ Steve Kowit's Mysteries, \$1 fm. Farpotshket
Press, P.O. Box 1851, San Diego CA 92112. ¶ Paul Feri-
cano's Commercial Break, \$4 fm. Poor Souls Press, P.O.
236, Millbrae CA 94030. ¶ Robert Head's I Once Was
Alive, unpriced fm. Samisdat, Box 129, Richford VT 05476.
¶ Kirsten Thorup's Love From Trieste (transl. fm Danish
by Nadia Christensen and Alexander Taylor), \$5 and Murat
Alpar's Memet (transl. fm. Danish by Alexander Taylor),
\$3.50 fm. Curbstone Press, 321 Jackson St., Willimantic
CT 06226 -- other Danish translations available from the
same source: Marianne Larsen's Selected Poems (\$4.50),
Henrik Nordbrandt's God's House (\$3.50), Jørgen Sonne's
Flights (\$3.50), and Uffe Harder's Paper Houses (\$3.50).
¶ Art On The Line is an important, well-printed series
in translation (essays, interviews, manifestos) edited
by James Scully: Cesar Vallejo's Autopsy On Surrealism
and The Mayakovsky Case plus Roque Dalton's Poetry And
Militancy in Latin America -- each \$3 fm. Curbstone
Press (address above). ¶ Robert Crosson's Geographies,
\$4 and Paul Vangelesti's Another You, \$4 fm. Red Hill
Press, P.O. Box 2853, San Francisco CA 94126.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED////////////////////////////////////

Franz Douskey's Rowing Across The Dark, unpriced fm.
University of Georgia Press, Athens GA 30602. ¶ Larry
Smith's Scissors, Paper, Rock, \$3.50 fm. Cleveland State
University Poetry Center, 1983 East 24th St., Cleveland
OH 44115. ¶ Philip Shirley's Endings, \$2.50 and Jeanie
Thompson's Lotus & Psalm, \$3.50 fm. Baltic Avenue Press,
1027 South 30th St. (#G-2), Birmingham AL 35205.

RECOMMENDED////////////////////////////////////

Ann Menebroker's The Blue Fish (free for postage) fm.
Bogg Publications, 2010 North 21st St., Arlington VA
22201. ¶ Peter Wild's Heretics \$2, Ingrid Swanberg's
Flashlights \$2, and Jonathan Moore's A Protecting Music
fm. Ghost Pony Press, 2518 Gregory St., Madison WI 53711.
¶ Nichola Manning's Historical Document \$3.95 and John
Yamrus' Someone Else's Dreams \$4.95 fm. Applezaba Press,
P.O. Box 4134, Long Beach CA 90804. ¶ Charles B. Taylor's
Leo (A Round Of Poems) \$2 and Albert Huffstickler's The
Remembered Light \$2 fm. Slough Press, Box 370, Edgewood
TX 75117. ¶ Dennis Gulling's Cheap Respect, unpriced fm.
Crawlspace Press, 908 West 5th St., Belvidere IL 61008.

RECOMMENDED (CONTINUED)////////////////////////////////////

Thomas Land's Prince Bluebeard's Castle/The Splendid Stags \$4.25 fm. author, 64 Highgate High St. (Top Floor), Highgate Village, London N6 5HX, England. ¶ Terry Kennedy's Heart, Organ, Part Of The Body \$3 and Gene Fowler's Return Of The Shaman \$4 fm. Second Coming Press, P.O. Box 31249, San Francisco CA 94131. ¶ Tony Quagliano's Fierce Meadows \$2.50 fm. Petronium Press, 1255 Nuuanu Ave. (#1813), Honolulu HI 96817. ¶ William Hathaway's The Gymnast Of Inertia \$5.95 fm. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge LA 70803. ¶ Stephen Corey's The Last Magician \$6.50 fm. Water Mark Press, 175 East Shore Rd., Huntington NY 11743. ¶ The Complete Poems of Jean Genet (effective translations + original French) \$8.95 fm. Manroot, Box 982, South San Francisco CA 94080. ¶ Bisbee AZ poets will not be silent and have published two collections: Frankie Rios' Feet (Ted Weller, Steve Bovee, Ellis Heckman, Judy Hamilton, Chris Bovee, Nick Sedgwich) and Ballwackers (Ellis Heckman, Steve Bovee, Ted Weller, Tom Stacy) \$2.95 each fm. Ted Weller, Box 712, Bisbee AZ 85603.

NEW MAGAZINE EXCHANGES////////////////////////////////////

Black Messiah, \$12/3 nos. fm. Vagabond Press, 1610 North Water St., Ellensburg WA 98926 (first issue is a tribute to Henry Miller). ¶ Goblets, \$2.50/no. fm. 22 Press, P.O. Box 6236, Wilmington DE 19804. ¶ Icarus, \$1.50/no. fm. Missouri Western State College, 4525 Downs Dr., St. Joseph MO 64507. ¶ Puerto del Sol, \$2.95/yr. newly resuscitated fm. New Mexico State Univ., Box 3E, Las Cruces NM 88003. ¶ Xanadu, \$4.50/2 nos. fm. Long Island Poetry Collective, Box 773, Huntington NY 11743. ¶ Primavera (an annual of writing and art by women), \$5/no. fm. Ida Noyes Hall, Univ. of Chicago, 1212 East 59th St., Chicago IL 60637. ¶ Quercus, \$3.50/no. fm. Poet Tree Inc., 2791 24th St., Sacramento CA 95818. ¶ The Living Color, unpriced fm. Jack Stevenson, 417 Euclid Ave., Elmira NY 14905 (latest issue has a Bukowski section). ¶ The New Southern Literary Messenger, \$1 (men) or 59¢ (women)/copy fm. 302 South Laurel St., Richmond VA 23220.

NOTICES////////////////////////////////////

WORMWOOD:89 will carry a complete list of our exchange magazines (includes subscription prices and addresses). ¶ The WORMWOOD chapbook for 1983 will be devoted to the work of Steve Richmond and the 1984 will be an encore by Charles Bukowski, whose 1978 chapbook is now officially sold out. Chapbooks still available for \$2 per (first class mailings) are: 1975: Lyn Lifshin's Paper Apples; 1976: Ronald Koertge's cheap thrills!; 1977: Gerald Locklin's Pronouncing Borges; 1979: David Barker's Scenes From A Marriage; 1980: Phil Weidman's Blind Man's Bluff; 1981: Judson Crews' If I: 79 Poems.

The edition of this issue has been limited to 700 numbered copies, the first 60 being signed by Gerald Locklin. The copy now in your hand is number: 595

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Because of the prohibitive postal/mailing costs these days, all subscribers are reminded that WORMWOOD is mailed out 2-4 issues per mailing. In a year's time, four issues are prepared, but they are mailed out at irregular times. The press cannot respond to library claims when the issues in question have not been released for mailing to all of our subscribers. Be assured that delivery is guaranteed for all paid-up subscriptions up through and including issue 96, which will contain our next three-year index. With the publication of issue 94, WORMWOOD will decide whether or not to publish up through and including issue 108.

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