

lay around and smooch. She smiled like a child.
I held her face in my hands and kissed her.
"You don't have to go to Brooklyn anymore," she said.
We both nodded solemnly.
Then someone knocked on the door and she opened it and
it was Ed, the next door singer. She let him in and
they started
to talk.
I went back to my chair and couldn't hear what they said.
It became night as they talked.
The cars went by and the rain stopped.
Ed went back to his apartment and my wife came in.
She smiled, bent down to kiss me and then sat in my lap.
We listened to apartment sounds: movement, pipe noises,
floor boards groaning under weight, distant televisions.
I don't have to go to Brooklyn anymore, I thought.
I can stay in Queens forever.

THE MAD WOMEN OF UNEMPLOYMENT

They really want me to get a job.
One of them, a fat one, an ugly squat New York type
middle aged wench, a bitch, a foul thick slow
serious dull dumb purposeful slob of a woman
once said to me at an interview:
"Where do you get off?"
in reference to my suggestion that I was looking
for a job that might pay more than the 5.40
an hour she was offering me as a stock clerk
in Chatsworth.
And she was serious and reasonable and smiling.
She really wanted to know where I got off.
I contained my anger. I vibrated.
I didn't say
anything.
She filled out some little cards and papers
and then sent me to the interview
out in Chatsworth.
I vowed to myself as I drove the stupid
monotonous streets
that if she fucked up my unemployment
and if my checks stopped coming through
I would kill that little bureaucratic hog-woman.
But my checks came through anyway
and I didn't have to kill her.
Another woman looked up into my frowning face
as I handed her the forms she'd asked me to fill out,
and she squealed in protest, looking at the forms,
that I wasn't eligible for an interstate claim.
She was in agony. She had the face of a little girl,
stupid with fear, trapped beneath the filmy horror

of a decaying old hag.
She didn't remember me from ten minutes before
when she had handed me the forms.
I vibrated but didn't explode.
I was humble, I'd do whatever she said.
I wanted to cause her horrendous pain.
I wanted to be the cause of her excruciatingly
deliriously horrible and painful death.
But I just calmly and meekly asked her what forms
I was supposed to fill out.
I waited quietly while she flailed about in her own
confusion for a few minutes until
she got it all figured out.
As she handed me the new forms
I saw in her dead eyes that she remembered me from
somewhere.

I refuse to feel sorry for the bitch.
All I want is my fucking money.

MORNING SICKNESS

"This is totally disgusting!"
She's standing in a drooping black bathrobe
in the middle of the kitchen, her belly hanging out,
and her face buried in her hands.
I look up.
"I feel awful. I'm sick!"
She goes back into the bathroom and closes the door.
I roll over on my back, stretch, yawn,
try to guess what time it is.
It's after eleven, for sure, from the sounds outside
and the sun.
"This is horrible!" she moans, doubled over on the toilet.
I decide to go look at the newspapers on the corner,
maybe she'll go to sleep while I'm gone
or kill herself or something.
Then the phone rings.
I answer it, expecting money and encouragement.
A sniveling voice comes over the line:
"Hello?"
"Hello."
"Hello? Is Pagen there?"
"She's on the toilet."
"Oh. Could you tell her that George called?"
"O.K." I hang up.
In the kitchen all is chaos. I step around it and look
out the window,
down through the fire escape and into the back yard.
The Puerto Rican kids are singing bible songs and playing
with a pregnant dog.
"George called," I say into the bathroom.