

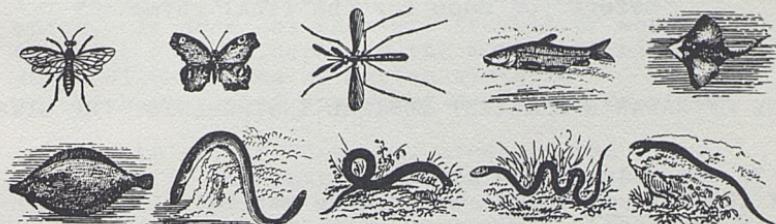
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ONE OF THE WORLD'S FIVE MOST EXCITING PROFESSIONS

"There are only four jobs in the world
worth having: an actor, a rock star,
a jet fighter pilot and President."

-- Tom Cruise's flight instructor

To these, Tom, you may add a fifth:
poet.

As you leave the house
on a very daring and very devilish
mission, a small crowd waiting across the street
sets off a cheer and overwhelms you
for your autograph.

At a reading, a shot
sings past your ear and you tactfully retreat

behind the lecturn.

Danger?

You are used
to it. No one knows the risks
a poet runs.

You walk a tight and slippery
metaphor but your fans see only the grace,
the bravura, the incredible act
of balance.

It takes guts to be a poet.

It takes more than talent and a pretty face.

Tom, you have to work hard, you need drive
and charisma and a kind
of gallant ruthlessness.

When you reach the heights,
the future fits the palm of your hand.

The climb
was hard but the view is worth it: the earth
spins below, dizzying and brilliant, as you loop
up once
before you zoom for the final rhyme.

ONE OF JAPAN'S EARLIEST MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, THE BIWA

In the illustrated scroll
of The Tale of Genji, we see the man bent
over the biwa's figgy form with its two
crescent eyes bobbing up back-to-back
in a pulpy sky, mirroring precisely
the arch of the man's brows, but more seductive.

The woman's face crouches in a crack

of her kimono, so sleek
and so fat, a soybean popping from its husk,
beanlike in expression, beanlike in beauty.

Persian poets invariably fit
the lover's face with a moon, but here I will
praise the man's face for its mooniness, stuck fast
to the pasty shoulder like one bit

of rice cake mounted upon
another. Here in the twentieth century
we have learned to smile at the biwa's buzzing,
rather lemony notes, and as slips
glide like fingerlings through your grasp, I observe
how, even though the biwa's sound-holes were meant
to copy human brows, yours eclipse

the biwa's eyes in the way
they magnify your laughter. You do not fret
when your touch loses its foothold on a fret, but
something mimic and wry monkeyshines
your face, gladdening me that the waxed and wooden
ways of love are of the past. Your fingers plunk!
and plunk! just so, on the silky twines

in the same way that you pluck
my chords. Then, when the song is done and we lose

our words, we slither into the brocade pod
of sleep overembroidered with our charms
(though neither of us is moonlike or beanlike).
But I wake, and want you again, and slide down
into the harmony of your arms.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DÉCORATION DES NYMPHÉAS

The surface is not water. It does not forge water. It does not shimmer, tremble or shudder as water does. There are the monstrous black-purples and indigo-purples of rotten wisteria only a half-choked eye might be forced to utter

as it dabbles its wings too close to the flame, and wide, trowel-shaped slashes of cinnamon red that surely have no place on water unless fresh embers of war are falling there or the shadows of a vermilion lacquer bridge. Webs of lead,

meant to collect the jasper-green and jade-green glass of lily pads, enriched instead with fused enamel and luster in strange salamander shades, bristle -- they cannot float -- above the shattered malachite facets of the pond. We are used

to such encrustings, as though the efflorescence of liverworts on stone or the rose-petal scales that flake from fish, in the gold and cloisonné work of Byzantine book covers or the altar front of St. Mark's, sometimes on the wings and tails

of Mogul enamel geese and ducks; we least expect mosaics or shell cameos on cloth. And yet, beneath this deceptively amorphous web -- we scarcely call it 'paint' -- lie the fossil Gothic bones of those years and years of behemoth

cathedrals that Monet so laboriously reconstructed there: the pillars, arches, vaults, braces, purlins, ribs and buttresses. Moated inside the nineteen panels of his last work, one senses the lack of wind, of sun; the faults

of color that will never abide dragonflies. Then, among those violet-rinsed greens and blue-browns, a substance flows. It sounds with the solemnity of sculpture but pulses with trills; and the eye, and what lives through the eye, flies in it and drowns.

WE WILL NOT SEE THE CAVE

One touch, one touch passed between me and the wife.

It started from the boatman.

He brushed dust from my back. He brushed me and I acknowledged it; when he showed me, always without speaking, that the wife's back was also streaked with dust, that I should brush her because I was closer, I edged toward his half

of the circle, unwillingly raised my hand.

A simple gesture, that smile

spread from person to person. The priest now waves his hand at the mouth of the cave. He holds no light, so we will not see the scenes inside he is describing. He does have light, but he dislikes the husband. At tea, he screened

this man, found he was strong but would not draw near.

The wife, the boatman, the guide

and I shrink from the feel of the cave and move together; I am closer

than I have been to anyone for years. The husband feels he can brave the cave. He cannot. He has not passed the test of contact, he has nothing to fear.

(Pagan, Burman, December 1984)

-- Roger Finch

Tokyo, Japan

HARD TIMES

Garbage is piled up along the streets. The empty oil drums that were placed in groups of three or four ever-so-often along the sidewalks are filled and buried beneath mounds of plastic bags full of debris that is constantly being deposited there. Now it has just about completely hidden the sidewalks, the curbs and is gradually trying to close off passage in the streets. It's hard to walk anymore. People have to step their way around however they can, always careful not to slip down amid the rot, stink and flies that swarm so thick they darken the air.

Rats, of course, are scurrying about, always keeping themselves just out of sight when someone passes close.

If one stops and stands still for a moment, fixing his eyes on a single point in the garbage, he can glimpse their quick seething movements, long hairless tails slithering in and out, over sour milk cartons, dry curled tortilla from a week ago, plastic bags and throw-away diapers. Their tails lap about like little snakes. If he stares long enough he begins to distinguish their dull bodies, beady eyes and whiskered snouts.

As if the garbage were not enough, the sewers have begun to back up. This evening there were three or four inches of "black water" standing in the parking lot, slowly expanding, gradually creeping toward the front door. Its foul odor hangs like a stubborn presence, a morbid reminder in air already darkened with smoke, rot and flies.

No one is really surprised at the way things have gotten. The cries that echo above the late-night streets from dark unknown corners of the neighborhood, prices so high that all legitimate commerce has come to a virtual stop, the constant stealing and animal brutality that have come to reign, the garbage, flies, rats and even the backed up sewer waters that seem intent on consuming everyone are really no surprise. Everyone somehow knew, or at least suspected, that sooner or later it would come to this.

What is surprising is the party going on in one of the dry corners of the parking lot. There is singing and dancing to the music of guitars and the not-so-rhythmic percussion of empty cans, bottles and sticks. Of course there are no record players and colored lights like before. There hasn't been electricity for weeks. But these people make their own music late into the night. It is now after three A.M. and they are still going strong.

It was found out today that the nearest urban water well, where hundreds of people had been standing three hours a day struggling with the crowd to get a bucketful of brackish water, has, as everyone knew it eventually would, gone dry. No one knows what to do now. They can survive without electricity, gas and plumbing, but they have to have water.

It's impossible to sleep. No one knows if it's because of the way things are, fear of how they are going to be, or the noisy celebration going on out in the corner of the parking lot. Why do those people keep on with their crude music and dancing? What in hell is there to celebrate?

BIG EARS AND RUDDY FACE

-- after Horacio Quiroga

Keep telling yourself this is just a story. It never really happened. Just something somebody made up. Otherwise you won't believe it's true.

There is a pastoral setting. A narrow road meanders through a valley. There is a patch of corn and a vegetable garden with a scarecrow that wouldn't frighten even the stupidest bird. There are grassy pastures with lazy cows and sheep surrounded by low stone walls and wooden fences -- no barbed wire on this farm.

There is only one house in sight -- the most storybookish of ageless little cottages where a hard-working man with big ears and a ruddy-skinned woman live with an eight-year-old son who has big ears and a ruddy face. He is their marriage's only fruit and the adoration of their lives. The parents are a happy couple in most ways, but blame each other for the boy's big ears and ruddy face, and for his not having any brothers or sisters in their twelve years of mostly-content marriage.

They also disagree on the boy's future. The father wants his son to be a farmer like himself and work the land and gradually buy more nearby. The mother wants her son to study to be a scientist or a priest -- a biologist, a veterinarian, or a Franciscan -- and tries to teach him about the mysterious wonders of nature, its creatures and its ever-changing ways.

The father has an entirely different idea about nature and its ways. He sees the fields and animals as the practical elements of a working man's everyday life. The animals are to be milked, sheared, fed, tended, slaughtered or sold -- everything for some practical benefit. Not to be thought about -- but used. Toward this end he has put his son in charge of a herd of hogs in a small muddy pen beneath a shady tree across a low stone wall near a barn.

One morning when the boy goes out to the pen to feed and water the hogs, he catches a glimpse of a robin's nest in the low branches of the tree and decides he'll climb up and have a look. Maybe he'll discover some of nature's wonderous mysteries -- brightly colored eggs yet to be hatched or baby robin chicks chirping with their bills open, waiting to be fed.

Just as he gets within reach of the nest, he slips and goes tumbling down with flopping arms into the hog pen

where the usually apathetic creatures come grumbling upon him as though he were a shovelful of corn. When, horror stricken and desperate, he finally scrambles over the wall around the pen, his ruddy face is bloody, scratched and scarred, and his big ears have been entirely gnawed away.

His eyes are full of mud and blood, but he can still see the green pastures, the heavy shade trees and the low stone walls of the valley. Even without his ears, he can still hear the excited grumble of the hogs growling muffled and dull, the nearby baying of cows and the occasional bleat of sheep as he runs toward the cottage. And even though he is desperately traumatized and afraid, he still believes in love, trust and hope.

For the rest of his days the big-eared man blames the ruddy-skinned woman for the boy's having climbed up into the tree; and she, in turn, blames her husband for having sent him to tend hogs at such a tender age. The boy sits mute and still with no ears and a scarred face.

Of course, all this has some moral or meaning, but damned if I can figure it out.

-- James Miller Robinson

Huntsville AL

GRANDFATHER

On the day you died,
we received
from Creative Playthings
a box of orange wooden letters
for your great granddaughter
Melanie Anne.

I thought of your defunct esophagus,
your failing heart,
your cataracts,
and your old mind,
and I wished I could spell out
an indestructible
orange message
for you.

1940-1980

That looks like me in the doorway.
My daddy cleaned bricks in Hamburg.
I used to sleep with a Ms. Schneider.
Flood waters are rising, I press on headphones.
Night after night my stricken singing
wakes the wife.

I tried sleeping in the attic,
woke up naked on the ridgepole,
yelling like a wild Indian.
My son ran up to hug his daddy.
Mommy called the police,
no sirens, no lights.

Each son's made from every other son.

IN ONE OF MY MOTHER'S TINY PICTURES

the two Reddig cousins are crying
but my sister and I are monkeyshining,
our ugly mouths spread out
on the inside of the backseat window
like two huge snails.

Now, turning on the kitchen light
twenty years later,
I knock my mother's pictures down.
Bending to pick them up,
I see, for the first time, really
the four wishbones
my father has set riding
atop the black frame,
one for each of us,
as African a thing as he ever did.

IMAGINE GERMAN BEACHCOMBERS

if you can. Almost a year they marched
Saco Bay beach like a beat.
Dressed like a quilted blue polar bear,
she nosed out sand dollars
like they really bought something.

A botany major and one of the world's
great rock painters, he once

nailed a stick and 38 driftwood scraps
into a salmon, mounted it on a board,
and hung it above the fireplace.

Before supper they toppled
driftwood 8 x 6's end over end
grunting together tough as life.
Then the saw hacking back and forth
between them coughed and coughed
sawdust onto the sand,

my mother and father
breathing and pulling together.

MY DAUGHTER ASKS IF I HAVE A PHILOSOPHY

she needs one for her yearbook.
I feel too small for a philosophy,
I'm trying to see through a hedge
to back onto a busy street.
We settle on: 2 is half of 1.
She asks if it's mine.
I say yes.
It's the first spring day.
It's weather for an affair.

INARTICULATE PEOPLE

i.

Inarticulate people get to the bottom
of things first.
At the Twin Tavern, Dave,
the unglible one, lumps and bumps
and makes a quick movement
before belting out the mot juste.
I've even been developing
some ambitions for my younger son
who doesn't talk good.
We didn't think he could talk at all
until a lady in her own kitchen
said, "Isn't that a nice dog?"
and he said,
"That's not a dog, it's a horse!"

ii.

One fall afternoon pulling grape
vines down out of the trees

I heard my neighbor who wears
a teeshirt every day of the year
saying, with fear in his voice,
"You better watch out
he could hurt you."
I kept pulling, my attention
was still up in the trees,
but finally I said to myself,
I wonder does that
have anything to do with Bowman?
I checked, and Bowman wasn't
in the back yard, and he wasn't
behind the blue house.
Then I saw him
back of the white house.
The fireman was standing
safe behind his fence
still pleading with him.
I ran and scooped up Bowman
and just then a big German shepherd
tore around the corner of the house.
Bowman, who was looking back
being carried, pointed at
the dog chasing us,
and asked,
"What's his name?"

TRAVEL

What I wouldn't like to do is travel,
get out of my rut
and find myself some place
where I don't know where to buy
a paper or dink some coffee.
Where I want to be is in my rut,
I don't want to be distracted,
the summer is ideal:

1 pair of shoes
2 pairs of pants
4 or 5 shirts
no socks

Rise at 7 A.M., put on shoes,
dusting off my feet on the porch steps,
walk across the river to school,
read the Times.
Then play in my office with my poems.
Lunch, walk home,
nap, maybe grade papers, sometimes
Debbie sits on my stomach

in her underpants. Eat at 5, walk back, teach three hours and walk the two miles home, eight for the day.

AN EXQUISITE OMBRÉ EFFECT

Walking the asylum grounds, a village by itself, really, gaining on two men walking, one trailing a stick. By their extreme sense of leisure, they almost seem tourists. But they are so self-contained. Lovers? Dragging a stick? Large children -- which is impossible! So, peasants on a large estate! And I a guest ending a stay with their master, having eaten and made wisecracks with him and his lady, shattered nuts, drunk, seen the estate through their eyes. For some reason these two are delighted to see me, but I hardly know them and walk ahead to the pharmacy, closed with a note, return a few minutes later, etc. etc.

-- Jim Klein

Rutherford NJ

ONLY THE ORDER OF EVENTS HAS BEEN CHANGED

I don't make up these stories. I don't have to. Just three days ago a battery thief shot it out with the cops under our house, although I missed it since our air conditioner is far too loud. Shortly thereafter, Lee telephoned to say that Moonyeen in Australia had finally

been able to ship Reggie
the kangaroo head he wanted
for his skull collection,
but since it's illegal to
mail kangaroo heads, it
arrived in a box labeled
MODEL, WITHOUT GLUE. Then
I left the house, and
the woman next door had
ejected her drunken husband
onto the sidewalk and was
flinging his clothes at him
piece by piece, including
individual socks, and he
was taking pot shots at her
with a heavy-duty Sears
staple gun. I decided
there were a dozen things
I should be doing and that
I should do them immediately.
But when I got in the Datsun
the words on the rearview
mirror said THINGS IN THIS
MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN
THEY APPEAR, and then I
really began to worry.

O RACCOON

I was driving through Albany
with Richard the trapper
and he told me, "I visited
your city of New Orleans
some years ago,
mainly Bourbon Street
where I was introduced
to a fuchsia drink
they called a Hurricane.
Later, I was lying
on my face in Jackson Square
protecting my tongue
and listening to a man
on a nearby bench
talk to a black raccoon
which wasn't there.
He was patting its head."
"If it wasn't there," I asked
"what made you certain
it was a raccoon?"

"By the informal manner
in which he addressed it,"
Richard said.

-- Martha McFerren

New Orleans LA

LONNIE WICKERSHAM

One divorce
one bankruptcy
one bad pileup in a
stockcar race

You don't like him
and neither do I

but you must admit
that old boy
don't make the same mistake
twice

MARTY FEDDERMAN IN CALIFORNIA

His eyes
and beard are
stabbing black

and he left New York
for Chico State

teaches advanced literature
to a multi-racial group

of students
who need bonehead English
bad

-- Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Paso Robles CA

ONE DAY

One day I discover a closet full of fedoras, derbys and berets. Each one fits as though I had picked it out myself. I try them all on, just to be sure, then shut the door behind me and go for a walk. I enter a store and the shopkeeper shakes my hand. He smiles and seems pleased to see me. I return home sporting a new bowler. No comment. But when I take the hat off and set it on the table, I see that the color of my wife's hair has changed. My children's bearded faces brood from the mantle. My favorite chair is in another room, in another house. A house where I used to play in a closet full of my father's hats.

THE LOWEST FORM OF CHICANERY

Hired to clear a drain, a plumber found a woman in the pipe under the house. "What are you doing down there?" he yelled into the sink.

"Mind your own business," the woman replied. "I own this house. Now are you going to unblock the drain, or shall I call a professional?"

Insulted, the plumber rammed his snake down the sink and destroyed the clot. When he opened the faucet and water ran freely through the pipe, he imagined with satisfaction the hair and debris that would soon empty into the ocean.

Then he realized that he'd been had, that he'd never get a thing out of her.

-- Greg Boyd

Mission Hills CA

the old man
and the pea
fowls:

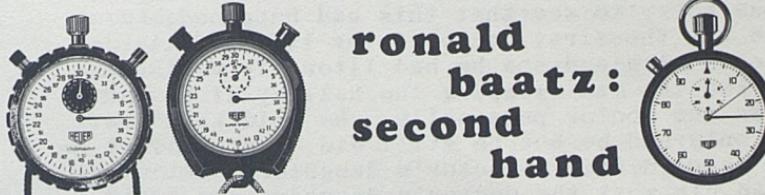
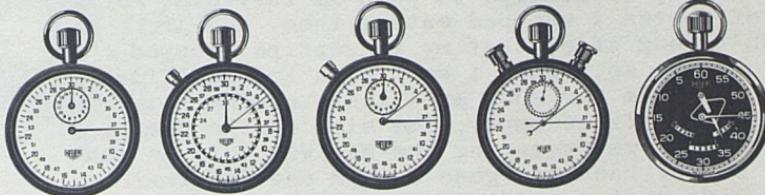
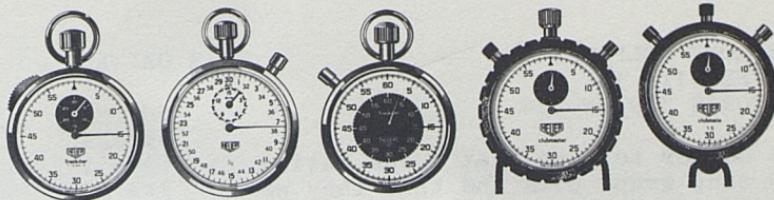
the racket
those damn
guinea hens
make in the morning
would raise
Lazarus

look homeward
angels:

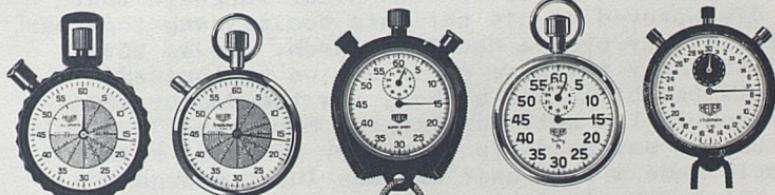
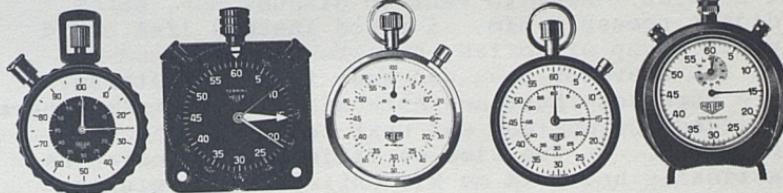
the presence
of pins
and a lack of
pricks

-- Saul Manilla

Pest TX



**ronald
baatz:
second
hand**



THE LONE WOLF HAS
COFFEE WITH THE
DOCTOR'S SON-IN-LAW

the doctor told me that i was eating too many grape pits and that they were causing my fingertips to pain as they did. so of course i stopped eating them, and it wasn't long after that my fingertips stopped paining me so. when i went back to the office to thank him for such excellent treatment i found the office empty, the sign on the door gone. the man sweeping the hallway told me that the doctor had been gone a week now and that he had left no forwarding address whatsoever. i was sorry to see that this had happened; here was the first doctor in my life i felt at ease with and now he had literally vanished. i asked the man sweeping the hallway if he had known the doctor personally. he said that not only had he but he still did, that in fact he was married to the doctor's daughter. i asked him what the doctor's daughter was like, but he didn't seem to want to discuss her, so i didn't pressure him. i asked instead if i could buy him a cup of coffee, and when he said yes we rode the elevator down and went to the cafeteria. there were some huge and enthusiastic fountains there. we picked one out and sat next to it and raised our voices. by the time we finished our coffee he practically had told me his entire life's story. when i told him what the doctor had done for me he pretty much made light of it, saying that the doctor had told many people to stop eating grape pits, and that he himself had been told to stop consuming them so that his hearing would improve (which incidentally did improve after he hadn't eaten any grape pits for only a short period of time). as we were about to leave, the doctor, of all people, suddenly came over to our table, looked at us very rigidly, and told us in some clear language that he disapproved of his patients socializing together, even if only over a harmless lunch. so we both did the only thing we could do: we apologized. i paid the bill, but since i saw the doctor and his son-in-law hotly exchanging more words i didn't bother to say good-bye to either of them, rather i simply made a fast exit and was lucky enough to catch a taxi right out front. the taxi driver turned out to be the doctor's daughter's ex-husband.

EATING FISH

in the
summer
i'm going
to eat
a lot
of fish.
i'm
going
to find
a good
fish
restaurant
with
outside
tables
and i'm
going to
frequent it.
i intend
to become
a big
eater
of fish.
fish
will be
coming
out of
my ears
before
september
rolls
around.
i'll watch
the green
leaves
in the
trees
while
i eat
all these
fish.
i'll
eat
more fish
than
there
will be
leaves.

HOT
SUMMER
i lie on
the couch
listening to
a record

in my hand the
red water gun
for shooting
at spiders
but
right before
getting up
to turn the
record over

i shoot
the gun
twice
in my
mouth.

EXTRA VIRGIN

i go down to the stream to talk to one girl, but she gets up and leaves, and then another girl comes over and she starts talking with me. it turns out this girl is a mere sixteen, with one year of high school remaining. she lives up around the corner with her mother; her father visits from long island about once every month. her name is tracey, a name i've never known anyone to have, although i know the name. she's slightly plump, but just right, with amazingly inviting breasts. and her shoulders are perfect. i'm very particular about shoulders. i can't take a woman if she has no shoulders. shoulders have to be shapely, round, with their own special set of curves. i moan to myself that she is too young. why couldn't she be twenty-six instead of sixteen. or why couldn't i be sixteen too on this breezy hot summer afternoon in 1985. she tells me she likes listening to jazz, and i tell her that if she were a few years older i'd invite her in my place to listen to some records. she wants to come anyway, she says, but i shy off, knowing that i'd never be able to trust myself with her. so we part, after talking maybe twenty minutes. when i walk away i feel my swollen prick relaxing a bit, a very little bit, and the walk back to the motel is an uncomfortable one. when i go in my dump i look in the mirror right away at the lines around my eyes, then i go back into my tiny kitchen and get the bottle of extra virgin olive oil and i rub some gently around my face, and especially around my eyes.

THE WHITE PIGEON

at the side of the office this morning there was a pigeon, a white one with dappled brown around the neck and a little going down the back. s spotted it first and pointed it out. it was walking along in the trench in the lawn where the rain runs off of the parking lot. it was alone, and as far as we could tell it looked lost. later in the evening i saw it outside my back window, pecking at the ground. i took a slice of bread and broke it up and threw the pieces out, noticing that my actions did nothing to scare it away. such an easy target it would be for a hungry cat. after dinner, and after washing my few dishes, i went back to the back window and i saw that it was still there, still pecking, moving slowly in circles. i began to think that maybe it was demented. and i wondered if that would make it an even easier target. i watched it on and off until dark, and i came to the conclusion that, yes, it was demented, and that being demented did indeed make it an easier target. and so i decided not to feed it the next day. it's a cruel world.

THE CICADAS

the cicadas are almost frightening tonight. there must be thousands of them in the weeping willow alone. you can't hear yourself think. the sound of them is just intense. before, when i was standing outside, i was engulfed by this racket as the sky, without thunder, kept periodically lighting up. now, suddenly, besides the cicadas, their racket, there is also the addition of the thunder rumbling. it sounds as though it's tearing up the horizon as it steadily comes closer and closer. so i close the windows and turn the air conditioner on. i light a long thin cigar. immediately the smoke starts off towards the air conditioner. when it disappears inside of it i take another puff and start the journey of smoke all over again. the storm is moving overhead. there's rain. even with the windows closed and the air conditioner going i can hear the rain. it's coming in waves. curious to see how this has affected the cicadas, i open the back window. they're quiet. as quiet as scared humans they are.

WAITRESS

i play with the ashtray in my hands,
waiting for the coffee to come, watching
the cook scrub the grill with a rag made
out of steel. as he works away he
puffs on a cigarette, letting it hang
from his lips, ashes falling at his feet.
he's an old guy, having had no shave in
at least five days. i'm waiting too
for the waitress to finish her shift. when
she brings me my coffee i ask her how much
longer she'll be, and she tells me not long honey.
she must be some ten years older than me,
putting her somewhere in her late forties.
when i was in earlier we had talked a bit,
like we usually do when i come in for dinner.
only this time i had asked her to go out with me
when she was finished working. my asking her
came as a surprise to both of us, i think.
i had often daydreamed about making it
with her, and now it looks as though that night
is here. and she knows how broke i am too, so
i don't have to worry about breaking into
my piggy bank to impress her. as we are
leaving the diner the last thing we hear is
the owner yelling, reminding her that she has
the early shift tomorrow. out in the street,
walking towards my car, we look at each other
and laugh. it hits us that we are in essence
complete strangers, even after all the meals
she has placed in front of me. she's beautiful
though, just beautiful. she reminds me of every
waitress i've ever wanted to take home. at my place
we throw our coats on the couch, and as she sits
down on them i get a bottle out of wine and i open
it in front of her on the coffee table, a little
embarrassed at the absence of a cork. an hour
goes by; the night goes by. toward the end
of the third bottle we are laughing more and more,
our kisses are careless and sloppy but getting
very prolonged. her hair is dyed a very colorful
reddish-brown. when i sit close to her i can
smell the diner. it's a wonderful perfume.
i refuse to let her take a shower. she insists
i take one. a wonderful perfume. in the morning
i hear the alarm go off, and i see her getting back
into her worn turquoise uniform, seemingly in a hurry.
roughly she brushes her hair back without mirror.
in the pushing light her face looks weary.
with pocketbook in hand she comes over to the bed

and touches my forehead as though checking to see if i have a fever. when i open my eyes they meet hers. before giving me a peck on the cheek she reminds me that pot roast is the special for today.

THE LONE WOLF VISITS OLD FRIENDS FOR DINNER

i sat at the big table telling my story with what i thought was just the right amount of dramatic flare, but when i looked over at the two people whom i was talking to i noticed very plainly that they were not at all involved in what i was saying. so i tailed off with as little fanfare as possible, and then i yawned as though yawning would somehow show that i was in complete accord with them. so for the rest of the meal we ate in silence, commenting only on the good flavor of the roasted chicken, drinking coffee afterwards, slowly stirring with spoons that seemed to have the ability to hypnotize. it was a dark, dark night outside, and other than the small portion of the woods lit by the floodlights there was nothing else to see. it was a superinsulated house so the rain which was falling could not be heard, not even on the roof. after awhile she put her head down on her arms which were folded on the table and she started to take a snooze, and when he saw this he did likewise, also pushing his coffee mug towards the center of the table where hers was. what could i do but join them. i pushed my mug towards the center, folded my arms, lowered my head and with zero trouble i fell into a deep sleep which must have lasted for at least a few hours. when i woke i was the only one at the table, and the only light that was on was the one on the stove which was used to light the stove's clock. this clock revealed that it was well past midnight. looking around i wondered where the other two had gone to. i found them in their bed locked in each other's arms, sleeping like satisfied babies. as i tiptoed out of the house, suddenly the urge for another bite to eat swept over me, and so i went back into the kitchen and took a chicken leg out of the refrigerator and i ate it with great relish. as i stood there i watched the second hand on the stove's clock as it ran smoothly and quietly and steadily through the seconds.

OCTOBER SECOND

rain. woke to it this morning, and it stayed around for the entire day. took a ride out of town with s in the afternoon. ended up at a university. checked out the gallery there, but came away dissatisfied. went for mexican food at a place that seemed to serve food from all over the world. found a stone in my chili and complained about it, mildly. rain. our conversations slow. old roads we've been over a hundred times before. old roads and old laments. i think we made the mistake of not taking any weed with us. found myself falling into a bit of a depression walking on the grounds of the university. everyone seemed so incredibly young. like children. this didn't seem to bother s though, who is older than i am. gallery was poor, so s just used the bathroom there and that was that. we took off from the precious parking spot which had taken us so long to find. went to the bookstore out on the highway. s bought another bukowski book. it astounds me the way he consumes bukowski. and the money he spends on him. i bought a couple of post cards. one was of a painting by monet, and the other was of some german dolls, antique ones. also bought a large rubber insect, a big green thing, a grasshopper with red eyes. it was only thirty cents. i thought it was a good deal. rain. the windshield wipers going for most of the drive. conversations slow. laments concerning escape from the lives we live. a stone in my chili. i'll give the big green insect to my mother for her birthday. old roads, passing under a dreary bridge, dreaming of the night's wine. a drive taken for the sole desire of getting the hell out of town. town with its dead stores and miserable dirty water. s looked like the only crazy on campus. the only animated creature. the only bald character with dangling black ponytail. walking fast between buildings. the gallery nothing special. some photo work. s had to take a wicked pee. young faces. i felt over the hill. a stone in my chili. the waitress did take a dollar off of the check.

THE ONLY EXIT

i'm driving on a narrow highway getting very tired at the wheel when i see this sign which advertises the fact that a cabin can be had for a mere twenty dollars a night. i cannot resist, especially when i see that the cabins have televisions. plus i simply have a stubborn weakness for such cabins. i feel like for the duration of my stay i'm living in a miniature village where life is very easy to understand, and death hardly ever occurs. the tendency to use yellow bulbs on their porches throughout the year is the only thing that bothers me about these places. yellow bulbs are all right in the summertime, but in the winter they are in my opinion very disconcerting. just once i'd like to rent a cabin in the winter and see a white bulb on the porch. i asked a woman at the office of one of these places why she didn't change her bulbs, but she just gazed at me as though i were looking to make her life difficult. by the ocean i lived in a bungalow some three years ago, and i know i used to take great pleasure in changing the bulbs in spring and autumn. but that's another story. this cabin i just rented smells from lysol. so i throw the window open, ignoring the cold. then i put my suitcase on the bed. it's almost empty. there isn't much even in the way of clothing. actually there's mostly newspapers and old paperbacks. between new york and miami. it's a shame i don't have more to wear with me. the little i have i keep washing in the sinks of motel rooms, letting the stuff dry out on the porches, on the railings if there are any. and of course this is the reason i have so little: people walking around at odd hours always are walking off with my belongings. even my socks. now who'd ever want to rob another person's socks. i guess someone would. continuing being naive about this makes no sense. anyway, there is very little room to move around in here. some tea bags and packets of coffee, and some powdered cream are on the counter next to a kettle and a mug. in the sink i notice a long turquoise stain from the water dripping. it's quite a beautiful stain, really. reminds me of mexico. i touch it. it's unforgivably cold. shit. there's no job waiting for me in miami, no friends, no place to stay -- nothing. i did this to myself: i put myself on the road, in this junk of an old blue car, ready to sleep the night in the middle of winter in a cabin that has a yellow bulb burning through the darkness onto brilliant moonlit snow, burning next to the door that is the only entrance, the only exit.

11/84

autumn night
dog barking
mars orange

EVERY TIME THE REFRIGERATOR COMES ON
its thick black wire
jumps like a frog

IN A NEIGHBORING YARD

the older girl holds the hose
while the younger does cartwheels
through the spraying water

A PUPPY

by the swimming pool
chewing on a naked doll

TWO SETS OF PICTURES

My father showed me some photos of his garden, a garden which he is very proud of. He actually had two sets of pictures: one set by my sister, and the other by some other gardener who had had a better camera to use. My father seemed more impressed by the photos by the gardener; I found the ones by my sister more poetic. So, I took my sister's photos with me when I left his house. He hasn't said a word to me about them yet. Either he knows and he doesn't care, or it just hasn't dawned on him yet that they are missing.

One of these photos my sister took shows my mother and father at the far end of the garden. They seem to be just standing there; it is hard to tell since both figures are so pulverized by intense sunlight. In the foreground there are hundreds of purple flowers sweeping up and around the trunk of a thin tree.

My father got an award from the garden club for this particular year's garden. It hangs in his kitchen. My sister had a baby last week. A son.

-- Ronald Baatz
Woodstock NY

COWS
DISCOVERING THEY ARE COWS

An important group of cows leave
On a business trip. "God, I hate
Flying," one cow bellows, and
The others agree. On the plane
A lady pulls out her leather
Brief case. The cows stare wide-
Eyed.

THE DYING SUN

A man takes his dog to the club.
They seem to enjoy each other's company
Drinking beer and talking politics.

Soon the man and his dog become best
Of friends, spending the weekends
At parties singing, dancing, and chasing
Women. Real swingers, one person comments.

The parties continue the same each week.
The man gets drunk, and each week the dog
Drives the man home and puts him to bed.

One night at the club the dog sits
Alone in the back. He looks at black
And white photos and thinks about
The times he spent with his mother

On the back porch listening
To the dying sun, and maybe barking
A little at the neighborhood kids.

The next morning in the bathroom
The man finds his dog
Dangling from the light fixture
Swinging slightly.

-- R. Evan Pitts

Centerville UT

LOVING OHIO UNIVERSITY'S OUTSTANDING
SENIOR INDEPENDENT WOMAN OF 1966-67

-- for Judy Brown

she combines
remarkable intelligence
with sensitive gentleness.
the former, worn as
a badge of honor,
intimidates some
people but such are
their insecurities.
the latter, a private
passion, seems
reserved for nature,
stuffed animals and
me. loving a woman
with the perspicacity
to know your foibles
and the compassion to
forgive them is
life's rare joy.

I'M STANDING ALONE

i'm standing alone sipping
a double shot of jim beam

sporting a name tag with my
high school senior picture

when some joker i haven't
seen in 20 years walks up
and spouts off

"jesus christ, morgan,
you've sure changed!"

i've been through college,
a divorce, a traumatic affair,
three near nervous breakdowns,
therapy, my father's death and
two bouts of unemployment

worked as a journalist,
canoe shelter attendant,
dishwasher, house painter,
apartment maintenance worker,
public opinion surveyor,

salesman, social worker
and writer of poetry

i've longer hair, a goatee,
mustache, large gut, suffer
from hypertension, rampant
cynicism and grinning
half-drunk idiots

"good god, i certainly hope
so," i quip, brushing past

escaping into the emptiness
of the crowded room

WEARING JEANS AT THE GRAND TRAVERSE RESORT

some patrons
of this fancy hotel
overlooking grand traverse bay
wear clothes worth more
than my car.

there's money galore
in this neck of michigan,
especially in summer
when the beautiful people
float in on long, sleek yachts
designer sails billowing.

hell, a small glass of beer
costs a buck-fifty and

i'm strolling about in faded,
old jeans, pullover shirt
and paint-spotted, blue suede
tennis shoes with bright orange
laces. maybe it's the laces,

people are staring, as i smile,
nod and keep on walking.

so far, only the maids
have smiled back.

TELL ME YOU LOVE ME, JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

the loudmouthed
obnoxious jerk at the end
of the bar is black

and

everybody else
is white and somewhat reluctant
to try and shut him up

idiots in bars
never accept responsibility
for their behavior

and

this one will undoubtedly
go into a honky-racist routine
the moment he's confronted

which is exactly
what happens when the bartender
tells him to cool it

and

i realize the self-centered
prick will never be a devotee of
existential syllogism

"isn't," i ask, "it possible
for people to dislike you simply
because you're an asshole?"

and

suddenly it's so quiet
i can hear the ice melting
into the bourbon

BRICKS

mike plays tennis
works in corporate
public relations

has a beautiful wife
two, quick-witted sons
a house in the suburbs
the sanctity of regular
church attendance

yet it bothers him
how everything seems
so blandly preordained

nags at his contentment
like lust in a confessional

he writes he's envious
of me penning poetry
doing my thing
pursuing mad dreams

while he awaits executive
action on his proposal
to distribute commemorative
bricks from the company's
old headquarters building

obviously, it's excitement
by the pound in mike's mighty
world of corporate conquest

RUBBING IT

rubbing it
stroking it
the dick the
ego the poetry
parties w/ex
co-workers still glad
to see me
after a two
year absence
reading penthouse naked
hand pumping
j.b. will be
tired when
she gets home
other swimmers
impressed i do
so many laps

without stopping
showing poems
to those who
comment favorably
rubbing it
stroking it
the dick the
ego the poetry
a never ending
cycle the
ceaseless charging
at windmills
afraid to stop
it might all
be illusion
rubbing it
stroking it
again and again
ad infinitum...

AIDING AND ABETTING

the final irony
is his sweaters on the table
at the rummage sale

the dude was cool in
his gold chains and v-neck
pullovers, attracting

the kind of fine
white pussy that grooved
on his jive est act

until one night while
stepping out to do his thing
he got shot in the head

by his pissed off wife
who smartly dumped the gun,
hired a fancy lawyer and

at \$2.50 each, the bargain
hunters are really making
a killing on those sweaters

as relaxed and acquitted,
she rakes in the money
hoping it doesn't rain

CIVIL WAR SUMMER

my best friend in memphis,
a towering 12-year-old, more gangly
than graceful, rarely beat me

at tetherball, wrestling or running,
much to his chagrin, as i was a short,
yankee kid who snuck drinks from

the "colored only" fountains
and stubbornly insisted the south lost
the war, so donald took up

teasing, made fun of my size,
belittled the north and preached
the Great Moral Victory

then one afternoon, in my room,
we bared budding bodies to discover
my cock was bigger, and don

muttered oaths of rebel dismay,
as we lay on the bed, wagging our
hard-ons into history

sherman was burning atlanta, as
grant knocked on richmond's front door,
summer was over, at last

I FIND POETRY

in the sneer of a bigot, the beauty
of nature, a madman's eyes.

a wino's alcoholic haze is always
worth a stanza or two and

I once earned \$10 for a 33-word
bit about a skunk.

I wrote for hours when the first
robin of spring got snowed on and

the muted desperation of a ladies'
night crowd turned up on the pages
of a very good magazine.

High school reunions, loudmouths
in bars and politicians make me
particularly acerbic and volumes

can be written about sex, lust
and former lovers, though only
co-eds losing their virginity

and old maids who never gave it
up, can use "womb" in a verse.

one writer's suicide occupied me
for days and months. after watching

a swarm of blackbirds devour
a field of thumb-sized toads,

I wrote a nifty piece about
starlings, toads and the insanity
of nuclear war.

yes, I find poetry in the oddest
and most normal of things.

the next time a stranger
stares at you, maybe
it's because you're a poem.

-- S. K. Morgan

Lansing MI

PATTY

around the latter grades of elementary school
she had a crush on me,
but i wasn't interested in her.
no, it wasn't that i had a string of girlfriends --
i didn't have any, in fact, and i badly needed
at least one -- it was just that
i didn't find her attractive.
she had bad skin,
and since i had bad skin myself,
it was out of the question that i fall for her.
i was in love with exactly those three girls
that every other boy in the class was also after,
and who no doubt made fun of me behind my back.

i wasn't deliberately cruel to patty,
but i never allowed myself to be paired off with her,
and once she accidentally overheard me
making it clear to some teasing friends
that i was not to be associated with her
in the juvenile gossip channels,
and her feelings were obviously hurt.

patty was, incidentally, the most intelligent girl
in the class, but i'd learned from previous experience
that there is nothing less sexy at that age than brains,
which is why i was wearing myself out
the year 'round with sports.

then we went to different high schools
and i didn't see much of her
until she held a graduation swim party
at her parents' country club.
her skin and hair were still a little oily,
but a routine of swimming, tennis and golf
had shaped her body magnificently.
the tan and vitamin d weren't doing her skin
any harm either.

i guess none of us had ever realized
exactly how wealthy her parents were.
i guess it wouldn't have mattered to me at least,
devourer of the idealism of our civics texts.
i could tolerate every human diversity
as long as it wasn't dermatological.

i should have been smart enough to realize, though,
that she was about to be transformed
into a highly desirable woman,
a witty, good-natured, highly-educated person,
that any man would be proud to be married to,
or even merely seen with.

she would, of course, become a classic beauty,
possessed of a physical perfection
that money can, indeed, buy and preserve.

i bet she's sitting right now
at the window of some woody mansion,
watching the sunset behind the 18th fairway,
as she sips a 200-year-old cognac,
pauses in her reading of derrida,
her body still taut from sports and spas,
her skin the sweetness of bailey's irish cream,
as she ponders her good fortune
in having, so many years ago,
been spurned by yours truly
mr. typical all-american male adolescent asshole.

SOME WOMEN STILL LIKE MEN TO LIKE EACH OTHER

i.

a girl once said to me, "i knew
you weren't gay as soon as i noticed
that you weren't afraid to hug your friends.

ii.

and last night a girl said, "lee has your books
all over our apartment. he really cares for you."

AN UNDERRATED CONDITIONED RESPONSE

he says, "after we made love
she kept asking me if i didn't feel guilty,
what with a wife and kids at home.
so i asked her if she didn't feel guilty
deceiving her fiance."

so, just for the sake of saying something,
i say, "it's a shame guilt has to enter into it."

but he corrects me: "no, it isn't.
this girl is beautiful
but she hasn't read anything
and she hasn't been anywhere
and she hasn't had an interesting thought
or experience in her life.
if it weren't for guilt,
we wouldn't have a thing to talk about."

A SPOIL-SPORT

because it's a boring evening
someone suggests we compile a list
of things we would not want to do
with various famous writers.

for instance, you would not want
to bake a cake
with sylvia plath.
presumably you would not
want to take a caribbean cruise
with hart crane
or ford a river with
virginia woolf.
hemingway would not be the one
to clean a shotgun with.
you'd avoid rimbaud's personal physician.

at last we are beginning
to show a little life,
but then this girl who is
drinking with us for the first time
has to go and say,
"this is sick; this is a sick joke."

so we all shut up
and the evening goes back
to being a bore.

-- Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

THE HISTORY OF A TOUGH MOTHERFUCKER:

he came to the door one night wet boney beaten and
terrorized
a white cross-eyed tailless cat
I took him in and fed him and he stayed and
got to trust me until a friend drove up the driveway
and ran him over
I took what was left to a vet who said, "not much
chance, give him these pills and wait, his backbone
is crushed, it was crushed once before but somehow
mended, if he lives he'll never walk again, look at
these x-rays, he's been shot, look here, the pellets
are still in him, also, he once had a tail, somebody
cut it off"

I took the cat back, it was a hot summer, one of the hottest summers in decades, I put him on the bathroom floor, gave him water and pills, he wouldn't eat, he wouldn't touch the water, I dipped my finger into it and wet his mouth and I talked to him, I didn't go anywhere, I put in a lot of bathroom time and I talked to him and gently touched him and he just looked back at me with those pale blue crossed eyes, after days went by he made his first move

dragging himself forward by his front legs
(the rear ones wouldn't move)

he made it to the litter box
crawled over and in,

that was like the horns of chance and possible victory
blowing away in the bathroom and into the city, I
related to that cat -- I'd had it bad, not that kind of
bad but bad enough

one morning he got up, stood up, fell back down and he
just looked at me.

"you make it, man," I said to him, "you're a good one...."

he kept trying it, getting up and falling down, finally
he walked a few steps, he was like a drunk weaving, the
rear legs just didn't want to do it and he fell again,
rested, then got up

you know the rest: now he's better than ever, cross-eyed,
almost toothless, all the grace is back, and that look
in the eyes never left ...

and now sometimes I'm interviewed, they want to hear about
life and literature and I get drunk and hold up my
cross-eyed shot runover de-tailed cat before them and I
say, "look at this!"

but they don't understand, they say something like, "you
say you've been influenced by Céline"

"no," I hold the cat up before them, "by what happens, by
things like this, by this, by this! ..."

I wobble the cat, holding him up under the front legs in
the smokey and drunken light, he's relaxed, he knows
things

it's about then that almost all the interviews end
although I am very proud sometimes when I see the inter-
views later and there I am and there is the cat and we
are photographed together

he knows it's bullshit too but it helps get the old
catfood ...

right?

DON'T PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

Bruch lived to be 82 and what fame he gained was for writing his First Violin Concerto at the age of 28; there you have 28 and 82, reversible numbers, and I'm speaking of Bruch, not Bruckner who also had problems -- the main one being an over-reverence of one Richard Wagner.

but back to Bruch: 82 minus 28 is 54, and he told people: "yes, I love it but please play something else that I have written"

he had written other things and had written them well but they just kept on performing his First Violin Concerto

which might be better than not being heard at all but I do suppose that after hearing it so much that dying, for him, was the only way to get away from it

which may not be a nice thing to say since we can get away from it in less drastic ways

although we all have our First Violin Concertos in different forms

all of which makes death less tragic for all of us boys girls men women snakes dogs elephants

things that fly and things which swim and all the things which can do neither and don't even care to

ask Mr. Bruch:

resting is good, but don't mention the First.

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

BUK COLLECTORS::

Bukowski portrait poster by R. Crumb, ltd. to 350 copies, \$11.50 bargain fm. Water Row Press, P.O. Box 438, Sudbury MA 01776. J David Barker's Bukowski: The King of San Pedro an illustr. miniature book (2" x 2.5") ltd to 250 copies, \$30 fm. Richard G. Wong, 638 S. Nardo, Solana Beach CA 92075. J BUK, an 11" x 14" portfolio of 8 color drawings by Andre Juillard, ltd. to 900 copies sgnd. by artist, unpriced fm. Editions GENTIANE, 229 bd Voltaire, 75011 Paris, France (at least 5 renderings are rated as "classic" of Buk and his environs) ISBN:2-904300-08-2.

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The edition of this issue has been limited to 700 numbered copies, the first 70 being signed by Ronald Baatz. The copy now in your hand is number: **522**

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