

BEAUTI - FUL



LETTER TO A FRIEND WITH A DOMESTIC PROBLEM:

Hello Carl:

don't worry about your wife running away from you she just didn't understand you.

I got a flat tire on the freeway today and had to change the wheel with these coke-heads breezing their Maseratis past my ass.

the main thing is to just go about your business and keep doing what you have to do, or better -- what you want to do.

I was in the dentist's office the other day and I read this medical journal and it said

all you got to do

is to live until the year 2020 a.d. and then if you have enough money

when your body dies they can transplant your brain into a fleshless body that gives you eyesight and movement -- like you can ride a bicycle or anything like that and also you don't have to bother with urinating or defecating or eating -- you just get this little tank of blood in the top of your head filled about once a month -- it's kind of like oil to the brain.

and don't worry, there's even sex, they say, only it's a little different (haha) you can ride her until she begs you to get off!

(she'll only leave you because of too much instead of too little.)

that's the fleshless transplant bit.

but there's another alternative: they can transplant your brain into a living body whose brain has been removed so that there will be space for yours.

only the cost for this will be more prohibitive

as they will have to locate a body a living body somewhere

say like in a madhouse or a prison or

off the street somewhere -- maybe a kidnap -- and although these bodies will be better,

more realistic, they won't last as long as the fleshless body which can go on about 500 years before need of replacement. so it's all a matter of choice, what you care for, or what you can afford.

when you get into the living body it isn't going to last as long -- they say about 110 years by 2020 a.d. -- and then you're going to have to find a living body replacement (again) or go for one of the fleshless jobs.

generally, it is inferred in this article I read in my dentist's office, if you're not so rich you go for the fleshless job but if you're still heavy into funds you go for the living-body type all over again. (the living-body types have some advantages as you'll be able to fool most of the street people and also the sex life is more realistic although shorter.)

Carl, I am not giving this thing exactly as it was written but I am transferring all that medical mumbo-jumbo down into something that we can understand. but do you think dentists ought to have crap like this lying around on their tables? anyhow, probably by the time you get this letter your old lady will be back with you.

anyhow, Carl, I kept reading on and this guy went on to say that in both the brain transplants into the living body and into the fleshless body something else would happen to these people who had enough money to do these transfer tricks: the computerized knowledge of the centuries would be fed into the brain -- and any way you wanted to go you could go: you'd be able to paint like Rembrandt or Picasso, conquer like Caesar. you could do all the things those and others like them had done only better. you'd be more brilliant than Einstein -- there would be very little that you could not do and maybe the next body around you could do that.

it gets rather dizzifying about there -- the guy goes on

he's kind of like those guys in their
Maseratis on coke; he goes on to say
in his rather technical and hidden language that
this is not Science Fiction
this is the opening of a door of horror and wonder
never wondered of before and he says that the
Last War of Man will be between the transplanted
computer-fed rich and of the non-rich who are
the Many
who will finally resent being screwed out of
immortality
and the rich will want to protect it
forever
and
that
in the end
the computer-fed rich will win the last
War of Man (and
Woman).

then he goes on to say that the next New
War will take shape as the
Immortal fights the Immortal
and what will follow will be an
exemplary
occurrence
so that Time as we know it
gives up.

now, that's some shit, isn't it,
Carl?

I would like to say
that in the light of all this
that your wife running away doesn't mean
much
but I know it does
I only thought I'd let you know
that other things could happen.

meanwhile, things aren't good here
either.

your buddy,

Hank

40 YEARS AGO IN THAT HOTEL ROOM

off of Union Avenue, 3 a.m., Jane and I had been drinking cheap wine since noon and I walked barefoot across the rugs, picking up shards of broken glass (in the daylight you could see them under the skin, blue lumps working toward the heart) and I walked in my torn shorts, ugly balls hanging out, my twisted and torn undershirt spotted with cigarette holes of various sizes. I stopped before Jane who sat in her drunken chair.

then I screamed at her:

"I'M A GENIUS AND NOBODY KNOWS IT BUT ME!"

she shook her head, sneered and slurred through her lips:

"shit! you're a fucking asshole!"

I stalked across the floor, this time picking up a piece of glass much larger than usual, and I reached down and plucked it out: a lovely large speared chunk dripping with my blood, I flung it off into space, turned and glared at Jane:

"you don't know anything, you whore!"

"FUCK YOU!" she screamed.

then the phone rang and I picked it up and yelled: "I'M A GENIUS AND NOBODY KNOWS IT BUT ME!"

it was the desk clerk: "Mr. Chinaski, I've warned you again and again, you are keeping all our guests awake"

"GUESTS?" I laughed, "YOU MEAN THOSE FUCKING WINOS?"

then Jane was there and she grabbed the phone and yelled: "I'M A FUCKING GENIUS TOO AND I'M THE ONLY WHORE WHO KNOWS IT!"

and she hung up.

then I walked over and put the chain on the door.
then Jane and I pushed the sofa in front of the door
turned out the lights

and sat up in bed
waiting for them.
we were well aware of the
location of the drunk
tank: North Avenue
21 -- such a fancy sounding
address.

we each had a chair at the
side of the bed,
and each chair held ashtray,
cigarettes and
wine.

they came with much
sound:
"is this the right
door?"
"yeah," he said,
"413."

one of them beat with
the end of his night
stick:
"L.A. POLICE DEPARTMENT!
OPEN UP IN THERE!"

we did not
open up in there.

then they both beat with
their night sticks:
"OPEN UP! OPEN UP IN
THERE!"

now all the guests were
awake for sure.

"come on, open up," one of them
said more quietly, "we just want to
talk a bit, nothing more"

"nothing more," said the other
one, "we might even have a little drink
with you"

30-40 years ago
North Avenue 21 was a terrible place,
40 or 50 men slept on the same floor
and there was one toilet which nobody dared
excrete upon.

"we know that you're nice people, we just want to meet you ..."
one of them said.

"yeah," the other one said.

then we heard them
whispering.
we didn't hear them walk
away.
we were not sure that they
were gone.

"holy shit," Jane asked.
"do you think they're
gone?"

"shhhh ..."
I hissed.

we sat there in the dark
sipping at our
wine.
there was nothing to do
but watch two neon signs
through the window to the
east
one was near the library
and said
in red:
JESUS SAVES.
the other sign was more
interesting:
it was a large red bird
which flapped its wings
seven times
and then a sign lit up
below it advertising
advertising
SIGNAL GASOLINE.

it was as good a life
as we could
afford.

I BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD

the Great Editor said he wanted to meet me
in person before he published my book.
he said most writers were sons of bitches
and that he just didn't want to print anybody
who was
so since he paid the train fare
I went on down there to
New Orleans
where I lived around the corner from him
in a small room.

the Great Editor lived in a cellar with a
printing press, his wife and two
dogs.
the Great Editor also published a famous
literary magazine
but my projected book
would be his first try at
that.
he survived on the magazine, on luck, on
handouts.

each night I ate dinner with the Great
Editor and his wife (my only meal and
probably theirs too).
then we'd drink beer until midnight
when I'd go to my small room
open a bottle of wine and begin
typing.
he said he didn't have enough
poems.
"I need more poems," he said.

he had caught up on my back poems
and as I wrote the new poems he
printed them.
I was writing directly into the
press.

around noon each day I'd go around
the corner
knock on the window
and see the Great Editor
feeding pages of my poems
into the press.

the Great Editor was also the Great
Publisher, the Great Printer and a
many Great Number of Other Things,
and I was practically the unknown

poet so it was all quite
strange.

anyhow, I would wave the pages at
him and he would stop the press
and let me in.
he'd sit and read the poems:
"hmmm ... good ... why don't you
come to dinner tonight?"
then I'd leave.

some noons I'd knock on the
window
without any poems
and the Great Editor would stare
at me as if I were a
giant roach.
he wouldn't open the door.

"GO AWAY!" I could hear him scream
through the window, "GO AWAY AND
DON'T COME BACK UNTIL YOU HAVE
SOME POEMS!"

he would be genuinely angry
and it puzzled me: he expected
4 or 5 poems from me
each day.

I'd stop somewhere for a couple of
six-packs
go back to my room
and begin to type.
the afternoon beer always tasted
good and I'd come up with
some poems ...

take them back
knock on the window
wave the pages.

the Great Editor would smile
pleasantly
open the door
take the pages
sit down and read them:
"umm ... ummm ... these are
good ... why don't you drop by
for dinner tonight?"

and in between the afternoon
and the evening

I'd go back to my room
and sign more and more
colophons.
the pages were thick, heavily
grained, expensive
designed to last
2,000 years.
the signings were slow and
laborious
written out with a special
pen ...
thousands of colophons
and as I got drunker
to keep from going
altogether crazy
I began making drawings
and
statements ...
when I finished signing the
colos
the stack of pages stood
six feet tall
in the center of the
room.

as I said,
it was a very strange time
for an unknown writer.
he said it to me one
night:
"Chinaski, you've ruined
poetry for me ... since I've
read you I just can't read
anything else"

high praise, indeed, but I
knew what he meant.

each day his wife stood
on the street corners
trying to sell paintings,
her paintings and the paintings
of other painters.
she was a beautiful and
fiery woman.

finally, the book was done.
that is, except for the binding;
the Great Editor couldn't do
the binding, he had to pay for
the binding part and that
pissed him.

but our job was done,
his and mine,
and the Great Editor and
his wife put me on the train
back to L.A.

both of them standing there
on the platform
looking at me and smiling
as I looked back from my
seat by the window.
it was ...
embarrassing

finally the train started
to slowly roll
and I waved and they
waved
and then as I was
nearly out of sight
the Great Editor
jumped up and down
like a little boy,
still waving

I walked back to the bar
car and decided to stay
my trip
there.

it was some stops and
some hours later
when the porter came
back there:
"HENRY CHINASKI! IS THERE
A HENRY CHINASKI HERE?"

"here my good man,"
I said.

"damn, man," he said, "I've
been looking all over this
train for you!"

I tipped him and opened the
telegram:
"YOU'RE STILL A S.O.B. BUT
WE STILL LOVE YOU ...
Jon and Louise"

I motioned the porter over
ordered a double scotch
on the rocks

then I had it
and I held it up a moment
toasted them an almost
lyrical blessing
then drank it down
as the train
rolled and swayed
swayed and rolled
working me further and further
away
from those magic
people.

BRIGHT BOY

we were in one of those after-hour places.
I don't know how long we had been there.
I noticed a dead cigar in my hand, attempted
to light it, burned my nose ...

"you never met Randy Newhall?" the guy
next to me asked.

"naw"

"he got through college in 2 years instead
of 4 ..."

I got the barkeep to bring us a couple more
drinks.

"... he walked into the largest agency in the
world, they had 3,000 applications for this
one open position but he didn't fill one
out, he just talked to management for 15
minutes and he was hired ..."

"... uh"

"he began in the mailroom and in 6 months he
was arranging package deals for tv programs
and the movies ...
nobody ever got out of the mailroom that
fast, and next he married an intelligent girl
just out of law school..."

"yeah?"

"in his office he seemed to spend most of his
time putting his golf balls across the room.
he made work look easy ..."

"listen," I asked, "what time is it? the battery in my watch went dead"

"never mind ...
he was promoted to upper management and stopped putting ...
he was
the youngest man in America in such a position ..."

"you buy the next round," I told him.

"sure, well, he doubled his work hours and after a while his wife left him -- women don't understand ..."

"what?"

"guys like him."

"oh"

"he didn't contest the divorce ..."

"I didn't either"

"he just went ahead, that didn't stop him, he kept up his contacts, it was amazing, you'd see him having dinners with congressmen, with mayors ..."

"are you going to get the next round?"

he got the barkeep to bring two more.

"he got into it, he got into the 15- and 16-hour day, and after work he began frequenting an after-hour place above the strip, to relax, to let go ..."

"a place like this, huh?"

"this was the place ... he didn't close any deals here but he relaxed with the great, the actors, the artists, the screenwriters, the directors, the producers, the industrialists, and so forth ... and, of course, the many beautiful girls ..."

"here?"

"yes, look around ..."

I did.

"you're really funny sometimes"

"well, then, to get on ... he first tumbled onto coke, then more coke. mostly in sundry condos and homes after the after-hours places ..."

"flying, what?"

"yes, but in his upper management position he continued to function well ... then he got into H ..."

"kicks like a horse, huh? my round"

I ordered two more.

"and after some months, he felt more and more depressed, he took 6 weeks off and went to Hawaii, surfing, lying in the sun ..."

"did he screw?"

"he told me that he tried ... anyhow, he came back and he used to talk to me here just like you're doing now ..."

"oh, great"

"he became obsessed with this Mexican Real Estate Dream which he would front with a Mexican friend who was well adored as a great Mexican comedian, and the way he laid out the master plan of the M.R.E. Dream -- within 8 years he would control and indirectly own one-third of the Mexican nation, and from there on in it would only be a matter of going on to controlling one-third of this nation and that nation ... after that, it could be progressively upped until ..."

"drink up," I suggested, "then what happened?"

"well, he didn't quite get it rolling ... instead at the office he became snappish and cantankerous, throwing ashtrays, yanking the phone from the plug, once pouring a bottle of TAB down a secretary's blouse ... yet he retained a rather stylish, though obnoxious brilliance ... and he remained semi-functional which was better than most of those about ..."

"most don't have much"

"that's true ... anyhow, he began arriving at work dressed in a house-painter's outfit, you know, white overalls, including cap, and management gave him a 3-month furlough ..."

"BARKEEP!" I yelled, "COUPLE MORE!"

"he sold his house and moved into a small apartment on Fountain Avenue, and friends came by for a while, then they stopped coming around ..."

"suckerfish like winners"

"yes, and then there was a period when he tried to get back with his x-wife but she didn't want any more of that, she was with this young sculptor from Boston who was said to be immensely talented and who taught at one of the leading universities ..."

"horse dung"

"of course ...

anyhow, our friend has this second-floor apartment, as I told you, on Fountain Avenue, so ...

one day the manager who lived in the apartment below noticed this water leaking down through his ceiling ..."

"oh?"

"the manager went upstairs and knocked on the door, no answer, he took out his key and opened it, walked in and there was this guy, he was standing there with his head in the bathroom sink and the water was still running out of the tap and overflowing the sink and running to the floor, and the manager wasn't sure, you know, such things are strange, and he walked up and noticed that the head just stayed there in the sink, and the manager touched his legs, his back, and everything was stiff, r.m. had long ago set in, there he was standing with his head in the bathroom sink with the water running and the overhead light on ..."

"listen, Monty," I said, "your name is 'Monty' isn't it?"

"yes, you've got it right ..."

"I drove here and I've got to go and I want to know if the parking lot to this place is in the front or out the back or to one side"

"it's straight out the back ..."

"goodnight, Monty"

"goodnight...."

I knew which way was back. I
got off the stool and started
moving toward there.

IT'S* ALL SO CLEARLY SIMPLE

the night the dogs came by to say
hello
was near the time
to end it
as the ladies on the telephone
screamed their furies
at me.
the night the dogs came by to say
hello
I gave them cigarettes and beer
and they told me about the
poet
who had to go to Paris
to select his poems for his book of
selects
and we smiled at that
the dogs and I
and we thought about starvation
mornings
deadly noons
evenings of elephantine
miseries.
the dogs said that all that mattered was
enduring the obvious
it was all we were worthy of:
a minor bravery
beats
chucking it
although we weren't sure
why.
the dogs said that was the best
part: not being
sure.

the night the dogs came by to say
hello
we all mused about whatever happened to
Barney Google with the googly
eyes: probably died for the love of
a strumpet as many good men

do
or went to London and walked in the
fog
waiting for
sinecure.

the night the dogs came by to say
hello
the walls were stained with mellow
agony
and beakers of curdled wine
dusty with almost dead spiders
sat around like memories best
forgotten.

the dogs said it was best to
chose what to
remember
and if anything were
best
maybe it was smoking cigarettes and
drinking
beer
and talking slightly about things
but
not too
much.

also said that most things were
a copy of the original
and that the original was not
much good.

left soon after that
and the phone kept ringing
as the ladies screamed their furies
at me.

what they wanted I didn't have
and what I had
they didn't want.

for them
I wish the dogs would say
hello.

hello hello hello and
hello.

FINGERNAILS

the nurse looked at my face.
"are you a seaman?" she asked.
"no," I said.
"then this didn't happen on the job?"
"no," I said, "I don't work."
"how did this happen to you?" the nurse asked.
"a woman," I explained, "fingernails ..."
"oh," she laughed, "well, fill out these papers, the doctor will see you soon"

there were a long list of questions like:
have you ever been in a mental institution?
have you had v.d.?
do you hate your parents?
do you consider authority necessary?
do you sleep on your back?
do you dislike sex?
what is your favorite color?
how many times a month do you masturbate?
if you had a chance, would you take it?

I felt that the nurse had possibly given me the wrong paper.

there were a dozen other questions of similar nature.

to all the questions I answered, I don't know.

the doctor came in, glanced at the sheet, put it down.

"you say a woman did this?"
"yes."

"did she bite you?"
"no."

"what do you want?"

"a tetanus shot ..."

"whenja have your last one?"

"I don't know"

the doctor grabbed my face, started squeezing it.

some of the scabs broke.
I began bleeding.

"how does that feel?" he asked.

"peachy-keen," I told him.

"o.k.," he said, "the nurse will give you your shot ..."

he began to walk out of the room then stopped and turned, "by the way, this woman, why did she do this to you?"

"I don't know"

the Dr. left as the blood dripped down onto my shirt collar.

ONE OUT

men on 2nd and 3rd.
first base was open.
one out.
we gave Turner an
intentional walk.
we had a 3 to 2
lead.
last half of the
9th, Simpson on the
mound.
Tanner up.
Simpson let it go.
it was low and
inside.
Tanner tapped it
down to our shortstop,
DeMarco.
perfect double play
ball.
DeMarco gloved it,
flipped it to Johnson
our 2b man.
Johnson touched 2nd
then stood there
holding the ball.
the runners were
steaming around
the bases.
I screamed at Johnson
from the dugout:
"DO SOMETHING WITH THE
GOD DAMNED BALL!"
the whole stadium was
screaming.
Johnson just stood there
with the ball.
then
he fell forward
still holding the ball.
he was
stretched out there.
the winning run
scored.

the dugout emptied out
and we ran
toward Johnson.
we turned him
over.
he wasn't moving.

he looked
dead.
the trainer took
his pulse and
looked at me.
then he started
mouth to mouth.

the announcer asked
if there were a
doctor in the
stands.
two of them came
down.
one of them
was drunk.

the crowd started
coming
out on the field.
the cops pushed
them back.

somebody took the
ball out of Johnson's
hand.

they worked on him
for a long time.
there was a
camera flash.
then the doctor
stood up:

"it's no good.
he's gone."

the stretcher
came out and
we loaded Johnson
onto the stretcher.

somebody threw a
jacket
over his face.

they carried Johnson
off the field
through
the dugout

and into
the dressing room.

I didn't go
in.
I had a cup of water
from the cooler
and
sat on the bench.

Toby the batboy
came over.
"what happened, Mr.
Quinn?" he asked
me.

"our 2nd baseman is
dead, Toby."

"who you going to play
there now?"

"I don't think that's
important," I told
him.

"yes, it is, Mr. Quinn.
we're 2 games out of
first place
going into September."

I got up and went down
the dugout steps
toward the locker room.
Toby followed me.

FOOLING MARIE

he met her at the quarterhorse races, a strawberry
blonde with thin hips, yet well-bosomed; long legs,
pointed nose, flower mouth, dressed in a pink dress,
wearing white high-heeled shoes.
she began asking him various questions about the
horses while looking up at him with her pale blue
eyes ... as if he were a god.

he suggested the bar and they had a drink, then
watched the next race together.
he hit twenty win on a six-to-one shot and she
jumped up and down gleefully.
then she stopped jumping and whispered in his ear:
"you're magic, I want to fuck you!"
he grinned and said, "I'd like to, but when?
Marie ... my wife ... has me timed down to the
minute."
she laughed: "We'll go to a motel, you fool!"

so they cashed the ticket, went out to parking,
got into her car ... "I'll drive you back when
we're finished," she smiled.

they found a motel about a mile and one half
west, she parked, they got out, went in, signed in
for room 302.

they had stopped for a bottle of Jack Daniels
on the way and he took the glasses out of the
cellophane as she undressed, poured two.

she had a marvelous body and sat on the edge of the bed sipping at the Jack Daniels as he undressed feeling awkward and fat and old but also feeling lucky: his best day at the track.

he too sat on the edge of the bed with his Jack Daniels and then she reached over and grabbed him between the legs, got it, bent over and kissed it.

he pulled her under the covers and they played. finally, he mounted her and it was great, it was the miracle of the universe but it ended, and when she went to the bathroom he poured two more Jack Daniels, thinking, I'll shower real good, Marie will never know.

I'll finish the day off at the track, just like normal.

she came out and they sat in bed drinking the Jack Daniels and making small talk.

"I'm going to shower now," he told her, getting up.

"I'll be out soon."

"o.k., cutie," she told him.

he soaped up good in the shower washing all the perfume-smell, the woman-smell, the sperm-smell away.

"hurry up, daddy!" he heard her say.

"I won't be long, baby!" he yelled from under the shower.

he got out, towelled off good, then opened the bathroom door and stepped out.

the motel room was empty.
she was gone.

on some impulse he ran to the closet, pulled the door open: nothing but coat hangers.

then he noticed that his clothes were gone: his underwear, his shirt, his pants with car keys and wallet, his shoes, his stockings, everything.

on another impulse he looked under the bed:
nothing.

then he noticed the bottle of Jack Daniels, half full, on the dresser.

he walked over and poured a drink.

as he did he noticed a word scrawled on the dresser mirror in pink lipstick: SUCKER!

he drank the drink, put the glass down and saw himself in the mirror, very fat, very old.
he had no idea of what to do.

he carried the Jack Daniels back to the bed, sat down, lifted the bottle and sucked at it as the light from the boulevard came in through the blinds.
he looked out and watched the cars, passing back and forth.

HEMINGWAY'S SHADOW

I met the famous writer but he had walked into all the traps: the talk shows, the monstrous book advances: "I got a million for the last, have spent it, haven't written a page ..."

now he was making a book into a screenplay, he was in ever-debt

grinding along to keep from going under to what he owed wives, publishers, Hollywood.

he still lived well, fed well

but he was not writing very well anymore -- in fact, badly

but as a person I liked him, he was a grey little bull but

balanced -- neither bitter nor ranting nor vindictive.

his generous calmness and fine blue eyes were quite damned appealing.

he spoke well and with good sense in spite of sometimes going on so long that he chewed it to death he

was

likeable, he had simply gotten his ass trapped in so many obvious traps and there was no backing out --

just more typing and more typing and more books and more talk shows and more movies.

he was no quitter, he was doing what he could in a game where the odds had swallowed him; lesser men would have panicked and broken.

yet his charm too was part of his trap:

people may like you but the typewriter is totally impartial.

we spent part of a long day and night together; what I didn't like about him was that he didn't drink very much and I have this possibly juvenile manner of judging men as -- the more they drink, the better they are.

so later on this given night we were at this stupid function together wherein, perhaps, I was getting sucked into one of his traps because there we were and it seemed to be a pityless, dumb place to be with whatever you had left of your life and I figured that the only viable thing left to do was to drink and drink and I lifted the thin-stemmed glasses and popped them down and kept motioning to the waiter for more until said waiter finally understood, watched my glass empty, to rush forward again. I bantered with the waiter, first praising him, then railing him.

as the night continued the famous writer simply sat and watched me, his eyes fixed, never leaving me. as each stupidity fell from my mouth his optics kept widening, as I emptied glass after glass after glass he just sat there looking looking as if I were some freakazoid.

at one time I told him between the rushes of the waiter: "you are making too much of this; join me instead of observing."

I think he had too much at stake, too many people not to offend.

later, past the midnight hour, I had to make the pisser. when I returned, my wife leaned to me, said, "he told me it was very nice of you not to have said anything about his writing."

the famous writer was a true class gentleman; I lifted my newly-filled glass to him and said, "we are all piss-ants."

I drank it down as those true blue eyes simply looked on and on, he was the old heavyweight champ, a darling in his class, I liked him, I truly did as the waiter rushed toward me again with the ever-bottle.

SWIVEL

I broke two chairs lately
while typing.
I was very drunk when
the last one broke.
I came crashing down at
3 a.m.
and never finished
the poem.

now I have purchased this
Lazy Boy swivel chair.
from the alleys of starvation
I have come
to this.
what a sardonic riposté
to my past!

I can spin around.
bend back.

I've got everything
but a button to push
for a secretary.

this Lazy Boy swivel has
many uses:

now I'm a tail gunner
in a bomber ...
I swing up, down,
around ...

tat tat tat tat

I'm shooting enemy planes
out of the sky ...

or, look, I'm the boss ...
I've called in some slump-

shouldered dolt
who has been working
all day
hungover.

I lean back,
look him over, he's
not much.

"Chinaski," I tell him,
"I gotta cut your ass
off. you're
finished! you ain't been
carrying your
weight! this is no
welfare project!"

he just stands there
saying nothing.

I spin my chair
look at the doll
sitting there with her
dress hiked up to her
ass.

"Mary Lou," I tell her,
"make out this fellow's
check. give him an extra
day. it's worth it just to
get him
the hell out of here!"

"all right, Jesus," Mary Lou
says to me.

(I have this Latino
name.)

I watch Chinaski pick up
his check and
slink off

now I
light a cigar.

there's a guy standing
in front of me.
he wants a job.

I rattle the application
he has filled out.
I exhale my expensive

cigar smoke
across the top of it.
I glance up at
him.

"you don't seem," I
smile, "very qualified."

"I can do the job, sir,"
he says.

I ball up his application,
toss it into the
wastebasket.

"you're wasting my time,
Rajaski! please delight my
presence by taking the
nearest exit! thank
you"

as he leaves
I lean back
puff on my cigar
exhale
look over
at my secretary.

"Mary Lou,"
I tell her,
"slide under this
desk and
give me a bit of
head"

put a man behind
a desk
in a swivel
and things begin to
happen.

this old desk
was here
when I moved
in.
now I have my
swivel.

I'm ready.

tat tat tat tat

I gotta protect my
fucking literary empire.
I like it.

I swivel to my right
and there on my
bulletin board
is tacked a photo
of Céline.

I swivel to my left
and there
hung on the wall is a
two by three foot
color photo
of a World War I
Fokker triplane ...

I've come a long way from
New Orleans, baby, and
I've got a long way
to go ...

tat tat tat tat

GOT CHA!!

TRANSFORMATION AND DISFIGURATION AT THE P.O.

there were always little tragedies
we heard about on the job
sitting on those stools
eleven and one half hours a night
every bit of outside information
was greeted by us
much like the inmates of a prison camp

every now and then
a courier would come by and say
"it's 3 to 2, end of the 3rd ..."

he never said 3 to 2 who
because if you had been listening
from the beginning
you were able to decipher all that

one night I heard it from two fellows
talking:

"Harry checked out early
when he walked into his house
it was dark
his wife and her lover were in bed
they thought he was a burglar
the lover had a gun
and he shot Harry"

"where's Louie?"
I asked one night
I hadn't seen Louie
in a couple of weeks
Louie had two jobs
when he slept I didn't know

"Louie?
Louie fell asleep in bed one night
smoking a cigarette
the mattress caught fire
he burned to death"

there were many deaths
among the clerks

we all felt like
inmates of a prison
I also felt as if we were
front line troops
under continual attack and
bombardment

when there weren't deaths
there were breakdowns --
people who after years of
sticking letters
just couldn't do it anymore

or there were dismissals
for the slightest of reasons

it was death and transformation
and disfiguration:
people found
they couldn't walk anymore
or they suddenly
came up with speech defects
or they were shaken by tremors or
their eyes blinked too fast or
they came to work drugged or
drunk or both

it was terror and dismemberment
and the survivors
hunched on their stools wondering
who would be next

as the supervisors brutalized us
the supervisors
were in turn brutalized
by their superiors who
were in turn brutalized

by Washington, D.C.
who always demanded
more for less
and the public brutalized
Washington, D.C.
and it was finally
the little old lady
pruning her garden roses
who was the central cause
of misery for everybody:
Democracy at work

one night I asked,
"where's Hodges?"

I don't know why but
I always seemed to be
the last to know anything
perhaps because I was white
and most of them were black
even though
they seemed to like me

there was no answer
about Hodges
who was one of the meanest soups
and white
to top it all

and I asked again
and somebody said
"he won't be around
for a while ..."

and then
in hints and bits
it was gotten to me:
Hodges had been knifed
in the parking lot
on the way to his car

and then
it was inferred to me
that they knew
who did it

"would it be anybody
I know?"
I smiled

it got very silent
Big George put his mail down
stared at me

he stared at me for a long time
then he turned
started sticking his letters again

and I said
"I wonder who's winning
the old ball game?"

"4 to 2,"
somebody said
"end of the 4th"

Hodges never came back
and soon
I got out of there too.

RED MERCEDES

naturally, we are all caught in
downmoods, it's a matter of
chemical imbalance
and an existence
which, at times,
seems contrary to
any real chance at
happiness.

I was in this downmood
when this rich pig
along with his blank
inamorata
in his red Mercedes
cut
in front of me
at racetrack parking.

it clicked inside of me
in a flash:
I'm going to pull that fucker
out of his car and
kick his
ass!

I followed him
into Valet
parked behind him
and jumped from my
car
ran up to his
door

and yanked at
it.
it was
locked.
the
windows were
up.

I rapped on the window
on his
side
"open up! I'm gonna
bust your
ass!"

he just sat there
looking straight
ahead.
the woman did
likewise.
they wouldn't look
at me.
he was 20 years
younger
but I knew I could
take him
he was soft and
pampered.

I beat on the window
with my
fist:

"come on out, shithead,
or I'm going to start
breaking
glass!"

he gave a small nod
to his
woman.

I saw her reach
into the glove
compartment
open it
and slip him the
.32

MACHO MAN

the phone rings.
I answer.
it's a woman.
she says,
"you are a sick
fucker and I thought
I'd tell you
this ..."

she hangs up.

I am supposedly
unlisted.

it rings
again.

"you write this
macho bullshit
but you're
probably a
fag, you
probably want to
suck
black dick!"

she hangs
up.

I am watching
the Johnny Carson

I saw him hold it
down low
and snap off the
safety.

I walked off
toward the
clubhouse, it looked
like a damned good
card
that
day.

all I had to do
was
be there.

show.
he amuses
me;
he's so
straight-backed
dressed in his
high school
go-to-dance
suit.
he touches
his nose
his necktie
the back of
his neck.
he's a
giveaway:
he wants
desperately
to be all right
just like his
audience.

it rings again.

"you don't know
what a real
woman is!
if you ever met
a real woman
you wouldn't know
what to do
with her!"

she hangs
up.

Carson jokes about
his jokes being
so bad
but he has probably
consumed and
murdered
more writers than
Bobby Hope.

then she's
back:
"why do you keep
listening to
me?
why don't you
hang up?"

I hang up
then take
the phone
off the
hook.

Carson has
finished his
monologue.
smiles
is delicately
concerned
yet
pleased.
he goes into
his little golf
swing

THE END OF AN ERA

parties at my place were
always marred by
violence:
mine.

it was what
attracted
them: the
would-be

as the commercial
descends
upon
me.

it's just another
dull night
in San Pedro
as all my
male servants
Kitcha Kubee
Des Man DeAblo
La Tabala
and
Swine Herd Sam
stand
with their
black dicks
extended.

I decide to have
my unlisted
number
changed
but meanwhile
remote control
the tv
off,
shush the
fellows
away
and reach for
the pages of
Sam Beckett
as my
cross-eyed white
cat
leaps upon the
bedcovers.

writers
and the
would-be
women.

these writers?
these women?
I could always hear
them

buzzing from the far
corners:

"when's he going to
flip? he always
does"

at most parties I
enjoyed
the beginnings, the
middles

but as each night
unfolded toward
morning

something
somebody
would truly disgust
me

and I'd find myself
picking up some
guy
and
hurling him off the
front porch:

that was
my favorite way of
getting rid of
them ...

well, so ...
this one particular
night
I made up my
mind
to see it all
through
without
untoward
incident

and was
walking into the
kitchen
for another
drink
when

I was
pounced upon

from
behind
by
Peter the
bookstore
owner

this bookstore
owner had more
mental problems than
most of
them

and
as he had me
in this excellent
choke-hold from the
rear
his madness gave
him a rather superb
strength ...

and as those milk brains
in the other room
babbled on about how to
save the
world

I was being
murdered ...

I thought I was
finished
bright flashes of
light
whirled
about

I could no longer
breathe
I felt my heart
beating through my
temples

and like a trapped
animal
I gave it one last
surge:

grabbed him
behind the
neck
bent my back

and carried him
along
like that

rushed toward the
kitchen
wall
ducked my head
low
at the last
moment
and

crashed his skull
against that
wall.

I steadied myself
a moment
then picked him
up and carried him
into the other
room

and dumped him upon
the lap
of his
girlfriend

wherein
within the
safety of her
skirts
this Peter the Bookstore
owner
came around and began
crying (yes, he actually
showed tears):

"Hank hurt me! he
HURT me! I was only
PLAYING!"

I heard voices about the
room:

"You're a real bastard,
Bukowski!"

"Peter sells your books, he
puts them in the
window!"

"Peter LOVES you!"

"o.k.," I said, "everybody
out! FAST!"

sure enough, they filed
properly out
only barely whispering
their comments
to each
other.

and
I locked the
door
put out the
lights
got myself a
drink
and
sat there
in the dark
drinking
alone.

and
I liked that
so
much
that
that's the way
I continued to
drink
from there
on
and
there were no more
parties

say
except with a
woman

and
after that
the writing got
better

everything got
better:

you've got to
get rid of

the
bloodsuckers
before they
get rid of
you.

THE MAIN COURSE

"Jesus Christ," he told me, "you know Rita and I split, just general attrition and a rather boring unhappiness. anyhow, I've been eating out and it's like a repeat movie or the same dream you keep having over and over."

"whatcha mean?" I asked.

"I mean," he told me, "I keep going into cafe after cafe: dim lights, empty tables. I go in, you know, and no matter the cafe the same man gets up from his newspaper and moves toward my table ..."

"hands you a menu," I said.

"yes, and I am pleased for him: I am bringing him money, I am bringing him trade ..."

"he might suicide otherwise?"

"I don't know," he continued, "anyhow, I order soup, beer, wine, salad, shrimp and fries. I make a small joke, hand the menu back. he walks off toward the kitchen. outside it rains; inside sickening music plays on the radio."

"then?" I asked.

"the soup arrives. not too bad. I read the paper as I spoon the soup and the paper says something like: woman steals baby from mother for 3 months. horse meat from Australia has been served at a nation-wide popular chain of drive-in eating places for 7 months. man kills estranged wife, 3 children and a man who happened to be outside reading the gas meter."

"then?" I asked.

"then the salad comes by. not bad.
I finish the salad. then comes the
main course. fair. somewhat dry and
dirty."

"you eat it?" I asked.

"yeah," he said, "only I needed some help.
I get him up again.
another beer. another wine."

"then?"

"the same man sits by the register.
he waits.
I am finished eating.
I nod.
he comes up and lays the bill on
me.
he goes back by the register.
he sits down."

"he is without talent," I said.
"also, his cook has no talent.
his lightbulbs have
no talent."

"I leave a tip anyhow," he mentioned.

"then?"

"then I get up.
pay.
leave."

"you've eaten."

"yes, but I keep going into cafe after
cafe and the same man gets up from his
newspaper, moves toward my table ..."

"he will only multiply," I suggested,
he will never suicide. he will sit under dim lights,
pretending to be what he isn't.
he doesn't even love or hate life,
he doesn't even consider it."

"I keep having this nightmare," he said,
"it's like, you know: eyes fingers hair
bellybutton butt, other parts --
they could have been assigned to any
inanimate finity."

"things get dark," I said, "and we awaken with a worse hangover than ever before."

"I gotta begin eating in," he said.

THE YELLOW PENCIL

I am sitting in the stands with a two-night, two-day hangover; the last night was the worst: white wine, red wine and tequila.

I am out there because I have evolved an astonishing new theory on how to beat the races.

the money is secondary: it's only used as a guideline to see if I am on the given path.

I picked up \$302 the day before and I am \$265 ahead going into the sixth.

I can barely function but the new theory (formula K) enacts itself continually:

M plus S plus C plus O (each brought down to relative powers of $1/4$ each): the horse with the lowest total is the winner.

it is like being inside one of the very secrets of life itself. when your figures tell you that a 2nd, 3rd or 4th favorite can beat the favorite and when your figures only select one horse,

it is a very curious and
magic feeling, of course,
and you learn to apply
the same simplicities to
other areas of existence
but in a spiritual
rather than the mathematical
manner.

I have my figures ready for the
6th race
then I look up
and see, well,
there in the stands ahead of
me
a fellow sits upright.
his face is smooth and
bland.
the physiognomy is set at
exact zero.

he has a yellow pencil.
he flips it over
once
into the air and
catches it with
one hand.

he does it
again.

and again
with the same
timing.

what is he
doing?

he just sits there
and continues to
repeat the
maneuver.

I begin to
count:
one two three
four five six ...

23, 24, 25, 26,
27 ...

his movements are
dull and graceless,
he reminds me of a
factory machine.

this man is my
enemy.

45, 46, 47, 48 ...

his face has the
taut dead skin
of a mounted
ape

and I am sitting
with my two-day
two-night
hangover
watching ...

53, 54, 55 ...

this will be my
life in hell: watching
men like that
sitting forever
tossing and
catching pencils
with one
hand
in that same
non-innovational
rhythm ...

I am in vertigo.
I feel a pressing
at the temples
as if I were going
mad.

I can't watch
any longer.

I get up and walk
away from the
seating section
as I think,

it will never
let go
with the women
you live with

or wherever you
go
supermarkets,
bazaars, hang-glider
meets. it will
find you, maul you,
piss over you, let
you know
about it
again.
and there will be
nobody
you can talk to
about it.

I find the bar.
the barkeep
seems a nice enough
fellow: little bright
blue eyes
and a crisp white
shirt.

"double vodka 7,"
I tell him.
he nods and moves
off.

a high-yellow in a
see-through
throws her
head back and
laughs about
something ...

she's about three
feet
to the left
so that's far
enough.

the barkeep comes
back with
my drink
asks me:
"how's it going?"

I wink and
slide
the money
toward
him.

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ESPECIALLY AROUND
HOLLYWOOD PARK

well, I use valet parking at the track, it's only
2 bucks more than preferred
and I'm usually late, hungover, and
I leave the machine there, right at the entrance:
one only needs a planned and reasonable
divinity
to continue to pass through the
fire.

the valets see me every day so they know I'm a
regular, some kind of special
nut.

but I've held my communication to a
minimal and polite
level,

my only reference to their
genuine alacrity
and humanity

being the daily buck tip
I slip to the man who tools up
old IHRS 291,

which is about the time
they are putting them in the gate
for the last
race

and there's nobody about except me
and the valets.

now, of late, the fellows
have been asking
in a curious manner
about those strange cigarettes upon the
dash

and I inform each of them that
they are

erala dinesh beedies

from India
rolled and made from the
betel leaf.

one afternoon
after having myself an excellent
\$425 day
the valet who brought the car
nodded toward the
dash, asked, "hey, mind if I try
one of those?"

"not at all," I said, "and here, give some
to your buddies ..."
and I handed him a
pack.

then I stalled, fastening my
seat belt, putting on my driving
glasses, adjusting the side mirror, turning
on the radio.

and when I looked over before
leaving

there were the 8 or 9 valets
sitting on the long yellow
bench, each puffing on an
erala dinesh beedie.

"get high, fuckers!" I yelled
and as a group
they all waved
laughing

and I cut right
up the exit lane
thinking, there are things more
important than beating the
horses, really,
but not much more
important.

THE TAX CONSULTANT

he arrived, brisk, with briefcase, highly recommended, he
sat on the couch and began his song;

I disliked him right off, made a few off remarks about
him.

he leaped up, grabbed his briefcase and ran out the
door.

"you hurt his feelings," said my
lady.

"he'll be back," I
said.

the door opened, he flung himself across the room and
was again on the couch with his
briefcase, talking
again.

I listened further; decided to let him have a go at my
finances -- he could be good at what he did even if he

seemed like a not so nice human, and a friend claimed him to be "one of the best in the business."

I poured him a drink and told him to come back at a later date.

he was back several days later.

"we are going to make you a Corporation," he told me.

"yeah?"

"yes, you will appoint a Board -- President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and so forth."

"yeah?"

"yes," he answered, "I will be the Treasurer."

"yeah?"

"I will have my lawyer mail you the papers; please read them, sign them, and we will begin"

3 or 4 days later the papers arrived: many many pages.

I read them over; I read them over a great many drinks.

there were some interesting lines like:

"In case the Head of the Corporation is deemed mentally instable, the finances of said Corporation will pass into the hands of the Board."

I crossed that one out.

there were more interesting lines, such as:

"Alcoholism or the use of narcotics will also be a determining factor in ruling out the Head of the Corporation as a factor in the distribution or dispersement of monies."

I crossed that one out.

"It will take a 75% vote by the Board to investigate any financial decisions."

cross out.

"Board members will receive salaries arrived upon as 5% of the gross income of the Corporation."

cross out.

there were many other cross-outs, each page was heavy with inked-out paragraphs.

and long into the night, after many drinks, I wrote in: "The Head of the Board appoints himself as Treasurer."

then I put everything into a big envelope, walked it down to the corner mailbox, dropped it in, hearing the big THUD as it hit bottom.

a few days later I received a letter: "my lawyers are working on a revision of the Corporation laws and bylaws ..."

but I never heard about the Corporation again
but there were still important calls from my tax consultant:

"I must come over, I have something exceptional for you."

then there he was.

he had papers.

"land in Oregon, I have several plots myself; there is a judged 36% appreciation per annum and also various tax write-offs involved."

"Gerry," I said (that was his name), "I don't want to buy anything that I can't reach down and touch and say, 'this is mine'."

Gerry grabbed the briefcase and fled.

a few days later the phone rang again.

"this one you can't pass up! I must see you immediately!"

and he was over again.

"there is this client of mine, trustworthy and financially established, he needs \$15,000 for 90 days and he's willing to pay you 20% on the money. now that's really 80% on an annual basis, think of that!"

"Gerry, all I can think of is myself not being able to sleep each night while worrying about my 15 grand."

"but this man has ultimate credibility!"

"if he's financially established then tell him to go to a bank for his loan, the interest rates are far more reasonable."

Gerry and the briefcase were gone through the door again. he made some other attempts but all my responses were negative.

"Gerry," I told him, "I just want to keep the government off my neck, I'll even give them more than they ask, I just don't want them messing with me."

"now, that's STUPID!"

"I know it is ..."

since I had already paid Gerry some opening fees I decided to go ahead and let him be my tax consultant and preparer for that year.

he had the forms ready for me on time
and after I filed on April 15th
here came the bill:

"\$3,500.00."

he listed sundry expenses, some of which
included Travel, Phone Communication and
Computerized Counter-Check and Accommodations.

I thought it was quite much but wrote
out the check.

(now, if you will, pass some time, say, a
year.)

now my income was hardly as much: I had
gotten large advances on royalties before
sales and now the sales had to catch up with
the advances.

so again I allowed Gerry to prepare my next
return, figuring since my income was
less, there would also be less
problems and
expenses.

I filed the April 15th forms, then got the
bill:

"\$6,779.98."

he had even added the 98¢ to give it a
touch of reality.

I had a friend who was a lawyer and
went to him with the
bit.

he got Gerry on the
phone: "this is totally immoral and
outrageous," he told him, "how can you
justify such a fee?"

"Mr. Bukowski," Gerry answered, "is an
unstable individual, nearing the verge of
dementia; my charges include nuturing
this man through his terrible
climate."

"my client is not going to pay you
any of your fee."

"I'll take it to court!"

"I will be prepared and delighted to see you in court."

"yeah?"

"in fact, we are considering suing for over-payment of past services."

I didn't pay and little came of it except one phone call from Gerry:
"listen," he said, "we don't need this fucker; we can work this thing out ourselves!"

"I refer all matters to my lawyer."

"listen, I'll take \$3,000.00."

"no."

"I'll take \$1,500.00 and that's my last offer!"

"I refer all such matters to my lawyer; please don't call again."

about a month later, read in paper:
a professional football player, hired this financial adviser, seemed almost a friend, they drank some nights and the adviser stayed over and in the morning the player's wife would cook breakfast for them. they went to dinners and stage plays together, exchanged birthday and Christmas presents and the football player allowed the adviser to write checks for him, to pay his bills, make investments, so forth and it appeared to work out nicely for 5 years, then the adviser was gone and along with him all the assets and unpaid bills ...

remember, don't sign anything, keep what you've got and be glad you've got

that
and prefer to remain,
happily,
an unstable individual
nearing the verge of
dementia.

BEAUTI-FUL

this one poet used to carry
this stringy-haired blonde around
with him at poetry readings
and
she'd sit out in the audience
and now and then
just as he concluded a
poem
the blonde would
breathlessly say:
"beauti-ful"

it made him look good
and I was a little jealous
of it
myself:
nobody had ever said that
about
one of my poems

and each time
after she said,
"beauti-ful ..."
it made them
applaud.

he had her planted at all
his readings
this poet who was so good
with the ladies
he had this
gentle smile and
these
artistic
dangling
hands
and he dangled
very well
elsewhere
it was
told.

I attended these readings
because I was living with a
sex-pot who insisted upon
going to them
and since our affair was
still fresh and
new
I made certain horrible
sacrifices

and he was reading
everywhere
in every little pitiful
hand-out
poetry hole in L.A.
and nearby
parts ...

and this one night
he had a new plant
in the audience
a tinted redhead
wearing fisherman's boots
and a cowboy hat
with a two and one half foot
red feather
but she was as good as the
other:
at certain times
after certain poems
she too would utter the
word:
"beauti-ful ..."

and the applause would
follow

an hour later he was still
tirelessly going
on, and then he finished
one
and his new plant said it
again:
"beauti-ful ..."

and then it came
from the rear
from one of the back
seats:
"NO, IT WASN'T, IT WAS A
PIECE OF SHIT JUST LIKE
EVERYTHING ELSE YOU'VE
WRITTEN!"

it was the stringy-blonde
standing up on
one of the seats
holding her paper cup
full of
Thunderbird

and then the applause came
it came and it
rose and it
rumbled
it was perfect and endearing
and unashamed

he had never heard applause
like
that ...

and after that night
maybe a week later
I was alone
sitting up against the
headboard of the bed
the sex-pot was out
to a reading or
somewhere
and I was into another
beer
going through one of
those
throwaway tabloids
when I came across this
short notice
that a certain poet
had left for
New York city
to seek his fame and
fortune
there ...

a beauti-ful city for a
beauti-ful guy, I thought,
bundling the tabloid
and dumping a 3 pointer into
the far off
basket

-- Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

