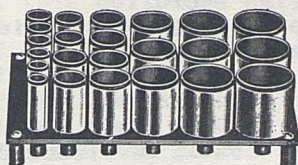






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LETTER TO A YOUNG POET: RIMBAUD IN ABYSSINIE

Sir:

I wish you to listen to me carefully. I shall write this only once.

I have nothing to do with poetry anymore, and I studiously avoid what you might call the muse, as I would any wearisome former love, and this one, I might add, was particularly feckless, noisy, malodorous and quite certainly dangerous.

Predictably, for all would-be poets are alike, your questions have an odd intensity to them. You remind me of a dog barking and nipping in his kennel, thinking he is about to be fed. I feel the impulse to beat you on the nose with a stick.

Let me assure you then, there is no "social significance to the art of poetry." None. And no I will not take your broken-hearted verses under my "wing." You would have to send me money first.

The books I read now are ledgers of fine, red-margined vellum. Gut-threaded and calf-covered. An entry:

"Item — mask, Somali; painted teak, design abstrait;  
of priestly origins; sold.

Of these words, the greatest is sold.

Write to anyone else on earth but me. I will read none  
of the poems you have sent me. Do yourself and the rest  
of your world a favor: stop writing. Stop it.

Yours, etc.

A.R.

Hrar, Abyssinie  
Juin, 1881

— Frederick J. Marchant

Belmont MA

#### THE MAN WITH THE HOE

I wondered of the race of mankind  
I wondered of its beliefs  
I wondered of its divinities  
I wondered of its comedians  
I wondered of its crowns  
I wondered of its clowns  
I wondered of its players  
I wondered of its carnival  
I wondered of its tyranny  
I wondered of its tyrants  
I wondered of its bondage  
I wondered of its bullies  
I wondered of its flights  
I wondered of its futility

Again I wondered of the race of mankind  
I wondered of a race of hands  
I wondered of its paws  
I wondered of its pawing the earth  
I wondered of its tools  
I wondered of its toolmakers  
I wondered of its construction work  
I wondered of its accomplishments  
I wondered of its workingmen  
I wondered of its acres  
I wondered of its plows

I wondered of its plowmen  
I wondered of its evidence  
I wondered evidently  
I wondered of the man with the hoe

#### OF THE DEATH OF A RHINOCEROS

What do you know of this funeral pyre  
What do you know of the death of a rhinoceros  
What do you know of this delicious calf's liver  
What do you know of this kind of a funeral of the wilds  
What do you know of its likely visitors  
What do you know of its hummingbees  
What do you know of its hummingbirds  
What do you know of its green gardens  
What do you know of its black gardens  
What do you know of its intense bees  
What do you know of its furious jungle  
What do you know of its wilderness  
What do you know of its darkness  
What do you know of its canary birds  
What do you know of this music above the roar of the tiger  
What do you know of all thru the night

#### NORTH ATLANTIC BRACELETS

What do you know of the land of Beatrix  
What do you know of the land of the blessed damozel  
What do you know of just touching one's toe to the polar  
regions  
What do you know of the northern passages  
What do you know of its ice floes  
What do you know of its icebergs  
What do you know of its surf  
What do you know of its icy mists  
What do you know of the land of the northern rhinoceros  
What do you know of the whereabouts of the British fleet  
What do you know of the famed passengers on board  
What do you know of the palaver and teatime and consomme  
What do you know of the land of the blessed  
What do you know of the blessed commands  
What do you know of the blessed commander  
What do you know of its face in the icy mists  
What do you know of its ice cold British tears

## SKY AND PURPOSES

I know this is colossal  
I know this is possible  
I know I can do it  
I know I can do it again  
I know I can do it again and again  
I know of a big cloud that is shaped for an elephant  
I know of a little cloud that is shaped for a peanut  
I know of pushing the little cloud over to the big cloud  
I know of putting the peanut onto the elephant's trunk

— Alfred Starr Hamilton

Montclair NJ

## THE LACEMAKER

A girl making lace bends to her task  
with the same look of love Vermeer pored  
over his craft. Her hair springs into bloom  
from the fur of his brush; one strand swirls  
because her fingers have just been twisting it.  
Back to business, her hands spider among the threads,  
drawing nature's symmetry from the spools.

Her dress is yellow. It flows like cream.  
On the left, a plump pillow, ink-blue  
or the black-blue of some Thai sapphires,  
serves no purpose but to oppose this gold  
and concentrate the soft Delft blue of the pad  
beneath the girl's hands, the mid-blue of her smock  
(or is it apron?). A red silk tress runs wild

from the pillow into the foreground,  
small streak of genius. One sees Vermeer  
rummaging his rooms for accent marks  
like this. Although his hands echoed hers,  
curled with care, as he painted the found thing in,  
she could not have wound that red into her work.  
The glints he introduced by chance still shine like  
stars.

## LADY STANDING AT A VIRGINAL

Where is the blue, the yellow?  
The lady is dressed in peachskin. An eye drunk  
on the clash of primary colors  
will find this juxtaposition of fruity silk  
and the grayish aquamarine  
of the chair seat, the lady's shawl and cap,  
too irresolute, too mild.  
Those squat Dutch faces are gone; this lady's face  
flowers with Englishness. Her heart is revealed

as she half-turns and gazes  
at the painter. As though we could mistake that look,  
a study of Cupid hangs on the wall  
behind her. The care with which Vermeer has set  
her curls, this time no half-bald  
skull gleaming with light, may mean her gaze  
was meant for him; or it may not.  
Even the homely girls glow with love; their love;  
Vermeer's love. It is the viewer who is caught.

— Roger Finch

Tokyo Japan

## MY CLOTHES

Did my clothes do me wrong? No, never.  
Then why is it such pleasure  
to take them off?  
I unbuckle my watch and lay it  
across the dresser in the dim bedroom.  
Time is dismissed!  
What about my leather jacket?  
I really like it but my own skin is warmer,  
certainly more familiar.  
I shed my leather jacket and hang it on a wooden hanger.  
Its elbows do not go limp.  
In fact, it looks rather jaunty,  
or possibly contentious, (even without me).  
Relax, jacket. There's always tomorrow.  
I remove the turquoise ring from my right little finger.  
It goes in a box with other rings, where they gossip  
in round, bright voices about my hands.  
Rings are such busybodies.

This sweater is rough like a towel  
and comes off with a tug over my head,

like an easy birth.  
I bend and unfasten my sandals.  
Stepping down from their slight eminence,  
I lift my sandals by the heel straps  
and sling them into position, side by side,  
in the closet. They'll never be lonely.  
Shoes are the twins among garments  
and finish each other's sentences.

For economy of motion, skirt, stockings, underpants  
come off all at once, but I separate them.  
It's a small quarrel, easily ignored.  
Skirt, go to bed. Stockings, drape over the chair.  
Underpants, into the corner with you.  
I'll deal with you all later.  
Good night clothes. Until tomorrow.

#### THE HENS THAT CAME WITH THE PLACE

We've bought a farm,  
a little twenty-acre farm;  
it came with chickens. Eleven hens.  
Mornings, these hens  
come out to cluck at us,  
and if they're out of food or water  
and in a mood for grouching,  
they cluck very sternly.

With a dim-witted but serious look,  
they stand at the chicken-wire fence  
and go raawk, raaawk, raaaawk,  
until, like childish gods who've been off playing  
with thunderbolts,  
we realize,  
we're guilty.

I've never had chickens before.  
Once I had a chick  
a neighbor lady gave me.  
I was only four.  
The chick got sick and was no more,  
but I remember its inverted eyelid,  
wonder of that small world.  
Its sleepy sickly closing  
like the eyes of a red-haired boy I knew,  
or the turgid closing  
of the eye on an immobile miniature alligator  
displayed downtown in the dusty window  
of an insurance company along with  
a triptych of pictures (a wreck,  
a tornado, an earthquake)



and the time of day  
on a black electric clock with white numbers  
encircled by the name  
of the Insurance.

But these hens, they are not  
like that.  
They are fat and red and rusty,  
and anxious to remind us:  
We came with the place!

At night, the hens jostle one another  
on the perch in the henhouse  
to get the best position; what that is  
I can't fathom,  
maybe where it feels they won't get eaten.  
This goes on for an hour  
after sundown, shoving and clucking:  
a rustle, squawk, and then a heavy slump  
as a dislodged chicken hits the floor of the coop.  
Fortunately, these bodies rise,  
and then more shoving  
until at last they close  
those unnatural eyelids  
and sleep.

On hot days, if the water dries to ash  
or they have drunk it all, one hen at least  
is apt to scale the brace of the fence and escape  
over the wall into the pasture  
where there's a watering trough.  
The commotion of this escape is enough to warn us:  
chickens are breaking out; bring water.  
And then they gather, clucking,  
We do not want to get out,  
but you leave us no choice.  
We, who came with the place  
must be minded. Shame on you.

Then I take the hose and fill  
their water tank.  
They strut and sip and toss their heads and gargle,  
throats full, like tasters at the winery on the hill.

These chickens are stern.  
They will not excuse us in neglect,  
and yet, when all is mended,  
there is a fluster of: She meant no harm.  
She is new here.  
And then a chorus: Oh Layena, chicken-manna,  
oh lettuce leaf, oh rotten apple  
with a bug in it,  
oh stoney water from the outdoor faucet,

oh lovely, lovely chicken house.  
Oh farm.  
This is our place.  
We came with it.

#### CUT HER HAIR

"Cut her hair. It takes  
the strength from her. She's  
too skinny," they said to Mother.  
It's true, I was light  
as a fish bone on the beach  
that summer;  
a dried smelt of a girl at six,  
I blew this way and that way  
in the winds of my own laughter,  
shrieking and running at the beauty parlor  
while Mother had her hair done.  
Elsewhere, the war went on  
I knew, but what was war?  
Hitler, that bad man; the absent boys next door  
who sent home nazi flags or coconuts,  
depending where they were.  
But I ran careless in the beauty shop  
which smelled of perfume and ammonia; I ran  
up and down between the dryers  
where ladies sat  
having their curls set.

"How about a finger wave?"  
Alvina said to Mother, and I pictured  
fingers gaily waving, as to men  
in Pathe newsreels marching ten by ten.  
In the beauty shop, where ladies came  
to shop for beauty, nails  
glittered like carapace of insects,  
and curled at the ends of fingers  
like the hooves of horses I'd seen  
crippled by neglect.  
Never neglected, I knew I was lucky.  
"Oh, eat your Cream of Wheat!"  
Mother cried, like other mothers of that time,  
"Just think, of children starving overseas.  
Oh, eat." I cared  
about those children;  
but I was thin by naughty preference  
and chose to run or read instead of eating,  
and my hair grew.  
My long hair. Commonly  
french-braided, then turned  
up in loops like handles on a purse

and tied with grosgrain ribbon  
or the rainbow-streaked georgette.  
When loose, I could sit on it.  
They said, "She can sit on her hair,"  
as if it were an acrobatic feat.  
"But look at her, thin like that.  
It's a sin to let her strength all run  
to hair. Cut it off," the beautician chided.  
So Mother cut my hair, or had it done,  
my long black shining hair. Then  
I could sit on it all right, step on it  
in fact, where it lay on the floor  
like a herd of snakes.  
"I want my hair back," I cried.  
"Oh, you'll look cute," the operator sniffed,  
and took another whack, then it was done.

Contrary to expectation,  
none of this put any meat on me,  
nor was I cute.  
For I had lost my mane, my tossing  
mantle, my purse handles.

Now, in middle age, at last  
after years of cutting hair,  
the cure must finally  
have been efficacious.  
No longer thin  
as a sheep bone in the grass, a wheat straw,  
a glass stirring rod, a thread  
pulled from a hem, long and thin but strong,  
I am soft, soft, substantial.  
I do have strength,  
more than expected.  
Who knows? As I get older,  
maybe I'll grow my hair  
and sit on it.

\* \* \*

CODA:

Here's to crackpot theories,  
opinionations pressed on helpless children,  
may these good intentions stick  
where they belong,  
in the teeth  
like seeds from wild blackberries.

— Barbara Drake

Yamhill OR

## CORONA SMITH BUYS VIOLETS

I love violets. Late one afternoon I was at Woolworth's, and they were having an end-table sale on potted plants. There was one pot of a new variety of violets: blue and white like I like, but developed in Japan to be hardy enough for the tropics. That one was the sample. I begged the salesgirl to sell it to me. The store closed at five, and it was one minute to. She gave it to me without ringing it up.

On Sunday, I went to a nursery looking for new ideas for ground-cover. Turning a corner towards the back, I saw hundreds of violets with a sign saying "New From Japan!" I bought two flats and planted them in my bed. For a while I had all the blue-centered violets I could ever dream of. Then things got busy and I forgot to water them.

## CORONA SMITH'S ELEVATOR ADVENTURE

After a loud snap! and dropping two floors, the elevator stopped, a little askew and shaky, at the seventh floor. I press and press the button and yell. Then the door opens. Standing there is a doctor who works in this building, though I am sure she has never noticed me. Apparently she's come in for some papers. She looks wonderful in her Saturday clothes, doesn't notice the slant of the floor. I decide whatever it takes

I must make friends with this woman. So I greet her casually, pretending confidence. The elevator works smoothly, and we chat into the lobby. She invites me out for quenelles. I don't know what those are but say sure, I have the time.

At the restaurant baroque music is playing. I claim I play flute, though I quit in seventh grade. The conversation turns to Woody Allen movies and something I say strikes her as clever. During the meal I admit I was anxious on the elevator, in fact would have bolted off and down seven flights if she hadn't got on. She says what she likes about me is

I'm so honest. I have to confess then  
that I'm no flutist. She laughs  
and says I'm only proving her point.

— Sue Cowing

Honolulu HI

NORMA JEANE

Richard and I drove up to  
Westwood one night  
to visit you but it was  
late — almost midnight —  
and the gates were locked.  
We considered scaling the fence  
but quickly discarded that idea  
realizing I was too stoned to  
accomplish such a feat  
without breaking a limb.  
We made vague plans to drive up  
again when the park was open  
but never did.

Richard and I don't see each other  
anymore but one of these days  
I'll drive up alone and tell you  
what I would have that night,  
that if I ever have a daughter  
she'll be called Norma Jeane  
(with an "e" on the end,  
the way you spelled it)  
and she will be very much loved  
and very much wanted  
as all children deserve to be.

COME LIVE WITH ME AND BE MY LOVE

Since you have a job we'll be able to  
rent a nice two-bedroom apartment  
within walking distance of McDonald's.  
We'll have two phones and two answering machines  
but we can share the cats and  
cleaning supplies.

We'll spend Thanksgiving with your family  
and Christmas with mine and you'll

save up your vacation days so we can take trips to Chicago and Cancun.

Since I want to adopt a child, we'll have to get married so the social workers will think us stable. It will help if we buy a house, too. We'll sell your Toyota and buy a mini-van. I'll keep my Dodge until it dies at which time I'll look around for something economical like a Fiat convertible.

I'll work on my B.A. a class or two at a time but you'll have to work a lot of doubles what with the house payments and all so you won't have much time to read or write and the Wormwoods will stack up until you cancel your subscription altogether.

We'll attend poetry readings once in a while but eventually we'll have to give that up, too. There just won't be enough time for poetry and true love.

#### TWO SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN FACTS

1. A bathroom scale alternately placed in six positions on a bathroom floor yields six different readings.
2. The correct reading is always the lowest of the six.

— Kathy Hand

Long Beach CA

#### I HAVE COMPLETELY GIVEN UP COOKING

i have completely given up cooking. after four years of living alone i have finally called it quits. the act was gradually getting on my nerves until late last week, i guess it was, when i decided to only eat what could be consumed

without any preparation. and if i do want something hot, or even if it's just a cold sandwich, i go out and pick it up at the deli, or a diner someplace. i used to invite people over for dinner, and when i did i'd go out of my way to really put together a fine meal. but those days are over. in fact, they ended a lot earlier than last week when i gave up cooking altogether. one consequence of this naturally is that i find myself getting invited out to eat less and less. this i find doesn't bother me though, since sitting at a table eating in the midst of conversation was only serving to give me indigestion. i don't know how many times i had to leave a dinner early because of this. so, now i eat alone every night, and i do so standing at the counter next to the fridge, and maybe a meal will consist of nothing more than a slice of cheese and some celery, and then for dessert i'll have an orange, or maybe a few chunks of pineapple. i can go on like this for days. and i notice that when an urge for something more ambitious hits me i can usually satisfy myself with a slice of pizza. yes, i am becoming very thin. just recently i had to put another hole in my belt. when i stop in to visit my parents i can see that worried look in my mother's eyes. she always puts out an enormous meal when i'm there, hoping to fatten and strengthen me. and then she'll make sure i leave with enough leftovers for two, three days. i notice she never lets my father see her giving me these leftovers. maybe, in his mind, if i get thin enough i'll come around to marrying that good italian girl he's always telling me about. and i'm sure there are a lot of good italian girls out there, but until the right one comes along i'm going to have to be satisfied with simply eating a tomato with a little salt on it.

#### EXOTIC JAPANESE

exotic japanese pens all over the table and i never use them. i don't know why i keep buying them. perhaps it is because they seem so cheap considering how very swank they are. i prefer writing with a plain yellow pencil, #2 soft. and it's not just because

it enables me to erase, no. i think i just feel at home with one. i've known these yellow pencils since childhood. sometimes i'll just pick up one of the japanese pens to give them a whirl and most times when i do this it seems as though the pen is fighting me. i swear, usually i get the message it wants nothing to do with either me or the page. especially the one from sakura; it's like trying to write with an unruly sewing needle. but, i keep them around nonetheless. the best thing to do with them is to simply hold one at a time; take the cap off of it and then put it back on; inspect the smart clip on it; notice how everything works so flawlessly. there are never any messy points, say, like on a bic pen. bic pens always have runny noses. and this, i confess, i cannot stand, and so i don't use them either. in fact, i won't even own one since they are not even pleasant to look at. and they're sold by the dozen usually, which i find repulsive and disconcerting. what would i ever want with twelve ugly pens with runny noses? to get back to the japanese pens: sometimes too i purchase one just so that i can walk around with it clipped into my shirt pocket. it's a very handsome piece of jewelry as far as i'm concerned, for little more than a dollar. and since i can't afford a new japanese car i figure this is a decent substitute. the biggest charge came last week when i was at the supermarket and this lovely woman whom i happened to be speaking with asked me if i had a pen that she might borrow. i can't tell you how much ahead of the rest of the herd i felt when i pulled out my completely full and very spiffy pen from sakura and handed it to her. i had no fear when she took the cap off that there would be any greasy blue snots on the nose, the point. and of course there weren't. and when she mentioned to me what a nice color the ink was i had to look over at it to see exactly what color she was talking about since i had never myself used the pen. and beautiful it was, yes, my god. it was pure turquoise, of all colors, my favorite. what made it all the more magnificent too was that this lovely woman had to go with this turquoise ink such wild unbelievably lively red hair, so red and so wild as to be able to make a candy cane bleed.

INSECURE

i've had a key on my key chain now  
for over a year and i don't know  
what it's for  
  
and i'm afraid  
to take it off



old tall dry sunflowers  
dog lying on the brown lawn  
squinting

on its side  
what's left of a bottle of wine  
in the fridge

#### WHEN I LEAVE HERE

i consider what  
i'll take with me  
when i leave here,  
and exactly what  
i'll leave behind  
or sell, and from  
the looks of it  
there won't be  
much that'll go.  
after all there  
isn't that much  
room in my car to  
begin with. the  
small oak coffee  
table i won't take,  
although i've always  
liked it.  
the table and chairs  
won't go, which is  
unfortunate since  
the chairs were  
given to me as a  
wedding present  
by my sister, and  
the table is another  
piece of oak i've  
become very attached  
to. the bed's not  
mine; the other chairs  
aren't mine;  
the sofa belongs  
to s. really,  
all i see myself  
leaving with is  
the stereo. then

there are some  
books, clothes,  
and of course my  
typewriter and  
some useless  
manuscripts.  
the huge abstract  
painting i can  
store somewhere.  
i don't want to  
give that up since  
it certainly is a  
fine painting.  
and then there are  
the two black iron  
frying pans. those  
i must take, as  
insane as that might  
sound. they symbolize  
my domestic side.

#### AGAINST THE WORLD

i tell her i have to  
be the one sleeping  
on the outside  
since i'm the  
first line of  
defense

## BACK AT THE PANDA

balmy autumn night, and g and i go for a big feast at the panda in celebration of my getting fired from my job.

actually it was such an unfair firing, fueled by dirty backroom politics, that we are really just out to forget

about what can happen to a person when surrounded by the wrong people. so, we order our favorite dishes, starting

with steamed dumplings and wine, and we sit there and map out the next six to twelve months like a couple of happy

generals who have managed to escape the horrors of war for one sweet carefree joyous night. the waiter knows us

from so many former nights, and he brings to the table two bowls of hot red-pepper sesame oil, and i keep making

believe during the course of our feast in my happy tipsy state that it's not my fault that my shrimp repeatedly

fall from my sticks into these bowls. and g does her best too to soak up as much of this oil as possible, so before

long we're both in tears and both sweaty and the rest of the world is a faraway place not to be missed. ah,

and so the meal unravels effortlessly right up to when the fortune cookies are brought to the table on a

little white plate. and strangely enough both cookies are carriers of the same exact message: you will take

a trip to the desert. and this, this is just fine with us, yes, because it's right in sync with what we

discussed way back during the early wine-and-dumpling segment of the meal.

## AROUND THE EDGES

next to my half-empty green beer bottle are the flowers g gave me before going away.

she's back now, and the flowers are starting to get very old looking, and some of the leaves are hanging

limp. she was only gone for five days. the flowers seemed to lose their beauty very quickly, so i thought.

even g noticed this tonight as we were sitting here indulging in a big late dinner. twirling

her noodles she happened to look over at the flowers and asked me if i had put any water in since we

first did. after dinner we watched a movie for a while and then we went off to bed, but i couldn't

sleep because i knew i had to write, and so i came out here to the kitchen and started drinking beer.

initially there had been a rose in with these flowers, but it went limp early on, and i remember when i

threw it out it landed in the garbage on top of some bread that had gone green around the edges. i thought

it was kind of a pleasant sight, this limp red soft rose on bread with green edges. i was going to

take a picture of it, but then realized that she had taken the camera with her.

#### FROZEN PIZZA

i think we've come to like frozen pizza better, especially late at night. it's more delicate than the pie from the pizza place up in town. it's so delicate that there is no stuffy feeling tummywise at all. it doesn't keep us from sleeping. sometimes we get the french bread pizza. we stick the two pieces of bread in the broiler and they're ready in no time. and really, there's hardly anything to them. they are light and disappear without any discomfort. the french bread pizza is definitely g's favorite. she got me into eating them. i don't know exactly what they're made of, because late at night i don't care to be reading boxes; i don't care what i'm consuming. yes, they're light though. they go down easy, and they let us fall asleep. in fact,

we eat them in bed, backs  
to the wall, watching a movie  
on the vcr. regular pizza  
is just too heavy. we've  
talked about this. we've  
come to this conclusion.  
also that we love  
one another.

#### MY MOZART SERIES

she wanted to know why i took a picture of the bananas  
in the basket, and i told her that i did so because their  
yellow was so bright and inviting. i don't think she  
accepted this as much of a reason though, and so when i  
took a picture of the sink in the bathroom i really had  
something to answer for. but i had never lived with such  
an expensive camera before and i was charmed with how  
easy it was to use, and how sharp and glossy the results  
were. the thing made me look like a professional, at least  
in the eyes of this amateur. and i kept at it: recording  
many still lifes of the apartment, until pictures were  
piled so high on the dresser that it was getting hard to  
see in

the mirror. finally it got to the point where there  
wasn't anything to snap away at anymore. i had used the  
place up, so to speak, and i had no intentions of going  
outside. there was nothing intimate in the outside world  
to me, and i really considered myself a photographer of  
the intimate only. so the only thing left for me that held  
any interest was to take pictures of the stereo while  
different pieces of favorite music were being played. i  
started with mozart. i did a series of twenty-seven photos  
for every one of his piano concertos. all of them i owned  
on tape so it wasn't hard to do this. it was called "my  
mozart series." on the back of each photo was marked the  
number of the concerto. of course, this didn't sit too  
well with my girlfriend either, and she set out on a  
campaign of nagging questions concerning it. for my part:  
i just accused her of not appreciating mozart.

#### BEFORE I SIT DOWN TO WRITE

before i sit down to write i put an old movie  
on the tv and sit on the purple couch for  
about an hour with a newspaper in my lap  
i ignore

before i sit down to write i go in the kitchen  
and make myself a big cheese sandwich, pour  
myself a glass of wine and stand in the window  
and watch the cars passing below on the highway

before i sit down to write i put some music on  
the stereo and walk around adjusting the pictures  
on the walls, even going so far as to rearrange  
some of them, putting them in places i never  
thought of before

before i sit down to write i go in the bathroom  
and trim my beard, washing the hairs down the  
drain with ice-cold water

before i sit down to write i live forty years,  
nine months and fifteen some odd days in needful  
yet exhausting preparation

#### POETRY HAS RUINED ME

my father likes to tell people that poetry has ruined  
my life. it doesn't bother me anymore when i happen to  
hear him say this. all my life he has been a source of  
negative comment. also i am at the age now where we've  
said just about everything to one another so many times  
that nothing has any punch anymore. and as far as poetry  
ruining my life goes, well, there is some truth to this,  
at least in some regards. for example: because of poetry  
i will never keep my lawn neatly cut. it'll grow wild  
and the weeds will have their own way. my car will al-  
ways be an old jalopy. it will be ruined with rust, and  
the insides will always be piled high with newspapers  
and model airplanes that won't fly (if ever i decide to  
attempt building and flying model airplanes). my house  
will be in perpetual shambles, eaten to the ground by  
poetry as if by crazed carpenter ants. and my children  
will be worthless. my ruined life will have ruined  
children running around it. they will be ruined by a  
lack of authority on my part, and they will run free  
to terrorize the neighborhood and eventually grow up  
and have ruined children of their own, who in turn will  
go out and ruin the four corners of the world. my  
wife will be ruined too. i'll ruin her with poetry  
just like i've ruined my own life. in time her  
teeth will turn black, her hair will turn white and  
her skin will rot with ruin. all this will happen  
to her from the effects of my poetry. i too will die  
from it. ruined in my grave. honored in heaven.

— Ronald Baatz  
Kingston NY

me poking my rod  
through the earth, Chinese sitters  
leaping to their feet

keeping me awake  
from outside, the gravelly grind  
of grass growing

imbedded in a tire track  
a reddish splotch  
that was once a kitten

gently polishing  
a pond's icy surface, shadows  
of scudding clouds

in a ditch, tires up,  
a Rolls Royce; beside it  
a coiffured woman, dazed

its linen kept fresh  
a crib still there for a child  
born dead years ago

nailed to the blackened  
door frame of a gutted store,  
a no-looting sign

— William Woodruff

Pasadena CA

# NICE

is not a fart sealed in a thermos.  
It is not a rubber dropped in the collection plate at church,  
or a dong drawn in the coach's yearbook smile.

Nice is a dog that wags its tail, doesn't smell, and doesn't bite;  
a cat that comes to you and, when you pat it, purrs.  
Nice is what the people next door were

when they gave me a squirtgun for my birthday,  
but weren't, drunk and fighting, Friday night.  
Nice describes their daughter Katie, dressed for Sunday school,

but not spreadeagled on my bunkbed, showing me her "thing."

At least that's what my mommy said.  
Nice is a mommy's favorite word,

along with "selfish," "bad," "ashamed," and "hands-and-knees."

Nice can be a disease; if you catch it, egg some old lady and run.

The same way ancient Egyptians worshipped the Sun,

the middle class worships the Nice.

It is the Grail which guides their lives toward Readers Digest and the Junior League,  
away from boogers on the tablecloth, and eating toe-cheese.

Nice is underarm deodorant, lack-of-panty-line, no-jiggle-bras,  
tampons with "hands-off" applicators and names like "Rely," "Concern," "Stay-Free."

Nice is what every vagina prays to be.

It's scented soap, tuxedos, black ties, thank-you notes, "chubby" instead of "fat," and "blow your nose" for "snot."

It's what most poems are, and mine consistently are not.

It isn't picking scabs, or picking up herpes, crabs or AIDS.

It isn't girdles on the clothesline, or a "Hershey Highway" down the middle of your underwear.  
It is not the expression "Hershey Highway."

It is male understatement for a perfect ass,  
an affliction of guys who finish last,  
arrival of your tax refund on time.

It is not pursuing cash (though cash-in-hand is always nice),  
or the feeling when the phone rings during sex,  
or when Jehovah's Witnesses knock at your door, flaunting  
their niceness like an open sore.

Nice is what a civilized war's supposed to be.  
Told that Nice is a resort in Southeast France,  
it is not nice to think of nude sunbathers, but hard  
not to.

When a boss says "nice job," beware the trap-door in the  
bedrock of his gratitude.  
When a woman says "nice guy," he is putting her to sleep,  
but not with him.

Webster's states that "nice" derives from a word meaning  
"stupid; lazy; dull."  
It would have been nice to know that years ago.

I could say more about this subject, this blatant turncoat  
word,  
(this worm in Monarch's clothing; pinhead who would be  
King)  
but I'm afraid that it would not be very

#### FURTHER DECLINE OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

I'm at the Odium in Hollywood, watching  
a double bill: Gorky Park and Angel.  
Two old ladies — one red-haired, the other, blue —  
take seats behind me, loaded down with popcorn and Pepsi.

Lee Marvin, Gorky's villain, stalks on screen, lethal  
and haughty.  
"He's such a crumb," Blue says, admiring.  
"He's a crumb in real life is what I hear," says Red.

Now we see the contraband sables,  
all teeth and fur and snarl, leaping around



their cages hissing like dynamite about to blow.  
"Aren't they cute," says Blue.  
"I gotta get my tooth fixed," Red declares. "It's  
painin' me."

Now the Anatomy Professor reconstructs the faceless heads  
of the corpses from Gorky Park.

"Ugh, that's disgusting," snaps Blue.  
"That doctor was a dwarf in the book," Red declares.  
"Why didn't they get a dwarf?" Blue wants to know.  
"That guy's pretty short," Red allows.  
"He's not a dwarf," Blue says. "My sister's son-in-law's  
a dwarf.  
He's out of work, too. They could of got him."

On to Angel, a 14-year-old orphan who goes to private  
school by day, and pays by turning tricks on Sunset Strip.  
"Why'd they want to make a movie about this?" Blue demands.  
"It's awful," Red agrees.  
Their chewing accelerates.

Now Angel's meeting friends: hookers, a crazy cowboy, a  
lesbian, a drag queen.  
"Is a morphadite the same as a transvestual," asks Blue.  
"A pervert is a pervert," pronounces Red.

The camera lingers on pogo-ing Hari Krishnas.  
"I wonder about that guy," says Red.  
"What guy?" asks Blue.  
"That Harry Krishner."

The crazed slasher knives a hooker,  
decks her out like a bride, and spreadeagles her on a  
motel bed.  
He bends to kiss her.  
"Ugh, that's sick," says Blue.  
"Nothing shocks me any more," says Red.

#### NOTHING EVER GETS EATEN ON WILD KINGDOM

The "feisty" bobcat which has chased the goose mom  
and her fluffy brood into the reeds and now approaches  
like a Nazi out to bayonet a baby, gets "distracted"

by another predator, a coyote, whose sense of smell  
can be applauded, but whose wish to wolf down someone  
else's flesh is not so nice. The coyote craves

a muskrat he's trapped in a tule pond. He trots in,  
sniffing like a pup. Muskrat attacks with squeals

and hisses, like some brave little democracy driving  
back the Russian bear. Even so, the coyote's ready  
to rip out that valiant windpipe, when he too  
is distracted by the baddest mama on the marsh,

Old Miz Mountain Lion. He retreats,  
a kicked cur scampering away just as Miz Lion  
spots a beaver, and pounces like a tabby on a bug.

Again the rodent turns, an animated rug  
snarling, tail-slapping, roaring like a Tasmanian  
Devil till Miz Lion, "discouraged," slinks away —

and meets a skunk. "Oh no," we laugh, proud  
of our woodsy lore. Lady Skunk squirts  
a warning across Miz Lion's bow — then two more  
squirts, to wound, not kill. Kitty keeps coming.  
No jury in the country could claim excessive force  
now as Lady Skunk looses a broadside. Miz Lion

rolls, screaming, paws clawing her eyes,  
muzzle tunneling through meadow grass like Horatio  
Hound, snout full of cartoon cactus spines.

We grin at Nature's comedy, intent as ospreys  
on the flashing tube, while through our windows,  
gray whales breach off Long Beach Harbor,

chased by humans screeching, "Thar she blows,"  
and Great White Sharks prowl each year closer  
to shore, feasting on sea lions and surfers,

and our city streets and alleys, Ferraris  
and flophouses run red, and every minute  
someone's raped or shot dead, and every ten

poor Marlon Perkins, just back from cancer surgery,  
introduces Mutual of Omaha, and smiling warmly,  
drives the hearse up to our double-bolted doors.

#### WHAT MISERY LOVES

A: So how've you been?

B: Incredible. I've had seven good days.

A: Seven good days. I haven't had seven good days in  
seven months.

B: Well, they weren't exactly good. More like passable.

- A: What I'd give for seven passable days.
- B: You realize that, for me, "passable" means a day I don't throw up my breakfast, I'm so depressed.
- A: For me, passable is a day I don't have a full-scale panic attack and have to run home and hide under the bed.
- B: Of course, my seven "good" days came after a year of living hell. Not a day went by I didn't want to chop off my fingers one by one and feed them to my piranha.
- A: I gave away my piranha and got some tapeworms — to sort of symbolize lingering pain.
- B: Last year was an improvement, actually! The year before, I hanged myself twice, overdosed on aspirin a dozen times, and jumped in front of a train, the 1:05 from San Jose. It would've killed me if it had been on time.
- A: I stuck my head in the oven last week, and nearly died. They say I still have some brain damage.
- B: Remember my trip to Three Mile Island? It affected my lungs and liver and kidneys. That trip took five years off my life. Conservatively.
- A: I'd welcome five years off my "life." It's been decades since I've had a good laugh.
- B: I never laugh. I barely smirk.
- A: A sneer is elation for me.
- B: I'm lucky if I don't break down in tears.
- A: I'm fortunate if I make three days without a nervous breakdown.
- B: I'm ecstatic if I don't go catatonic on the spot, and require hospitalization.
- A: I'm really blissful if I don't go into a coma, and stay that way for months.
- B: I count myself blessed if I don't go into a coma, live on respirators for a year, and wind up with permanent brain damage and facial paralysis.
- A: I'm in heaven if I don't fall down dead, get resuscitated with massive brain damage that makes me a quadriplegic, and after years of living as a vegetable, die in agony.
- B: I'm positively beatified if I don't die after years of agony, going in and out of comas, screaming for days on end, withering, wasting away to sixty pounds, enduring every humiliating and painful test known to medicine, overhearing all my loved ones wishing I'd just

die so they could squander what money I have left;  
then when I do die, come back reincarnated as a dung  
beetle.

A: Well, I've got to go. Call you tomorrow — if I  
make it home.

B: Good to see you. I'll be here — if I last the night.

HONEY, I'M BACK

here in the Cottage of Suspended Desires.  
After two weeks in the Mansion of Agonizing Need,  
what a relief to sink, clam-like, into this worn chair  
and not think of the hammocks and peeled grapes  
and dancing girls limber as ferns,  
which are the good points of the Mansion,  
the bad being that the girls are lesbians,  
can run faster than I,  
and have razor blades in all my favorite spots.

With any luck I'll just stay here,  
lulled by the scent of last night's casserole,  
sipping warm beer and looking forward  
to the postman's bringing  
the occasional ad for auto parts  
or a limited edition set of pewter frogs,  
but no more tickets to the Mansion  
or the House of Desperate Longing,  
no maps leading to the Palace of Skull-Crunching Despair.

GATHER YE ROSEBUDS WHILE YE MAY (BUT WATCH FOR PLASTIQUE  
PETALS)

The worst thing about disasters  
is not that they're so bad,  
but that they're so damned unexpected.  
I don't mean popular stuff:  
the Big California Quake,  
or standing on Ground Zero,  
or even learning that your latest  
headache is brain cancer. I  
mean you're in your livingroom  
watching The Love Boat,  
when a runaway freight train  
cuts off your legs;

you're  
thirty feet from your apartment

in your rented Porsche, and you  
make the turn you've made  
a thousand times, but this one  
time you clip a fire-hydrant,  
which blows like Old Faithful,  
your car's rear end falls off,  
you forgot to buy insurance,  
and a drenched mafia hit-man  
is standing right there, scowling  
at it all.

Somewhere, sometime,  
someone cooking dinner got his brains  
splattered by a meteor; and though  
they always say "You have more  
chance of being hit by lightning . . .,"  
someone has been hit by it,  
or stepped on a live grenade  
in his back yard, or been crushed  
by a falling pop machine,  
after kicking it, trying to get  
back the quarter it just screwed  
him out of.

Right this minute  
I've got whiplash suffered  
listening to the Lakers  
in my parked car. I know  
a guy who broke his back  
slipping on a Rhinoceros Beetle;  
a guy who cut his prick off  
by accidentally closing it  
in his dresser drawer.

So,  
when you say that you like  
sex with me "too much,"  
and think about me "much  
too much," and even think  
we should "back off," get "less  
involved," it makes me crazed.  
My suggestion, my sweet  
but timid love, is that you  
tell me what you like the most,  
and let me do it

now  
and every chance we get,  
before the bomb an insane  
woodcarver stashed in your four-  
poster explodes, or your sheets  
spontaneously combust, or  
the first verified flying

saucer in earth's history  
crash-lands below your panty-  
line, seconds before my tongue.

BOB

Everyone laughed at the horse's name:  
Bob. They laughed louder  
to learn it was my turtle's name —  
or possibly, to learn I have a turtle.  
I laughed too, remembering April  
days in Houston, finding turtles  
in the woods as spring broke open  
like a sweet red melon.

Rich  
as Scrooge McDuck, I rode around,  
bike basket full of turtles. I  
built elevators to my treehouse for them,  
ran up and down my backyard,  
swooping turtles through the air  
with wing-feet flailing, routing  
Nazis to the Stars and Stripes  
Forever.

Even in 1955,  
I knew that there was something  
fine, something primarily decent  
about turtles: their slow walk  
and patient eyes, the gentle  
way they nipped their apple-cores  
and lettuce, licking with their ancient  
tongues.

The 50s changed to 60s,  
70s, and 80s. Heroes changed  
from strong and silent to flashy  
and loud — Muhammad Ali, John McEnroe,  
Prince. I quietly watched  
the Apotheosis of the Asshole, and kept  
turtles: tolerant, easy, fearless  
enough to crawl off tables, tough  
enough to hit the floor and walk away.

The starting gun blasted. Bob  
stumbled from the gate, dead last.  
halfway around the track, he was  
still last. "A turtle," I moaned.  
"I bet on a fucking turtle."  
My friends were still laughing

as Bob pulled up on the second-  
to-last horse, Obstinado, then  
passed.

Down the home stretch,  
the announcer droned as if it didn't  
matter, "Coming up on the inside,  
it's Bob." The crowd began  
their swelling, oceanic roar,  
and I roared with them as Bob  
charged into the pack of tiny  
Nazis

flogging their mounts  
with the noisy, hard aggressiveness  
I'd learned to loathe and envy.  
Bob punched through them  
like a hot needle through leather,  
like light through black chain  
mail, winner by three lengths,  
going away.

I took my friends  
to dinner on my winnings: two  
dollars at twenty-three to one.  
But I only pretended to cash  
my ticket. And I watched  
the replay twice, tears in my eyes.

#### A FATAL FREUDIAN SLIP

— for Gerry Locklin

If the braless blonde in the tank top  
was really an old highschool friend  
he was just driving to a bus-stop,  
then why, his wife wanted to know,

did he first deny the blonde's existence,  
then try to change the subject,  
then go into a lengthy explanation  
about how he'd bumped into her at the library  
passing out Christian tracts,  
and how Platonic their friendship had always been.

He gulped and said  
"I didn't want you to get the right idea."

## THE LEAF EATERS

In his best suit, holding champagne,  
he stands politely in his spotless efficiency  
apartment. He's thrown a tarpaulin across  
his waterbed to show his good intentions.  
But the little leaf-eaters do not appear.

He takes out poems and reads,  
his new condo ringing with his tender  
passion. He lingers in his hallway,  
hung with his prize-winning oils.  
Still the soft curves, the swayers  
under smooth chemises don't come near.

He executes karate katas on his thick front lawn,  
each movement crisp, suffused with power.  
At the gym, he goes three hard rounds,  
pumps iron another hour then,  
sweat-drenched and panting, waits.  
Yet the musical high voices, silky  
hair and bright mascaraed eyes steer clear.

Guitar crotch-high, a thrusting satyr,  
he rocks out into his latest hits.  
Strings stretched to breaking,  
he screams, crooms, growls, cries,  
struts/humps/wiggles/glides through his echoing mansion.  
But the clingers to muscled arms and dreams  
of house and baby, the perfumed  
snugglers in the night don't seem to hear.

He slaves for years to earn four PhDs,  
a DDS, JD, and MD with two specialties.  
He rises from stockboy to president of six big  
companies, dons a different hand-tailored  
suit every day, and when too old and sick to drive,  
is chauffeured through BelAir in his platinum Rolls.  
Still the lovers of new shoes and long-stemmed roses,  
gentle wearers of bikinis and frilly lingerie,  
the fabled, all-healing leaf-eaters do not appear.

## BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

The day, age 4, I left my turtle in a cake pan in  
the sun and his blood boiled;  
The night Sue dumped me to go back with her ex;  
The morning Karen's car was stolen, and we both  
stood there and cried;

The time I dove into my Milk Drop Moe pool, landing  
on a plastic ship which took an ice-cream-sized



scoop out of my thigh;  
The first two years after the drunk rear-ended me, and  
every time I bent down, I remembered;  
The little league game where a line drive smashed me in  
the balls and I threw out the runner, then threw up;  
My first talent show, when I dared an Elvis wiggle,  
dropped my guitar on my foot and broke my toe;  
Homeroom, 9th grade, being publically stripped of the  
Class Presidency, after a "friend" told Miss Birchett  
that I called her "Old Bird Turd;"  
The night at Tommy Sloane's when I laughed so hard I peed  
my khaki pants in front of his big sister, who I loved;  
The Saturday my parents squashed my 8th birthday party  
because Terri next door hit me, and I hit back;  
The afternoon my novel came back, shitcanned, crushed by  
the Post Office, soaked by the morning's rain;  
The night Craig and Tim squeezed me out of my own band;  
The night I put away my velvet pants and Fender Strat for  
good;  
The night I learned my mother's lawyer had left for  
Barbados with her insurance money, one more attorney  
proving crime does pay;  
Each day I see my father wandering around the house, half-  
blind, after a mugger bashed him with a rifle at  
age 73 —

All the things I've whined and cried and raged and  
groaned and blushed and cursed about for 37 years  
file by our tent in the mountains as we make love.  
One by one.

They pull off black hoods and snarling masks, revealing  
smiles, tears tracking kind faces  
Sad to have hurt me,  
Happy to have led me here.

WITH THE AID OF COMIC BOOK ADS, WEEB  
FINALLY MAKES SOMETHING OF HIMSELF

Weeb, with his Pocket Spy Telescope,  
Two-Headed Nickel,  
Unbeatable Self-Defense Course,  
Flashing Police-Light,  
Stop Watch (98 cents),  
Fake Bullet Holes,  
Silent Dog Whistle,  
Police Handcuffs,

Foaming Sugar,  
Encyclopedia of World Records,  
Planet of the Apes Mask,

Weeb, with his Hercules Wrist Band,  
Hypnotizing Record,  
1001 Great Put-Downs,  
Playboy Decals,  
Secret Pocket "Pen Radio,"  
X-Ray Vision Glasses,  
Live Sea-Monkeys,  
Rubber Dollars,  
Karate and Judo Medals (with Ribbon),  
Vibrating Shocker,  
U-Control-It Life-Sized Scary Ghost.

## HIS DAY

"This just isn't my day," he used to say, several times per hour, every day.

He said it when the drunk rear-ended him en route to pay his overdue auto insurance.

He said it when he wrapped his neck-brace on too tight, passed out and suffered a concussion.

He said it when he finally won the big Pick Six Exacta, and excitement made him have to crap before cashing his ticket, which, just as he flushed the toilet, fell in.

He said it three days later, too, trying to convince his wife he really had caught herpes from that racetrack toilet seat.

Today was different, though.

He couldn't explain it, and felt no need to try.

Explaining was for days that weren't his day.

All he knew was, he'd awakened by the woman of his dreams; and he was a better lover than he'd ever been in dreams.

A better singer too, he realized, flinging scarves to a stadium full of screaming adorers.

There seemed to be as many of him as he needed, he observed, piloting his space-shuttle to a perfect landing, crossing the plate after his World Series winning Grand Slam homer.

He parried an eye-patched pirate's cutlass-thrust, lopped off the black-bearded head and leapt over his burning frigate's side.

The sea was shimmering as he swam ashore.  
He'd always wondered what ancient Egypt was like.

"What is your pleasure, Pharaoh," he heard a soft voice  
say — his queen, her lithe form outlined by papyrus  
sheer as cellophane.

"What is thy will, O God-Made-Man," a host of brawny  
soldiers boomed.

And, of course, he was the brawniest of all.

But to the west, he saw the sun sinking behind the  
pyramids.

His day was ending. So he decided "I'll make my own  
world, with unlimited time. And so I'm certain to  
experience everything, I'll make everyone a little  
chunk of me."

And he sat down in the midst of the old world (which  
we now call the "constellations") and, on the first  
day, began to write.

#### THE PLANET OF DELIGHTFUL WOMEN AND DISGUSTING MEN

is even better than the Planet of the Amazons,  
where fierce blondes leap on castaways, hungry as ants,  
or the Planet of Lost Women,  
where starlets stand around in g-strings,  
hoping to be found by something with testosterone.  
The women here are beautiful,  
but nicer than Amazons,  
better company than Lost Women,  
who only talk about shopping, tv, and what their man is  
doing wrong.  
Women here don't pout if a guy's not in the mood,  
or doesn't want to spend Sunday with the in-laws.

As for the men,  
they're fat, and smoke cigars  
and think five dollars is outrageous for a date,  
and lie around in dirty underwear,  
chomping nachos and describing farts.  
They have bad jobs if they work at all,  
gripe about dinner, sneer at art,  
and never lift the toilet seat or wipe the yellow stains.

Women go wild for a man with just one chin,  
a guy who works, and likes to kiss,  
who doesn't smoke or drink too much,  
who doesn't bully or bluster  
or think Isaac Newton is a cookie  
or Descartes what shouldn't come before Deshorse,

a guy who treats her like more than just some holes  
and fatty tissue.

A decent earth-man stands out here, like a diamond in  
dandruff:

scarce, and sparkling, and good for something.  
No need even to pity the guys you replace.  
They simply find new knockouts eager to have them.  
They take their Popular Mechanics and Wrestling News,  
their loud voices and walrus buns  
to some new livingroom kept all pretty for them,  
so they can invite over their friends,  
break out the beer, turn on the game,  
and shoo away their latest "ball-and-chain"  
right into your arms.

#### RECLAMATION PROJECT

- I reclaim my baseball glove from its grave in my attic,  
the crowd still roaring in its leather ear.  
I reclaim my flyrod — after years, still quivering with  
rainbow-lighting.
- I reclaim my daylight hours, auctioned to the lowest  
bidder.  
I reclaim my balls from my employer's billiard room.
- I reclaim the word "no" from the Museum of Ancient  
Thoughts and Antiquated Customs.  
I reclaim my scowl of menace, too long confined at home.
- I reclaim my good looks, hidden to quell envy.  
I reclaim my singing voice, grown hoarse with praising  
fools.
- I reclaim my prejudices, my unpopular beliefs, to light  
my way like attendant fireflies.  
I reclaim my sneeze, half brother to my scream, which I  
also reclaim.
- I reclaim my marriage from the gray sweatshop of habit.  
I reclaim my lover, who I dumped to save my marriage.
- I reclaim my back, dumping its gunnysack of obligations.  
I reclaim my passion, bonfire at the base of my spine.
- I reclaim my eyes, the kleig lights of my brain.  
I reclaim my brain, too long the cloud above my body's  
picnic.

I reclaim my vocabulary, where epistemology and deoxy-  
ribonucleic march arm-in-arm with fuck and shit and  
piss and come.

I reclaim my cock, the soul's divining rod.

I reclaim my Smith and Wesson, offering friend and foe  
its barrel — in peace.

I reclaim my guitar, locked in its case of dreams, which  
I reclaim.

I reclaim my hippie hair from fashion's Hall of Mocking  
Laughter.

I reclaim my bank account, which everyone knows more  
about than me.

I reclaim my bones, skeleton in my body's closet.

I reclaim my erogenous zones, best friends a body ever  
had.

I reclaim my happy childhood from adult cynicism,  
my good parents from neglect and psychoanalytic lies.

I reclaim my Dixieland records, exploding cigars in the  
mouth of Cool.

I reclaim my high spirits.

I reclaim my optimism from the blizzard where I left it,  
naked, smiling foolishly.

I reclaim the right to reclaim anything that I'm for-  
getting any time.

I reclaim my good name, which I've mumbled and written  
sloppily,

which I've allowed the unworthy to speak, prefacing  
orders, but which I now reclaim, and place on a gold  
throne,

and proclaim its owner, wearing a cocky grin, which I  
reclaim, to be the sun

around which everything revolves, and on which everything  
depends.

#### WARNINGS IN SEARCH OF A WOMAN TO WHOM THEY DIN'T APPLY

Beware of the man who praises liberated women;  
he is planning to quit his job.

— Erica Jong

Beware of the woman who praises independence;  
she is planning a coup.

Beware of the woman who accepts abuse;  
she is collecting ammunition.

Beware of the woman who doesn't nag;  
she doesn't care.

Beware of the woman who does nag;  
she cares too much.

Beware of the woman who wants children;  
she wants you to support them.

Beware of the woman who doesn't want children;  
she doesn't know what she wants.

Beware of the woman who wants a "liberated" man;  
she is looking for a slave.

Beware of the woman who comes with no strings attached;  
she killed her last puppetmaster.

Beware of the woman who comes too easily;  
she will go easily, too.

Beware of the woman who masturbates;  
she wants to prove she doesn't need you.

Beware of the woman who doesn't masturbate;  
she will need you too much.

Beware of the woman who issues ultimatums and pronouncements;  
her inactions speak louder than words.

Beware of the woman who reads MS Magazine at lunch;  
she will put rat poison in your tv dinner.

Beware of the woman who tells you all her secrets;  
she has something to hide.

Beware of Radical Women;  
they are Good Old Boys rolled over.

Beware of the woman who wants to mother you;  
she'll only love you in diapers.

Beware of the woman who runs for President;  
she is no different from the man who runs.

Beware of the woman who loves policemen;  
she expects to be raped and murdered.

Beware of the woman who didn't like dolls;  
she will steal your Tonka trucks.

Beware of the woman who adored dolls;  
babies will disillusion her.

Beware of the woman who embraces feminism;  
she does not caress your balls out of love.

Beware of the woman who promises undying love;  
she wants to haunt you.

Beware of the woman who promises "understanding;"  
she will use it against you.

Beware of the woman who, reading this, laughs too much,  
or scowls;  
she'll never understand.

DR. INVISIBLE AND MR. HYDE

— for Ron Koertge

Like a low tide, the Malibu girl's  
green bikini bottom has rolled back,  
exposing white crescents above her  
legs' tan-line. Her bra-straps lie  
like handlebars beside her on the sand,  
cups peeling down from breasts as white  
and curved and smooth as ostrich eggs.

"I'd like to hide in the girls' locker-  
room," I say. "And watch her change."  
"Yeah," says Ron, "Or be invisible,  
and follow her home." While our peers  
plod through Coping With Middle Age,  
we prowl L.A., and dream of roaming,  
unseen, through showers and bedrooms,  
crouching behind the Doctor's screen  
at the Clinic for Young Actresses and Models,  
slipping backstage at the Bikini Festival,  
our eyes, like God's, everywhere.

As younger guys than we write wills  
and prepare to die, Ron and I feed  
raw flesh to the boys still alive  
and well inside us, the same boys  
who risked buckshot and juvie hall  
to peer through neighbors' blinds  
at panty-girdles, slips, and harness-bras.

What, after all, is growing old,  
but ceasing to desire? What  
is death but hiding underground,  
a sure-fire way to be invisible?

A thousand years from now, as some tanned angel steps into her bath and drops her towel, don't be surprised if the steam says "Wham bam, I'm in heaven!" and the soap replies "Me too, Charlie. That's just where I am."

## PUSSY

It was all we cared about, those highschool years of calloused fists and smuggled Playboys. All day long we scanned for skirts to look up, blouses to look down. Every flash of breast or thigh stiffened the will of every guy to get pussy. First Steve, then Ted, then Carlos, then Johnny, one by one

they did. One by one they got pussy, and traded cruising the Chuck Wagon hang out for helping girls watch baby brothers, or go shopping, or do homework — anything to reach that slippery jungle we were all bananas for. I watched my friends' lives coil around them like pythons

in those Tarzan flicks I watched to see Jane's thighs; and I wanted to be wrapped in those coils too. Then it happened: I got pussy. It was all I'd hoped and more, sweaty nights parked in Dad's Dodge, or panting out on Devore Field with Linda, which meant beautiful, which Linda was. Only later

did I wonder, was it worth it: Ted and Carlos, Johnny, Steve, and me shouldering open the heavy door marked Adults Only, pulled by dirty blues guitar through velvet curtains into our own bedrooms where girls we knew lay in our beds and offered us that cherished slit which drew our boyhoods inside blissfully to die.

— Charles Webb

Los Angeles CA



THE MAJESTIC DINER  
PITTSTON, PA

Wooden booths  
worn tile floor  
and hot dogs —  
Texas Hot Dogs  
for a buck.  
Griddle fried,  
the split weiner  
rides on spicy mustard  
and mayo in a bun  
of fresh bread  
that can't hold  
all the chili  
and onions  
piled on top.

Good stuff  
served  
on the main street  
of a town  
dying slow.

IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

My dad  
times his bbq-ed chicken  
by beers:  
flip after one,  
remove from grill  
after two.

— Keith A. Dodson

Whittier CA

im walking along this  
car stops a voice  
says get in i  
get in the back  
its bukowski locklin and  
koertge in the front  
seen some of your  
stuff buk says hands  
me a beer

better  
 to  
 be  
 free  
 better  
 not  
 to  
 fit  
 in  
 better  
 to  
 be  
 alone  
 separate  
 weird

want to sit around  
 sugarmommy's pool till the  
 grim reaper comes for me  
 want to spend my time rapping  
 with a linda evans  
 lookalike drinking ice tea  
 but if she's a boozier  
 ill be a boozier too

looks like it's going to  
 be a jackoff day can't  
 seem to keep my hands off  
 myself this morning but  
 will hold off for awhile  
 might see some horny chicks  
 at the grocery they  
 can always sense when my  
 bag is full of love juice

if	you	jumped
off	the	empire
state	building	holding
	a	grappling
would	it	hook
possible	to	be
yourself	by	save
	throwing	by
it	through	an
office	window	?

— Les Cammer

Santa Barbara CA

#### DRINKING TEA AMONG CRAGGY PEAKS

(An imaginary translation from the Chinese written to accompany an imaginary Chinese painting entitled "Drinking Tea Among Craggy Peaks")

Silence of mountains and streams.  
Higher than clouds, finally reaching  
The peak, we spread out teapot and cups  
Then wait for the water to boil. A steady wind  
Blows the first few autumn leaves.  
Finally, the serving boy hands me the pot.  
Filling each cup a little at a time,  
The brew becomes richer with each serving.  
Stretching out, we chant poems until the tea  
Is finished. Our talk never turns  
To the affairs of men. After a while,  
You take out ink and paper and begin painting  
The ancient face of a mountain rock. In an instant  
You have captured ten thousand years.  
As you hand it to me, a sudden gust of wind  
Carries it off, and we laugh. Since the immortals  
Left, what does it matter? There are only  
These mountains and rivers without end.  
Getting ready to leave, we gather up the cups  
And tray. The wind blowing harder now swells out our  
sleeves  
And we are almost carried away. You joke  
About the return of the Yellow Crane.  
Looking below, the Yangtse is only a winding thread.  
Halfway down the mountain, you tell me how much  
You enjoyed the tea.

WRITTEN AFTER READING THE TANKA OF TACHIBANA AKEMI

"Happiness is when"

1.

Happiness is when  
You come home from work  
And something good is ready to eat  
And after you eat you sit down  
And take a long nap  
And wake up the next morning  
And it's Saturday.

2.

Happiness is when  
You wake up very early  
And don't have to go to work  
And the kids sleep late  
And before you even have breakfast  
you've written a new poem.

3.

Happiness is when  
You find yourself out of work  
And have just enough money  
So you don't have to worry  
For a little while  
And can really enjoy it.

4.

Happiness is when  
You go into a book store  
Not knowing what you're looking for  
And walk right up  
To the book you want and buy it  
Without even thinking  
About the money.

5.

Happiness is when  
You buy a new car  
And don't have to wash it  
Or check the oil or tires  
And you can drive it for two years  
Without ever thinking about it.

6.

Happiness is when  
You sit out on the back steps  
And drink just enough wine  
Or just enough beer  
So you don't have to think  
About anything unpleasant.

7.

Happiness is when  
You don't have to go to work  
And for three or four days  
You can sit around at home  
And not have to shave  
Or even brush your teeth.

8.

Happiness is when  
You go to work for a week  
And have nothing to do  
And it never catches up with you  
And nobody notices  
You sit at your desk  
Revising poems.

9.

Happiness is when  
There's no one at home  
And you find an old girly magazine  
That looks good to you again  
And you go upstairs to bed  
And jerk off with it in peace  
And fall soundly asleep.

10.

Happiness is when  
On a cold winter Sunday  
The snow flurries fall now and then  
And you drink a little wine  
To keep off the melancholy  
And at evening sit down  
With your wife and children  
And eat a big dinner  
Of garlic bread and spaghetti

11.

Happiness is when  
You stay home from work sick  
And after everyone's gone  
Crawl back into bed  
And fall asleep slowly  
With a drop of sunlight  
On your nose.

12.

Happiness is when  
You don't feel a bit tired  
And stay up all night

Puttering around the house  
Like a friendly ghost  
And have everything you want  
All to yourself.

— Joe Salerno

North Caldwell NJ

THE STATE AND THAT BEGGING MOTHERFUCKER, ART

Shostakovitch,  
I listen to the 8th written during World War II,

he has this blaring lemon intense vastness  
which  
people might read messages into;  
the intellectuals and world-savers loved  
Shostakovitch while  
Russia was on our side

(upon the capture of Berlin there were  
world-wide photos of American and Russian  
soldiers embracing)

whatever is needed at the moment is  
right

when that moment is used and something else  
is needed  
that situation adjusts to what some call  
history.

I still like Shostakovitch  
especially his 5th  
which is another historic  
celebration of something  
else.

Shostakovitch,  
I listen to his  
8th

then it ends ....

now there's a Beethoven string  
quartet  
and my white cat with his  
one eye  
stretches his legs at  
my feet.

THE FACTORY CREW OF SOUTHEAST L.A.:

the factory off of Santa Fe Ave. was  
best.

we packed these heavy fixtures into  
long boxes  
then flipped them up into stacks  
six high.  
then the two loaders would  
come by  
clear your table and  
you'd go for the next six.

ten hour day  
four on Saturday  
the pay was union  
pretty good for unskilled labor  
and if you didn't come in  
with muscles  
you got them soon enough

most of us in  
white t-shirts and jeans  
cigarettes dangling  
sneaking beers  
management looking  
the other way

not many whites  
the whites didn't last:  
lousy workers

mostly Mexicans and  
blacks  
cool and mean

now and then  
a blade flashed  
or somebody got  
punched out

management looking  
the other way

the few whites who lasted  
were crazy

the work got done  
and the young Mexican girls  
kept us  
cheerful and hoping  
their eyes flashing  
small messages  
from the  
assembly line.

I was one of the  
crazy whites  
who lasted  
I was a good worker  
just for the rhythm of it  
just for the hell of it

and after ten hours  
of heavy labor  
after exchanging insults  
living through skirmishes  
of those not cool enough to  
abide  
we left  
still fresh

we climbed into our old  
automobiles to  
go to our places  
to get drunk half the night  
to fight with our women

to return the next morning  
to punch in  
knowing we were being  
suckers  
making the rich  
richer

we swaggered in  
in our white t-shirts and  
jeans  
gliding past  
the young Mexican girls

we were mean and perfect  
for what we were

hungover  
we could  
very damn well  
do the job

but  
it didn't touch us  
ever

those tin walls

the sound of drills and  
cutting blades

the sparks



we were some gang  
in that death ballet

we were magnificent

we gave them  
better than they asked

yet

we gave them  
nothing.

DEAR PAW AND MA

my father liked Edgar Allen  
Poe  
and my mother liked The  
Saturday Evening Post  
and she died first  
the priest waving a smoking  
stick above her  
casket  
and my father followed  
a year or so later  
and in that purple velvet  
his face looked like ice  
painted yellow.

my father never liked  
what I wrote: "people  
don't want to read this  
sort of thing."

"yes, henry," said my  
mother, "people like to  
read things that make  
them happy."

they were my earliest  
literary critics  
and  
they were both  
right.

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

The edition of this issue has been limited to 700 numbered copies, the first 70 being signed by Charles Webb. The copy now in your hand is number: 568

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