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BALLAST

in cutting right
one rocks the knife
heel of the hand
on the blade's blunt side
then seesaw down
other hand raising
the handle and pivot
toward what's uncut
the knife's scale balancing
the weight of each hand
heavy light
like a man so fat
he's got to walk carefully
not to tip over
the way our hips
rub against each other
balancing balancing
like those pictures we drew
when we used to be children
the important thing being
not what was drawn
but the never once lifting
your pen from the paper

I'VE TRIED SO MANY TIMES

to write a poem for Munch's The Cry I feel
like the guy inside it,
the one in so much pain
he could tear his own head off,
push up on those hands
over each ear
to stop himself from hearing
the shriek of all that black and white.

Everything's at such an impossible angle,
the bridge he's about to jump off of,
the clouds like gouges, and that body
twisted as a wick
with everything about to go out.

In two minutes he'd just jump
or offer us the skull,
but he's screaming here forever,
with two boats on the water
and two gentlemen in top hats
vanishing to the point
at the end of the bridge,
one with his head turned slightly back,
wishing that man
would just
shut up.

— Aaron Anstett

Iowa City IA

PEOPLE KEEP TELLING ME

they're running into my twin
all over the place: at Star Market
where the two-dollar-a-pint
blueberries have dropped
to a miraculous 99¢, at
the Foxy Lady where I am easily
spotted by my blue sunglasses
amid the nervous nude lighting,
at the Cathedral, bringing a red
votive candle to life, of course
I'm dressed in my summer whites
making me look more other worldly
than a dweller in this.
Someone's even seen me all mustachioed,
quahoaging off Point Judith,
can you imagine that.

PARADISE IS NOT LOST

Why just the other day
I saw a vision of Paradise
above the trees; I think
it was Blake.
No, he wasn't singing,
but his beard was magnificent.

— Dieter Weslowski

Providence RI

HIS NAME WAS STEVE

but we all called him the Fly
What a pest The Fly always around
getting on us Never stayed
with anyone very long We always
tried to shoo him away Thought he'd
be gone but then there he was
Tried to swat him now and then but
he always jumped just out of reach

Looking back now I got to laugh
Good old Fly Sometimes landed
sideways sometimes upside down but
never crashed always landed
on his feet

A GUY I KNOW

where'd you get those big
teeth with the big spaces in
between and that big belly of
yours for your distinctive
profile and how about that big
voice of yours always talking
man you need some big ears to
listen sometimes too you know I
can tell you a mile away but
when we're standing here
talking I can't tell you
a damn thing

THE WRITER AT HOME

Sitting here at my desk trying
to write feeling low down Poems
keep coming back in the mail can't
think how to finish the story I'm
writing got three other stories and a
dozen poems still out there for
weeks now on strangers' desks When
here comes Blythe holds out
an envelope "To Dad" scrawled in
crayon I open it up and Christ
it's full of colored hearts and crazy
rainbows I see she's been working too
So I get the tape and we put
them all up on walls corkboard
printer computer file drawers After
we're done I tell her I'll write
a poem about this and give it to
her She says "No thanks Dad" Well o.k.
I'm used to that attitude but at least
now I have colors around me again.

THE KID BELIEVES IN MANAGEMENT

he hasn't spent time with the big boys
never been to a company party seen the
top man expansive surrounded by VPs never
noticed that outer circle the young execs
hustlers suck-ups hovering seeking eye contact
pretending they like it never checked out
the old strivers earnest aging wondering
have they peaked and all those company
wives well-coached always knowing
who to flatter flirt with snub yeah
the kid believes and maybe
someday he'll astonish us all
make himself successful
or something

EARL RECONSIDERS HIS VIEWS ON ISRAEL

Had this girl in Starkville, green-eyed
blonde, my first one, only one, face like an
angel and an ass to match. We were doin' just
fine until this rag-head kinda A-rab
boy from the college, had a loaded
Chevy van? he started sniffin' around on the
sly, said he'd treat her like a

desert queen or some-such crap, and after
that I never got a word in edge-ways.
I don't know why I never hit him.

I saw that boy a week ago downtown,
talkin' to some other kinda A-rab
lookin' guys, talkin' English like
they didn't care who heard 'em. He
was tellin' all his buddies about
some girl he knew, said she
let him "fock her in the ozz," and
I've been wonderin' ever since.

BE BRAVE

You have to because we all know it isn't easy huh?
Writing this stuff and sending it out god knows when
you'll see it again Sending it to people who if you
knew them you might not even give the time of day But
here you're giving them a piece of your soul Waiting
for their decision like a little kid in trouble

And the postman — god! Ever think of him? Probably
wonders what the hell he's got here Maybe he thinks
you're some kind of revolutionary You hope you are
Maybe he thinks you're queer or something Well maybe
you are in one way or another so what? Maybe he
doesn't even look at the mail you send Doesn't know
or care what you do

But then maybe he pays some
attention thinks writers are smart Maybe he's got
some things of his own he wishes he knew how to
explain on paper Like the woman who came to the door
naked Or the time he maced that pit bull blind but
it kept on coming tried to chew a tire off his jeep
Or the time he gave CPR to the old gripe-ass
who never tipped on Christmas etc etc etc

But I'm way out of line here All I really mean to say
is keep sending it out Probably best not to care about
the postman Just be brave because somebody's got to and
if it was easy everybody would be doing it Postmen
would be poets and all the poets would just be
sending poems and reviews to each other
Which come to think of it is pretty much how it is now
anyway

— Michael R. Battram

Evansville IN

WILLIAMS

William Shakespeare

William Blake

William Carlos Williams

Tennessee Williams

William Burroughs

Bill Chown

THE GUYS

who make puzzle

pieces are the greatest

artists in the world

— Bill Chown

Ann Arbor MI

On the cold marble

fireplace

she's placed her

plastic case

with the rubber

diaphragm

She's shaved it

completely

as I watch her dress

I

water the blooming

cactus

Rope marks

on a maple

bent by kids

who swung there

fifty years

POEM FOR PAULA

Here is the crate
of last summer's
pomegranates
you forgot to make into jam.

Now they are dry and empty
almost weightless
covered with dust.

Nevermind love.
Nothing is lost.
Brush them off and bring them
upstairs.
The colors are soft as your hair.
There's just enough
to fill our Christmas
tree with ornaments.

— Kevin O'Neill

Los Angeles CA

KARATE

if you just stood still
in a doorway say
facing in
the asshole who'd taken
10 karate lessons
couldn't do very much

THE ECONOMY (1989)

based on weapons
squares off against
the one based on drugs
the problem being
they're the same

STATUS SYMBOLISM

COULD IT BE

many who come down with
'mental illness' are simply
more civilized than whatever
retarded area of 'civilization'
they've been condemned by chance
to live in

furriers do to animals
what the rich
do to the poor

TWO BLACK GUYS

pull into the gas-station
yank their beat-up pontiac
around the pump-island
they're laughing wildly one says
10 unleaded regular
as i plug them in they get
out of the car giggling
shadowboxing i acutely feel
alone naked nausea curse
this stupid job in the bronx
in the night i'd felt safe
but now feel
unsafe i curse my stupidity
i curse my weakness & fear
i curse my hatred & the hatred
of others i think
lord if anyone's going to rob
me these are
the guys john & singh & milito
were right to work here
armed but i was in the army
never wanted to see guns
again
they were right then for no
reason at all
ask them got any weed you can
sell me?
no no no says the driver
we've been born again
i said what?
he said we're born again
christians & don't get high
anymore, right earl?
earl says you have to get high
on the lord, bro

they pay & as they're leaving say
god bless you, man — be careful
out here

THE CONSENSUS

most oppose measures
that would strengthen the individual

— Cory Monaco

Bronx NY

MADONNA WHO THROWS SO MANY INTIMATE DETAILS OUT FAST

to camouflage
or distract
like pick
pockets who
work in pairs
a shove to
get you off
balance as
she moves in
to lift your
heart

TAFFETA MADONNA

you can hear
her coming

PAYOLA MADONNA

pays you
to put her on

MADONNA OF THE OBSESSIONS

tapes his voice
while she sleeps
turns him on if
she wakes up listens
all day burns to
just touch hears
on Wall Street
if you can have it
you don't want it

SANTA CLAUS' MADONNA

knows he
wants her
to sit on
his lap
so he can
let her know
what he wants

MADONNA WHO GOES DOWN ON YOU

would
do anything to
have some
thing come
up

HARD MATTRESS MADONNA

doesn't let you
wake up with
a stiff bone

POETRY SUCKS MADONNA

takes what she
can't use
and uses it
so it won't
use her

DOOR MAT MADONNA: 1

with your feet
grinding her in
to herself, crush
ing and staining
her she feels
useful

TABASCO MADONNA

is concentrated
you use a
little of her
at first work
your way up

DOOR MAT MADONNA: 2

is nothing with
out you grinding
her down, rubbing
the dirt you don't
want to track
anywhere else
deep into her

BLACK RAIN, HIROSHIMA

It was as if we
were thrown into a
smelting furnace.
My friend had skin
hanging down like
the meltings of a
candle. Many ran
to the cool of any
water they could
find, hurled them
selves into sewers
or headed for the
River Ota which
soon was thick with
the dead and dying.
Some died on the
river bank, their
heads in the water
having used their
last surge of earth
ly energy for a drink.

OTHER APRILS

my father coming
came at lunch to
watch As The World
Turns as Otter Creek
got higher logs
slammed in the
whirlpool blue
wool got tighter
as I ate white
brownies, curled
into dreams on my
lilac bed after
Robin Senecal,
skinny as a
weasel, said he
wouldn't go with
me to the Junior
Women's Club dance
Only fingers in books
seemed warm or real

CICADA

hogwood area
a continuous ring
underground for 17 or
13 years you can't
hear anything else
the male makes
the noise he wants
a woman they shed
their casings coming
out after 17 years
make a strange crunch
walking over what
they've left like
a president kept
underground from his
birth they

sound like water
or machines

PREJUDICE

he wore it like
a badge that
scratched the
clothes of
whatever woman
he held, snagged
lips skin
trees polished
till it glowed
then passed
down like a
family heirloom

— Lyn Lifshin

Niskayuna NY

NATIVE WILLOW

Buy willow to plant
at our cabin but
pushing it into
pickup split crotch of
two main branches.
At home I bind
the slender limbs
with green stretch tape,
closing the split, hoping
it will heal. Like
a human wound.

LOTTO PLAYER

He plays same lotto
numbers once each week,
not with any lasting
expectations, or
wish to help the schools.
He uses it as
a fantasy to
liven up a life
he feels is hopeless.
A little hedge
against despair.

WHY THE CON?

Received an anonymous
letter today that had
God loves you P.
written on the back.
This disturbed me.
What person could possibly
know God's feelings?
Why the con?
Inside was a printed
tract titled "Steps
to Peace With God"
from Billy Graham.

ENLIGHTENED ONE

It's time. He
hunkers down into
bed. Smiles. This
is where it happens.
In dreams he is
the Enlightened One.

A SLACK MEMORY

Memory's faulty.
Forget my glasses,
names of neighbors.
Forget to meditate
& end my prayers.
Too much booze
over the years.
Now I use tricks.
Reminders. If I
can think of them.

PHOTO FOR B.R.

Today Pat took
my picture
dozens of times.
She was hoping
to capture something
friendly while I
stared & grimaced,
groping for an
expression to
represent me,
collect myself
in black & white.

BOUQUET

Had good friends over.
Most brought wine.
Marilyn brought a
lively, full bouquet
of chrysanthemums.
Yellow, orange, rust.
It's been three weeks.
Yet they struggle,
limp & fading,
to keep their promise.

A PENCHANT FOR SLEEP

I have a penchant
for sleep (although
it doesn't come easy).
I treasure it.
Not just for the rest
it offers, but
for the adventures
it tumbles me into.

IN TOUCH

Wife gone, I turn
off tv, switch
on stereo, dial
a classical station
& turn up volume.
Know very little
about this music.
All its composers
are dead.
I can't write to it.
Its rhythms are
not my rhythms.
But it moves me,
puts me in touch
with foreigners
in myself.

BOUNCING ON EMPTY

Past midnight.
Needle's bouncing
on empty but
can't stop now.
Place I'm headed's
tucked in a rainbow,
just down the road,
around next
blind curve.

DANCER

Inside the ticking
advances. She
is winding down
like a choice toy.
She knows this but
can do nothing
to change it.
She steels herself
with prayer, drugs,
whatever supports
her against this
knowledge &
continues her dance.

TRUCKIN'

Bought an '87
Chevy truck.
Last of the
old breed.
Big four
wheeling V8
to carry me
up there above
the traffic.
Where it's safe.

COMPANY

Thought I was alone,
but a squirrel is
chewing a green
pine cone high in
a lodgepole, showering
me with discarded
pieces. I'll have
to sweep our deck
when he's finished.
But I don't mind.

SURVIVOR

He talks to himself.
Sometimes he talks
sense, sometimes
nonsense. When he
remembers he thinks
this to himself:
I'm healthy,
loving & talented.
He gently repeats
this over & over
until his mind
drifts. He believes
these thoughts (if
they penetrate) will
help him survive
into his sixties.

— Phil Weidman

North Highlands CA

THE WALK TO THE DONUT SHOP

It was shorter to walk this way, along the tracks. And you weren't so close to the damned, noisy traffic. Every morning I took this trail to the donut shop for my coffee. Most of the other old folks that live in the trailer park walk out to the street that runs parallel to the tracks to go over to the shopping center, it's only another hundred feet or so, but I prefer the trail. The ground is uneven and there's a lot of rocks scattered about from the tracks, with the kids throwing them and what not, but hell, I'm not so old that I have to stick to the steady ground of the sidewalk just yet. Besides, like I said, it was away from the traffic.

The trail, and the street, of course, run under the freeway, Interstate 5. The freeway separates the mobile home park and the shopping center. Underneath the freeway, it's always shady and cool, even in the Santa Anas. Eight full lanes of shade. On the really warm days, you can see the old ladies with their little pull-from-in-front grocery carts stopping to rest on the sidewalk when they get to the shade of the overpass, fanning themselves with their newspaper full of coupon inserts.

Well Joyce, she owns the donut shop, she never liked the idea of me walking that old trail. She says the weeds are too high and what if I fall down or something. It might be hours before anyone finds me. Joyce is good people. She's like family. I have my own coffee cup hung on a hook behind the counter there in the shop. It's got my name on it, the cup. I was at her and her husband's house for Thanksgiving last year. I figured with the wife gone and the boys both living up in L.A., and probably not wanting to be bothered with me anyway, why not?

Well, this morning I wished I had walked that extra hundred feet out to the street. Directly under the freeway where the weeds were the tallest, hidden from the street, that's where they caught me. Two of them, not more than thirteen or fourteen years old. One of them moved around behind me and grabbed me, then the other one punched me in the face. It happened so fast. One minute I'm walking along the trail and the next I'm sitting in the dirt holding my mouth looking at my empty wallet. They laughed while they turned my pockets inside out. They got five dollars from the wallet and some change, maybe fifty cents, from my pockets. "Don't call the cops, old man, or we'll get you," the taller one said. Then they both rode off on those little small-wheeled bikes that I've seen kids doing stunts on.

Damn, I felt like a foolish old goat. I wiped my mouth with my handkerchief and walked back to the trailer. My

denture was broken, the upper. When I got home I checked myself in the mirror. My lip was cut, but not bad. It wouldn't need stitches. I'd have to call the dentist to see if I could get the plate fixed. I kept a spare set, my old ones. They were stained and they didn't quite fit right but they'd have to do.

I sat down and turned on the T.V. There was a show on gardening on. Fat chance in a mobile home park, huh. I had to be satisfied with window boxes. I kept dabbling at the lip until it stopped bleeding.

Then the phone rang. It was Joyce, "Al, where've you been? I've been worried about you. I was gonna send Frank out to check the trail."

"Don't worry about me, Joyce. I'm O.K. It's just that I, uh, well, I broke my denture this morning and I've got to wear my old ones until I get it fixed. I didn't want to show up there wearing the old ones. You know how Frank and Lefty are, always kidding me about my age. I didn't want to hear any denture jokes."

"Jeeze, Al. Don't be so damned vain. You men are worse than us women, I swear. Just get your butt down here."

"My old teeth look terrible, Joyce."

"Oh, who cares. Besides, Frank's driving Lefty down to the V.A. Hospital today for those tests he's got to have."

"Well, I guess I could drive on over."

I drove this time, the old Oldsmobile. A hundred and twenty thousand miles on it and still going strong, not even a valve job yet. It'd be good to see Joyce.

When I pulled into the parking lot I saw the bikes outside of Joyce's. They were the same bikes, I was sure. Small wheels, high handle bars. Then they came out of the shop, still chewing on their donuts. The taller one threw his chocolate milk carton on the sidewalk and they both got on their bikes. Joyce came out and said something to them, pointing to the empty milk carton on the ground. The shorter, blonde, flat-topped boy said something to her and gave her the bird. They started peddling down the sidewalk then bounced off the curb between two parked cars and out onto the parking lot. They were coming toward me. I hit the gas and steered straight at them.

It was sweet, the look on their faces that split second before impact.

DRAFT BEER, ZOMBIES, AND COFFEE

"My old man's an asshole," she says.

"Yes, many are," you say. Christ, you wouldn't even be in this bar if that shitbird Tony, the bartender, didn't owe you fifty bucks. You don't see him. It must be his night off.

"He ran off with an oriental girl," she says.

"It happens," you say. You take a better look at her. Short black hair, blood-red fingernails, lots of make-up, big tits. Not bad. A little broad in the beam, but what the hell, you like them that way.

"She couldn't even speak good English. She was from Taiwan or Thailand. Some place like that." She's starting to cry.

You touch her shoulder, "Forget the bum," you say, "I'll buy you a drink." She switches from draft beer to zombies.

* * *

"Get up quick, he's home," she says, pushing you towards the edge of the bed.

"Who?" you're trying to remember where you are, what happened. Zombies, dope in the car, the fist fight at the twenty-four-hour taco shop, the scratch marks on your back, the five-year-old girl saying, "Mommy, get off that man's head."

"What, huh, what about the oriental girl?"

"I made that up. He works the night shift. We must have over slept."

Everything looks foggy. You hear footsteps in the next room. You grab your underwear and pull them on. They don't feel right. The door opens and he stands there looking at you with his metal lunchbox in his hand. The little girl is holding on to his leg saying, "Last night Momma was on top of him and she was screaming and now he's wearing her underwear."

They're pale yellow with pink cupids and flying arrows.

You hitch them up and say, "Hi. Coffee ready yet?"

ALL BY HERSELF

"This is what we'll abandon her to next September,"
I think, on my way to the Seven-Eleven for
coffee, a L.A. Times.

Small ruffians on a morning sidewalk
knocking each others' school books loose
and to the ground, screaming frosty breathed in
the cold morning air, pushing, tripping each other.

Last night she put on her pajamas, "All by myself."

We'll send her off in
a crisp new dress,
a ribbon in her hair,
a lunch-pail with a
cartoon character on it.

— Dan Lenihan

Oceanside CA

LOVER'S LEAP

Jumping to
conclusions.

ROAD KILL

Remains
to be seen.

SYSTEMATIC

The mind
over
matters.

HUMAN

Being.

LINEAGE

Another
wrinkle.

— Guy R. Cochrane

Mountain View CA

WHY ROBERT WAGNER MARRIED NATALIE WOOD

Robert Wagner lived in my closet the summer I was 14. Between movies, bored with *Bel Aire* and the *Riviera*, he lived amongst my skirts and sweaters and pedal pushers, and sat with me next to my shoes on the floor and talked to me about being grown up where the summer before I'd talked to my dolls about castles and everafters.

One day my father found Robert Wagner in my closet, his photograph actually, from Photoplay tacked to the closet door, and my father saw the lipstick kiss (Cutex's "Roses In The Snow") next to Robert Wagner's smile. My father didn't know what to think of me, he said, and neither did I, feeling strange and dreary as I would years later from postpartum blues, so I removed Robert Wagner from the closet and glued him in a scrapbook and didn't look at him again for 15 years.

That's why he married Natalie Wood.

Joan Jobe Smith

WHAT YOU LEARN FROM GETTING BURNED

Even after he was grown and owned his own business and a Beech Bonanza, my father was ashamed of the lunch he had to take to school when he was a poor farmboy in Texas. His husky drawl would go cold and thin as if he faced a Norther wind when he told me about his tin lardcan in which he carried his one cold, day-old biscuit ladled with bacon fat. My father never knew about et pa y all, the hunk of stale bread soaked with olive oil Pyrenees peasants wrapped in a rag for their dejeuner; and he would have thought it silly how city people search gourmet shops today for the virginest oil for that repast. All he knew was that he had to get away from that farm before he starved; so he quit his three r's and joined the Civil Conservation Corps, then later went to the city where he could always get a decent meal of store-bought bread — and plenty of red meat.

GUFF

My father ruined me for other men. Not because of beatings or beratings, but because he was so good to my mother. She didn't think he was so good, though, and she was always saving her money so that when he was bad she could rent an apartment in Long Beach, pack our things, and be gone when he got home from work. She always burned her bridge behind her, didn't even tell her sisters Lil, Essie, or Vera where she was going, gave the landlady and the telephone company her maiden name, Smith, and then she and I'd eat chocolate sundaes and go to the movies until her savings ran out and she had to get a waitress job and I had to go back to school.

My father always found her.
His own shamus Sam Spade, he'd
gumshoe every cafe and drug store
in town, showing people her photos,
the one of her wearing pigtails,
an upsweep with gardenias behind
her ears, until someone identified her
and my father would find her, follow her
home, begging her to listen to him
until she'd say, Ray, don't give me
any more guff, else I'll call the police.
Then he'd lean against the lamppost
outside her apartment, chainsmoking
Lucky Strikes, and calling not Roxanne,
not Stella, but Margaret, Margaret,
until finally she let him in and
he'd kneel beside her feet and weep,
Please come back to me, his tears
streaking and salting up his
wire-rimmed Glenn Miller glasses.

How my father ruined me
for other men.

HEARTTHROBS

My Aunt Louise subscribed to Photoplay,
wrote fan letters, and kept a movie star
scrapbook for so long that she began to
hallucinate. Boldfaced lie, my father said,
but I believed my Aunt Louise's story that
the movie star Richard Egan had fallen
head-over-heels in love with her, drove
all the way from Hollywood to Colton,
California, to meet her Saturday afternoons
at the chili dog stand on Mt. Vernon Boulevard.
Just to hold her hand, nothing else,
my Aunt Louise, only 16, swore to her daddy,
a hot-headed Texas railroad man, who got out
his pistol and cleaned it and loaded it and
tried to sneak up on Richard Egan at the
chili dog stand to catch him in the act
with his little girl. But he always
got there too late, Richard Egan just
having driven away, just moments before,
back to L.A. in his red '54 Coupe de Ville.
Someday, someday, my grandpa would say,
I'm gonna get me that slippery son of a bitch,
and my father would say, Jesus Christ, if this

don't beat all, and go outside to grind his teeth. Later, on our way back home to Long Beach my father'd say if Louise were his girl, teen-ager or not, he'd get out his belt and wallop some sense into her butt, and I knew that he would, so I never told him when Robert Wagner began peeking into my bedroom window on nights the moon was full.

DOROTHY LAMOUR AND HEDY LAMARR PUT TOGETHER

To show my Uncle Darryl what he was missing, my Aunt Essie had my mother take a picture of her wearing the hula skirt and paper leis he sent her from Hawaii where he went after World War II for 2 years to help rebuild Pearl Harbor. My Aunt Essie also wore plum-red lipstick, gardenias in her long, curly hair, and a flesh-colored halter top that made her look naked while she leaned against the oak tree in her back yard in Oroville, California. My cousin Darlene, her daughter, and I giggled when we saw the picture which stayed pasted in our family album until the '50s when my mother decided that it was nasty and they'd been silly and a little drunk on beer that day. My Aunt Bessie died young of Lou Gehrig's and just before my mother died at 66 she said she sure wished she'd kept that picture because her sister Essie was prettier than Dorothy Lamour and Hedy Lamarr put together.

DIRECT OBJECT OF THE SUBJECTIVE CASE

The old guys, and some of the young guys, too, always wanted to buy a piece of our go-go fringe or a sequin, something to remember us by, they said, sometimes even wanting to buy for twice what we paid, our dancing tights, unwashed, and once this old guy at the Shimmy Shack wanted to buy my towel I used to wipe my breasts and forehead and back with

between songs, hot from the yellow spotlights, and no air conditioning. A dollar, he offered, and I said no, knowing, no longer a Catholic, a go-go dancer going on 5 years, exactly what he wanted the towel for. Two, he said, tossing another bill on my tiptray, and I said no, and danced to the Stones' "Satisfaction." Five, he said and tossed, and I ignored him and danced to Wilson Pickett's "In The Midnight Hour." Six, seven, eight, he said, just for a keepsake, baby, something for me to wish on. But I'd read Havelock Ellis and Freud and said no. Even when he put a fifty dollar bill on my tiptray I said no, and finally he got up to go, scooped up his money and said, Hell, a skinny-assed dame like you ain't worth fifty bucks! Then he staggered away just as the two navy-blue-suited aerospace execs who'd been talking shop in front of me suddenly took an interest in me, taking me for a lady of the night and ill repute instead of a poor working girl, and eyeing up my fringe and sequins, they began tossing money on my tiptray, and while I danced to that long, long version of the Doors' "Light My Fire," I had fantastic fetishes of my own, my libidinous dream of someday going back to college, becoming an English teacher wearing alligator pumps and flower print dresses and teaching, sincerely and patiently, the direct object of the subjective case.

I NEVER WENT TO BED WITH THE FAMOUS ASTRONAUT

Although the famous astronaut cliched what's a nice girl like you doing in a dump like this, I knew he thought me a tramp just like all the other go-go girls he'd met in all the beer joints he'd been in. He told me the dirtiest jokes I'd ever heard, and kept yanking me down to whisper secrets in my ear and

sometimes stuck in his tongue so far I could feel it on my retina. He said he'd give It to me any way I wanted, but all I wanted was his autograph. I had other things on my mind, like my overdue rent and my ex-husband who was harrassing me. So the famous astronaut told me he'd tell me what it was like in outer space if I had dinner with him and drinks later in his hotel room. I didn't show up, and the next day, while I was on the stage dancing to Lovin Spoonful, he came in, stood with his hands on his hips, glowered at me, and said, just who the hell do you think you are, you little tramp, and then he left, slamming the sunshine and door behind him. The famous astronaut had the right stuff, all right, he'd met the President of the United States, seen Earth from outer space where he'd defied gravity and nausea for Americans like myself. He even had a nice smile. But I had my mean ex-old man and overdue rent on my mind.

WHEN IT WAS FUN, IT WAS VERY VERY FUN

Sometimes it was fun being a go-go girl, usually on a payday, and probably when it was a full moon, some night when everyone was inexplicably happy, even Duke, because the place was packed and he was tripping on some good acid, and Dick the machinist was happy, had brought us girls a 5-pound Whitman's Sampler and made us new tiptrays on his machine, carved our names on them, then painted them fluorescent to glow under the black lights, our names in lights, at last, and Big Dave and Little Jim were happy, having brought their camera to take our pictures when Duke wasn't looking, and Dick Dale's surfer guitar was hanging ten, so hot that the guys and their dates now and then got up to do The Twist and the bouncers didn't make them sit down, and the pool hustlers were winning and tipping for the first time in months. Even

Fat Bob was tipping 2 dimes instead of just one, and Suzie Q was getting married instead of getting an abortion, and two celebrities wanted to date us, and the 3 tables of El Toro Marines were back from Nam, and a customer who was cute gave Carolee a real pearl ring, and after I danced football signals — off sides, time out, touchdown — to "Mony Mony," my favorite customer who only came in every 6 months gave me \$5 and told me again that I was as funny as Carole Lombard and how for sure soon I would get discovered, and afterwards at Belisle's for breakfast, we were all still happy, and I could afford steak and eggs and a slice of fresh strawberry pie.

And later in bed before sunrise
I'd think how fun it had been, how
someday I'd look back on all this and think ...

but then, tomorrow
was another day.

FRYING PORK CHOPS TOPLESS

Brandi Blue thought the topless craze would cure us all — even The Establishment — of our uptight ways and so she got silicone shots to size 38C to dance topless for 10 dollars an hour at the Purple Haze.

Brandi Blue wasn't a very good dancer but she smiled and bumped and grinded and the guys liked it, gave her lots of tips, and one of the regulars, a pool hustler, wanted to take her to bed.

Brandi Blue took him home with her and cooked him his favorite food, fried pork chops, topless, him grinning, while the pork chop grease-pops flew onto her jiggling breasts, making her nipples good and hard.

I didn't approve of her frying pork chops topless, especially in front of her little girl, but Brandi Blue just tweaked, don't be uptight, be out of sight.

Brandi Blue married the pool hustler,
had his son, but the pool hustler
ran off with the babysitter, and the
topless craze got mellow, the Purple Haze
only paying \$5 an hour, so Brandi Blue
had to work stag parties, model for
soft porn, until her silicone went bad
and she had to have a mastectomy at age 29.

Brandi Blue became a reborn Christian,
had her name legally changed to Brandi Blue,
studied real estate, tried to learn to type,
went to manicurist school and graduated.
Her daughter turned out to be weird and wild,
her son dyslexic, and now they rent rooms
in her tract home she bought with her
topless dancing money.

Brandi Blue had a hard life, all right,
but what bums me out the most was me not
approving of her frying pork chops topless.
It was the happiest time of her life.

A GROOVY KIND OF LOVE

Crazy Fred,
a Registered Sexual Deviate
for homosexuality and Navy- and Nietzsche-macho,
was a gentleman, my Don Quixote, and when
a biker or a pool hustler called me Twiggy,
he yelled at them as loud as he could,
"The meat's always sweeter next to the bone,"

and on slow days when I whined
I only made half the tips the other
sexier and bolder go-go girls did,
Crazy Fred always handed me a dollar,
put his hand on my shoulder, and told me
I was too good for All This,
and would someday marry a prince.

I would never marry a prince,
but on some Sunday afternoons,
Crazy Fred would fatten me up
on to-go steak and lobster dinners,
and some Sunday mornings,
when we were the only ones in Abner's 5,
he'd bring me Dom Perignon we'd sip
from a coffee mug, and Melba toast,

and Beluga caviar we'd spread,
for want of a knife, with the red handle
of my Maybelline mascara brush,

and Crazy Fred,
my Knight of the Crazy Countenance,
would hold up his mug of Dom Perignon,
look up at the windmills of broken
air conditioning in the ceiling,
smile as big as the moon does, and say,
quoting jukebox
rather than Cervantes,

We had a groovy kind of love.

MT. EVEREST

On cold, rainy Southern California days
like this one when I was a kid
and came home from school
my mother'd have all the doors and
windows wide open, airing the house
of her and my father's chain-smoking
and last night's fried chicken,
the wind blowing the criss-cross curtains
into skirts of snow.
I'd put on my slippers and another sweater
and go into the kitchen where my mother
had a stew simmering and a cherry pie
baking in the stove. I'd press my icy
hands and rump up against the oven door
till they nearly cooked, and my rained-on
hair crisped with the smell of cherries.
Today my kids come home and close the doors
and windows I opened, complain that it's
cold in the house, damp from the rain, ask
why don't I turn up the thermostat.
Put on your slippers and another sweater,
I say, but they won't, go on complaining
that I'm not cold like them, me barefoot
with rolled up sleeves, worked up from
rolling pie crust dough for the
cherry pie baking in the oven.
Why aren't you cold, they ask,
and I answer, Because I'm tough.

SPAR SISTERS

My friend Kay and I both think our judgment is superior to the other's in what we prefer. She drinks blush wines; I like white. She likes baseball, football and ice hockey; I like poetry. She knows math and can do her own income tax; I'm a good speller. She reads John D. MacDonald; I read MacDonald Harris. I ride my bike 5 miles a day, while she walks 2 on a treadmill reading Woman's Day and People and waves at me from her window as I ride away. She has 2 dogs the size of motorcycles whose fleas only bite me. Kay smokes Carltons and when I sneeze, allergic to cigarettes, she gets me a wad of scented toilet paper for my runny nose. Kay's a Republican, and even though I'm apolitical, I know not to trust Reagan. If Kay and I didn't have so much in common, we'd fistfight.

ON THE WAY TO HEAVEN

She nearly died the year before she really died. I saved her, gave her mouth-to-mouth, pounded her chest, like they do in the movies — bruising her — until she finally came to, and like in the movies, smiled, looked around, and asked, "Where am I?" When I told her, and that I'd brought her to, she said, oh, no, you ruined everything, I was on my way to heaven, heard angels singing, I was dressed all in white and had no more pain. She wept all morning.

In the afternoon she called me into her room and sternly told me that if that ever happened again, not to save her. I told her I couldn't help trying to save her, that something stronger than me made me do it, a reflex perhaps from

the womb like when she'd yank my hand in time to save me from being run over by a car. She screamed at me all afternoon from her room how I'd ruined it for her, and would again, and I screamed back how sick I was of all this — the bedpans, the morphine, my keeping her alive for her to wish she'd die. Such ingratitude! We both wept till dinnertime.

While I fed her dessert of ice cream, she cleared her throat, letting me know more was to come, but she apologized instead, thanked me for saving her life. "I know now how much you really must love me," she said, "to save this old bag of worthless bones." Then she laughed for the first time in a long, long time. I wanted to hug her, but I couldn't for her pain. I'd never hug her, I knew, ever again, but it felt good to both of us when I cooled her bruises with a little witch-hazel-soaked cotton swab.

ME AND MY MOTHER'S MORPHINE

Deukmejian and the DEA, my mother's doctor says, keep close tabs on Californians' medical morphine use, so I must drive five miles once a week to fetch in person The Triplicate, a beige, crisp piece of paper, as dear as a cashier's check, to take five miles the other side of town to the only pharmacy that carries my mother's liquid morphine. On the way, I stop at Trader Joe's for mine, the California kind: green syringes of sauvignon blanc, chablis, chardonnay, Sebastiani Eye of the Swan I later sip from a plastic cup to blur Life while I spoonfeed my bedridden mother her supper.

"Now I know why you drink wine," she says, a teetotaler, a good Christian woman who's never approved of my drinking. "Being doped up brings you closer to God," she says, seeing Sistine things now upon her ceiling, fidgeting and licking her lips, the one-half cubic centimeter of morphine, the same color blue as Windex,

I give her mornings and bedtime in apple juice more potent to her 70 pounds than a \$100 heroin hit to a prickled L.A. hype.

Sad and ashamed of her addiction as much as her disease, sometimes she weeps as she sucks through a straw the last drop of morphine from the cup, and sometimes I imagine Deukmejian and the DEA boys breaking down my mother's bedroom door — conquistadores roaring "Eureka!" — coming to prick their spears at us, a couple pagans all right, red-eyed and doped-up, naked with sin and death.

SUBSEQUENCE

My prospective employer asks me about the 3 years on my job app that I didn't work, instead took care of my dying, bedridden mother, and he frowns, suspicious that I am lazy as well as unskilled on Wordstar and Word Perfect, my job duties as nurse and nurturer of no use to him, nor that I learned to butter toast to the edges, just so, and then cut bite-size for her, nor that I perfected cream and barley soups to add fat to her tiny bones, came to know Duoderm, decubitus ulcers, catheters, and morphine, and developed my communication skills so as to articulate with paramedics and intensive-care personnel.

Once I ran the mile in a minute when I heard the hospital intercom cry "Code Blue!" to find where she lay inside the CAT Scan, but my prospective employer wants someone quicker who can field invoices, push paper into their proper pink, green, and goldenrod places, catch faxes and the phones, then slide safe into home after the grand slam.

Next time, I will lie on my job app and resume, make up some made-up

employer for those 3 years.
These businesses aren't running
some rest home.

FEMALE MUD WRESTLING

The middle eastern woman working in the postal service outpost in the back of her husband's pizza place wears enough gold around her wrists and neck to buy a lemon grove in San Diego. She's too rich and beautiful to work here and lets me know by walking slowly instead of saying I'll be right there when I ding the bell; she quibbles with me over 4th class book rate, shakes my Xmas packages for potential rock and rolling dope and uzis and refuses to insure them because of the tape I used. Because she's so rich and beautiful, she holds up her nose while she eyes my jeans and old Dodge I park next to her new Cadillac, and does not tell me to have a nice day when I walk away. In her country, she knows, that with my beady eyes and narrow hips, I wouldn't have married well there either, probably to some stinky Bedouin cheesemaker who'd kowtow and hah-so to her pizza- and falafel-making husband coming to buy his feta and tahini. I dislike female fights for human status, wrestling in the haute-coutured and French-parfumed mud some husbands buy. It sullies our sisterhood. Impedes clitoral growth. But if I ever get the chance, I'd like to spill pomegranate juice all over her white Anne Klein, and cram a little spanakopita up her aquiline, peasant-pshaw-ing nose.

ORGANIC ORCHARD

This summer I had to fight for the right to my own peaches from a horde of Genghis Khan beetles bivouacked in the highest branches of my tree, glistening in the sun like emeralds or scum. Armored

with rubber gloves, broom, and wooden shoes, I began my assault — smacked the branches from the rear with my broom, squashed the wounded beetles with my shoes, swatted the retreating beetles into the neighbor's yard, until a beetle kamikazied into my hair, flaked into my ear, and another beetle divebombed into the bodice of my sundress and I ran for my life back into the house where I watched the beetles through my sliding-glass door the rest of June have their fill of my peaches, each chomping its way through a peach a day so loud I could hear them lick their chops from my kitchen. Last year, when the peaches were all mine, I made 41 cobblers — 8 cups of sliced peaches in each — and when my kids got sick of eating peach cobbler every day, I gave them to friends and neighbors, then froze some we later ate on Thanksgiving and Christmas. This year, though, I made only four, but tell my war stories and brag about my Peach Badge of Courage and my Peach Heart.

KAFKA THE SPIDER

My tract home was designed in the '60s, one of those architectural ostrich-optimisms, a G.E. untruism, so there are no windows in my bathroom, just one of those blowers that megaphone all the jet-airlined, cop-helicoptered sky noise and the nearby freeway roar while I take my bath. Because of the unnatural darkness, my bathroom's the local hideout for spiders, who probably think it an attic, a dungeon, or some other unlit den of iniquity. So every morning, before I run my bath, there's always a spider near the faucet, so I Save The Spider, transport it upon my comb to the

National Forest in my wastebasket. Sometimes the spider saves itself and splits for sanctuary behind the soap dish. I know it's probably not the same spider, but I've named it Kafka and, while I bathe and it hides out, I ask it questions about the Universe, entropy, irony. "Tell me, Kafka," I ask, while I shave my legs, "What is it like to be blind and have 8 legs?" And Kafka's silent, scorching answers steam up my bathroom mirrors. I'd like to ask Kafka to put in a good word for me with God, tell Him what a St. Francis of Spiders I am, but it would be like asking B.F. Hutton to give you free money when you can't even balance your bank balance of ninety-nine bucks.

THE MACHINE SHOP

The girls in the office want to show me, the new girl, the machine shop, so we cross the threshold separating our air-conditioned Shangri-la and enter a hot, Hieronymus Bosch's Steely Delight where hooks and ladders orbit the heaven while it rains chains, thunders baritone and tonnage. Out back, the girls in the office show me the men's latest machine shipping out for Japan, a Jupiter strapped to a flatbed truck, the widest load I've ever seen, and I imagine the Volkswagens it could run off the road. Walking back, I stop to remove a steel sliver from my shoe, this steel place's rason-sharp sawdust, a man-thread, amazing me again at man's ability and necessity to make a machine bigger than himself, his house, his God. No wonder a man is merely amused by a woman's patchwork and crochet; a peach cobbler is no wonder to him. He has steel and he can bend it with his bare hands.

Back at Shangri-la, the girls in the office and I nibble on Winchell's powdered donuts and talk about how much noise men make while they work.

WE DRINK A LOT WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER

Happy to see each other, falling in
love, I think, we drink good stuff,
Beaulieu Beaufort chardonnay, so good
the cork smells sweet as a peach pit.
He pours, we clink wine glasses,
laugh at each other's jokes, sip,
and touch incessantly, as if we're
buying each other, his finger between
my cleavage, my palm on his corduroyed
cock, getting high, making me feel like
a powdered courtesan in Louis' court,
irresistible as Maugham's tart who won
Philip's heart, until the chardonnay
buzz, like a doorbell, summons us
to his bedroom where his Hopper prints
look down at his mattress, I, on the
mattress, look up at his fur, his
fuckability, chug more chardonnay,
then place my wine glass on the floor,
roll over to greet him, arch up for him,
lips parched for him.

Tomorrow will bring the hangover,
the reckoning of the hair of the dog,
that only tasting him, having him,
the hair of that man,
will make me well.

— Joan Jobe Smith

Fountain Valley CA

PLUMS (1989)

Karen brings plums
from her garden —
fallen
or ripened on the tree,
bird pecked; all
go into the same brown bag.

For years she has brought
these aging, not yet rotten
gifts of fruit,

as though a sackful
of softly oozing plums
could save us from
despair;

all harvest summer they come ...

plums like small sacred organs
removed

in Sumeria
a violation of plums
the sweet, dully thudding avalanche

and whether we eat them
or not

they putrify

SANS 11

(The Whitney Museum)

They are rectangular
boxes
of opaline fiberglass

pure as honeycomb pure
and stable as wasp hive

molded
20 years ago
yet seem old

old and gather
dust in corners

24
boxes in 2 horizontal rows
of 12

each bisected
by a 1/4"
line

Step back and watch it glow
like amber

as if a great wall of scrolls
were touched by burnt
rain;

even the shallows unreadable

Dead at 34 was Eva Hesse

— Thomas Avena

San Francisco CA

A MOTHER'S DAY

My child brings me
tiny packages covered
with wrapping paper
he painted only moments before,

as I try to convince my own mother
that it's all right to take back
the robe and slippers without
hurting my feelings.

My husband makes his annual claim
that I'm not his mother,
exempting him
from cards and gifts.

We spend most of the day and night
trying to get through
the circuit lines to Buffalo
to wish his mother a happy day.
By ten-thirty we get through
and make all the necessary small talk
that gets my husband yawning
and ready for bed.

Later, after the house is quiet
and I retire to bed with a book,
he pounces upon me,
as if the thing between his legs
were worth a dozen yellow roses.

CHOP SUEY

My idea of a drink
isn't liquor over fruit salad
with an umbrella,
but I sip it anyway
waiting for the waitress to bring
my dinner.

Fuscia and emerald dragon lanterns
are strung around the door leading
to the kitchen,
while an oriental girl
with little or no breasts
leans against it.

When my dinner comes
I try a little pork fried rice
set before me in the colorful bowl,
but I can't take my eyes
off that girl under the lanterns.

Embroidered with satin multicolored threads,
her gaudy blouse and trousers
hang loosely over her narrow frame.
She lines her slanted eyes
over and over again
with black shadow.

The shiny-haired beauty
would rather be wearing
real people's clothes,
but she gives the customers
what they want.

— Nancy Avdoian

Fairview Heights IL

OPERA

[Setting can be anything you want. Characters can be doing anything you want.]

Evelyn: Are you picking your nose?

Dale: No.

Evelyn: Why was your finger up it?

Dale: I was scratching something inside it.

Evelyn: You were picking your nose, Dale. That's what you like to do.

Dale: It's these Santa Ana winds. They dry out my sinus.

Evelyn: That doesn't mean you have to pick your nose.

Dale: I wasn't picking it.

Evelyn: You were scratching something inside it?

Dale: That's right."

Evelyn: You sure scratched it for a long time.

Dale: It itched for a long time.

Evelyn: Yeah.

[A long protracted silence.]

Evelyn: Picking your nose is a disgusting habit.

Dale: That's why I don't pick it.

Evelyn: You look like a moron when you do it.

Dale: I know it.

Evelyn: Then why do you do it?

Dale: I don't do it.

Evelyn: I see you doing it all the time.

Dale: You do not.

Evelyn: Do you think you're hiding it from me?

Dale: I don't have to hide anything from you because I'm not doing anything.

Evelyn: You pick your nose every time we get into the car to go anywhere.

Dale: What?

Evelyn: You like to pick your nose when we're in the car, don't you?

Dale: What are you talking about?

Evelyn: Do you do it because you're bored when we're driving?

Dale: Shut up about it, Evelyn.

Evelyn: Do you need to pick your nose?

Dale: I do not ever pick my nose.

[A long protracted silence.]

Dale: I wasn't picking my nose a minute ago, Evelyn. I was scratching something inside it. A hair was tickling me.

Evelyn: Was it?

Dale: My nose needs to be scratched sometime, Evelyn. It's just another part of my body.

Evelyn: It's your favorite part.

Dale: Whenever I need to get something out of my nose, I always use a Kleenex.

Evelyn: But you wrap the Kleenex around your finger and run it up your nose. You're supposed to blow your nose in the Kleenex.

Dale: Blowing doesn't work sometimes.

Evelyn: So you scoop it out with your fingernail.

Dale: Shut up, Evelyn.

Evelyn: That's what you're doing. You're using your fingernail like a shovel to get everything out of your nostril.

Dale: I never pick my nose like that.

Evelyn: You excavate it.

Dale: I don't pick my nose any more than you pick yours.

Evelyn: You pick it all the time. It gives you something to do.

Dale: I don't want to talk about this anymore.

Evelyn: Do you need to start picking your nose?

[There's a knock at the door. Evelyn answers it. It's Bambi.]

Bambi: Buddy and I are going to the opera tonight.

Evelyn: That's nice, Bambi.

Bambi: I'm so excited. I'm going out to buy a new dress today and then we're going to get Buddy a new suit. We're both going to look so elegant.

Evelyn: Make sure Buddy doesn't pick his nose.

Bambi: His nose?

Evelyn: Dale loves to pick his.

Dale: She doesn't know what she's talking about, Bambi. Have fun at the opera.

Evelyn: Try to sit in the shadows in case Buddy picks his nose like Dale does.

Dale: Tell us about what you saw when you get back, Bambi.

Bambi: We're going to see La Triviata.

Evelyn: Is that the one where they pick their noses?

Dale: We'll see you later, Bambi. I bet you're going to have a great time at the opera.

Evelyn: Dale wants you to leave so he can pick his nose.

Bambi: I ...

Dale: Night, Bambi.

[Dale walks Bambi to the door. Then Dale comes back to Evelyn. There's a moment of silence.]

Evelyn: You better leave your nose alone or you'll make it bleed, Dale.

Dale: It's already been bleeding because of this dry weather.

Evelyn: It's bleeding because you pick it so much.

Dale: I'm not picking my nose, Evelyn.

Evelyn: That's right. You call it scratching the inside of your nose.

[The end.]

BRIDGE

[Setting can be anything you want. Characters can be doing anything you want.]

Dale: How's your boil?

Evelyn: It still hurts.

Dale: Want me to look at it?

Evelyn: No.

Dale: I might be able to get rid of it for you.

Evelyn: It'll go away by itself.

Dale: You should squeeze it.

Evelyn: Shut up.

Dale: You have to do something to get the pus out of it or it'll be absorbed back into your body.

Evelyn: What are you talking about?

Dale: I want to squeeze that boil on your butt.

Evelyn: I want you to shut up.
[A long protracted silence.]

Dale: Maybe you should put hot water on it.

Evelyn: What?

Dale: Maybe you should soak your boil in hot water to soften it up so it'll pop by itself.

Evelyn: Would you stop talking about this boil.

Dale: You've got to do something about it, Evelyn, or it'll just get worse.

Evelyn: It'll be just fine if I leave it alone.

Dale: You're supposed to squeeze boils so everything'll come out of them.

Evelyn: If I squeeze it, it'll just get infected.

Dale: It's already infected, Evelyn. That's why it's a boil.

Evelyn: Jesus, Dale. Stop talking about this thing.

Dale: If you don't squeeze it, it'll just get bigger and bigger.

Evelyn: I'm not going to do anything to it, Dale. It'll go away when it's ready.

Dale: It's ready now, Evelyn. Let me squeeze it.

Evelyn: Shut up about squeezing it.

Dale: I'll make it stop hurting.

Evelyn: It doesn't hurt that much anymore.

Dale: It must hurt. Look how red and hard it is.

Evelyn: Just stop worrying about my boil, Dale.

Dale: Let me help you get rid of it.

Evelyn: Leave me alone.

[There's a knock at the door. Evelyn answers it. It's Bambi.]

Bambi: Buddy and I thought you might like to play some bridge with us tonight. Buddy's setting up the table right now.

Evelyn: Bridge?

Bambi: It's a lot of fun. We just learned how to play.

Evelyn: I don't think we can play with you tonight, Bambi. It's too late.

Dale: We need to stay home to squeeze Evelyn's boil anyway, Bambi.

Bambi: What?

Evelyn: Thanks for asking us to play, Bambi. We'll see you later.

Bambi: Are you sure you don't want to play? We need four people. We've been playing by ourselves for a few weeks to make sure we know all the rules but now Buddy says it's time for us to get two more people so we can have a real game. We're making popcorn and we've got lots of soda for everyone to drink.

Evelyn: Sorry, Bambi. We don't know how to play bridge anyway.

Bambi: We could teach you.

Evelyn: Maybe you can teach us another time. Thanks for coming by.

Bambi: Then I don't know what Buddy and me are going to do tonight. Buddy was counting on playing a real game of bridge with four people and now I know he won't want to play with just me.

Evelyn: You'll think of something to do, Bambi. Don't worry.

Dale: Why don't you and Buddy come over here and watch me squeeze Evelyn's boil?

[Evelyn walks Bambi to the door. Then Evelyn comes back to Dale. There's a moment of silence.]

Dale: Let me get to work on that boil, Evelyn.

Evelyn: You're not going to touch my boil.

[The end.]

MASTURBATE

[The living room of an apartment. Dale is reading. Evelyn, dressed in a robe, is moving around the stage, perhaps dancing slowly to music.]

Evelyn: Do you masturbate?

Dale: What?

Evelyn: It's O.K. to masturbate. You shouldn't be afraid to admit it.

Dale: I'm not afraid of anything.

Evelyn: Masturbation's good for you. It helps relieve tension and keeps you from trying to screw girls.

Dale: Great.

Evelyn: It really has a medicinal effect if it's done regularly. You'd be surprised how calm it can keep you.

Dale: I really don't care about it, Evelyn.

Evelyn: Doctors even recommend masturbating for some people. They say it's the best way to relieve stress so you can sleep better.

Dale: I thought physical exercise did that.

Evelyn: Masturbation is physical exercise. It gets the heart rate going and flexes all your muscles.

Dale: I'd rather do a few other things to get physical exercise.

Evelyn: You'd rather jog or ride a bike instead of having an orgasm?

Dale: Do we have to talk about this?

Evelyn: I'd always pick having an orgasm over some other form of exercise. The other types of exercises only relieve stress, but an orgasm is something to really feel good about.

Dale: I think you've said enough, Evelyn.

Evelyn: Why don't you masturbate with me, Dale? It'd be fun.

Dale: I don't want to.

Evelyn: I could show you how. First you take it in your hand ...

Dale: Stop it.

Evelyn: I think you'd like it once you got started.

Dale: Then I'm not going to like it because I'm not going to get started. So just leave me alone.

[A long protracted silence.]

Evelyn: You think because you're a grown man you can't masturbate?

Dale: Jesus.

Evelyn: This is the time in your life when you need it the most. When you're a teenager you hardly have any stress in your life but that's when most people think it's O.K. to masturbate. But when you're older you have lots of worries about money and jobs so masturbating can really be a welcomed relief.

Dale: I'm sure it can. Now can we talk about something else?

Evelyn: You might start to enjoy it so much you'll look forward to masturbating.

Dale: Evelyn, why don't you masturbate and leave me alone about it?

Evelyn: I do, and I wish you'd let me teach you. Watch.

Dale: Jesus Christ, What are you doing?

Evelyn: Masturbating.

[There's a knock at the door. Evelyn answers it.
It's Bambi.]

Bambi: I heard so much going on over here, I had to come over.

Evelyn: Hi, Bambi.

Bambi: Why didn't you tell me you were going to do it tonight? I would've come over sooner.

Dale: What are you saying, Bambi?

Evelyn: Bambi knows all about masturbating.

Bambi: Doesn't Dale?

Evelyn: He's afraid.

Bambi: Masturbation's fun. I don't know what I'd do when Buddy was gone if I didn't masturbate.

Dale: Stop doing that, Bambi.

Evelyn: Maybe I should do it for her.

Dale: My God.

Bambi: Ummmmmm. Buddy never touched me like that.

Dale: Are you people serious?

Bambi: Let us show how to do it, Dale. It really is a lot of fun.

Dale: I've got to get out of here.

Evelyn: Don't go.

Bambi: When I'm at my apartment alone, I masturbate all the time. Usually I do it in the shower. The hot water runs down over me and I grab my breasts like Buddy does in those huge hands of his and then I rub my ass and slide my finger deep down inside it and think of Buddy pushing his thing in there. And my other hand goes down to my pussy and all that hot water's falling down over me and the tiles are so slippery and wet and my mouth gets full of water and it's ... good.

Evelyn: See what it can be like, Dale.

Dale: You two are too much. How can you touch yourself like that?

Evelyn: Let us do it to you.

Dale: Shouldn't I do it to myself?

Bambi: Ummmmmm.

[The end.]

HE NEED REGRET NOTHING

when my father was informed
upon returning in his late thirties
from world war 2
that the hundred pounds he'd lost
was the result of diabetes,

he shot himself with insulin every day
and he watched his diet
and he took his urine tests
and he went to work every day
while doing his best
to tread the tightrope between
coma and insulin shock,

and he put up with my mother
and he attended all my athletic events
and every night he sipped imperial blend
with water back.
he said it was only beer and wine
that he wasn't supposed to drink,

but his sister, my aunt bea, once told me,
"i used to say to your father,
'ivan, the doctor said you could
drink a little!'"

still he never got really drunk
nor even really hungover
although i suppose the hiram walker
helped to usher in
some of the episodes when he would have
to be hospitalized.

he died early, aged about fifty, of a heart attack,
just after i finished high school.
he was a very good father to me.
i suppose he could have lived longer
without the evening whiskey
but as it is he died quickly and cleanly —
he died before he could lose
his eyesight, his arms, his legs,
or his son.

IN MEMORIAM

the few last living men in america
are in mourning for edward abbey.
the few last living women in america
are in mourning for him also.

WHAT WE CAN DO AND WHAT WE CAN'T

because of an article in the campus paper
extended education called me about designing
a course as part of their communications package.
the first one i came up with was,
"exercising the poetic imagination."

in spite of excellent publicity,
only one student registered
and it was cancelled.

the next semester
the exact same thing occurred.

so this fall i offered a course called
"getting your poems into print."

twenty-four people paid their tuition.

i guess we poets are all in agreement

that the writing is the easy part.

NOT QUITE

the free copy allotted to each of us
who had made nominations for the awards anthology
arrived with a cover letter requesting
that we check the text for typos
that could be corrected in time for the paperback edition
although the editor hoped this one was at least "error
free."

i turned first,
egotist that i am,
to gaze upon my name among the contributing editors.

my name was misspelled.

I THINK MY GREAT WORK ON THE PROGRESS OF WESTERN
THOUGHT WILL BE ENTITLED:

from plato to play-doh.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

SHE SAID:

what are you doing with all those
napkins in your car?
we don't have napkins like
that
how come your car radio is
always tuned to some
rock and roll
station?
do you drive around with
some
young thing ...?

you're
dripping tangerine
juice
on the floor.
whenever you get into
the kitchen
this towel gets
wet.
why is
that?

when you let my
bathwater run
you never
clean the
tub first.

why don't you
put your toothbrush
back
in the rack?

you should always
dry your
razor.

sometimes I think
you hate
my cat.

Martha says
you were
downstairs
sitting with her
and you
had your
pants off.

you shouldn't wear
those
\$100 shoes in
the garden.

and
you don't keep
track
of what you
plant out there

that's
dumb.

you must always
sit the
cats' bowls back
in
the same place.

don't
bake fish
in a frying
pan

I never saw
anybody
harder on the
brakes of their
car
than you.

let's go
to a
movie.

listen, what's
wrong with you?
you act
depressed.

I MIGHT GET TRADED

they sent the old second baseman
up to Oakland
so a 22 year old kid could have
straight playing time.

it's a matter of investment:
cheaper help
with a future.

life in sports
is limited.

with a little luck in The Arts
you might last
right up to your deathbed.

it took me
half a bottle of wine
just to write this.

it looks like
a slow night in
San Pedro.

I AM CHASTISED

she was driving the car.
there was a disagreement about
something.
she parked it and we got out
to go to the cafe to eat
and I told her:
"without me, you are nothing.
and with me, you are less."

she said, "you know, I really
dislike you when you go on your
beer binges, you act so
superior!"

I didn't answer.
we entered, were led to a
table and opened our
menus.

"I'll have a Chinese beer,"
I told the waitress,
"now."

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

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