



People Poems
by
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Buk

THE MUTILATION OF THE SPECIES

PEOPLE WHO NEED OTHER
PEOPLE
SO BADLY
THAT THEY OFTEN
SETTLE
FOR THOSE
GLASS PEOPLE
IN THE PROGRAM
GUIDE
GET WHAT THEY
DESERVE.

Alfred P. P. P.
1985

JOURNEY

there is this fellow in The Netherlands who keeps sending me photos of Céline and marvelous boxes of cigars.

well, I am a dog: I enjoy both.

the cigars go well with my red wine and I never tire of Céline or his photos — a very good face on that fellow Louis Ferdinand Destouches.

we have some famous modern writers whose faces look like the insides of bedpans and they write the same way.

I like to play: some nights I have nights of Céline photos, classical music, cigars, red wine and the typewriter.

Céline looks at me as I drink, type, listen to the music and smoke the cigars; we have a great time together as other people are bowling, sleeping, watching tv, arguing, screwing, eating, doing all those dumb things and others.

but now here

the words fly like crazy sparrows in a storm, Shostakovich bellows, as the cigar smoke whirls to the left and outside the door and into the night as the red wine, the blood of the gods enters me.

hello Céline ... Céline ... you dog ... we piss the pain of centuries ... but we can laugh ... sometimes ... how fast the bottle empties ... among your photos ... the dark luck is good.

THE ROACHES

the great editor and his wife were testing me, they didn't want to publish anything but the real thing and they wanted to find out if I was the real thing and so there I was down in New Orleans living in a room around the corner and I came over for dinner each night and afterwards we drank, although I did most of the drinking.

we ate at this table and there was a light in the wall and a wire led down from the light and it ran right past the edge of the table and when the light was turned on and we sat down to eat then two lines of roaches would

appear, one line going up the wire and the other down and sometimes they bumped and one or two roaches would fall to the table but they just leaped up onto the wire again.

I noticed this the first night I ate there but I didn't say anything because I knew that they knew I had lived in many cheap rooms full of roaches and I was supposed to be used to them but actually it made me a bit sick to look at them and I always killed them right off but down there in New Orleans I didn't say or do anything, I pretended that the roaches were fine, just there, and so what, and all that. I wanted them to print my book, they did fine work.

they never said anything about the roaches either except finally after about a week the editor said to me, "have you noticed the roaches?"

"the roaches," I answered, "oh, yeah, yeah, the roaches."

"you know," the editor said, "this other writer came by one time to eat dinner here and he saw the roaches and said, 'why in the hell don't you get rid of those damned things?'" "he did?" I asked.

"yeah, he did," said the editor's wife. the editor smiled, "I told my wife that you would never say anything about the roaches." "yeah, he did," said the editor's wife.

I let out a small belch. "forget about the roaches, you got anything to drink around here?"

that's what they wanted to hear. they had a real writer in the room with them.

the editor's wife got up to fetch the first bottle of wine for that night.

A LADY WITH SOME FRENCH WINE

I picked up the phone, answered as her voice rushed on like a quicksilver snake. I couldn't get most of it, she just kept talking, on-rushing: "... and she claims she knows you. she's dying in a hospital and she wants you to come see her. she says her name is -----."

"I'm sorry the lady is sick," I said, "but I don't know her."

"that's what I thought. anyhow ..." she continued.

the speaker had come by to a place I had lived at many years ago, had taken some photographs of me drugged-out, mad, when I had been living with the prostitutes.

they were very good photos but others had taken some good ones in those days when I was puking over the lip of the grave.

she went on and I just held the phone two feet from my ear and still heard the intensity of the sound.

I looked at the rug
I looked out the window at the tops of trees remembering the days when
I had to choose between eating or using the money for stamps to send the stuff out
and I usually sided with the stamps
and when it came back I was more often than not known as address unknown.
and as far as the women were concerned I was the graceless idiot of nowhere.

I placed the phone back to my ear: "... and I know that you like German wine but I've got a good case of French wine and I'd like to come over and have a couple of bottles with you"

"I've been drinking too much," I explained, "too many people want to come by and drink with me"

"sure," she said, "I understand ... you know, Henry Miller was bothered too, he finally put a sign on his door, it said"

"I know about the sign," I said, "I read about it somewhere"

"anyhow," she went on, "Henry Miller took me to dinner a couple of times but he knew me, it was different"

"yes," I said, "of course."

"did you get my chapbook of poems?" she asked.

"yes"

"well, do me this favor"

"what is it"

"well, you know, you've probably read the poems, so what I want to ask is, if you like anything about them, about any of them, please write me and say what you like about them, o.k.?"

"o.k.," I said.

the conversation was over. I hung up.

"who the hell was that?" the woman I live with asked.

"a friend," I answered.

"a woman?"

"yes."

"well, it seems to me that when you're on the phone that long that that woman is something else beside a friend!"

she was absolutely right.

BAD TIMES AT THE 3RD AND VERMONT HOTEL

Alabam was a sneak and a thief and he came to my room when I was drunk and each time I got up he shoved me back down.

you prick, I told him, you know I can take you!

he just shoved me over again.

when I sober up, I said, I'm going to kick you all the way to hell!

he just kept pushing me around.

I finally caught him with a good one, right over the left temple and he backed off and left.

it was a couple of days later
I got even: I fucked his girl.

then I went down and knocked on his door.

well, Alabam, I fucked your woman and now I'm going to kick you all the way to hell!

the poor guy started crying, he put his hands over his face and just cried

I stood there and watched him.

I said, I'm sorry, Alabam.

then I left him there, I went back to my room.

we were all alkies and none of us had jobs, all we had was each other.

even then, my so-called woman was in some bar or somewhere, I hadn't seen her in a couple of days.

I had a bottle of port left.

I uncorked it and took it down to Alabam's room

said, how about a drink, Rebel?

he looked up, stood up, went for two glasses.

CAR WASH

got out, fellow said, "hey!" walked toward me, we shook hands, he slipped me 2 red tabs for free car washes, "find you later,"

I told him, walked on through to waiting area with wife, we sat on outside bench, black fellow with a limp came up, said, "hey, man, how's it going?" I answered, "fine, bro, you makin' it?" "no problem," he said, then walked off to dry down a caddy. "these people know you?" my wife asked. "no." "how come they talk to you?" "they like me, people have always liked me, it's my cross." then our car was finished, fellow flipped his rag toward me, we got up, got to the car, I slipped him a buck, we got in, I started the engine, the foreman walked up, big guy with dark shades, huge guy, he smiled a big one, "good to see you, man!" I smiled back, "thanks, but it's your party, man!" I pulled out into traffic, "they know you," said my wife. "sure," I said, "I've been there."

MY NON-AMBITION AMBITION

my father had little sayings which he mostly emitted during dinner sessions; food made him think of survival:

"succeed or suck eggs ..."

"the early bird gets the worm ..."

"early to bed and early to rise makes a man (etc.) ..."

"anybody who wants to can make it in America ..."

"God takes care of those who (etc.)"

I had no particular idea who he was talking to, and personally I thought of him as a crazed and stupid brute but my mother always interspersed during these sessions: "Henry, you listen to your father."

at that age I didn't have much other choice but as the food went down with the sayings, the appetite and the digestion went along with them.

it seemed to me that I had never met
another person on earth
as discouraging to my happiness
as my father.

and it appeared that I had
the same effect upon
him.

"you are a bum," he told me, "and you'll
always be a bum!"

and I thought, if being a bum is to be the
opposite of what this son of a bitch
is, then that's what I'm going to
be.

and it's too bad he's been dead
so long
for now he can't see
how beautifully I've succeeded
at
that.

DING-DONG

he came over with a rag around his
head, it was tied around his head
and a large segment of that rag
dangled down by his side
like a bell-cord
and it often got in his way
as he tried to light a cigarette
or lift his drink.

his girlfriend was dressed in an
all-fur outfit
that came down and covered her
feet.
her eyes were large and nice
but seemed always near
tears.
but she was
quiet.

he wasn't.

he jumped up often
spilling his drink against his
mod shirt
and he was six feet four and
worse than a bore.

it was at my place
and there were others
about.

I grabbed him by his belt and
pulled him to one side and
said: " what the fuck are you
on? I mean, buddy, you're
driving everybody crazy! do I
have to kick your ass just to
get a modicum of
silence?"

he just went on
talking

I went back and sat down.
he followed and sat down
next to me.
he was a computer engineer.

he and the girl in the
fur outfit were going to
get married.
I knew I'd never be
at that wedding.

there was a fellow sitting on the floor
across from the coffee table
who really told
interesting and funny stories
but all any of us could hear was
the computer engineer.

after not too long a time
we gave up speech and just
listened
although nobody was sure of
what he was saying

the computer engineer and his
girl
were friends of the lady
I lived with
and since said lady
would tend to say that
I usually treated her friends
badly
I just sat there and drank
as the tall one
leaped up and down
talking
and getting tangled in his
bell-cord.

I glanced over at the lady
I lived with.
she was smiling pleasantly
as he screamed his
nonentities

and I thought, if I am being
tested I am failing again.
I can't find anything
endearing in any of
this

and I reached out and
yanked his
bell-cord

still talking
his head
yanked
downward
and he spilled his drink
on me

sat upright again
and began with
more volume than
ever

only the head-yank
had seemed to clear his speech
pattern
and I finally understood what
he was saying
and so did the others

he was coming on
he was telling the world
that
I was an
antisocial hunk of
despicable shit.
brotherhood and sisterhood
would engulf my
smallness.
every man was a poet and
every woman was too

I poured him a new
drink

he picked it up and
snouted it
down

love is what mattered,
he went on
and
furthermore

RED

he runs a bookstore
just off Hollywood Boulevard
and all that part of Hollywood
is just about skid row,
the young boy prostitutes
running the streets at night;
the hard young girls, the blacks,
the disoriented children from
ruined families, they are
frightened, mean, helpless and
dumb and
all that's left of that part of
town is
Musso's and Frederick's of
Hollywood.

but Red is there too,
wily old Brooklyn Red,
book collector, survivor.
Henry Miller once said to
him, "where'd you get all my
fucking books, Red?"

Red has the largest collection of
Chinaski books anywhere in town,
probably in the nation.

he's got them stacked up on his
desk in large piles
and he's got some specials under
glass
and then he takes me into the
back room
and there are cases and cases
of Chinaski
books.

"my god, Red, I hope you don't
get stuck!"

"I stock what I like"

Red knows the scene, he locks up
at 4 or 4:30 before the streets

become ugly but not real, just
inhuman and unjust.

he's home with Mina by

5.
maybe they'll eat
in,
maybe they'll go to
Canter's.

wise old Brooklyn Red,
he's seen more than
he'd care to talk
about.

and Paris is dead now
and so is Henry Miller
but down there on skid
row Hollywood
with only Musso's and
Frederick's left,
there's still a little
bit of the old
Paris
and a large touch of
class:

Red Stodolsky.

FREE DINNER

I was still the starving writer when I met this beautiful
lady who was young educated rich I really can't
remember how that all came about she had come to my
court a few times for brief visits "I don't want sex"
she told me "I want you to understand this" "o.k,"
I said "no sex"

one night she invited me to dinner on her she
arrived in her Porsche and we were off

the table was in front it was a fancy place I suppose
and there was a fellow with a violin and a fellow at the
piano

I ordered a wine and then we ordered dinner it was quiet
and I was hungry and thirsty it was a good red wine

it went quickly and I ordered another
"tell me about your writing" she said

"no no" I said

dinner arrived I had ordered a porterhouse and fries
she had something delicate I don't know what it was
we began eating then

she started talking it began easily enough something
about an art exhibit I nodded her on

being an almost starving writer it didn't take me
very long to finish my plate

she began talking about the life of Mozart putting
small bits of food into her mouth

I poured more wine

then she started talking about saving the American Indian

I ordered another bottle of wine

the waiter took our plates and she began to pour her
own wine

she told me that Immanuel Kant had a most brilliant mind
astonishingly brilliant

her voice was getting louder and louder and she spoke more
and more rapidly

then the guy at the piano started in and the guy with the
violin joined him

she raised her voice to be heard over the music

she was back to saving the American Indian

I began getting a headache I sat and listened to her and
my headache got worse

she began to explain to me what Jean Paul Sartre really
meant

the guy at the piano and the guy with the violin got
louder and louder

I waved my arms at her and yelled "LOOK LET'S GO TO MY
PLACE!"

she paid the bill and I got her out of there she talked
all the way back to my place then she parked and
came on in

I had some scotch I poured the scotch I sat on the couch
and she sat on a chair across the room talking loudly
and rapidly

she was on Vivaldi on and on about Vivaldi

she stopped to light a cigarette and I got to speak

"look" I told her "I don't want to fuck you"

she jumped up knocked over her drink began prancing
about the floor "oh hahaha! I know you want to
fuck me!"

then she went into some type of whirling dance holding
her cigarette over her head she was very awkward
breathing heavily and staring at me

"I have a headache" I told her "I want to go to bed and
rest"

"haha! you're trying to trick me into bed!"

then she sat down and looked at me

"I'm not going to let you fuck me"

"please don't" I said

"tell me about your writing" she said

"look" I said "Will you please get out of here and
leave me alone?"

"ha!" she jumped up

"ha you men are all alike! all you think about is
fucking!"

"I don't have the slightest desire to fuck you"

"haha! you expect me to believe that?"

she grabbed her purse ran toward the door then she was
out of there slamming it

and my beautiful rich educated lady was gone
forever

SOMEBODY

he had long thin arms,
sat always in a white t-shirt,
no gut at all, he was in his mid-40s,
cheeks staved in,
an x-con, he rolled a cigarette with one hand,
skin burned brown,
he had crazy gray eyebrows,
never looked right at you,
he had no luck with women,
was always in love with some number who disdained him,
he coughed too often,
talked about all his terrible jobs of the past,
sitting in a chair
he drank wine out of tall water glasses,
preferred port, said muscatel made him crazy.

each time we drank it was about the same,
he got into it:

"come on, Hank,
let's fight!
you've got guts,
let's fight!"

"I don't want to fight you,
Lou."

I wasn't afraid of him.
in fact, he bored me.

there wasn't anybody else to drink with in that hotel except a lady I knew down the hall.

"you banging her, Hank?"

"maybe."

"can you fix me up?"

"I don't think so."

"come on, Hank,
let's fight!"

"go on, drink your wine."

"I got in a fight with a guy once, we used pick handles.
he broke my arm on the first swing.
I still got him, I busted him up good."

he poured the wine down.
he always got sick.
he could seldom make it to the hall bathroom.
he'd let it go in my sink.

"all right, Lou,
clean up that fucking sink!"

"sorry, Hank,
sorry, I think I got an ulcer."

"clean the sink!"

he was like a 17 year old boy,
nothing had developed.
I preferred to drink alone
but I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

one time he didn't come around for a couple of nights.
that was all right but he owed me ten bucks and I needed money for wine.

I went down to his door and knocked.

no answer.

I pushed the door open. he was on the bed and his gas heater was hissing. it wasn't lit and all the windows were closed.

I shut the heater off, opened the windows and stood at the door swinging it back and forth to get air into the room.

then I shook him. he was still alive. he gave me a stupid smile.

"Hank, you saved my life! you saved my life!"

he got up in bed, put his feet on the floor.

"you saved my life! you're my buddy forever!"

"next time you want to

kill yourself, lock your door."

I walked out of there and back to my room.

then he was knocking on my door.

I told him to come in.

he sat in the chair.

"I'm in love," he said.

"yeah?"

"it's the manager. you ever notice her body, her eyes, her hair?" and she's intelligent."

"Lou, you owe me ten bucks."

"all I got is a five."

"let me have it."

he took a 5 from his wallet. that's all that was there.

I took it.

"I wrote her a long love letter, 4 pages long, I slipped it under her door."

"did you sign it?"

"no."

"don't worry about it."

"all right, Hank. but I think she knows it's me. I'm afraid to face her. you got any wine?"

"one bottle."

"can I have a drink?"

"I got the bottle and put the corkscrew to the cork.

Lou sat there and rolled a cigarette with one hand.

MY FRIEND, THE PARKING LOT ATTENDANT

- he's a dandy
- small moustache
- usually sucking on a cigar

he tends to lean into cars as he transacts business

first time I met him, he said,
"hey! ya gonna make a
killin'?"

"maybe," I answered.

next meeting it was:
"hey, Ramrod! what's
happening?"

"very little," I told
him.

next time I had my girlfriend with me
and he just
grinned.

next time I was
alone.

"hey," he asked, "where's the young
chick?"

"I left her at home"

"Bullshit! I'll bet she dumped
you!"

and the next time
he really leaned into the car:

"what's a guy like you doing driving a
BMW? I'll bet you inherited your
money, you didn't get this car with your
brains!"

"how'd you guess?" I
answered.

that was some weeks ago.
I haven't seen him lately.
fellow like that, chances are he just moved on
to better
things.

CANCER

I found her room at the top of the stairway.
she was alone.
"hello, Henry," she said, then,
"you know, I hate this room, there's no window."

I had a terrible hangover.
the smell was unbearable,
I felt as if I were going to vomit.

"they operated on me two days ago," she said, "I felt better the next day but now it's the same, maybe worse."

"I'm sorry, mom."

"you know, you were right, your father is a horrible man."

poor woman. a brutal husband and an alcoholic son.

"excuse me, mom, I'll be right back"

the smell had seeped through me, my stomach was jumping.
I got out of the chair and walked down the stairway, sat there halfway down, holding to the railing, breathing in the fresh air.

the poor woman.

I kept breathing in the air and managed not to vomit.

I got up and walked back up the stairway and into the room.

"he had me committed to a mental institution, did you know that?"

"yes, I informed them

that they had the wrong person
in there."

"you look sick, Henry, are you all
right?"

"I am sick today, mom, I'm going
to come back and see you
tomorrow."

"all right, Henry"

I got up, closed the door, then
ran down the stairway.
I got outside, to a rose
garden.

I let it all go into the rose
garden.

poor damned woman

the next day I arrived with
flowers.
I went up the stairway to the
door.
there was a wreath on the
door.
I tried the door anyhow.
it was locked.

I walked down the stairway
through the rose garden
and out to the street
where my car was
parked.

there were two little girls
about 6 or 7 years old
walking home from school.

"pardon me, ladies, but would you
like some flowers?"

they just stopped and stared at
me.

"here," I gave the bouquet to the
taller of the girls. "now, you
divide these, please give your
friend half of them."

"thank you," said the taller

girl, "they are very
beautiful."

"yes, they are," said the other
girl, "thank you very
much."

they walked off down the street
and I got into my car,
it started, and
I drove back to my
place.

MADMAN

being
checked into a cell at L.A. City jail I
was still a bit drunk
there was a back-up of prisoners
nobody noticed me smoking this cigarette
until some ash dumped off the end
then a cop screamed at me about how
"they kept this fucking place CLEAN!"
"oh," I said, and then the cop said,
"wise fuckers, huh? ... o.k., now you
get it!"
and he pushed me into this room and
locked the door behind
me
and here behind this yellow thick
wire was this total
madman
he saw me and screamed
ran full force toward me
smashed into the wire
bounced back
rushed the wire again
grabbing it
shaking it
wanting to get through it
trying to get at me
trying to kill me

it was fearful
but I was drunk
found another cigarette
lit it
pushed it through the wire
expecting to get my hand ripped
away
he took the smoke

put it to his lips
inhaled
exhaled

I lit up
also
and we stood
smoking.

that's the way the cop
found us
when he opened the door
behind
me.

"son of a bitch," he said, "that's
beautiful, I wish I could let
you go."

"I wish you could too,"
I told him.

"let's go," he
said.

as we walked toward the door
the madman grabbed the wires and
screamed
screamed
he rattled and banged the
wires
those thick yellow wires
with the yellow paint flaking off
showing areas of
steady grey
beneath.

THE MIRROR GAME

Peter was the freak, Peter was fat, Peter was dumb, Peter was clumsy, Peter stuttered and Peter stumbled and the girls giggled at Peter and the boys taunted him, and Peter was kept after school and Peter's glasses always fell off of his nose and his shoelaces were untied and his shirttail hung out and his clothing was unlike anything sold in the stores and Peter always sat in a back seat with lines of snot dripping from his nose.

that was then. that was grammar school and
partly through junior high, and time went
on and

now

Peter never drives his expensive car over
two years and he always has a new and
beautiful girlfriend and he no longer wears
glasses and he has thinned down, looks al-
most handsome but certainly assured, he
has a home in Mexico and a home in Portu-
gal and he has purchased the two estates
which border his and he rents them out.
Peter deals in law, artwork and the stock
market, he speaks seven languages, has a
yacht and a private plane and he also
sometimes produces movies.

those who knew him then don't know him
now.

something
happened, what the hell
was it?

and most of the golden boys of then
who are still around now
are misshapen, beaten, inglorious,
idiotic, homeless, senile or
dying.

it seldom works the way we think it
works.
in fact, it never
does.

POEM ABOUT A LADY WITH A RED FACE AND LONG BLONDE HAIR

I met this female poet many years ago.
we were to read on the same card
for our hundred bucks
with 3 or 4 others.

the university got us our dinner with
wine
and the 3 or 4 others didn't drink much
wine
but the female poet and I kept ordering
more bottles.

at the time she was writing about the
terrible times she was having with
men

while I was writing about how terribly
the women were treating me.
(when one listens to this crap one
always yearns to hear the words of the
non-writers.)

anyhow, this female poet and I didn't
particularly like each other, which
is the way it is, most times with the
poets.

well, the prof got us to the reading
and I don't remember much about it
except that she wouldn't get down from
there
she stood at that podium reading poem
after poem about her troubles with
men
she was really in agony and listening
to her I got that way too.

next thing I knew I was back in my motel
room sobering up on beer
getting ready for the flight out the
next morning.

I sat waiting, sucking on those beers —
somehow, even though we hadn't particularly
liked each other, I expected her to come by
and lay her body under mine

don't ask me why, just natural stupidity,
you know.

I got on the plane and out

she did have a rather pretty face,
long sharp nose, rather dirty stringy
hair
she was dressed in a long white gown
a madhouse gown
except with a long low-cut section in
front
she smoked constantly and kept staring
at the tablecloth.

that must have been a couple of decades
ago.

she's still writing and I am too

she's still writing about how it keeps
going wrong with men

and I?
well

meanwhile, the 3 or 4 others with us
at that reading have vanished

which seems to show that to last you
have to choose enduring subject
matter
and/or drink very much wine

or maybe better yet, like she taught
me, not to go to bed with any body
around because there's
nothing else to do.

THE FAMOUS WRITER

when I was a mailman
one of my routes was a special route:
a famous writer lived in one of those
houses,
I recognized his name on the letters,
he was a famous writer but not a very
good one, well, maybe a fairly good
one.
but I never saw him
until one morning when I was
very hungover
I walked up to his house
and he was outside
he was standing in an old bathrobe,
he needed a shave and he looked ill
about 3 years from death
but he had this good looking woman
standing there with him
she was much younger than he
the sun shining through her full hair
and her thin dress,
I handed him his mail over the gate and
said, "I've read your books,"
but he didn't answer
he just looked down at the letters
and I said, "I'm a writer too"
he still didn't answer,
he turned and walked off
and she looked at me
with a face that said nothing,
then turned and followed
him.

I moved on down to the next house
where halfway across the lawn
a little toy bulldog
came charging out
growling
whirling
with his putrid little eyes
seething
I caught him under the belly with
my left foot
and flung him up against a
picture window
and then I felt somewhat better
but not
entirely, hardly
so.

A LITTLE CAFE ON 6TH STREET IN PEDRO

went in about 1:30 p.m.
ordered the turkey sandwich
on wheat plus some
decaf,
opened the paper and
waited:

two men to my left
talking:
"well, I wasn't going to
say anything but I looked at
your haircut and I saw
something was
wrong"

"yeah, I was watching her
in the mirror and I thought,
'hey, what's she doing?'"

"I noticed it right
away ...

you should have said
something"

they went on talking about
the haircut and I went on
reading.

the sandwich and decaf
arrived with a side order
of

slaw and I began
eating.

"she should have taken more
off the left side"

"yeah, yeah, she's always given
me a good cut before"

"Yeah, I mean, it doesn't look
bad but somehow it doesn't look
right, you
know?"

"I know ... I might not go
back"

then
one of the men
asked for some
cherry pie:

"I really like your
cherry pie"

"me too ...!"

I finished my meal
left the tip
got up and walked to the
cash register near the
door.

the men were into their
cherry pies:

"I wasn't going to say
anything, it's really not a
big thing, you know ... but
I thought I'd better tell
you"

"oh, I knew"

"it'll all grow out, you'll
be all right"

"when it does, I don't think
I'm going back"

"it's not that bad, it's
just"

I paid and walked outside
and my car was there and
I got in and drove away
but I had to stop for a red
light
at Pacific
and
the turkey on wheat and
the slaw and the
decaf
huddled and bucked in
my stomach

and as I got the green
I thought
I might not
go back there.

ABOUT PAIN

my first and only wife
painted
and she talked to me
about it:
"it's all very painful
to me, each stroke is
pain ...
one mistake and
the whole painting is
ruined ...
you will never under-
stand the
pain"

"look, baby," I
said, "why doncha do
something ya like ta
do?"

she just looked at me
and I think it was her
first understanding of
the tragedy of our being
together.

such things usually
begin
somewhere.

DRIESER WASN'T SO HOT EITHER

he is really a nice fellow
of good heart
but I don't know what to do
with him:
he is bitten by over-
enthusiasm.

and i have no desire to
hurt him.

he phones often.

"I'm on my novel," he'll
say.

"good," I'll
answer.

"123 pages"

"good"

"you know what you told
me?" he will
repeat.

"what?"

"never write unless you really
have to, never write until it
leaps on you'"

"yes"

"I've done that ... I'm up to
page
123"

then he'll talk about other
things, and then
a lot more about the
novel.
then it will be
over.

"was that Harry?" my wife will
ask.

"yes, it was Harry"

a day or so will pass,
I'll drive in from
the track
and my wife will
say, "Harry phoned. "

"ah"

"he talked about his
novel"

"123 pages"

"135 pages ... he also
said he invented
a couple of
women
who didn't
exist"

"yes, he told me and
I told him that it was
all right: it's
fiction"

"he tells us both the
same things," my wife
mentioned.

"yes"

usually he phones
in the mornings, I only
wish he'd wait until
nightfall
but
he's excited.

it could be a good
novel, maybe it
is, I hope so,
only
I wish he wouldn't
talk about it
all the
time.

"I wish he wouldn't talk

about
the novel," I tell my
wife.

"why don't you tell
him?"

"Christ, I can't totally
re-make this
guy!"

"he believes in you,
tell him"

"look, F. Scott Fitzgerald used
to read his stuff
to his woman
right after he wrote
it.
isn't that
even worse than
talking about
it?"

"but
you said
F. Scott Fitzgerald
was the most over-rated
writer of
our time"

"I just can't tell Harry
to
stop talking about
his novel."

"he's your friend"

"maybe he's your friend,"
I tell her.

"but
I'm no writer"

"for this," I tell her,
"let us bless the
gods and everything
else."

NO NONSENSE

Faulkner loved his
whiskey
and along with the
writing
he didn't have
time
for much
else.

he didn't open
most of his
mail

just held it up
to the light

and if it didn't
contain a
check

he trashed
it.

SNAKE-EYES

William Saroyan
married the same
woman
twice

which means
he must have
forgotten
something
about the
first
time.

anyhow, he claimed
it ruined his
life.

but,
actually,
there are
many things
which can
ruin

a man's
life

just
depending upon
which one
gets to him
first.

A PROBLEM

we met at dinner
a place off the
harbor.
Paul, his wife,
Tina.
me, my wife,
Sarah.

we finished
dinner.
I suggested
drinks at our
place.

they followed
our BMW in
their
Mercedes.

around drinks
we got into
politics and
religion.
I looked at
Paul and
noticed that
his face had
turned into a
cardboard
face, his
eyes into
marbles.

then I saw
my face
in the mirror
above the
mantle.

I had the
head of an
alligator.

I poured
more
drinks.

the conversation
got into
after-life,
abortion and
the Russians.

then somebody
started in
on ethnic
jokes
and the night
was over.

we walked them
to the
door.
they got into
their Mercedes
and backed out
down the
drive.

we waved
they blinked
their
lights.

we went
back
inside.

"I wonder what
they are saying
about
us?" I
ventured.

"what are we
going to say
about
them?" Sarah
asked.

"nothing," I
answered.

"did you ever
notice?"
she asked.

"what?"

"sometimes you
have
a head
like an
alligator."

"I've noticed."

"we don't have
any friends,"
Sarah
said.

RED TENNIS SHOES

he sits
3 or 4 rows
below me.

his hand
trembles
as he takes
a cigar
from his
mouth.

he stands up,
stretches,
tucks his shirt
into his
pants.

he finds
a large piece of
yellow paper
in one of his
pockets.

he sits down
with the yellow
paper
in one hand
and the
cigar

in the
other.

both hands
tremble.

he studies the
yellow paper,
puts the cigar
into his
mouth,
inhales.

he coughs
keeping the
cigar
in his
mouth.

he stops
coughing,
adjusts the
cigar,
straightens his
glasses,
rises to
bet.

he is in
his mid-
sixties.

as he walks
up the
aisle
I notice his
shoes —
tennis shoes.

a bright
red.

when he
returns he
sits very
still.

as the race
goes off
and
unfolds
he sits
very
still.

the race
finishes
and he still
sits very
still.

the jocks
bring their
mounts
back in.

suddenly he
rises
as a jock
gallops
his horse
by.

"HEY, LAFFIT, YOU
ASSHOLE, WHO
TOLD YOU
THAT YOU COULD
RIDE A
HORSE!"

the jock just
rides his horse
on in,
he's heard it
all
before.
they all
have.

the horseplayer
sits down
biting into his
cigar.

he consults the
yellow
paper
again.

he's going to
give it another
try.

and I am
too.

MAILBAG

a schizophrenic
in Dallas
writes me of his
problems:
he
hears voices,
he's
hooked on
Beckett.
also his shrink
makes him
wait too long
in the waiting
room.

he's supported
by his
mother
and he follows
softball.

he recently
won
2nd prize
in a chili
cook-off.

you ought to come
to Austin,
he writes,
you'd love
Austin.

I file his letter
in with
other letters
from
schizophrenics.

I've been to
Austin.

THE TWO TOUGHEST APES IN THE SOUTH BAY AREA

— for K.P.

there's this great big guy comes to see me, he sits in
this big chair and starts smoking his cigars
and I bring out the wine bottles
and we pour it down.
the big guy just gulps them down and I gulp
right along with him.
he doesn't say much, he's a stoic.

when other people are around they say, "Jesus, Hank,
what do you see in this guy?"
and I say, "hey, he's my hero, every man has to have a
hero."

the big guy just keeps lighting cigars and drinking.
he never even gets up to piss, he doesn't have
to.
he doesn't bother.

he smokes ten cigars a night and matches me
drink for drink.
he doesn't blink.
I don't either.

even when we talk about women we
agree.

it's best when we're alone because he doesn't
talk to the other people.

but when we're alone I never remember him
leaving.
in the morning his chair is still there
and all the cigar stubs and
all the empty bottles but he's
gone.

what I like best is he never disturbs the
image I have of him,
he's a tough son of a bitch and I'm a
tough son of a bitch
and we meet about once
every 3 months and put on our
performance.

anything closer than that would
wipe us
out.

THOSE GIRLS WE FOLLOWED HOME

in Jr. High the two prettiest girls were
Irene and Louise,
they were sisters;
Irene was a year older, a little taller
but it was difficult to choose between
them;
they were not only pretty they were
astonishingly beautiful
so beautiful
that the boys stayed away from them;
they were terrified of Irene and
Louise
who weren't aloof at all,
even friendlier than most,
but
who still seemed to dress a bit
differently than the other
girls:
they always wore high heels,
silk stockings,
blouses,
skirts,
new outfits
each day;
and,
one afternoon,
my buddy, Baldy, and I followed them
home from school;
you see, we were kind of
the bad guys on the grounds
so it was
more or less
expected,
and
it was something:
walking along
ten or twelve feet behind them;
we didn't say anything
we just followed
watching
their voluptuous swaying,
the balancing of the
haunches.

we liked it so much that we
followed them home from school
every
school day.

when they went into their house
we stood outside on the sidewalk
smoking cigarettes and talking.

"someday," I told Baldy,
"they are going to invite us inside their
house and they are going to
fuck us."

"you really think so?"

"sure."

now
50 years later
I can tell you
they never did
— never mind all the stories we
told the guys;
yet, it's the dream that
keeps you going
then and
now.

THE ACTION

he buys 5 cars a month, details them, waxes and buffs
them, then
resells them at a profit of one or two grand.

he has a nice Jewish wife and he tells me that he
bangs her until the walls shake.

he wears a red cap and squints in the light, has a regular
job besides the car gig.

I have no idea of what he is trying to do and maybe he
doesn't either.

he's a nicer fellow than most, always good to see him,
we laugh, say a few bright lines.

but
each time
after I meet him
I get the blues for him, for me, for all of us:

for want of something to do
we keep slaying our small dragons
as the big one waits.

JUST TRYING TO GET A LITTLE SERVICE

I am drinking beer.

I have a table to the side
and am waiting on my
order.

it is one of these chain
restaurants that are
all about the
city.

the food is usually bad
but there is much space
and I usually attempt to
situate myself
as far from the people as
possible.

it's not always
possible.

at the nearest table
sit
two fellows.
one is rather ugly and
plain
and the other a young
bland blonde boy
in a blue t-shirt and white
walking
shorts.

the waitress is
bending over the table
between them.
she is bending over
the back of a
chair
she is
chatting and
giggling ...

the poor dear is
evidently
interested in
blue t-
shirt
but she speaks to
both of
them.

then
she
rushes off.

"what a whore," says
blue t-
shirt.

"terrible ass,"
says the ugly
fellow.

"I wish to hell,"
says blue t-
shirt, "we could just
get waited on
without all the
bullshit."

there is nothing much
for a while
then
she's back
bending over the
chair
talking and
giggling.

"waitress," I
say.

she doesn't
respond.

"HEY! WAITRESS!" I
intone.

she gets off the
chair-back and
faces
me.

"yes, sir?"

"could I have another beer,
please?"

"oh, of
course"

she trots off toward the libation.

blonde t-shirt looks at me:

"you don't use the term 'HEY!' when you address people."

"no, when it's necessary, I do"

"what's with this old fuck?" asks his ugly friend.

"he thinks he's a wise fuck, that's all"

"remember what we did to the last wise fuck we ran into?"

"oh yeah: we put the cure"

the waitress is back with my beer. then sensing that something is in the air she vanishes.

I take a hit from the bottle.

"hey, old man" says blue t-shirt, "I got something else you can suck on!"

I look at him.

"yeah? what is it?"

"you wanna step outside and find out?"

"any time"

"that old man thinks he's tough," says the ugly one.

"you tough, old man?"

"maybe not but I'll tell you what: I'll step outside with both of you"

"hey, listen to that shit!" says blue t-shirt.

"he must be near 70 years old," says his buddy.

"please don't worry about my age"

"fuck you, old man!" says blue t-shirt.

I point casually toward the doorway.

they get into a conversation about other matters.

they won't bother me any more.

for it all I am usually better off eating at home —

I take another
hit of my
beer:
something's always
after a
man.

EMILY BUKOWSKI

my grandmother
always made the sunrise
Easter service
and the Rose Bowl
parade.

she also liked to go to the
beach, sit on those benches
facing the sea.

she thought movies were
sinful.

she ate enormous platefuls
of food.

she prayed for me
constantly.

"poor boy: the devil is
inside
of you."

she said the devil was
inside her husband
too.

though not divorced
they lived
separately
and had not seen each
other
for 15 years.

she said that hospitals
were
nonsense

she never used them
or
the doctors.

at 87
she died one evening
while feeding her
canary.

she liked to
drop the seed
into the cage
while making these
little
bird sounds.

she wasn't very
interesting
but few people
are.

A RE-EVALUATION

he told me he had been
married
5 times and that next
Wednesday
he would be
38 years
old.

I had always thought him
to be
one of the sharpest of the
valets at
racetrack
parking

but then
I've always been better at
picking horses
than at
picking
people.

THE CRAZY TRUTH

the nut in the all red outfit
came walking down the street
talking to himself
when a hotshot in a sports car
cut into an alley
in front of the nut
who hollered, "HEY, YOU DOG DRIP
SWINE SHIT, YOU GOT PEANUTS FOR
BRAINS!"

the hotshot braked his sports
car, backed toward the nut,
stopped,
said: "WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY,
BUDDY?"

"I said, YOU'RE JUST GOING TO
DRIVE OFF WITH YOUR DICK UP YOUR
ASS!"

the hotshot had his girl in the
car with him and started to
open the door.

"YOU AIN'T GONNA GET OUT OF THAT
CAR, PEANUT BRAINS!"

the door closed and the sports car
dug out and roared
off.

the nut in the red outfit then
continued to walk down the
street.

"THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' NOWHERE,"
he said, "AND IT'S GETTING TO BE
LESS NOTHING ALL THE
TIME!"

it was a great day for accuracy
there on 7th street just off
Weymouth.

THE FIGHTER

Hemingway feels it from the grave
every time the bulls run through

the streets of
Pamploma
again

he sits up
the skeleton rattles

the skull wants a drink .

the eyeholes want sunlight action.

the young bulls are beautiful,
Ernest

and you were
too

no matter
what they say

now.

SUITABLE

she is an old woman
now
still quite beautiful
she has known many of
the famous.

we are sitting in a cafe
and she tells me,
"Hemingway was an amazing
man, he'd sit about and
make these statements
one after another, these
astonishing statements"

I like that.
but I have nothing to
say.

well, I do.
I tell her: "the red
sauce in the little bowl
is very hot so
don't use it unless you
like that sort of
thing."

— such statements don't
create legends
but for temporary mortals
they still have a
rather
sturdy worthiness.

BAND-AID

we are destroyed by our
conscience, I explained to
him.

no, no, that's not what I
mean, he said.
I mean, I'll wake up
feeling good, you know,
ready for the action, ready
for whatever's out there and
then the first words she'll
say to me
will be
simply vicious and stupid,
really unwarranted, you know.
then, I'm depressed, the
whole day's
shot through the head.

we are destroyed by expecting
more than there is,
I said.

or, he continued, I'll be out
there all day, it will be hard
enough but I'll see it through
and I'll drive up thinking, now
for the good part, I'll park it,
get out, walk in the door,
then she'll say something
totally unrelated either to her
or to me, I mean something that
is simply and violently ugly,
right off, you know, and there
goes the evening and the night,
there goes any good feeling
I might have had.

you sound like a little nit-
pick, I said.

you mean these things don't
happen to you? he asked.

I mean, with your
woman?

never, I told him.

no problems? she respects you?
he asked.

she adores me, I said, the way
I speak, walk, talk, my skin-
glow, the whole bundle.

I don't believe you,
he said.

you shouldn't, I
answered.

why do women act
like that? he
asked.

it's love, I answered,
they care.

maybe it would be better
if they hated us?
he asked.

they do, I said.

I just wish they'd treat us
with the same respect they
do with strangers, he
said.

we couldn't stand that,
I said.

you mean we get what we
need? he asked.

we need what we get, I
told him.

is there anything else?
he asked.

not today, I said, we've
been talking an hour —
that's \$75.

I just think you've
compounded my

problem, he
said.

of course, I told him, and
that's why you must
come back.

I think not, he
said.

that's true, I told
him, good
day.

SELF-INVITES

well, put my ass on backwards, phone China, notify the
iceman he forgot to deliver, run the birds off the wire,
dial 911, buy a painting of a red dove and remember
Herbert Hoover,
what I am trying to say here is that 6 nights out of the
last 8 there have been visitors, all self-invites, and
like my wife says, "we don't want to hurt their feelings,"
so we have sat about and listened to these, some of them
famous and some of them not so, some of them fairly bright
and entertaining, some of them not so
but it all ends up as chatter, chatter, chatter, voices,
voices, voices, a polite heady whirling of sound and
there's a loneliness there: they all want to be recognized
in one way or the other,
they want to be listened to and that's understandable but
I am one of those human beings who would rather sit quietly
with his wife and 6 cats or I like to sit upstairs alone
doing nothing.
the idea is that I am selfish and that these people
diminish me, and the longer I sit and listen to them
the more I feel like a piece of dung but I don't get
the idea that they feel like pieces of dung, I feel
that they enjoy the sounds from their
mouths
and when they leave almost all of them make little gestures
toward future visits.
my wife is nice, makes them feel warm as they exit, she's
a good soul, so good a soul that when, say, we eat out and
get a table she always takes a seat where she can "see the
people" and I take a seat where I can't.

all right, so I was forged by the devil: almost all
humankind disinterests me and no, it's not fear although
certain things about them are fearful, and it's not
competition because I don't want

anything that they want, it's just that
in all those hours of
voices voices voices
I feel nothing essentially either kind or daring or noble,
and not the least bit worth all that time shot through
the head
and you remember when you used to run them out into the
night instead of just letting them wear themselves
down,
those with their lonely wish for accolade, and you are
ashamed of yourself for putting up with their mostly pure
crap
but then your wife would say or at least think,
"do you think that you are the only living person on
earth?"

you see, that's where the devil's got
me.

so I listen to them and they are
fulfilled.

HORSE FLY

the young man with his cap on backwards
came up to me at the racetrack
and asked, "who do you
like?" and I answered,
"don't you know that when you tell your
horse to somebody else it never
runs?"
he acted as if he hadn't
heard: "who do you like in the
exacta?"
"I don't bet exactas," I told
him.
"why?" he
asked.
"because they take a 20 percent
cut," I responded.
he acted as if that fact had nothing
to do with anything.
in a further effort to delete him from
my existence
I stated, "I don't bet daily doubles,
parlays, quinellas or
trifectas."
it was useless: "who do you like
in this race?" he
repeated.

"Your Mother's Ass,"
I informed
him.

as he checked his program
I walked
off.

ROSARY

my father was a man full of
sayings:

"early to bed and early to
rise ..."

"a fool and his money ..."

"you made your bed now lie in
it ..."

"a penny saved is ..."

"do as I say, not as I have
done ..."

"if you don't succeed, suck
eggs"

there were others but I have
forgotten them.
how he would toll them off
endlessly

when he died I went to look at
him in his casket.
everybody talked about how good
he looked, "peaceful! look at him,
how peaceful! they've fixed him up
real nice!"

I just looked at him
almost expecting him to pop off
one of his sayings:

"a dead ass is better than no
ass at all ..."

or

"don't you wonder where I'm chasing daffodils now?"

but nothing happened so I walked off followed by uncle who said, "hey, Henry, let's go get something to eat!"

"I know just the place," I said, "follow me"

I could almost hear him saying from the casket:

"the way to a man's heart is through his stomach"

COUNSEL

I am living in hell, he told me, and I said, is that right, Frankie? and he said, I am truly living in hell, you would never believe it. everything, he continued, has hardened into a repetitious going-on toward nowhere. is that right, Frankie? fucking-a, he said, you ever been locked into a position where the only escape is death? yes, I told him. then what do you do? he asked. Frankie, I just wait, death is coming anyhow. but, he told me, I can't wait. Frankie, you'll wait. why, he asked me, is pain the most present and constant thing in life? physical pain is hard to explain, Frankie, but I know what causes most spiritual pain. yeah? yeah? he asked. most spiritual pain, my lad, is caused by over-expectation. yeah? yeah? he asked. over-expectation, I said, try to avoid it. do you? he asked. yes, more and more I expect less and less, and do you get less? almost always, Frankie. damn, he said, it always helps to talk to you, you've been around the block. I'm afraid so, Frankie.

he asked, did you ever think you would live this long?
Frankie, I haven't lived this long, I've lasted this
long, good
night.

I hung up the receiver and pulled the
bottle
toward me.

A FINAL WORD ON NO FINAL WORDS

near the end of the interview he leaned forward and
asked, "now is there any final word you'd like to give to
your audience?"

"no," I answered, "no final word."

I felt his disappointment.

"no final word?" he asked again.

"no," I said.

he had wanted a nice closer, he had wanted me to save
his ass,
he had wanted me to save the asses of my readers.
well, I had worked on saving my own ass but I felt that I
hadn't really done so

but just to come up with some ditty of a line
would have been
totally misleading ultra crap.

"well," he recovered himself and said to me, "it's been
a real pleasure to interview
you."

"sure, baby," I said.

then he motioned to the camera and the sound men that
it was over
and they began packing their
gear.

"you fellows care from a drink?" I asked.

"no thanks," the interviewer spoke for everybody, they were
pulling plugs from the walls, folding equipment into
cases, it were as if I no longer
existed.

they had what they needed.

I stood with cigar and drink and watched them file out the door and into the night.

then they were gone with their asses that needed saving even worse than mine.

EACH MAN'S HELL IS DIFFERENT

I get reports about a dear friend in Europe, this man is not the complaining type

so what I've learned doesn't come from him

but he can't hide everything and some of it filters through from sources:

he must go to a hospital every other day, he is dying by the god damned inch.

his home life has long been unhappy and now

his wife has become suicidal.

most of my letters to him go unanswered and when he does

reply the responses are clipped and stark.

I've learned he can't drink, smoke, even consume coffee and

there are occupational problems.

he's not old.

my friend always wanted to be a writer

he became a translator working the language of the successful practitioners into his own.

the long hard hours with the dream getting further and further out of reach, his wife going mad:

"you're always typing!"

a killing unhappiness: never knowing what you might have been.

THE LADY WHO LOOKS YOUNG FOREVER

is in trouble:
the famous place she has gone to for all these
years for
face-lifts
refuses to give her
another:
the skin on her face is stretched so
tight
that she's like a balloon about to
burst
and they will not accept the
responsibility
of having her smile into another
camera
and exploding
like a tomato blasted by a
firecracker
all over the lens and all over
the people.

poor doll.
she's just another one of our
ageless
stars.
but have cheer: she'll never
die: film lasts longer than we
do.

OH, YES

there are worse things than
being alone
but it often takes decades
to realize this
and most often
when you do
it's too late
and there's nothing worse
than
too late.

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

