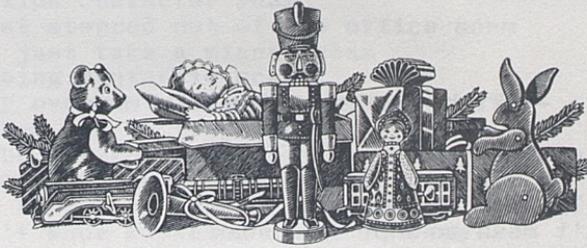


THE WORMWOOD REVIEW



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I WANT TO MAKE ONE THING PERFECTLY CLEAR

Rap Singer Sistah Souljah, who said black people should take a week off from killing each other and kill whites actually meant that racial tensions were running high, and that blacks and whites should sit down and calmly discuss their differences.

Democratic Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton, who decried Sistah Souljah's statement, actually meant that it might be misconstrued, and that he and she and Reverend Jesse Jackson should sit down and rap, because he had a lot to learn.

Republican President George Bush, who promised, "Read my lips. No new taxes," actually meant that he would try not to raise taxes, but that as President, he needed flexibility, and should not be held to statements made in one set of circumstances, when circumstances changed.

Erstwhile Presidential Candidate Ross Perot, who said that he would not appoint gays to sensitive government positions, actually meant that it wouldn't be fair

to gays since it could expose them to blackmail and other stressors — though the matter was moot, in point of fact, since people's sex lives were none of his concern.

Poet Robert Frost, who said that "Poetry is metaphor ... saying one thing and meaning another," actually meant that poetry is the one written art which can't be translated, and therefore says exactly what it means.

SCAMS

— With thanks to Joe Williams

You can't escape 'em.
The Forgot my billfold scam
The I barely know you scam
The I didn't mean to hurt you scam
The Be good and you'll go to heaven scam
The I'm sorry to say no scam
The I'm on my period scam
The scam of the blind reading and the impartial judge
The I've got a boyfriend scam
The I like this, but we're overstocked now scam
The You need more education scam
The You're overqualified scam
The Don't take this personally scam
The It's just temporary scam
The Budget Crisis scam
The I just want to be friends scam
The I'm not mad, I'm disappointed in you scam
The I'm not ready to commit scam
The scam that there's plenty for everyone
The You're being petty scam
The I didn't mean how it sounded scam
The I'm just kidding scam
The I don't want to change you scam
The I love you just the way you are scam
The I made it on my own scam
The I do my work and let fame take care of itself scam
The honesty scam
The respect the law, the cops, the government, your
elders, scam
The I'll get back to you scam
The "Helps prevent" scam
The Safe Sex scam
The It's for a good cause scam
The Postage and Handling scam
The It's only fair scam
The I'm concerned about you scam

The Everything's a scam scam
 The You don't give a damn about me scam
 The You're the most selfish person I've ever met scam
 The I've been so busy scam
 The Tough guy scam
 The Sensitive guy scam
 The Tough yet sensitive guy scam
 The Sensitive yet tough guy scam
 The Madonna-whore scam
 The Liberated woman scam
 The Madonna-whore inside the liberated woman scam
 The List of the permutations of things to get a laugh
 and seem inclusive scam
 The I'm an Artist scam
 The Poetry scam
 The I was just trying to help scam
 The I need a quarter for the bus scam
 The I don't know how I'll make my rent scam
 The It's your problem scam
 The It's everyone's problem scam
 The I'm sick of scams scam
 The I'm sick of scams scam scam scam
 The I'm sick of scams scam scam scam scam scam scam scam scam
 scam scam
 The Climatic ending scam
 The Anticlimatic ending scam
 The Ending in the middle of a sentenc

AN HONEST MAN

He believed in fair play, and "All men are created equal," but at his draft physical, when a black guy with a withered leg got booked for Vietnam and he wormed out with hay fever and three pounds of medical reports he took his 4F, and went home without a word.

When Jan, his girlfriend, cheated on him, he dropped her like a shoe with a scorpion inside. "I won't have a woman I can't trust!" he said, dated nine new ones in six months, but when none of them worked out, went back to Jan.

He loathed lawyers, their Porches and Bel Air homes, their leather chairs and books and paper clips, their carp-lips pursed to suck the slimy green. "They're the cancer that's killing America," he said. But when a drunk rear-ended him, he sighed, and hired the slickest shyster he could find.

After an editor held his short story a year, coaxed two re-writes, then rejected it with a form letter, he raved "I oughta buy a .45, fly to Manhattan, walk in her office, and decorate it with what passes for her brain." But when, years later, she called to offer him a big advance for his next book, he told his friends, "Aw, screw the bitch," and signed.

"Faced with a test of principle," he said, "I sink to the occasion every time."

— Charles Webb

Los Angeles CA

UNTITLED

"You're right my dear," Carmen said, "I was once a model." She patted her gray curls with the tips of her mottled but still slender fingers. "The reason you think so is because of the way I carry myself. You probably noticed how I hold my knees together and turn my ankles out ever so slightly. And the way I gesture with my hands gracefully like this."

"You act like a model on television," said Betty.

"You see, the reason I carry myself this way so...naturally...is because I'm from Royalty." Carmen said. "Portuguese Royalty."

"Gee," said Betty. She'd been a nurse's aide for six months at Hilldale Nursing Home, but she'd never before met anyone Royal.

"It's my father's family. He's the one from Royalty. His family is one of THE Portuguese families." Carmen surveyed her violet nail polish. "Everyone said I resembled my father's family. I don't delude myself; I know I'm not beautiful. But there was always something about me, something...aristocratic, maybe. Even today they're still after me to model."

"Oh, you are beautiful. Especially for your age," Betty said, as she helped Carmen from her wheelchair onto her bed.

"Beauty is more — much more — than looks," Carmen said sternly. "It's the way you arch your back. And the way you hold your neck, pulled up like this. That's very important. Never forget your neck."

"I won't," Betty promised, extending her neck.

"You see, Dear, you have...a disadvantage. Eu sou criada com cultura. You understand: I was born with cultivation." Carmen sighed delicately. "But you come to see me every day, and I'll teach you as much as I can. As if you were the daughter I never had."

"You're like a Queen," said Betty, as she slipped a clean johnny over Carmen's shoulders. "Do you have a title or something? Like Lady Di?"

"My father, of course, had a title," Carmen said frowning. "But I've...forgotten exactly what it was. You see, he didn't permit us to use it, anyway. He didn't want us to be loved for being Royalty. He wanted us to be loved for who we really were: plain folks at heart."

THE CLOSET

Eddie and Carol tiptoed into Martha's house hesitantly, suspecting they knew why she'd frantically summoned them over.

"Come see the closet," said Martha, eyes so intense they threatened to self-destruct.

On no, thought Eddie and Carol, their suspicions confirmed. Here we go again.

"Did you fix Fred's clothes?" Eddie asked cautiously.

"I did the best job ever," said Martha. Then she blushed and stammered. "Well, I think it's the best. Do you think so?" She led them into her bedroom and flipped open the closet doors. "Look! I starched the collars stiff. Pressed his ties and lined everything up — the way Fred likes — brown suits together, white shirts next to tan ones...."

Eddie and Carol stared at the clothes lined up perfectly, polished shoes underneath. She's turning into a Fruit Loop! they thought. Still: Martha was their younger sister.

"Beautiful," said Eddie.

"Fantastic," said Carol, their smiles smooth as Eddie's polyester blouse.

"Do you think Fred will really like it?"

"Absolutely," said Eddie.

"Sure," said Carol, their eyes sparkling like Carol's zircons, although they both knew Fred would never see Martha's closet. It had been six years since Fred had gone out for beer — and never returned. They'd heard he'd moved in with a 28-year-old widow.

"When he comes home," Martha said, almost reading their minds, "he'll have his creases extra-straight."

"Terrific," they said, eager to go home.

When the doorbell rang, Martha opened the door. It was Fred.

Edie and Carol opened their eyes wide as their drooping mouths.

"I got the beer," Fred said.

"Come see your shoes," said Martha, leading Fred by the hand into their bedroom.

DRESSING MARIA

When Maria Mello died, her sisters agreed: Maria's casket should be open for the two-day viewing service at Cabral's Funeral Parlor. They did not agree on how Maria should be dressed.

"Her blue dress is perfect," said Olivia. "Her favorite one with sequins that she wore dancing."

"You want Maria buried in a dance dress?" Carmen said. "Mother of Mercy! I never heard such a thing."

Olivia had graduated from Warwick Community College and considered herself modern. "Maria loved that blue dress," she said. "And her hair should be pinned up with her diamond barrette."

Carmen made a sign of the cross. Her olive skin blanched white. "Maria should wear the black dress she wore to Church. And her hair neat and plain. She's going to visit God — not Alfie's dance hall."

"The blue dress," Olivia insisted.

"The black dress," said Carmen, wedging both hands on wide hips.

Finally, Olivia suggested, "How about this: Monday — the viewing — Maria can wear the blue dress; Tuesday, she can wear black."

Olivia and Carmen turned to Mr. Cabral. "That's very... irregular," he said, taken aback. "Of course, I'd have to charge an extra fee for dressing the deceased twice."

Satisfied, Olivia and Carmen agreed.

Suddenly, it occurred to Mr. Cabral: his customers might really like this, having their loved ones wear two attractive outfits instead of one. Who knows, he thought, I might get a reputation for having the best-dressed deceased in town.

— Cynthia Lelos

East Freetown MA

SOME FRIENDS OF RUTH AND ELLIS GET MARRIED

— For Dan Lenihan

An obvious gatecrasher
slides up to me, belches,
and says that the wedding cake
represents Alcatraz;
I'm invited back and forth across the room
to hear these bad stories about
Adelaide, Morocco, and how
they amputated the wrong leg
on cousin so and so.
After a while
I stand off in one corner
pretty convinced
that I've found a pubic hair
in my vol-au-vent.

The band at the reception
was called the "The Yawning Haloes,"
an a cappella group,
all with speech impediments.
Someone had invited an undertaker —
he went red
trying to tell me a joke about
a left-handed gynecologist.
The guy reading the telegrams
lost his glasses
in the soup tureen.
When we left the reception
most of us
had parking tickets.

The wedding was held
in a really nice public park

but the ceremony was delayed
while some of the bride's cousins from Montana
tried to lasso
a giant, crazed brown bear
just some hours fugitive
from the nearby
San Diego Zoo.

The priest was late too.
Some of the in-laws
got a bit touchy about
raising his bail.

The couple
were having their honeymoon
in Kuwait.

"Dare to be different," they said.

We all cheered and waved
the limo goodbye.
Halfway out the park
it got
a flat tire.

Most of the guests
rang the happy parents,
the day after the wedding, to say
they had had ...

food-poisoning.

OBSERVATION, NUMBER THREE

You can tell
if a house is being rented by rock musicians
by the number of empty pizza cartons
out front
on garbage day.

LA BREA TAR PITS OF THE MIND

The construction workers
wolf whistle
at the passing office girls,
their leers
setting in the concrete.

BATH PLUG

A way
to edit
water.

OUTSIDE NIGHT WINDOW

Momentarily
the traffic
swabs its wounds
with a traffic light.

ONE THEORY

An ironing board
is just a surf board
that's become
a conservative.

THE MASTERS

Rust and moss
inhabit the quiet places,
give their signature
to the loneliness.

— Peter Bakowski

Richmond, Victoria, Australia

ANNETTE'S CZECH ACCENT

in each lilting syllable
the refined cruelty
of centuries

HOW I LIVE

have chinese
& vodka
time to time,
if I get deathly ill
have access to a
hospital

the rest is
conceptual

THE HILL

when i drink & smoke too much
can't bike up it quick as i used to yet
there's no other way
to take some of these nights
still w/out a woman i try to keep looking
reasonably fit but sometimes
drink & smokes become that woman
i'll get a fat ass & bad heart
if i don't watch it,
be ruled 'out' in the game of social darwin-
ism

COLD

as a bitch's wit

SCISSOR-LIKE

- .spring-loaded chopsticks
for people inept in their
use
- .chopstick horror-stories:
shooting the woman
with a shrimp &
later, a noodle
- .manipulating chopsticks imitating
charlie chan, who was
a white guy
- .holding cigarette only
with chopsticks, to make smoking
as big a nuisance as
possible so i'll
cut down
- .using chopsticks to reach
ball-bearing that fell down
into the planetary gears
of my bicycle-hub
(i had to first sand the tips
to flatten them)
- .disposing of mouse my cat killed
with chopsticks
- .chased off the beach
by a million birds with blurring
little chopstick legs
- .walked back 4 blocks because
they forgot the chopsticks
- .as i read, unconsciously working
chopsticks
- .tweezers are extremely literal
& therefore witless
chopsticks

SYMMETRY OF VODKATION

spent a bunch of hours last night
celebrating my existence
& as many hours today
wishing i was dead

NO NIGHT BIRDS

as there were a month ago at this hour, 3 am.
i think how difficult it would be to discover
the reason for this. as difficult as continuing
this poem w/out any further thoughts. they
stay away perhaps thinking i don't appreciate
them enough. there's a grain of truth in this:
i have indeed been cultivating oblivion, like
a quiet black field these last mos. i have
been seeking silent trees, w/out the terrible
wind & song of recently dead relatives & a
friend. but the sweet songs are gone too.
i can stay drunk & hear nothing or get sober,
try to save one song from another. what used
to be idle music suddenly becomes a matter of
life & death. my understanding of art becomes s
a little sharper. i once heard a jazz musician tell
a young student, you learn to play this in
order to become adult. it must be the same
for poets.

— Cory Monaco

Bronx NY

2 INSOMNIACS & THE CAT

i look out through the back door
& once again notice that his light's on.
he lives adjacent to this view
& at 3 a.m. when i let the cat back in
i see that his & mine are the only ones left.
i wonder what he does up there at night:
is he a madman?
does he sing dirges in his dirty underwear
while the neighbors beat fruitlessly on their walls?
does he have a hot poker game going?
does he drink himself silly & forget the light?
i let the cat in & he expects a pat on the back,
maybe a hug or two, a hint that he's approved of —
instead i walk to the t.v. & flip the channels,
flip the lighter & burn the tobacco.
two insomniacs stare down at their feet,
two so-called oddities of human behavior
wait for the american flag & the national anthem,
wait for some approval from their masters.

THE SET UP

the flower & plant lady gives me the eye,
she has a rottweiler chained in her lawn
& i've seen rather large, muscular looking
men emerging from her house late at night;
she gives me the eye
(this is not the first time)
as she digs in the box for her mail;
on the other side of the street
i walk past her with half a hard-on
pretending not to notice her.

— Todd Kalinski

Lincoln NE

AND LOTS OF WAVY HAIR LIKE LIBERACE

Every day after school
Marion and Naomi came to my house
and I played 45s of the Maguire Sisters,
the Chordettes, the Platters, and Etta James,
and we sang, or lip-synced the too-
high and low notes, and shoved each other
for the middle of the mirror
hanging on my living room wall.

I guess we imagined fame,
whatever that meant back then,
a white Cadillac, a white fox stole, maybe,
until the right guy came along
and bought us a tract home
and appliances, which is what
happened to Marion, but not to
Naomi and me, us armed with
Geiger counters for Mr. Wrong,
and Naomi's trouble with tumors.

For a year, though,
in front of my living room mirror,
Marion, Naomi, and I were all three
beautiful and perfect,
our songs made nightingales croak,
and we were the stars of the Ed Sullivan Show,
brought to you coast-to-coast,
memorable, vibrant, and fragile,
as black and white
kinescope recording.

BEFORE THE ICE IN THE TEA MELTS

Sometimes
when she was mad at my father
my mother fell in love with
Van Heflin, Joseph Cotten
and Perry Como
and said how she'd be a
much better wife to Van Heflin
than Bette Davis was in that dump
in "Beyond the Forest,"
and better than Marilyn Monroe was
to Joseph Cotten in "Niagara"
because she would never leave
a good man for another man
no matter how rich and handsome he was
but she wasn't so sure that she,
a Texas Baptist, would make a
better wife for Perry Como,
an Italian Catholic,
and she wasn't so sure
she'd like reeking of garlic, olive oil,
and wine all the time
or that Perry Como would like
her fried chicken, mashed potatoes
and cream gravy, biscuits, and iced tea
all the time like my father did
and when we heard my father's
car door slam, and our
dog whine at the front door,
my mother always said, hurry up
and mash the potatoes
before the ice in the tea melts.

THE COOLEST CAR IN SCHOOL

Wearing a white chiffon waltz-length
gown with seed pearls on the bodice
and white gardenias on my wrist
I went to my junior prom with Vic Shermer
in the aquamarine leather tuck-and-roll back seat
of Tinker Christensen's white '56 Olds,
Tinker taking my girlfriend Jan
in the front seat. Tinker's Olds,
the coolest car in school, Tinker
waxing, polishing, and hand-customizing it
every night after his job at the supermarket,
us cruising in it, actually cruising,
listing like a yacht in tropical seas,
tradewind-blown as a schooner in moon rivers,
down Firestone Boulevard in that lowered,

white-glowing car, all of us glowing,
Jan in powder-blue taffeta, Tinker
in a powder-blue tux, Vic Shermer
in a white one, on our way to the prom,
and then the Moulin Rouge in Hollywood
where even the movie stars envied that car,
and then on the way home, gliding in our barge
along the Nile of the Hollywood Freeway,
the moon our wish lamp, the stars
our diamond dust, Vic Shermer,
without asking, surprised me by kissing
my naked back, smack in between
my bare shoulder blades.

Later, all grown up, I would ride
in Corvettes, Cadillacs and limos,
Rolls Royces, Benzs, Mustangs, Zees,
a Pantera, and an XKE, and men,
as handsome or more handsome
than Vic Shermer, would wine and dine me
and kiss my naked back,
but never again would it feel like that,
and never again
would the moon, pearls, or gardenias
glow as white,
or a '56 Olds shine in the night
as that night when our eyes
were as aquamarine and young
as Tinker's leather tuck-and-roll.

MUTE FORCE

When they dropped the A-bombs
on Japan, I was too little
to do anything about it
and had to believe what the grown-ups said
about them deserving it,
us the good guys safe and sound
in our living room watching the newsreel
on my father's home movie projector,
Tommy Dorsey's "Boogie Woogie"
playing on the record player
my father's irony, that '78
for background music, his sense of fair play
as the mushroom clouds boomed silently
shattering the eardrums, tongues, bones,
and souls of all those invisible,
deserving human beings
as images of teen-aged jitterbuggers
filled our minds

bombclouds and boogiers forever binding in mine

even now
as I sit watching the bad news on tv
that they've bombed Baghdad
the tv sound turned off as
Peter Jennings, Bush, and
stern grown-up men from Paris, London,
Washington, and Jerusalem
move their hands and mouths wordlessly,
squint and blink their eyes into the tv lights
and explain, report soundlessly
about the bombs and The War,
men with bald heads, or goatees, white beards,
men with neither tongues nor speech,
because I can't bear to turn on the tv sound
and listen to the screech-bombing
and shriek-boogying
because I'm still too little
to do anything about it.

BOREDOME

Boredome, not ennui, I called my boredom
en faux francaise,
bored from dancing all day
or all night, the guys bored too now
with this going-over-the-hill go-go thing
a big, still-kicking, dying horse
and while the guys weren't watching,
while they talked shop, Nam, sports, and tv
or watched another, prettier, go-go girl
I did my own thing to those
jukebox songs impossible to dance to

danced to the Righteous Brothers' "Ebb Tide"
my Twyla Tharp moderne, pirouetted
and pressed my fists to my forehead and heart,

danced to the Stones' "Sympathy For The Devil"
my Josephine Baker banana dance,
rolled my eyes, scratched imaginary
monkey fleas from my ribs and armpits,

danced to the Doors' long-long "Light My Fire"
my Cleopatra dance,
and to the Beatles' "Ob-li-de-ob-li-dah"
I danced a yo-ho-ho hornpipe,

one guy watching, though,
my boss,
the mean one with the
Edward G. Robinson eyebrows
warning me one more time
to clean up my act before he fired my ass,

patting my red-sequined ass
while he stared into smokey, blacklighted space,
wondering what he'd do for a living
after they closed down this place.

THE 1992 L.A. RIOTS BRING BACK MEMORIES

The night of the Watts Riots
I went to work anyway at The Fort,
the diviest, dirtiest beerbar ever
on the wrong side of the tracks
just 6 miles, as the crow flies, from Watts.

The doors of The Fort were locked
and after I knocked a long time
Mick my boss opened and said,
Fuck, man, what're you doing here?
You crazy or something, don't you
know there's a riot going on?
No, I didn't know about any riot,
I'd slept all day to work all night,
hadn't watched tv or read a newspaper,
my riotous world inhabited mostly by me,
my 3 kids and worries about overdue rent,
and then suddenly I realized that the
noises I'd heard on the freeway
on the way to work had been
sniper's rifles, not backfire.

Mick said come look,
leading me up to the roof
where the guys in the band
did drugs during their breaks
and he showed me the yellow fires
and red sky of Watts just 6 miles away.
The world is coming to a fucking end,
Mick said, not knowing then
that 1965 was merely Genesis 1
of what was to come and be

then he offered me a suck off his joint
and a quickie on the desk
in the storage room he called his office
but I said no and went on home
back down the deserted freeway
through the sniper fire, unafraid,
because I was only 25
and too busy with worries and life
to realize yet that I was not
immortal.

— Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach CA

COOK HIGH SCHOOL

robert jarelski was a senior and
i was a freshman when he stuffed me
headfirst into the delightful blend
of candy wrappers, orange peels and
chew spit composting in the tall grey
plastic garbage can next to the heater
but that's okay cuz when robert went to
canada with his old man to hunt grouse
i screwed his lonely girlfriend.

ECOCHAUVINISM

when i was six
ross anderson and i
taught the neighbor lady's dog
to fetch rocks.

it was fun to throw
them in the lake
black lab almost drowning
in its eagerness to retrieve.

— Will Lahti

Järvenpää, Uusimaa, Finland

RESIDUE

after cashing my paycheck I decided
to turn in some pennies for more
silverish coins ten of them grabbed
from my pocket and dumped onto the
counter along with a very conspicuous
pubic hair coiled like a snake staring
straight at the teller who turned
pale she handed me a
sterile dime and brushed the
evidence on the floor.

SIMPLICITY IS SALVATION

eating the same breakfast
every morning
or better yet
no breakfast at all.

— James Osmer

Santa Barbara CA

Attacking The Problem

Goodstone Aircraft Company attacks a problem by immediately thinking of an acronym such as Quality Product Enhancement System, QPES; or Part Conformity Assurance Program, PCAP; or Parts Quality Team Management, PQTM. Armed with the acronym, they immediately make huge 100-foot-long banners QPES or PCAP or PQTM and hang them across the tops of the walls of buildings facing employee parking lots. They immediately print up thousands of posters and tens of thousands of fliers and memos and bulletins sporting the headline QPES or PCAP or PQTM, handing them out at the plant gates and pinning them to bulletin boards in every building as executives give speeches and videocassettes are shown expanding on the themes of QPES or PCAP or PQTM.

Even though none of this will actually affect the work being done on the shop floor, it will give all of those people in the offices something to do.

Fred Voss

WHO CARES?

A few months ago I was transferred to department PSLR and I have since discovered that no one in department PSLR knows what PSLR means what the letters stand for I have been all over the shop asking machinists what the letters stand for and they all shrug their shoulders and shake their heads and say they have no idea as if knowing the answer to that question were the most meaningless, insignificant and uninteresting thing in the world — I guess in a department where things make as much sense and inspire as much enthusiasm as they do in department PSLR, it's just fitting that no one knows.

ONE OF THE GREAT SECRETS

The tool crib attendant avidly hands the air nozzle on the end of the compressed air hose in his tool room to the veteran Lead Man outside the gate who once again tunes up by making 3 or 4 quick squirts of air with the nozzle against the palm of his hand producing random squeaks and whistles then lowers the nozzle to the jeans on his thigh where with his special technique developed over the years he with nozzle and fingers pressed against thigh jeans makes a loud perfect wolf whistle of one ascending and then one descending note, once again leaving the young tool crib attendant shaking his head as he takes the air nozzle back and makes futile attempts with it against a rag making nothing but weak out-of-key fart-like sounds, leaving him with nothing to do when that mouth-watering secretary walks by but lean out over the gate and run his hand rapidly up and down the gate post like he was jacking off.

KEEP SMILING

With the first storm of winter,
once again the Goodstone Aircraft Company machine shop roof
lets water pour through in columns
to collect in spreading puddles
all over the building,
and the machinists dust off the old jokes
about machine operators
wearing raincoats and standing under umbrellas
as they work,
nodding in familiar recognition as they look up at
a particularly big leak in the ceiling and saying,
"It rains harder in here than it does outside!"
or pointing at a rapidly spreading puddle
and saying,
"If that water reaches 440 volts, it'll be the highlight of
somebody's day!"
as the Lead Man rides around on a bicycle
with a basket full of plastic sheeting
offering to sell it
to machinists
scurrying to cover up
electrical boxes and circuit breakers.

THANKS, WE NEEDED THAT

I guess we should be grateful
that the Planning Dept.
writes out all those sequences
on the Manufacturing Orders telling us
when to hold which dimensions
as we carve blocks of aluminum or steel
into aircraft parts.
Those sequences ensure
that we spend a lot of time
trying to figure out how to translate
their drawing-board never-having-run-a-machine
fantasies
into reality as we
create immensely more complex and difficult than necessary
set-ups,
tearing down the set-ups
only to have to rebuild them later
as we are forced to get first-article parts
inspected and approved
for each planning sequence.

If it wasn't for the Planning Dept.,
we wouldn't be nearly as skilled as we are.

CHOO! CHOO!

Big Ed doesn't mind that the emollient
and the water
we mix to make coolant for our machines
are 100 yards apart
at opposite ends of the building separated
by our 3-rowed array of machinery,
he just stiffens his jaw
and takes hikes
with the 100-gallon steel barrel
on wheels,
pouring the quart of emollient into it at one end of the
building and then rolling the barrel
the length of the building toward the water faucet
at the other end,
digging into the concrete aisleway with his heels
and putting his muscle into it,
increasing the speed of the rolling barrel and getting
a rhythm going with the clacking of the wheels
over the bumps and cracks in the concrete aisleway,
able to keep control of the lurching directions of the
barrel so as to avoid running into
expeditors or supervisors walking the aisles
and yet able to increase the speed
of the clacking
to the point where the rolling barrel sounds just
like a train rolling down the tracks
and admiring machinists at their machines
are doing ear-splitting train whistle imitations
and lifting their caps and staring
with admiration.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT

The old guy
sits in the tiny trailer
after the hearing test
and listens to the nurse tell him
about the irreparable damage
working in building 44 eight hours a day
may be doing to his ears
after 30 years of not wearing earplugs
or ear muffs.
He chuckles as he gets up and walks out the door
back to the screaming pounding din
of the building,
holding his head up
and saying proudly,
"The only time I'll start worrying about that is when
I can't hear the buzzer to go home!"

SICK

On the way through the main gate each day
the Goodstone Aircraft Company employees
see the big, "Have a GREAT day!" sign
on the wall ahead of them.
The monthly Goodstone newspaper is titled, "SUPER Times!"
while the Vice President's weekly newsletter
is called "Golden Horizons"
and the man and woman
Mr. and Mrs. Goodstone cartoon figures
in all those company memos on things like good housekeeping
and instrument calibration and timecard completion
are always beaming with huge smiles.

And the worst thing is,
Goodstone's not even trying to be sarcastic.

OSCAR NOMINEES

The Goodstone Aircraft Company machinists
look seriously intent and credulous
or at least expressionless
lined up in their seats along the walls
of the conference room upstairs as the instructor
tells them
how they should get any part
they drop immediately inspected for damage
and how every machined part
must be wrapped in special air-cushioned bubble-wrap
wrapping,
as they think of the routine regularity
of parts being dropped 3 or 4 feet
to the concrete floor
and picked up
and thrown into finished-parts boxes along with
all of the other finished parts
that are as usual
wrapped in nothing.

They figure
that if the instructor can keep a straight face
so can they.

TUNNEL VISION

The new Air Force rules
mandating the stamping of "Shop-Aid"
into every last one of the hundreds of odd-shaped
pieces of bar or roundstock aluminum
that fill our drawers
for our use in machining-operation set-ups

puzzled us,
as did the Air Force's mandating
the labelling of every last plastic bottle in the shop
whether it contained cutting fluid or soap or water,
until the supervisor at the meeting considerably explained
that we probably had trouble understanding
the importance of these new Air Force rules
because all we ever thought about
was producing aircraft parts.

COPING

After the 6:00 a.m. start-work buzzer
blares Mitch begins humming and la-la-ing
cha-cha rhythms louder and louder
as he fills out his time card at his workbench
until he turns toward Bobby
on machine #451 next to him and shouts, "Suck my cock,
BobBEEE!" in cha-cha rhythm
cha-cha-ing his feet back and forth and beating out
a rhythm with his fists at his side as if he were
holding maraccas,
turning around to face Alan
on machine #462 and sing out, "Bend...over, AaaaLAN!"
as he grins and cha-chas his feet
then turns to face Tom across the aisle
at machine #456 and shout, "Suck me off, TomMEEE!" and go
into a prolonged
near hysterical giggle until he has to grab the edge of
his workbench to keep from falling over.

Some machinists
take having to be away from their wives 8 hours each day
pretty hard.

LUCKY

I am machining
2 blocks of sawed aluminum bar stock
into 2 identical parts,
and filling out separate First-Time-Conformance cards
on each one
because each one came with its own separate
manufacturing order
bearing different part numbers, serial numbers,
and issue numbers,
and I am spending most of my time
confusing the 2 parts and then trying to re-identify them
and record
their different dimensions to the thousandth of an inch
in the tiny little boxes
all over the separate First-Time-Conformance cards,

and getting angry
over the fact that Goodstone Aircraft Company
didn't put the identical parts on one manufacturing order.

Of course, it could have been worse —
Goodstone could have followed its usual procedure
and sent me 1 part on 1 manufacturing order and then,
when I had finished the part and torn down
all of the complex set-ups and sent back
all of the special tooling and cutters
for the job,
sent me the second identical part on a separate
manufacturing order.

FAN CLUB

Whenever Maintenance arrives
to work on one of our machines,
we make a point to gather about
the machine they are working on and stare at them,
munching apples and
leaning back with arms folded
elbowing each other in the ribs
as we crack jokes
at their expense,
chuckling and shaking our heads
and whistling the Laurel and Hardy theme
as the Maintenance men
sweat and strain and grapple,
turning and pushing and hammering
machine parts,
turning red with embarrassment
and cursing and having fits
because they know they must do a good job
if they don't want to endure
having us watch them all over again.

NOT AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS

Graveyard shift machinist
Gus springs at me the moment I arrive
at the beginning of my day shift
to take over for him,
shoving the part he is working on
under my nose
and rattling off with speeded-out-of-his-mind baggy-eyed
intensity,
"You can put the head on an 8-degree 42-minute angle to
go in on the Y axis and hold the 35 thousandths radius on
the A datum, well actually you can go in 100 thousandths
extra because of the 4-degree 12-minute angle on the B
datum, but you don't want to go past the middle of the

radius blending with the B datum, course later they'll have to blend it anyway because of the 220 thousandth fillet radius tapering down to 60 thousandths on this side and 50 thousandths on that side so maybe it doesn't matter, but I'd watch it. 'Course you could turn the part around and cock the head on the 4-degree 12-minute angle instead and come in the other way then you wouldn't have to worry about the 100 thousandths, but you'll have to stay away from the B datum wall so I don't know...." and the final buzzer blares making him jump and drop the part on the workbench in front of me yelling "Good Luck!" as he races off and I stare at his toolbox and finally understand why it has that sticker stuck to it saying, "KEEP IT SIMPLE STUPID!"

THERAPY

Our machine shop supervisor was always hiding behind posts or hurrying up and down the aisles, glancing about as if he were lost. He began to stutter and spend more and more time in the toilet stalls, until one day he climbed up onto one of our machines and began screaming that we were all against him.

We gathered about the machine he stood on and looked up at him in silent respect of his long overdue decision to deal with reality.

UNQUALIFIED

George was relatively new at Goodstone Aircraft Company, and he puzzled and frowned at our time-consuming, tedious attention to plus or minus thousandths of an inch tolerances on blueprints for various K-20 bomber parts always turning the handles furiously on his machine and making piles of metal chips 5 or 10 times as big as ours, coming over to our machines and shaking his head at our pitiful production and the close tolerances on our blueprints

and shouting, "It's just a NUT!" or "It's just a fucking FOOD TRAY!" or "It's just a TOILET HANDLE for Christsake!"

We all felt sorry for George.

It was beginning to look like he just didn't have what it takes to work in such a high-tech vital-to-national-security program.

NATIONAL SECURITY

A man from the offices comes by to lean over my toolbox and tell me in low voice that the Air Force is coming through and so the supervisor wants the manufacturing orders and parts conformance charts in their proper clear-plastic folder-like envelopes, as he gathers the paperwork up from my workbench and stuffs it all into the plastic envelope so that I will have to take it out again when I want to use it later, and sets the envelope down neatly onto the top of my toolbox and walks off toward the next machinist.

It sure is good to know that the Air Force is keeping a close watch on such a really vital aspect of our job.

GO WITH THE FLOW

The Goodstone Manufacturing Standards books are in 5 volumes that are each 4 inches thick and 12 inches high and stacked at several strategic locations around the machine shop, full of standards for things like finish and squareness and taper and concentricity tolerances on the aircraft parts we manufacture, but only once in the 2 years I have worked at Goodstone Aircraft Company have I actually seen someone drag one of the 10-pound volumes off its shelf and carry it to their workbench and thumb through it looking to see if the part they were making was within Goodstone Manufacturing Standards' tolerances, even though every blueprint we use states that we are to work according to those standards.

After all of those hundreds and hundreds of aircraft
we've made,
I guess none of us wants to be the one
to discover
what we might have been doing wrong.

CRITICAL CONDITION

The machinists were concerned.
Curly
hadn't been doing too well
that from-behind pussy shot
of a woman bent over with her legs spread
that he moved along on the calendar on his toolbox,
sticking it to the dates
when he had gotten laid by his wife,
hadn't moved in a long time — it was stuck way back
on the 11th and it was now
the 20th and his trademark grin
was becoming more and more forced as he tried to swagger
about
and said, "I'm sorry"
whenever another machinist pointed out that his pussy
shot hadn't moved.

But the machinists really started to get worried
that morning of the 24th when they
passed by
his toolbox and saw
that he'd removed the pussy shot from his calendar
entirely.

A man who has lost his reason for being
is in real trouble.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

There has been an acid bath
leak over between buildings 51 and 52
and all of the machinists in 3 buildings
have been evacuated leaving behind
their open toolboxes and thermoses and lunches.
They are now milling about in front of building 54
having put in too many hours for Goodstone Aircraft Company
to get away with sending them home with less than a
full day's pay,
and with nothing to do
but stand around
with their hands behind their backs
relaxed and joking in shifting circles
of conversation like executives —

until a junior executive
has the supervisors announce
that the machinists will begin a walking
heads-to-the ground sweep of the asphalt roadway
around the offices and then
of the mile-square company parking lot
in order to pick up paper and cigarette butts.

Whew.

Another dangerously out-of-control situation
among the machinists
averted
by quick-witted management.

NO EXCEPTIONS

At the end of his shift
the machinist spends an hour
cleaning his machine,
sticking the tip of the barrel of his airgun
down into each trough and way
of the machine table
and blasting them clean, blowing chips out and up
into the air where they rain down
all over the floor around the machine,
running his airgun barrel
up and down each trough and way
and blasting
until every last chip is blown out,
then lifting the covers to the coolant drains
at the bottom of the troughs
and blowing out every last chip and drop of coolant
there,
at last wiping down the table
with rags and towels
until it shines spotless and clean as new

so that the machinist on the next shift
can come in
and immediately begin covering the table
and filling up its troughs and ways
with new piles of blue coolant-soaked
steel chips
as he continues the job
they have been running for weeks.

THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT

Lincoln never accomplished anything.
He just walked around his machine all night
with his hands closed up into fists
sticking his chin out

defiantly
and talking back
to the foreman whenever the foreman told him to do anything,
until finally the foreman one day
standing atop the big inch-thick slab of steel
bolted to the table of Lincoln's milling machine
suddenly began shouting at the top of his lungs,
"You cocksucker Lincoln! You you cocksucker you don't do
a Goddamned thing I tell you you cocksucker you son of
a bitch. Every day I have to listen to you bitch and you
never do a thing, I say you COCKSUCKER Lincoln EVERY day I
have to hear you bitch you cocksucker YOU COCKSUCKER
LINCOLN — "
on and on for 5 minutes
at the top of his lungs.

And 10 minutes later
Mitch went over to Lincoln
and asked him how it felt
and Lincoln shrugged coolly and said,
"He was just blowing off steam."

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

Whenever some machinists cutter blows up or rips into a
part
screaming and tearing the part off the machine table
and bringing the machine spindle spinning at 1000 or so
r.p.m.
to a slamming halt that sounds like a gunshot,
machinists all across the shop
let out with loud
wolf whistles of admiration
and screaming hoots of crazed delight
like a rodeo rider makes as the bronco he rides
breaks out of the gate,
and loud sustained applause,
leaving their machines
and slowly approaching the disaster in a closing circle
like fans
seeking out the star of a show,
as the machinist who had the accident trembles and stares
blinking
with shock at the jagged stub of a cutter
and the ruined part and torn-up tooling,
doing his absolute best
to keep that smile
he has forced across his face.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

Whenever an aisleway
begins to be continually cluttered and blocked
with carts and flats Goodstone Aircraft Company will
quickly hang a huge
sign there emphatically prohibiting the leaving
of carts and flats in the aisle,
just as Goodstone
immediately leaves DO NOT CROSS HIGHWAY, USE THE TUNNEL
signs on the corners of intersections
where droves of employees are starting to regularly cross,
just as Goodstone puts up
YOU WOULDN'T THROW TRASH AROUND IN YOUR OWN LIVING ROOM
SO WHY DO IT HERE?
signs
in areas of the shop where the floor is beginning
to be chronically covered with things like plastic cups
and wadded-up potato-chip bags,
just as Goodstone puts up those big
FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS, OR GET THE DIRECTIONS CHANGED
posters
in those areas of the shop
where it's getting to seem like no one does
what the paperwork tells them to do.

Don't blame it on Goodstone.

AS I AM BURIED DOING THE WORK OF 2 MACHINISTS

Tim
the layout man wanders over to my machine
and motions with his head
toward the new machine next to me
that has sat useless and unhooked-up for a month,
saying, "Yeah you know Goodstone's got to go through
ALL that red TAPE before they can hook that machine up,
they got to go an'get CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL before
they can even begin to THINK about hooking it up,
everyone's got to have a piece of paper sitting on the
right desk in the right building
first"
and I nod frowning
and Tim grins at me happy like a cat
torturing a grasshopper,
knowing
the red tape won't REALLY begin
until after they hook the new machine up
and have to go through all of the proper channels
to okay
someone running it.

GOOD MEN #2

What is important
is filling out those First-Time-Conformance charts
in sequence with manufacturing orders written
by men who have never run a machine,
what is important
is rising above our common sense
and hands-on knowledge
regarding the most efficient, most effective ways
to sequence cuts that will carve bomber parts
out of metal blocks,
what is important
is to become part of the overall program
of paperwork
that will deliver to the Air Force
those perfectly filled-out and rubber-stamped
First-Time-Conformance charts
that will insure
that we are doing our jobs correctly.

MORE THAN ENOUGH

"You're gonna miss me, Fred!!" Curly shouts
back at me as he rolls
his toolbox and cabinet
away from the machine next to me down toward
machine #620 50 feet away,
but since
for the last 6 months I have heard nothing but every detail
of Curly's private life and his reading to me
of Ann Landers' columns and comic strips and
his imitations of Saturday Night Live and
In Living Color and The Simpsons and Pee
Wee Herman and his repeating to me
of the remarks of radio talk-show hosts and callers
he listens to on his headphone radio
as well as his descriptions
of his shits in the bathroom and of how far his cum spurted
when he jacked off the other night,
I doubt it.

AN E FOR EFFORT

Safety has had another brainstorm.
It has had the wooden platform in front of my machine
thickly painted so that I won't slip
on an oily wooden surface
like I never have in 2 years
of working the machine.
And they had it painted on Tuesday

rather than on the weekend
so that I can now spend Wednesday
working on sheets of cardboard
my supervisor has laid down
on the wet paint,
cardboard sheets like the one
that last night slipped out from under the feet
of another machine's operator
causing him to fall backwards and break his collarbone,
cardboard sheets that
will stick to the wet paint and rip it back off
of the wooden platform
tomorrow or the next day
when we try to remove them.

Otherwise,
it's a great idea.

HONKERS

The workers
make the most of the echo chamber
acoustics of the tin
50-foot-high building
to showcase
their sneezes —
one does a kind of
screaming birdcall,
another a broncho-busting
rodeo star "YaaaHOOO!"
as he rears his head back
then throws it down
to jump back with the explosion.

But the forklift driver
has them all beat,
driving around
sounding his horn
with his right hand
just as he buries his nose
into the handkerchief
in his left.

BUBBLING OVER

He couldn't stop
slipping those big pistol-like parts through his belt
and walking around pulling them out
pretending to fire them at machinists,
or walking around with long aircraft spar parts
in his hands, opening and closing their opposed ends

like the jaws of an alligator
as he worked his own jaws up and down
making weird grunts.
He couldn't stop
going up to some machinist
with a long cylindrical part
and blowing through the part as if he were
doing a trumpet call,
then loudly announcing the machinist's name
as if he were announcing a King.
He just couldn't stop putting
a big C-clamp around his head
and closing its steel pads against his temples
and walking up to machinists telling them
how he had this pressing pain in his head
and asking them for aspirins.

Being a machinist at his machine
just wasn't good enough for him.

DESTINY

The managers are afraid
some auditor with a clipboard
will come walking through the building
and notice the 60-year-old
machines
and, thinking them useless broken-down antiques,
order them taken out and melted down
into scrap metal.
So the managers
never spend any money
buying new machine parts to replace the old ones
that inevitably
wear
and loosen
and lose accuracy,
rendering the machines closer and closer to being
useless broken-down antiques.

COMPANY MAN

He arrives back skidding
to a stop on the stripped-down little-kid-style
Goodstone Aircraft Company bicycle he uses
to ride all over the plant in and out of building after
building for hours,
stepping up to his machine and punching
the SPINDLE START button and standing there
turning handles and making chips fly out of a block of
metal as he spends the last 2 minutes

before the mid-morning break
cutting metal feverishly,
just as
immediately after the 10-minute break he is up
jumping to his machine to grab a handle and push
the SPINDLE START button and cut
metal feverishly for another 2 minutes
before hopping back on his bike and riding out of the
building
again for another hour or two.

He really takes seriously
the supervisor's repeated stressing at meetings about the
importance of working during those 2 minutes right before
and after breaks.

That's when Goodstone's idle-time auditors
walk around checking for machinists wasting time.

THE MANTRA

At 7:00 a.m.
unlocking his toolbox and throwing open its lid he'll
begin yelling, "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck." and then
"Fuck it. Fuck it. Fuck it." and then
looking over at me with wild-eyed
despair say,
"Fuck it Fred! Fuck it Fred! Fuck it Fred!"
waiting for me to look and then
slamming his airgun down onto his sheet-metal workbench top
so that it SLAPS and yelling,
"Fuck this place! Fuck this place!"
waiting for me to nod and then taking out his hammer
and pounding out an ear and nerve shattering drum roll
against a particularly reverberative steel section of his
machine,
turning to stare at me with legs spread, shouting out as
loud as he can, "Fuck 'em! FUCK 'EM ALL, FRED! FUCK 'EM
ALL IN THE ASS!!"

It's just a little early morning
Goodstone Aircraft Company ritual he goes through
that makes him feel better.

VALUABLES

Goodstone Aircraft Company never buys
enough new parts or tooling
to go around
in the machine shop.
So on our 3 shifts,
we cram our toolboxes full

of machine handles and attachments,
fan electrical cords,
jigs and fixtures and clamps,
anything that works right
and can't be locked up or nailed down,
leaving each other without access
to much indispensable tooling and parts.

Goodstone Aircraft Company really knows how
to get their employees to treasure and preserve
its equipment.

A WORKING FOOL

Curly
at the machine next to mine likes to laugh
at all the hot jobs I get,
the jobs that have to be done NOW the parts
that must be finished that planes
out on airstrips are waiting for so that they can
take off, the jobs
that bring expeditors buzzing around my machine pestering
me with, "When will you have them done?"
Curly likes to laugh
when the expeditors come by and point them
toward my machine saying, "HE gets all the hot jobs!"
grinning at me as if I were the village idiot,
as he
works very SLOWLY as always on his latest gravy job
that isn't needed for months,
laughing especially
at my inability to slow down and totally fuck up
Goodstone Aircraft Company's production schedule
like he did a long time ago
when he decided to make sure
that he never got any of those hot jobs again.

THIN LINE

Every few days
the K-20 bomber production manager
grabs the Drill Press Lead Man from behind
and pulls him back in his swivel chair
choking his neck
and grinning/grimacing
with fun/murderous intent,
the Lead Man swiveling and the manager choking
until the Lead Man is pulled out of the chair
and he and the manager are wrestling across the machine
shop floor,
rolling in the paperwork that spills
out of the expeditors' bicycles

they knock over,
as they call each other sons of bitches —
everyone running machines
or climbing stairways
or sitting at desks
around them
stopping to stare and listen waiting
to either laugh or rush in to prevent a murder,
knowing that the Lead Man and the manager
are no more sure than anyone else
whether they are joking or not.

NO GEORGE WASHINGTON

Curly holds out a time-card the supervisor gave him
and now he's doing a celebration dance
like a touchdown scorer in the end-zone,
flopping about the huge mop of Afro-like curls on his head
and saying to me,
"You know, Fred, Goodstone's TESTING me, they say I forgot
to fill out my timecard last Thursday — the Thursday I
wasn't here, remember? — and Ron says for me to fill out
this time-card so I can correct my mistake of not turning
in a card and get PAID for last Thursday ...," Curly,
giggling as his uncontrollably delighted smile begins to
make his eyes water, saying, "You know, Fred, Goodstone's
testing my MORAL FIBER ...
they're testing my INTEGRITY"
Curly dance-stepping about
knowing he need say nothing more,
knowing that I know as well as he
that Goodstone
couldn't have made a more totally misguided
strategic error.

FRUGAL

Though our supervisor
will not purchase the cutters we need to do our
jobs on our milling machines
correctly and efficiently, though
our cabinets are largely bare of any parallel bars
or vise jaws or chucks
or cutters
which would normally be available to machinists trying
to do
the best job they could,
our supervisor does
put big padlocks on all of the doors to the cabinets
and locks
on all of the gates and doors leading into our
machine shop area,

and our supervisor does issue all of us machinists keys
and makes us use them to open
the gates and doors which we are told
must be kept locked at all times,
and our supervisor does promise
to put all thieves
in jail.

When you have as little to work with as we do,
you've really got to hang on
to it.

REPRIEVE

When the final buzzer sounds
throughout building 8,
machinists jump to life
for the first time that day,
hustling in a line
to the final punching of the timeclock
to charge out the door,
legs and arms pumping and eyes brightening
as they get their circulation and alertness back
and regain full lung capacity,
breathing huge sighs of relief
as they increase speed
heading toward the guard gate
and laugh,
pointing at the speed and energy of those ahead of them,
saying things like "What drive!"
or "What initiative!"
and making jokes
about the resurrection of the
dead.

— Fred Voss

Long Beach CA

POPULAR IN GREENLAND

Although we're not all that close
to Greenland geographically speaking
some maps make it the same color purple
as the United States.

It is for this reason that Shelby has
always imagined that people would be
very friendly to her there.

MORNING MARRIAGE

While out for a morning's drive
Joseph imagined himself happily
married to a woman who has no
idea he even exists.

ANYTHING BUT AMISH

When faced with an alien
and seemingly unidentifiable
presence in the universe
a sensible route of approach is
to learn what it is not.

With her spiked green hair
her paper-clip nose-ring
and storm trooper boots

we can safely assume
that Paula is anything but Amish.

PERHAPS A MARIGOLD

Taylor is convinced
that something ordinary —

the curvature
of a tree trunk
or
perhaps a marigold —

will put him in mind
of something significant,

turn his whole
life around.

THREE-PIECE DINNER WITH FRIES

Nicholaus is so prudishly reserved
that when ordering fried chicken
from a woman

he is wont to hold up
his entire line

while seeking an acceptable
euphemism for "breast."

— Brook Zelcer

Fair Lawn NJ

OLD NASSAU'S BLACK SHEEP

i'm experiencing some typical fatherly concern
because my daughter, blake,
having survived my poem, "poop,"
is going off to teach english for a year
in macao, cinematic capital of opium dens,

and my buddy ray attempts to reassure
me with, "graduates of princeton,
gerry, have a tendency not to do too
badly for themselves in life,"

and i sip my vodka-and-tonic and think,

you know, he may be right; the only
downright fuck-up i can think of off-hand
who ever came out of princeton was
f. scott fitzgerald.

MY WIFE'S TWO TOADS

for years i wrote about half my poems
under the persona of "the toad."

now i seldom employ that mask,
but my wife has brought home two
real toads, one to live in an aquarium,
the other in the back yard.
she feeds the aquarium toad crickets,
which she purchases at the pet store.
when they escape, or sequester themselves
in the wire aquarium roof, they sing the
whole house to insomnia. this toad is
well fed, but he still flattens himself

against the glass that separates
him from his instincts.

the backyard toad we seldom see
except when he lets himself in from
the patio on a hot night and surreptitiously
seeks refuge behind the television set.
then i grab him with a paper towel and
he sinks his fingers and toes into the
carpet as i gently separate him from
the middle-class comforts to which he
apparently aspires.

the glassed-in toad will never know
freedom. the backyard toad, who with
a modicum of strategy could probably
escape, chooses carpeting over loam.

neither of them has much of a sex life.

ONLY IN FRISCO

returning from the men's room to
the fern-bar at the san francisco airport,
i hear, "jane has found that her new family
welcomed her kind words and gestures."

and i glanced up at one of the ubiquitous
t.v.s to discover an attractive white
woman surrounded by chimpanzees.

"what are we watching, a fucking tarzan flick?"
i complained to my buddy, larry kramer, and
larry, the kindest of poets, did his best
to suppress a wheeze of mirth as he
informed me, "gerry, that's jane goodall."

FLIRTING WITH DISASTER

for one evening, a few months ago,
i really thought that she and i
would end up married to each other,
even though we already both are married
elsewhere. we had a lot in common and
seemed to appreciate each other a lot
more than either of us was being appreciated
at home.

then last night over drinks
my jokes kept being taken as attacks,
there was a slashing irrational tone
in her voice that i recognized all too well.

i knew she hadn't been feeling well, but
a lot of people haven't been well. some
people haven't felt well for years. how do
i know that she wouldn't keep feeling ill
and touchy long into the indefinite future?
maybe there's something about me makes
women feel not well at all. some of them,
at least. maybe, eventually, all of them.

PARADISE REMEMBERED

when we leave the patio door ajar
on a hot summer night
the toad invariably hops into our family room.

i wrap my hand in a towel,
like a wart-prophylactic,
before picking him up.

as i carry him outside and lower him gently
into the bushes, he expresses his emotions
in a very high pitch. my wife says, "you're
squeezing him," but i know i haven't
been. "no," i say, "what he doesn't like
is that i momentarily tipped him upside-down."

to be on one's back: that is the nightmare
of toads and tortoises.

a man's is to be on his knees; a woman's,
on her belly.

ELECTION '92: FAMILY VALUES

early in this century mikhail bakhtin was
already pointing out that communal values were
indeed necessary for social discourse, but
that as long as they were assumed in common
they were never verbalized: they were tacitly
accepted by all. it was only, he went on to
observe, when those values were breaking down,
deteriorating, being challenged, undermined,
and replaced, that they began to be prominently,
if not in fact ubiquitously, debated.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

THE SICKNESS

if
one night
I write
what I consider to
be
5 or 6 good poems
then I begin
to worry:

suppose the house
burns down?

I'm not worried
about
the house
I'm worried
about
those 5 or 6
poems
burning
up

or

an x-girlfriend
getting in
here
while I'm away
and stealing or
destroying
the poems.

after writing
5 or 6 poems
I am fairly
drunk
and
I sit
having a few
more
drinks
while deciding
where to hide
the poems.

sometimes I
hide the poems
while
thinking about
hiding
them
and when I

decide to
hide them
I can't find
them ...

then
begins the
search

and this
whole room is
a mass of
papers
anyhow

and

I'm very clever
at
hiding poems
perhaps more
clever than I
am
in
writing
them.

so
then
I find them
have another
drink

hide them
again

forget it
then
go
to sleep ...

to awaken in
late morning
to remember
the poems
and
begin the
search
again ...

usually only a
ten or fifteen
minute
period of

agony

to find
them
and read
them
and then
not like them
very much

but you know
after all
that
work

all that
drinking
hiding
searching
finding

I decide
it's only
fair
to send
them
out
as a
record of
my
travail

which
if
accepted
will appear in
a little
magazine
circulation
between
100 and
750

a year and
one half
later

maybe

it's
worth
it.

THE STAR

I was drunk and they
got me out of my car
put the bracelets on
and made me lie down
on the roadway
in the rain.

they stood in their
yellow raincoats
cops from 3
squadcars.

the water soaked
into my clothing.
I looked up
at the moon through
the raindrops,
thinking,
here I am
62 years old
and being
protected
from myself
again.

earlier that night
I had attended the
opening
of a movie
which portrayed the
life of a drunken
poet:
me.

this then was
my critical review
of their
effort.

PROBLEMS

I go to
this place to get a
foot rub-down to
release the
toxins.
the masseur has good
hands,
gets to talking.
well, it's about his bad
experiences with

women.
they ask him for
money.
he has a good
heart.
he gives it to them
but they won't give
him
any snatch.
been married
twice, shackled
once.
shack lasted two and
one half
years.
she got more and more
negative.
every time she
opened her mouth it
was something
critical.
kind of like having
poisoned darts
shot at you
night and day.

"how you doing with
the ladies?" he
asks.

"about the same."

"am I putting too much
pressure there?"

"yeah, you're just about
killing me"

"that's your
liver"

he works away and
talks away.
we are on
Avenida del Norte in
the Hollywood Riviera.
it is a 3 p.m.
Tuesday
and I haven't written
anything decent
in a couple
of weeks.

"I recently met this

Chinese wench," he
says, "and"

"OW! CHRIST!"

"that's your
pancreas," he
says.

"thanks," I tell
him, "move over to
the kidneys"

LONDON BRIDGES

"London Bridges falling down,
falling down! ...

all
fall
DOWN!"

and the little girls
would all fall
on their butts
laughing

and I'd see their
panties

then we'd get up,
hold hands
and
circle:

"London Bridges falling down,
falling down! ...

all
fall
DOWN!"

and I'd see their
panties
again.

"Hey, Henry," the guys
would say to me,
"you're always playing
with
the girls!"

"you guys are too

tough for me," I'd
tell them.

they liked that.

and my mother would
ask, "Henry, how come
the backs of your
pants
always have
grass stains?"

"what stains,
Mom?"

you don't know the
trouble I had
just to see
those
panties

and it's never
stopped.

A CAT IS A CAT IS A CAT IS
A CAT

she's whistling and clapping
for the cats
at 2 a.m.
as I sit in here
with my wine and my
Beethoven.

"they're just prowling," I
tell her

Beethoven rattles his bones
in majesty

and those damn cats
don't even care
about
any of that

and
if they did
I wouldn't like them
at
all:

things begin to lose their
natural value

as they near
human
endeavor.

nothing against
Beethoven:

he did fine
for what he
was

but I wouldn't want
him
on my rug
with one leg
over his head
while
he was
licking
his balls.

RIFT

"I can't live with you
anymore,"
she said,
"look at you!"

"uuh?" I
asked.

"look at you!
sitting in that god
damned
chair!
your belly is sticking out
of your
underwear,
you've burnt cigarette
holes in all your
shirts!
all you do is suck
on that god damned
beer,
bottle after bottle
what do you get out of
that?"

"the damage has been
done," I told
her.

"what're you talking
about?"

"nothing matters and
we know nothing matters
and that
matters"

"you're drunk!"

"come on, baby, let's get
along, it's
easy"

"not for me!" she screamed,
"not for
me!"

she ran into the bathroom to
put on her
makeup.

I got up for another
beer.

I sat back down
just had the new bottle
to my mouth
when she came out of the
bathroom.

"holy shit!" she screamed,
"you're
disgusting!"

I laughed right into the
bottle, gagged,
spit a mouthful of
beer across my
undershirt.

"my god!" she
said.

she slammed the door and
was gone.

I looked at the closed door
and at the doorknob
and strangely
I didn't feel
alone.

I wasn't.

I lifted the beer bottle and
took another
hit.

— Charles Bukowski
San Pedro CA

IMPORTANT PRESS NOTES:.....

¶ New expanded edition of a classic: M. Kasper's All Cotton Briefs, \$7.95 fm. Left Lane Must Turn Left, 106 High St., Florence MA 01060. ¶ The definitive anthology: Many Californias: Literature from the Golden State (Edit. Gerald W. Haslam) fm. Univ. of Nevada Press, Reno NV 89557. ¶ Best USA poetry anthology to date: A New Geography of Poets (edit. Edw. Field, Gerald Locklin & Chas. Stetler) fm. Univ. of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville AK 72701. ¶ Impressive new format and content: Asylum Annual (edit. Greg Boyd) \$10 fm. P.O. Box 6203, Santa Maria CA 93456. ¶ Two resurrected little mags: Atom Mind (edit. Gregory Smith) \$16/4 nos. fm. Mother Road Publ., P.O. Box 22068, Albuquerque NM 87154, & Desperado (edit. Kell Robertson) fm. P.O. Box 581, Raton NM 87740. New exchange mag: Long News: In the Short Century (edit. Barbara Henning) \$5/no. fm. P.O. Box 150-455, Brooklyn NY 11215.

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GOOD NEWS: Bill SB267, sponsored by Senator Quentin Kopp (Independent), was passed 55 to 9 in the California Assembly and 22 to 5 in the California Senate. Governor Wilson signed the Bill into law effective November 1, 1992. This law repeals the 1991 sales tax on subscriptions delivered by mail and means that California subscriptions to WORMWOOD are no longer subject to a 7.75% sales tax! In a time of increasing illiteracy, a tax on readers of periodicals was certainly ill-advised. WORMWOOD subscription rates are now: \$8/4 nos./yr. for individuals; \$10/4 nos./yr. for institutions; \$24/4 nos./yr. for patrons. Patrons receive poet-signed special-sections and chapbooks. Free inspection copies are not available because of our very limited press run; however, individual copies may be purchased for \$4 each (includes postage). Back issues 4-15, 7-44, 46-52, 54-62, 64-65, 68-70, 72-91, 93-94, 96-99, 101-102, 104-105, 108-109, 112-127 are also \$4 each post-paid. Check with the editor first if you want to order multiple copies of a single issue.

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