

WR: 133



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I LIKE CATS THAT CATCH THINGS

i never discourage a cat's natural instinct
to catch things.

i love it when a cat catches a rat. who wouldn't?
our cats probably spare us many plagues. we
have three cats in our house and it is not a
popular getaway-weekend for rats.

i don't even mind it when a cat catches a bird.
there seem to be many species of birds that are
not endangered. generally a cat will bite right
through the top of a bird's skull and puncture its
brain. it ain't pretty, but it's effective. and,
after all, since birds can fly and cats can't,
it's quite an accomplishment for a cat to catch
a bird, even though many birds, pigeons in
particular, can be mighty stupid. i would
never discourage a cat from catching even the
most beautiful of birds (excluding the kids'
parakeet). birds are a cat's proudest trophies,
like santiago's big fish was his.

i just wish they wouldn't insist on bringing
all the bloody, furry, feathery fuckers into
the house for our dinner guests to admire.

OR MAYBE AMBROSE BIERCE

one of the deans posted a notice
in the elevators cautioning us to make
sure the building doors were locked
behind us on weekends since there
had been reports of "suspicious traffic."

the notices were taken down before i
returned from my trip, but i'm
told that someone scrawled above the
accusatory phrase,

"not to worry — that's only gerry locklin."

THEY'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND

she says, "i just got back from scoring hundreds
of essays on a sports topic, and it was really
depressing to read how much pleasure so many
of these high school football players had taken
in inflicting pain upon opponents who were
presumably smaller or weaker than themselves."

i remember a game in sophomore year when john
button, jim clapp, and i all converged upon
and simultaneously popped this poor little
punt returner and left him curled up and
coughing up bile as we recovered his fumble.

the others at the table are shaking their
heads at the inexplicable cruelty of teenage boys,
when i mutter, "it is a great feeling."

LIKE SON, LIKE FATHER

near her death, under the influence
of erroneously prescribed
synergistic drugs,

my mother would lapse into talking
about me,
to me,
as if i were my father.

"ivan," she would say, "do you remember
when jodie came home from second grade
and said ... "

or, "ivan, do you remember when we took jodie to quebec and how he loved the chateau frontenac and the plains of abraham ..."

or, "ivan, he's teaching out in california now ..."

it was strange, but i didn't mind, and no terribly embarrassing revelations emerged from it.

the circuits of the mind are as easily crossed as any other circuitry:

when a number of my children are in proximity i'll invariably begin to interchange their names, although i never do it when dealing with them individually.

eventually, my mother would come back to the present and say, "oh, you are jodie, aren't you? ... i thought for a moment there you were your father ..."

and i realized that she must have actually missed him all these years, which, having observed them for seventeen years, i had never really believed,

and i also saw how right i had been to flee and stay flown from

the role for which i had been understudy.

WAITING FOR ANYTHING

when my students deride how many millions of dollars arnold schwartzenegger got paid for speaking so few lines in terminator: 2, i

say, "he puts people in the seats. the film isn't losing money, is it?"

and i wonder if it is really stupider to sit through, say, professional wrestling than, say, waiting for godot.

A REMARKABLE CASE OF SIBLING SPECIALIZATION

i knew these two brothers
who both worked for
an achieva dealer service department,

and one washed the roofs
while the other changed the oil:

the first, of course, was an over-achieva
and the latter an under.

FRANZ LOCKLIN'S MASTERPIECE

one morning a bug woke up to discover
that it had been metamorphosed into
a man named gregor samsa.

nothing further of interest happened to him.

THE LARGESSE OF THE GENTLEMAN POET

for weeks i have been struggling
to complete a poem on the subject,

"he who lives by the swordfish,
dies by the swordfish."

none of my drafts has proved satisfactory
but then i am a notorious perfectionist,

so i have decided to place this idea
in the public domain.

i only ask that the user itemize for me
all fees that may accrue to his production

in order that i may write my fertile starting point
off as a charitable contribution.

HOW VERY INTERESTING (1992)

after reading a couple of recent reviews,
it has begun to dawn on me that,

because i am known to admire
the works of charles bukowski

and known to have enjoyed
over twenty years of correspondence
with him,

one-half of the literary world
considers me an asshole

while the other half concludes
i must be one hell of a guy.

how very interesting.

you know, in all the decades
of studying and writing and teaching
and fatherhood and women and travel
and friends and enemies (few but powerful)
and economic realities,

it never occurred to me that this one
almost accidental connection
would loom so large

on my public opinion report card.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA

WALMART HAS EVERYTHING THAT A MAN COULD WANT

at the local walmart the
man in front of me is buying
some dowel rods, big ones
and the girl is having a
hard time sacking them keeps
trying to cram them into the
weak plastic and making little
faces of accommodation and the
man eventually leans over and
says thats alright honey ill
just carry them my wifes
waiting in the car and im
going to beat her with them
the sack would just get in
the way he winks at her to
say, its just a joke and
walks on out, swinging one
of the dowels like a base
ball bat i can hear the
crack of her head now.

APPRECIATING THE CLASSICS

i remember my mom giving me a copy of the great gatsby when i was just a little shit; telling me i ought to read it, that it was a CLASSIC, i

ignored her, choosing detective novels and cheap fuck books instead but now that ive got some time on my hands and a library card i

check out a book of old f. scotts short stories from the downtown branch of the tucson public library and try to read it in the park across the street while i drink a pint of early times but i just fall asleep and when i wake up my bottle is gone but

of course they left the god damn book — figure ill discard it on the way to the liquor store where ill buy another pint of early times — hell, i might even spring for a pint of jack, now thats a classic that i can truly appreciate.

FULL COLOR

on our way to little rock to eat or drink or trade some tapes with my buddy who has a used tape shop when my lady says oh shit, did you see that wreck it looked really bad i say no i didnt see anything (though i did see a twisted crumpled body)

but do you want me to turn around and go back and she says no i see an ambulance coming so we go on and do our thing and when we get home im watching the news, drunk when the accident comes on the screen, full color my lady is in the bathroom taking off her

face i dont call her in
to look at the crumpled

body that we both saw
earlier i take another
drink of my beer and
switch the channel until
i find some pro wrestling.

NO, I DONT REMEMBER THAT

i was reading the paper
saw an article about
a convicted killer
who had escaped
from prison and
eluded authorities
for weeks, stealing

cars, double tracking
through streams, living
in the woods and when
the cops finally caught
him in some womans back

yard he showed no remorse;
said that they were all
pretty goddamn stupid and
that yes, he had robbed
a bank while he was out
and yes, he had kidnapped

a couple of women but
just for their car and
maybe he had busted a
red light or two while
making good his escape

but damned if he knew
anything at all about
that dismembered body
that they had found
behind his last known
place of residence.

NAKED BY THE TRAIN TUNNEL

paul tells me that he got fucked up
with some girls this weekend and
a buddy of his and that the girls

talked him and his buddy into getting naked in the back seat of their car with the promise that they would get naked too

but after the guys got naked the girls wouldnt and they took off driving around town at an extremely high rate of speed with the guys in the back seat, naked

drove out into the country where the guys had to piss due to all the whiskey and beer which was why they got naked in the first place and they got out at the old train tunnel and were pissing good when they saw the car lights fading in the distance, felt the raw night and heard the high pitched

laughter this is what paul tells me when he calls in to say that he wont be in for work today i let it slide because i like paul and if his story is true i almost feel sorry for his dumb naked ass and if he made it all up, hell, anyone who can tell a story like that deserves the occasional hungover day off.

EDDIE

went to court where the judge took away his license and sentenced him to seven days in jail, to be served on the weekends so now

eddies got to work all week and then get as loaded as he can between three and seven on friday so he can make his forty eight hours in the county lock up he comes to work on monday tells me he went to the courthouse this past

weekend but they sent him away, said that the jail

was already full with REAL
criminals, you know, rapists,

murderers and people who
forgot to pay their property
taxes on time and all i can

think is poor eddie, all
liquored up and ready to
pay his debt to society
and all they do is turn
him away; sorry, the

inns all full.

MEMPHIS, ART SHOW

driving home blind with
my lady; my factory buddy
in the back seat with his
lady he hands me a plastic
cup says dont bogart it
thats all the long island
tea that i got left so i

suck the whole thing down
and as im suggesting that
we stop for some beer i
become aware that the
orange road barriers
are getting very close
to the car and bam
before i can think about
it there goes the side
passenger mirror i pull

into the gas station and
ask what everyone wants
to drink we end up with
a case of genuine draft
and a stray cat that no
one at the gas-mart wanted

neither of our ladies wants
the cat either so my buddy
and i argue over it for a
while until it falls asleep
in his ladys lap and we
drive the rest of the way
home in silence, full of

genuine draft and dreams
that none of us know
exactly how to talk about.

— Tom Caufield

Conway AR

coyotes howling
at the moon, from the moon
other coyotes howling back

reeling, blood-splotched, two
boxers on the hospital's
waiting room TV

flashing in my cornering
headlight beams, the eyes
of a startled cat

on the frayed carpet
slivers of sunlight
from the boarded-up window

needed to vacuum
up the dirty atmosphere
volcanos that suck

— William Woodruff

Pasadena CA

EVALUATION OF CABO SAN LUCAS

At Thrifty Drug today
there was a lineup at the
pharmacy window
people with summer flu
a redhead was confiding

to another woman,
we spent last week in Cabo
trying to unwind
I took three times the clothes
I needed
down there you swim
or fish or drink a lot
I don't fish and I can't stay
too long in the sun
and one cocktail before dinner
is all I want
I guess the trip was worth it
but I wouldn't go there twice

FLAWED EXISTENCE

Speaking from
a crooked mouth
I confess to being
a chronic pessimist

It hurts me nothing
is ever perfect
I warn myself
be on guard
for pitfalls in Paradise
should you end there

I carry mousetraps
to places that haven't
had a mouse
in twenty years

I made a roast-beef dinner
for old friends
I hadn't seen since 1981
how was I to know
they had become
wild-eyed vegetarians
and carry sprouts
everywhere they go

DEATH IN A SACRED PORSCHE

Julio had a gnawing fear
he shouldn't lend
his holy icon to anyone
even his only son

Still he never heard it
was against Canon Law
so he reverently handed
it over for a weekend

Not realizing he served
a very jealous god
who took his son in
sacrifice
and hurled him from a cliff

— Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel

Hanford CA

A TRUE STORY (1907)

One day early in the winter, when the first snow was falling, papa found a little chicken in the snow. It had only a few feathers and was about frozen, so he brought it to the house, and when it got warm it was all right.

It got very tame. Every night papa would put it in the toe of his felt boot behind the stove so it would keep warm, and when he started the fire in the morning he would stand up a piece of wood near the stove and put the chicken on it, and it would crow about six times. So we called him "Jim Crow."

At night papa always read aloud from The Daily News, and Jim Crow would get up on his shoulder and pick at his ears and the paper.

When he got to be a big rooster, he was always in the way. So mama said we had better kill him, but we all hated to, so we gave him to my aunt, who lives in a little town near here, and they turned him loose and he wandered up town. And the next morning they looked everywhere for him, and then they asked the storekeeper; and a man that stood nearby, who lived about two miles out of town, laughed and said, "When I was going home last night, a rooster was sitting on my buggy wheel, and when I tried to push him off he jumped in the buggy, so he rode home with me. He must have been the one. I will bring him back tomorrow."

So my aunt cooked him for their next Sunday dinner.

— Elizabeth F. Torrey

Fairbury NE

THE ARNOLD & ANN SHOW

i.

The man shouted
OH MY GOD,

He was over
7 feet tall
she about 4
which made
over 11 feet
of loud wealth
just in
from America.

We were quietly
waiting our turn
to go up quietly
to the restaurant
on Eiffel's tower
for another quiet
credit-card lunch.

OH MY GOD DON'T
THEY KNOW I HAVE
TO PEE WHERE IN
THE HELL IS THE
ELEVATOR DAMN IT.

Arnold,
hush.

BUT I HAVE TO PEE
OH MY GOD I WILL
EXPLODE IF I DON'T
PEE OH MY GOD SO
I'M GOING TO SING
SO I WON'T THINK
ABOUT HOW MUCH I
NEED TO PEE DAMN IT.

Don't sing.

WHY NOT?

Arnold.

IT'S EITHER PEE
OR SING WHICH DO
YOU WANT DAMN IT?

We were 12
or so in the
dumb line.

WELL?

No one spoke.

ALL RIGHT THEN.

Out came a bit
of an Italian
opera.
He was good.

A couple of
idiots applauded.

DO YOU THINK I
COULD JUST USE
THIS ASH CAN OH
MY GOD I AM DYING.

The woman with him
said to everyone,
I don't know him,
seriously.

A couple of
idiots nodded.

YES SHE DOES TOO
KNOW ME YOU KNOW
ME ANN YOU DO.

She studied the
wall.

ii.

We got in
the elevator.
He sang some
more opera
and everyone
looked sadly
down at the
world.

I GET TEARS SOMETIMES.

The maitre d'hotel,
a chilly bitch,
assumed we were
together and made
sure
we had
adjoining
tables
way

out
of the
way.

I don't know him,
she said again.
We smiled and
she smiled
back.
A little meeting
of the minds.

Then he returned
from the can and
stood there by
the table.

OH MY GOD DON'T THEY
EVEN HAVE ICE WATER
IN THIS PLACE WAITER
BRING SOME ICE WATER.

Sit down, Arnold.
He sat down.

OH MY GOD THIS
IS GOING TO COST
ME A FORTUNE.

There was a long
pause.

HOW ABOUT THAT NOTRE
DAME TEAM? HUH? HOW
ABOUT THEM BOYS.

Yes, said a man
at another table.

GOOD TEAM HUH?

Yes.

ALL RIGHT YEAH.

Somehow we ordered
and ate and stared
out at the city and
drank.

iii.

until she said I
want to go to
Hermes.

OH MY GOD.

By now the wine
had brought us
much closer to Ann.
Arnold was on ice
water.

OH MY GOD HERMES.

Ann, go to Hermes,
my friend said.
Go for it, I added.

DON'T DON'T.

I think I will,
said Ann. I need
a new scarf.

She didn't look
like she needed
anything, but
touched her neck
where the new
scarf would go.

OH MY GOD HERMES.

Get over it,
Arnold, we said.

Yes, Arnold,
said Ann, chill
out.

Then Arnold
slapped
his
forehead.

iv.

Here, my card.

It said ANN'S IDEAS.

I run a little
interior design
shop down in
Flada.

She had enough
gold on her to
open a big bank
in a big city.

Coming to,
Arnold said

YOU DON'T NEED
ANOTHER SCARF
JESUS CHRIST HERMES
DO YOU GUYS REALIZE?
DO YOU
RE-
A-
LI-
ZE?

What, Arnold?

OH
MY
GOD.

v.

WELL IF YOU'RE EVER
IN PALM BEACH OH MY
GOD LOOK AT THIS BILL
WAITER THIS BILL HAS
GOT TO BE WRONG HEY
WHAT IS THIS JESUS.

Have some
water, Ann said.
Then we'll go
to Hermes.

OH MY GOD.

Is he always like this?

Lovely, isn't
it, she said.

Someday, she added,
I'll have to lock
him up.

That would be
terrible, we said.

Wouldn't it,
she said.

LOCK WHO UP?

MODERN MAN

3 A.M.
at the cash machine
drunk as hell.

OLD COWBOY

I'm waiting for the bus
when all at once five
shetland ponies come
running down the street.

No one moves at first.
Then the old man beside
me jumps out in front
of them and begins
to wave his arms.

Spooked,
the ponies cut away
onto the highway
and gallop straight for
the Arc de Triomphe
with a thousand Mercedes
in pursuit.
In a minute they
are out of sight.

The old man comes back,
dusts his flannel pants,
lights a cigarette
and says, I think I've
seen just about everything.
A couple of people laugh.

Sirens begin to blare.

SAVED: 2

We finally got a new girl
at the post office. Before,
we had a couple of old hags.
This one is nice, patient,
and has long tanned hands.
She doesn't understand it
all yet but this is better
than the others who worried
about being sure you knew
they were right, always.
Now we like to go mail
letters, even the bills.
Somewhere, someone made
a bold and perfect move.

MELODRAMA, LIVE

One night the press corps
ran out of questions
and slowly began to laugh
at the President of The United States.
Everyone was there, all the big
shot paper guys, the networks.
And when it finally fell
it was like an avalanche
sweeping everything in its path.
Martha, said John, come look.
Martha came in. What.
Look, they're laughing at him.
Martha sat down to watch.
What for? What'd he say?
Nothing, said John, they just
started laughing — like that.
It went on for a long while
and then an announcer broke
in to say, We'll have an analysis
of this apparent breakdown
of respect for the nation's
highest office right after this
quick commercial message.
Funny, said Martha, I feel
sort of sorry for him. That's
it! cried John, jumping up.
I'm leaving! Go ahead! I am!
Then go! Just go, go now go!
OK! After he slammed the door,
she watched the rest in tears.
There goes everything, she whispered,
over and over and over again.

THE DECLINE OF AMERICA

It was around 4 PM or so
when this program came
on about masturbation.
There we were, me and
my buddy, his dad, mother
and grandmother, watching.
The first thing they said was
get out of the room if you
are not an adult.
His mother giggled
and looked at her mother,
who apparently did not
at all understand.

Then they showed the panel:
a middle-aged woman who
ran a masturbation clinic
somewhere out West, one of
her former lady patients,
and a male doctor who scowled.
There was a big studio audience,
mostly young nervous couples.

First the clinic lady explained
how they get all their clothes
off and sit in a circle and
if there's any problem well
then they get out the vibrators.
At that point, the grandmother
said to her daughter, Barbara?
And Barbara said, Yes mother?
Barbara, is this show what
I think it's about here?
Well, it sure does look like
it, mama. Well! she replied,
but stayed put on the couch.

Rudy, his dad, said, "Hell,
all that is what we used
to call the circle jerk.
No one said a word.
He took a hit off his Coke.

The show went on a while
more, with the doctor shouting
at the clinic lady that this
was all crap, just self-
love, total self-love. She
hissed back that that was
the whole damn point and
the audience, most of it,
broke into applause.

Then a little gal from Idaho
stood up and said to the
nation
that in fact her marriage to
John, yes, he's right here,
her marriage to John
had really improved since she
got over it and just started
masturbating whenever she
damn well pleased. John nodded.

I'd been out of the country
a few years, and Rudy said,
Well, boy, what the hell
do you think of that? Has
the USA gone to pot or what?

I said, It sure has, and he
smiled and said, real loud:
Who wants some more of
that coconut cake, mama.
Get these boys some
more of your fine cake.

And up she jumped
as he hit the zapper
for something else.
We've got a dish,
he said. We can watch
just about anything
that's on in the whole
wide world. You got
that where you live?

Grandma had started snoring.
Then in came the cake.

TRASH: 2

Take all the waste
of my body and of
my mind and gather
it in one place.
How much would there
be? How many wadded
poems? How many steak
bones and beer bottles?
Imagine the particular
smell.

— Kyle Jarrard

Suresnes France

GHAZAL: HOUDINI

Driving alone somewhere in the Midwest.
Thunderclouds breaking on the fields' edges.

I wash developer across the paper,
only the outline of your face emerges.

frogs suction to my window. Small red hearts
pound through the thin film of belly.

MINNEAPOLIS HOTEL

By the end of my third week I join
the night crew's 2 a.m. ritual.
The three of us form a loose circle
around the hot plate. Coffee grounds
soak in the garbage. A scroll of orange
peel unwinds on the tile.

While someone on a fourth floor balcony plays
a saxophone, the security guard arranges
the cups into a fragile pyramid and watches
the janitor stare into his coffee. He
reports the discovery we'll mark the night
by. "Found a shoe in the stairwell," he says.

— Thomas Heise

Tallahassee FL

JAMES JOYCE GOES TO A BIKER BAR

whereupon the patrons
break his glasses,
scrape off that little
wormy mustache
with a buck knife,
cram his hat into his mouth,
stomp his head
and throw his ass out into the street,
where he lands in a fluttering heap
resembling nothing so much
as a gnarly bird.

I FINALLY GAVE IN AND CALLED HER TONIGHT

to see how Asshole was doing,
not that I care
not that I will lose any sleep
over his heart attack,
or the fact that he might die.
But, her feelings. I don't know.

he's a dumbass to the end,
refusing to go to the hospital,
his fat ass sinking into the bed,
the clogged heart draining
blood from his Jackie Gleason face,
unwilling to call his kids,
or his mother, or sister.

I've wished his death many times before,
and laughed at the prospect
of pissing on his grave,
but hell, contact drains that energy
and I say, "tell him,
to get his ass in the hospital"
as I'm hanging up
the phone.

RATTLETRAP

Stopped behind a '66 Buick
that has what looks like
a mother and daughter inside
arguing over some
timeless shit.
The girl opens her door
and jumps out slamming it shut.
The mother says something loud,
and the girl bends over
and leans in the window,
talking low, and shifting
her weight from foot to foot.
She has these brown legs,
the muscles making shadows
on her thighs and calves.
When the car in front of
them moves and they don't
I blow my horn.
The mother looks back at me
and the girl yells, "fuck you."
I put my hand over my heart
and pretend to swoon.
She gets back in the car
and they pull up to the speaker.
Nothing brings people together
like a common enemy.

— Daryl Rogers

Lexington KY

CHRISTMAS EVE '92

as long as it's women who give birth
their wit at parties will be sharper

EAVESDROPPING

i.

the eavesdropper
listening up against the door
is seen by the neighbors upstairs
who are eavesdropping down the space
between the flights of stairs

later, they are outraged
at his eavesdropping

no one saw the guest from france
eavesdropping against the first
eavesdropper's door
2 days later

ii.

lying w/ear to the floor
hears his own stomach growling
thru the floorboards & thinks
it's bedsprings in the apt below
tho the rhythm isn't a sexual one

this puzzles him

iii.

turns his refrigerator off
the better to listen thru the floor

he forgets to turn it back on
for 20 or so hrs

iv.

realizes: you don't put the glass
against the wall open side in
& listen against the bottom,

you put your ear against the wall
& put the glass over the other ear
to dampen room noise.

then he tries one against the wall
& one against the other ear.

this doesn't work too well either.

THE LAZY WORM

avoids the early bird

ELMER TO DAFFY

i've got a lot of anger in me from when
i was a child & that's why
i'm gonna stwangle you, duck!!

THE DOG MIRAGE

hung over this rainy night
i look at the wet black street
& think i see a black dog
walking across it. then lift my eyes
& see that dog a block away
w/its woman master

IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

my new woman friend tries controlling me
by telling me how my mother's always trying
to control me.

she also nags me that i shouldn't let my folks
nag me

when i get fed up at the house i go
to her house & when i get fed up at her house
i go back to my house.

i should get my own house but usually feel
too nagged controlled & fed up.
wages stuck so low don't help the boy either.

THE FLYING SAUCER

between my blinds see very bright lights
they're moving neither up nor down
getting neither closer nor further away
they're hovering
2 large floodlights
w/2 smaller floods between
like the eyes of a wolf spider
it's because the plane is headed straight
for me
at a certain point it veers off to the
south
soaring over the mental hospital
to land at Kennedy

'UGLY WOMAN'

i feel like a traitor to humanity
calling her what everyone else does —
young but way too skinny
she's bagging groceries today
while on the register a new face
a shining young madonna, younger than the
'ugly woman' & the way 'the boss' keeps
glancing over, maybe her replacement —
'ugly woman' flashes boney haunches
reaching down for more bags
she catches my eyes on the girl
whose straight-arrow teenage beauty
fills me w/feelings — mostly generous
silly ones — i'm entranced —
'ugly woman' lunges for me
her old customer
takes my money herself, thereby superceding
chipmunk-cheeks madonna
i say 5 or 6 funny words to her
she frankly laughs
(maiden's nose is so far up
she'll drown if it rains)

NEW JERSEY

was an army truck driver
sometimes she drove our transports
out to various ranges, rifle
machine gun or what have you
we became friends —
got drunk together friday
saturday nights & talked
all this family shit & the bad
marriage on new jersey's mind
all the time & the war & the future
& did we really understand hippies
& how did we feel about nixon —
later up front in the truck
she told me i'd given her the best
head she'd ever had
which may or may not have been true
tho it was true she gave me
the best i'd ever had
& that's still true

tho a new yorker
i never make fun of
new jersey

JERKING CON EDISON AROUND

first i say

'i'm applying for gas & electric
service — will pay the first
of august — i promise'

& they say

ok

then i say

'can't pay this all at once —
break it down into 3 equal \$50
payments & i'll make one
payment today'

& they say

ok

then i say

'that line's too long —
i'll zip around the corner

& pay at the check-cashing joint

& they say

ok

then i call back the next day

& say 'i can't pay this 50 this mo —

let me go till oct. 1 & i'll make

2 payments on the first'

& they say

ok

those employees just like me

not so much scheming as required

to best the system every second of

our lives / they're helping me do it

too as if enjoying every twist & turn

in the fiction i'm writing them

even now

i'm figuring out what to say

on the first that'll set them up

so they say

ok

again

i'm sure if i stop amusing them

they'll come down on me

like hostile critics who'd

plunge me into the cold & darkness

— Cory Monaco

Bronx NY

More Secrets About Beans

Beans meant a lot to me
being a kid disliking meat,
beans the favorite meal
my mother fixed, but my
father who'd grown up
in Texas Dust Bowl poverty
where a pot of beans
was eeking out a living
as well as Sunday supper
loved meat, T-bones, thick
roasts, pork chops. Meat
on his plate meaning not just
luxury, deliciousness and
plenitude, but also, so he
thought, good health, so my
mother's once-a-week pot of
pintos and cornbread because
she craved them was always a
meatless bone of contention
between them. Beans still
mean a lot to me, a big pot
of them my favorite soup to
cook, especially on a cold
winter day when I'm all alone
and its steam fogs up the
windows, encasing me, making me
feel special and wrapped-up
as if I were a good-news secret
and I like how its bubbling
warmth actually speaks to me
and I understand
every word.

Joan Jobe Smith

TOAD DILLARD

When my mother was 17 and got the mumps Toad Dillard dedicated to her on the radio "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" it rumbled all over Paris, Texas that she was going to marry my father and pretty soon she did and Toad Dillard told her any old time she needed him just to let him know.

A year later and pregnant with me, out dancing with my father at a roadhouse she got huffy when he drank too much beer and started picking on her so she asked Toad Dillard to drive her home and when she took his arm

my father punched him in the nose but passed out cold before Toad Dillard could punch him back. On the way home even though neither of them were drunk my mother and Toad Dillard got into a head-on collision with another Model A Ford and the other people were killed, my mother got knocked out plus a cut on her head and Toad Dillard walked away not one bit hurt.

For years it was the town scandal, for 20 years my father brought up Toad Dillard's name every chance he got, and after my father died 35 years later my mother went back home to Paris to visit kin and saw Toad Dillard again. He'd farmed cotton all his life, had a pecan-pie-sweet Texas wife, 4 kids and 13 grandkids and my mother was pleased with her city life in California with only one child and 3 grandchildren and its preferred, perfected neatness.

DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

Depending on whether or not I've got to tell the truth like on a passport or job app sometimes I say I was born in Long Beach, California, instead of Paris, Texas, because it's a long story why I don't talk like a Texan and how I got here to Long Beach, but just about every day I wish I could go

to Paris, Texas, where, so I've
been told, they grow roses
pretty enough for flower shows,
and cottonwood and pecan trees.
I'd like to see fireflies and
buttermilk skies, compare the
rocks, leaves and dirt of Paris
to those in Long Beach.

Other than the winter when
I was born I've only been
to Paris once, and on the way,
right in the middle of Texas
near Denton or Sweetwater, someplace
in the middle of the night and
where there's not a tree or
hill, just flat land falling
off the thousand corners of the earth
my father parked the car
on the side of the road
and he, my mother and I
got out to look at the stars,
the sky a big, round dome full of
so many sugar-crystal stars that
the sky dripped white as cake icing
and my father stood in front
of the car lights as if on a stage
and sang that song which should be
Texas' state song, sang as loud
as he could into the big, round night,
"The stars at night are big and bright,"
and then he clapped his hands 5 times
and went on singing,
"deep in the heart of Texas...."

NEPENTHE

My father always said that my
mother was so pretty because she
was a Texas girl and Texas had the
most pretty women in the whole world
and this would please my mother so
and make her smile she'd let him
embrace her in front of me, she'd
sit on his lap, no mention ever
that when a Texas girl she'd
picked cotton, wore flour sack dresses
and couldn't go to school winters
because she had no shoes, the bad
and the sad things never mattering,
the hard times easy as Eden
once you're grown and pretty
and sitting on a happy man's knee.

GREEN

Everything was green when I was a kid
our house was green, the orange and lemon trees,
the back and front yards were green,
my mother's car was green, the gingham
ruffles she tacked on the kitchen cabinets
were green, the spinach, lettuce and
green beans we ate were green, even the
hassock in front of the corner windows
in my bedroom where I sat waiting
for my boyfriends to come in their
lowered Mercs and Chevies was green.
I hated green, vowed that when I married
everything would be aquamarine
and for years just about everything was,
the tv and drapes, the naugahyde couch,
even my unbreakable Melmac plates and
saucers had tiny aquamarine flowers
on them even though there were no
aquamarine flowers anyplace else in the world.
Now everything in my house is green
the ivy on my mother's old Franciscan
dinnerware is green, the apples and
avocados in the fruit bowl are green,
the napkins and placemats, the lamps,
throw pillows and Christmas lights,
the shower curtain, towels and walls
are the color of the rain forests,
the ceiling painted a pearl white
to resemble thick, cumulus rain clouds.

I guess I lied about hating green.

STRAWBERRY JAM

Every June my mother would ruin my summer
by making me help her make strawberry jam
making me sit with her out back on a blanket
beneath the orange tree, our two dogs and
one cat watching us pluck one by one the
stems from hundreds, thousands, a million
strawberries while I listened to the kids
out front, Circean voices laughing, having
fun riding bikes, throwing baseballs, and
just for spite I wouldn't eat even one of
those strawberries and then the next day
it got even worse when she made me help
her can the strawberries, help her boil
lids and jars, listen to her stories of
germs I didn't believe in and couldn't see
that could spoil the jam and make you sick

her stirring the strawberries, sugar and pectin, pouring the hot, bubbly stuff into the awful-hot jars, her sweating, telling me to pay attention, watch now, so you can make your own jam when you're grown, and I'd say, oh no, when I'm grown I'll buy my jam at the store. I wanted my summer freedom when grown from all that busy-ness with pots and jars, a June of days of my own choosing, never thinking for one minute that a time would come when I'd want more than anything just one of those jars of strawberry jam she stacked on the window sill, just one of those hot, steamy ruby-sweet sparkling jewels cooling off in the white June sun.

IN THE SHADOW OF RASPBERRY PIES

Rock 'n' roll drove my father crazy made him curse modern society and grind his teeth. My mother either in spite of him or to spite him loved it, bought the latest hit every week to play on the 45 record player in the den where she'd teach me the jitterbug to "Tutti Frutti" and "Roll With Me Henry" and I'd teach her the Bop to "Ain't That a Shame" and "Don't Be Cruel," me imagining to be the winner of a rock 'n' roll tv dance contest, James Dean my dance partner.

Then at five when my father arrived home from work he played his Classics, his "Desert Song," Strauss waltzes, and Mario Lanza, boxed 45s the color of raspberry pies, and he'd sing his Texas baritone along with Lanza's "La Donna Mobile" while my mother and I fixed supper, me imagining to be a princess waltzing "The Blue Danube" with a prince, and my mother saying, even though my father was only 2 years older than she, "That old fogey."

THE STICKY SUFFOCATION OF KISSING

Three Saturday afternoons in a row in the back row of the movie show watching my 14-year-old babysitter kissing her boyfriend, her rosebud breasts full-blooming in his hands, their lips melting, their eyes fluttering butterflies, chiaroscuro in the black-and-white Orson Wells movie, that one where he plays that magician with crazy eyes, eyes just like the eyes of the man I'd marry 18 years later. I went out into the happy daylight of the lobby, flushed all the toilets in the ladies room, pulled the handles of the cigarette machine, smelled the salty popcorn and thought about the sticky suffocation of kissing, an experience as far away from me as ballet dancing on the moon in red shoes so that night I told my mother about my babysitter kissing her boyfriend three Saturday afternoons in a row in the back row of the movie show and my mother told my babysitter's mother who told my babysitter's boyfriend's mother who wouldn't let them see each other ever again my babysitter finally forgiving me, though, when she had children of her own.

PEARL HANDLES

One day the pearl-handled antique pistol my Grandma Nora had cherished for years, acquired some romantic way she never revealed, disappeared and she accused her son-in-law (who didn't like to work) of stealing it and from then on for 20 years at every family reunion or funeral she'd harp at my Uncle Jimmy to give it back, she'd cherished that pearl-handled pistol and she wanted it back where it belonged and everyone would get mad at her for ruining everyone's fun and tell her she was selfish and stingy for not forgetting about that damned pearl-handled gun

and one day I acquired in a romantic way a pearl-handled antique letter opener I hardly ever used, just liked to touch it: the pearl prettier than the moon,

and smoother, cooler than satin,
the handle gardenia, magnolia, plumeria
and orange blossoms turned to bone
and when I divorced my husband,
even though he got the big things: the armoire,
the pool table and two cars, he took
my pearl-handled antique letter opener, too,
kept hidden in the secret drawer of my rolltop,
and even though I harped about it for months,
he wouldn't give it back, lied like my Uncle Jimmy
and said he didn't take it, dammit

and during those midnights
when I talk to my Grandma Nora,
those summer nights I can't sleep beneath
the cotton quilt she made me in 1972,
I say to her, "You weren't selfish, you weren't stingy,"
and she says, "Honey, you weren't selfish,
you weren't stingy."

But
just what is it
about those things
with pearl handles
that people
just can't keep
their hands off of?

VODKA VERACITY

Every Thanksgiving my sister-in-law Babsie
would get drunk on pink chablis and tell
the whole fam damily how her brother Bart
raped her for years when she was a little
girl and Bart would call her a damned liar
and everyone would get disgusted because
she had ruined everyone's fun and Babsie
would drink more and cry because no one
believed her not even her husband who sent her
to a psychiatrist who didn't believe her
either said she harbored secret incestuous
feelings for her tall, dark, handsome brother
so Babsie quit drinking pink chablis
and started drinking vodka so her husband
divorced her and took the kids but Babsie
was cute and married again right away
but her new husband didn't believe her
either because she was always drunk and
you can't believe half of what drunks
say so Babsie went to Betty Ford Clinic
where they sort of believed her
but told her to get on with her life

so Babsie started taking jugs of vodka
to motels for lost weekends the motel
manager banging on the door on Monday the
paramedics coming until Babsie's pancreas
was the size of Africa and then when
Bart's kids got grown they told
everyone how he'd raped them for years
even the boys.

TOUGHER THAN CORNED BEEF HASH

The only things my mother ever trusted
me to iron were the pillow cases she'd
made from that tough cotton airplane
covering she got when she worked
at Hughes Aircraft, so tough the
iron burn marks washed right out,
so tough I took them with me when
I married but stopped ironing them
because I had babies right away and
no time for a wrinkle-free life,
so tough years later after my divorce
not a hole one, and still crisp as
parchment but now with a yellow patina
that matched the amber wishfulness
of the Hippie Era.

Today I looked all over for them,
looked behind the old super-8 home movies
beneath the broken electric blankets
the 1978 calendar, the 1983 newspaper
of the day Gloria Swanson died
and couldn't find them,
those tough old pillow cases gone
without a hole one —
lost during the 90s' Save The Earth Era
just when I need them the most.

TASTE BUDS

My friend Kay and I loved our dogs,
hers a dachshund, mine a Dobie,
so much that we wanted them to
grow as healthy and happy as our
children so we began to make
homemade dog food of chopped
beef heart and kidney, chicken
gizzards, fish stock made from
trout heads and tails, garlic
(rumored to ward off fleas),
eggs (an emulsifier),

carrots (for good eyesight),
cod liver oil (for a shiny coat)
and kibble we mixed into a
surfboard-size meatloaf and baked,
it making the oven and house
smell awful for days but it
was worth it because our dogs
loved it and loved us all the more
when we fed them the malodorous
and healthy homemade dog food

and then one day my philandering
hippie husband came home after
3 days and nights at a love-in
bleary-eyed with a bad case
of the munchies and ate
a big plateful of it.

My god, he said, that meatloaf
in the refrigerator tastes
just like dog food.

THE VOLKSWAGENS

The first one, the red one, my second
husband bought us because he liked to
make jokes about wearing it but soon
he wanted more room and traded it
for a big white '65 Chevie,

the blue one he paid down on for me
after he left me so I could find
a job and when it blew up just past
the Grapevine en route to Bakersfield
I called the bank to repossess it,

and the green one my mother bought me
after my father died so I could
find a job and when I married my
3rd husband he drove it until he
wrecked it, screwing up the alignment

so bad it shimmied going over
40 so he exchanged it for a
beige, stolen Volks keeping the green Volks'
license plate. It was all so clever
until he was hit head-on one night

by a pick-up truck and the cops found
out the beige Volks was stolen and they
confiscated it so he traded

his not-stolen Harley for a white
Volks which we drove so much and so far

twice the brakes, clutch and engine had to
be replaced, and the sunroof wouldn't
roll back anymore, the radio
knobs broke off, the seats and windows stuck,
so we sold it and bought an Audi Fox

and I've regretted it every day since.

I KNOW IT WAS ONLY A COINCIDENCE

I know it was only a coincidence that after
I read in that book on witchcraft that it
brought bad luck to take a lock of hair
from the dead and I cut a curl from my
dying grandmother for a keepsake that I
began to have the worst luck of my life:

I caught the flu and missed 2 week's work.

My boss started picking on me.

My boss fired me.

I missed my plane to San Francisco.

My tooth abscessed and I had to have
a root canal.

A spider bit me.

My car broke down on the freeway.

And I caught my husband with another woman.

So I threw away the lock of my
grandmother's hair and immediately
my luck changed for the good.

I know it was only a coincidence.

DEAD MOVIE STARS COME TO ME IN DREAMS

Cary Grant saved me one night from a mudslide,
John Wayne bought my mother and me roast beef
in an English pub, Natalie Wood came weeping,
telling me she didn't like being dead or those
Dead Natalie Wood jokes they were cracking all
over L.A., Rock Hudson wanted to marry me
because he loved my black bean soup, and my
first husband who was handsome as a movie star
in his youth came to me the night he died
holding a vodka bottle and looking sad and shy

because it had been 21 years since we'd seen each other and he didn't know what to say, and other dead people come to me and ask me to tell their loved ones they miss them but if I did they'd think me crazy, or worse, an extortionist. I wish I could make this ability, or affliction, whichever, willful and beneficial to peoplekind, could summon forth Rachel Carson and Lincoln to save the world, Nietzsche and Einstein to tell us The Next Important Thing, Buddha and Christ to light the way, but best of all, Elvis to teach us to sing, drive a white Cadillac car, and play a rock 'n' roll electric guitar.

SERGEANT PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND

It's hard to believe today how bellybuttons once drove men crazy in 1965, the raison d'être, original sin of go-go bars when French bikinis were banned on state beaches and tv and I wouldn't wear one at first, wore leotards or costumes showing just a bit of midriff, Abner's 5's bosses not caring, a shy new girl gave the place class but it drove the guys crazy, one guy offering me one day \$20 to show him my belly button. I don't have one, I told him, but he didn't believe me, I'm a Martian, I told him, but he didn't believe that either, just got drunker and drunker and yelled all afternoon, Hey baby, lemme see yer bellybutton, but I kept saying no. It's all so silly nowadays. I sure could've used that \$20 then. I still could.

DIVERSIFIED

He wanted to make me a star. Then why are you looking for one in a sleazy beer bar? "Ah," he said, lighting his cigar, "you're cautious. I admire that in a woman."

No, I said, waving cigar smoke
out of my face, I'm cynical,
suspicious, and paranoid.

"Hey," he said, "and you got a
sense of humor, real comedienne ability,
the next Carole Lombard."

No, I said, pouring his imported beer
into a glass, I'm a hateful bitch,
hating every minute of my
miserable existence as a go-go girl.

"Wow, a realist. I can just see you now
in an Ingmar Bergman film.
Another Liv Ullmann."
He surveyed my facade with his thumb.

And I walked around the bar, sucking
in my stomach, sticking out my chest,
arched my eyebrows in the mirror,
and when I went to the Ladies Room
he left, leaving on my tiptray
one dime and a business card that read:

"Walter B. Somethingorother, Diversified."

No telephone number.

No address.

WALLFLOWER

The Playgal Club owner had photos
of all of us go-go girls
wallpapering the wall of his office,
8 x 10 glossies of all of us,
past and present, bending over
or turning around showing off
tits or asses or our faces
marabou or leopard skin draped
across our boobs pooching over the top

all of us photographed
by a guy older than our fathers
who called himself the Silver Fox
and still wore a 1954 bowtie and crewcut
and fancied himself a hot loverman
a Hugh Hefner harem-keeper
instead of a dirty old man
rutting around shirtless

while he snapped our pictures
in his apartment taking hours
touching here and there
wiping his balding brow sweating
from the hot lights and his libido

and it was rumored that you
only got photos of yourself for yourself
if you went to bed with him although
all the girls denied it, said, What?
Go to bed with that old fart?
Yet Bunni, Wendi, Suzie Q and Delilah
got portfolios, Barbie 50 8 x 10s
she sold for \$20 each to all
her boyfriends and sugar daddies
while all I ever got after coffee
at Denny's with the Silver Fox
was one copy for the boss's office
which he tacked near the trashcan
and every day during the 2 years
I worked there I watched my face,
cleavage, smile and hairdo
become fly-specked, cigarette ash-dusty,
beer-, coffee- and spit-stained,
as the strange wallpaper of myself
became a ruin in my own lifetime,
a squalid impertinence
of inestimable unimportance.

DANCING IN THE FRYING PAN

Richard, my agent, was always calling me
about my go-go gigs from some phone booth
off some L.A. freeway or highway,
cars, motorcycles and trucks roaring by
as he yelled into the receiver at me.
"Hey baby!" he yelled at me the very last
time he called me. "I can't book you no more
at no place! No place wants you back!" (Roar)
"Joe's Bar & Grill in Pomona says
you're a shitty dancer! You kicked over
some Mexican dude's beer!" (Roar)

"He was reaching for my ankle...."

"And the Bullpen says you blow
your nose all the time!" (Roar)

"I had the flu...."

"And the Blue Bunny says all the guys
walked out when you came on!" (Roar)

"I came on after that 6-foot-tall
48-inch-boobed Vegas showgirl...."

"And the Amber Inn says all you could dance
was the bassa nova and the jitterbug!" (Roar)

"All the old guys kept playing Sinatra
and Glenn Miller on the jukebox...."

"Excuses! Excuses!" he yelled, and while
some car, motorcycle or truck backfired
Richard, even though he personally
thought me okay and cute, he yelled,
fired me from a job (Roar) I never wanted
in the first place, a job that
had caused me to break out in hives

and for the rest of the summer
I lay in the sun 8 hours a day
dreaming about my future
until my tan peeled off
and leaves on the trees began to fall,
stupid me never dreaming for one minute
that working for Richard's freelance dance agency
would not be
the worst job I'd ever have.

THE FRIENDS YOU LOSE ALONG THE WAY

Patty in 8th grade didn't want to be
my friend anymore because I didn't
have breasts and she did. She
called me a baby and dumb because I
didn't understand her dirty jokes
about Jergen's hand lotion.

Jan, when we were 19 and just married,
said we couldn't be close friends anymore
because our main loyalties now should be
to our husbands.

Marlene stopped being friends with me
when she started having an affair
and got afraid I'd tell her husband.

Ruthie stopped speaking to me after she
told me about her new job as a "Foxy
Lady," an out-call masseuse, and I
wouldn't come to work for her. She
said I was stupid for turning down
such an easy job that paid so much money.

Norma, in the '80s, my friend since the '50s, stressed out from working 2 jobs to make payments on her new condo and car told me she didn't have time to be my friend anymore and was tired of me dumping guilt trips on her by calling her all the time.

Suzie stopped being my friend after we had a fight, both of us PMSing, after her dog chewed up my new shoes. She called me a vivisectionist and I called her a misogynist.

I'd still like to see all my used-to-be friends. Talk to them on the phone. Have them over for some wine. The friends you lose along the way are like losing your wallet or your job. Friends are like money. Without them you are very poor.

THE GIRLS OF THE CHICKIE RUNS

Where are those girls of the chickie runs, the Natalie Wood one and the other ones? They were all so thin and cute in their tight skirts and sweaters, their cherry Coke kisses driving the guys insane enough to drive off cliffs into the sea like the lemmings and now you see the girls of the chickie runs wearing jogging suits and Nikes fast-walking to shed cream cheese Christmas pounds, wearing down jackets sitting with their old man in beach chairs next to their fishing poles and R.V., some of them have been forced into early retirement from the phone company, some are raising their grandkids after their daughters got strung out in the '80s, a few of them learned shorthand up to 140 words per minute, a few got Ph.D.s, one still skis Jackson Hole, four wear Eva Gabor wigs to hide what chemo did, one bought a million-dollar condo after her husband left her for another man, a lot of them got tattoos and smoke three packs of cigs a day, some grow roses, basil and marijuana, 13 teach aerobics, 10 made videos, 20 take Prozac, one rots in jail for complicity to murder, two slept with John Lennon, one fell out of a jet on her way to Australia, many are becoming curly question marks from osteo, and all of them wish they were thin and cute and still had cherry Coke kisses guys were willing to die for.

THE ELVIS STAMP

One Elvis stamp to mail
my smog certificate
to the DMV, two
Elvis stamps to mail a
letter plus photographs
and \$10 to my
daughter who collects
Elvis stamps and whose
husband is in jail.
Four Elvis stamps and a
Gone with the Wind stamp
to mail the L.A. Times'
Neo-Nazi piece to
Annerose who just moved to
Berlin, Germany,
One Elvis stamp and one
Grace Kelly stamp on my
SASE, and one
Elvis stamp, two Johns
Hopkins, one Dorothy
Parker, one Love Earth,
one Dinah Washington,
one Fanny Brice, one
Igor Stravinski,
and one Luis Muñoz
Marin to mail my stuff
to a chapbook contest
in Huddersfield, England;
one Elvis stamp with "Don't
Be Cruel" written on the
envelope to my
publisher who wants to
use a stupid photo
of me on my first book;
one Elvis stamp on the
birthday card with "Don't be
Drool" written on the
envelope to my grand-
son on his first birthday.

Never before has
mailing mail
been so much fun.

— Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach CA

N.B. Four unsolicited tributes to C.B. — two before
09 March 1994, and two after....

MAD MONEY BLUES

"Hey, old timer. Who do you like in the fourth?" Ellis called over the sea of empty seats behind him to the curmudgeon who was sitting back there alone. He had seen the old boy pick up a bundle off an X-acta in the first race and another bundle off a twelve-to-one shot that came hard off the curve to win by a length in the third. The old timer ignored Ellis, kept his nose buried in his Racing Form. "My partner," Ellis continued, "is at the window right now puttin' thirty down on Lusty Lorraine to win." The Form dropped, revealing a pock-marked bulldog's face with a long red nose in its center. "Then your partner's a fucking idiot," the old timer called down. Lusty Lorraine was running at 99 to 1. "So what the hell are you gonna do, you old bastard? Bet the favorite? That's what my wife does, bets two dollars to win three." The old timer ignored him, and Ellis, under his breath, called the old boy an asshole as he turned around to watch the horses strut by. He noticed that his Lusty Lorraine had a spring to her step.

The favorite was a coal-black filly named Dangerous Donna. Her jockey, Mr. Pincay, fell off her when she bolted out of the gate. The old timer crumbled up his Racing Form and threw it to the ground and stomped it. When Lusty Lorraine edged through on the rail to win by a nose, the old boy stalked down and punched Ellis in the eye and Clete on the jaw, then stormed back up to his seat and tried to iron out the damage he had done to his Racing Form. "Cranky son-of-a-bitch," said Clete as he rubbed his jaw. Ellis blinked his reddened eye and shook his head and said, "Good thing the old fart's got little hands."

— Dan Lenihan

Oceanside CA

YOU PRICK

I'd never read a poem under my own steam until 1972, when I was 22.

Then, walking through Pickwick's one day looking for something on serial murder, I was distracted by something startling in a corner. It looked like what I was looking

for: BUKOWSKI. ERECTIONS, EJACULATIONS, EXHIBITIONS AND GENERAL TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS. But it was the face that got me. I had to find out what this was.

From there I became hopelessly enmired. I didn't know if it was poetry but I knew it reached inside, jangled things. I bought everything I could find by the gargoyle of poetry. I still disliked poetry. But I liked the gargoyle. (Some cretin once was mouthing copious "poetic" references at me and when I told him I didn't know what the fuck he was talking about, he said, "You mean you haven't read So-and-so?" "No," I said, "I don't read much poetry." Stricken, he stammered, "But you write poetry." "That doesn't mean I have to like it.")

I lived in L.A. until 1981 and I would spot the gargoyle every now and then. Once at a film documentary on international gore. Once outside a record store. Twice I passed him on the freeway. It was good to see the book cover in motion.

I attended a couple readings. At the first one, in Huntington Beach, he had been droning on disinterestedly for about 20 minutes when he looked into the audience and said, "What's wrong with you people? You're all dead. Just sitting there, listening to this shit." After a moment of silence I addressed him from my seat: "You prick!" His face lit up and he said, "There's a man who appreciates my work."

I saw him another time reading at The Troubadour. It was a rotten place for it. After it was over and I was exiting the club, I noticed Bukowski sitting on a bench. As I approached him, he glared at me and said, "Get away from me." I had already called him a prick, so I figured we were even.

He got big. Europe. Movies. Videos. I'm still waiting for the TIME cover. When you say "Bukowski" now, most people not only know who you're talking about but have an opinion as well. "Oh yeah ... the Barfly." Sometimes they'll just smile, or laugh. Some people will snort. You often get vivid reactions from females.

Still, the gargoyle writes.
And I still read it all.
And I imagine, still, he is a prick.

— Scott Schafer

Port Angeles WA

OBITUARY

from hollywood
i drove to the westside
ate lunch
then shot down stocker east
through south central
up martin luther king boulevard
jazz till 2 a.m.
and watched crossing
guards escort boys
and girls across the street
passed sunshine
bright
clear
the calling card lounge
the ski hut's
chain-locked door
the menlo room
closed since 1948
and the coliseum
cracked and beat
2 riots and 7 earthquakes
to figureoa
turned left and moved beyond
julie's trojan barrel
green light
red light
cachao and eddie palmieri
oscar 'd leon
and war
pumping through air
a black lincoln
cuts in front
booming bass
cruising
into downtown civic
center next to
beggar jack
the shoe shine boy
and the one-legged
wheelchair-bound
vietnam veteran who
whispers good morning
every afternoon
subterranean park
up the stairs
sit and dial
974-2233
you have 1 message
press 1 to listen
press 2 to ...
press

"hey lawrence
this is your brother sean
i don't know if you
heard
but they're saying
on the news that
bukowski's
dead"

— Lawrence Welsh

Los Angeles CA

THE SHIMMERING WALL

On the wall of my workroom
are pictures of writers
that I admire,
photos I've clipped over the years
& tacked up there
to give me a little help
when the blank white sheet
starts staring back at me:

Pound lounging in his Paris studio with friends,
F. Scott with Zelda on the deck of an ocean liner,
Hemingway drinking in a crowded Havana bar,
T.S. giving a reading at Sylvia Beach's bookshop,
Joyce at a tea party playing his mandolin...

Then there's the picture of Céline
alone,
an old man
alone in the dining room
of his ramshackle house at Meudon.
It's dead of winter but the fireplace is dark.
He sits at the large round table
wearing an overcoat & scarf.
The table's cluttered with his writing,
some of it in stacks, some scattered
among the pencils & pens, a bottle of ink,
two knobby apples, half a sandwich, a cup & saucer...

Céline looks up hopelessly at the camera;
he's waiting for death to knock,
death does knock.

Now Bukowski's dead,
dead as his beloved Beethoven.

Bukowski & Céline were brothers;
a couple of pirates, two lone wolves,
who loved their cats more than they did humankind.

Still their intuitive flights carried them
at least part of the way
over the shimmering wall
that stands between us
& whatever it hides.

I don't have a picture of Bukowski
on my wall,
because I've never found one
that did justice to his sublime ugliness.

But, Buk, I do have your poems on my desk
& the music's still there,
clear & rising,
just like a symphony by the Bee.

— Richard M. West

Bainbridge Island WA

THE HIGHSCHOOL GIRLS (1984)

the girls used to say to me: "you're so
negative!"
they said this in a very final way and
it seemed to satisfy
them.
(the boys didn't say anything to me because
they knew I would take it to
them.)
but the girls were very superior
saying, "you're so
negative!"
It made them feel intellectual, or,
at least, intelligent.
they had already formed ideas
of what life was
and what life should be
and how one should perform
under these
conditions.

it was all right with me, I didn't want to be
near them, I didn't want to fuck them or
marry them or
even date them,
I found none of them
beautiful.

now, over 45 years later
I find that almost everybody is
negative
and I'm positive

and I'm still glad I didn't fuck, marry or
date any of those.
they, and those their age, have
largely become so
sad, embittered and
psychotic.

I guess that they started being
positive
so early
that they just wore it all
out.

WHO'S WHO IN AMERICA: 1984-1985, FORTY-THIRD EDITION
(1985)

"inclusion in which is limited to those individuals who
have demonstrated outstanding achievement in their own
fields of endeavor and who have, thereby, contributed
significantly to the betterment of contemporary society"

and upon the certificate, The Marquis Who's Who Publications
Board embossed in fancy type
the name:

CHARLES BUKAWSKI

well, I've had trouble with my name for some time, and
most of it has come in group situations, a gym class or
various roll calls of that like, and they usually
come up with:

"BERKOWITZ!"

"Here!" I'd answer, knowing from the past who they
meant

but always wondering how they could come up with
"Berkowitz" from "Bukowski"....

people who had never met, people miles and years
apart, who when they looked at the name
"Bukowski" still managed to come up
with:

"BERKOWITZ!"

"Here!"

but ... "BUKAWSKI"

that's a new one

and I suppose it's what I deserve for
contributing significantly to the betterment of
society.

still, it's nice, I guess to
be in

WHO'S WHA INN AMARACA.

FEELING FAIRLY GOOD TONIGHT (1985)

Thou shalt not fail as a writer
because the vultures wait to swoop in with their
"I told you so's."

Thou shalt not fail as a writer
because the very act of it is the finest balance
against the madness of the
world.

Thou shalt not fail as a writer
because it's the best form of self-entertainment
ever
invented.

Thou shalt not fail as a writer
because 50 years of heavy drinking have
purified your brain
cells.

Thou shall fail as a writer
upon the night or day of your
death

only to have new books of yours
appear for years afterwards
from the stockpile that your publisher
was never able to keep up
with.

Let it be so:
these words indented into the guts
of
Time.

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA

N.B. Wormwood has 84 more unpublished C.B. poems in
stock, so C.B. will appear here through Issue 158.

The edition of this issue has been limited to 700 numbered copies with the first 70 being signed by Joan Jobe Smith. The copy now in your hand is number: 516

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