New Poems
COME ON IN!
CHARLES BUKOWSKI
‘The best poet in America.’ JEAN GENET
New Poems
COME ON IN!

CHARLES BUKOWSKI

Edited by John Martin

CANONGATE
Edinburgh • London • New York • Melbourne
These poems are part of an archive of unpublished work that Charles Bukowski left to be published after his death.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to John Martin, who edited these poems.
I live near the
slaughterhouse
and am ill
with thriving.

come on in!
nothing but a scarf
literary chitchat
this machine is a fountain
200 years
residue
Coronado Street: 1954
a vision
cut-rate drugstore: 4:30 p.m.
you can’t tell a turkey by its feathers
too early!
the green Cadillac
I’m not all-knowing but …
in the clubhouse
a famished orphan sits somewhere in the mind
form letter
first family
a real thing, a good woman
a child’s bedtime story
working out in Hades
half-a-goldfish
lousy mail
from the Dept. of English
and poems have too
poets to the rescue
red hot mail
some personal thoughts
he’s a dog
tremor
my Mexican buddy
strangers at the racetrack
will you tiptoe through the tulips with me?
the novel life
thanks for your help
I have continued regardless
balloons
moving toward the dark
the real thing

she looked at me and asked,
did you?
did you?
did you?

on the cuff
alone again
fooling Marie (the poem)
the copulation blues
the faithful wife
once in a while
another high-roller
the fucking horses
hello there!
the fuck-master
my personal psychologist
jealousy
her guy
dead poet’s wife
scrambled legs
endless love
down and out on the boardwalk
sex sister
to the ladies no longer here
the nude dancer
Ma Barker loves me
here we go again
do you believe that a man can be taught to write?
hail and farewell
weep

it’s a lonely world
of frightened people.

a note upon modern poesy
the end of an era
Paris in the spring
alone in this chair
talking about the poets
was Li Po wrong?
operator
a note from Hades in the mailbox
on the sunny banks of the university
vacation in Greece
the spill
the last salamander
learning the ropes
bombed away
the swimming pool will be going here
a bright boy
my turn
skinny-dipping
a close call
like a rock
the waitress at the yogurt shop
one out in the minor leagues
the little girls hissed
I dreamt
the old couple next door
men without women
the “Beats”
hurry slowly
hello and goodbye

I will never have
a house in the valley
with little stone men
on the lawn.

don’t call me, I’ll call you
taking the 8 count
going going gone
this is where they come for what’s left of your soul
hot night
the x-bum
something cares
my cats
6:30 a.m.
what I need
gender benders
after many nights
good morning, how are you?
a reader of my work
Sumatra Cum Laude
the disease of existence
another comeback
two nights before my 72nd birthday
have we come to this?
old poem
older
closing time
no leaders, please
everything hurts
husk
my song
cancer
blue
twilight musings
mind and heart
COME ON IN!
I live near the slaughterhouse and am ill with thriving.
come on in!

welcome to my wormy hell.
the music grinds off-key.
fish eyes watch from the wall.
this is where the last happy shot was fired.
the mind snaps closed
like a mind snapping closed.
we need to discover a new will and a new way.
we’re stuck here now
listening to the laughter of the gods.
my temples ache with the fact of the facts.
I get up, move about, scratch myself.
I’m a pawn.
I am a hungry prayer.
my wormy hell welcomes you.
hello, hello there. come in, come on in!
plenty of room here for us all, sucker.
we can only blame ourselves so come sit with me in the dark.
it’s half-past nowhere everywhere.
nothing but a scarf

long ago, oh so long ago, when
I was trying to write short stories
and there was one little magazine which printed
decent stuff
and the lady editor there usually sent me
encouraging rejection slips
so I made a point to
read her monthly magazine in the public
library.

I noticed that she began to feature
the same writer
for the lead story each
month and
it pissed me off because I thought that I could
write better than that
fellow.
his work was facile and bright but it had no
edge.
you could tell that he had never had his nose rubbed into
life, he had just
glided over it.

next thing I knew, this ice-skater-of-a-writer was
famous.

he had begun as a copy boy
on one of the big New York
magazines

(how the hell do you get one of those
jobs?)

then he began appearing in some of the best
ladies’ magazines
and in some of the respected literary
journals.

then after a couple of early books
out came a little volume, a sweet novelette, and he was truly famous.

it was a tale about high society and a young girl and it was delightful and charming and just a bit naughty.

Hollywood quickly made a movie out of it.

then the writer bounced around Hollywood from party to party for a few years. I saw his photo again and again: a little elf-man with huge eyeglasses.

but soon he went back to New York and to all the parties there.

he went to every important party thereafter for years and to some that weren’t very important.

then he stopped writing altogether and just went to parties.

he drank or doped himself into oblivion almost every night.

his once slim frame more than doubled in size. his face grew heavy and he no longer looked like the young boy with the quick and dirty wit but more like an old frog.

the scarf was still on display but his hats were too large and came down almost to his eyes; all you noticed was his twisted lurid grin.
the society ladies still liked to drag him
around New York
one on each arm
and
drinking like he did, he didn’t live
to enjoy his old age.

so
he died
and was quickly
forgotten

until somebody found what they claimed was his secret
diary / novel

and then all the famous people in
New York were very
worried

and they should have been worried because when it
was published
out came all the dirty
laundry.

but I still maintain that he never really did know how to
write; just what and
when and about
whom.

slim, thin
stuff.
ever so long ago, after reading
one of his short stories,
after dropping the magazine to the floor,
I thought,
Jesus Christ, if this is what they
want,
from now on
I might as well write for
the rats and the spiders
and the air and just for
myself.

which, of course, is exactly what
I did.
my friend Tom, he liked to come over and he’d say, “let’s go get a coffee.” and my girlfriend would say, “you guys going to talk that literary stuff again?” and we’d go to this place where you paid for your first coffee and all the refills were free and we’d get a seat by the window and he would begin: Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos mainly but others got in there too: e.e. cummings, Ezra Pound, Dreiser, Jeffers, Céline and so forth. although I will admit I was mostly a listener and wondered what he was really getting at, if anything, I continued to listen and drink coffee after coffee. once he said, “look, I’ll take you to the place Fitzgerald stayed at for a while during his Hollywood period.” “all right,” I said and we got into his car and he drove me there and pointed it out: “Fitzgerald lived there.” “all right,” I said and then he drove us back for more coffee. Tom was truly excited about these literary figures of the past. I was too, to an extent, but as Tom talked on and on about them and the coffees continued unabated my interest began to wane, more than wane. I began to want to get rid of Tom.
it was easy.
one day I wrote a poem about Tom
and it was published and he read it
and after that
we enjoyed no more coffees together.

Tom had been working on a biography of me
and that ended that.
then another writer came along
and he drank my wine
and didn’t talk about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, etc.,
he talked about himself
and ended up writing a not-very-satisfactory biography of me.

I should have stuck with Tom.
no, I should have gotten rid of both of them.

which is exactly what I have done.
this machine is a fountain

my system is always the same:
keep it loose
write a great number of
poems
try with all your
heart and
don’t worry about the
bad
ones.

keep it going
keep it
hot
forget about immortality
if you ever
remembered
it.

the sound of this machine is
good.

much paper
more desire.

just
hammer away and wait for lady
luck.

what a
bargain.
hunched over this white sheet of paper
at 4 in the afternoon. I
received a letter from a young poet this morning
informing me that I was one of the most
important writers of the last
200 years.
well, now, one can’t believe that
especially if one has felt as I have
this past month,
walking about,
thinking,
surely I am going crazy,
and then thinking,
I can’t write
anymore.

and then I remember the factories,
the production lines,
the warehouses,
the time clocks,
overtime and layoffs
and flirtations with the Mexican girls
on the assembly line;
each day everything was carefully planned,
there was always something to do,
there was more than enough to do,
and if you didn’t keep up,
if you weren’t clever and swift and
obedient
you were out with the sparrows and
the bums.
writing’s different, you’re floating out there in the
white air, you’re hanging from the high-wire,
you’re sitting up in a tree and they’re working at
the trunk with a power
saw …

there’s no silk scarf about one’s neck,
no English accent,
no remittance checks from aristocratic ladies in Europe
with blind and impotent
husbands.

it’s more like a fast hockey game
or putting on the gloves with a man
50 pounds heavier and ten years
younger, or
it’s like steering a ship through the fog
with a mad damsel clinging to your
neck

and all along you know you’ve gotten away
with some quite obvious stuff, that
you’ve been given undeserved credit, for stuff
that you either wrote offhand or
hardly meant or hardly cared
about.

well, it helps to be
lucky.
yet, on the other hand, you have sometimes
done it as you always knew it should
be done, and you knew then that it was
as good as it could be done,
and that maybe you had done it better,
in a way,

than anybody else had done it for a long time

and
you allowed yourself to feel
good about that

for a moment or
two.

they put the pressure on you
with statements about 200 years,
and when only one individual says it, that’s all
right
but when 2 or 3 or 4 say it—
that’s when they tend to open the door to a
kookoo bin.

they tell you to give up cigarettes and
booze, and then they tell you that you
have 25 more good years ahead of you and
then
perhaps ten more years to enjoy your old
age
as you suck on
the rewards and
memories.

Patchen’s gone, we need you, man,
we all need you for that
good feeling just above the
belly button—
knowing that you are there in some small room in
northern California writing poems and
killing flies with a torn
flyswatter.

they can kill you,
the praisers can kill you,
the young girls can kill you,
as the blue-eyed boys in English depts.
who send warm letters
handwritten
on lined paper
can kill you,
and they’re all correct:
2 packs a day and the bottle
can kill you
too.

of course,
anything can kill you
and something eventually
will. all I can say is that
today
I have just inserted a new
typewriter ribbon
into this old machine
and I am pleased with the way it
works and that makes for more than just an
ordinary day, thank
you.
there’s an old movie
based on a Hemingway short story
I saw the beginning of it
again on late night /
early morning tv
but the fellow who plays
Hem
his ears aren’t right
neither are
his chin
his hair
his voice;
and there’s this lovely
wench
in the film
with perfect buns
whose role it is to
endure his precious
literary abuse
while he slowly dies in the
African jungle.

I click the movie off.

of course, I never met
Hemingway.
maybe he was like that fellow.
I hope
not.
then I look about my bedroom and
think, Jesus Jesus,
why am I so upset by this
lousy tv movie?

what did I want them to make him
look like?
act like?
he was just a journalist from
Michigan who liked to shoot big game
and his last kill was his biggest;
surely he would have deserved the nice buns
and the adoring eyes
of that actress who
he never saw and
who
in real life
later
drank herself to
death.

(the actor who plays Hem in the film is still around however
but barely functioning.)
I guess when I look at that movie
all I can think of to say is:

bwana, bring me a drink.
Coronado Street: 1954

listen, I been in the navy and I never heard cussing like you and your girlfriend, man, and it lasts all night, every night.
we got religious people here, children, decent working folk, you’re keeping them awake every night and look at this place! everything’s broken, when I evict you you’ve got to pay to replace everything, buddy!
what do you mean, you don’t have no fucking money?
what do you buy all that booze with?
credit?
don’t give me that!
listen, I want it so quiet in here tonight we’ll be able to hear the church mice pray!
what’s that?
well, up yours too, buddy!
and you wanna know what?
I saw your old lady sucking some guy’s banana in the alley!
you don’t give a damn?
what do you give a damn about?
nothing?
what kind of shit is that, nothing !
did you get a lobotomy somewhere along the way?
I got a good mind to wipe up the floor with you!
you say I’m the one with a lobotomy?
hey, don’t go closing the door on me, pal!
I own this fucking place!
OPEN UP, BUDDY! I’M COMING IN!
WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?
HEY, WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU LAUGHING AT?
we are in the clubhouse
3rd race, 83 degrees in June,
they have just sent in a 40-to-1 shot
in a maiden race,
the tote has clicked 3 or 4 times,
the old general feeling of futility
has arrived early
and then a girl walks by
to the window to make a bet
her skirt is slit
almost to the waist
and as she walks
this
most beautiful leg
is exposed
it sneaks out as she walks
flashes and vanishes.
every male in the clubhouse
watches that leg.
the girl is with a woman
who looks like her mother
and her mother keeps close
to the side of the skirt
that is slit,
trying to block our view.

the girl makes her bet
turns and now the leg is on
the other side
along with her mother.
the girl disappears down an
aisle to her seat
as all around us
there is a rising,
silent applause.
then the applause stops
and like forsaken children
we go back to our Racing Forms.
this woman at the counter ahead of me
was buying four pairs of panties:
yellow, pink, blue and orange.
the lady at the register kept picking up
the panties and
counting them:
one, two, three, four.
then she counted them again:
one, two, three, four.
will there be anything else?
she asked the lady who was buying the
panties.
no, that’s it, she answered.
no cigarettes or anything?
no, that’s it.

the woman at the register
rang up the sale
collected the money
gave change
looked off into the distance
for a bit
and then she bent under the counter
and got a bag
and put the panties in this bag
one at a time—
first the blue pair, then the yellow,
then the orange, then the pink.

she looked at me next:
how are you doing today?
fair, I said.
is there anything else?
cigarettes?

all I want is what you see in front of
you.
I had hemorrhoid ointment
laxatives
and a box of paper clips.

she rang it up, took my money, made
change, bagged my things, handed them
to me.

have a nice day, she did not say.

and you too,
I said.
you can’t tell a turkey by its feathers

son, my father said, if you only had some ambition! you have no get up and go! no drive!
it’s hard for me to believe that you are really my son.

yeah, I said.

I mean, he went on, how are you going to make it? your mother is worried sick and the neighbors think you’re some kind of imbecile. what are you going to do? we can’t take care of you all your life!

I’m 15 now, I told him, I won’t be around much longer.

but look at you, you just sit around in your room all day! other boys have jobs, paper routes, Jim Stover works as an usher at the Bayou! HOW IN THE HELL ARE YOU GOING TO SURVIVE IN THIS WORLD?

I don’t know …

you make me SICK! sometimes, having a son like you, I wish I was dead.
well, he did die, he died more than 30 years ago.

and last year I paid $59,000 income tax.
too early!

there are some people who will phone a man at 7 a.m. when he is desperately sick and hungover.

I always greet these idiots with a few violent words and the slamming down of the receiver knowing that their morning eagerness means that they retired early and thus wasted the preceding night (and most likely the preceding days, weeks and years).

that they could imagine that I’d want to converse with them at 7 a.m. is an insult to whatever intelligent life is left in our dwindling
universe.
the green Cadillac
he hung the green Cadillac
almost straight up and down
standing on its nose
against the phone pole
next to the
All-American Hamburger Hut.

I was
in the laundromat
with my girlfriend when
we heard the sound of it.

when we got there
the driver had
dropped out of the car
and run off.

and there was the
green Caddy
standing straight
up and down
against
the phone pole.

it was one of the most
magnificent sights
I had seen
in years:

in the 9 p.m. moonlight
it just stood there—
the people gathered
the people stood back
knowing the Caddy
could come crashing down
at any moment

but it didn’t
it just stood there
straight as an arrow
alongside
the phone pole.

how the hell
they were going to get
that down
without wrecking it
was beyond me.

my girlfriend wanted to
wait and see how
they did it

but we hadn’t
had dinner
yet
and I
talked her into
going back into the
laundromat and then
back to my place.
I was not
mechanically inclined
and it pissed
me off
to watch people
who were.

anyhow
about noon
the next day
when I went out to
buy a newspaper
the green Caddy
was gone.

there was just
an old bum
at the counter
in the All-American
having a coffee

but I had already seen
the real miracle
and I
walked back to my place satisfied.
I’m not all-knowing but …

one of the problems is that when most people sit down to write a poem they think, “now I am going to write a poem” and then they go on to write a poem that sounds like a poem or what they think a poem should sound like.
	his is one of their problems. Of course, there are other problems: those writers of poems that sound like poems think that they then must go around reading them to other people.

this, they say, is done for status and recognition (they are careful not to mention vanity or the need for instantaneous approbation from some sparse, addled crowd).

the best poems it seems to me
are written out of an ultimate need.
and once the poem is written, the only need after that is to write another.

and the silence of the printed page is the best response to a finished work.

in decades past I once warned some poet-friends of mine about the masturbatory nature of poetry readings done just for the applause of a handful of idiots.

“isolate yourself and do your work and if you must mix, then do it with those who have no interest at all in what you consider so important.”

such anger, such a self-righteous response did I receive then from my poet-friends that it seemed to me that I had exactly proved my point.
after that,
we all drifted
apart.

and that solved just
one of my
problems
and I suppose
just one of
theirs.
he is behind me,
talking to somebody:
“well, I like the 5 horse, he closed well last time, I like a horse who can close.
but you know, you gotta kinda consider the 4 and the 12.
the 4 needed his last race and look at him, he’s reading 40-to-1 now.
the 12’s got a chance too.
and look at the 9, he looks really good, really got a shine to his skin.
then too, you also gotta consider the 7 …”
every now and then I consider murdering somebody, it just flashes in my mind for a moment, then I dismiss it and rightfully so.
I considered murdering the man who belonged to the voice I heard,
then I worked on dismissing the thought.
and to make sure, I changed my seat,
I moved far down to my left,
I found a seat between a woman wearing a sun shade and a young man violently chewing on a mouthful of gum.
then I felt better.
a famished orphan sits somewhere in the mind

a heavyweight fighter called Young Stribling
was killed in the ring
so long ago
that I am certain
that I am the only one remembering him
tonight.

I am thinking of nobody else.

I sit here in this room and stare at the
lamp
and I think,
Stribling, Stribling.

outside
the starved palms continue to
decay
while in here
I remember and
watch a cigarette lighter, 
an empty glass and a
wristwatch propped delicately on its
side.

Stribling.

son-of-a-bitch,
what causes me to think
about things like this?

I really don’t need to know,
yet I wonder.
form letter

dear sir:
thank you for your manuscript
but this is to inform you
that I have no special influence
with any editor or publisher
and if I did
I would never dream of telling
them who or what
to publish.

I myself have never mailed any
of my work to anybody but
an editor or a publisher.
despite the fact that
my own work
was rejected for
decades,
I still never considered
mailing my work to
another writer
hoping that this other
writer might help me
get published.

and although I have
read some of what you
have mailed me
I return the work without
comment
except to ask
how did you get my
address?
and the effrontery
to mail me such
obvious
crap?

if you think me unkind,
fine.
and thank you for telling
me that I am a
great writer.

now you will have a
chance to re-evaluate
that opinion
and to choose another
victim.
it’s unholy.
I appear to be
lost. I walk from room to room and
there aren’t many (2 or 3)
and she is in the dark room
snoring, I can’t see her but her
mouth is open and her hair is gray
poor thing
and she doesn’t mean me harm
least of all
does she mean me
harm,
and in the other room are
pink lips pink ears
on a head like a cabbage
and a child’s blocks on the floor like
leprosy
and she also doesn’t mean me any harm at
all,
but I cannot sleep and I sit in the kitchen
with a big black fly
that goes around and around and around
like a piece of snot grown a
heart,
and I am puzzled and not given to
cruelty (I’d like to think)
and I sit with the fly
under this yellow light
and we smoke a cigar and drink beer
and share the calendar with a frightened cat:
“ katzen-unsere hausfreunde: 1965.”
I am a poor father because I want to stay alive as a
man but perhaps I never was a
man.

I suck on the cigar and suddenly the fly is gone
and there are just
the 3 of us

first family
here.
I put the book down and ask:
why are they always writing about
the bulls, the bullfighters?
those who have never seen
them?
and as I break the web of the
spider reaching for my wine,
the hum of bombers
breaking the solace, I decide
I must write an impatient letter to my
priest about some 3rd St.
whore
who keeps calling me up at 3 in
the morning.
ass full of
splinters,
thinking of pocketbook poets
and the priest,
I go over to the typewriter
next to the window
to see to my letter
and look look
the sky’s black as ink
and my wife says Brock, for
Christ’s sake,
the typewriter all night,
how can I sleep? and I crawl quickly
into bed and
kiss her hair and say
sorry sorry sorry
sometimes I get excited
I don’t know why …
a friend of mine has
written a book about
Manolete …
who’s that? nobody, kid,
somebody dead
like Chopin or our old mailman
or a dog,

and I kiss her and rub her head,
a good woman,
and soon she sleeps as I wait for morning.
a child’s bedtime story

unsaid, said the snail.
untold, said the tortoise.
doesn’t matter, said the tiger.
obey me, said the father.
be loyal, said the country.
watch me climb, said the vine.
doesn’t matter, said the tiger.
untold, said the tortoise,
unsaid, said the snail.
I’ll run, said the mouse.
I’ll hide, said the cat.
I’ll fly, said the sparrow.
I’ll swim, said the whale.
obey and be loyal, said the father and
everybody shut up! roared the Queen.

the night came and all
the lights went out
as the cities
burned.

now, go to
sleep.
holy Christ, I was on fire then and
I’d tell that whore I lived with on Beacon Street
starving and drinking
I’d tell her that I had something great and mysterious
going for me,
in fact, when I got really drunk I’d pace the floor in my
dirty torn shorts and ripped undershirt and
say more in desperation than belief: “I’m a fucking
genius and nobody knows it but
me!”

I thought this was rather humorous but she’d say, “honey, you’re
full of shit, pour us another drink!”
she was crazy too and now and then an empty bottle would come
flying toward my head.
(she
missed most of the time)
but
when she bounced one off my skull I’d ignore it, and pour another
drink because
after all, when you’re immortal, nothing
matters.
and besides, she had one of the finest pair of legs I’d ever
seen
in those high-heeled shoes and with her slender
ankles and her great knees glimmering in the
smoky drunken light.
she helped me through some of the worst times and if she was
here now we’d both laugh our goddamned asses
off
knowing it was all so true and real, and yet that somehow it
wasn’t real at
all.
we were out on the town
and we
went to this nice
house, lovely couple, etc.
anyhow, there were 7 or
8 of us and a jug of really
cheap wine
came out and then some
snacks, and then the man
got up and came back with
3 live goldfish and he said,
“watch this!”
and he put them in a large
fish tank
and the next thing I knew
there were 6 or 7 heads
down there glued to the fish tank
including my girlfriend’s
and the soft light from the tank
shone on all the faces
and in all the eyes,
and one of the men went,
“ah!” and one of the girls
went, “oooh!”
some terrible thing was eating the
goldfish.
then somebody said, “look,
there’s just half-a-goldfish
left and he’s still swimming
around!”
I said, “why don’t you fucking
party animals
get up off that rug
and help me finish this
cheap wine?”
12 or 14 eyes turned and looked at
me. then one at a time
the people moved away from
the fish tank and came back and sat down at the table again.

then they began a discussion about the merits of little literary magazines.
lousy mail

the time comes when the tank runs
dry and you have to
refill
if you can.

the vulture swoops low over
you
as you open the manila envelope
from the ivy league university and
read:
“we have to pass on this batch of poems
but we are reading again in the
Fall.”

“you were rejected?” asks my
wife.

“yes.”

“well, fuck them,” she says.

now, there’s loyalty!

the vulture pauses in mid-flight,
defecates,
and flies out of the dining room
window.

and I think, it’s nice that they’ll be
reading again in the
Fall.
from the Dept. of English

we are surprised:
you used to jab with the left
then throw a left hook to the body
followed by an
overhand right.
we liked that
but we like your new way too:
where you can’t tell where
the next punch
is coming
from.
to change your style like that when you’re
not exactly a kid
anymore,
I think that takes some
doing.
anyhow, enough chitchat.
we’re accepting your poems
for our departmental Literary Journal
and, by the way,
you are one of the poets selected for
class discussion
in our Contemporary Poetry Series.

no shit, baby?
well, suck my
titties.
and poems have too

don’t worry, Dostoevsky,
the fish and the hills and the harbor
and the girls and the horses and the
alleys and the nights and the dogs
and the knives and the poisons and
the wines and the midgets and the
gamblers and the lights and the guns
and the lies and the sacrifices
and the flies and the frogs and the
flags and the doors and the windows
and the stairways and the cigarettes
and the hotels and myself have been
around a long time.

just like you.
poets to the rescue

the night the poets dropped by to say hello
was at the time
that terrible time when
the ladies on the telephone
were screaming their fury
at me.

the night the poets came by to say hello
I offered them cigarettes
as they talked about the poet
who traveled all the way to Paris
in order to be able
to select the contents
of his next book
and we smiled at that
the poets and I
as we remembered starvation
dark mornings
deadly noons
evenings of elephantine misery.

the night the poets came by to say hello
we also mused about whatever happened to Barney Google with the googly eyes: he probably died for the love of a strumpet as many good men have
or went to London and walked in the fog
waiting for what?

the night the poets came by to say
hello
c
the walls were stained mellow with
grief
and beakers of curdled wine
dusty with dead spiders
sat about like memories best
forgotten.

c
the poets insisted then that it was best
not to think too much about things
or remember too much
but best just to sit around
in the evenings
and smoke our cigarettes and
drink our
beer
and talk quietly about
simple
things.

c
the poets
left soon after that
but the phone kept ringing
and I stood there frozen
as the ladies screamed their fury
at me.

c
what they wanted I didn’t have
and what I had
they didn’t want.
red hot mail

I continue to receive many letters from young ladies. evidently they have read some of my books but they hardly ever mention this.

many of their letters are on pink or red stationery and they inform me that they want to kiss my lips and they want to come and stay with me and they say they will do anything and everything for and to me for as long as I can keep up with them. also, the younger ones are quick to mention their age: 21, 22, 23.

these letters are fascinating, of course, but I always trash them for I know that all things have their price especially when they are advertised as being free.
besides,
what does it all mean?
bugs fuck, birds
fuck, horses
fuck, maybe some day they’ll
find that
even wind, water and
rocks
fuck.

and
where were all these eager
girls
when I was starving,
broke, young and
alone?
they were
not born yet, of
course.
I can’t blame them now
for
that.

but I do blame the girls
of my youth
for ignoring me and
for bedding down with all the
other
milkfish souls.
those other lads, I suppose,
were grateful then to
sink their spike into
any willing thing that
moved.

I only wish now some lass had
chanced upon me then
when I so needed her hair blowing in my
face
and her eyes smiling into mine,
when I so needed
that wild music
and that wild female willingness
to be
undone.

but they left me to sit alone
in tiny rented rooms
with only the company
of elderly landladies
and the comings and goings
of unsympathetic
roaches, they
left me terribly alone with
suicide mornings and
park bench
nights.

and now that
they are old
and
I am old

I don’t want to know
them
now

or even to know
their
daughters

even though
the gods
in their infinite wisdom
still refuse to
let me
forget and
rest.
some personal thoughts

ey’re right: maybe it’s been too easy just writing about myself and horses and drinking, but then I’m not trying to prove anything. taking long walks lately has been pleasant and although my desire for the female remains, I find that I needn’t always be on the lookout for new conquests. riding the same mare need not be boring, let the wild young fillies be a problem for other men. I am often satisfied just being alone. I now find people more amusing than disgusting (am I weakening?) and although I still have nights and days of depression the typewriter does not fail me. readers expect continual growth from their poets but at this time just holding (the fort, haha) seems miraculous. long walks, yes. and the ability not to care—at times—as our society erupts and struggles does not mean that I am the victim of artistic loss. solitary evenings behind drawn blinds, being neither rich nor poor, can be satisfying. will madness arrive on schedule? I don’t know and I don’t seek an answer—just a small quiet space between not knowing, not wanting to know and finally finding out.
he’s a dog

who? Chinaski? he hates fags and women.
he’s a drunk. he beats his wife. he’s a Nazi.
he only writes about sex and drinking. who
cares about that?
and he’s a nasty drunk.
I don’t understand what people see in his
writing.
I am the real genius and now
Chinaski has asked his publishers not to
publish me!
I’ve known some of the greatest writers
of our time!
Chinaski has met nobody.
I got him his start!
I got him included in that prestigious
anthology!
how does he repay me?
he writes unflattering things about
me.
and he claims he’s lived with all
those beautiful women.
have you ever seen his face?
who would bed down a man
like that?
and he’s had no education, no formal
training.
he has no idea what a stanza
is.
or for that matter—a line
break.
he just begins at the top
of the page and runs on to the
bottom.
and he says things like,
“Shakespeare bores me.”
Shakespeare!
imagine that!
and the only people he cares to see
now are the Hollywood stars!
he doesn’t want to see anybody else.
well, I don’t want to see him either.
I remember when he lived in rooms the size of a closet.
now that he has had a few books published
he’s too good for the rest of us!

look, I’m tired of talking about Chinaski.
I want you to look at these poems here.
my Collected Works,
my work of a lifetime.
I sent them to Chinaski for a reading,
asked for a foreword or at least a blurb.
that was two months ago and not a word from him since.
not even a sign that he’s received the stuff.

and I got him his start!
I got him in that prestigious anthology!
and then he asked his publishers not to publish me!
at 9:50 the dogs started barking.
a few minutes later there was an earthquake
near Palm Springs.
the television stations break into their
programs with the news.
then the radio stations begin belaboring
the situation and
the earthquake experts at Caltech are
asked for their opinion.

the announcers are in their element.
phones begin to ring
in radio stations all
over the city.
yes, it was a quake.
yes, there will be aftershocks.
yes, we should check for gas leaks
and run a supply of water into the tub.
yes, we are all as one now.
yes, we have something we can all talk about
and we can talk about it
together.
yes, we should all call our friends
to be sure they’re safe.
(I can only wonder,
will some say they were copulating when
it happened?
will others have been sitting on the
toilet?
so many people may have been copulating
or sitting on the toilet!)
the announcer continues:
what’s that, caller?
you say you were copulating on the toilet
when it happened?
this is no time to be funny!
now we will switch to our Eye in the
Sky.
Henderson?
Henderson, are you there?
Henderson?
very well, ladies and gentlemen, we seem to have
lost contact with Henderson
so we’ll go to our roving reporter who is now
on the scene.

Barbara, are you there?
I liked him
he was clever and he could make me laugh
and often when he worked the case next to
mine we would stick our letters together and
talk
even though it was against the
rules.

he had become an American citizen
had found his way into the post office
and owned a movie theatre in
Mexico City.
I usually disliked ambitious fellows
but this guy was humorous so I forgave
him his ambition.

“hey, man,” he asked me one night,
“How long has it been since you had
a piece of ass?”

“god, I don’t know, man, 10 years
I guess.”

“10 years? how old are you?”

“50.”

“Well, listen, I’ve been shacked with this
crazy woman, you know, and I’ve told her all
about you and I thought I might send her
over to your place some night, she could cook
you dinner or something, how about it?”

“please do not project your troubles
upon me,” I told him.

“I didn’t think it would work,”
he said with a grin.
the supervisor walked up behind us and stood there.
“listen, I’ve warned you guys about talking!”

“about talking when?” I asked.

“listen,” he said, “just keep it up and I’ll fry your ass!”

“you win,” I said.

the supervisor walked away.
interesting things like that happened there almost every night!
strangers at the racetrack

I do not want to meet them or their wife or look at photographs of their children.

this is serious business this is war all the time.

I look into their maledict eyes, excuse myself and walk away.

and as Rome burns and as the odds flash on the tote board Lady Luck smiles, crosses her legs and applauds my grit.
will you tiptoe through the tulips with me?

the sky is broken like a wet sack of offal.
the air stinks, I walk into a building,
wait for the elevator, it arrives, I get in and join 3 people with new shoes and dead eyes.
we rise toward the tenth floor.
one of the people is a big woman with long brown hair.
she begins to hum a little song.
I hate it.
I press the button and get off the elevator 2 floors early.
I wait for the next elevator.
it arrives.
it’s empty.
it’s a beautiful elevator.
I go up two floors, get out and walk down the hall looking for room 1002.
I find it.
I go in.
I tell the receptionist that I have a 2 o’clock appointment.
she tells me to be seated, that they will be with me soon.
I sit down.
there is only one other person in the waiting room.
it is the big woman who was humming the little song on the elevator.
now she is silent.
she wears a green dress and pretends to read a magazine.
I look at her legs.
not good legs.
I get up and walk out, walk down
the hall.
I find a water fountain,
bend over, drink some
water.
then I walk back to
1002.
the woman in the green
dress is gone
but where she was
sitting on that chair
there is her green dress,
nicely folded, her shoes
and her panty
hose.
her purse is gone.
the receptionist slides
back the glass partition
and smiles at me:
“we’ll be with you
soon!”
as she slides the
partition closed
I get up and walk out of there,
fast.
I take the elevator down.
soon I am at the first floor and
then I am outside on the
street.
as I walk away from the
building I look back.
flames are rising from
the windows of the tenth
floor and spreading up.
nobody on the street seems
to notice.
I decide to have lunch.
I look for a place to eat.
I walk along humming the
same little song that the big
woman hummed.
it’s now about 95 degrees on a hot
Wednesday afternoon in
August
exactly one year from yesterday.
the novel life

one night I started
shivering, I got *ice cold*, I shivered and
shook for 2 and one half hours, the whole
bed jumped, it was like an
earthquake.

“you’re panicking,” said my girl. “breathe deeply
and try to relax.”

“I’m not panicking,” I said. “death doesn’t
mean shit to me. this is coming from some
place that I don’t understand.”

all during the freezing and shaking,
my only thought was, well, I’ve written my 5th
novel but I haven’t made the final revisions yet.
it’s not fair that I die
now.

then I got well and revised my 5th novel and
it’s supposed to be out next spring, so you
know I won’t die, be killed, or catch a fatal
disease until then.

even in midlife I never
dreamed I’d write a novel
and here I’ve written 5, it’s a bloody
miracle, a shout from the heart,
far from the school yards of hell
which started the luck
and far from
the world of hell that followed and
which kept it
going.
thanks for your help

here
there’s less and less reason to write as they all close in.
I’ve barricaded the doors and windows, have bottled water, canned
food, candles, tools, rope, bandages, toothpicks, catnip,
mouse traps, reading material, toilet paper, blankets, firearms,
mirrors, knives
—cigarettes, cigars, candy—
memories, regrets, my birth certificate,
photographs of
picnics
parades
invasions;
I have roach spray, fine French wine, paper clips and last year’s
calendar because
THIS COULD BE MY LAST POEM.
it could happen and, of course, I’ve considered and
reconsidered
death
but I haven’t yet come up with how, which makes me feel
rather foolish about everything,
especially now.
—just waiting is the worst.
nothing worse than waiting
just waiting. always hated to
wait. what’s there about waiting that’s so
intolerable?
—like you’re waiting for me to finish this
poem and
I don’t know exactly
how
so I won’t.
—so, if you happen to read this
in a magazine or a book
just
rip the page out
tear it up
and that’s the graceful way
to end this poem
once and for all.
I have continued regardless

almost ever since I began writing
decades ago
I have been dogged by
whisperers and gossips
who have proclaimed
daily
weekly
yearly
that
I can’t write anymore
that now
I slip
and fall.

when I first began
there was much complaining about
the content of my
poems and stories.
“who cares about the low life of a
drunken bum?
is that all he can write about,
whores and puking?”

and now
their complaint is:
“who cares about the life of a
rich
bum?
why doesn’t he write about whores
and puking
anymore?”

the Academics consider me
too raw
and I haven’t consorted with most of the
others.

the few people I know well have nothing to do
with poetry.

there has also been envy-hatred
on the part of
some fellow writers
but I consider this
one of my finest
accomplishments.

when I first began this dangerous
game
I predicted that these
very things would
occur.

let them all rail:
if it wasn’t me,
it would just be someone
else.

these
gossips and complainers,
what have they accomplished
anyway?

never having risen
they
can neither
slip nor
fall.
I saw too many faces today
faces like balloons.

at times I felt like
lifting the skin
and asking,
“anybody under there?”

there are medical terms for
fear of height
for
fear of
enclosed spaces.

there are medical terms for
any number of
maladies

so
there must be a medical term
for:
“too many people.”

I’ve been stricken with
this malady
all my life:
there has always been
“too many people.”

I saw too many faces
today, hundreds of
them

with eyes, ears, lips,
mouths, chins and so
forth

and
I’ve been alone
for several hours
now

and
I feel that I am
recovering.

which is the good part
but the problem
remains
that I know I’m going to
have to go out there
among them
again.
moving toward the dark

if we can’t find the courage to go on,
what will we do?
what should we do?
what would you do?
if we can’t find the courage to go on,
then
what day
what minute
in what year
did we go
wrong?
or was it an accumulation of all the
years?

I have some answers.
to die, yes.
to go mad, maybe.

or perhaps to
gamble everything away?

if we can’t find the courage to go on,
what should we do?
what did all the others
do?

they went on
living their lives,
badly.

we’ll do the same,
probably.

living too long
takes more than
time.
yes, I know that you think
I am wrong
but
I know what is right for me
and what
is not.
may I tell you my
dream?

I am surrounded by
thick cement walls,
I am dressed in a red
robe
and I am sitting at an
organ.
there is
not a
sound.
I begin to play the
organ.
the hiss of the notes
is sharp and soft
at the same
time.

it is a slightly bitter
music
but among the dark notes
there are flashes of light and
laughter.

as I play,
the incomprehensible mystery
of the past
and of the present
becomes
comprehensible.
and best of all,
as I play,
nobody hears the music
but me.

the music is only for
me.

that is my
dream.
she looked at me and asked, did you? did you? did you?
on the cuff

Jane would awaken early
(and 8:30 a.m. is early
when you go to bed at
dawn).

she would awaken crying and bitching
for a drink.

she’d keep at it, bitching and wailing,
just laying there flat on her back
and running all that noise
through my
hangover.

until finally, I’d leap out of bed
landing hard on my feet. “ALL RIGHT,
ALL RIGHT, GOD DAMN IT, SHUT UP!”

and I’d climb into the same pants, the
same shirt, the same dirty socks, I was
unshaven, unbrushed, young and mad—
mad, yes, to be shacked with a woman
ten years older than
I.

no job, behind in the rent, the same tired old
script.

down three flights of stairs and out
the back way
(the apartment house manager hung out
by the front entrance,
Mr. Notes-under-the-door, Mr.
Cop-caller, Mr. Listen-we-have-only-nice-
tenants-here).

then down the hill to the liquor
store around the corner, old Don Kaufman
who wired all the bottles
to the counter, even the cheap stuff.

and Don would see me coming, “no, no, not today!”

he meant no booze without cash, I was into him pretty deep but each time I looked at all those bottles I got angry because he didn’t need all those bottles.

“Don, I want 3 bottles of cheap wine.”

“oh no, Hank.”

he was an old man, I terrorized him and part of me felt bad doing it. the old fart should have blown me away with his handgun.

“Hank, you used to be such a nice man, such a gentleman. what’s happened?”

“look, Don, I don’t want a character analysis, I want 3 bottles of cheap wine.”

“when are you going to pay?”

“Don, I’m going to get an income tax refund any day now.”

“I can’t let you have anything, Hank.”

then I’d take hold of the counter and begin rocking it, ripping at it, the bottles rattling, joints and seams giving way
all the while
cussing my ass
off.

“all right, Hank, all
right! ”

then
back up the hill, back through
the rear entrance, up the three
flights of stairs

and there she’d be, still in bed.
she was getting fatter and
fatter, although we seldom
ate.

“3 bottles,” I said, “of
port.”

“thank god!”

“no, thank me . I work the
miracles around
here.”

then
I’d pour the port into
two tall water
glasses

another day
begun.
alone again

I think of each of them
living somewhere else
sitting somewhere else
standing somewhere else
sleeping somewhere else
or maybe feeding a child
or
reading a newspaper or screaming at their new man …

but thankfully my female past (for me) has concluded peacefully.

yet most others seem to believe that a new relationship will certainly work.

that the last one was simply the error of choosing a bad mate.

just bad taste bad luck bad fate.

and then there are some who believe that old
relationships can be
revived and made new
again.

but please
if you feel that way

don’t phone
don’t write
don’t arrive

and meanwhile,
don’t
feel bruised because this
poem will last much
longer than we
did.

it deserves to:
you see
its strength is
that it seeks
no
mate at
all.
he met her at the racetrack, a strawberry blonde with round hips, well-bosomed, long legs, turned-up nose, flower mouth, in a pink dress, wearing white high-heeled shoes.
she began asking him questions about various horses while looking up at him with her pale blue eyes.

he suggested the bar and they had a drink, then watched the next race together.
he hit fifty-win on a sixty-to-one shot and she jumped up and down.
then she whispered in his ear, “you’re the magic man! I want to fuck you!”
he grinned and said, “I’d like to, but Marie … my wife …”
she laughed, “we’ll go to a motel!”

so they cashed the ticket, went to the parking lot, got into her car. “I’ll drive you back when we’re finished,” she smiled.

they found a motel about a mile west. she parked, they got out, checked in, went to room 302.
they had stopped for a bottle of Jack Daniel’s on the way. he stood and took the glasses out of the cellophane. as she undressed he poured two.

she had a marvelous young body. she sat on the edge of the bed sipping at the Jack Daniel’s as he undressed. he felt awkward, fat and old but knew he was lucky: it promised to be his best day ever.
then he too sat on the edge of the bed with her and his Jack Daniel’s. she reached over and grabbed him between the legs, bent over and went down on him.
he pulled her under the covers and they played some more.
finally, he mounted her and it was great, it was a
miracle, but soon it ended, and when she
went to the bathroom he poured two more drinks
thinking, I’ll shower real good, Marie will never
know.

she came out and they sat in bed
making small talk.
“I’m going to shower now,” he told her,
“I’ll be out soon.”

“o.k., cutie,” she said.

he soaped good in the shower, washing away all the
perfume, the woman-smell.

“hurry up, daddy!” he heard her say.

“I won’t be long, baby!” he yelled from the
shower.

he got out, toweled off, then opened the bathroom
door and stepped out.

the motel room was empty.

she was gone.

on some impulse he ran to the closet, pulled the door
open: nothing there but coat hangers.

then he noticed that his clothes were gone, his underwear,
his shirt, his pants with the car keys and his wallet,
all the money, his shoes, his stockings, everything.

on another impulse he looked under the bed.
nothing.

then he saw the bottle of Jack Daniel’s, half full,
standing on the dresser.
he walked over and poured a drink.
as he did he saw the word scrawled on the dresser
mirror in pink lipstick: SUCKER.

he drank the whiskey, put the glass down and watched himself
in the mirror, very fat, very tired, very old.
he had no idea what to do next.
he carried the whiskey back to the bed, sat down, 
lifted the bottle and sucked at it as the light from the 
boulevard came in through the dusty blinds. then he just sat 
and looked out and watched the cars, passing back and 
forth.
the copulation blues

fuck
the phone rings once
stops
fuck
I am on top
we roll off to the side
fuck
she throws one leg over
and plays with her clit
while I harpoon her
fuck
the dog scratches on the door
won’t stop
I get up and let him in
then it’s time to
suck
she’s got it in her mouth
not the dog
me
suck suck
the doorbell rings
a man selling mops made by the blind
we buy a mop for eleven dollars with a little gadget
that squeezes out the water
fuck
now it’s up again
I’m on top again
the phone rings
a girlfriend of hers from Stockton
they talk for ten minutes
finish
I am reading the sports section when
she comes back with a bowl of grapes and
I hand her the woman’s page
no fuck.
the faithful wife

she was a married woman
and she wrote sad
and futile poems
about her married life.
her many letters to me
were the same: sad
and repetitive and
futile.

we exchanged letters for
some years.
I was depressed and suicidal
and had had nothing but
bad luck
with women
so I continued to write
her
thinking, well, maybe
this way
no ill will come to
either one of us.

but
one night suddenly
she was in town, she
phoned me:
“I’m at a meeting of
The Chaparral Poets of
California!”

“o.k.,” I said, “good
luck.”

“I mean,” she asked,
“don’t you want to
see me?”

“oh, yeah …”
she told me she would be waiting at a certain bar in Pasadena.

I had half a glass of whiskey, 2 cans of beer and set out.

I found the bar, went in. there she was (she had sent photos) the little housewife giddy on martinis. I sat down beside her.

“oh my god,” she said, “it’s you! I just can’t believe it!”

I ordered a couple of drinks from the barkeep.

she kissed me right there, tongue and all.

we had a couple more drinks then got into my car and with her holding my cock I drove the freeway back to my place where I sat her down. she began talking about poetry but I got her back into the bedroom got her down onto the bed and stripped down except for the panties. I had never seen such a beautiful body.

I began to slip the
panties off but she said, “no, no, I can TELL you’re very POTENT, you’ll make me PREGNANT!”

“well,” I said, “what the hell!”

I rolled over then and went to sleep.

the next morning
I drove her back to her Chaparral Poets of California.

as the weeks and months went on
her letters kept arriving.
I answered some, then stopped.

but her letters kept coming,
there wasn’t much news
but many photos: photos of her children, photos of her,
there was one photo of her sitting alone on a rock
by the seashore.

then the letters were fewer and fewer and then they stopped.

add some years
some other women
many changes of address
and one day
a new letter found its way to me:

the children were grown and gone.
her husband had lost his part of the business, his partners had knifed him,
they were going to have to sell the house.
I answered that letter.

two or three weeks passed.
her next letter said that there was a divorce and it was final.
she enclosed a photo.
I didn’t know who it was at first.
182 pounds. she said she’d been living on submarine sandwiches and refried beans and was looking for a job.
ever had a job.
she could only type 23 w.p.m.
she enclosed a small chapbook of her poems inscribed “Love.”

I should have fucked her that long-ago night.
I should have been a dog.

it would have been one good night for each of us, especially for me
stuck between suicide and insanity
in bed with the beautiful housewife.
I had never seen a body like hers before.

now I don’t even have her letters.
there are nearly a hundred of them somewhere

and this is a sad futile poem
about it
call.
it is only
once in a while
that you see
someone whose
electricity
and presence
matches yours
at that
moment

and then
usually it’s
a stranger.

it was 3 or 4
years ago
I was walking on
Sunset Boulevard
toward Vermont
when
a block away
I noticed a
figure moving
toward me.

there was something
in her carriage
and in her walk
which
attracted
me.

as we came
closer
the intensity
increased.

suddenly
I knew her entire history: she had lived all her life with men who had never really known her.

as she approached I became almost dizzy.

I could hear her footsteps as she approached.

I looked into her face.

she was as beautiful as I had imagined she would be.

as we passed our eyes fucked and loved and sang to each other

and then she moved past me.

I walked on not looking back.

then when I looked back she was gone.

what is one to do in a world
where almost everything worth having or doing is impossible?

I went into a coffee shop and decided that if I ever saw her again somehow I’d say, “listen, please, I just must speak to you …”

I never saw her again.

I never will.

the iron in our society silences a man’s heart

and when you silence a man’s heart you leave him finally with only a cock.
I went to Vegas last weekend
I had on that blue dress
low-cut and short
the one you like
and I wore my brown boots
and this guy at the crap table
he kept winning
and he kept feeding me chips
he said I brought him luck.
I won a few hundred but
I swear to Christ he must have
won 40 thousand dollars that
night.
he was a great guy.
he told me,
“don’t go away, we’re going to win
the world! ”
it was some night, believe me.
I’ll never forget it.
you don’t like Vegas, do
you? she asked.

I once got married there,
I said.

and what did you do over the
weekend? she asked.

I waxed my car,
I told her.
“the fucking horses,” she said, “you keep bringing me out to these fucking horse races and I lose, god damn it, it’s all so useless and ignorant, I hate it, I just hate it!”

her purse had a long strap and she was swinging it around and around with great velocity.

we were walking out of the track after the last race.

“I told you,” I said, “not to bet the horses with high speed ratings, especially at comparative distances.”

“but shit,” she screamed, “why doesn’t it work? the horse that ran faster last time, why doesn’t he win against the slower ones?”

“anybody can take a short price on exposed form,” I said. “it’s self-defeating.”

“goddamn you!” she screamed. “I hate you and I hate horses!”

and she swung her purse around and around on its long strap.

then there was a hard harsh thud: she had just hit the man on the head who was walking behind us.

the poor soul was badly staggered. an elderly Mexican.

I held him up by the arm.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” I said, “it was an accident! she didn’t mean to hit you with her
purse!
she has lost a great deal of money today
and she’s a little crazy!
I’m very sorry!”

“it’s all right,” the fellow said.

I let go of his arm and we turned and walked on.

“what’s the matter?” she screamed.
“are you afraid of that man?
are you afraid of a real fight?”

“of course I am,” I told her.

“I thought so!” she screamed. “let’s get the hell out of here!”

it was when we got to the car and after I got it started that this thought went through my mind:

baby, I don’t know why the hell I’m living with you!

I stopped at the first light.
then as we drove up Huntington Drive she said to me,

“you know, I don’t know why the hell I’m living with you!”

I kept on driving up Huntington.
then I turned on the car radio.
we had been together one and one-half years.
it’s always easier to meet than to part.

I know because after that day at the track we managed to live together for another year.
hello there!

when death comes with its last cold kiss
I’ll be ready.
(I’ve already experienced my share of
deadly kisses.)
the mad ladies who helped me
consume my hours
my years
have readied me for the
dark.

when death comes with its last cold kiss
I’ll be ready:
just another whore
come to
shake me
down.
the fuck-master

Arnie was ahead of all of us, he began shaving
first and then he flashed rubbers at us
in their mysterious tin cases
and he was the first one with his own automobile
and he always had some girl in his
car, always a new one,
sitting there quiet and frightened
and we knew he was fucking her
and
he knew where to get gin, he’d get them
drunk on gin and then he’d do it to
them!

all that was in jr. high
but when we went on to
high school
Arnie kept going back to jr. high
to pick up the jr. high school girls
in his car (it was almost like he was stuck
back there in jr. high).
well, time passed and then Arnie
dropped out of high school and
I forgot about him.

two years later I was walking
home after classes one afternoon
and here came
Arnie.
Christ, he looked all wizened, almost
vanished.

I had gotten bigger and wiser meanwhile
and I was more comfortable with
things.

I slapped him on the back, “hey, Arnie, you
FUCKER, how ya doin’?

“hi, Hank,” he said.

we shook hands and his hand was trembling and sweaty.

I let go of it.

we stood and looked at each other.

“well, see you around, cousin,” I said.

and I left him standing there.

the poor guy had fucked himself away, completely fucked himself away.

and I still had all mine left!
you’re a screwed-up Romantic, she said, you read all the old philosophers and you listen to Wagner and Mahler and you think the ancient Chinese poets were hot shit, yet you’re depraved, you’re at the racetrack every day and you know that’s sick, and all that wine you drink, it’s eating your brain away, and when you get drunk you talk about what a great fighter you used to be, even though you admit you took more beatings than you gave. you dislike people and love animals. I really don’t know what the hell you’re all about—you just grab at things, you rely solely on instinct and your prejudices and sometimes I think you’re retarded. it was your childhood, you didn’t get any love so it’s hard for you to give any, you just get drunk and call every woman a whore.

listen, I said, isn’t there any more beer? and where the hell are the cigarettes? there were 3 on this table a moment ago and now they’re all gone!
jealousy

I know this fellow, he is amazing, so terribly dull 
but get him in a room full of women 
and he will find the easy one 
and they will begin talking 
and eventually they will vanish 
and they will fuck.

his conversation is quite banal:  
“oh, did your mother come from Michigan? I had a brother who went to the University of Detroit!”

what all this means is that he will talk and talk about anything and listen and listen forever to everything.

the ladies really ate it up.

most of us are unable to accomplish this kind of thing but this fellow can talk dumb crap for hours
and much later
after completing his
coitus
he will walk in
with the smiling lady
like a Lion King
as if the
whole thing
was
an endearing adventure
and somehow
fulfilling
for us
all.
you had gotten out of
jail earlier that morning.
you got home about 4:30 a.m.
and started drinking with those
two dykes.
when I got there around 9 a.m.
you were lying on the couch with them
in your shorts and
undershirt
smoking an old cigar
and holding a beer can in your
hand,
you were a mess,
you had pennies and beer caps
stuck to your back
and the floor was covered with
bottles.

“hi, kid,” you said,
“I just got out … we’re celebrating.”

you were totally gone.
I’d heard some terrible things about you
and finally
I believed them.
dead poet’s wife

she told me that I was insensitive
that I didn’t revere God or love
animals. even flies have souls,
she told me.

we were in a motel room at Laguna
Beach. she was overweight and
so was I and maybe in the
great all-encompassing nature of things
we both had souls
like flies.

I lifted my drink
and emptied it.

“shit,” she said, “William drank too much
too. don’t you know that life can be
beautiful?”

“yes, that’s why I drink.”

“don’t you love the beauty of nature?” she
asked. “don’t you ever think of the miracle
of birth?”

“I think of the miracle of death.”

“I used to think you were a great poet,”
she said, “but now that I’ve met you and
know you better, I don’t think that anymore.
you can’t fuck
me.”

“I don’t have the desire to fuck
you,” I answered, “and you know it.”

it was 3 a.m. and I walked out of the
motel room with a new drink in my hand.
I was dressed in my shorts and I
finished the drink and dropped myself into the swimming pool. all the lights were out. the manager stepped out as I dog-paddled about in the dark.

“What the hell are you doing?” he screamed.
“Turn on the pool lights,” I screamed back.

The lights came on and I paddled around for 5 minutes more, then climbed out and walked back into the motel room.

She had her back turned to me in the bed. I got in with a new drink and looked at my feet sticking out from under the covers. I decided that I had the most beautiful feet of any man on earth. Then the pool lights went out and all I could see was the glowing end of my cigarette. I decided that in the great all-encompassing nature of things it must certainly have a soul too.
we were having lunch
at Hal’s Diner.
“you know,” he told me, “after we made love
the last time
she lay in my arms and cried. she said,
‘oh my god, I miss him so!’
she was talking about you, Hank.”

“that’s just the way it is, Jack, with all
my women: while I’m with them they hate
me but after I leave them they love
me.
I’m never tempted to go back to them, however, I don’t even
consider it.”

“you don’t mind that I slept with her,
Hank?”

“did she cook you a good breakfast afterwards,
Jack?”

“I don’t remember.”

“well, I’ll tell you: she didn’t.”

“is that the reason you left her:
because she couldn’t cook
a good breakfast?”

“I never eat breakfast, Jack.”

“then what happened?”

“too often, after we made love, she
began crying in my arms about how she
missed some other guy.”

“well,” he said, “I’ll be a son-of-a-bitch.”
“don’t be,” I said, “just pass the salt and pepper.”
endless love

I’ve seen old married couples
sitting in their rockers
across from one another
being congratulated
for staying together 60 or 70
years,
either of whom
would
long ago have
settled for something
else, anything else,
but fate
fear and
circumstances have
bound them
eternally together;
and as we tell them
how wonderful
their great and enduring love
is
only they
really know
the truth
but they don’t tell us
that from the first day they
met
somehow
it didn’t mean
all that much:
like
waiting for death
now
it was just an endless determination to
endure.
she lived in Venice
on some 2nd floor
and I’d knock and she’d
let me in
and there was no bed
just a mat on the floor
and candles
everywhere
there was even a
piano
and there was also a
guitar
and while we sipped
white wine
she’d sit on the
floor
and play the
guitar
and sing songs
her own lyrics
godawful stuff
about the
soul
and I’d go to the
window
and look out and
say
“nice view but let’s
work out.”

“work out?”
she’d ask. “what
do you mean?”

“I mean
I’ll suck your tits
and stuff.”
“I want you to hear this new song.”

she’d start right in.

she had an awful voice but nice long hair.

I’d get playful and hammer on the piano just so I wouldn’t have to listen to her.

I was in a bad way: in between real women and just doing time with her.

one night I asked her, “listen, how do you make it?”

“make it?”

“I mean how do you pay the rent, all that?”

“oh, I’m a marriage counselor.”

“really?”

“yes.”

“you been married?”
“3 times.”

I finally stopped going to her place but somehow she found out where I lived and then came to see me.

She said we couldn’t have sex because she was going to be married again and didn’t want to be untrue to him.

She described her boyfriend in detail to me then took out her guitar and started singing.

Later that night I sodomized her and told her not to come around any more.

I got lucky: she didn’t.

Soon after that I met a plump Jewish girl who promised she’d save me from
myself.

I thought that would be a very good idea.
there were 4 of them between the ages of 30 and 45 and all they talked about was men and sex, I mean, it was all-consuming, to them there wasn’t anything else.

I was living with the youngest sister and she had me performing sexual acts I had never even heard of before.

“now, let’s try this.”

“all right.”

at first it was lively, adventurous, even humorous but as the months passed and the nights added up I began to resent it, like—oh, here we go with SEX again! (she also liked to do it in strange places like public parks or in automobiles while I was driving.)

I began to feel that all the sisters were crazy; in fact, one of them had been in a madhouse (the one I was with).

the sisters had boisterous, screeching laughs, really rather ugly laughs and I began drinking more so I could tolerate them and their laughter.

the drinking made the sister I was with quite angry because sometimes I would just go to sleep instead of performing.

I finally told my lady that I couldn’t take it anymore and that it was over and she seemed to accept that at first but finally it was not to be so: she began to phone me continually, mostly at night, around 3 or 4 a.m.: “YOU’VE GOT SOMEBODY THERE,
HAVEN’T YOU?”

she followed me everywhere. once I took some clothes in to the cleaners and when I came out my car was nearly destroyed—ripped upholstery, shattered windows, torn dashboard, all within 3 or 4 minutes. it looked as if a tiger had been in the car.

another time I was making love to another lady when my bedroom window was smashed open and there was the sister’s face, twisted, spitting at me, “YOU FUCKING BASTARD!” then she was gone.

the lady in bed was terrified, trembling. “what was that?”

“nothing, baby, nothing.”

the sex sister also tried to murder me a couple of times in a couple of different ways and just missed both times.

let me tell you that the police weren’t much help, they picked her up but she somehow convinced them that I was at fault.

“there’s nothing wrong with that lady,” they told me, both times.

two squads of officers.

maybe she had sex with the whole gang of them?

fortunately, as the months went on she gradually abandoned her terrorist attacks until finally it was just a weepy phone call or two and then a letter or two, then silence.

she probably found somebody who could perform all the tricks that she had taught me and could probably perform them better. I hope so.

and I just hope he likes sex 62 times a month.
to the ladies no longer here

it’s just as well

you should see me now

driving to the racetrack

a tiny German flag decorating the rear window.

I dislike the heavy traffic on the boulevard and I drive through the back streets of the black ghetto.

the years have gone by quickly.

Death sits in the seat next to me.

we make a lovely couple.

a man finds consolation while driving and waiting.

one consolation is how lucky I am that I never settled down permanently with any one of the ladies.

driving along, that thought comes back to me and falls at my feet.

Death picks it up looks at me shudders and quickly fastens his
seat belt.
she’s got a 6-month-old baby
and a 9-year-old son,
but she said
it sure beats the factories.

why do those guys just sit there and
stare at that thing
when a woman’s dancing? I asked.

they memorize it, she said, then they
go home and flog off. I danced last
night and nobody watched me.
they were all watching some movie
where this woman was fingering
herself, and
after I finished my dance
I stood there and told them,
you guys are going to go crazy watching that
shit. you don’t know where you’re at
anymore.

you know, some of those guys freaked
out? about 7 of them got up and
left.

no shit, I said.

no shit, she said. I’ve worked 3 different places
since I’ve seen you
last. but it beats the factories and
it beats the
streets.
at least you can catch a drink
once in a while.

yes, that’s right,
I told her,
that’s right.
Ma Barker loves me

lying in the sack in the dark
sick from days of drinking.

head hurting
tongue thick.

watching tv
phone off the hook.

tired of trying to relate to the
female,
I watch tv.

the walls stacked up around me
like shields.

I watch these guys blasting holes
in people
with their submachineguns.

they need money
they have trouble with their molls
things keep
screwing up.

I get up to piss during a tire
commercial.

when I get back the main guy is
lying out in a field with his
moll.

there’s a stream below them.

it’s peaceful but he has a cigar
stuck into his mouth and a .357 magnum
resting in his shoulder holster.

the moll leans over him
she has blonde wispy hair which flicks in the wind.

she says, “Johnny, why don’t you give it up?”

“give what up?” he asks.

“you know, Johnny,” she says, “killing people and all that …”

“now, baby,” he says, “I’m just trying to get by.”

“you could give all that up, Johnny, we could settle down in a nice little place with a picket fence and have babies …”

“ah, now, baby, that life ain’t for me.”

“well, Johnny,” she smiles, “it’s either give it up or lose me …”

he sits up
pushes her away:

“no, baby! you don’t mean that?”

“yes,” she says, “I do, Johnny!”

“I’m not going to live without you, baby,” he says

takes out the .357
jams it between her legs and pulls the trigger.

I get up
go to the refrigerator and get a beer.

when I come back
there’s a shaving cream commercial on.

I drain the beer
toss it in the basket
put the phone back on the hook
dial a number.
she answers and I say, “listen, baby, I can’t have you around anymore, you get in the way. sorry.”
I hang up
take the phone back
off the hook.
time for another beer.
I like gangster movies best.
it’s stupid, I know, but I have an
ability to feel happy for little or no reason,
it’s not a great elation, it’s
more like a steady
warmth—
something like a warm heater on a cold
night.

I have no religion, and not even a
decent philosophy
and I’m not
stupid: I know that death will finally
arrive
but don’t consider even this to be
a negative
factor.

which is to say that in spite of
everything, I feel good
most of the
time.

I appear to handle setbacks, bad
luck, minor tragedies, without
difficulty, my mood remains
unchanged.
much experience, perhaps, has taught
me
how to remain unmoved.

yet there is one situation
I can’t endure:
a bitter, depressed, angry
woman
can still murder any
good feelings
that I might have—and
just like that I despair and
fall into a black pit.
this occurs with some regularity and unfortunately in the wink of an eye I am sullen and depressed.

and that’s stupid, I should be able to ignore female disorders even as the dark shit (that despite the dark shit) floods my brain.
do you believe that a man can be taught to write?

there was my cheap hotel; I was up on the 4th floor; I’d bring a lady in from the bar 2 or 3 times a week and we’d burst into that lobby like we wanted to wreck something, and the desk clerk, a really nice fellow, was terrified of me, I was big of chest and gut and when the writing was going badly, which it often was, upon entering with my lady, I’d take it out on the desk clerk: “hey, buddy, I think I’ll take one of your legs, twist it up the middle of your back and wind you like a clock!” I had him so scared he only called the cops once or twice and I had fun with the cops—barricading the door and listening to the dumb useless double-talk that cops liked to use; I always wore them down and they never got in.

up there I stripped to my undershirt and shorts, I was nuts, had very muscular legs, strutted up and down the room saying, “look at my legs, baby! you ever seen legs like that?”

I always pretended to be the toughest guy in town but when it actually came to fighting I wasn’t all that good: I could take a hell of a punch and didn’t have much fear but my own left hook and right cross were missing, and worse, I couldn’t seem to get the hatred going, it all seemed a joke to me, even when some guy was crushing my head against the edge of some urinal. but let’s forget all that! up on that 4th floor, I was best, the red neon sign near the downtown library flashing CHRIST SAVES, me strutting about and proclaiming, “nobody knows I’m a genius but me!” and all the time I was strutting I would glance over at my lady of the night, looking at those legs, those high heels, thinking, I’m going to rip the love out of those high-heeled shoes and those ankles and those thighs and that dumb pitiful face, I’m going to make her come alive! and poor Hemingway, I thought, never met dolls like I’ve met dolls!

which was true.

he would have walked away.
hail and farewell

as gentle as a butterfly
fluttering in the
murdered light
you came through here
like fire singing
and when it was over
the walls came down
the flags went up
and love was finished.

you left behind a pair of shoes
an old purse
and some birthday and
Xmas cards
from me all
held together
by a green rubber
band.

all well and good enough,
I suppose,
because
when your lover is gone,
thank the gods,
the silence is
final.
weep

weep for the indifference of flying fish
weep for the absence of long-haired blondes
weep for the sadness of yourself
weep for Bach
weep for the extinct animals
weep for grandfather’s clock
weep for weeping
because no one cares

the doors open in and out
the lights go on and off
teeth are pulled

I forgive the indifference of flying fish
I forgive the butterfly and the moth
I forgive the first woman who held my psyche
in her fingertips when

I was sold into captivity
long ago.
it’s a lonely world
of frightened people.
poetry has come a long way, though very slowly;
you aren’t as old as I am
and I can remember reading
magazines where at the end of a poem
it said:
Paris, 1928.
that seemed to make a
difference, and so, those who could afford to
(and some who couldn’t)
went to
PARIS
and wrote.

I am also old enough so that I remember when poems
made many references to the Greek and Roman
gods.
if you didn’t know your gods you weren’t a very good
writer.
also, if you couldn’t slip in a line of
Spanish, French or
Italian,
you certainly weren’t a very good
writer.

5 or 6 decades ago,
maybe 7,
some poets started using
“i” for “I”
or
“&” for “and.”

many still use a small
“i” and many more continue to use the
“&”
feeling that this is
poetically quite effective and
up-to-date.
also, the oldest notion still in vogue is that if you can’t understand a poem then it almost certainly is a good one.

poetry is still moving slowly forward, I guess, and when your average garage mechanics start bringing books of poesy to read on their lunch breaks then we’ll know for sure we’re moving in the right direction.

& of this
i am sure.
he lived in the Village
in New York
in the old days
and only after he died
did he get a write-up
in a snob magazine,
a magazine which had
never printed his
poems.

he came from the days
when poets called
themselves
Bohemians.
he wore a beret and a
scarf
and hung around the
cafés,
bumped drinks,
sometimes got a
night’s lodging from the
rich
(just for
laughs)
but mostly
he slept in the alleys
at night.
the whores knew him
well
and gave him
little
hand-outs.

he was a communist
or a
socialist
depending upon what
he was
reading
at that
moment.

it was 1939
and he had a
burning hatred
in his heart
for the
Nazis.

when he
recited his poems
in the street
he always
ended up
frothing about the
Nazis.

he passed out
little stapled
pages
of his
poems
and
he wrote
with a
simple
intensity.

he was good
but not
great.

and even the good poems
were not
that
good.

anyhow
he was an
attraction;
the tourists always
asked for
him.

he was always
in love
with some
new whore.

he had a
real
soul
and the usual
real
needs.

he stank
and wore cast-off clothes
and he screamed
when he spoke
but
at least
he wasn’t anybody
but
himself.

the Village was
his
Paris.
but unlike
Henry Miller
who made
failure
glorious
and finally
lucrative
he didn’t know
quite how
to accomplish
that.

instead of being
a
genius-freak
he was just
a
freak-freak.

but most of
the writers and
painters
who also had failed
loved him
because he
symbolized
for them
the possibility
of being
recognized.
they too wore
scarves and
berets
and did more
complaining than
creating.

but then they
lost him.

he was found
one morning
in an
alley
wrapped around
his latest
whore.

both of them
had their
throats
cut
wide.

and
on the wall
above them
in their
blood
were scrawled
the words:
“COMMIE PIG!”

another freak
had found
him?
a
freak- Nazi?
or maybe
just a
freak-freak?

but his murder finally created the fame he had always wanted, though it was to be but temporary.

he was to have a final fling in this his crazy life and death.

he had left an envelope with a prominent Matron of the Arts, marked: TO BE OPENED ONLY IN THE EVENT OF MY DEATH.

all during his stay in the Village he had spoken about a mysterious WORK IN PROGRESS.

he had claimed he’d written a GIGANTIC WORK, more pages than a couple of telephone
books.
it would
dwarf Pound’s
*Cantos*
and put a
headlock
on the
Bible.

the instructions
were
specific:
the WORK was
in an iron
chest
buried
in a graveyard
30 yards
south and west
of a certain tree
(indicated on a
hand-drawn
map)
the tree
where he claimed
Whitman once
rested
while he wrote
“I Celebrate Myself.”

the ground
all about was
soon
dug up and
searched.

nothing was
found.

some Romantics
claimed it was
still
there
somewhere.

Realists
claimed it never had
been there.

maybe the
Nazis
got there
first?

at any rate
it was
shortly after
that
that
almost all the
poets
in the
Village

and most poets
living
elsewhere

stopped
wearing
scarves and
berets
and reluctantly
went off to
war.
if death was staring you in the face,  
he was asked, what would you say to your readers?  
nothing, he told the interviewer, would you please  
order another bottle of wine?  
he was an old, tired writer from Los Angeles, hungover,  
and his French publisher had pushed one more  
interview on him.

the free dinners and drinks usually  
were great  
but now he was fed up.  
the many recent interviews had become  
frustrating and boring.  
he figured either his books would sell on their own  
or fail the same way.  
he hadn’t written them for money anyhow but to keep  
himself out of the madhouse.  
he tried to tell the interviewers this but they just went on with  
their usual  
banal questions:  
have you met Norman Mailer?  
what do you think of Camus, Sartre, Céline?  
do your books sell better here than in America?  
did you really work in a slaughterhouse?  
do you think Hemingway was homosexual?  
do you take drugs?  
do you drink when you write?  
are you a misanthrope?  
who is your favorite writer?

the interviewer ordered another bottle of wine.  
it was 11:15 p.m. on the patio of a hotel.  
there were little white tables and chairs scattered about.

theirs was the only one occupied.  
there was the interviewer, a photographer,  
the writer and his wife.
have you had sex with children? the interviewer asked.
no, answered the writer.
in one of your stories a man has sex with a child and you describe it very graphically.
well? asked the writer.
it was as if you enjoyed it, the interviewer said.
I sometimes enjoy writing, the writer said.
you seemed to have experienced what you were describing, said the interviewer.
I only photograph life, said the writer. I might write about a murderer but this doesn’t mean that I am one or would enjoy being one.

ah, here’s the wine, said the interviewer.
the waiter took out the cork, poured a bit for him.
the interviewer took a taste, nodded to the waiter and the waiter poured all around.
the wine goes fast when there’s four of us, said the writer.

do you drink because you are afraid of life?
the interviewer asked.

disgusted with life is more like it, said the writer, and with you.
we were up very early, said the writer’s wife.
he’s given at least a dozen interviews over the past 3 days and he’s tired.

I am from one of the city’s most important newspapers, said the interviewer.

fuck you, said the writer.

what? said the interviewer. you can’t talk to me like that!

I am, said the writer.

all you American writers think you’re God, said the interviewer.
God is dead, said the writer, remember?
	his interview is over! said the interviewer.

the photographer quickly drank his wine, then he and the interviewer stood up and walked out.

you better get yourself together, said the wife to the writer, you’re on television tomorrow night.

I’ll tell them to kiss my ass, said the writer.

you can’t do that, said his wife.

baby, said the writer, lifting his wineglass, watch me!

you’re just a drunk who writes, said his wife.

that’s better than a drunk who just drinks, said the writer.

his wife sighed.
well, do you want to go back to the room or to another café?

to another café, said the writer.

they rose and walked slowly out of the restaurant, he looking through his pocket for cigarettes, she looking back over her shoulder as if something was following them.
alone in this chair

hell, hell, in hell,
trapped like a fish to bake
here and burn.
hell, hell, inside my brain
inside my gut,
hell hanging
twisting
screaming
churning
then crouching still
both inside
and outside of
me.
hell,

hell in the trees,
on the ground,
crawling on the rug.
hell,
bouncing off
the
walls and
ceiling as
I sit in this chair here
as outside
through the window
I watch
6 or 7 telephone wires
taut against the
sky
as fresh hell slides
toward me
along the wires.

hell is where I
am.
and I am
here.

there isn’t any
place
else.

see me now
reaching for a
cigarette,
my hand pushing
through boiling space.

there is nothing more
I can do.

I light the
cigarette,
lean back here
alone
in
this
chair.
“correctly so,” I told him,  
“I would much rather they all  
robbed banks or sold  
drugs and if you please may  
I have a vodka-7?”

“I agree,” said the  
barkeep mixing the  
drink, “I’d rather they  
collected garbage  
or ran for Congress  
or taught  
biology.”

“or,” I said, reaching  
for the drink, “sold  
flowers on the corner  
or gave back rubs or  
tried blowing glass.”

“absolutely right,” said  
the barkeep  
pouring himself a  
drink, “I’d rather they  
plowed the good  
earth or  
delivered the mail.”

“or,” I said, “mugged  
old ladies or  
pulled teeth.”

“or directed traffic or  
worked the factories,”  
said the barkeep, “or  
cought the bus to  
the nearest harvest.”

“that will be a great day,” I said,
“when it arrives.”

“beautiful,” said the barkeep, “but isn’t it the mediocrity of the masses which diminishes the wealth of its entertainers and artists?”

“absolutely not,” I said, “and may I have another vodka- 7?”

“if I was the policeman of the world,” the barkeep continued, moving the drink toward me, “many a darling poet would either be allowed to starve or forced to get a real job.”

“and correctly so,” I said, raising my drink.

“that will be a beautiful day,” said the barkeep, “when it arrives.”

“a hell of a beautiful day,” I agreed.
was Li Po wrong?

you know what Li Po said when asked if he’d rather be an Artist or Rich?
“I’d rather be Rich,” he replied, “for Artists can usually be found sitting on the doorsteps of the Rich.”
I’ve sat on the doorsteps of some expensive and unbelievable homes myself but somehow I always managed to disgrace myself and / or insult my Rich hosts (mostly after drinking large quantities of their fine liquor).
perhaps I was afraid of the Rich?
all I knew then was poverty and the very poor, and I felt instinctively that the Rich shouldn’t be so Rich, that it was some kind of clever twist of fate based on something rotten and unfair.
of course, one could say the same thing about being poor, only there were so many poor, it all seemed completely out of proportion.
and so when I, as an Artist, visited the homes of the Rich, I felt ashamed to be there, and I drank too much of their fine wines, broke their expensive glassware and antique dishes, burned cigarette holes in their Persian rugs and mauled their wives, reacting badly to the whole damned situation.
yet I had no political or social solution.
I was just a lousy houseguest, I guess, and after a while I protected both myself and the Rich by rejecting their
invitations
and everybody felt much better after
that.
I went back to
drinking alone,
breaking my own cheap glassware,
filling the room with cigar
smoke and feeling
wonderful
instead of feeling trapped,
used,
pissed on,
fucked.
the phone doesn’t ring.
the hours hang limp and empty.
everybody else is having it
all.

it seems to never end.

one night it got very bad.
I needed just a voice.

I dialed the time on the
telephone and listened to her
voice as she said:

“it’s eleven ten and ten seconds.
it’s eleven ten and twenty seconds.
it’s eleven ten and thirty seconds …”

then she told me that it
was:
“eleven ten and forty seconds.”

she might have saved my life
although I’m not sure.
it reads:
Mr. Chinaski, we stopped by to see if you’re interested in a free lunch. we’ll stop by again later this afternoon. we’ll bring some beer. it is now 2 p.m. call meanwhile if you’re interested.

397- 8211

Steve and Frank
on the sunny banks of the university

I think that all the decades of teaching English Lit has gotten to him.

his own writing has become more and more comfortable.
he has survived, he has held on to his job, he has changed wives (often).
but it was all just too easy, really, teaching those Lit classes
and coasting along and by doing that he has missed out on something important,
reality perhaps,
and it’s beginning to show.
each new book of poetry gets more and more comfortable (as I said earlier).

I think good poetry should startle, shatter and, yes, entertain while getting as close to the truth as possible.
I can get all the comfort I need from a good cigar.

if this gentleman expects his own poetry to be taught by others in future English Lit classes
he’d better get his ass out of the warm sand and start splashing in the bloody waters of real life.

or maybe he’d just rather be a good old guy forever, adored and comforted by the eager young coeds.
that’s not so bad, really, considering that you get paid very well for that.
vacation in Greece

it was 4 years ago, she told me, and we were on a private beach, on the Mediterranean my sister and I—
my sister is 18 and she has long and lovely legs, and these 3 beautiful young men bronzed and slim put their blankets near ours; one was an Englishman, one was a Scotsman and the other might have been Greek or Italian. my sister and I started spreading oil on our bodies, you know, and it was all going well, you could feel the vibes— then this boy of 12 walked up, he was bowlegged, had acne, a very scruffy boy, and he started speaking to the men and the men talked to him and one of the men gave him a cigarette and the boy stood there smoking the cigarette not inhaling and then one of the men got up and went into the water with the boy behind some rocks where the water was shallow and the man and the boy stayed there quite a while, then they came back. then the men got up, folded their blankets and walked off. the boy stood there smoking another cigarette, not
inhaling.
I asked him:
“how did you get in here? it’s a private beach.”
the boy pointed to a fence behind us.
“it was easy,” he said, “there’a hole in the fence.”
his English was terrible.
and then he walked away along the shore with his bowlegs, such a scruffy boy.
the spill

the jock’s horse
the 7 horse
clipped the heels
of the horse
in front of
him

stumbled and
fell
throwing the
jock
over its
head
and onto the
track before
some
oncoming
horses

most of
which
avoided the
jock’s
still
form

except for
the 9
horse

who gave him
one step
in the middle
of his
back

you could
see
the hoof
dig
in

then the
field was
past
and the
ambulance was
on its
way

the jock wore
Kelly green
silks,
black
sleeves.

3 or 4
people were now
gathered around
the
still
jock.

as the ambulance
moved in

the man behind
me
said to his
companion,
“let’s go get
a
beer.”
it’s freezing again, and the snitch is sucking up
to the warden. I’m down $20 with six to go, someone stole
the bell and Darlene broke her left kneecap; the hunter
weeps in the bracken, and in the mirror I see pennies for
eyes; this war is like a dead green shawl
as the last salamander
gets ready to
die.
I am down $50 with four to go,
the boy broke the mower on an apricot and
the skyscraper trembles in the bleeding January night.
I am down $100 with two to go, I will double up
face down, go for broke, and it
might be time for a trip to Spain or to buy
one last pair of new shoes.
it gets sad; the walls grip my
fingers and smile;
I know who killed Cock Robin; I know who tricked Benny
the Dip; and
now somebody is picking the lock and the searchlights are
out of focus.
I’m down $500 with one to go,
my horse explodes in the middle of the dream,
it’s really freezing now, can’t
get it up
can’t
get it down
can’t
get it;
a chorus of purple songbirds
shakes the trees; I watch a parade of wooden monkeys
burn; as the tin cock crows, I just don’t
understand.
he was my guru.
he was a big man, bearded, self-assured.
he sat in one chair.
I sat in another.
we had been up together many days
and nights.

there had been an hour’s heavy
silence.
then he leaned forward slightly
and whispered,
“you don’t have to worry about
worms when you die, Chinaski,
worms don’t infest dead
bodies, it’s a fairy tale.”

“that’s good to know,” I
said.

then we fell into another
hour’s heavy
silence.
bombed away

when I was younger
when we were all younger
one of T. S. Eliot’s most admired
and envied
lines
was:
“this is the way the world
ends,
not with a bang
but a
whimper.”

before Hiroshima
we all wished we had written that immortal
line.

however
poor T.S. lost
much of his immortality
because of that
monstrous
event.

but at least
he had his immortal status
for a
while

and like the old fighter
Beau Jack said
after blowing his fortune on
parties, suckerfish and
women:

“it beats not ever having been
the champ.”

these days
we don’t know how
or
when
the world will
conclude.

and under the circumstances,
the idea of
an immortal line or poem
seems somewhat
optimistic

not to mention the fact that
most of us now
do our whimpering long
before any possible
end.
the swimming pool will be going here

Mr. Cobweb, call me when the applause breaks out like a sprinkle of henshit; 1671 wasn’t so long ago and tomorrow waits like a headless anvil; but I’m still able to reach for my handkerchief and wave to the ever-dancing girls (what dolls!) stomping away as my brain in that dark cellar simmers in the stew.
sure, good things keep happening, eh? I mean, sometimes I fear that I’m going to explode right through the top of my skull: teeth, lungs, intestines, liver, bladder, balls and all, and for hardly any reason! I’ve got to be nuts, you know! hope so.

Mr. Cobweb, call me, I have an answering service, and oh yes, my friend the great actor stuck his foot down into the dirt behind his mansion in Malibu Canyon and told me: “the swimming pool will be going here.”

mainly, though, what I like is how the sun keeps on trying and we build sidewalks and walk on them, we go up and down in elevators, read newspapers, take issue with events singular and worldly, keep exercising, we keep going and going, it’s all rather fresh and exciting, and new girls continue to get up to dance, those beautiful dancing girls, I clutch the blade in my teeth and grin at them, Mr. Cobweb!

and, Mr. Cobweb, there was another great actor, he was sitting with his drink, looking down into his drink, he had a long thin sad neck and I walked over and said, “listen, Harry, you’re always depressed, get over it, you’re at the top of your game, things could be a lot worse, you could be servicing Hondas at Jiffy Lube …”

Mr. Cobweb, even 1332 wasn’t so long ago, we are all blessed in this life, looking around and trying to fit ourselves into the puzzle, it takes time, a lifetime, many lifetimes, but we have to keep trying and that takes guts. me? shit, I’ve had enough, it’s grand, sure, but let me nudge out now. I distrust the whole tawdry game.

Mr. Cobweb, Al Capone has been dead a long time but it doesn’t seem so
long to me, I sit within these brown-yellow walls and there’s an old rose stuck in an old drinking glass, it’s been there several months looking at me and I reach out and touch it—the petals are still there but they feel strangely like paper; why shouldn’t they, huh?

Mr. Cobweb, you tell the funniest jokes I’ve ever heard!

so call me any time, I always answer on the fourth ring, for sure.
I was in one of those after-hour places.
I don’t know how long I had been there when
I noticed a dead cigar in my hand. I attempted
to light it and burned my nose.

“you ever meet Randy Newhall?” the guy
next to me asked.

“no …”

“he went through college in 2 years instead
of 4.”

I asked the barkeep to bring us a couple more
drinks.

“then he walked into the largest employment agency
in town, they had 50 applications for this
one job at a talent agency but
he just talked to the manager for 15
minutes and was hired.”

“uh …”

“he began in the mailroom and in 12 months he
was making package deals for tv programs
and movies.
nobody ever got out of the mailroom that
fast, and next he married a rich girl
just out of law school.”

“yeah?”

“after that he spent most of his
time putting golf balls into a water glass
in his office.
he made the work look easy …”

“listen,” I asked, “what time is it? the
battery in my watch went dead.”

“… and in another year he was promoted to upper management and a year later he took over the whole place. he was the youngest CEO in America.”

“you buy the next round,” I told him.

“sure, well, he doubled his work hours and after a while his wife left him—women don’t understand.”

“What?”

“guys like him.”

“Oh …”

“he didn’t contest the divorce. he just moved on. it didn’t faze him one bit. it was amazing, you’d see him having dinner with congressmen, with the mayor.”

“are you going to get the next round?”

he told the barkeep, who brought two more.

“then he began working 16- and 18-hour days and after work he’d frequent after-hour places above the Sunset Strip, to relax, to try to unwind.”

“A place like this, huh?”

“This was the place. he didn’t try to close deals, he just wanted to relax with the actors, the artists, the screenwriters, the directors, the producers, the investors and so forth. and, of course, there were also the beautiful girls.”

“Here?”

“Yes, look around …”
I did.

“well, it was just a matter of time until he discovered coke, then more coke, mostly with his new friends after the after-hour places closed.”

“flying, what?”

“yes, but professionally he continued to function well until he began doing crank.”

“it really keeps you awake, huh? my round to buy …”

I ordered two more.

“after some months he felt more and more depressed, he took 6 weeks off and went to Hawaii, resting, laying in the sun.”

“did he screw?”

“he told me that he tried. anyhow, he came back and he used to talk to me here just like you’re doing now.”

“oh.”

“then he became obsessed with some Mexican Real Estate Dream which he would bankroll with a Mexican friend who was powerful in politics there, the master plan was that within 8 years they would control a real estate empire and several banks before the government could stop them.

“drink up,” I suggested.

“well, they didn’t quite get it rolling. he lost everything. at the office he became difficult and unreasonable, smashing ashtrays, throwing the phone out the window, once pouring a can of Tab down his secretary’s
blouse. yet somehow he managed to retain an obnoxious brilliance and he remained almost functional which was better than most of the others there.”

“most others don’t have much.”

“that’s true. anyhow, one day he arrived at work dressed in a house painter’s outfit, you know, the white overalls, the little white cap, carrying a brush and a bucket of paint. that’s when the Board of Directors insisted on a 3-month leave of absence.”

“BARKEEP!” I yelled. “COUPLE MORE!”

“he sold his house and moved into an apartment on Fountain Avenue. his friends came by for a while, then they stopped.”

“suckerfish like winners.”

“yes, and then there was a period when he tried to get back with his x-wife but she didn’t want any more of that. she was with a young sculptor from Boston who was immensely talented and who taught at an Ivy League university.”

“a rough turn of events,” I said.

“anyhow, our friend had this apartment on Fountain Avenue and one day the manager who lived in the apartment below noticed water coming down through the ceiling …”

“oh?”

“he ran upstairs and knocked on the door, there was no answer, he took out his key and opened it, went in and there was Randy standing there like a statue, his head down in the bathroom sink, the water running and overflowing, running over the floor, and the manager wasn’t sure what to think, it looked so strange, and he went over and saw that the head was wedged there in the sink, and the manager felt his legs, his back, and everything was stiff, rigor mortis had long ago set in, there he was standing with his head down under the water and the overhead light on …”
“listen, Monty,” I said, “your name is ‘Monty,’ isn’t it?”

“yes, you’ve got it right.”

“I drove over here earlier but that was such a long time ago. do you remember if the parking lot is out front or in the back?”

“it’s straight out back.”

“goodnight, Monty.”

“goodnight.”

fortunately after all that I still knew front from back. I climbed down off that bar stool and made my way as best I could to the exit.
my turn

the male reviewer writes that he
misses the poems about
the drinking bouts and the hard
women and the low
life.

the female reviewer says that
all I write about
is drinking and puking and bad
women
and a life nobody could
ever care
about.

their reviews are
on the same page
and are about
the same book

and
this is a poem
about
book reviewers.
skinny-dipping

as a young man
he went skinny-dipping with
Kafka
but it was too much
for him:
the sun burned him badly
and he was in bed
for two days
with a high
fever.
he was fat
and in great pain
as he twisted in the
sheets.

now Kafka didn’t get burned
and he visited the fat
boy
and the fat boy’s
mother
gave Kafka
hell.

and life continued.

and the fat boy
went on to write many
books and he became
famous in his own
time
while Kafka only wrote
a few books and remained
unknown.

the fat boy
even went on to live
comfortably in Paris
with a wife of some
importance
and they mixed with
many of the
great artists of their
day

while Kafka remained
unknown

and life continued.
a close call

pushing my cart through the supermarket
today
the thought crossed my mind
that I could start
knocking cans from the shelves and swiping
at rolls of towels, toilet paper and silver foil,
I could throw oranges, bananas, tomatoes
into the air, I could take cans of beer from the refrigerator and roll them down the aisle, I could pull up women’s skirts and grab their asses, I could ram my shopping cart through the plate glass window.

then another thought occurred to me: people generally consider the consequences before they do something like that.

I pushed my cart along.

a young woman in a checkered skirt was bending over in the pet food section. I seriously considered grabbing her ass but I didn’t, I rolled on by.

I had the items I needed and I pushed my cart up to the checkout stand. a lady in a red smock with a nameplate waited on me. the nameplate indicated her name was “Robin.”

Robin looked at me: “how you doing?” she asked.
“fine,” I told her.

and then she began tabulating and bagging my purchases with no idea that the fellow standing there before her had just two minutes ago been one small step away from the madhouse.
like a rock

through early evening
I
sit alone
listening to the sound of
the heater;
I fall into myself
like a rock dropped into some
ungrand canyon.
it hits bottom. I
lift my drink.

unfortunately
my hell is not any more hell
than the hell of a
fly.

that’s what makes it
difficult. and
nothing is less
profound than a
melancholy
drunk.

I must remember:
the death or the murder of a
drunk matters
less
than
nothing.

spider, on the wall:
why do you take
so long?
the waitress at the yogurt shop

is young, quite young,
and the boys are lined up on the bench
waiting for a table
as she waits on customers.

the boys say sly and
daring things to her
in very low voices.

they all want to
bed down with her
or
at least
get her
attention.

she hears the
whispered remarks,
really likes hearing them
but says,
again and again,
“shut up! oh, you shut up!”

it goes on and
on:
the boys continue and
she continues:
“oh, shut up!”

in a voice without
grace or melody
in a voice
without warmth or humor
in a voice
remarkably
ugly:

“oh, shut up now!”
but the eager boys
are not aware of her
tone of
voice

and the one who will
finally live with that
voice
is probably not yet sitting
there.

her husband of the
future
will finally understand
the horrible reality of
that voice

(remember,
the voice is the window
to the soul)

and he will think:

oh my god
oh my god
oh my god

what have I
done?

won’t
she
ever

shut up?
one out in the minor leagues

men on 2nd and 3rd.
first base was open.
one out.
we gave Parker an
intentional walk.
we had a 3- to- 2
lead.
last half of the
9th, Simpson on the
mound.
Tanner up.
Simpson let it go.
it was low and
inside.
Tanner tapped it
to our shortstop,
DeMarco.
perfect double play
ball.
DeMarco gloved it,
flipped it to Johnson
our 2b man.
Johnson touched 2nd
then stood there
holding the ball as
the runners were
steaming around
the bases.
I screamed at Johnson
from the dugout:
“DO SOMETHING WITH THE
GODDAMNED BALL!”
the whole stadium was
screaming.
Johnson just stood there
a funny look on his face
with the ball.
then
he fell forward
still holding the ball.
he was
stretched out there as
the winning run
scored.

the dugout emptied
as we ran
to Johnson.
we turned him
over.
he wasn’t moving.
he looked
dead.
the trainer took
his pulse and
looked at me.
then he started
mouth-to-mouth.

the announcer asked
if there was a
doctor in the
stands.

two of them came
down.
one of them
was drunk.

the tiny crowd started
coming
out on the field.
the ushers pushed
them back.

somebody took the
ball out of Johnson’s
hand.

they worked on him
for a long time.
there was a
camera flash.
then another.
then the doctor
stood up:

“it’s no good.
he’s gone.”

the stretcher
came out and
we loaded Johnson
onto the stretcher.

somebody threw a
warm-up
jacket
over his face.

the stadium was
almost deserted as
they carried Johnson
off the field
through
the dugout
and into
the locker room.

I didn’t go
in.
I took a cup of water
from the cooler
and
sat alone on the bench.

Toby the batboy
came over.
“what’s going to happen now, Mr.
Quinn?” he asked.

“our 2nd baseman is
dead, Toby.”

“who you going to play
there now?”

“I don’t think that’s
important right now,” I
told him.

“yes, it is, Mr. Quinn!
we’re 2 games out of
first place
going into September!"

“I’ll think of something,
Toby …”

then I got up and went
through the door
to the locker room,
Toby following right
behind.
since my last name was Fuch, he said to Raymond, you can believe the school yard was tough: they put itching powder down my neck, threw gravel at me, stung me with rubber bands in class, and outside they called me names, well, one name mainly, over and over, and on top of all that my parents were poor, I wore cardboard in my shoes to fill in the holes in the soles, my pants were patched, my shirts threadbare; and even my teachers ganged up on me, they slammed my palm with rulers and sent me to the principal’s office as if I was really guilty of something; and, of course, the abuse kept coming from my classmates; I was stoned, beaten, pissed on; the little girls hissed and stuck their tongues out at me …

Fuch’s wife smiled sadly at Raymond: my poor darling husband had such a terrible childhood! (she was so beautiful it almost stunned one to look at her.)

Fuch looked at Raymond: hey, your glass is empty.

yeah, said Raymond.

Fuch touched a button and the English butler silently glided in. he nodded respectfully to Raymond and in his beautiful accent asked, another drink, sir?

yes, please, Raymond answered.

the butler went off to prepare the drink.

what hurt most, of course, continued Fuch, was the name-calling.

Raymond asked, have you never forgotten it?
I did for a while, but then strangely I began to miss the abuse …

the butler returned carrying Raymond’s drink on a silver tray.

here is your drink, sir, said the butler.

thank you, said Raymond, taking it off the tray.

o.k., Paul, Fuch said to the butler, you can start now.

now? asked the butler.

now, came the answer.

the butler stood in front of Fuch and screamed: *fucky-boy! fucky-baby! fuck-face! fuck-brain! where did your name come from, fuck-head? how come you’re such a fuck-up?* etc.

they all started laughing uncontrollably as the butler delivered his tirade in that beautiful British accent.

they couldn’t stop laughing, they fell out of their chairs and got down on the rug, pounding it and laughing, Fuch, his lovely young wife and Raymond in that sprawling mansion overlooking the shining sea.
I dreamt

that I was
in my room

having been
shot in the belly
by some tart.

snakes crawled the
floor

while outside
a schoolmaster
sang
an old school
song

then

the curtains
went up in
flame

the phone
rang

everything
seemed
in a hurry
to die

so I
decided to
die

which made all the
bad poets
happy
and all the good poets
glad
as they
rushed in
to fill
the vacancy

then the dream
was
over

I awakened
and I was

the Bad Boy
of poetry

all over
again.
the old couple next door

ey were an old couple
and she slept with her
head at one end of the
bed
and he with his head
at the other
end.
they explained that
in case somebody
came in to murder
them
at least one of them
would have a
better chance to
escape.

when he died
she had a stuffed replica
made of his
body
and she slept with
her head at one end
of the bed
and the replica’s
head was down at the
other.

and just like in the
past,
at least once every
night,

she would awaken
in a fury and
scream,
“STOP
THAT
GODDAMNED
SNORING!
men without women

finally,
goaded by the high price of female relationships
he lashed his ankles to the bedpoles
and tried to reach his own penis
with his mouth:
close but no cigar.
another of nature’s dirty tricks.

finally, in a fury, he gave it a last mad attempt.

something cracked in his back
and a blue flame engulfed his brain.

after 45 minutes of agony
he got himself off the bed,

found he couldn’t stand straight.
each time he tried a hundred knives cut into both his back and his soul.
the next day
he managed to drive to
the doctor’s
office
bent low over the
steering wheel
barely able to
see through the
windshield.

“how did you do this?”
the
doctor
asked.

he told the doctor
the honest
truth
because he felt
that an informed
diagnosis
was the only chance
for a complete
cure.

“What?” said the
doctor. “you’re
kidding?”

“no, that’s what
happened.”

“please excuse me,
I’ll be right
back.”

there was a dead
silence.
then he heard the
soft laughter of
the doctor and the
nurse from
behind the door.
then it grew
louder.

he sat there
looking out the office
window: there was a park outside
with lovely mature trees, it was
a fine summer afternoon
the birds were out in force and
for some odd reason
he longed for a shimmering bowl
of cool wet grapes.

the laughter behind the door
grew softer again
and then died out
as he sat there
waiting.
some keep trying to connect me with the “Beats” but I was almost unpublished in the 1950s and even then I very much distrusted their vanity and all that public posturing.

and when I met a few of them later in life I realized that most of my original feelings for them hadn’t changed.

some of my friends accepted that; others thought that I should change my opinion.

my opinion remains the same: writing is done one person at a time

and all the gatherings of the flock have very little to do
with anything.

any one of them could have made a decent living as a bill collector or a used car salesman

and they still could make an honest living instead of bitching about changes of fashion and the ways of fate.

but instead from the sad university lecterns and in the poetry halls these hucksters of the despoiled word are still clamoring for handouts, still talking the same dumb shit.
hurry slowly

when will you take to the cane, Chinaski?
when will you walk that short-legged dog into the last sunset?
that wrinkled-nosed dog snorting and sniffing before you as the sidewalks part and the ocean roars in bearing beautiful mermaids.

straighten your back, the sun is rushing past you, grin at the gods, they only lent you the luck and the mirage.

Chinaski? you hear me? the young girls of your dreams have grown old. Chinaski, let it go, the music has finished. Chinaski? Chinaski, don’t you hear me?

why do you keep trying? nobody is watching. nobody cares, not even you.

you are alone, Chinaski, and below the stage
the seats are
extempt.
the theatre is dark.
why do you keep
acting?

what a bad
habit.

the air is so still,
the air is black and still as
you move through the last of
yourself,
give way, give way
old poet,
hanging by the last thread,
use your courage
write that last line,
get out, get out, get out,
get out, get out, get out,
it’s easy,
the last classic
act.
the coast is clear,
now.
hello and goodbye

there’s no hell like your own hell,
none can compare,
twisting in the sheets at night,
your ass freezing,
your mind on fire,
everything stupid, stupid,
as you are stuck in your poor body and in
your poor life
and it’s all slowly dissolving, dissolving
into nothing.
like all the other bodies, like all the other
lives,
we all are being counted out,
taken down
by disease
by just being rubbed up against
the hard days, the harder years.
there’s no escaping
this,
we just have to take it,
accept it—
or like most—
not think about it.
at all.

shoes off and on.
holidays come and gone.
hello,
goodbye.
dress, undress.
eat, sleep.

drive an automobile.
pay your taxes.
wash under the arms and
behind the neck
and scrub everything
else, for sure.
pick your coffin ahead
of time.
feel the smooth wood.
go for the soft, padded, expensive
interior.
the salesman will commend you
on your good
taste.

then horrify him.
tell him you want to try it for
size.

there’s no hell like your own
hell and there’s nobody else
ever
to share it with
you.

you might as well be the only
person left on earth.
sometimes you feel as if you
were.
and maybe you are.

meanwhile, pluck the lint from
your belly button,
accept what is,
get laid once in a while,
shake hands with nothing at all.
it’s always been like this, it’s always been like
this.
don’t scream.
there’s nobody left to hear
you.

strange things,
strange things these cities, the trees,
our feet walking the sidewalks,
the blood inside us
lubricating our
hearts,
the centuries finally shot apart
as you slip on your stockings and pull them
up over your
ankles.
I will never have a house in the valley with little stone men on the lawn.
don’t call me, I’ll call you

once more
the typing is about
finished

poems scatter the
floor

this smoky room

the radio whispers
the symphony of a
dead
man

the lamp
looks at me
from my
left

it is late
night
moving
into
morning

I have lived
again
the lucky
hours

then the
phone
rings
son-of-a-
bitch:
impossible!

but my wife
will get
the phone

perhaps it’s for her

it can’t be for me

I’d kill anybody who would spoil what the gods have sent this old fellow

once again as the dark trees shake outside as death finally is a monkey caught in a cage.
“today,” says the radio announcer,
“is Bastille Day.
203 years ago they stormed the Bastille,”
and that is the highlight of my day.
I have really been burnt out lately.
I go outside,
undress,
get in the pool, wrap my blue
floater around my gut
and water-jog.
I feel like an old man.
hell, I am an old man.
when I was born it was only 132 years back to
Bastille Day.
now, pains in my right leg and foot make for
a long day at the track
and the decades cling to me like
leeches,
sucking my energy and
my spirit.
but I intend to make a comeback
very soon.
I need the action, the gamble.
now I am drinking a cold beer.
I relax and just float.
suddenly things look better.
the leg and foot no longer hurt.
I even begin to feel good.
I’m not done yet!
I will remain in the arena.
hail, Bastille Day!
hail all the old dogs!
hail you!
hail me!
that last good
night is not yet here.
my wife doesn’t see much of me anymore
since she got me this computer for Xmas.
I never thought anything could consume me like it has.

the poems arrive by the dozens
and yesterday there was even a decent bit of prose.

I’ve now gone the complete route.
I once hand-printed all my poems and stories.
then came the manual typewriter.
then the electric typer.
and now this.

it’s as if I have been reborn.
I watch the words form on the screen
and as I watch more and more words form.

and, actually, the content seems to be as good as ever.

things get said as they have always been said.
only now it’s more like setting off firecrackers or exploding words into outer space.
I’ve been told that the computer can’t write for me. hell, I don’t know, this thing seems to have a psyche all its own and it certainly spells better than I do.

there were always words I wanted to use but I was too lazy to check the spelling. so I used a simpler version or just didn’t bother. now I toss the word in, then ask the computer if I’ve got it spelled right.

there’s an old theory that if you put ten thousand monkeys in a room for Eternity they would eventually rewrite every great novel ever written, word for word.

with a computer they’d do it in half an hour.

anyhow, I’m more or less one of those monkeys now and my wife hardly ever sees me anymore, as I said before.

I hear her coughing in the next room
so I know that she is there.

but that’s enough computer talk.

it’s time for another poem.
the books are selling, there are critical articles, more and 
more critical articles that claim my work is, indeed, 
last, pretty damned good. 
I am being taught alongside some of the masters. 
a dangerous time, a most dangerous time 
for me. 
if I accept my new position, then I must work from that new 
position. 
I must then attempt to hold my ground, not 
despoil it. 
but I have watched too many others 
soften, lose their natural force. 
too much acceptance destroys. 
so listen, my fine fellows and ladies, I am going to 
ignore your late applause, 
I intend to still play it loose, commit my errors, 
enrage the entrenched and piss upon your 
guardians, angels and / or devils. 
I intend to do what I 
have to do, what I have always done. 
it’s been too much fun to falter now. 

you will not escape my iron grip 
and I will escape 
yours.
like this, sitting in my shorts, listening to a tenor
all the way from Cleveland
garnering applause on the radio.
I’ve never been to Cleveland.

I sit here in my shorts on a humid night
now listening to Ravel with my gut hanging out
over my shorts.
my soft white gut.
I draw on this cigar, inhale, then blow
blue smoke as
Ravel waltzes.

I read a fan letter written to me from Japan.
then I rip it once, twice, three times, trash it.
young girls send me photos of their naked selves.
blank-faced, I set my lighter to the photos,
turn them to twisted black ash.

it’s midnight and I’m too dumb to sweat.

“oil and natural gas,” says the man on the radio,
“we need oil and natural gas
for the nation’s energy needs.”

“fuck you, buddy,” I say.

I scratch, yawn, rise, walk
to where my little refrigerator holds food
and drink.

it takes me 7 steps to get there.
one for each decade.

did you know that

hot night
to this very day
nobody can figure out how
they built the
pyramids?
it was a good training ground out there (although there were times of fear and madness) and there were times when it wasn’t kind and there were times when my comrades were cowardly treacherous or debased.

it taught me also that there was no bottom to life you could always fall lower into a bestial groveling and when you reached that point nobody cared or would ever care. and then, with no feelings left, that was the strangest feeling of them all.

so, today I got into my BMW, drove to my bank and picked up my American Express Gold Card. (I always promised myself that I’d write about that when it happened.)

I know what people will say: “Chinaski! writing about his American Express Gold Card! who gives a damn about that? or who cares that he’s now in Who’s Who in America?”

I can’t think of another poet who makes people as angry as I do. I enjoy it knowing that we are all brothers and sisters in a very unkind extended
family and I also never forget that no matter what the circumstances, the park bench is never that far away from any one of us.
something cares

a reader writes from Germany
that a lady friend saw me interviewed
on tv and then
told him
that to kiss my face would be a
disgusting thing.

I wrote back that
she might be right, I didn’t know,
I’d never actually tried
it.

but really
I don’t write with my
face
I use my fingers
and this old Olympia
standard,
and with all the luck
I’ve had
I should kiss this
typer
but
I won’t.

well, there, I just
did.
it was a cold kiss
but a faithful
one.

and now the machine
answers back:
I love you too,
old boy.
my cats

I know. I know.
they are limited, have different
needs and
conterns.

but I watch and learn from them.
I like the little they know,
which is so
much.

they complain but never
worry.
they walk with a surprising dignity.
they sleep with a direct simplicity that
humans just can’t
understand.

their eyes are more
beautiful than our eyes.
and they can sleep 20 hours
a day
without
hesitation or
remorse.

when I am feeling
low
all I have to do is
watch my cats
and my
courage
returns.

I study these
creatures.

they are my
teachers.
6:30 a.m.

fondly embracing mad hopes in my dreams the first intrusion of day begins when that young cat of mine starts knocking over and attacking things at 6:30 in the morning. I rise to lead that frisky rascal down the stairway and open the door where he always pauses introspectively until I give him a gentle boot in the ass and then he is gone into the blissful glory of the day while I then climb back up the stairway to bed down again with wife who has heard nothing who sleeps so still I must check her breathing to make certain she’s alive and finding that she’s o.k. I pull the covers up. I have the best hours of sleep then before the long drive to the racetrack one more time and one more time and one more time again until I get so old that the DMV will take away my driver’s license and I will have to ride the bus out there with the damned ghost people son-of-a-bitch what an awful goddamned thought better to stay home with wife and cats putter with paints a la Henry Miller and also help with the weeding and the shopping while the last of the sun slants in like a golden sword.
what I need

I need a light pine kitchen, a new freezer, a picture window, a first-alert ready-light, a pair of jogging shoes, some real excitement, a yellow banjo, hot chips, a spark, two love birds, sheer stockings, a touch of miracle, a March star, a true woman, a new fantasy, a spicy sky, a charmed quark, some luck, a VISA card, a walrus, a sunset at the beach, a well-seasoned cigar, an antelope, a racy subject, an ideal to fight for, a rainbow, a halcyon holiday and a winner in the first, a winner in the second, a winner in the third, a winner in the fourth, a winner in the fifth.

hell, that’s what I got just now: a winner in the fifth!

couldn’t you guess?
gender benders

I’m only guessing, of course, as usual but here goes:
when the ladies gather over cocktails they talk about
how their husbands tend to stifle them, smother their creative instinct, their natural joy, their ultimate female selves.
without their husbands they would float free and thrive and grow without limit as they were meant to do.

but ladies, I will tell you this:
when men gather they never talk about their wives.
we discuss the Dallas Cowboys or the new barmaid at The Bat Cove Tavern or about how Tyson would kick Holyfield’s ass …
unconcerned with petty argument we have floated free … giant macho soaring balloons!

WHEE!
after many nights

the last hour at the typewriter is only
good
if you’ve had a lucky and
productive
night,
otherwise
your time and effort have been
wasted.

dthis night
I feel good about the poems scattered
on the floor.

the door of this room is
open
and I can see out into the
night,
see part of the city to
my left;
see many lights—yellow, white
red, blue;
see also the moving lights
of the cars
traveling south on the
Harbor Freeway.

the lights of this city
are not at rest,
they shimmer in the
dark.

a blue tree outside the
window
looms powerful and at
peace.

my death,
after so many nights
like this,
will seem
logical,
sane
and
(like a few of my poems)
well-
written.
good morning, how are you?

$650,000 home, swimming pool, tennis court, sauna, 4 late-model cars, a starlet wife; he was blond, young, broad-shouldered, great smile, great sense of humor.

he was an investor, said his starlet wife.

but he always seemed to be at home.

one afternoon
while he was playing tennis with his friends
two plainclothes cops
walked up
handcuffed him
took him
off.

it was in the papers the next day: he was a hit man wanted for killing over fifty men.

what bothered the neighbors most was not who would move in next but when had he found time to do it?
what will you write about? he asks.
you no longer live with whores, you no
longer engage in barroom brawls, what
will you write about?

he seems to think that I’ve manufactured
a life to suit my typewriter
and if my life gets good
my writing will get bad.

I tell him that trouble will always
arrive, never worry about
that.

he doesn’t seem to understand.
he asks,
what will your readers
think?

Norman Mailer still has
his readers,
I say.

but you’re different,
he says.

not at all, I say,
we’re both about
25 pounds
overweight.

he stares at me
unblinking
through dull
gray
eyes.
sitting across from my lawyer, I
decide, at this time, one needs a good
lawyer, a tax accountant, a decent
auto mechanic, a sympathetic doctor and
a faithful wife, in order to
survive.
also, one needs some talent of one’s own,
very few friends, a good home security
system and the ability to sleep peacefully at
night.
you need at least this much in order to
get by and naturally you also must
hope to evade a long illness and / or
senility; finally, you can only
pray for a quick clean finish with
very little subsequent mourning by everybody
closely connected.
sitting across from my lawyer, I
have these thoughts.
we are on the 16th floor of a downtown office
building
and I like my lawyer, he has fine eyes,
great manners.
also, he has gotten my ass out of
several jams.

( meantime, among other things, you also need
a plumber who doesn’t overbill and
an honest jockey who knows where the
finish line is.)

you need all the above (and more) before
you can go home with a clear mind, open a
wooden box labeled Sumatra Cum
Laude, take one out, light it
and take a quick puff or two
before the bluebird leaves
your shoulder,
before the snow melts,
and before the rain and the traffic
and our hurly-burly life
churn everything into
black
slush.
the disease of existence

dark, dark, dark.
humanity’s shadow
shrouds the moon.
the process is
eternal.

once, I imagined that
in my old age
there would be
peace,
but not this:
dark humanity’s
insufferable
relentless
presence.

humanity claws
at me
as persistently
now
as in the
beginning.
I was not born to be
one with them
yet here I am
with only
the thought
of death
and that final
separation
to comfort me.

so there’s no chance,
no
hope,
just this waiting,
sitting here
tonight
surrounded
unsure
captured
transfixed,
the hours, the years,
this minute,
mutilated.
another comeback

climbing back up out of the ooze, out of
the thick black tar,
rising up again, a modern
Lazarus.
you’re amazed at your good
fortune.
somehow you’ve had more
than your share of second
chances.
hell, accept it.
what you have, you have.
you walk and look in the bathroom
mirror
at an idiot’s smile.
you know your luck.
some go down and never climb back up.
something is being kind to you.
you turn from the mirror and walk into the
world.
you find a chair, sit down, light a cigar.
back from a thousand wars
you look out from an open door into the silent
night.
Sibelius plays on the radio.
nothing has been lost or destroyed.
you blow smoke into the night,
tug at your right
ear.
baby, right now, you’ve got it
all.
two nights before my 72nd birthday

sitting here on a boiling hot night while
drinking a bottle of cabernet sauvignon
after winning $232 at the track.
there’s not much I can tell you except
if it weren’t for my bad right leg
I don’t feel much different than I did
30 or 40 years ago (except that
now I have more money and should be able
to afford a decent
burial). also,
I drive better automobiles and have
stopped carrying a
switchblade.
I am still looking for a hero, a role model,
but can’t find one.
I am no more tolerant of Humanity
than I ever was.
I am not bored with myself and find
that I am the only one I can
turn to in time of
crisis.
I’ve been ready to die for decades and
I’ve been practicing, polishing up
for that end
but it’s very
hot tonight
and I can think of little but
this fine cabernet,
that’s gift enough for me.
sometimes I can’t
believe I’ve come this far,
this has to be some kind of goddamned
miracle!
just another old guy
blinking at the forces,
smiling a little,
as the cities tremble and the left
hand rises,
clutching something real.
Lord, boys,
it’s been a long time since we
sang a happy tune from
deep in the lungs.
somehow we’ve allowed them
to shut off our air, our water, our
electricity, our joy.

we’ve become like them: stilted, exact,
graven,
secretly bitter, smitten by
what’s small.

Lord, boys,
we’ve not been kind enough to hippies and
harpies, to sots and slatterns,
to our brothers and
sisters.

Lord, boys,
where has the heroic self
gone?
it’s gone into hiding, a scattered cat
in a hailstorm!

have we come to this?
have we really come to
this?

as I open my mouth
to sing
a happy tune from
deep in the lungs
a black fly
circles and swoops
in.

Lord!
what an old poem this is from an old guy.

you’ve heard it many times before:

me sitting here sotted again.

ashtray full.
bottles about.

poems scattered on the floor.

as night creeps toward dawn I make more and more typing errors and

the bars closed long ago.

even the crickets are asleep.

Li Po must have experienced all these things too.

hello, Li Po, you juicehead, the world is still full of rancor and regret.

you knew what to do
about that:
set fire to the
poems and then
sail them down the river
as the Emperor wept at such
waste

(but you and I
know that waste is a
natural part of the
way).

and the way is
now
and
fortunately
I have one drink
left
there on the floor
among the
poems
as
out of smokes
I poke into the
ashtray
light a butt
burn my nose
singe my
eyebrows

then tap out
another line of
boozy poesy

as I hear a voice
rising from the
neighborhood:
“FUCK YOU AND THAT
MACHINE!”

ah, they’ve been very
patient: it’s 3:45
a.m.

I will now stop
typing and I will
savor this last
drink
because while
I have defeated death
at least
10,000 times

the L.A. police department
is another
matter.
older

I’m older but I don’t mind, yet.
I feel like a tank
rolling over and through all
the accumulated
crap.
more and more of it
piles up
as time passes,
physical and spiritual
crap.
we’ve even polluted
the stratosphere with
space junk,
with crap,
it floats around up
there.

I remember my grandmother.
she was old.
a mound of useless flesh
with dead eyes,
and a mind stuffed with,
well, crap.

it made me tired and
discouraged to look
at her.

me, I’m still rare meat,
I’ll make a good meal,
the black dogs of death trail me,
nip at my heels.
tiresome hounds, they never
quit.

when they bring me down
they’ll have something worthy of their efforts. young maidens in far-off countries will weep, and rightfully so.

and hell for me will be something interesting and new.
closing time

around 2 a.m.
in my small room
after turning off the poem
machine
for now
I continue to light
cigarettes and listen to
Beethoven on the
radio.
I listen with a
strange and lazy
aplomb,
knowing there’s still a poem
or two left to write, and
I feel damn
fine, at long
last,
as once again I
admire the verve and gamble
of this composer
now dead for over 100
years,
who’s younger and wilder
than you are
than I am.

the centuries are sprinkled
with rare magic
with divine creatures
who help us get past the common
and
extraordinary ills
that beset us.
I light the next to last
cigarette
remember all the 2 a.m.’s
of my past,
put out of the bars
at closing time,
put out on the streets
(a ragged band of
solitary lonely
humans
we were)
each walking home
alone.

dthis is much better: living
where I now
live
and listening to
the reassurance
the kindness
of this unexpected
SYMPHONY OF TRIUMPH:
a new life.
no leaders, please

invent yourself and then reinvent yourself, don’t swim in the same slough.
invent yourself and then reinvent yourself and stay out of the clutches of mediocrity.

invent yourself and then reinvent yourself, change your tone and shape so often that they can never categorize you.

reinvigorate yourself and accept what is but only on the terms that you have invented and reinvented.

be self-taught.

and reinvent your life because you must; it is your life and its history and the present belong only to you.
everything hurts

when you get as old as I am you can’t help thinking about death; you know it’s getting closer with every tick of your watch: an old fart like me can go in a second, have a stroke, or cancer, or etc.

while the young think about locating a piece of ass the old think about … death.

still, age makes you appreciate small things: like, say, you look at a grapefruit like you never quite looked at one before, or at a bridge, or at a dog or even just at the sidewalk, you realize you’ve never really seen them clearly before.

and all the other things around you suddenly seem … new.

the world is now a flower, though sometimes an ugly one.

and driving the boulevards, you watch people in their cars and you think: each of them must finally die.

it’s strange, isn’t it, that each of them must finally die?

then (I often get lucky) I will forget about death. I will forget that I am … old.

I will feel 45 again. (I’ve always felt 45, even when I was 16.)

as somewhere somebody waters a small potted plant, as a plane crashes with a fierce explosion into a mountain, as deep in the sea strange creatures move, the poet remains manacled to his helpless self.
now I watch other men fight
for money and glory
on television
while I sit on an old couch
in the night
a wife and 5 or 6 cats
nearby.

now I sit and watch other men fight
for money and glory.

hell,
I never fought for money.

maybe I should have
but I was never that good
at it—
only sometimes
brave.

is it too late for a comeback?

a comeback from where?

now I sit and watch other men fight
for money and glory.

I sit with a soda and 3 fig bars
as the world curls and goes up in
flame around
me.
my song

ample
consternation,
plentiful
pain

restless days
and
sleepless
nights

always fighting
with all your
heart and soul
so as not
to fail at
living.

who could ask
for anything
more?
cancer

half-past nowhere
alone
in the crumbling
tower of myself

stumbling in this the
darkest
hour

the last gamble has been
lost

as I
reach
for

bone
silence.
blue fish, the blue night, a blue knife—
everything is blue.
and my cats are blue: blue fur, blue claws,
blue whiskers, blue eyes.

my bed lamp shines
blue.

inside, my blue heart pumps blue blood.

my fingernails, my toenails are
blue

and around my bed floats a
blue ghost.

even the taste inside my mouth is
blue.

and I am alone and dying and
blue.
twilight musings

the drifting of the mind.
the slow loss, the leaking away.
one’s demise is not very interesting.
from my bed I watch 3 birds through the east window:
one coal black, one dark brown, the
other yellow.
as night falls I watch the red lights on the bridge blink on and off.
I am stretched out in bed with the covers up to my chin.
I have no idea who won at the racetrack today.
I must go back into the hospital tomorrow.
why me?
why not?
mind and heart

unaccountably we are alone
forever alone
and it was meant to be
that way,
it was never meant
to be any other way—
and when the death struggle
begins
the last thing I wish to see
is
a ring of human faces
hovering over me—
better just my old friends,
the walls of my self,
let only them be there.

I have been alone but seldom
lonely.
I have satisfied my thirst
at the well
of my self
and that wine was good,
the best I ever had,
and tonight
sitting
staring into the dark
I now finally understand
the dark and the
light and everything
in between.

peace of mind and heart
arrives
when we accept what
is:
having been
born into this
strange life
we must accept
the wasted gamble of our
days
and take some satisfaction in
the pleasure of
leaving it all
behind.

cry not for me.
grieve not for me.

read
what I’ve written
then
forget it
all.

drink from the well
of your self
and begin
again.
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CHAPTER ONE

A COUPLE OF days later Pinchot phoned. He said he wanted to go ahead with the screenplay. We should come down and see him?

So we got the directions and were in the Volks and heading for Marina del Rey. Strange territory.

Then we were down at the harbor, driving past the boats. Most of them were sailboats and people were fiddling about on deck. They were dressed in their special sailing clothes, caps, dark shades. Somehow, most of them had apparently escaped the daily grind of living. They had never been caught up in that grind and never would be. Such were the rewards of the Chosen in the land of the free. After a fashion, those people looked silly to me. And, of course, I wasn’t even in their thoughts.

We turned right, down from the docks and went past streets laid out in alphabetical order, with fancy names. We found the street, turned left, found the number, pulled into the driveway. The sand came right up to us and the ocean was close enough to be seen and far enough away to be safe. The sand seemed cleaner than other sand and the water seemed bluer and the breeze seemed kinder.

‘Look,’ I said to Sarah, ‘we have just landed upon the outpost of death. My soul is puking.’

‘Will you stop worrying about your soul?’ Sarah responded.

No need to lock the Volks. I was the only one who could start it.

We were at the door. I knocked.

It opened to this tall slim delicate type, you smelled artistry all over him. You could see he had been born to Create, to Create grand things, totally unhindered, never bothered by such petty things as toothache, self-doubt, lousy luck. He was one of those who looked like a genius. I looked like a dishwasher so these types always pissed me just a bit.

‘We’re here to pick up the dirty laundry,’ I said.

‘Ignore him,’ Sarah interspersed. ‘Pinchot suggested we come by.’

‘Ewe,’ said the gentleman, ‘do come in …’

We followed him and his little rabbit cheeks. He stopped then, at some special edge, he was charming, and he spoke over his left shoulder as if the entire world were listening to his delicate proclamation:

‘I go get my VOD-KA now!’

He flashed off into the kitchen.

‘Jon mentioned him the other night,’ said Sarah. ‘He is Paul Renoir. He writes operas and is also working in a form known as the Opera-Movie. Very avant-garde.’

‘He may be a great man but I don’t want him sucking at my ear lobes.’

‘Oh, stop being so defensive! Everybody can’t be like you!’

‘I know. That’s their problem.’

‘Your greatest strength,’ said Sarah, ‘is that you fear everything.’

‘I wish I had said that.’

Paul walked back with his drink. It looked good. There was even a bit of lime in there and he stirred it with a little glass stick. A swizzle. Real class.
‘Paul,’ I asked, ‘is there anything else to drink in there?’
‘Ewe, sorry,’ he said, ‘please do help yourself!’
I charged into the kitchen right upon the heels of Sarah. There were bottles everywhere. While we were deciding, I cracked a beer.
‘We better lay off the hard stuff,’ suggested my good lady. ‘You know how you get when you’re drinking that.’
‘Right. Let’s go with the wine.’
I found a corkscrew and got a bottle of fine-looking red.
We each had a good hit. Then we refilled our glasses and walked out. At one time I used to refer to Sarah and me as Zelda and Scott, but that bothered her because she didn’t like the way Zelda had ended up. And I didn’t like what Scott had typed. So, we had abandoned our sense of humor there.
Paul Renoir was at the large picture window checking out the Pacific.
‘Jon is late,’ he said to the picture window and the ocean, ‘but he told me to tell you that he will be right along and to please stay.’
‘O.K., baby …’
Sarah and I sat down with our drinks. We faced the rabbit cheeks. He faced the sea. He appeared to be musing.
‘Chinaski,’ he said, ‘I have read much of your work. It is wild shit. You are very good …’
‘Thank you. But we know who is really the best. You’re the best.’
‘Ewe,’ he said as he continued to face the sea, ‘it is very very nice of you to … realize that …’
The door opened and a young girl with long black hair walked in without knocking. Next thing we knew she was stretched out up on the back of the sofa, lengthwise, like a cat.
‘I’m Poppy,’ she said, ‘with 4 “p”s.’
I had a relapse: ‘We’re Scott and Zelda.’
‘Cut the shit!’ said Sarah.
I gave our proper names.
Paul turned from the sea.
‘Poppy is one of the backers of your screenplay.’
‘I haven’t written a word,’ I said.
‘You will …’
‘Would you, please?’ I looked at Sarah and held up my empty glass.
Sarah was a good girl. She left with the glass. She knew that if I went in there I would start in on sundry bottles and then start in on my way to being nasty.
I would learn later that another name for Poppy was ‘The Princess from Brazil’. And for starters she had kicked in ten grand. Not much. But it paid for some of the rent and some of the drinks.
The Princess looked at me from her cat-like position on the back of the couch.
‘I’ve read your stuff. You’re very funny.’
‘Thank you.’
Then I looked over at Paul. ‘Hey, baby, did you hear that? I’m funny!’
‘You deserve,’ he said, ‘a certain place …’
He flashed toward the kitchen again as Sarah passed him with our refills. She sat down next to me and I had a hit.
The thought then occurred to me that I could just bluff the screenplay and sit around Marina
del Rey for months sucking up drinks. Before I could really savor that thought, the door burst open and there was Jon Pinchot.

‘Ah, you came by!’

‘Ewe,’ I said.

‘I think I have a backer! All you have to do is write it.’

‘It might take a few months.’

‘But, of course …’

Then Paul was back. He had a strange pink-looking drink for the Princess.

Pinchot flashed toward the kitchen for one of his own.

It was the first of many meetings which would simply dissolve into bouts of heavy drinking, especially on my part. I found it to be a needed build-up for my confidence as I was really only interested in the poem and the short story. Writing a screenplay seemed to me an ultimately stupid thing to do. But better men than I had been trapped into such a ridiculous act.

Jon Pinchot came out with his drink, sat down.

It became a long night. We talked and talked, about what I was not sure. Finally both Sarah and I had drunk too much to be able to drive back. We were kindly offered a bedroom.

It was in that bedroom, in the dark, as we poured a last good red wine, Sarah asked me, ‘You going to write a screenplay?’

‘Hell no,’ I answered.
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