

*you*

you're a beast, she said  
your big white belly  
and those hairy feet.  
you never cut your nails  
and you have fat hands  
paws like a cat  
your bright red nose  
and the biggest balls  
I've ever seen.  
you shoot sperm like a  
whale shoots water out of the  
hole in its back.

beast beast beast,  
she kissed me,  
what do you want for  
breakfast?

*fuck*

she pulled her dress off  
over her head  
and I saw the panties  
indented somewhat into the  
crotch.

it's only human.  
now we've got to do it.  
I've got to do it  
after all that bluff.  
it's like a party—  
two trapped  
idiots.

under the sheets  
after I have snapped  
off the light  
her panties are still  
on. she expects an  
opening performance.  
I can't blame her. but  
wonder why she's here with  
me? where are the other  
guys? how can you be  
lucky? having someone the  
others have abandoned?

we didn't have to do it  
yet we had to do it.  
it was something like  
establishing new credibility  
with the income tax  
man. I get the panties  
off. I decide not to  
tongue her. even then

I'm thinking about  
after it's over.

we'll sleep together  
tonight  
trying to fit ourselves  
inside the wallpaper.

I try, fail,  
notice the hair on her  
head  
mostly notice the hair  
on her  
head  
and a glimpse of  
nostrils  
piglike

I try it  
again.

*pacific telephone*

you go for these wenches, she said,  
you go for these whores,  
I'll bore you.

I don't want to be shit on anymore,  
I said,  
relax.

when I drink, she said, it hurts my  
bladder, it burns.

I'll do the drinking, I said.

you're waiting for the phone to ring,  
she said,  
you keep looking at the phone.  
if one of those wenches phones you'll  
run right out of here.

I can't promise you anything, I said.

then—just like that—the phone rang.

this is Madge, said the phone. I've  
got to see you right away.

oh, I said.

I'm in a jam, she continued, I need ten  
bucks—fast.

I'll be right over, I said, and  
hung up.

she looked at me. it was a wench,  
she said, your whole face lit up.

what the hell's the matter with  
you?

listen, I said, I've got to leave.  
you stay here. I'll be right back.

I'm going, she said. I love you but you're  
crazy, you're doomed.

she got her purse and slammed the door.

it's probably some deeply-rooted childhood fuckup  
that makes me vulnerable, I thought.

then I left my place and got into my volks.  
I drove north up Western with the radio on.  
there were whores walking up and down  
both sides of the street and Madge looked  
more vicious than any of them.

*cockroach*

the cockroach crouched  
against the tile  
while I was pissing and as  
I turned my head  
he hauled his butt  
into a crack.

I got the can and sprayed  
and sprayed and sprayed  
and finally the roach came out  
and gave me a very dirty look.  
then he fell down into  
the bathtub and I watched  
him dying  
with a subtle pleasure  
because I paid the rent  
and he didn't.

I picked him up with  
some greenblue toilet  
paper and flushed him  
away. that's all there  
was to that, except  
around Hollywood and  
Western we have to  
keep doing it.  
they say some day that  
tribe is going to  
inherit the earth  
but we're going to  
make them wait a  
few months.

*who in the hell is  
Tom Jones?*

I was shackled with a  
24 year old girl from  
New York City for  
two weeks—about  
the time of the garbage  
strike out there, and  
one night my 34 year  
old woman arrived and  
she said, "I want to see  
my rival." she did  
and then she said, "o,  
you're a cute little thing!"  
next I knew there was a  
screech of wildcats—  
such screaming and scratch-  
ing, wounded animal moans,  
blood and piss . . .

I was drunk and in my  
shorts. I tried to  
separate them and fell,  
wrenched my knee. then  
they were through the screen  
door and down the walk  
and out in the street.

squadcars full of cops  
arrived. a police heli-  
copter circled overhead.

I stood in the bathroom  
and grinned in the mirror.  
it's not often at the age  
of 55 that such splendid

things occur.  
better than the Watts  
riots.

the 34 year old  
came back in. she had  
pissed all over her-  
self and her clothing  
was torn and she was  
followed by 2 cops who  
wanted to know why.

pulling up my shorts  
I tried to explain.

*defeat*

listening to Bruckner on the radio  
wondering why I'm not half mad  
over the latest breakup with my  
latest girlfriend

wondering why I'm not driving the streets  
drunk  
wondering why I'm not in the bedroom  
in the dark  
in the grievous dark  
pondering  
ripped by half-thoughts.

I suppose  
that at last  
like the average man:  
I've known too many women  
and instead of thinking,  
I wonder who's fucking her now?  
I think  
she's giving some other poor son of a bitch  
much trouble right now.

listening to Bruckner on the radio  
seems so peaceful.

too many women have gone through.  
I am at last alone  
without being alone.

I pick up a Grumbacher paint brush  
and clean my fingernails with the hard sharp end.

I notice a wall socket.

look, I've won.

*traffic signals*

the old folks play a game  
in the park overlooking the sea  
shoving markers across cement  
with wooden sticks.

four play, two on each side  
and 18 or 20 others sit in  
the sun and watch  
I notice this as I move  
toward the public facility  
as my car is being repaired.

an old cannon sits in the park  
rusted and useless.  
six or seven sailboats ride  
the sea below.

I finish my duty  
come out  
and they are still playing.

one of the women is heavily rouged  
wearing false eyelashes and smoking  
a cigarette.  
the men are very thin  
very pale  
wear wristwatches that hurt  
their wrists.

the other woman is very fat  
and giggles  
each time a score is made

some of them are my age.

they disgust me  
the way they wait for death



with as much passion  
as a traffic signal.

these are the people who believe advertisements  
these are the people who buy dentures on credit  
these are the people who celebrate holidays  
these are the people who have grandchildren  
these are the people who vote  
these are the people who have funerals

these are the dead  
the smog  
the stink in the air  
the lepers.

these are almost everybody  
finally.

seagulls are better  
seaweed is better  
dirty sand is better

if I could turn that old cannon  
on them  
and make it work  
I would.

they disgust me.

*social*

the blue pencil of the wave  
shots of yellow road

a steering wheel  
an insane woman sitting  
next to you

complaining as the ocean  
creams-off

and people in yellow and  
white  
campers  
block your way  
a frantic  
time  
as you listen  
guilty of this and  
guilty of that

you admit  
this and that  
but it's not  
enough

she wants splendid  
conquest  
and you're weary of  
splendid  
conquest

getting there  
she climbs out  
walks toward the  
house

you piss across the  
fender of your car  
drunk on beer

little spots of you  
dripping down into  
the dust  
the dry  
dust

zipping up you  
march in to  
meet her  
friends.

*coupons*

cigarettes wetted with beer from  
the night before  
you light one  
gag  
open the door for air  
and on your doorstep  
is a dead sparrow  
his head and breast  
chewed away.

hanging from the doorknob  
is an ad from the All American  
Burger  
consisting of several coupons  
which  
say  
that with the purchase  
of a burger  
from Feb. 12 thru Feb. 15  
you can get a free  
regular size bag of french  
fries and one  
10 oz. cup of coca cola.

I take the ad  
wrap the sparrow  
carry him to the trash bin  
and dump him  
in.

look :  
forsaking fries and coke  
to help keep  
my city  
clean.

*luck*

what's bad about all  
this  
is watching people  
drinking coffee and  
waiting. I would  
douse them all  
with luck. they need  
it. they need it  
worse than I do.

I sit in cafes  
and watch them  
waiting. I suppose  
there's not much  
else to do. the  
flies walk up and  
down the windows  
and we drink our  
coffee and pretend  
not to look at  
each other. I  
wait with them.  
between the move-  
ment of the flies  
people walk by.

*dog*

a single dog  
walking alone on a hot sidewalk of  
summer  
appears to have the power  
of ten thousand gods.

why is this?

*the night I fucked my alarm clock*

once  
starving in Philadelphia  
I had a small room  
it was evening going into night  
and I stood at my window on the 3rd floor  
in the dark and looked down into a  
kitchen across the way on the 2nd floor  
and I saw a beautiful blonde girl  
embrace a young man there and kiss him  
with what seemed hunger  
and I stood and watched until they broke  
away.  
then I turned and switched on the room light.  
I saw my dresser and my dresser drawers  
and my alarm clock on the dresser.  
I took my alarm clock  
to bed with me and  
fucked it until the hands dropped off.  
then I went out and walked the streets  
until my feet blistered.  
when I got back I walked to the window  
and looked down and across the way  
and the light in their kitchen was  
out.

there are many single women in the world  
with one or two or three children  
and one wonders where the husbands  
have gone or where the lovers have  
gone

leaving behind  
all those hands and eyes and feet  
and voices.

as I pass through their homes  
I like opening cupboards and  
looking in

or under the sink  
or in a closet—

I expect to find the husband  
or lover and he'll tell me:

“hey, buddy, didn't you notice her  
stretch-marks, she's got stretch-marks  
and floppy tits and she eats  
onions all the time and farts . . . but  
*I'm* a handy man. I can fix things,  
I know how to use a turret-lathe and  
I make my own oil changes. I can shoot  
pool, bowl, and I can finish 5th or  
6th in any cross-country marathon  
anywhere. I've got a set of golf  
clubs, can shoot in the 80's. I know  
where the clit is and what to do about  
it. I've got a cowboy hat with the brim  
turned straight up at the sides.  
I'm good with the lasso and the dukes  
and I know all the latest dance steps.”

and I'll say, “look, I was just leaving.”  
and I *will* leave before he can challenge me  
to arm-wrestling

or tell a dirty joke  
or show me the dancing tattoo on his  
right bicep.

but really  
all I find in the cupboards are  
coffee cups and large cracked brown plates  
and under the sink a stack of hardened  
rags, and in the closet—more coathangers  
than clothes, and it's not until she shows  
me the photo album and the photos of him—  
nice enough like a shoehorn, or a cart in  
the supermarket whose wheels aren't stuck—  
that the self-doubt leaves, and the  
pages turn and there's one child on a  
swing wearing a red outfit and there's  
the other one  
chasing a seagull in Santa Monica.  
and life becomes sad and not dangerous  
and therefore good enough:  
to have her bring you a cup of coffee in  
one of those coffee cups without *him*  
jumping out.



*yellow cab*

the Mexican dancer shook her fans at  
me and her ass at me, I  
didn't ask her to and  
my woman got mad and ran out of the cafe and  
it began raining and you could hear it on the  
roof and I didn't have a job and I had 13 days left  
on the rent.

sometimes when a woman runs out on you like  
that you wonder if it's not  
economics, you can't blame them—  
if I had to get fucked I'd rather get fucked  
by somebody with money.  
we're all scared but when you're ugly and you  
don't have much left you get  
strong, and I called the waiter over and I said,  
I think I am going to turn this table over, I'm  
bored, I'm insane, I need  
action, call in your goon, I'll piss on his  
collarbone.

I got  
thrown out swiftly. it was  
raining. I picked myself up in the rain and  
walked down the empty street  
cotton candy sweet  
dumb shit for sale, all the little stores locked  
with 67¢ Woolworth locks.

I reached the end of the street in time  
to see her get into the yellow cab with  
another guy.

I fell down by a garbage can, stood up  
and pissed against it, feeling sad and not  
sad, knowing there was only so much they could do to

you, piss sliding down the corrugated  
tin, the philosophers must have had something to  
say about this. women. their luck against your  
destiny. winner take Barcelona. next  
bar.

*the bee*

I suppose like any other boy  
I had one best friend in the neighborhood.  
his name was Eugene and he was bigger  
than I was and one year older.  
Eugene used to whip me pretty good.  
we fought all the time.  
I kept trying him but without much  
success.

once we leaped off a garage roof together  
to prove our guts.  
I twisted my ankle and he came up clean  
as freshly-wrapped butter.

I guess the only good thing he ever did for me  
was when the bee stung me while I was barefoot  
and while I sat down and pulled the stinger out  
he said,  
"I'll get the son of a bitch!"

and he did  
with a tennis racket  
plus a rubber hammer.

it was all right  
they say they die  
anyway.

my foot swelled up double-size  
and I stayed in bed  
praying for death

and Eugene went on to become an  
Admiral or a Commander  
or something large in the United States Navy

and he passed through one or two wars  
without injury.

I imagine him an old man now  
in a rocking chair  
with his false teeth  
and glass of buttermilk . . .

while drunk  
I fingerfuck this 19 year old groupie  
in bed with me.

but the worst part is  
(like jumping off the garage roof)  
Eugene wins again  
because he's not even thinking  
about me.

*I'm getting back to where I  
was*

I used to take the back off  
the telephone and stuff it with rags  
and when somebody knocked  
I wouldn't answer and if they persisted  
I'd tell them in terms vulgar  
to vanish.

just another old crank  
with wings of gold  
flabby white belly  
plus  
eyes to knock out  
the sun.

*a lovely couple*

I had to take a shit  
but instead I went  
into this shop to  
have a key made.  
the woman was dressed  
in gingham and smelled  
like a muskrat.  
"Ralph," she hollered  
and an old swine in a  
flowered shirt and  
size 6 shoes, her  
husband, came out and  
she said, "this man  
wants a key."  
he started grinding  
as if he really didn't  
want to.  
there were slinking  
shadows and urine  
in the air.  
I moved along the  
glass counter,  
pointed and called  
to her,  
"here, I want this  
one."  
she handed it to  
me: a switchblade  
in a light purple  
case.  
\$6.50 plus tax.  
the key cost  
practically  
nothing.  
I got my change and

walked out on  
the street.  
sometimes you need  
people like that.

*the strangest sight you ever did  
see—*

I had this room in front on DeLongpre  
and I used to sit for hours  
in the daytime  
looking out the front  
window.  
there were any number of girls who would  
walk by  
swaying;  
it helped my afternoons,  
added something to the beer and the  
cigarettes.

one day I saw something  
extra.  
I heard the sound of it first.  
“come on, push!” he said.  
there was a long board  
about 2½ feet wide and  
8 feet long;  
nailed to the ends and in the middle  
were roller skates.  
he was pulling in front  
two long ropes attached to the board  
and she was in back  
guiding and also pushing.  
all their possessions were tied to the  
board:  
pots, pans, bedquilts, and so forth  
were roped to the board  
tied down;  
and the skatewheels were grinding.

he was white, red-necked, a  
southerner—

thin, slumped, his pants about to  
fall from his  
ass—  
his face pinked by the sun and  
cheap wine,  
and she was black  
and walked upright  
pushing;  
she was simply beautiful  
in turban  
long green ear rings  
yellow dress  
from  
neck to  
ankle.  
her face was gloriously  
indifferent.

“don’t worry!” he shouted, looking back  
at her, “somebody will  
rent us a place!”

she didn’t answer.

then they were gone  
although I still heard the  
skatewheels.

they’re going to make it,  
I thought.

I’m sure they  
did.

*now, if you were teaching creative writing, he asked, what would you tell them?*

I'd tell them to have an unhappy love affair, hemorrhoids, bad teeth and to drink cheap wine, avoid opera and golf and chess, to keep switching the head of their bed from wall to wall and then I'd tell them to have another unhappy love affair and never to use a silk typewriter ribbon, avoid family picnics or being photographed in a rose garden; read Hemingway only once, skip Faulkner ignore Gogol stare at photos of Gertrude Stein and read Sherwood Anderson in bed while eating Ritz crackers, realize that people who keep talking about sexual liberation are more frightened than you are. listen to E. Power Biggs work the organ on your radio while you're rolling Bull Durham in the dark in a strange town with one day left on the rent after having given up friends, relatives and jobs. never consider yourself superior and / or fair and never try to be. have another unhappy love affair.

watch a fly on a summer curtain.  
never try to succeed.  
don't shoot pool.  
be righteously angry when you  
find your car has a flat tire.  
take vitamins but don't lift weights or jog.

then after all this  
reverse the procedure.  
have a good love affair.  
and the thing  
you might learn  
is that nobody knows anything—  
not the State, nor the mice  
the garden hose or the North Star.  
and if you ever catch me  
teaching a creative writing class  
and you read this back to me  
I'll give you a straight A  
right up the pickle  
barrel.

I am driving down Wilton Avenue  
when this girl of about 15  
dressed in tight blue jeans  
that grip her behind like two hands  
steps out in front of my car  
I stop to let her cross the street  
and as I watch her contours waving  
she looks directly through my windshield  
at me  
with purple eyes  
and then blows  
out of her mouth  
the largest pink globe of  
bubble gum  
I have ever seen  
while I am listening to Beethoven  
on the car radio.  
she enters a small grocery store  
and is gone  
and I am left with  
Ludwig.



*the place didn't look  
bad*

she had huge thighs  
and a very good laugh  
she laughed at everything  
and the curtains were yellow  
and I finished  
rolled off  
and before she went to the bathroom  
she reached under the bed and  
threw me a rag.  
it was hard  
it was stiff with other men's  
sperm.  
I wiped off on the sheet.

when she came out  
she bent over  
and I saw all that behind  
as she put Mozart  
on.

*a gold pocket watch*

my grandfather was a tall German  
with a strange smell on his breath.  
he stood very straight  
in front of his small house  
and his wife hated him  
and his children thought him odd.  
I was six the first time we met  
and he gave me all his war medals.  
the second time I met him  
he gave me his gold pocket watch.  
it was very heavy and I took it home  
and wound it very tight  
and it stopped running  
which made me feel bad.  
I never saw him again  
and my parents never spoke of him  
nor did my grandmother  
who had long ago  
stopped living with him.  
once I asked about him  
and they told me  
he drank too much  
but I liked him best  
standing very straight  
in front of his house  
and saying, "hello, Henry, you  
and I, we know each  
other."