

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



New Poems Book Four
Charles Bukowski

CONTENTS

COVER

TITLE PAGE

PART ONE

A 4TH OF JULY IN THE EARLY 30s

WITHOUT STRESS OR AGONY

MY CLOSE CALL

CLOTHES COST MONEY

AN EASY WAY TO DIE

WE HAVE HAND GUNS AROUND HERE

MAKING DO

RARE INDEED

THE POET

BOLERO

A WINTER MEMORY

LIVING IN A GREAT BIG WAY

THEN AND NOW

HOW DID THEY GET THEIR JOB?

PAPER AND PEOPLE

WRITER'S BLOCK

DISORDER AND EARLY SORROW

IN THIS PLACE

THE UNINITIATED

CICADA

NEVER INTERRUPT A WRITER AT WORK

OH MY

MEETING THEM
NO EULOGIES, PLEASE
FINALITY
THE MACHINERY OF LOSS

PART TWO

DAMSELS OF THE NIGHT
FOREWARNED
SHE LOST WEIGHT
MILITARY SURPLUS
A DIFFICULT WOMAN
TALK
WHERE THE ACTION IS REAL
ACADEMY AWARD?
BEACH BOYS
I'M NO GOOD
FRIEND OF THE FAMILY
SOLVING A CRIME BEFORE IT BEGINS
NOTE FOR MY WALL
THE WINE THAT ROARED
2:07 A.M.
A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE
DO WE REALLY CARE?
FOR CRYING OUT LOUD
HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS
EMERGENCY
FOR A WOMAN WHO MIGHT SOME DAY BECOME A
NUN:
SOME PEOPLE ASK FOR IT
AGAINST THE WINDOW PANE
AN ANSWER TO A DAY'S WORTH OF MAIL:

NEW YORK, NEW YORK
THE KNIFE WALTZ
DUSTY SHOES
VULGAR POEM
THIS ONE
THE BIG LONELY NIGHT

PART THREE

ONE A.M.
THE CURSE
WITH HIS AWFUL TEETH
GOLDEN BOY
SURREAL TANGERINES
LITTLE MAGAZINES AND POETRY CHAPBOOKS
MY BUDDY
LAST FRIDAY NIGHT
OPEN HERE
A NAME IS NOTHING IF THE NAMED IS NOTHING
THE STUPIDEST THING I EVER DID
YOU CAN'T MAKE A LION OUT OF A BUTTERFLY
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU BUT
IT'S A DRAG JUST BREATHING
A HARD LESSON
A CONVERSATION TO REMEMBER
PICTURE SHOW
HE PLAYED FIRST BASE
THE SUICIDE KID
SNAKE EYES AND FAULTY SCREAMS
I FOUGHT THEM FROM THE MOMENT I SAW LIGHT
NOW, EZRA,
CONCESSION

IT
TERROR
MY ROSY ASS
THIS IS A BITTER POEM
POEM FOR NOBODY
CHECKMATE
THE TIDE
TO HELL AND BACK
SOMETHING'S KNOCKING AT THE DOOR
REGARDLESS

PART FOUR

THE DANDY
I AM A MOLE
SOMEBODY ELSE
IBM SELECTRIC
WHY OH WHY AND OH WHY NOT?
MOVIES
NO LUCK AT ALL
GOOD NEWS
BEDPAN NIGHTMARE
ROBERT
PRIVATE SCREENINGS
AS YOU SLOW DOWN THE MERMAIDS LOOK THE
OTHER WAY
SOMETHING NEW
THE SWIMMING POOL
THE GREAT WRITER
I USED TO THINK
FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
WORKING OUT

MY FRIEND WILLIAM BURROUGHS
A NOTE UPON STARVATION
POEM FOR MY 70TH BIRTHDAY
YOU'LL NEVER KNOW

JOE

TOP GUN

IT'S STRANGE

EXPLOSION

SMALL TALK

BASIC

COPYRIGHT

NEW POEMS BOOK FOUR

Charles Bukowski

Edited by John Martin



PART ONE

Bach is the hardest to play badly because he made so few spiritual mistakes.

A 4TH OF JULY IN THE EARLY 30s

there wasn't much to celebrate,
of course,
our fathers weren't working
and the canned food from the Dept. of Relief
all had the same terrible
stale taste.
nothing much was happening anywhere and
there was a joyless resignation
in the air
but I remember this one morning at about
6 a.m. on the 4th of July
1932 or 3 or 4, I don't remember which,
when I heard loud explosions
in the street outside:
GIANT FIRECRACKERS!

I got out of bed, dressed
quickly, ran outside
and there
coming up Longwood Avenue
right in the center of the street was
my buddy Gene
walking along and throwing
giant firecrackers
into the air.

the morning fog
was just beginning to lift
and the first sun was coming
through
and there was Gene
walking

along
and making the air
explode!

I ran up to him.
“god damn! what you got?”

“cherry bombs!
and plenty of
them!”

he also had
what was called a “punk,”
a coated metal stick that
glowed hot and red at the
end.

Gene touched the punk
to a fuse
watched it burn down,
then tossed the bomb high
into the air
where it exploded
right at the height of its
arc.

a man came out
on his front porch
in his pajamas.

“HEY, YOU KIDS, CUT OUT THAT
SHIT! I WANT TO SLEEP!”
“come out here and make us
stop!” said Gene
(he was big for his
age).

“I’LL TELL YOUR FATHER!”

Gene laughed, lit a cracker,
and tossed it toward the
man. it landed
right on the ledge of his large
plate glass window.

“BAANNNGG!!”

luckily the window didn’t
break.

the man ran back into his
house.

Gene handed me the punk
and a bomb.

“you try one ...”

I lit the fuse and waited
as long as I dared
then hurled the bomb.
it went off a dozen feet over my
head.

“not bad,” Gene said.

we walked up Longwood to
21st street, took a left, then
went up the little hill.

“watch this,”
said Gene.

there was a garbage can sitting out by a

fence.

Gene took the lid off, dropped
a lit bomb in there and
put the lid back
on.

“BAANNNGG!!”

the explosion sent the lid flying
about 3 feet
into the air.

“god, they’re powerful!”

“yeah,” said Gene.

we walked a little further up
the hill.
there was a car parked there
with the window slightly open
on the driver’s
side.

“watch this,” said Gene.

he lit a cracker and dropped it
through the window.

“BAAANNNGG!!”

the car rocked, then
was filled with thick
blue smoke.

“that was great!” I
said.

Gene had 3 or 4 cherry bombs left.
we turned, walked back down
the hill.

Gene lit the last ones,
one by one and arched them
as far as possible
into the air where
they exploded.

then we were standing in front of
his house.
it was now about 6:30
a.m.

"well, that's it," he said,
"it's over."

"thanks, Gene."

"sure, see you
around ..."

he walked into his
house.

I walked to mine,
opened the front door,
entered, walked down
the hall.

my father heard me from
his bedroom.

"where the hell you
been?"

“out celebrating ...”

“good for you, son!
it’s a great country
we live in!”

I walked back to my bedroom,
undressed, got back
into bed.

he’s got it all wrong as usual,
I thought,
I was only celebrating
myself.

WITHOUT STRESS OR AGONY

they sit down
get comfortable
talk and
complain and
wave their arms
they have nothing else to
do
and since they have
nothing else to do
they'd prefer to do it
in your company.

I am astonished at the
number of people with
nothing to do
but get comfortable
talk
complain and
wave their arms.

tirelessly
they knock on many doors
looking for other
people with
nothing to do

and when they talk
or complain
their speech is
without stress or agony
they're more like a mild nervous
affliction with

nowhere to go.

sometimes I simply ask them
to leave
and they do
and then I feel guilty
as if I had perhaps misunderstood
their need
or I feel that I may have offended
them.

not so.
they return
they always return
each and every one of them
they sit down again
get comfortable
talk
complain and
wave their arms.

but I know
that I am not the only one
who suffers thus.

they go from one to another
from here to there
and while they are with another
I get the one who has just been
elsewhere
and then
a new visitor sits down
gets comfortable
talks
complains and
waves their arms

at me.

MY CLOSE CALL

not a good fighter, he managed to get into some brutal back-alley fights.

because of his darkened mind and too much to drink,
he
always
picked the biggest meanest fucker he could find.
winging and catching shots to the shouts of the
whore bystanders, he took some lovely beatings some
of the time.

“Hank,” his best friend told him one night, “we want
you
to join
the gang.”

“I can’t.”

“can’t? why?”

“I got something else to do ...”

2 days later one of the gang was wounded in a police
shoot-out and 2 others killed,
including his friend.

he went to a bar 3 blocks east, sat waiting for
an answer, sat waiting for
the moon to change into the sun,
sat waiting patiently for one thing
or another.

CLOTHES COST MONEY

Hofstetter wore knickers with
kneesocks, the only kid in school
who dressed like that, only he didn't
dress himself, his mother dressed
him and to top it off he wore
large horn-rimmed glasses and he had
a very fat white face, in fact his
whole body was soft and white and fat,
and he wore bright checkered sweaters,
a different color
sweater each day, and he had the
strangest shoes—large, square, clumsy
orthopedic shoes, black,
and it was a long walk from grammar
school to where Hofstetter lived,
maybe 12 blocks, and I walked home
with him each day after school
but he never made it safely home,
the gang followed him each day,
taunting, calling him names, throwing
rocks, spitting on him until they
finally closed in to give him his
daily treat.

they were older and
there were 5 or 6 of them and they
thrashed him well, chops to the
neck, fists to the face, and down
he'd go, again and again, silently,
taking his beating almost as a ritual,
rising to be smashed down again,
his bloody nose dripping onto

his brightly colored sweater,
his face glistening with tears, the
late afternoon sun reflecting on
them, and the knees of his knickers
now torn and dirtied, the
flesh showing through as he was
knocked down again and again
until he no longer rose and
then they slowly left, that gang of
5 or 6, still shouting vile
threats.

it happened day after day
after day.

I always helped him up then
gathering his books and his notebook
from where they'd been tossed
with the papers torn loose and
I helped him walk back home
his stockings dragging, his glasses
half on often with one lens
gone.

as he entered his house
day after day after day
I sat on the lawn in front and
listened while his mother
screamed, "YOU'VE
RUINED YOUR CLOTHES AGAIN!
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT CLOTHES
COST MONEY?"

Hofstetter never replied,
and then I would hear his mother
slap him and he would scream

as
his mother kept slapping
him, "YOU'VE RUINED YOUR CLOTHES
AGAIN!
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT CLOTHES
COST MONEY?"

I would leave then.

the next day I would see
Hofstetter again at school, again
dressed in knickers, his brightly
colored checkered sweaters, his
square, clumsy, black orthopedic
shoes and they would begin on him
early—putting gum on his seat,
dropping itching powder down the
back of his neck, zapping him with
spit-wads with their home-
made slingshots while the
teacher was absorbed with the
lesson ...

the hot Los Angeles
sun came through the windows,
the blackboards were
formal, dull and uninspiring
as Hofstetter sat there
waiting for the last bell
and the walk home, day after
day after day, it never
changed, it couldn't and
would never change,
that horrible march home,
that little-known history of
inhumanity.

AN EASY WAY TO DIE

is talking about writing while signing
your published tomes in a
bookstore as cars swish by outside in the rain
and authors living and dead sit all around
you on their shelves.
you suck on a green bottle of beer
while the people sit and watch you sign your books.
something inside you keeps saying,
what the hell am I doing?
this isn't me sitting here signing books,
this is some fat old fool relaxing in the shade of
nowhere.

I should get up and crack one of these
suckers over the head with this bottle,
I should scream,
"I WON'T DO THIS SHIT!"
but look at me:
nice old guy, smiling, talking about Faulkner,
talking about the racetrack,
talking about ... what?

this is the ultimate sellout, Jack.
you are letting them cover you with salve
and cream.
did you fight your way off the park bench
just to do this?

finally, you shove the books aside,
"I've got to go."

"that's all right, that's all right, thank
you very much."

you get up, shake hands.
you are the author, hey, hey, you're
not really crazy after all, are you?

they've tamed your ass.

"thanks very much," they say
again.

"sure, sure," you answer, then you're
out the door
into the night
carrying what bits are left of you
in your pocket, in your shoe, in
your graying hair.

and not very much is left:
they took away the tiger and left a
pussycat
as you meow yourself to your car and
get the fuck out of
there.

WE HAVE HAND GUNS AROUND HERE

they broke in and stole
the old Jewish lady's
red Irish setter.
it's nearly all she had except
for her New York accent.

then they came back
and stole her hair dryer
and 4 large cans of Starkist
chunk-style tuna.

her son has come by
with a dozen cardboard cartons
he found behind the
supermarket.

he's moving her,
he says, to a safer
part of town.

now, I thought, where can
that be?

I ought to ask him while
she stands there waiting
in the center of the
lawn but I think he's in a
hurry.

MAKING DO

once
on this ball-busting
job
I asked the worker
next to
me,
“how do we know
we haven’t died
and gone to
hell?”

he didn’t
reply.
he
thought I was
crazy to imagine
we might have
gone to
hell.

the fact
was:
he was not
in
hell, I
was.

I
looked at the
other
workers.
they didn’t think

they were
in hell
either.

the foreman
walked up
behind
me.

“Chinaski,
what are you
looking around
for?”

“I
want to see
where I
am.”

“you’re here at the
A-Gleam Lighting
Company.”

“thanks.”

“and no talking
on the
job.”

“what?”

“I saw you
talking to
Meyers.”

“o.k.”

“stay on top
of your job,
Chinaski.”

he walked
off.

“Meyers,” I
said, “I think
I’m in
hell!”

he still didn’t
reply.

I
looked at
the wall
clock:
25 minutes
until lunch,
30 minutes
for lunch,
then
5 more
hours
plus 2 hours
overtime,
an hour to
drive home,
ten minutes
to
bathe,
30 minutes to
eat,
20 minutes