

she hangs
up.

Carson jokes about
his jokes being
so bad
but he has probably
consumed and
murdered
more writers than
Bobby Hope.

then she's
back:
"why do you keep
listening to
me?
why don't you
hang up?"

I hang up
then take
the phone
off the
hook.

Carson has
finished his
monologue.
smiles
is delicately
concerned
yet
pleased.
he goes into
his little golf
swing

THE END OF AN ERA

parties at my place were
always marred by
violence:
mine.

it was what
attracted
them: the
would-be

as the commercial
descends
upon
me.

it's just another
dull night
in San Pedro
as all my
male servants
Kitcha Kubee
Des Man DeAblo
La Tabala
and
Swine Herd Sam
stand
with their
black dicks
extended.

I decide to have
my unlisted
number
changed
but meanwhile
remote control
the tv
off,
shush the
fellows
away
and reach for
the pages of
Sam Beckett
as my
cross-eyed white
cat
leaps upon the
bedcovers.

writers
and the
would-be
women.

these writers?
these women?
I could always hear
them

buzzing from the far
corners:

"when's he going to
flip? he always
does"

at most parties I
enjoyed
the beginnings, the
middles

but as each night
unfolded toward
morning

something
somebody
would truly disgust
me

and I'd find myself
picking up some
guy
and
hurling him off the
front porch:

that was
my favorite way of
getting rid of
them ...

well, so ...
this one particular
night
I made up my
mind
to see it all
through
without
untoward
incident

and was
walking into the
kitchen
for another
drink
when

I was
pounced upon

from
behind
by
Peter the
bookstore
owner

this bookstore
owner had more
mental problems than
most of
them

and
as he had me
in this excellent
choke-hold from the
rear
his madness gave
him a rather superb
strength ...

and as those milk brains
in the other room
babbled on about how to
save the
world

I was being
murdered ...

I thought I was
finished
bright flashes of
light
whirled
about

I could no longer
breathe
I felt my heart
beating through my
temples

and like a trapped
animal
I gave it one last
surge:

grabbed him
behind the
neck
bent my back

and carried him
along
like that

rushed toward the
kitchen
wall
ducked my head
low
at the last
moment
and

crashed his skull
against that
wall.

I steadied myself
a moment
then picked him
up and carried him
into the other
room

and dumped him upon
the lap
of his
girlfriend

wherein
within the
safety of her
skirts
this Peter the Bookstore
owner
came around and began
crying (yes, he actually
showed tears):

"Hank hurt me! he
HURT me! I was only
PLAYING!"

I heard voices about the
room:

"You're a real bastard,
Bukowski!"

"Peter sells your books, he
puts them in the
window!"

"Peter LOVES you!"

"o.k.," I said, "everybody
out! FAST!"

sure enough, they filed
properly out
only barely whispering
their comments
to each
other.

and
I locked the
door
put out the
lights
got myself a
drink
and
sat there
in the dark
drinking
alone.

and
I liked that
so
much
that
that's the way
I continued to
drink
from there
on
and
there were no more
parties

say
except with a
woman

and
after that
the writing got
better

everything got
better:

you've got to
get rid of

the
bloodsuckers
before they
get rid of
you.

THE MAIN COURSE

"Jesus Christ," he told me, "you know Rita and I split, just general attrition and a rather boring unhappiness. anyhow, I've been eating out and it's like a repeat movie or the same dream you keep having over and over."

"whatcha mean?" I asked.

"I mean," he told me, "I keep going into cafe after cafe: dim lights, empty tables. I go in, you know, and no matter the cafe the same man gets up from his newspaper and moves toward my table ..."

"hands you a menu," I said.

"yes, and I am pleased for him: I am bringing him money, I am bringing him trade ..."

"he might suicide otherwise?"

"I don't know," he continued, "anyhow, I order soup, beer, wine, salad, shrimp and fries. I make a small joke, hand the menu back. he walks off toward the kitchen. outside it rains; inside sickening music plays on the radio."

"then?" I asked.

"the soup arrives. not too bad. I read the paper as I spoon the soup and the paper says something like: woman steals baby from mother for 3 months. horse meat from Australia has been served at a nation-wide popular chain of drive-in eating places for 7 months. man kills estranged wife, 3 children and a man who happened to be outside reading the gas meter."

"then?" I asked.