

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories Study Guide

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories by Charles Bukowski

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The Most Beautiful Woman in Town

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town Summary

Henry Charles Bukowski, Jr. and beautiful, erratic Cass share a brief affair. She refuses to "shack" and kills herself while he is unavailable at work, leaving him deeply hurt. Cass is introduced as the youngest of five sisters who finds Bukowski's ugliness attractive. Accepting a drink, she asks if Bukowski finds her pretty and then horrifies him by driving a hat pin through her nose. The bartender nearly throws them out. They move to his apartment, where he surprises her by waiting until morning for sex. Charles leaves town for six months, returns, and resumes the affair. He is upset by more piercings and scars from an attempt at slitting her throat. They enjoy beach life as much as sex, but Cass does not want to live together. After a week's work that keeps them apart—Charles is adverse to regular employment—he gets the shocking news in the West End Bar wondering why Cass has not appeared.

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town Analysis

Charles Bukowski tells of his brief affair with Cass, a "beautiful and spiritual schizti," wild and incoherent, which ends in her suicide. That Cass will slit her throat at age twenty is predictable from what is told about her life, but it is brought up so bluntly that it is shocking, and Charles is thrown into despair at having been negligent in caring for the troubled young woman. Charles misses the crisis and tragedy because he has taken a short-term job. He avoids full-time employment, preferring to get by piecemeal. He wishes he could have died instead and corrects himself for calling himself a dog—he is much worse. Having driven home dead drunk, he curses a driver who honks his horn, for there is nothing else that he can do. In the end, Charles concludes, "The night kept coming on in and there was nothing I could do."

The story allows Cass to describe the hardships of prostitution, but Bukowski concentrates on a pleasant, normal life with her, enjoying the beach and lying in bed together without sex. This is quite atypical for a Bukowski story and unique in this collection. He uses his bath time as a segue from prostitution to life together. Cass seems to know when he is taking a bath and inevitably shows up with an elephant ear leaf to place over his genitals as a prelude to intense love-making. No symbolism is suggested.



Kid Stardust on the Porterhouse

Kid Stardust on the Porterhouse Summary

Needing money, Bukowski signs on at a meat-packing plant and entertains his tough fellow workers until he can take it no more and quits. Bukowski has applied at the plant before but been too disgusted to work and left. To get around this, he invents a persona, Kid Stardust, whose boxing fame conveniently lies outside the U.S. His fellow workers appear to be Black Muslims, and Bukowski feels the intimidation of the schoolyard again. Handling meat is disgusting and requires technique. He manages to learn it but cannot do it fast enough to suit others. At break time, he is assigned to move a truck instead. Having done that, he quits and goes to a bar.

Kid Stardust on the Porterhouse Analysis

The second story finds Bukowski short of money and too depressed to work an easy job like stock boy or shipping clerk. He signs on at a meat-packing plant, knowing from 2-3 years ago that it is too disgusting to bear. Boots too small are a symbol of his suffering. He innocently rejoices that one of the workers, all of whom he assumes is a Black Muslim, is also named Charlie. The story has a definite racial undercurrent, but no more than that. Most of it is given over to describing the tossing hams like medicine balls and dancing with half-steers at rates too fast to keep up.

Bukowski gives an excellent feel for the artistry required in these jobs and the frustration of trying one's best. The work is so disgusting that he daydreams about sex and is dramatically brought out of his reverie by new barked orders. Bukowski is struggling not to quit as he knows the other workers want him to, but being ordered to re-park a truck during the rest break is the last straw. He strips off his bloody work clothes and stomps away after two hours' work. In a bar, he contemplates how he has failed as in the schoolyard. A minor motif is that all of this is being done for the convenience of "gossiping cranky well-rested stupid housewives."



Life in a Texas Whorehouse

Life in a Texas Whorehouse Summary

Bukowski rides the bus from Los Angeles to New Orleans, but then doubles back to an unnamed city in Texas to find Gloria Westhaven, who had wept when she got off the bus. He lodges in a whorehouse to save money and a local newspaper runs his romantic story, helping him reunite with Gloria, whom he offends and walks away. Twice he finds himself under a table during bar fights over Texas' honor. His disinterest in sex the first day gets a whore beaten by her pimp, but a cleaning lady changing his sheets gives him an excellent ride. The newspaper runs a follow-up on the failure of Romance.

Life in a Texas Whorehouse Analysis

Bukowski on a trip to New Orleans is touched by a fellow passenger's tears when she gets off somewhere in Texas. With an unusual romantic flair, he returns to that town and the photography shop that Gloria Westhaven says her mother owns. As a twist, a pretty employee claims to be Gloria, but when he uncovers her fraud, she offers to help him get his story out. The newspaper editor, her friend, runs a piece, in which the bus trip is made into a plane trip to give it a bit more class, and then is reluctant to release Gloria's address when she responds. Bukowski maintains his usual level of indifference and is given the information. He is uncharacteristically but appropriately tongue-tied at the door. Bukowski and Gloria enter into a bizarre exchange being an unpublished writer, living in whorehouses, and his cowardly lack of military service. Gloria having a naval officer fiance is something of a stumper: why is she flirting if she is engaged to a war hero? Bukowski wonders how killing can make one a gentleman. Fed up, he makes an obscene remark and leaves. He throws away the stories about him clipped from the paper and asks the reader, "Wouldn't you?"

A good deal of the story is devoted to Bukowski's slow resumption of bowel movements, thanks to beer. He complains that bus rides always constipates him, and worries a great deal about it until he achieves success.



Six Inches

Six Inches Summary

Henry Jones, a shipping clerk meets beautiful Sarah, a company secretary, at a Christmas party and marries her, against dire warnings that she is a witch. Sarah proves sexually insatiable but opposed to population growth, declares that Henry must become the perfect size, and by diet shrinks him down to six inches tall, making him a perfect dildo. Disgusted and desperate, Henry stabs Sarah to death with a hat pin, runs away and lives secretly in a small market, where he feeds himself properly and regains the size of a dwarf. Robbing the safe of \$23,000, Jones heads off towards the Hollywood Hills and a new life.

Six Inches Analysis

In a truly bizarre fantasy, which takes a slantwise view of population control, Henry Jones, a shipping clerk (a common Bukowski employment when he grows short of funds) meets beautiful Sarah, a company secretary, at a Christmas party and marries her. Coworkers warn him that Mann and Lincoln have disappeared after associating with Sarah. They call her a witch, but Henry dismisses the idea as far fetched. Sarah is wonderful for a few months, but then begins to nag Henry about being overweight. She pounds his fat bulges and makes him do likewise. One at this point wonders why Henry has not realized that Sarah is insane.

Instead, Henry goes along with it, is proud when he reaches his ideal weight and looks terrific, but does not strenuously object when he starts shrinking in height. He brings up witchcraft, but Sarah dismisses it. Eventually, he is tiny, relieving himself on newspapers and drinking beer from thimbles. He feels humiliated. Sarah has always been sexually insatiable but opposed to population growth, and Henry finds out the hard way why she wants him just six inches tall. There follows a most graphic description of what it feels like to be a living dildo and how one simulates a convincing full-body orgasm. Henry next describes the difficulty of a six-inch person murdering a sleeping giant (hat pin in the heart), and the exigencies of surviving at that size. Once he eats enough to regain the size of a midget, Henry goes about a new life.



The Fuck Machine

The Fuck Machine Summary

A retired German scientist, Von Brashlitz, has been pensioned off at \$500 a month and drifts from town to town, sets up his "FUCK MACHINE" in a room above Tony's bar. He charges patrons \$20 a piece to enjoy it. The unnamed narrator and Indian Mike go upstairs for a try. Introduced as Von Brashlitz's beautiful daughter Tanya, the machine falls in love with the narrator after one bout of sex, and when Mike tries to get his turn, tears off his penis and testicles and he swiftly bleeds to death. Von Brashlitz proves to officials that Tanya is not human, and, after they gang rape and rend her to pieces, he is acquitted by a jury. Von Brashlitz moves to Massachusetts, sets up a mail order sex toy business, and ships the narrator a model. The gas station attendant gets exciting watching it blown up. The narrator enjoys the dummy in every possible way but finds it disappointing after Tanya and shreds it. He has to start patronizing a different bar and gas station.

The Fuck Machine Analysis

Another bizarre fantasy with a science fiction twist, "The Fuck Machine" has a crazy German scientist offering the service of a sex toy so spectacular that he hid during the war to keep it away from Hitler. Von Brashlitz also keeps handy a terrible looking metal thing, which he copiously lubricates to scare customers. He then laughs at his own joke and reveals that Tanya his daughter is actually a machine. Along with electronics and structural parts she includes more organ transplants than modern science believes possible. Tanya apparently has had quite a track record, for when she falls in love with the unnamed narrator (a rare occurrence in Bukowski stories), the inventor is livid. He has invested so much in this machine and now it refuses sex with anyone else. Indian Mike insists on the turn for which he has paid, and pays dearly and gruesomely with his life. Every conceivable law enforcement and public safety agency is called to the scene and they proceed to gang rape Tanya and destroy her. Bukowski enjoys such slaps at authority.

The story could end there, but Von Brashlitz is exonerated and relocates far away, where he opens a mail order sex business. In scenes more farcical than the first part of the story, the narrator receives his package, takes the full-sized doll to the gas station to use the air hose (exciting the young attendant, of course), and takes it home to enjoy. Bukowski gives a good deal of graphic attention to how the doll is used and the narrator's feeling ridiculous as he continues to the end, and then has him destroy it because it is not as good as Tanya. The gas station attendant asks hopefully about the doll, so the narrator must change stations, and after the mess he cannot go back to Tony's bar, and he even avoids the barber shop where he had seen Von Brashlitz's ad. He needs to forget everything and asks the reader if s/he would not also.

This story first mentions oral sex between males as a common part of life in Bukowski's world and the author's alter ego is not enthusiastic about receiving or giving it.



The Gut-Wringing Machine

The Gut-Wringing Machine Summary

The Satisfactory Help Agency wrings the guts out of potential temporary workers. Bagley and Danforth, proprietors, have been partners for 25 years. One morning, Bagley takes two phone orders, which Danforth processes until they determine that prospective workers Herman Telleman and Barney Anderson are sufficiently broken in will to do a good job as cost accountant and deep-sea diver, respectively. Then, proposing a bit of therapy, Danforth runs his partner through until Danforth's anger at the idea of Bagley having sex with his wife, Minnie, turns to an enthusiastic desire to watch them. Closing up shop for the day, Danforth drives and talks to Minnie by phone while Bagley performs oral sex on him. Danforth considers how business and life are good.

The Gut-Wringing Machine Analysis

Even more fantastic is the idea that rebels can have their guts squeezed out by an old-fashioned laundry wringing machine and become docile workers in the American economy. Two examples are examined at length, with verbatims of their before and after declarations of attitude towards authority and long, boring tasks offering sharp contrasts and humor. Some of the references may elude younger readers. There is an exercise on how modern science can make even grandmother-aged actresses look young. The Satisfactory Help Agency's standard operating procedures are detailed over the phone for prospective customers, who are told not to look the gift horse of a partial refund if they fire the worker. The logic is not entirely clarified but does not affect the plot.

The story changes when Danforth talks Bagley into a little therapy in the wringer. Bagley is leery but goes along with it, foolishly as it turns out. Rather than political questions, Danforth determines that Bagley is sufficiently gutless when he agrees to watch Danforth have sex with Bagley's wife. As they drive over at 90 mph, Bagley performs oral sex on Danforth, who only hopes that he leaves enough for Bagley's wife to enjoy. The ending is a bit confusing unless one postulates that with Bagley emptied of guts Danforth has control of all Los Angeles.



3 Women

3 Women Summary

Henry Bukowski and Linda live together on the sixth floor of a building across from McArthur Park. One night an upstairs tenant jumps to his death. The mess is nauseating. They enjoy sex and wine and always find rent money without working. They watch the ducks but to not catch and eat them like some tenants. It is too hard. Bukowski steals vegetables and cigarettes to make due.

One day in desperation, Bukowski walks to the Farm Labor Market but misses the opportunity to pick tomatoes. He returns to find Linda partying with friends Jeanie and Eve. When the women pass out, Bukowski crawls into bed with Jeanie for slow, quiet sex, a bit later goes to Eve for quick relief, and finally, ready to sleep, finds Linda on fire. When he is too tired to perform, Linda sucks him to a third orgasm, which he believes is medically impossible. In the morning, the women head to Tommi-Hi's for an "eye opener." Seeing them leave, the land lady evicts Bukowski, so he heads to Tommi-Hi's, where Linda has left a note to meet her at midnight at the Roach Motel. She, is not there, of course, and Bukowski heads to skidrow. Sex with three women in one night is story enough.

3 Women Analysis

This story finds its two basic plots woven into Bukowski's novels. In the first part, he describes the hand-to-mouth existence that satisfies him and lover Linda. Everyone in their high-rise drinks, has sex, and gets by; the rare one jumps to his death and creates a mess for Sanitation. Linda vomits repeatedly, seeing one on the sidewalk. They steal vegetables and cigarettes and somehow money always shows up to pay the rent. They find themselves particularly desperate, so Bukowski walks 27 blocks before dawn to get a day job as a farm hand. He humorously wonders how cotton pickers can be needed a century after Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin (a machine that cleans the cotton of seeds but does not harvest it), and then as workers board a truck bound for the orchards, chivalrously allows "ladies first." A Mexican supervisor closes the tailgate ahead of Bukowski, and for the rest of the story, the image of its closing haunts and obsesses him. Even while having sex, he cannot get this out of his mind.

Sex is the focus in the second part of the story, when Bukowski arrives home fuming and finds his lover partying with two friends, Jeanie and Eve. Bukowski joins in the drinking and talk, and then has sex with each of the drunken women. He observes philosophically that every woman makes love in a unique way, questions whether the traditional approach of hurrying to orgasm is sensible, and equitably accepts being evicted from the apartment because having sex with three women in one night seems quite an accomplishment.



3 Chickens

3 Chickens Summary

Henry Bukowski is living with ornery Vicki in a violent relationship, during which he breaks her arm by slamming the folding bed into the wall with her on board, and also punches her off a bar stool for flirting with men. Vicki constantly abuses him verbally and is obsessed with catching him masturbating. Fed up, Bukowski goes to Vicki's favorite bar and, to antagonize her, picks up Margi under the alias Thomas Nightengale, shoe salesman. On the way back to the apartment, they purchase a large quantity of alcohol and three chickens, which Bukowski intends to bake using Vicki's recipe. Instead, Bukowski and Margi fall to having sex, only to be interrupted by Vicki. A savage verbal battle between the women brings the police, who arrest Margi and threaten to haul off Bukowski, but Vicki intercedes. The officers say that she will have to increase her monthly protection payments, given the frequency with which she needs it.

3 Chickens Analysis

This is a story about a radically dysfunctional relationship. Bukowski does not name himself as the narrator and uses an alias when picking up the third member of the triangle in a bar. He is far more violent than in other stories, breaking Vicki's arm and slapping her off a bar stool. At the end of the story it is revealed that she is paying for police protection against him—not too effectively. Vicki, in turn, is verbally abusive and obsessed with Bukowski masturbating. Her harping on the subject leads him to do it out of spite, leaving him wondering if he will be able to perform when he picks up Margy in a bar, in front of Vicki, intending to provoke her. Vicki returns to the apartment to find Bukowski and Margy getting down to sex and the two women square off for an exchange of insults loud enough to attract the police. Bukowski, who is quite proud of the size of his erection, wilts in bed as the officer puts his shiny shoe on the blanket as though the bed were the fender of an automobile he is ticketing. Bukowski recalls the exquisite pain of being handcuffed too tightly as Margy is hauled away. Vicki keeps him from following her to jail, and he has to admit in the brief argument that follows that she is right.

The story's title comes from the three pitiful, incompletely plucked chickens that Bukowski and Margy buy on the way from bar to apartment. He intends to use Vicki's recipe for baking them with whiskey, but the package holding them falls and splits open in the kitchen as they grope each other and head for bed. In the final scene, the red and white neon lights of a gas station logo pulses on the three carcasses.



Ten Jack-offs

Ten Jack-offs Summary

Sanchez is a genius who builds a two-story shack, installs plumbing, and taps electrical and telephone wires. He talks little, paints, writes concisely with no care for fame, occasionally reads poetry at some university, and makes love with sexy, beautiful Kaakaa (derived from Kafka). They take Bukowski in when he feels like after eleven years on the job he is cracking. Sanchez shows him a close-up photograph of his penis at the moment of ejaculation and brags about it taking ten sessions to capture it perfectly. After sleeping in their bed that night, Bukowski finds Sanchez and Kaakaa asleep in each other's arms on a narrow sofa and leaves feeling depressed at his own life.

Ten Jack-offs Analysis

This story is the first in which Bukowski examines his condition as a professional writer. Suffering writer's block, he visits his poet friend Sanchez and Sanchez lover Kaakaa. She originally adopts the name of a favorite author, Franz Kafka, and later modifies it herself into the baby-talk word for feces. Bukowski describes in detail their two-story, self-built shack somewhere on the outskirts of Los Angeles. It features a large black sign with a variety of existential epigrams pasted on it. These set the flavor of the story. To encourage Bukowski, Sanchez quotes Hitler, "Victory or death," the order given to his generals on the brink of disaster in North Africa and at Stalingrad. Hitler makes cameo appearances in several of Bukowski's stories and is featured in "Swastika."

The story shifts to sex when Sanchez shows Bukowski a close-up photograph. In rapid dialog, they determine that it shows Sanchez's penis at the point of ejaculation. Sanchez talks about the challenge of snapping the picture at the precise moment. It takes ten attempts over three days. Before the lengthy explanation, Bukowski says vapidly, "it's not hard, Sanchez, I do it all the time..." They next turn to Bukowski's writer's block. He has an idea about a drunken composer and his maid. The composer interprets "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth" (Mt. 5.5) to mean "the stupid have the greatest persistency." Possible story lines include the narrator lashing the maid and/or sucking the composer's penis, but Bukowski, being "square," has never done that or cared to, so he must leave it unfinished. Frustrated, Bukowski gets nasty drunk, brags about his fame, trips over his shoes, and is put to bed. In the morning, finding the lovers cuddled on a narrow couch, Bukowski leaves, feeling blue, muttering incoherently about images of life. The clearest is an allusion from "beat" author Jack Kerouac's writings. He is Bukowski's contemporary, some of whose stories appear alongside Bukowski's in literary magazines.



Twelve Flying Monkeys Who Won't Copulate Properly

Twelve Flying Monkeys Who Won't Copulate Properly Summary

As Henry Bukowski struggles to build a story around the concept of twelve flying monkeys—lots of sex is mandatory, he is interrupted by Crazy Jack and two looking for Jerry Borst. Jack tells about a close call holding drugs at Venice Beach. He and his woman invade Borst's house while he is giving someone oral sex, and hides in the bathroom, themselves enjoying hours of sex. Borst, also supported by his mother, has not written a decent poem since 1955. Borst later phones, asking to borrow money so he can go to New York City. Having lost his sponsors has motivated him to write seriously again. He plans to visit Switzerland and Greece and settle in New York.

Twelve Flying Monkeys Who Won't Copulate Properly Analysis

This second story about writer's block is set in Venice, CA, allowing a quick sketch of the drug scene there. As Bukowski struggles with how to develop a story idea about a dozen flying monkeys, he is constantly interrupted by fellow artists whose work is bad enough that they must live with their mothers, who nonetheless brag about their genius. Bukowski resents that they are moochers. These friends' sex lives are described as Bukowski struggles to put plenty of sex into his monkey characters. As he regrets having resigned from the Post Office—an autobiographical fact to write full-time—Bukowski considers having them fly around Washington, D.C., dropping turds; he decides that dropping one on the President is going too far, but the Secretary of State is fair game. This leads to a call-out of the police to shoot them down. One cop considers having sex with a female monkey, decides it is dangerous, and blows its head off. Bukowski's anal and anti-establishment fixations are thus incorporated in the story. After an interruption, Bukowski considers flying the monkeys to London and feeding them Spanish Fly (a male aphrodisiac). After another interruption, Bukowski again regrets his decision to write full-time but is thankful to live in a country where someone with minor talent can succeed.

The story, as many do, takes an odd turn at the end. Next morning, a black girl and a "stupid-looking white guy" appear at Bukowski's door, announcing they are taking him, as preciously arranged, boating. He gets seasick and sees a floating suckerfish, which he considers using in the story, wrapped around a monkey. He vomits again at the thought. The guy asks how the great writer is doing, and Bukowski thinks of the French poet Jean Nicolas Arthur Rimbaud, whom Bukowski does not consider great. Bukowski borrows his friend Borst's plan and announces he is going to Greece next year. They



pun sexually about Greece/grease. He thinks of Joseph Conrad, a great writer about the sea, whom he also curses, as they plunge toward Ireland—except that they are in the Pacific. He concludes the story, "To hell with it."

25 Bums in Rags

25 Bums in Rags Summary

Kathy is Bukowski's lover, whom he claims to have "dug out of a gin mill" on Alvarado St. and kept "in furs and hundred proof" ever since. She happily fetches him alcohol and cigars on demand. When Bukowski suggests that she will bed the slobbering "old guy next door" as soon as he leaves for the track, Kathy throws a book at his head, drawing blood. Kathy consoles him when he loses \$500 and is forced to take a humiliating job delivering newspapers in their neighborhood, helps him to get the job done before neighbors wake up and see, and helps him laugh off the fact that he is paid only \$3 for their efforts. When Bukowski wins \$140, Kathy makes meatloaf and fetches him whiskey, beer, and cigars.

25 Bums in Rags Analysis

This story shows Henry Bukowski gambling away his safety margin and having to accept a menial job. He portrays those who seek out and fulfill these jobs, listlessly, only to be cheated by management with administrative charges and estimated hours. Bukowski is outraged to work all day for \$3. He is further incensed at being assigned to deliver papers in his own neighborhood. He recognizes a little girl who recognizes him; his girl friend actually knows the girl's name. She also helps him finish the job swiftly. A supervisor then makes him help out a slower colleague. Only winning again at the track puts Bukowski's life back on track and makes him feel good.



Non-Horseshit Horse Advice; and Another Horse Story

Non-Horseshit Horse Advice; and Another Horse Story Summary

Henry Bukowski opens by paraphrasing one of Freud's pupils: gambling is a substitute for masturbation. He notes that at the Hollywood Park racetrack, women's skirts climb higher with each race until by the ninth race it is hard to refrain from raping them. This aside, he settles into explaining the principles of "horse-wagering" for those unfamiliar: the state and track's 15% take on each dollar bet, "breakage" (rounding pennies down to closest dime), the odds of losing, handicapping, wrong instincts, and mathematics. Bukowski identifies himself as a "hard-nose," accepting that he will neither win nor lose much. He refuses to reveal his system, but offers a few suggestions for how to save some money: 1) watch the "underlay shots," 2) lay off "closers," 3) bet on closers only in shorter races, if one must, 4) watch one's toteboard and "morning line," 5) only bet what one can afford to lose, and 6) limit one's odds. Bukowski concludes by saying no one can know enough about racing (or anything else). He then reminisces about a big win that lets him rent a luxury motel room in Del Mar.

"Another Horse Story" deals in the same vein with harness racing, examining the card for 1 Sep. (year unspecified), when Bukowski claims to have won "a few dollars." He gives a somewhat clearer picture of how the many factors combine to suggest a specific bet. In the last race, Bukowski offers advice to an old man who wants to win big before he dies; the man picks "a stiff, as usual," the odds-on favorite, and is furious at the track when he loses. Bukowski wins, cashes in, but at home finds two magazines in the mail in which his prose and poetic style are parodied. Frustrated but knowing that he is a true writer, he runs a bath, drinks a beer, studies the racing form, and ignores the phone.

Non-Horseshit Horse Advice; and Another Horse Story Analysis

These two stories provide a primer on betting at the track, ostensibly targeted at novices. In both, the reader can sense Bukowski laughing at the rush of jargon he delivers up, clarifying little but entertaining. At the end of the first, he declares that no one can ever know enough about racing. At the end of the second, his disappointment at being parodied in magazines matches the ire of an old man who ignores his advice in the ninth race and loses, as he usually does. The stories are difficult reading for a non-fan. In both, Bukowski opens with a bit of shock appeal. In the first, he remarks on how women's skirts ride up with each successive race, raising his passion (and presumably that of all other males). In the second, a man loudly proclaims his disgust at finding an unflushed toilet in the men's room. Bukowski remarks that it is always the guy who does

not enjoy the appearance of turds who comes upon them, suggesting that he would have been quite pleased with the experience, further demonstrating his anal fetish.



The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper

The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper Summary

Despite their dislike of his behavior while drunk, Joe and Cherry Hyans hire Bukowski to write a column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man," for their new underground newspaper, Open Pussy. The operation begins in the first floor of their rented house before moving to a vacant building on Melrose Ave. Most of the employees are volunteers. Publication of a literary supplement results in an "obscenity" charge. Bukowski, still a Post Office employee, is twice interrogated about his column, with the status of his support payments for an illegitimate child being brought up.

Joe and Cherry, meanwhile, have marital difficulties, splitting up and getting back together repeatedly. When the paper folds, heavily in debt, Joe tries to commit suicide with the gun he buys to kill Cherry's lover, but it jams and he sells it. Joe makes off with everything in the office, including the IBM machine that he does not own. He declares that the paper has "fulfilled its artistic purpose" and as an artist he must move on. The couple gets back together and plans to move to San Francisco.

The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper Analysis

This rather long story examines the operation of an underground newspaper that flaunts the moral standards of the late 1960s. Many of the employees are volunteers; others are obnoxious college types. Bukowski recalls working with such in 1939/40 at the L.A. City College newspaper. He prefers to submit his column and avoid the office and meetings. His involvement draws the attention of his superiors in the Post Office and he undergoes two interrogations. Disinterested in the inquisitors' names, he refers to them as Mr. Washington and Mr. Los Angeles. They suggest that he become more of a model citizen if he wants to keep his job. Bukowski is blasé about it. He is told that an informant has tipped them to his behavior and he rather sedately shows the power of the bureaucracy to intimidate.

As the paper declines, the owners experience marital difficulties, splitting up and getting back together repeatedly. Although he has a mistress nearby, Joe Hyans buys a gun to kill wife Cherry's assumed lover. Bizarrely, he then decides to challenge him to a boxing match with all the trimmings—ring, referee, etc. When the paper fails, Joe attempts suicide but the gun jams. He sells it. A colleague asks Bukowski if he would be able to try it a second time. As Bukowski and the political editor talk by phone a last time and make vague promises to stay in touch, Bukowski records, "I went into the crapper and



took myself a beautiful beershit. Then I went to bed, jacked off, and slept." Bukowski shows himself to be a hard man to faze and the simple pleasures of life always suffice him.



Life and Death in the Charity Ward

Life and Death in the Charity Ward Summary

Bukowski finds himself in the top rack of an ambulance that gather destitute patients to take them to the hospital's charity ward. He has been vomiting large quantities of blood and worries about getting it on those below. He has been ignoring the effects of drinking whiskey for some time. Swallowing a mouthful of blood, he makes it to the hospital and through check-in. He is deposited in a dark, cold cellar and given a pill. The other 8-10 beds are also occupied. A huge man in his fifties talks to the ceiling about being robbed by a wonderful boy whom they hire as a fry cook. The man screams in outrage and agony. Later he retells the story more calmly and Bukowski vomits blood. When taken for x-rays, Bukowski is too weak to stand up and ruins several films.

Bukowski is moved to a large room where 40 people are dying. Hating to use a bedpan, Bukowski walks to the bathroom but vomits and collapses on the way back, annoying patients and the sadistic staff. He is denied a blood transfusion and forced to see a Catholic priest, since that is on his admission form. Because his father works for the L.A. County Museum, Bukowski eventually gets blood and glucose. He tells the priest that "Once a Catholic always a Catholic" is bullshit.

When he improves to the point that he is only bleeding out his rectum, Bukowski offers to buy cigarettes for Harry, a rose grower whose heart is so weak that doctors say smoking will kill him. They and Charley enjoy a smoke in bed, lie to an angry doctor, and continue when he leaves. Harry would rather die happy than live in misery. Bukowski's stern father and drunken ex-wife Vicki visit and make a scene. Bukowski refuses an operation, is advised about diet and warned not to drink, and is discharged. His first beer goes down smoothly.

Life and Death in the Charity Ward Analysis

In a fairly harrowing story, Bukowski describes a hospital stay from being picked up in the overcrowded ambulance to his first beer after being released with strict orders not to drink. Whiskey has been his downfall and he has seen the signs but ignored them until he is vomiting large quantities of blood. He remarks that it is not red but black and foul-smelling when it comes from the stomach. Courteously he swallows mouthfuls rather than spewing his fellow sufferers. He shows the bureaucracy that governs how indigent patients are treated. Mostly they are left to die in a large room. He is denied a blood transfusion until his father, a county employee participating in the blood bank, sponsors him. He endures a visit from a Catholic priest because he has been forced to record a religion on his admission form. He causes problems by refusing to use a bedpan and so infuriates "Florence Nightingale" (the head nurse) by exposing himself that she spits in his face.



Bukowski talks about three fellow patients. One is a man restrained to his bed who endlessly tells the long and detailed story of how he and his wife are betrayed and robbed by a young boy they hire and befriend. The other two are in the large ward where 40 patients are dying, Bukowski says, rather tongue-in-cheek. One man, Harry, is white. Suffering heart disease, he has been warned never to smoke again. The other, Charlie, is black. Bukowski is feeling better, so he strolls down to the lobby to buy cigarettes for Harry. Charlie makes a lukewarm attempt to keep Harry from smoking, allowing for a discussion of living in misery vs. dying happy. Notably, Charlie lights up with the other men. After a doctor rebukes them, Bukowski develops a case of conscience about being responsible for killing Harry and wants Charlie to pass the pack to him, as though that mediates guilt. In the end, Bukowski tosses the pack and matches to Harry. As soon as he is released, strictly warned not to drink, Bukowski gingerly sips one beer and downs another.



The Day We Talked About James Thurber

The Day We Talked About James Thurber Summary

Down on his luck selling his work, Bukowski is forced to room with Andre ("Frenchy"), an "immortal," fastidious, and bisexual French poet in Venice, CA. Andre speaks seven languages, has likable ways, and takes good care of Bukowski. He has known all of the great literary figures of the mid-20th century and likes to drop names. Like many—including Bukowski—Andre has been cheated on movie contracts. Bukowski repeatedly vomits at the sight of Andre's enormous penis, which Andre often displays, even when doing yoga. Bukowski prefers to walk on the beach whenever visitors (usually male) come to satisfy Andre.

Andre gets an offer to read poetry somewhere and leaves Bukowski alone to write. Admirers of the French genius arrive, however, and assume he is Andre. The unnamed male begins immediately to give Bukowski oral sex while he talks about Ezra Pound with Wendy. Later, Bukowski has wild sex standing up with Wendy, recalling a similar experience in Detroit that had nearly killed him from the exertion. When the male sticks a finger up Bukowski's anus, he punches him in the face, but they depart amiably enough, leaving Bukowski happy to be "a pretty good guy after all," whose "talent is not yet finished."

The Day We Talked About James Thurber Analysis

This story is about Bukowski as a frustrated writer and a successful French poet who takes him in and, of course, sex. It opens with a cavalcade of famous names and protestations about being overlooked and cheated—James Thurber's name is barely mentioned. Thurber is an American humorist, producing essays, stories, and drawings for the prestigious *New Yorker*. His most famous story is "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." His themes are often sexual, but with none of the raw intensity of Bukowski. Bukowski opens by declaring that he is either down on his luck or his talent is finished. He quotes Aldous Huxley on it being hard to sustain genius at age fifty, which he is approaching. Known by "Genet, Henry Miller, Picasso," etc., he does not even have a copy of his last book of poems, which is now an expensive collector's item, and the last time he takes a job as a dishwasher he is fired for incompetency. He has a five-year-old daughter in San Francisco—the only person he loves—or whom he feels responsible.

Bukowski has become the virtual ward of Andre (or "Frenchy"), an "immortal" poet who enjoys the luxury of literary sponsors and is thus free to crank out poems at leisure. Andre has known Corso, Burroughs, Ginsberg, kaja, "the early hotel gang," and even encountered "Miro and Hem" on the street. Andre says that William S. Burroughs, with



Jack Kerouac a major Beat author, reminds him of Bukowski, crawling, dead drunk, complaining how they have screwed him out of movie rights to his most famous book, *Naked Lunch*, for \$500. Andre adds that Burroughs gets lucky and the option runs out. The same thing happens to Nelson Algren over *Man with the Golden Arm*. Bukowski complains that they get him drunk and fix him up with a prostitute to get him to sign a contract for \$50 without reading the fine print on *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. Note that the first two books are made into films, while Bukowski's never is and he is too drunk to remember the prostitute.

The story shifts gears violently, as Bukowski describes the immaculate apartment, Andre's endless stream of lovers, male and female, and particularly his enormous penis. Bukowski makes himself scarce during orgies, although Andre says there is no need. Bukowski paints a picture of the seagulls of Venice Beach fighting for scraps weekdays, oblivious to the feast that awaits when the weekend beach crowd abandons its garbage. Andre leaves town on business, and a young couple, admirers of Andre's poetry, show up and mistake Bukowski for him. The male gives him enthusiastic oral sex while the female, Wendy, discusses Ezra Pound. They go on to discuss literature (including Thurber in passing), drink wine, and then Bukowski attacks Wendy in a frenzy, ripping her clothes off and taking her standing up. He meditates on nearly dying doing this in Detroit and explains the physics of copulation standing up. When "the kid" fingers Bukowski's anus he punches him and grows sullen, waiting for them to leave. In most of the stories Bukowski declines oral sex by males but because he has allowed it, this reaction is unexpected. The couple dress, thank "Andre," and depart. Bukowski feels renewed.



All The Great Writers

All The Great Writers Summary

A testy book publisher, Henry Mason, interviews two would-be clients who drop into his office demanding to talk. One has had his manuscript rejected and the other wants an advance on a story idea. Mason considers such writers worse than salesmen, but when his receptionist, Francine, is unable to get rid of them, allows them to come in.

Mason tells the angry James Burkett that he runs a business, whose profits depend on accepting only books that will sell. Artists are "intolerably dull" and short-sighted, believing they are great no matter how bad they are. They cite Van Gogh and Mozart as unrecognized geniuses, but Mason could cite 50,000 intolerable idiots trying to get published. Mason admits that his client, Bukowski, has slipped, but insists that "the shit" that he writes sells. He advises Burkett to try another publishing house, and Burkett storms out. Hard on Burkett's heels comes Ainsworth Hockley, one of Mason's already-published authors, obsessed with oral sex, and seeking an advance on a sexual story set in outer space. Mason gives him a check for \$75.

Mason then takes sexy Francine to an early lunch, kissing and groping her on the way down in the elevator. He smokes a cigar—Hockley's ploy for looking manly and dynamic—at the restaurant. When the unnamed waiter gets an erection studying Francine while awaiting their food order, Mason shoos him away, claiming his "horn" could kill someone. The waiter sulks, envious that some guys get all the beautiful women and angry to be waiting tables when he has a trunk load of unsold manuscripts.

All The Great Writers Analysis

This story looks at publishing from the publisher's point of view. All would-be authors believe that they are geniuses and are able to cite fellow geniuses who were not recognized until after their deaths. Publisher Henry Mason insists that he is in business to sell books; manuscripts that are unlikely to sell are rejected. There are many publishing houses to choose from and another might pick up a title he declines. Mason talks to two walk-ins. The first, James Burkett, has just had a manuscript declined and is fighting mad. He hides behind reverse discrimination: if he were black or homosexual, his work would have been bought. He cites Bukowski as an example of a writer who has "slipped" but continues to be published by Mason. Mason readily admits this, but explains that Bukowski's "shit" still sells.

The next drop-in is Ainsworth Hockley, a sexually conflicted man who has been paid for his *Lust and Busts on the Campus*. He has a new story idea that he has not even outlined but wants to present in person. Mason declares outright that Hockley is insane as he comes in marveling at the 36-inch penis he has just sucked and offering to suck Mason—or let Mason suck him. He rants on about other huge endowments he has seen



before being reined in to talk about business. His oddball story idea has potential and Mason gives him an advance to go away.

The story shifts to Mason's apparently sudden realization that his receptionist is beautiful and wears short skirts. There is no indication that he has come on to Francine previously. It also appears that his company publishes primarily materials of a sexual nature, so it is unlikely that the earlier discussions have primed his interest. None of this is important, for their going to an early lunch serves only to let Francine's beauty inflame the waiter. He turns out to be a frustrated would-be writer who is chagrined to be waiting tables. He has manuscripts of four novels, 40 short stories, and 500 poems, all unpublished and his talent is unrecognized. As he splashes cold water on his penis (a cliché), he grumbles about how some people have all the luck and vehemently reiterates the arguments of Burkett and Hockley. The irony is that he does not know whom he is serving that day, so they remain ships passing in the night.



The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California

The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California Summary

After the bar closes, Tony and Bill talk themselves into stealing a corpse from a hearse parked across the street, outside the Stomach Hospital. They have studied the pick-up operation for weeks and know the timing. Tony and Bill screw up their courage and steal one, hauling it to their boarding house and upstairs to Tony's room. Bill is frightened. Drinking muscatel, they talk about rigor mortis, stench, and the possibility of jail. Finally pulling back the sheet, they are amazed to find a beautiful, shapely blond woman. Tony gets excited and shamelessly has sex with the corpse. He is so enthusiastic that reluctant Bill takes a turn and agrees that she is the best fuck ever. Tony declares that he is in love. Nevertheless, they must dispose of the body before they are caught. They drive it to Venice Beach just before dawn. The lovely corpse is stiffening as they kiss it tenderly goodbye, and Bill chivalrously swims her out beyond the surf line to become "shark meat." Tony cries over their mermaid on the drive home.

The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California Analysis

Tony and Bill are a pair of inarticulate friends who after weeks of studying logistics steal a body from a hearse on a lark. Tony cannot imagine how they can get caught once behind locked doors. Eventually they get around to looking at their prize, discover a beautiful young woman so recently deceased that rigor mortis has not begun. Bill watches silently while Tony fondles, kisses, and has sex with the body. Bill is at first turned off, but eventually follows suit. Both seem to realize that they are breaking taboo but are unfazed; neither seems to realize that necrophilia is illegal in California and considered more loathsome and serious than mere body-snatching.

They do realize that they must get rid of the body, however. Having declared that he loves the corpse (or is at least "hooked"), they throw it in the car, drive it to the beach, and deliver it up to the sharks. The shift from emotion to practicality is sharp. Tony's "I love you, dead bitch," is somehow rendered poignant. Bill swims the body out past the breakers and sees it as a beautiful mermaid with golden hair floating. He swims her out so far that he nearly drowns getting back to shore. The ending, with Tony and Bill each alone, the rest of town awakening to each individual's business, the mermaid floating away, and pelicans feeding normally, is oddly lyrical.



Trouble with a Battery

Trouble with a Battery Summary

An unnamed narrator buys a "fine-looking Mexican-Indian girl" (also unnamed) a drink in a bar and is led upstairs for sex. Her vicious-looking kid brother is there as a body guard, because one of the girls had been cut up badly. She boasts that her big brother is the famous matador, Jaime Bravo. Each time they have sex, the narrator adds to the pile of bills. The tough bartender barges in wondering why she has not finished with this one yet. He is "sort of" her husband, but she does 8-10 guys a week. She pulls out a strap-on dildo and offers to let him experience anal sex. He asks her to put it away. He is reminded of an old Leslie Howard movie and Somerset Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. She has not heard of them. He asks if she sucks; she says she does—and does. He leaves, picks up his car across the street, and drives home, watching waring for police. He reads a terrible story, *Baby Susan's Chicken*, to his little girl, takes a hot bath, and considers that the next time he has a dead battery he will catch a movie instead.

Trouble with a Battery Analysis

"Trouble with a Battery" describes how an unnamed narrator buys a "fine-looking Mexican-Indian girl" (also unnamed) a drink in a bar and enjoys sex for so long that the bartender—her husband and pimp—comes up to hurry her along. Not until the very end of the story is it revealed that the narrator is in that bar/whorehouse because his car battery has died. He is killing time while it is being recharged across the street. He is married with a daughter, who is still awake when he comes home, her mother having fallen asleep. Daddy reads her a story about chickens from which he draws a bawdy conclusion, and figures that next time that he has car trouble, he will go to a movie while it is being fixed.

The conclusion seems odd, because his experience with the girl seems not so bad. Her vicious-looking kid brother watches, because one of the girls has been cut up badly. The narrator seems to have no problem performing with him there. He is put off when she pulls out a strap-on dildo and offers to let him experience anal sex. When he asks if she sucks, he gets his money's worth. In other stories, Bukowski is revitalized by such an experience. He mentions the renowned actor/director/producer Leslie Howard and film of Somerset Maugham's novel *Of Human Bondage* in which Howard stars. neither of which she has heard. He finds that their scene fits with the film—if purged of explicit sex. He does not believe the woman's claim that her big brother is the daring Mexican matador Jaime Bravo, a historical character.



Swastika

Swastika Summary

The unnamed President of the United States is driven from the White House not to the airport to begin his scheduled vacation at his private home, but for several hours to a wooded area. He ends up at a boarding house at 2435 Shoreham Dr., where surgeons exchange his brain and larynx for that of the supposedly-late Adolph Hitler. Der Führer admits to having ordered the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy in order to have an easier role to step into. It is a triumph of "History and Science." Hitler is then driven on to his vacation home and eventually to the White House, back to world power, and wondering how the First Lady will enjoy his sexual prowess in a young body. He forbids the use of German to his aides. The President insists on his old identity, but is laughingly dismissed and gradually ages to Hitler's true age. The landlady, who has known Hitler as Tilson, reminds the President that he owes back rent. The President is institutionalized. Patients mock him for his claims, although one thinks he resembles that "dictator-fellow." He seems to know a lot about politics, which is probably what drives him crazy.

Swastika Analysis

Bukowski refers often enough in his writings to the Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, whose burned corpse is found by the Soviet Army outside his Berlin bunker on 30 Apr. 1945, but in this story makes him an actual character. He has not perished but has bided his time to wait for the right man to be elected President of the United States. His skilled surgeons, Graf and Voelker, rapidly transplant the two brains and larynges, leaving no telltale scars. Dressed as the President, Hitler orders aides never to speak German or use his real name or title, and laments losing his signature mustache. He boasts of having the Kennedy brothers killed because they are "too alienated from my political philosophy." JFK's successor is "far more ideal and he is too old to wait for a better candidate. JFK's success is, of course, Lyndon B. Johnson, author of the Great Society and champion of the Vietnam War. The Presidential character seems too meek and accepting to be LBJ, but it could be that Bukowski wants to demean him in fiction.

The story title uses a graphic swastika, which cannot be reproduced in normal typography.



Politics is like Trying to Screw a Cat in the Ass

Politics is like Trying to Screw a Cat in the Ass Summary

In response to a reader, a certain M.K., who wonders why he never writes about politics and world affairs, Bukowski comments on a series of recent events in 1968. Several H-bombs, which the U.S. State Department assures citizens are protecting their lives, are accidentally lost. They are said to be "unarmed," but one splits open off the coast of Spain and contaminates the bottom with radioactivity. Democracies and dictatorships both do as they like, but dictatorships spare the citizens the bother of voting. The State department revises vocabulary for press releases to minimize the danger, and the U.S. Navy, having recovered the bomb off Spain throws a band concert in Palomares to celebrate. Other accidents occur off Iceland and Greenland.

These incidents disappear from the front pages of newspapers when the North Koreans seize the U.S.S. Pueblo, a spy ship. Patriotism soars and Congressional leaders back Pres. Johnson's calling up of the Reserves. Communism is still intent on world domination. There are crises galore as idiots control the fate of humanity. Bukowski prefers to concentrate on books, horses, and whores.

Politics is like Trying to Screw a Cat in the Ass Analysis

This story is a political diatribe showing how the State Department manipulates the news of events in 1968 to raise patriotism. It is structured as a response to a reader who wonders why Bukowski never deals with politics and world events. He concludes that there are too many ways in which instant death can come about to bother. Science has run amok, madmen and the sane are indistinguishable. Bukowski prefers to concentrate on simple pleasures while there is time—booze, horses, and whores. Dying from any one of these is less offensive than for Freedom, Democracy, Humanity, and other Bullshit. He notes that Hitler, whom he likes to invoke in stories, would approve of the modern world.



My Big-Assed Mother

My Big-Assed Mother Summary

Two "good girls"—who are close to 40 but look 60, thanks to worry and wine—Tito and Baby live in Bukowski's apartment when he is 29 but looks 50. The apartment house manager calls the police over any noise. Bukowski is trying to pleasure them both when the "big fist of the law" arrives. The women huddle in the corner while Bukowski deals with it, slipping the door chain back in place every time an officer nearly has it detached, claiming to have a lawyer, and clearly knowing his rights. He mocks them for suggesting that he let them in for a little chat. He claims merely to be playing chess with his mother and sister.

When the police leave, Tito performs oral sex on Bukowski while he reads the racing form. Eventually she bats the paper away so he can concentrate. Baby puts her tongue down his throat to help the cause. Afterwards, they smoke together. Bukowski loses track of them but appreciates the memories.

My Big-Assed Mother Analysis

This is another story of Bukowski living in a high rise with women and making too much noise for the tenants' and landlady's taste. The police swing by on a regular basis. Bukowski says the landlady is so sensitive that he is afraid to urinate in the middle of the bowl because of the added noise. All three have lived hard and look far older than their true ages. Most of the story is given over to Bukowski dealing with the police. They get the door open a bit but a chain stops further movement. One officer uses a screwdriver to push the latch and just before he succeeds, Bukowski slips it back with a finger. It is a fine game. The threat of a lawyer sends the officers away. Bukowski lists all of the bogus raps that the lawyer has helped him beat. A noise complaint is obviously not in the same league.

Naturally, the story returns to sex, but also incorporates Bukowski's love of horses. Tito revives his "dead little Vienna sausage" and is noisily slurping away on his as he reads the racing form. His lack of concentration eventually frustrates her. It is all very prosaic. Even Bukowski seems to see the sadness in not knowing whether Tito and Baby, with whom he has had good time—including "making the L.A. Police Force earn the green—are even alive any more, after they drift apart.



A Lovely Love Affair

A Lovely Love Affair Summary

The owner of a small New Orleans café, Marie takes in the destitute Bukowski under the alias Charley Serkin, when Joe Blanchard, editor of the underground newspaper *Overthrow* introduces them. Marie lives upstairs in a long, narrow apartment. She weighs 250-300 pounds. Marie says that Charlie reminds her of Marty—beat-up like a fighter—and warns him that she is a good girl, brought up right. In the morning, Marie cooks breakfast before going to work, and leaves her purse with a \$10 bill in it, probably as a test.

Charlie takes the \$10 to buy beer and puts the change back. Marie also makes straw hats to sell to tourists. Watching her intricate work and chatting with her gets him excited. Charlie claims to be exhausted and climbs into her bed and waits for Marie. When she finds him, she protests, crying, but then gives in and they have great sex—some of the best of Charlie's life. Next morning, when Marie goes to work, Charlie decides that she is too good for him, writes a note, and walks out of the French Quarter. He knows it is a crazy thing for a poor man to do.

A Lovely Love Affair Analysis

"A Lovely Love Affair" is about as touching a tale as Bukowski can tell. An obese woman takes him in as a free tenant when he is destitute and over the course of two days and nights he comes to appreciate and even love her so much that, knowing himself, he has to leave for her sake. Although using an alias, Charlie Serkin, Bukowski is clearly himself: eating little, drinking as much as possible, having an anal fetish, but he is also more honest than usual (not stealing Marie's money) and more caring. He begins as a bit of a chauvinist pig, claiming that he could give her great sex (although he finds her size repulsive), but she warns him that she is a proper girl, which he accepts. Gradually, however, her sweet personality overcomes Charlie's repulsion and he sneaks into her bed. The normal Bukowski comes out as he describes the logistics of making love to an obese woman, but he has to admit it is one of the best sexual experiences of his life. In the end, Marie is just too good for Charlie to stay with and ultimately hurt, so, still destitute (refusing to rob her purse), he leaves a tender note and walks away.



All the Pussy We Want

All the Pussy We Want Summary

Harry and Duke are partners, ex- and future-convicts. Harry has a stupid round face with eyes that make one hate him. Duke is younger and more attentive. Harry is unemployed and Duke is a janitor. While drinking in a cheap hotel room, Harry describes his plan to recover gold thrown up by the impact of artillery shells at an army site nearby. It is risky by day but lucrative and safer at night. The work takes two because there are rattlesnakes that must be fended off. All that gold means unlimited sex—even with Beverly Hills whores. They will be gentlemen. Having described the plan, Harry worries that Duke might shoot him to get it all, but Duke assures him that they are friends.

On the way to the liquor store, they meet a well-built woman, Ginny, who has just escaped from the closet where some guy has kept her locked naked for a week. They take her home. Ginny does not like the looks of Harry and wants to have sex with Duke first. Duke wants to make her part of the gold-finding team. Ginny claims to have "the tightest pussy in the state of California, but Duke's experience proves otherwise. Watching the couple move, Harry considers that they might team up to kill him and figures he might have to kill them first.

All the Pussy We Want Analysis

Bukowski creates some pitifully inept characters, but Harry and Duke surpass them all. Poor Duke, who likes to listen to people, sees the logic in impacts on an Army artillery range blasting out gold that is there for the picking. Harry claims the danger is minimal at night. Even during the daytime, once they hit the target, they would be satisfied and quit. That the range will be fenced and guarded seems not to occur to him or Duke. Duke also accepts that it is a two-man job because somebody has to guard against rattlesnakes while the other collects the riches. The selling point is that gold equals access to superior-class women: all the pussy they want. The mental picture of them hoping around a cratered field is fantastic.

The story is complicated when they pick up a young woman, undoubtedly a prostitute, who tells her sad story of abduction and heads up to their room. From the start of the story it is clear that Harry's face provokes hatred, and Ginny is repulsed. She asks to do Duke first. Watching and listening to them, with Ginny obviously faking the passion, leads Harry to consider they might join forces against him to get all the gold. The possibility of a double cross is left hanging. Harry would like all the gold plus Ginny's "tight box."



The Beginner

The Beginner Summary

When Bukowski checks out of the Charity Ward and tires of drinking, sex, movies, and stupid zoos, his girlfriend Madge suggests that they go to Hollywood Park. Bukowski is amazed by everything he sees. Madge explains the Racing Form to him, but says that she just bets on horses' names that she likes. Bukowski badgers her constantly about pulling down her skirt and up her stockings so that she does not look badly. They grow discouraged as they lose, but finish the day with big payoffs on Claremount III and Lucky Max. Madge is crazy, jumping and hugging Bukowski. As they are leaving the track with their winnings, Bukowski considers that he can now afford something better than Madge.

The Beginner Analysis

Bukowski returns to the race track, this time picturing himself as a novice. He describes all the confusing sights and sounds. The people seem insane and stupid. He asks incredulously about being able to win money and even have a drink. He studies the Racing Form (how, if he has never seen one, he could interpret it is left unexplained and even unacknowledged) while Madge bets on horses whose names she likes. She points out the famous jockey Willie Shoemaker, who yawns, showing the same boredom that Bukowski claims to feel. Losers look unhappy, desperate, stunned, and ugly.

At first, Bukowski sees that no system will work: whatever he bets on, another wins. He is surprised when Claremount wins and realizes that one need not win every race; hitting big once or twice is enough. His confidence grows and he places a scientific bet—and wins. He is now sure that the system can be beaten and has enough money in his pocket to step up to a classier girlfriend than Madge. This insensitivity is unusual in Bukowski.



The Fiend

The Fiend Summary

Married and divorced twice and having shackled up many times, Martin Blanchard at 45 lives alone on the fourth floor of an apartment house. He is happy to be apart from the human race and does not feel lonely. One summer morning, he watches children at play out his window and becomes obsessed with ruffled panties worn by a saucy little girl. He masturbates, but gets no relief. When he later notices that the girl and two boys enter the garage, he locks himself in with them, threatens violence if they make noise, and rapes the little girl. She passes out before it is over. Back upstairs, he watches an angry mob form and an ambulance and police arrive. Shortly two large officers are at his door, beating him, handcuffing him, and shoving him into the squad car, where the beatings resume. One has a five-year-old daughter. When Blanchard claims that he could not help it, he loses his teeth and vomits blood. He then arrives at the station.

The Fiend Analysis

In a story so vile that he uses a character other than himself, Bukowski deals with child molestation (pedophilia). Martin Blanchard is not unlike Bukowski: multiple failed marriages, an inability and/or unwillingness to hold a regular job, and habitual heavy drinking. He is, however, a high school dropout. Bukowski takes special note because of this that his tastes run to symphonies, particular those of the Austrian Post-Romantic composer Gustav Mahler. The set-up is completed by saying it is early summer and Blanchard has a "strange feeling of peace." It is the calm before the storm.

Bukowski skillfully shows unnatural passion growing in Blanchard, his trying not to watch the little girl who has caught his fancy, masturbating in hopes that this will calm him down, and then deciding to go to the store—to escape. Unfortunately, as he is headed out he sees the children enter the garage and reverse track to follow them in.

Much of the action is shown from the two frightened and amazed boys' vantage point. They huddle in a corner at first, then creep closer for a good look at the great "snake" Blanchard pulls from his pants and tries to stick in the little girls "slit." One has heard that that is how one has babies, so they assume their friend will now have a baby. Blanchard has great difficulties dealing with such a tiny body. The horror builds progressively.

Suddenly it is over and Blanchard is back at his window, watching the aftermath. He likes the looks of one of the young policemen who come to his door, but is battered, handcuffed, and led through the angry, violent mob. Safe inside the squad car, he is brutally beaten, particularly after claiming not to be able to control himself. One of the cops has a five-year-old daughter. The story ends with no indication of what faces Blanchard in jail and beyond.



The Murder of Ramon Vasquez

The Murder of Ramon Vasquez Summary

Two brothers, Lincoln (aged 23) and Andrew (17), appear at the Hollywood door of the retired legendary romantic actor Ramon Vasquez, claiming to have driven from Kansas and ask for a bit of food and drink. They ask about their prospects of getting into the movies with Vasquez's help and beg a bit of food. Over the light refreshments and good wine that Vasquez provides, Lincoln explains that two magazine writers claim that he keeps a \$5,000 stash at home and demands it. When Vasquez denies the rumor, Lincoln's violent homophobia erupts.

Lincoln force him to perform oral sex on both of them and then drags him upstairs to his bedroom to torture until he provides the money. Andrew holds back, phoning his aspiring actress girlfriend in New York, while Lincoln brutally beats and kick Vasquez to a pulp until he drowns in his own blood. Lincoln leaves false graffiti clues for the police before they head for the beach with \$23 and stolen wine. Along the way, they pick up a pretty hitchhiker, Clair Edwards and head for the beach.

The Murder of Ramon Vasquez Analysis

In a story so brutal and appalling that a disclaimer is printed at the beginning, stating that it is purely a work of fiction, invented by having lived just short of a half-century among human beings, Bukowski again keeps his name—and this time his persona—out of the story. Given the dates on the tabloid newspapers that show up in the novel, it is unlikely that Bukowski is not influenced by the grizzly murder of Sharon Tate by members of the Charles Manson "family." Bukowski builds suspense and disgust in this story superbly.

Ramon Vasquez is a retired actor from the days of the silent screen, acquainted with Humphrey Bogart and Clark Gable but not James Cagney. Women had swooned at performances of "The Great Lover," but he is in fact a homosexual. In retirement he has not been able to avoid the tabloids. They have printed that he keeps \$5,000 at home because he mistrust the banking system. Two brothers, Lincoln and Andrew, appear at his door claiming to be fans and wanting advise about getting into the movies. He welcomes and feeds them. He laughs off the \$5,000 rumor and shows he has just \$23 in his wallet.

Lincoln, whose cruelty Vasquez has seen in his face, reacts violently and begins shouting sexual insults at him. He violently forces Vasquez to suck his penis and then makes reluctant Andrew also accept this service. When Vasquez spits the semen onto the rug, Lincoln goes berserk. Declaring that "queers are natural-born liars," Lincoln manhandles the aged actor upstairs and begins beating him. When Vasquez faints, Andrew is forced to revive him in the shower, and then Lincoln explodes in violence as



Vasquez prays to Mary the Mother of God. He crushes Vasquez's genitals while mocking him for the macho roles he used to play.

Andrew cannot believe that Lincoln has killed the man who was going to get him into the movies—or that Lincoln plans on blaming him. Early in the torture, Andrew had been talking with his New York girlfriend, claiming the screams are role playing. He instructs her not to get involved with any "nigger playwrights." Talking with her he acts macho; with his brother he is subdued. When they escape and head to the beach, Andrew first introduces himself to a pretty young hitchhiker, calling himself Harold Anderson, and begins groping her.

Bukowski ends enigmatically (as he often does), declaring that the Great Lover is dead but others, mostly un-great will follow. "It was the way things worked. Or didn't work."



A Drinking Partner

A Drinking Partner Summary

A "younger model" of Bukowski, Jeff works with him as a "flunky" in an auto parts warehouse on Flower St. (or maybe Figueroa St.). Both are currently without a woman (Bukowski for 14-18 months), eat little, and drink heavily, particularly on Saturday nights, to have Sunday for recovery. Both usually come to work with hangovers and regard this as a private joke.

Jeff introduces Bukowski to Gramercy Edwards, who butchers an annoying neighborhood bulldog that Jeff catches. Bukowski is disgusted and never sees that "victim of reform schools and prisons" again, but Jeff is a great drinking partner, and Bukowski sticks with him. Jeff's biggest drawback is that he gets violent whenever he drinks, is a good "duker," and is the strongest man Bukowski ever meets.

One Saturday night after some heavy drinking at their favorite bar, the Green Light, they get hungry and head to the clean, classy Chinaman's restaurant. Staggering, Jeff breaks furniture. He makes lewd comments to a pregnant woman who stares at him, and belittles her absent husband when she threatens to tell him. When she walks away, Jeff shoves her down a stairway. Bukowski is shocked. Rushing from the men's room to his wife's side, to Jeff's neck, the husband has him in a stranglehold, but is not strong enough to keep from also being hurled down the stairs. After a few minutes, suddenly, Jeff lies still and mutters, "Mother!" He is taken away and never returns to work. Bukowski summarizes: Jeff is not a good human being, makes brutal mistakes, but is interesting and a fine drinking partner. He is probably dead by now.

A Drinking Partner Analysis

After being dumped by a "little Flo," Bukowski swears off women. He takes a menial job and meets a younger version of himself. He carefully specifies that the relationship is not homosexual. Jeff is a good drinking companion, except that he is enormously strong and grows violent. The body of the story shows him swarmed by the staff of a Chinese restaurant when he attacks a pregnant woman and her husband. Not overly given to similes, Bukowski likens them to a swarm of ants attacking a spider, and uses the familiar racial stereotype of Asiatics offering themselves up as a human wall against a bloodthirsty opponent. Bukowski sits, drinks, and watches. He has already established that he dislikes brutality: he never again sees psychotic Gramercy who giggles after carving up a bulldog that Jeff holds for him, and he is shocked when Jeff pushes a pregnant woman down a stairwell. After Jeff gives in and is taken away, Bukowski is wistful about losing a fine drinking partner, who he figures must have gotten himself killed by now. Sons of bitches like Jeff are needed now and then.



The White Beard

The White Beard Summary

Herb and Talbot are two of Bukowski's fellow laborers, assigned to fruit picking near a disputed border in a foreign land. Life in the infirmary is even worse, so men who get sick get better fast. Nurses deliberately fart in patients' faces. Enormous Herb amuses himself by drilling holes in watermelons, masturbating, and making Talbot tearfully eat the mixture. Talbot used to teach high school algebra in the U.S. Herb is farts worse than the nurses, loudly, and nauseatingly. Talbot resolves to some night kill Herb with his own knife. He never has liked watermelon.

An unnamed girl of 13-14 joins them for lunch. She is a tiny body attached to enormous white breasts. She knows that they make the men hot. A bomb falls nearby and while Herb retrieves the fallen candle, Bukowski kisses and fondles the girl. It drives him crazy. Her asking price is too high for a fruit picker. Bukowski muses about their next assignment—drilling holes for dynamite, attaching fuses, and running as fast as possible (premature explosions send bodies flying)—and heads upstairs with the girl. He feels like a nursing baby, playing with "tons of meat." It does not take long for Bukowski to orgasm.

Herb and Talbot are waiting for a report. As Herb goes up to take his turn, Talbot vows to kill him some night with Herb's own knife. An enormous fart—enough to wake an Arab and make him burst into the street, screaming—announces Herb's success. He comes down bragging about the "white beard" he gives the girl and details his technique. Talbot loses his appetite and is derided. On their day off there is nothing to do but lie on their bunks and escape Herb's farts. Nothing matters. A school bus is bombed blocks away. Herb mourns the kids who never get laid. Bukowski figures they have been.

The White Beard Analysis

"The White Beard" has much the feel of a Hemingway story: three Americans working abroad, not sharing their reasons for leaving the U.S. They work on a contested border that gets shelled despite a cease-fire. They work for a pittance and are bored. A bully has his fun with a milk toast. The real Bukowski then asserts himself: the bully's "fun" is masturbating into watermelons and making the milk toast eat it. The men are currently picking fruit. When that is done, they will work the mines, handling dynamite and shoveling rock. The prospects of this outweigh the men's poverty and they accept to pay a prostitute's high asking price.

The prostitute is an amazing, unreal creature. A tiny adolescent body with enormous breasts. Bukowski imagines himself a nursing baby. The experience of intercourse is described in surreal images of steamships, elephants, blue flowers, turpentine, Moses,



and rolling inner tubes—far less suggestive than the images used on television and movies trying to be suggestive but not graphic.

Herb mocks Bukowski afterward for having intercourse with her vagina and goes upstairs to do it right—between her massive breasts. He returns, spouting macho bravado: he has given her a "white beard" that takes two towels to clean up. Little Talbot, who had planned to go third—"what the heck?"—changes his mind and is heckled. He launches a few insults that go over Herb's head, suggesting that Herb is homosexual.

The story ends with routine tragedy: a bomb destroys a school bus, ending many youthful lives. Bukowski's assumption that they have been laid is enigmatic. It could refer to the young prostitute and generalize her experience, or it could—translating "laid" as "screwed" or "fucked"—mean that cruel life has had its way with them.



A White Pussy

A White Pussy Summary

An unnamed narrator enters an unnamed bar whose current theme is Mexican and sits dully until a "Mexican with the Perpetual Grin" sits down beside him. When the man asks for "3 g's," the narrator takes him for a cop. He claims to be a night school student who needs to tide himself over until he can blow a safe and retire to Beverly Hills, where future riots cannot harm him. The man claims to have seen the narrator wandering the streets, bloody and in tatters but been too afraid of him to help. The narrator claims to have been luck: too unimportant to kill. They talk about assassinations and the Black Revolution, the grinner asks again for a loan, and the narrator again ask if he is FBI. The man leaves angrily.

The narrator steps outside, thinking about how they had wanted to kill him. He remembers the barmaid's face that night. She wants her keys back. As she mixes him a drink, she says, "I want to fuck you again. You do good tricks for an old man." He explains it as the effects of her white wig. She says that sometimes she dyes her pussy white. He drinks and evades his stalkers, catching a cab. He passes out, thinking of the barmaid and loaning money.

A White Pussy Analysis

The final story is primarily a forum for comments on assassination and racial unrest in the late 1960s. It begins with a narrator, unnamed but clearly of Bukowski's age, drinking in a bar when someone asks to borrow \$3,000 for 35 days, with a guaranteed payback of \$4,000. The narrator suspects a police sting and avoids the subject. The man has recently seen the narrator beaten bloody on the street. They talk about the spate of assassinations in the 1960s and the Black Revolution. The narrator admires how the blacks are at least trying; "white panty-waists"—himself included have given up. All of the white patrons have been knocked out by Mickey Finns (drugged drinks) and had their wallets taken. The narrator admires how the Mexicans brass bands perform for the gringos who have stolen their land. The barmaid had liked him and claimed he performed pretty well sexually for an old man. He had remarked that he likes older women who pretend to be young and vice versa. She reveals that sometimes she dyes her pubic hair white (hence the story title). There are 2-3 toughs stalking him that night, but he drinks up and slips into a cab conveniently at the curb, where he passes out.



Characters

Henry Charles Bukowski, Jr. appears in most of the stories

Author Henry (Hank) Bukowski features himself in most of the stories by name and in most of the remaining ones he veils himself only lightly. In the ones describing the most loathsome behavior—pedophilia, necrophilia, and homophobic first-degree murder—he increases the distance between himself and the offending characters. When including himself in the stories, Bukowski is not personally fond of male-on-male sex but is tolerant of others and once accepts it when he cannot easily prevent it. He relishes in describing many male/female sexual positions in a variety of venues.

As a general rule, Bukowski lives with one or more women, variously named, generally in shabby high rises in or on the border of skid row in Los Angeles. He avoids regular employment and takes short-term, odious jobs (meat packing, vegetable picking, newspaper delivering) only when forced economically. When he does have a regular job (stock boy, shipping clerk, dishwasher), it is light and menial. His women drink as heavily as he and enjoy sex. When he has a few dollars, Bukowski loves to go to the track and bet on the horses; he believes he has a system that allows him to win. In one story, however, he paints himself as a novice to show what the racing scene looks like from the non-jaded side.

In several stories, Bukowski portrays his life as an author. Sometimes he prides himself as no less than California's greatest living writer, and at other times despairs of having any talent. He writes a column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man," for *Open Pussy*, an underground newspaper that closes its doors when it is fined for obscenity. At the time, Bukowski's "day job" is in the Post Office. In another story, he is destitute trying to sell stories and laments ever having quit working for the government. This is autobiographical.

Bukowski involves himself with writes twice when he ventures to Texas (where he boards in a whorehouse to save money) and New Orleans, LA (where he lives with an obese lady whom he comes to love and, therefore for her sake, leaves), and once finds himself Hemingway-like somewhere overseas, thousands of miles from the U.S., working in a war zone with other ex patriots, picking fruit and working the mines.

In several stories, Bukowski lands in the charity ward of hospitals with gastric bleeding caused by excessive, chronic drinking. Most of the stories demonstrate how he achieves that. In one story, his father and ex-wife visit the ward. In many stories he claims to have been married and divorced several times. In one he admits to having a daughter in San Francisco. He knows that he is better off without a woman to badger him. In several stories, the sex is mixed with poignancy and tragedy, notably the lead story, "The Most Beautiful Woman in Town," and "A Lovely Love Affair."



Cass appears in The Most Beautiful Woman in Town

The youngest and most beautiful of five sisters, Cass is also the most beautiful girl in town (presumably Los Angeles). She is half-Indian, supple, snake-like, spirited, excitable—and some say that she is crazy. Cass dances, flirts, and slips away from men. She paints, dances, sings, sculpts, and grieves for those she saddens. Her sisters are jealous.

Orphaned and deserted, they grow up in a convent, which ill-suits Cass. She bears scars from many fights gotten before reaching legal age and obtaining freedom. She is a heavy drinker, although probably underage. She prefers ugly men to conceited handsome ones, and for this reason alone sidles up to Charles Bukowski in the West End Bar.

Her early questions to Bukowski indicate that Cass is both vain and self-conscious of her beauty. She shocks Charles by thrusting a hat-pin through her nose and later, knowing such mutilations bother him, gets other piercings. Charles goes away for six months and returns to find that Cass is hustling actively and has slit her throat non-fatally; she laughingly shows customers the scar only after being paid, and many times they flee, sparing her having to perform.

Cass enjoys a normal life with Charles but refuses to live with him. While he is working a temporary job and is unavailable, she slits her throat and her sisters bury her before Charles hears the horrible news. He blames himself for not taking better care of Cass.

Joe and Cherry Hyans appears in The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper

Despite their dislike of his behavior while drunk, Joe and Cherry Hyans hire narrator Henry Bukowski, portraying himself, to write a column for their new underground newspaper, Open Pussy. The operation begins in the first floor of their rented house before moving to a vacant building on Melrose Ave., where Joe pirates utilities. There, Cherry is always too busy to talk and Joe is always running about getting copy ready or on some always-important errand, so Bukowski prefers to drop off his column and leave.

When Joe suggests that Bukowski gather the best writers and poets to produce a literary supplement, the results are an "obscenity" raid, which leads to a trial and the levying of a \$1,000 fine, which is sufficient to bring down the paper. Bukowski makes an exception, when begged, and attends one staff meeting. At it, Joe treats the young volunteers brutally, and Bukowski curses him as a Simon Legree and Hitler. Knowing Bukowski's personality, Joe lets it slide.

Joe's father in Cleveland is high-placed in the Plain Dealer and quite wealthy. When "Pops" visits, he offers to hire thugs to bust up the Free Press' sales operation (the



Open Pussy's chief rival), but Joe is adamantly against violence. Oddly, Joe buys a gun to kill the man he learns is seducing Cherry—although Joe has a lover who lives nearby. Joe and Cherry split up and Joe decides to fight his opponent by standard boxing rules. They get back together and split up many times. Eventually the paper folds, heavily in debt, and Bukowski hears that Joe has tried to commit suicide, but when the gun jams, he sells it rather than making a second try. He also makes off with everything in the office, including the IBM machine that he does not own. He declares that the paper has "fulfilled its artistic purpose" and as an artist he must move on. As the story closes, Joe and Chery are back together and planning to move to San Francisco.

Thurman, Charlie, and George appears in Kid Stardust on the Porterhouse

Workers in the meat packing plant to which Henry Bukowski applies for work, Thurman is the foreman, Charlie supervises Bukowski, and George is the immensely strong man who demonstrates how to "dance" huge pieces of meat onto dull hooks. Bukowski describes the whole crew as Black Muslims and feels intimidated by their size and ability. They achieve their goal of getting him to quit in less than a day.

Gloria Westhaven appears in Life in a Texas Whorehouse

Westhaven is a "healthy Texas redhead" whom Henry Bukowski meets casually on a bus from Los Angeles to New Orleans. When she gets off in Texas, she has tears in her eyes. Bukowski continues to his destination, but because no woman has ever cried over him, returns to Texas and looks for her in her mother's photography studio. The woman working there first claims to be Gloria, but when Bukowski makes clear that he knows the truth, promises to talk to the editor of the local newspaper into running a story that may draw Gloria out. Gloria reads it, phones the paper, and Bukowski visits her home. She asks about his work, his military record, and declares that she is engaged to a naval officer who would thrash him for his vile remarks. She reveals that she had wept over how ugly Bukowski's face is. He walks away.

Bruno appears in Life in a Texas Whorehouse

The pimp in the Texas whorehouse in which Henry Bukowski lodges to save money, Bruno punches the prostitute who fails to seduce Bukowski. This shows that he has a large stable, because otherwise he would not want to puff up her face.



Henry Markson Jones II and Sarah Jones appears in Six Inches

Henry Bukowski names himself Henry Markson Jones, II, in this story and places himself working as a shipping clerk in an auto warehouse. He meets Sarah, a company secretary, at a Christmas party and marries her, against dire warnings that she is a witch: two other employees who have fallen for her have disappeared slowly—vanished. Sarah proves sexually insatiable but opposed to population growth. By diet Sarah shrinks her husband down until he is six inches tall, making him a perfect dildo with which to pleasure herself. Disgusted and desperate, Jones stabs Sarah to death with a hat pin, runs away and lives secretly in a small market, where he feeds himself properly and regains the size of a dwarf. Robbing the safe of \$23,000, Jones heads off towards the Hollywood Hills and a new life.

Dr. Von Brashlitz and Tanya appears in The Fuck Machine

A German scientist captured by the U.S. Army after World War II, during the scientific talent competition with the Soviets, Von Brashlitz has been pensioned off at \$500 a month and drifts from town to town in the U.S., lugging a red trunk containing his "FUCK MACHINE." Brashlitz charges patrons \$20 a piece to enjoy it. His is a "horny-looking freak," with old-time glasses.

When the unnamed first-person narrator and Indian Mike go upstairs for a try, Von Brashlitz introduces his beautiful daughter Tanya and, while drinking schnapps non-stop, lubricates an ugly looking metallic machine that makes his customers demand a refund. Finally Von Brashlitz laughs and reveals that Tanya herself is a machine, assembled from more organ transplants than modern science considers possible.

The narrator goes first and the sex is so wonderful that Tanya falls in love and refuses Indian Mike. Von Brashlitz is livid at this betrayal. When well-endowed Indian Mike strips to take his turn, Tanya tears off his penis and testicles and he swiftly bleeds to death. Von Brashlitz tears off one of her arms to show police that she is a machine. They gang rape her and rend her to pieces. A jury acquits Von Brashlitz and he moves to Massachusetts to set up a mail order sex toy business. The narrator buys and tries one of his dummies but shreds it because it is not as good as Tanya.

Tony, Indian Mike, and Petey the Owl appears in The Fuck Machine

Tony is the proprietor of a bar named after himself. Indian Mike, like the unnamed first-person narrator, is a hard-drinking customer. Petey the Owl hangs out in the men's room, offering oral sex for \$1. Tony gets 50% of Dr. Von Brashlitz's profit when sending



customers upstairs to enjoy his "FUCK MACHINE." The narrator and Indian Mike go upstairs to enjoy themselves on the perfectly lifelike machine, named Tanya. The narrator goes first, Tanya falls in love, and, when Mike strips to take his turn, tears off his penis and testicles, leaving him swiftly to bleed to death. The narrator feels sorry for someone with a 20 inch penis not getting his money's worth.

Danforth and Bagley (Bag) appears in The Gut-Wringing Machine

Business partners for 25 years, Bagley handles the phones while Danforth runs prospective workers through the wringers in the Satisfactory Help Agency. Before sending them out, they ask questions to determine that the workers have no gripes against the American capitalist system. Barney Anderson is so completely wrung out that even Danforth is nauseated. When Danforth suggests giving Bagley a quarter turn through the wringer as a sort of "tonic," Bagley is anxious that it be only a quarter turn, but Danforth lets it run for a good long time, until Bagley's anger at the idea of Danforth having sex with his wife, Minnie, turns to an enthusiastic desire to watch them. Closing up shop for the day, Danford drives and flirts with Minnie by phone while Bagley performs oral sex on him. Danford considers how business and life are good.

Herman Telleman and Barney Anderson appears in The Gut-Wringing Machine

Telleman is one of the prospective workers hung on a clothesline at the Satisfactory Help Agency. He still resents the idea of working to death as his father had. Talking like a 1950s beatnik, Telleman wants just to "laze around." After a second run through the wringer with the screws tightened, he feels nothing, likes policemen, and believes in God, Family, State, Country, and honest labor. He wants to work two jobs seven days a week if possible to gain money for all of the consumer goods he desires. In this condition, he is sent out as a cost accountant.

Barney Anderson is selected as the right type for a hazardous deep-sea diving assignment: fat around the belly, balding, stooped, bad eyesight, possible early throat cancer. After four trips through the wringer, Barney is still mouthing off, naming tough guys and rebels—losers all—as his heroes. After three more trips screaming through the wringer, Barney loves only heroes and the whole American way of life.

Linda, Jeanie, and Eve appears in 3 Women

Henry Bukowski lives with Linda in a sixth-floor apartment opposite McArthur Park in Los Angeles. They drink wine, have sex, and watch the ducks in the lake, and work as little as possible. Jeanie and Eve are Linda's friends. Jeanie has begun receiving unemployment checks and Eve is "on the dole." One night they drink themselves unconscious, and Bukowski has sex with all three. Jeanie is a large woman who worries



about Linda catching them. They move "ever so slowly" and quietly, and Bukowski is convinced that "Man has been fucking improperly for centuries" (that is: going fast). Eve is fat and wrinkled but as obscenely sexy lips. She lets him enter and it is over in no time. Finally, when Bukowski is exhausted, Linda declares that she is hot; when he cannot perform, she gives him fabulous oral sex.

Vicki and Margy appears in 3 Chickens

Henry Bukowski is living with ornery Vicki in a violent relationship, during which he breaks her arm by closing her in the wall on the folding bed. He also punches her off a barstool for flirting with men. Vicki constantly abuses Bukowski verbally and is obsessed with catching him masturbating. Fed up, Bukowski goes to Vicki's favorite bar and, to antagonize her, picks up Margy using the alias "Thomas Nightengale, shoemaker." On the way to the apartment, they purchase a large quantity of alcohol and three chicken, which Bukowski intends to bake using Vicki's recipe. Instead, Bukowski and Vicki fall to having sex, only to be interrupted by Vicki. A savage verbal battle between the women brings the police, who arrest Margy and threaten to haul off Bukowski, but Vicki intercedes. The officers say that she will have to increase her monthly protection payments, given the frequency with which she needs it.

Sanchez and Kaaka appears in Ten Jack-offs

Sanchez is a genius who builds a two-story shack, installs plumbing, and taps electrical and telephone wires. He talks little, paints, writes concisely with no care for fame, occasionally reads poetry at some university, and makes love with sexy, beautiful Kaaka (derived from Kafka), a painter. They take Henry Bukowski in when he feels like, after eleven years on the job, he is cracking. Sanchez shows him a close-up photograph of his penis at the moment of ejaculation and brags about it taking ten sessions to capture it perfectly. After sleeping in their bed that night, Bukowski finds Sanchez and Kaaka asleep in each other's arms on a narrow sofa and leaves feeling depressed at his own life.

Crazy Jack and Jerry Borst appears in Twelve Flying Monkeys Who Won't Copulate Properly

Crazy Jack pretends to be a painter and lives with his mother. He appears at Henry Bukowski's door with two friends, asking if Bukowski has seen a mutual friend, Borst. Jack tells of being at Venice Beach with a woman and holding 100 "rainbows" (LSD), when he thinks he sees police. They flee to Borst's place and hide in the bathroom having sex, while Borst gives some man oral sex. It turns out to be a false alarm. Borst is also supported by his mother and has not written a decent poem since 1955. After Jack and his odd friends leave, Borst phones, asking to borrow money so he can go to New York City. He has lost his sponsors but wants to get down to serious writing again. After New York he will visit Switzerland and Greece.



Kathy appears in 25 Bums in Rags

Kathy is Henry Bukowski's lover, whom he claims to have "dug out of a gin mill" on Alvarado St. and kept "in furs and hundred proof" ever since. She happily fetches him alcohol and cigars on demand. When Bukowski suggests that she will bed the slobbering "old guy next door" as soon as he leaves for the track, Kathy throws a book at his head, drawing blood. She consoles him when he loses \$500 and is forced to take a humiliating job delivering newspapers in their neighborhood, Kathy helps him to get it done before neighbors wake up and see. When he discovers he gets just \$1 an hour for an arbitrary three hours, he goes berserk, but Kathy helps him have some laughs. When he wins \$140, she makes meatloaf and fetches him his whiskey, beer, and cigars.

Andre (Frenchy) appears in The Day We Talked About James Thurber

Down on his luck selling his work, Henry Bukowski is forced to room with Andre, an "immortal," fastidious, and bisexual French poet in Venice, CA. Andre speaks seven languages and has likable ways, is humorous and brilliant, wears a wig that always slips, and takes good care of Bukowski. He has known all of the great literary figures of the mid-20th century and likes to drop names. Like many writers—including Bukowski—Andre has been cheated on movie contracts. Bukowski vomits at the sight of Andre's enormous penis, which he often displays, even when doing yoga. Bukowski prefers to walk on the beach whenever visitors (usually male) come to satisfy Andre. Andre gets an offer to read poetry somewhere and leaves Bukowski alone to write. Admirers of the French genius arrive, however, and assume he is Andre. The unnamed male begins immediately to give Bukowski oral sex while he talks about Ezra Pound with Wendy. Later, Bukowski has wild sex standing up with Wendy and sends them on their way.

Henry Mason appears in All The Great Writers

A testy book publisher, Mason interviews two would-be authors who drop into his office demanding to talk. One has had his manuscript rejected and the other wants an advance on a story idea. Mason considers such writers worse than salesmen, but when his receptionist, Francine, is unable to get rid of them, allows them to come in.

Mason tells the angry James Burkett that he runs a business, whose profits depend on accepting only books that will sell. Artists are "intolerably dull" and short-sighted, believing they are great no matter how bad they are. They cite Van Gogh and Mozart as unrecognized geniuses, but Mason could cite 50,000 intolerable idiots trying to get published. Mason admits that his client, Bukowski has slipped, but the shit that he writes sells. He tells Burkett to try another publishing house.

Hard on Burkett's heels comes Ainsworth Hockley, one of Mason's already-published authors, obsessed with oral sex, and seeking an advance on a sexual story set in outer



space. Mason gives him a check for \$75. Mason then takes sexy Francine to an early lunch, kissing and groping her on the way. He smokes a manly cigar at the restaurant.

James Burkett appears in All The Great Writers

A temperamental, narcissistic, chain-smoking writer, Burkett insists on meeting publisher Henry Mason face-to-face about a rejected manuscript. Ordering Mason not to call him Jimmy—that is reserved for his friends—Burkett claims that if he were black or homosexual the manuscript would have been accepted. Mason rejects the claim that to get published one must "suck dick." He says he runs a business, whose profits depend on accepting only books that will sell. Burkett's needle is stuck in 1955. When Burkett cites Bukowski as a Mason client who has "slipped" and "writes SHIT," Mason tells him that there are other publishing houses. Burkett stalks out and slams the door.

Ainsworth Hockley appears in All The Great Writers

The author of *Lusts and Busts on the Campus*, Hockley is unsure about his sexual orientation, but smokes cigars to look manly and dynamic to others. He is obsessed with oversized male genitalia, claims to have just sucked a 36-inch penis, and offers to suck published Henry Mason and/or let him suck his. Mason declines and asks what their business is. Hockley has an idea for a story set in space with two men, four women, and a computer. There are many possible outcomes. He needs an advance and receives \$75.

Francine appears in All The Great Writers

Publisher Henry Mason's receptionist, Francine has beautiful long legs and her skirts keep getting shorter, in line with fashion. After seeing two frustrating drop-in clients, Mason invites her to an early lunch, admitting she gives him "rocks." He kisses and paws her in the elevator; she tastes like "raspberry with a slight hint of halitosis." At the restaurant, Francine intuits that Mason wants to have sex and is agreeable.

Tony and Bill appears in The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California

After watching the operation as hearses pick up newly-deceased patients at the "Stomach Hospital," Tony and Bill screw up their courage and steal one, hauling it across the street to their boarding house and upstairs to Tony's room. Bill is frightened. Drinking muscatel, they talk about rigor mortis and stench, and the possibility of jail. Finally pulling back the sheet, they are amazed to find a beautiful, shapely blond woman. Tony gets excited and has sex with the corpse; he is so enthusiastic that reluctant Bill takes a turn and agrees that she is the best fuck ever. Tony declares that he is in love. Nevertheless, they must dispose of the body, so they drive it to Venice



Beach just before dawn. She is stiffening as they kiss her tenderly goodbye, and Bill swims her out beyond the surf to become "shark meat." Tony cries on the drive home.

Adolph Hitler / Mr. Tilson appears in Swastika

The unnamed President of the United States is driven from the White House not to the airport to begin his scheduled vacation at his private home, but for several hours to a wooded area. He ends up at a boarding house at 2435 Shoreham Dr., where surgeons exchange his brain and larynx for that of Adolph Hitler. Der Führer admits to having ordered the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy in order to have an easier role to step into. It is a triumph of "History and Science." Hitler is then driven on to the vacation home and eventually to the White House, back to world power, and wondering how the First Lady will enjoy his sexual prowess in a young body. He forbids the use of German to his aides.

The dethroned President insists on his old identity, but is laughingly dismissed and gradually ages to Hitler's true age. The landlady, who has known Hitler as Tilson, reminds the President that he owes back rent. Claiming to be the President gets him locked up in an insane asylum, where patients notice a resemblance to the dictator. They believe that politics, which he obviously knows much about, has driven him mad.

Tito and Baby appears in My Big-Assed Mother

Two "good girls" who are close to 40 but look 60, thanks to worry and wine, Tito and Baby live in Henry Bukowski's apartment when he is 29 but looks 50. The apartment house manager calls the police over any noise. Bukowski is trying to pleasure them both when the "big fist of the law" arrives. The women huddle in the corner while Bukowski deals with it, claiming to have a lawyer and knowing his rights. He says that he is just playing chess with his mother and sister. When the police leave, Tito performs oral sex on Bukowski while he reads the racing form. Eventually she bats the paper away so he can concentrate. Baby puts her tongue down his throat to help the cause. Afterward, they smoke together. Bukowski loses track of them but appreciates the memories.

Marie Glaviano appears in A Lovely Love Affair

The owner of a small café, Marie takes in Henry Bukowski's alter ego, Charley Serkin, when Joe Blanchard, editor of the underground newspaper Overthrow introduces them. Marie lives upstairs in a long, narrow apartment. She weighs 250-300 pounds, and says that Charlie reminds her of someone named Marty—beat-up like a fighter. She warns him that she is a good girl, brought up right.

Next morning, Marie cooks breakfast before going to work. She leaves her purse with a \$10 bill in it, probably as a test. Charlie takes it to buy beer and puts the change back. Marie also makes straw hats to sell to tourists. Watching her intricate work and chatting



with her gets him excited. He climbs into her bed and waits for her. She protests, crying, but then gives in and they have great sex—some of the best of Charlie's life. Next morning, when Marie goes to work, Charlie decides that she is too good for him, writes a note, and walks out of the French Quarter. He knows it is a crazy thing for a poor man to do.

Harry, Duke, and Ginny appears in All The Pussy We Want

Harry has a stupid round face with eyes that make one hate him. Duke is younger and more attentive. Harry is unemployed and Duke is a janitor. Both are ex- and future-convicts. They sit drinking in a cheap hotel room about Harry's plan to recover gold thrown up by the impact of artillery shells at an army site nearby. It is risky by day but lucrative. They will work at night. The work takes two because there are rattlesnakes that must be fended off. All that gold means unlimited sex—even with Beverly Hills whores. They will be gentlemen. Having described the plan, Harry worries that Duke might shoot him to get it all, but Duke assures him that they are friends.

On the way to the liquor store, they meet a well-built woman, Ginny, who has just escaped from the closet where some guy has kept her locked naked for a week. They take her home. Ginny does not like the looks of Harry and wants to have sex with Duke first. Duke wants to make her part of the gold-finding team. Ginny claims to have "the tightest pussy in the state of California," but Duke's experience proves otherwise. Watching the couple move, Harry considers that they might team up to kill him and figures he might have to kill them first.

Madge appears in The Beginner

Henry Bukowski's partner when he checks out of the Charity Ward, Madge suggests that they go to the Hollywood Park race track. Bukowski, a novice, is amazed by everything he sees. Madge explains the Racing Form to him, but says that she just bets on horses' names that she likes. He badgers her constantly about pulling down her skirt and up her stockings so that she does not look badly. They grow discouraged after many loses, until their luck changes, and they finish with two big pay-offs. Madge is crazy, jumping and hugging Bukowski. As they are leaving the track, Bukowski coldly considers that he can now afford something better than Madge.

Martin Blanchard appears in The Fiend

Married and divorced twice and having shacked up many times, Blanchard at age 45 lives alone on the fourth floor of an apartment house. For the 27th time, he is unemployed, drinking as much as possible and sleeping late. He is happy to be apart from the human race and does not feel lonely. A high school drop-out, he enjoys listening to Mahler.



One summer morning, he watches children playing on the large green lawn below and is attracted to a saucy little girl in a short red skirt that shows ruffled panties. The ruffles obsess him. He masturbates, but this does not set him free. He decides he needs a good 2-for-27¢ cigar and more wine, dresses, and heads out, but notices that the girl and two boys have entered the garage.

Blanchard goes in and locks the door. He threatens them if they make noise. The boys watch in wonder as Blanchard kisses and rapes the little girl. She passes out before it is over. From upstairs, he watches an angry mob form and an ambulance and police arrive. Shortly two large officers are at his door, beating him, handcuffing him, and shoving him into the squad car, where the beatings resume. One has a five-year-old daughter. When Blanchard claims that he could not help it, he loses his teeth and vomits blood. He then arrives at the station.

Ramon Vasquez appears in The Murder of Ramon Vasquez

Vasquez, "The Great Lover" of the silent screen movies, now in his 60s, retains the looks that once make female fans swoon, but he is a homosexual. He lives in a nicely-appointed house in Hollywood. He opens his door to two brothers, Lincoln and Andrew, who claim to be interested in Hollywood idols. Vasquez invites them in and provides refreshment. He talks about stars he has and has not known and gripes about how the later ones make all the money. He has only enough to live on comfortably until his death. The boys, however, claim to know from the tabloids that he keeps \$5,000 as a reserve and demand it. When he laughs at this, Lincoln grows violent. Reviling Vasquez as a homosexual, he forces him to fellate himself and his brother, and then takes him upstairs to beat him to a pulp. Vasquez prays to Mary Mother of God before drowning in his own blood.

Lincoln and Andrew appears in The Murder of Ramon Vasquez

Brothers, Lincoln (aged 23) and Andrew (17), appear at the door of the famous retired actor, Ramon Vasquez, claiming to have driven from Kansas and ask for a bit of food and drink. They ask about their prospects of getting into the movies with Vasquez's help. Andrew has a delicate, fascinating, brooding face, while Lincoln's is cruel. After Vasquez provides light refreshments and good wine, Lincoln claims that two magazine writers claim that he keeps a \$5,000 stash at home and demands it.

When Vasquez denies Lincoln's violent homophobia erupts. Lincoln force him to perform oral sex on both of them and then drags him upstairs to his bedroom to torture until he provides the money. Andrew holds back, phoning his aspiring actress girlfriend in New York, while Lincoln brutally beats and kick Vasquez to a pulp until he drowns in his own blood. Lincoln leaves false graffiti clues for the police before they head for the



beach with \$23 and stolen wine. Along the way, they pick up a pretty hitchhiker, Clair Edwards and head for the beach.

Jeff appears in A Drinking Partner

A "younger model" of Henry Bukowski, Jeff works with him as a "flunky" in an auto parts warehouse. Both womanless, they eat little and drink heavily. Jeff introduces Bukowski to Gramercy Edwards, who butchers an annoying neighborhood bulldog that Jeff catches. This disgusts Bukowski and makes him care less for Jeff, but Jeff is a good drinking partner, so he stays with him. Jeff gets violent whenever he drinks, but does not fight with Bukowski. He is a good "duker" and the strongest man Bukowski ever meets.

One Saturday night, they get hungry and head to a Chinese restaurant. Jeff is already drunk and staggering. He makes lewd comments when a pregnant woman stares, and belittles her absent husband when she threatens to tell him. When she walks away, Jeff shoves her down a stairway. The husband attacks Jeff, but he breaks the stranglehold and hurls him down the stairs. A dozen Chinese staff members swarm Jeff and plead with Bukowski to help control him. Bukowski can only think to knock Jeff out, but cannot get a shot. Suddenly, Jeff lies still and mutters, "Mother!" He is taken away and never returns to work. Bukowski summarizes: Jeff is not a good human being, makes brutal mistakes, but is interesting and a fine drinking partner. He is probably dead by now.

Gramercy Edwards (Gram) appears in A Drinking Partner

A friend of Jeff's, Edwards has been in prison and psychiatric hospitals more often than he has been out. His eyes keep rolling back as though he is trying to see what has gone wrong in his brain. He dresses in rags and keeps a wine bottle handy. When a neighborhood bulldog annoys them, Jeff catches it and Edwards butchers it with his knife. Sickened by the story, Bukowski never sees Edwards again.

Herb and Talbot appears in The White Beard

Herb and Talbot are two of Henry Bukowski's fellow laborers, assigned to fruit picking near a disputed border in an unspecified foreign land. Life in the infirmary is even worse, so those who get sick get better fast. Herb amuses himself by drilling holes in watermelons, masturbating, and making Talbot eat the mixture. Talbot used to teach high school algebra in the U.S. Herb is large, with "steam-shovel hands" and a black beard. He carries a large hunting knife and farts constantly, loudly, and nauseatingly—enough to wake an Arab and make him burst into the street, screaming. Talbot resolves to some night kill Herb with his own knife. He never has liked watermelon.



Objects/Places

Los Angeles, CA appears in most of the stories

Los Angeles is the setting for most of the stories in this anthology. In real life, it is author Henry Bukowski's residence for most of his life. Most of the stories take place in generic bars, apartment houses, hospital wards, and the rare place of employment in or near the skid row sections of Los Angeles. A few mention landmarks: the Hollywood Hills, the famous Richfield Building, McArthur Park, 6th and Union, Beverly Blvd., Melrose Ave., and the Vermont turnoff from the Hollywood Freeway. Some stories are set in the Venice Beach section of Los Angeles, the Hollywood Park racetrack, a Hollywood mansion.

Federal Building appears in The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper

Henry Bukowski is still employed by the U.S. Postal Service when he begins writing a column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man," for an underground newspaper and is summoned to the "insane and modern" glassed in, "Kafkaesque" new Federal Building for interrogation and subtle intimidation. He finds the Diego Rivera-style murals in the lobby an unfortunate attempt. The interrogator, who gives his name but Bukowski ignores it, working on an informant's tip points out that public employees must make a positive impression, which the column does not convey, and also asks about child support for Bukowski's illegitimate child. A follow-up interview is held in the Tour Supervisor's office of the branch in which Bukowski works. It too is a Kafkaesque maze.

Hollywood Park appears in 25 Bums in Rags, Non-Horseshit Horse Advice, and The Beginne

The famed race track in the suburbs of Los Angeles, CA, Hollywood Park draws in the inveterate gambler Henry Charles Bukowski, Jr., in a handful of stories. It is incidental in "25 Bums in Rags." Losing \$500 forces Bukowski to take a short-term job; winning \$140 makes him feel heroic again. In "Non-Horseshit Horse Advice" and "Another Horse Story," Bukowski goes to the park, but the story is a technical essay about gambling on horses. In "The Beginner," Bukowski assumes the role of a novice who by pure luck leaves the track a winner.

New Orleans, LA appears in A Lovely Love Affair

One of the times that Henry Bukowski goes broke, he goes to New Orleans' French Quarter, and Joe Blanchard, editor of the underground newspaper Overthrow, introduces him as Charley Serkin to Marie Glaviano, owner of a small café. She lets him



live in her upstairs apartment and they eventually, despite her 250-300 pound size make wonderful love. Charlie's wanderings through the French Quarter allow local color to be brought in. The "quaint" bars nauseate him as does the heavy cuisine. Little stores that do not put on airs go without customers and are eager to please. Charlie leaves because Marie is too good for him. He walks out of the Quarter and crosses Canal St., not knowing where he is going. Although he has only 74¢ in his pocket, he turns down a job shucking clams.

Open Pussy appears in The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper

The Open Pussy is an underground newspaper, headquartered at 4369 Melrose Ave. in Los Angeles that publishes weekly for almost two years. Bukowski contributes a column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man," which push the boundaries of decency, getting him in trouble with his Post Office superiors. The use of an illustration of a vagina lead to an obscenity charge and fine of \$1,000, which force the paper to shut down. It is owned and edited by Joe and Cherry Hyans. Bukowski dislikes going to the office because the young employees are all "shitty and snobby and not quite right." The Beatles play endlessly in the background. Cherry is always too busy to talk and Joe is always running about getting copy ready or on some always-important errand. Barney Palmer is the likable political writer. When the paper folds, heavily in debt, Joe makes off with everything, including the IBM machine that he does not own. Joe declares that the paper has "fulfilled its artistic purpose" and as an artist he must move on.

Palomares, Spain appears in Politics is like Trying to Screw a Cat in the Ass

The site of the latest accident in 1968, in which U.S. H-bombs are lost, creating local fears of radioactive contamination of the environment, Palomares prompts the State Department to modify its vocabulary to lessen the apparent threat. After finally recovering the bomb, the U.S. Navy throws a band concert to celebrate. It turns into a great sexual and spiritual release. Some 1,000 tons of radioactive sea bottom is shipped to Aiken, SC, doubtless dropping property values. Similar near-catastrophes occur off Iceland and Greenland, "irking" the inhabitants.

U.S.S. Pueblo appears in Politics is like Trying to Screw a Cat in the Ass

An American spy ship seized by the North Koreans, the Pueblo causes an international incident over whether the seizure takes place in international or territorial waters. Prominent Congressional leaders are quoted, calling for military mobilization to meet the continued communist threat. Patriotism soars and troubling stories about lost nuclear weapons vanishes to the back pages of newspapers. Bukowski believes that Hitler



would enjoy current events. Everyone's lives are in the hands of idiots. Bukowski prefers to concentrate on book, horses, and whores.

Paris Peace Talks appears in The Gut-Wringing Machine

Negotiations to end U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, which waste a good deal of time on such trivialities as the shape of the conference table, serves as a back drop to the story about running people through an old-fangled laundry wringing machine to render them sufficiently gutless to perform government and industry's requirements. There are many who hate to think about either the Peace Talks or the war ending, as it will not be good for the economy

Satisfactory Help Agency appears in The Gut-Wringing Machine

Owned and run by Danforth with help from Bagley, the Los Angeles-based Satisfactory Help Agency presses people through an old-fangled laundry wringing machine to render them sufficiently gutless to perform government and industry's requirements. The agency has 19 workers wrung gutless and has hired out 14 the day before. There is concern of demand slipping if the Vietnam War ends. The machinery is virtually obsolete for laundry purposes by the mid-1960s, giving the story an even more farcical atmosphere than would otherwise be the case. Modern readers might not be able to picture the operation, which could not be carried out on a human and allow for survival.

Potential workers over forty and/or "married with family" lose their guts most easily. The standard rental deal calls for \$300 a week for the first two weeks paid to the company and then \$50 a week if the work is acceptable or the worker is fired and the client is paid \$100. In the case of dangerous duty the rate is \$500 and he payback in case of firing \$200. The idea is to "keep things moving." Danforth and Bagley listen to all the clichés about the troubles of life as the units are run through the machinery.

Texas appears in Life in a Texas Whorehouse

Henry Bukowski gets off a bus somewhere in Texas—in the state's second or third biggest city—and checks into a whorehouse to save money. He goes to the photography shop that a woman he meets on the bus, Gloria Westhaven, says her mother owns, and a beautiful woman who works there puts the romantic story in the newspaper to draw Gloria out. Bukowski next visits a bar, where a fight breaks out, leaving him cringing beneath a table. The newspaper editor has qualms about giving Bukowski Gloria's address but does so, and Bukowski visits, only to be told that Gloria weeps over how ugly his face is. He returns to the bar and finds himself under the table as another fight breaks out.



Venice Beach, CA appears in Twelve Flying Monkeys Who Won't Copulate Properly; The Day W

The popular tourist attraction and home to "beat" poets, Venice is home to author Henry Bukowski, who is frustrated at being unable to figure out a good sexual situation for twelve monkeys. He is continually interrupted by men urinating in his bushes and visits and phone calls from hack writer friends. The drug scene at Venice is briefly but effectively sketched.

In the Thurber story, Bukowski is down on his luck selling his work and is forced to room with Andre, the successful, bisexual, "immortal" French writer. While Andre is away, two admirers drop by, mistake Bukowski for Andre, and the trio enjoy a good amount of wine and sex.

Finally, in "The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California," Tony and Bill abandon to the ocean the corpse of a beautiful young woman whom they have stolen from a hearse and with which they have each had sex.

Washington, DC appears in Swastika

The unnamed President of the United States is driven from the White House not to the airport to begin his scheduled vacation at his private home, but for several hours to a wooded area. He ends up at a boarding house at 2435 Shoreham Dr., where surgeons exchange his brain and larynx for that of Adolph Hitler. Hitler is then driven back to the White House, back to world power, and wondering how the First Lady will enjoy his sexual prowess in a young body.



Themes

Sex

Sex in some form is mentioned in every story included in Charles Bukowski's *The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories*. In a few it is a cursory reference. In most it is a primary ingredient in the action. Bukowski and his various autobiographical alter egos is a hedonist or sybarite, devoted to his own pleasure. His characters never raise moral questions. Sex is simply a part of life.

The stories are populated by contented prostitutes earning a living, generally careful for their physical safety in an unsafe world, and happy to please. Rarely employed, Bukowski has little to do but drink and have sex. He enjoys receiving oral sex from women and once accepts it from a man when that man begins too quickly to shoo him away. In general, if asked if he would like to receive or give oral sex with a male, he declines politely. He surprises a few prostitutes by preferring to wait when first approached. With regular female partners (singly or in pairs) he finds himself facing the police when tenants and landlords complain about the racket they make. Elated or depressed, Bukowski takes refuge in sex.

In several stories, the sex takes aberrant forms and Bukowski hides behind non-autobiographical characters. A life-like "FUCK MACHINE" invented by an ex-Nazi scientist falls in love with a client and refuses sex with anyone else. When a well-endowed would-be client tries to force her, she rips off his genitalia and allows him to bleed to death. Two friends steal a corpse from an ambulance on a lark, discover it is a beautiful, not yet rigid female, and take turns having intercourse with her. They declare it the best sex of their lives. One claims to love her—and then they throw her corpse in the Pacific Ocean to become shark food. A middle-aged man, feeling content living on his own, become suddenly obsessed with a little girl's ruffled panties and viciously rapes her as two little boys watch and offer confused commentary on what they see. He gets his comeuppance in a squad car from a cop who has a five-year-old daughter.

Bukowski is obsessed with gigantic male genitalia and female breasts. The only somewhat tender scene comes when he learns to care for an obese lady who takes him in when he is destitute and takes good care of her. She warns him that she is a good girl, but eventually succumbs. They have wonderful sex together and he then leaves with a kindly parting note, saying that he is too good for her.

Employment

Charles Bukowski and his various autobiographical alter egos are loath to work on a regular basis. One character notes that in 45 years he has been unemployed 27 times. When rent is due, Bukowski sometimes takes light office and shop jobs that allow for a good deal of goofing off. In one story he is fired in a single night as a dishwasher when



the owner discovers he does not know how to use the disinfecting and soap tubs; Bukowski gorges on roast lamb before departing.

In one story, Bukowski returns to a meat packing plant to which he had applied years earlier. He had been issued overalls and boots (three sizes too small) and taken one look at the bloody operation before removing the uniform and disappearing. On his return engagement, the boots are still three sizes too small, but he lasts a couple of hours before throwing in the towel. His fellow workers chide him, hoping he will crack. He admits that not only strength but finesse are required in tossing heavy hams like medicine balls and swinging half-steers onto dull hooks. He recalls being chided and beaten in school yards for quitting and hangs in as long as he can. When assigned to move a large truck during break, he can take no more and suggests where they can put the job.

Several times Bukowski goes out to day jobs. He cannot figure out why, a century after Eli Whitney, anyone would advertise for jobs picking cotton, but shows up at the departure point for trucks. That job is closed, but they need tomato harvesters. For the rest of the story, Bukowski kicks himself for letting the ladies board the truck first and finding the tailgate slammed in his face as the quota is met.

As in real life, Bukowski in the stories works for the U.S. Post Office for a decade. He is the quintessential disgruntled employee. At the same time, he is writing fiction, including a column for an underground newspaper that gets him in trouble with officialdom, which insists that government employees be upright citizens. When he finally quits that job to become a full-time writer, Bukowski several times is sure he has made a mistake. Writer's block and the inability to sell stories haunts him in several stories. The only marginally contented workers in the collection are its various prostitutes.

The Establishment

Charles Bukowski and his various alter egos and associates are not fans of the Establishment. Most often he encounters it in the person of police officers summoned by landlords fed up with him and his lovers making too much noise. Bukowski enjoys playing games with them, warning them of the danger of false arrest and suggesting that his lawyer has gotten him released from serious criminal charges. They generally slink off sulking. In one story, Bukowski's live-in lover is paying a cop protection money to keep him on-call. Various times, Bukowski shows police cars patrolling for drunks, which is usually his state, and luckily being distracted by other minor infractions. In one story, where prospective employees are put through old-fashioned laundry ringers to remove their guts, the attitude towards police is part of the proof that they are ready. Despised "cops" become police officers dedicated to protecting the rights and property of law-abiding citizens.

Bukowski in one story still works for the U.S. Post Office, while writing for an underground newspaper on the side. An "informer" tells higher-ups about him, and he is summoned to the "Kafkaesque" Federal Building for interrogation. Superiors know of his

activities, produce stacks of the offending newspapers, and also question him about child support for an illegitimate child. The performance is repeated in the local post office, with representatives from Washington, DC, and Los Angeles participating. It is shades of Big Brother.

An odd story has the President of the United States kidnapped by agents of Adolph Hitler so their brains and vocal boxes can be switched. No longer Führer, Hitler resumes his quest for world domination. He tells the hapless ex-president that he has had the Kennedy brothers killed because they do not align properly with his political philosophy, but the former incumbent does.

In one story, a reader asks why Bukowski does not write about politics and international affairs. This provokes a scathing commentary on historical events in 1968 involving the loss of nuclear weapons and calling up reservists to deal with North Korea's seizure of a U.S. spy ship. Bukowski concentrates on the spin used by the State Department to minimize the appearance of danger and the party thrown in Spain by the U.S Navy to celebrate the safe recover of the bombs. Bukowski also traces how the Korean story conveniently moves the H-bomb stories to the back pages of newspapers: out of sight, out of mind. He believes that there is sufficient horror in the modern world to satisfy Hitler, and for himself prefers to die of the effects of booze, horses, and whores, than for the sake of Freedom, Democracy, Humanity, and other Bullshit.

Style

Point of View

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories is a collection of short stories by Charles Bukowski. There is no consistent point of view. Most of the tales are narrated in the first person, past tense as Charles Bukowski himself, rather than as his favorite alter ego, Henry Chinaski, as in many writings. Others are told in the third-person, past tense. Except when the story is narrated anonymously, Bukowski figures as a character, usually with his status as a professional writer forming the subject of the characters' conversations. Dialog is used extensively. Several of the stories can be seen refitted to the Chinaski character and incorporated within a larger context in Bukowski's autobiographical novels Post Office and Factotum.

Bukowski almost always writes about his own depraved life of alcohol, sex, and violence. He writes with no shame and applies maximum shock value whenever possible. Many of the stories originally appear in the underground press, and Bukowski may be pandering to his readership. Bukowski has an eye for the human depravity and dysfunction in himself and others. He finds the comic aspects of even the worst situations and describes them sparingly. He rarely goes for belly laughs as opposed to wry, knowing chuckles—or gasps of horror.

Some of the stories break away from sex and alcohol to examine philosophical and political aspects of American society. They are written in the era of sexual revolution and women's liberation, and Bukowski seems determined to remain a misogynist. Even when not focusing on sociology, Bukowski looks at impoverished urban life and shows how one does what one must to survive.

Setting

The collection, The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories, like most of Charles Bukowski's fiction, is largely autobiographical. Bukowski spends most all of his life in various poorer parts Los Angeles, drinking, picking up women, writing short stories for underground publications, and doing as little physical work as he can and still afford an apartment, alcohol, and small amounts of food. In several of the stories, Bukowski works for the U.S. Post Office, as in real life for ten years. He depicts himself quitting that hated job to write full-time.

Bukowski pictures drab hotel rooms, bars, warehouses, itinerant job placement centers, hospital wards for the indigent, and race tracks. A few mention landmarks: the Hollywood Hills, the famous Richfield Building, McArthur Park, 6th and Union, Beverly Blvd., Melrose Ave., and the Vermont turnoff from the Hollywood Freeway. Some stories are set in the Venice Beach section of Los Angeles, the Hollywood Park racetrack, a Hollywood mansion.



Two stories take place elsewhere in the United States: Bukowski visits one of the largest cities in Texas, where he lodges in a warehouse to save money, and the French Quarter of New Orleans, where he lodges with an obese lady whom he comes to love. One story finds him, several fellow ex patriots, and some standoffish Arab workers, in an unspecified foreign country, thousands of miles from home, in a war zone where the cease-fire truce is not working.

Language and Meaning

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories is a collection of short stories by Charles Bukowski, many originally published in the underground press between 1967 and 1983. Bukowski almost always writes about his own depraved life of alcohol, sex, and violence shamelessly and with an eye to shock value. As Bukowski attains a following, his works appear in literary magazines, but the raw language and graphic imagery remain full-strength.

Bukowski has an intense anal compulsion, which surfaces regularly. He seems dedicated, like his contemporary comedian George Carlin, to utilizing whenever possible the "Seven Dirty Words You Can't Say on Radio or Television." The story, "The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper," describes Bukowski's experiences publishing an outrageous syndicated column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" for the NOLA Express, that contributes to the paper's demise. Bukowski has sex with a variety of prostitutes, lovers, co-workers, casual acquaintances, and casual acquaintances of casual acquaintances. In between he happily masturbates and sometimes contemplates how much easier life is without women. He seems determined to offend the women's liberation movement, which is evolving in the era when these stories are written.

Even today, when Carlin's seven words are commonplace, Bukowski's graphic use in this volume are jolting. Because it seems that he could phrase things less shockingly than he does, it is obvious that shock is his primary intention, overwhelming the thrust of the story. Bukowski is dedicated to liberating language from puritan hang-ups and describing life not how it would be nice for it to be, but as it is.

Structure

The Most Beautiful Woman in Town & Other Stories is a collection of thirty short stories by Charles Bukowski. Notably, the contents originally form Part 1 of the volume, *Erections, Ejaculations, Exhibitions and General Tales of Ordinary Madness*, which gives a better feel for the content of the stories. (The second half is reprinted as *Tales of ordinary Madness*.)

These stories originally appear in a variety of periodicals between 1967 and 1983, in *Open City*, *NOLA Express*, *Knight*, *Adam*, *Adam Reader*, *Pix*, *The Berkeley Barb* and *The Evergreen Review*. This is a mixture of obscure underground and influential literary publications. "The Birth, Life and Death of an Underground Newspaper" describes



Bukowski's experiences publishing an outrageous syndicated column, "Notes of a Dirty Old Man" for the NOLA Express, contributing to its demise. Unfortunately, where and when the stories originally appear is not indicated. Some can be dated by reference to contemporary events.

Virtually all of the stories feature in large quantities sex and alcohol and, quite candidly the devastating effects, psychologically, physically, and socially of these vices. Sex and alcohol are not featured in two odd items that seem rather not to fit in the collection, "The Gut-Wringing Machine,"and "Swastika."

Many stories deal with the tortures of writing for a living and related literary themes, most particularly keeping tabs on how California's self-proclaimed best author, Bukowski, is faring as a published writer. A few deal with horse racing and betting. (these are grouped together), and politics as a secondary interest.



Quotes

"I found a job as a packer in the factory next day and the rest of the week went to working. I was too tired to get about much but that Friday night I did get to the West End Bar. I sat and waited for Cass. Hours went by. After I was fairly drunk the bartender said to me, 'I'm sorry about your girl friend.'

" 'What is it?' I asked.

" 'I'm sorry. Didn't you know?'

" 'No.'

" 'Suicide. She was buried yesterday.'

" 'Buried?' I asked. It seemed as if she would walk through the doorway at any moment. How could she be gone?'

" 'Her sisters buried her.'

" 'A suicide? Mind telling me how?'

" 'She cut her throat.'

" 'I see. Give me another drink.'

"I drank until closing time. Cass the most beautiful of 5 sisters, the most beautiful in town. I managed to drive to my place and I kept thinking, I should have insisted she stay with me instead of accepting that 'no.' Everything about her had indicated that she had cared. I had simply been too offhand about it, lazy, too unconcerned. I deserved my death and hers. I was a dog. No, why blame the dogs? I got up and found a bottle of wine and drank from it heavily. Cass the most beautiful girl in town was dead at 20.

"Outside somebody honked their automobile horn. They were very loud and persistent. I set the bottle down and screamed out: 'GOD DAMN YOU, YOU SON OF A BITCH, SHUT UP!'

"The night kept coming on in and there was nothing I could do." The Most Beautiful Woman in Town, pgs. 6-7.

"they put me under the next steer.

"ONE.

"TWO.

"THREE.

"I had it, its dead bones against my living bones, its dead flesh against my living flesh, and the bone and the weight cut in, I thought of operas by Wagner, I thought of cold beer, I thought of sexy cunt sitting across from me on a couch with her legs crossed high and I have a drink in my hand and am slowly and surely talking my way toward her and into the blank mind of her body, and Charley hollered HANG HER IN THE TRUCK!

"I walked toward the truck, out of the shame of defeat taught me in American schoolyards as a boy I knew that I must not drop the steer to the ground because this would show that I was a coward and not a man and that I didn't therefore deserve much, just sneers and laughs and beatings, you had to be a winner in America, there wasn't any way out, and you had to learn to fight for nothing, don't question, and besides if I dropped the steer I might have to pick it up. besides it will get dirty. I don't want it to get dirty, or rather—they don't want it to get dirty." Kid Stardust on the Porterhouse Summary, pgs. 11-12.



"And just what is the Culmination of the Opposition?"

" 'Enjoy your beer, little sweetie, you'll know soon enough.'

"I finished my beer and then the disgusting thing happened, a most disgusting thing. Sarah picked me up and placed me down between her legs, which she spread open just a bit. Then I was facing a forest of hair. I hardened my back and neck muscles, sensing what was to come. I was jammed into darkness and stench. I heard Sarah moan. Then Sarah began to move me slowly back and forth. As I said, the stench was unbearable, and it was difficult to breathe, but somehow there was air in there—various side-pockets and drafts of oxygen. Now and then my head, the top of my head bumped The Man in the Boat and then Sarah would let out an extra-illuminated moan.

"Sarah began moving me faster and faster. My skin began to burn, it became harder to breathe; the stench became worse. I could hear her panting. It occurred to me that the sooner I ended the thing the less I would suffer. Each time I was rammed forward I would arch my back and neck, tilt everything in me into this hooking curve of a thing bumping the Man in the Boat.

"Suddenly, I was ripped out of that terrible tunnel. Sarah held me up to her face.

" 'Come, you damned fiend of a thing! Come!' she demanded." Six Inches, pg. 31.

"Vicki was all right, but we had our troubles. we were on the wine, port, that woman would get drunk and get to talking and she would make up some of the vilest imaginable stuff about me. and that tone of voice: shoddy and lisping and grating and insane. it would get to any man. it got to me.

"once she was screaming these insanities from the fold-down bed in our apartment. I begged her to stop, but she wouldn't. finally, I just walked over, lifted up the bed with her in it and folded everything into the wall.

"then I went over and sat down and listened to her scream.

"but she kept screaming so I walked over and pulled the bed out of the wall again there she lay, holding her arm, claiming it was broken.

" 'your arm can't be broken,' I said.

" 'it is, it is. Oh, you slimy jackoff bastard, you've broken my arm!'" 3 Chickens , pg. 66.

"in the morning when I awaken, go down to piss, come out from pissing, I find them both asleep on that narrow couch hardly enough for one body, but they are not one body and their faces together and asleep their bodies together and asleep, why be corny??? I only feel the tiny clutch at the throat, the automatic transmission blues of loveliness, that somebody has it, that they don't even hate me ... that they even wish me what?...

"I walk out staunching and grieving and feeling and sick and blue and bukowski, old, starlit sun, my god, reaching into the final corner, the last midnight blast, cold Mr. C., big H, Mary Mary, clean as a bug on the wall, the heat of December a brainweb across my everlasting spine, Mercy like Kerouac's dead baby sprawled across Mexican railroad tracks in the everlasting July of suck-off tombs, I leave them in their there thar, the genius and his love, both better than I, but Meaning, itself, shitting, shifting, sanding down, until I maybe writing this down by myself, leaving a few things out (I have been threatened by various powerful forces for doing things that are only normal and gaga gladful to do)" Ten Jack-offs Summary, pg. 81.



"The girl asked, 'Andre?'

" 'No. I'm Hank. Charles. Bukowski.'

" 'You're making a joke aren't you, Andre?' the girl asked.

" 'Yeh. I'm a joke,' I answered.

"There was a light rain out there. They stood there.

" 'Well, anyhow, come on in out of the rain.'

" 'You are Andre!' said the bitch. 'I recognize you, that aged face—two hundred years old!'

" 'OK, OK,' I said. 'Come on in. I am Andre.'

"They had two bottles of wine. I went into the kitchen for the corkscrew and the glasses. I poured three wines. I was standing up drinking my wine, glancing up her legs best I could, when he reached out, unzipped my fly and began sucking at my dick. He made very much noise with his mouth. I patted him on top of his head, then asked the girl, 'What's your name?'

" 'Wendy,' she said, 'and I've always admired your poetry, Andre. I think that you are one of the greatest living poets.'

"The guy kept working away, sucking and slopping it up, his head bobbing like some crazy thing with a lost mind.

" 'One of the greatest?' I asked. 'Who are the others?'

" 'One other,' said Wendy. 'Ezra Pound.'

" 'Ezra always bored me,' I said.

" 'Really?'

" 'Really. He works too hard at it. Over-serious, over-learned, and finally just a dull craftsman.'

" 'Why do you simply sign your work "Andre"?'

" 'Because I feel like it.'

"The guy was working very hard then. I grabbed his head, pulled it forward into me and unloaded.

"Then I zipped up, poured three more wines." The Day We Talked About James Thurber, pgs. 144-145

"he pulled up her chair and looked at her legs as she sat down. Mason sat down. 'god, I'm hungry. I keep thinking of clams, I wonder why?'

" 'I think you want to fuck me.'

" 'WHAT?'

" 'I said, "I think you want to fuck me."'

" 'oh.'

" 'I'll let you. I think you're a very nice man, a very nice man, really.'

"the waiter came up and waved the smoke away with his menu cards. he handed one to Francine and one to Mason. and waited. and got rocks. how come some guys got nice dolls like that while he had to beat his meat? the waiter took their orders, wrote them down, waled through the swinging doors, handed the orders to the cook.

" 'hey,' said the cook, 'whatcha got there?'

" 'whadya mean?'

" 'i mean, ya got a horn! in front there! stay away from ME with that thing!'

" 'it's nothing.'

" 'nothing? you'll kill somebody with that thing! go throw some cold water on it! it just



don't look nice!

"the waiter walked into the men's room. some guys got all the broads. he was a writer. he had a whole trunk full of manuscripts. 4 novels, 40 short stories. 500 poems. nothing published. a rotten world. they couldn't recognize a talent. they kept talent down. you have to have an 'in,' that's all there was to it. rotten cocksucking world. waiting on stupid people all day.

"the waiter took his cock out, put it in the hand basin and began splashing cold water on it." All The Great Writers, pgs. 154-155.

"When he got back, Bill had mounted the body. Bill was going good. Moaning and groaning a bit. Then he reached over, kissed that dead mouth, and came.

"Bill rolled off, hit the edge of the sheet, wiped off.

" 'You're right. Best fuck I ever had!'

"Then they both sat in their chairs and looked at her.

" 'Wonder what her name was?' asked Tony. 'I'm in love.'

"Bill laughed. Now I know you're drunk! Only a damn fool falls in love with a living woman; now you gotta get hooked on a dead one.'

" 'Okay, I'm hooked,' said Tony.

" 'All right, you're hooked,' said Bill, 'whatta we do now?'

" 'Get her the hell outa here!' answered Tony.

" 'How?'

" 'Same way we got her in—down the stairway.'

" 'Then?'

" 'Then into your car. We drive her down to Venice Beach, throw her into the ocean.'

" 'That's cold.'

" 'She won't feel it any more than she felt your cock.'

" 'And how about your cock?' asked Bill.

" 'She didn't feel that either,' answered Tony.

"There she was, double-fucked, dead-laid on the sheets.

" 'Let's make it, baby!' screamed Tony." The Copulating Mermaid of Venice, California, pgs. 160-161.

" 'Welcome, Mr. President. I've waited a long time on History and Science and You, and all have arrive, on schedule, today...'

"The President looked at the old man in the rocker. 'Great God! You're ... you are ...'

" 'You've recognized me! Others of your citizens have made jokes about the similarity! Too stupid to even realize that I was ...'

" 'But it was proven that ...'

" 'Of course, it was proven. The bunkers: April 30th, 1945. we wanted it that way. I've been patient. Science was with us but at times I had to speed-up History. We wanted the right an. You are the right man. The others were too impossible—too alienated from my political philosophy ... You are far more ideal. By working through you it will be easier. But as I said, I had to speed-up the reel of History a bit ... my age ... I had to ...'

" 'You mean ...?'

" 'Yes. I had your president Kennedy assassinated. And then, his brother ...'

" 'But why the 2nd assassination?'



" 'We had information that that young man would have won the presidential election.'

" 'But what are you going to do with me? I've been told that I'm not to be assassinated ...'

" 'May I introduce Drs. Graf and Voelker?'" Swastika, pgs. 171-172.

"There were some Chinamen circling down there. Cooks, waiters, owners. They seemed to run about talking to each other. Then they started running up the stairway. I had a half pint in my coat and sat down at a table to watch the fun. Jeff met them at the top of the stairway and punched them back down. There were more and more of them. Where all those Chinamen came from, I don't know. Just the force of them all moved Jeff back from the stairway and then he was stepping about in the center of the room knocking them down. I would have helped Jeff otherwise, but I kept thinking about that poor dog and that poor pregnant woman and I sat there drinking from the half pint and watching.

"Finally a couple of them got Jeff from the back, another grabbed one arm, two others got the other arm, another had a leg, another had him about the neck. He was like a spider being brought down by an ant-swarm. Then he was down and they were trying to hold him down, hold him still. As I said, he was the strongest man I had ever seen. They held him down but they couldn't hold him still. Every now and then a Chinaman would come flying off the pile as if he had been ejected by some invisible force. Then he would leap back on. Jeff simply would not give up. And although they had him there, there was nothing they could do with him. He kept struggling and the Chinamen seemed very confused and unhappy that he would not give up.

"I had another drink, put the bottle in my coat, got up. I walked over there.

" 'If you'll hold him still,' I said, 'I'll knock him out. He'll kill me for it, but it's the only way out.'" A Drinking Partner, pg. 229.

"I went upstairs with the girl. The place had no windows, and again a candle. There was a mat on the floor. We both sat on the mat. She lit the hash pipe and passed it to me. I took a hook and passed it back, looked at those breasts again. She looked almost ridiculous tied to those two things. It was almost a crime. I said, almost. And, after all, there are other things besides breasts. The things that go with them, for instance. Well, I'd never seen anything like that in America. But in America, of course, when there was something like that the rich boys took it and hid it until it spoiled or changed, then they let the rest of us have a run at it." The White Beard, pgs. 233-234.

" 'what do you think of the King-thing?'

" 'a real chickenshit play, like any assassination from Julius Caesar on down.'

" 'you think the blacks are right?'

" 'I don't think that I deserve to die at the hands of a black man, thought I think there are some fantasy-sick whites who do, I mean, THEY want to die at the hands of a black. but I think that one of the finest things about the Black Revolution is that they are TRYING; most of us white panty-waists have forgotten how to, including me. what's this got to do with 3 g's?'

" 'well, I was told you had the "inside" and I need bread but I think you're some kind of nut.'

" 'F.B.I.'



" 'sir?'

" 'are you the F.B.I.?'

" 'are you paranoid?' he asks.

" 'of course. what sane man is not.'" A White Pussy, pg. 239.



Topics for Discussion

In the opening story, "The Most Beautiful Woman in Town," Bukowski feels guilty for Cass' suicide. How would you counsel him in his grief?

How does Adolf Hitler figure in this collection of stories? Why do you suppose Bukowski so frequently refers to him?

Given the difficulty of an author's life—often suffering block and getting published with difficulty—why do you suppose Bukowski bothers? What are the positive benefits of writing?

Given the suffering that alcohol brings Bukowski and his friends, why do you think he continues to drink?

How does the jargon of the race track affect your enjoyment of the three stories devoted to racing?

Do you find in Bukowski and his various alter egos any redeeming features? What are the best and worst aspects of his personality?

What do these stories reveal about Bukowski's views on race and gender?