

Bob Flanagan & David Trinidad



A Taste of Honey

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for Amy Gerstler & Sheree Rose

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Disappointed 'cause all I want is more.
A big letdown in fact. All my loving –
yeah yeah yeah . . . that's a funny word for it.
Funnier still, this photograph of our
nuptial. How many circles do you see?
How many love triangles? How many
times do I have to tell you I love you?
Truth is you look like a wilting lily
and here I am again calling you "Rose,"
though the star on your door says "Honey West."
I beg you, "Please, Honey, don't say you will."
Stranger still, your voice on my phone machine
filled with misdirected vindictiveness:
"Hello. This is Honey West. I'm gonna
vanish from this poem, although David
will be lost, utterly lost without me."
What's it to you? Who cares if David's lost?
We can get Christie Love to solve this case!
In case you forgot, this is a love poem.
It's written in lipstick on the inside
of your thighs – smeared headlines, declarations
of my adolescent lust. Baby I'm
full of it, and you're getting all of it,
each and every sweet drop of honey squeezed
ever so lovingly, but not gently,
from the head of the stuck-up Honey Bear.
My fingers are sticky 'cause of you, Pal.
All this oozing goo! What a mess we've made!
What about the plans we've made? And all this
white icing? It's a blessing in disguise.
I'm God, laying down a blanket of snow
the dreary masses don't even notice
till they're up to their noses in the stuff.
Something much better is in store for us
though we're both too tired to believe it.
But you never know, tomorrow we might.

Shake Up, Twist and Shout, and Hallelaloo

It's hard to know what to do with oneself
what with all these earthquakes shaking things up.
No matter how we try to tie things down,
we have no control over what happens
to the breakables and the unattached
sheets that flutter above clotheslines like ghosts
heading toward heaven . . . those friends of ours
are happy now that they see and know all,
even what's in our hearts, safely hidden
from human sight. Once upstairs, our dear friends
carouse and carry on at our expense,
waking us up at night with loud music
and the screams of angels snagged in their harps.
Then there are the bells and the strange voices
here on earth, séances with galloping
horse-ghosts, like Nightmare, Casper's trusty steed.
Friendly indeed. With friends like that, who needs
a handsome lover or a brand new car?
These earthly possessions are empty shells;
their coming and going teaches us how
fortunate we are to be here at all.
We should be grateful, pray for those lost souls
and our own as well, which even now seem
as aimless as the clouds that float around
from one place to the next, so changeable
and yet always the same, in that we are
continually grasping for anchors —
a handsome lover or a brand new car.
The weather gets rough and tries to blow us
back into our sleeping bodies, but we're
not so easily pushed around these days.
Our bodies, though, toss and turn down below,
not dreaming, just rolling with the punches
until daybreak, when they're thrown out of bed
into a wobbly world, not bewildered
but cheerful as they slip, tumble, and fall.

You Boys with the Circus?

Wake up to the smell of burnt — what is it?
I can't tell. Maybe it's nothing at all,
but all the bad smells of the world are here.
It's like opening a bottle of old
Grandad; not booze, but the old coot himself.
Ninety-nine bottles are left on the shelf.
In each one of them, a message from Gramps
and a tiny plastic Cracker Jacks prize:
magnifying glasses, so I can see
the ants, roaches, spiders, and lice that live
and die in the marrow of these old bones.
At night my skeleton turns green and glows,
my face sports a wicked smile and my eyes
pop right out of their sockets. Then it's time
to squeeze myself into my own bottle
and lap up the little happiness that's
left in this reflective puddle of slime.
I'm so grotesque I scare myself sometimes.
The sound of my own heart is deafening.
Its pounding has haunted this house for years.
From the basement to the attic, the blood
of my family is smeared and splattered
in polka dots of everlasting love.
I can no longer remember their names,
but their faces, emblazoned like tattoos
on the torso of a huge inflated
sex doll, make my heart swell with desire.
I must set them on fire or they'll tell me
what I don't want to know: the time of day,
the day of the week; my age, weight, and height.
"Your name is Bob and you add up to zip."
No one will ever see this, my secret
flame. Pilot light that flares like a blowtorch,
obliterate the faces and the blood,
turn this flesh into memory and ash
and cast away my smoldering remains.

I

This is what's called autobiography:
it begins with my birth in Midwestern
America, a country known for its
paper dolls, baseball cards, and comic books –
things you can fold up and put into your
lunch boxes and carry to school with you.
My school was a prison, but my lunch box
was lined with pictures of my favorite
moments in history – my own – personal
and yet, at the same time, larger than life.
My Addams Family lunch box said it well:
the weirder the better. I believed this,
hence my passion for tattooed body parts.
Horror films and detective magazines
goaded me with promises of rough stuff
while game shows on television taught me
the value of knowledge and big winnings.
I was showered with home appliances
like a newlywed, but had no idea
how to simmer, whip, mix, baste, or blend
the varied but tasteless ingredients
of my mundane life. Year after year,
I stared at my acquired possessions
as they piled up and surrounded me like
birdshit on the statue I erected
to immortalize my own humanness
and remind myself I'm not a monster.
For the most part, I was sensitive and
took the blows in life without striking back.
Once, however, I pierced a voodoo doll
nine hundred times in the heart, but Mother
caught me and said, "Knock it off!" I never
lost my temper, or anything else, since.
The only thing I regret is that I
never found anything either, only
this: "All who persist reach the sunlit snows."

True Confessions

Late that night I went into a blackout
and ended up in a strange hospital
where they poked me with a hundred needles.
As a result, I've become addicted
to the poking and must actively seek
black women who are willing to play nurse
by pricking my white skin night after night.
It's not a bad life, but I must confess
I'm losing so much blood I can hardly
lift this glass of elixir to my lips.
Although poisonous, its effectiveness
is undeniably the secret of
my good looks — that is, good looks gone sour.
I look in the mirror. Like a vampire,
the sight of my ugly puss is missing.
Am I out of body? Does one's soul have
the option to take a hike now and then,
scaling blue astral slopes or flying through
window panes, away from earth's agonies?
Being a pragmatic sort, I think not.
But the neurotic in me says, "Why not?"
I mean if the soul can indeed escape
what am I but a good egg with no yolk,
an empty cup, a vacant apartment?
Therein lies the crux of my misery.
How and with what do I fill myself up
when not even poison sticks to the ribs?
Experiences, too, pass right through me.
And what is my life but a pile of shit?
Is it all worth it? Am I in the right
decade? Perhaps it should be the sixties;
then I could wear flowers in my hair and
take enough acid to leave this body
for good, fly high enough to reach heaven
and have a long heart-to-heart talk with God —
if there were a god, if I had a heart.

King of the Road

If there were a god and I had the heart
to forgive him for what he's done to me,
I might never be lonely or needy.
If he indeed made me, he made me mad.
It's a sad way to spend the first half of
each day: game shows and foul meditations;
serpents, sunglasses, electric guitars.
And on the seventh day I too rested,
slept on a straw mat in my tiki hut
dreaming of a world squashed like a cockroach
and a whole universe beyond this one
inhabited by great thinkers like me.
I wake up without a thought in my head.
The job, the wife . . . they're right where I left them
— here in our lakeside condominium
surrounded by young toughs who peer into
our bedroom window, driving the wife nuts,
so now she won't even take off her clothes.
All day, she sits in front of the TV,
addicted to the intimate sex lives
of her daytime idols. Toward evening,
I wear myself out hoping to achieve
the peaceful union between mind and heart.
However, the computer and the pump
have been disconnected for a long time.
This lump of flesh has a lump in its throat.
I can't speak or do anything to change.
My lovely wife would love to push me off
the balcony of our condo and then
drive her car over my face just for kicks.
She wields a 12" butcher knife and hides
my medicine, laughing as I wither
at her feet . . . a lifetime of bitterness
from the woman I used to call "Sweetie."
She calls me "Piss Ant" and "Dung Heap" and leaves.
Dear God, in spite of all my prayers, she leaves.

Strawberry Blonde

At last there's proof: we *can* talk to the dead!
I'm doing it now. And guess who talks back?
Liberace? Rock Hudson? Marilyn?
There's more to life than has-been movie stars,
but this voice I hear sounds so familiar.
Far from the hollowness of Hollywood,
the larger-than-life image that flickers
before me is a projection of my
own secret dream of immortality.
A close-up of my mouth floating in space
speaks for itself: "I am the spirit of
lost words, paying lip service to what was."
What was isn't worth remembering, but
I miss it. And that's what matters: the hurt.
Not to mention the pain and the drama:
boy meets girl; girl beats boy; boy gets hard-on;
boy sticks hard-on up ass of other boy;
the end. In the meantime, the real meaning
of this underground film remains hidden
between the lines of these silly actors.
Jayne Mansfield reclines in her pink mansion.
"Beautiful, ain't it?" she whispers to me
as I wait in line at the checkout stand,
her sweet voice thicker than the jam I just bought.
She follows me out to the parking lot.
The jam hits the pavement and suddenly
I'm splattered with preserves. It looks like blood.
What a sap I am to be so careless,
especially with something this precious:
the confectionary embodiment
of the dumb blonde — another sex goddess
fallen prey to my insatiable lust.
And now I'm lost in a cloud of stardust,
scattered lint from the fabric of one's life.
I stand naked in front of you tonight,
a star in my own right, about to go out.

The Spirit of St. Louis

If you're in doubt about angels being real,
prove it: hike to the nearest cliff and jump.
You'll either fly or you won't. Most likely,
you'll hit bottom before you get your wings.
You'll be a sight for sore eyes, no better
than the twisted wreckage of an airplane,
like the one Buddy, that angel of rock,
ended up in. Yeah, that'll be the day
you'll die, die, my darling. They'll have to pull
you out, piece by piece, patch you together
like some sort of mangled stuffed animal.
Oh, let me be your teddy bear of death.
Let me cover your last breath with my lips.
Inflate me with your departing spirit;
fill me with your diseased semen; pump me,
drill me, drive me insane with desire!
Then get out of my life! Leave me alone!
I've fallen madly in love – with myself.
I love myself exactly as I am,
each hair and pimple precisely as is.
And like drama masks, there are two of me:
one who remembers you and longs to be
back in your arms again, and one who hates
myself for remembering and longing.
I must be balancing some bad karma
on the sandy shores between then and now.
How many lifetimes has it taken me?
Each new body's no more than a new shirt
which I put on without much willingness.
Today I'm a redhead; tomorrow I'm tan;
the day after tomorrow I'm just blue.
I'm the chameleon of the universe,
forever changing colors to fit your
perception of what a good soul should be.
You can't see the real me, and won't until
the end. And by the way, just when is that?

Friday the 13th

You can make a new start with your last breath,
it so happens, every time you let go.
If bad luck follows, why not embrace it
like an oozing mutation right out of
your high school anthropology textbook?
Why not learn to love the part of you that
dropped off ages ago but nonetheless
hangs around, hiding in the attic or
in the basement, or somewhere in between?
Are you afraid other people might scream?
Too bad if they do. You are what you were:
a ghoulish vision of selfishness and
self-imposed emotional implosion.
You have no reason to live, but still you
fog up the windows with your heavy breath
and point that accusing finger at me,
the one who wants to hold you in his arms.
You've grown too big for that, like a balloon
expanding beyond your own capacity
and my sense of good taste. It takes courage
to stay the same, bravery to be small.
In the land of the giants, no one gets
stepped on but the dumb ones, the bit players.
What a spectacle your life has become!
With your head in the clouds, you don't notice
the peons you crush beneath your great feet.
It's no great feat to make mud pies of men,
but you act as if you should be given
a standing ovation. We applaud you,
O fifty-foot woman! When you attack,
our penises react, little pip-squeaks
squealing and scurrying hither and yon.
We excite you, don't we? Oh, please say so!
Otherwise we must hide our heads in shame,
weeping over our diminutive egos,
while you grow larger with each breath you take.

Dim Bulb City

Go placidly amid the noise and haste
and ask yourself what the hell you're doing here.
You won't know, of course, but it doesn't hurt
to stare at yourself and scream like crazy
like some crazy cat in the Kit Kat Klub
hepped up on hooch and meowing at the moon,
that cool white crescent in the vast black sky.
Now is the time to wonder, Pussycat,
why there are no birds out tonight, and why
you have those tears dripping from your whiskers.
Could it be love? Has your one and only
left you lonely? Or is your empty gut
growling out of complete ennui?
The fog rolls in on giant tractor feet:
the neon lights of the bars and strip joints
suddenly as soft as cotton candy,
sickeningly sticky and sweet and pink,
so tantalizing until you realize
that this instant, love is passing you by.
Oh, for a mouthful of that instant love!
It pulls up in a red convertible
but you're such a sourpuss you can't see
that Mr. Right is behind those Foster Grants.
Everything's wrong as far as you're concerned.
Yes, this topsy-turvy metropolis
shakes you up, but don't you always land feetfirst
and fancyfree, feeling a bit frisky,
frothing at the mouth, grinning ear to ear,
spitting out a wad of pink gum as love
turns pale in the light of your indifference?
It's quite apparent you're no pushover
when a stiff kick in that heinie of yours
fails to register on the Richter scale.
You cold-hearted hardhead, rigor mortis
has left you more beautiful than ever
but you can't know that now, you never could.

Anger Turned Inward

I am the God of Hellfire and I bring
incense, peppermints, and green tambourines
to delight and titilate the senses
that I've neglected for such a long time.
But, try as I might, I'm still a numbskull,
a bona fide nincompoop, a nothing
in a world where everyone wins but me.
I suffer from entropy and a mal odor.
I myself am an eyesore and should be
treated far worse than the Elephant Man
for I am not even a human being.
I am the God of Hellfire and I bring
myself into every conversation
about sex and death. Though you're not aware,
I'm stealing from you and I'm fucking you
in the face while you caress your pet rock —
that's about as much life as you can stand.
Nonetheless, I have come to answer your
need for love and your hunger for someone
with a big dick and excellent credit
so you can buy, buy, buy and fuck, fuck, fuck
in order to feel complete and make life
appear to be more than the maddening
mishmash of morbid misinformation
you've had forced down your throat ever since birth.
Instead of lies, you now gag on a prick —
the biggest lie of all. Now you see it
and now you don't even want to see it.
But see it you will, and taste it too, each
glorious inch of stiff, uncut Godhead!
You need it! You are the God of Hellfire
(not me) and you have brought me down to earth,
down to my knees, up to your expectations
of the kind of blow job you dream of
where at last you swallow seed and bear fruit
in the flickering red flames of Hellfire.

Roses in December

Well, I have found the hawthorn bush, my sweet,
and it has found me. Look, I'm bleeding.
My blood drips on its green leaves and small red fruits.
I'm the Jackson Pollock of the Garden
of Eden, creating masterpieces
for masturbators like you to ogle,
Angel, your eyes bulging like billiard balls
and your testicles swaying to and fro
beneath your fig leaf as you swing from tree
to tree and back again to my waiting
Venus's-flytrap. You're not the first one I've
— GULP! — made into mulch. I rape what I sow.
O my enemy. Do I terrify?
Don't fret, monkey man. Plant a wet one here,
on my parched, love-starved lips. Me Sheena, you
nothing but a big ape whose banana
rots to a black splotch in the hot tropic sun.
Life below the equator is so short.
Soon the sky will grow dark and the Devil
will open his mouth and swallow us whole.
Down we'll go, kicking and screaming as we
tumble through Satan's inflamed intestines
and — SPLAT! — land in the dank stench-pit of his
inner soul, not like any soul we've seen
or might expect to ever see again.
This is the factory where the seeds are made
and these are the seeds that will impregnate
Mother Earth with the ultimate evil:
row after row of enraged vegetables
passing themselves off as human beings.
Thus was the end begot at the beginning,
consuming itself, consuming itself.
Love! Pain! Outrage! The jungle overflows,
one peabrain he-man after another
scattering rose petals to the wind
while trampling everything, even the thorns.

Bob Flanagan lives in Los Angeles and is the author of several books, including *The Wedding of Everything* (Sherwood Press), *Slave Sonnets* (Cold Calm Press), and *Fuck Journal* (Hanuman Books). He is currently at work on an autobiographical book entitled *The Book of Medicine*, several sections of which will appear in *Dear World* and the anthology *High Risk* (New American Library).

David Trinidad's five books include *Monday, Monday* (1985), *November* (1987), and *Three Stories* (1988). His work has appeared in numerous publications, including *The Paris Review* and *New American Writing*. Originally from Los Angeles, he now lives in New York City, where he teaches writing at Brooklyn College and at the Writer's Voice at the 63rd Street YMCA.

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