THE PLEASURES OF
THE DAMNED

POEMS, 1951–1993

charles bukowski
edited by john martin
the mockingbird

the mockingbird had been following the cat all summer mocking mocking mocking teasing and cocksure; the cat crawled under rockers on porches tail flashing and said something angry to the mockingbird which I didn’t understand.

yesterday the cat walked calmly up the driveway with the mockingbird alive in its mouth, wings fanned, beautiful wings fanned and flopping, feathers parted like a woman’s legs, and the bird was no longer mocking, it was asking, it was praying but the cat striding down through centuries would not listen.

I saw it crawl under a yellow car with the bird to bargain it to another place.

summer was over.
on the sidewalk and in the sun

I have seen an old man around town recently carrying an enormous pack. he uses a walking stick and moves up and down the streets with this pack strapped to his back.

I keep seeing him.

if he'd only throw that pack away, I think, he'd have a chance, not much of a chance but a chance.

and he's in a tough district—east Hollywood. they aren't going to give him a dry bone in east Hollywood.

he is lost. with that pack. on the sidewalk and in the sun.

god almighty, old man, I think, throw away that pack.

then I drive on, thinking of my own problems.

the last time I saw him he was not walking. it was ten thirty a.m. on north Bronson and hot, very hot, and he sat on a little ledge, bent, the pack still strapped to his back.

I slowed down to look at his face. I had seen one or two other men in my life.
with looks on their faces like that.

I speeded up and turned on the radio.

I knew that look.

I would never see him again.
dark night poem

they say that
nothing is wasted:
either that
or
it all is.

(uncollected)
the last days of the suicide kid

I can see myself now
after all these suicide days and nights,
being wheeled out of one of those sterile rest homes
(of course, this is only if I get famous and lucky)
by a subnormal and bored nurse . . .
there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair . . .
almost blind, eyes rolling backward into the dark part of my skull
looking
for the mercy of death . . .

“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah . . .”

the children walk past and I don’t even exist
and lovely women walk by
with big hot hips
and warm buttocks and tight hot everything
praying to be loved
and I don’t even
exist . . .

“It’s the first sunlight we’ve had in 3 days,
Mr. Bukowski.”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.”

there I am sitting upright in my wheelchair,
myself whiter than this sheet of paper,
bloodless,
brain gone, gamble gone, me, Bukowski,
gone . . .
“Isn’t it a lovely day, Mr. Bukowski?”

“O, yeah, yeah . . .” pissing in my pajamas, slop drooling out of my mouth.

2 young schoolboys run by—

“Hey, did you see that old guy?”

“Christ, yes, he made me sick!”

after all the threats to do so
somebody else has committed suicide for me at last.

the nurse stops the wheelchair, breaks a rose from a nearby bush, puts it in my hand.

I don’t even know what it is. it might as well be my pecker for all the good it does.