

# BOB FLANAGAN



Bob Flanagan

THE KID IS THE MAN

BOMBHELLER PRESS

The kid  
is  
The man

KATER-FOUND  
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**BOB FLANAGAN**

**THE KID**

**is**

**THE MAN**

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811 F.

*for Jim and Jack*

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*THE NAILS DRIVE HOME*

The nails drive home into wood.  
The heads meet flush against uneven planks  
and broken boards. My hand  
around the hammer starts these nails to sing—  
a higher note the farther in they go.  
Not one of them is bent. They drive in clean,  
so hot they smoke with every hammer crack  
and burn my fingers when I stroke the wood.  
The nails drive home to keep my house together,  
nails to keep the door attached,  
to hold the window frames;  
a screen nailed down to keep out insects.  
Nails drive deep through all the beams. A nail  
for every broken thing.  
My arm still pounds, even in my sleep,  
still driving them home.

*LOVE IS STILL POSSIBLE IN THIS JUNKY WORLD*

That's right kid I'm not tryin to sell ya a bill o'goods  
I'm here to tell ya you too can be a winner  
in the ball breaking day to day  
Kid pack them blues away  
Thems that sing 'em is the ones that live 'em  
And those that shove 'em will rise above 'em  
O kid O boy O man o man  
O son of a bitch world with no damn chance  
But you kid you can beat it you can be the one  
To wake up with the sun breakin through the window  
Beating down on a pair of smooth white legs  
draped across your waist  
A chance of a lifetime kid  
For just one dollar, a fifth of a fin, a buck  
And you can be a winner  
Yes love is still possible,  
Love is still possible in this junky world  
What's that kid?  
You say you been there pressed between the pastel sheets  
Only to have the mattress ripped out from under ya?  
Say you've had that elevator ride to the top  
just to have it stop between floors?  
Well put yourself in my hands  
Put your heart in my hands  
Put your buck in the box kid  
Take a chance, pick a card, pick a number, place a bet  
That's right kid I smell a winner  
I see love about to rise from pigsty smoke and cinders . . .  
Darnit kid, too bad

Try again, here ya go, take these darts and find the cupid  
One more buck Mr Don Juan, Mr Cassanova, Mr . . .  
Dammit kid, so close, must have been tail wind  
Wait a minute, come back kid, these balls here,  
Knock them bottles down and win yourself a future  
That's it kid . . . careful . . . careful . . . DAMN!  
Almost kid  
Hey don't quit now ya disappoint me  
Kid I'll make it right  
Two chances for the price of one  
And tell ya what I'm gonna do  
I'm throwin in a brand new color tv  
with automatic fine tuning . . .  
Come back here kid don't be a quitter don't give in to it  
Love is still possible,  
Love is still possible, love is still possible.

## WINDOWS

In all the windows I see women.  
Strands of hair,  
a fingertip,  
a shadow across the blinds,  
I see women;  
I see plants; I see pots on stoves.  
Bright light bulbs burn,  
a candle snaps,  
dark beds rock behind the shutters.

Men drive up in big cars, small cars.  
Men walk. Men whistle.  
Doors open. I smell baked potatoes.  
I hear water running.  
I hear boots and slippers,  
bare feet slapping on wood floors.

All around me men and women  
press their bodies close.  
I see my face, yellow as a moon,  
float across the glass and disappear.

## BEVERLY

Beverly Beverly Beverly Beverly Blvd Beverly Hills  
better I should forget but how Bev  
Bevy I'd like to write something besides your name  
like to drive with my eyes closed  
break shop windows where you've been Beverly  
Bobbie says you're gone forget it  
you've been to the Beverly Wilshire with some big-shot  
and it's no use  
I should find someone better  
but even that's no good  
last week a party in Beverly Hills Beverly Glen Blvd  
and the girl's name was Beverly Beverly Beverly Beverly

I'm afraid to go to sleep cause I woke up once  
and my mother's name was Beverly  
my sister's name was Beverly  
I had five aunts named Beverly  
even my hamster was Beverly

Beverly Beverly Beverly Beverly Typewriter Repair  
Beverly Venetian Blind Co  
Beverly Sanitarium Beverly Lock and Key  
Bev I'm moving to Long Beach  
where there are no hills  
and the streets are named after trees

## FOUND POEM

from *400 Fascinating Magic Tricks You Can Do*

for Beverly

## BALL TRICKS

The Appearing Ball; The Vanishing Ball;  
The Diminishing Ball; The Self-rolling Ball;  
The Ball Tube; The Balls and The Hats;  
The Floating Paper Balls; The Three Marble Trick

## CORK TRICKS

The Bouncing Cork; Upright Corks; Two Corks;  
Cork and Bottle; Adhesive Corks; Removing the Cork;  
The Improved Multiplying Corks

## EGG TRICKS

The Balanced Egg; Spinning an Egg;  
Eggs, Spools, and Glasses; Egg to Confetti

## FINGER TRICKS

The Mummified Finger; The Extended Finger;  
The Removable Thumb; The Detachable Finger;  
Stretching the Thumb; Eleven Fingers; Flexible Hands;  
An Illusion of Touch

## RING TRICKS

The Phantom Ring; The Improved Phantom Ring;  
Ring Tied On A String; The Ring On The Finger;  
The Released Rings; The Ring In The Egg;  
The Vanishing Ring

## MISCELLANEOUS TRICKS

The Jumping Ruler; The Changing Spools;  
The Vanishing Candle; A Difficult Job;  
The Mystic Propellor; Pin Through the Head;  
Pins Through the Finger; The Turn Over Key;  
The Perfect Dissolving Knot; The Dry Hand;  
The Escape

*SPANISH STAIRWAY IN BEVERLY HILLS*

open my mouth  
say "hi" eat cake  
"how ya doin'?" "how ya been?" hope  
nobody saw me wipe my mouth on my sleeve  
"pard' me, 'xcuse me" i say  
"love that shirt" finish my cake  
put the paper plate in a trash bag  
walk in circles  
"pard' me"  
through clumps of people  
"where's my jacket?"  
walk around  
to the wrought-iron railing  
one brown shoe on the edge of the steps  
the red-tiled floor  
the spanish looking stairway  
in the middle of beverly hills  
my car parked on some side street  
frost on the windows  
hard to see  
the rear-view mirror needs adjusting  
my face in the rear-view mirror  
white icing in the corners of my mouth

*cut cut cut*

cut cut cut. the mean kid  
chops his neighbor down  
and hurts her feelings.

bang bang bang. the miffed kid  
blows his mom and dad away  
they being so disagreeable.

punch punch punch. the vexed kid  
lets his friends know  
when it's time to go.

whack whack with a baseball bat  
the mad kid shows us all.

and cut and push and stick and stab—  
the nice kid  
rip and break and stomp—  
the sweet kid  
crack and smash and kick and shove  
the dear kid holds for love.

## THE REAL STORY

here comes the kid and mrs kid  
all the little kids  
visiting grandma and grandpa  
arms full of gifts  
and big smiles on their kid faces.

*hold it, kid, tell us what really happened.*

the kid wakes up next to his kid bride;  
they have big kisses and warm hands.  
together they make pancakes with raisins,  
read the sunday paper,  
and curl up on the big couch  
to watch cartoons.

*you're dreaming, kid. now cut the bullshit  
and tell us the real story.*

the two kids meet. they kiss:  
explosions, fireworks, ka-boom.  
he says forever, and she says . . .

*what does she say, kid?*

. . . forever.

*and then?*

and then they find an apartment together.  
he hangs movie stills and prints by van gogh  
while she does macrame—

*macrame! kid, you're hopeless.  
you've got it all wrong. we want the real story.  
like this:  
the kid's on the edge, see?  
he's on the brink.  
he can't eat. he can't write.  
he's dropped out of school.  
he's a has-been at 25.  
we want the real story.  
he's standing on a bridge, see?  
staring at the water—  
the real story;  
you get it, kid?*

the two kids are watching tv and eating brownies;  
they've finished off the whole package  
along with several glasses of milk.  
tired and full, they go to bed early  
and sleep with their backs to one another.

## THE ANIMAL

The animal  
Is the city where I live.  
In the black fur  
The ground breathes.

Wood frames, tile, pipe  
Cling to the belly.  
There are arguments.  
A shade flaps open.

Traffic jams  
While men repair the streets.  
Kids knock over trash cans;  
The smell blows through the windows.

There's a letter:  
My uncle, asleep on the couch,  
Never had a chance.  
The burning cigarette tip is all I see.

I want to know what's wrong.  
I hear the springs pulled back,  
Feel the claws in my mattress.  
In the morning

The sun's not right;  
There's a chair out of place.

## I WANNA BE LOVED BY YOU

from this mattress on the floor  
i can see the tops of telephone poles  
apartment buildings  
and trees  
no birds  
the 5 pm traffic is louder than my television  
just saw a friend of mine  
in a commercial singing "I Wanna Be Loved By You"  
he looked like a banana  
everyone on my set either looks like a banana  
or a talking pancake  
i can't see the telephone poles anymore  
everything is blue in here  
headlights run across the ceiling  
what is it now, six? it feels like six

## JUST THEN

just then, just as he lights a cigarette,  
up to his knees in snow, just as he remembers again  
the postcards from California,  
a street in Beverly Hills, Hollywood at night,  
a picture of her at the beach  
waving, squinting;  
just as he starts to wonder what the hell he's waiting for  
how long before she "finds herself"?  
how many postcards?  
how many ceramics classes, dance classes,  
guitar lessons?  
just as he steps out from under the elevated,  
the grey rush hour of Lake and Wabash;  
just as he starts to think about dinner,  
all the fish he can eat at Lucille's for \$1.98;  
just as he notices the man in fur selling pretzels  
by the 5 & 10;  
as he turns his head;  
as the adrenalin starts to pump  
and he gets the feeling he should run,  
he looks up, a woman drops her groceries,  
and everything falls into the snow.

## ALKIES FROM HEAVEN

they're falling everywhere  
smashing through windshields  
thuds on the sidewalk  
some of them dangling from phone lines  
and some in the trash  
they've been landing like this for days

one had landed near a gas station  
we dragged him into the shade and called an ambulance  
but there are too many now  
and the ambulances never come

they keep falling  
and no one knows what it is  
some say it's god  
some say it's the heat  
but most of us don't say anything  
we duck mostly  
and watch for falling bottles  
that's the hard part—  
the bottles  
five or six at a time  
one after the other like machine gun fire—  
we have to duck into doorways, hide under canopies  
run home with our hands over our heads  
and lock ourselves in  
try to eat, try to read, watch television  
newscasters and scientists report the latest  
assure us all that an end is in sight  
"we are getting closer and closer . . ."  
but all night long the set crackles with bad reception

## BUKOWSKI POEM

I started writing this poem  
where Pamela and I  
are sitting in a bar in Santa Monica  
and she shows me some of her new poems.

I tell her they're not very good

and she starts yelling and throwing  
glasses and all of a sudden I realize  
it sounds a lot like  
a Bukowski poem.  
Shit, I say, it sounds a lot like  
a Bukowski poem.  
What am I doing writing like  
Bukowski?

I rip it up and toss it on the floor  
beside the ants and the empty bottles  
and Pamela's candy wrappers.

What wrong with *you*? she asks.

Oh, nothing, I say, it's just that  
I'm starting to write like Bukowski.

Well, what's wrong with that, she says.  
He's a nice guy. I talked to him on  
the phone one time. I asked him if he'd  
like to do a reading. He said no but  
to keep buying his books.

There's nothing wrong with Bukowski,  
I say. I just don't want to write  
like him. I have a hard enough time  
writing my own stuff, let alone  
Bukowski's too. And besides, he's  
doing an ok job of it on his own.

I go to the refrigerator for a beer  
but there's just a lot of milk and  
Pepsi-Cola. How come we don't have any  
beer? I ask.

Don't be an ass, she says. You know  
we never buy beer. Since when  
do you want a beer? I think you're  
going out of your mind, she says.

You might be right, I say.

And I go into the bathroom and feel  
like vomiting but can't.  
I fill the tub with hot water.  
CHRIST! I yell.  
I don't take baths; Bukowski takes  
baths; I take showers!  
I shut the water off and sit down on  
the crapper. I'm constipated and  
I have hemorrhoids and Pamela is  
pounding on the bathroom door.

Hurry-up in there, she says;  
*I HAVE TO TAKE A PISS!*

Ok, I say, it figures — somebody has to  
piss in this poem; it wouldn't be right  
without pissing.

*HUMBLE KID HUMBLE*

humble kid humble  
wakes up  
with his head  
smaller than it was last night

his piece of toast  
won't fit his mouth  
he jabs his cheek  
with a fork

humble kid humble's  
hands are too big  
they lie in his lap  
like pink young pigs

big dreams tumble  
behind the small face  
the pasted moustache  
full of chocolate cake

piano bars, night spots,  
parties buzz  
but humble kid humble's  
not the man that he was

guitar strings rust  
the piano's gone back  
somebody took  
his cowboy hat

his long white legs  
refuse to dance  
they grow like snakes  
inside his pants

humble kid humble  
asleep in his chair  
a spider  
starts a nest in his hair

*THE HEART IS A PUMP*

i can't scream loud enough to stop things from falling  
i love you she says  
but there are strange dogs in the kitchen  
we fill the place with birds and roses

black tail brush against us

if i shake you i think  
if i could just shake it out of you  
if i could slap you  
i would  
but everything breaks

*THE HEART IS A PUMP*

the sky is orange like a match  
you leave me  
pressed against the glass  
watching my own hands  
wave to strangers  
long legs  
in the white writing style  
you leave all special and rosey  
nothing behind  
left in the closet but blue corners  
and lamps  
i don't know if i'll start buying things again

*THE HEART IS A PUMP*

the skin turns red  
it withers like a peach  
until there's no chance of seeing you  
young men fly about the room  
each time you touch me  
i jump  
when you close the door  
i scrub at the stains in the mattress  
i scratch myself until the blood comes  
the heart is a pump  
hit me again  
hit me harder until something shows  
i can disappear  
i can shrink smaller than your boot heel

*BURN*

*People don't want to be healed. They  
want a nice juicy wound that will show  
well when they put neon lights around it.*

—Kenneth Patchen

water down my face  
my chest  
burn me  
make me warm  
this bathroom  
cold  
the chrome towel racks  
bare window  
white feet  
the skin blisters  
burn  
cigarette  
hot sidewalk  
hole in my shoe  
sofa  
mom forgets  
burning  
even the firemen  
come  
break windows  
neighbors point  
and kids drop bicycles  
run  
the black smoke is in my house

my soft mattress  
my sheets my pillow  
bright  
my fingers bright  
my feet so bad

look  
i'm hurt  
my hands tied behind me  
kids light fires  
at my feet  
watch me dance  
indian howl  
slave  
spiders and lizards in the tool shed  
want to see something?  
look—  
where the hand was  
left a red mark  
see the skin broke open  
flood finch eggs, roses  
splash the white night-gown  
she throws off  
look how she holds me  
mornings  
while friends in jail  
burn with losing  
downstairs  
women talk to dogs  
my wrists in her hands like birds  
her mouth on my cheek  
she asks  
was it good?

## LOVE LETTERS, CUT UP

ice floats penis clinic/ i was raisins and apples,  
me blender full of *was* and *mistake*/ my squeal—i  
expected/ i howling, asleep on little dimes/ until  
*UP THE WHOLE PROCEDURE!*/ like that with you deep  
kept pillows curled/ and it was all over . . . i don't  
burn—i ponder, upon you the schedule, ribs my fingers,  
the realization: oh i IT for eight, about two weeks,  
crying on 21 days, takingness or irritate, have a  
period, then beg (or very near with) (what a hassle)  
etc., angel we cannot pill belly at lunch time/ when  
all open, all were, we were/ we lay in bed . . . the  
afternoon/ on top of blankets/ pursuing quiet ends/  
i'd love to have an evening, plants, draw you, not  
cough so much/ i might even (once would be enough) . . .  
we were, you are an excellent person

## BIRTHDAY

i count the candles:  
25, 24, 23  
back in the city  
cooking spaghetti  
the girl from the bookstore  
is coming for dinner  
she'll be on time  
she'll be wearing a white shawl  
she'll stay for two years  
and things will change  
the bedspread will be a new color  
the walls will fill with pictures  
mail is delivered  
the phone rings  
the kitchen is warm with the smell of baked yams  
refrigerator full  
spinach, brussels sprouts, corn on the cob  
cupboards packed with teas and spices  
that's my girl now coming up the stairs  
with a box of brown rice, raw milk, and cheese  
candles glow in the small kitchen  
shadows on the ceiling grow longer and more frantic  
we have animals  
finches, hamsters, geese  
months pass by  
her birthday, my birthday  
christmas and hanukkah

paper clings to books and records  
the sink fills with dishes  
two single beds pushed together  
toothbrushes jammed at the bristles  
a white cake with candles  
i dip my finger in the wax  
it cools too soon  
not long enough to burn  
or make the skin red

*THE KID IS THE MAN*

The kid is the man  
This is his woman  
These are his kids  
The kids are not born yet  
The woman is gone  
The kid is the man  
Who grows a beard  
The woman says no  
He shaves  
The woman leaves  
He grows a beard  
The man in the house  
The man in the mirror  
Leaves  
The woman leaves  
The kid shaves  
The kid is the man who shaves  
The kid is the man with kids  
Pretending to shave  
The kid has a woman  
That's the woman  
Her plate, her chair  
The kid brings flowers  
The kid is the man with a woman  
A house and kids  
The man in the mirror  
Whose woman is gone

*THE ONE*

i'm the one the ambulance brings  
tied to the bed  
belly full of bleach  
i'm the red scream broken kid  
sped through the streets  
the late night cough  
the fever the wheeze  
the sick kid  
wrapped in ice-water sheets  
i'm the one  
special kid bundled  
my mother brings  
cake

*DRAGGING THE CANAL*

The boats are quiet in the black water. You  
face up floating in this night with steel against your cheek.

I can't remember what you said;  
I can't remember what you did.  
I don't know you, but you're so close I feel your breath.  
You so disfigured; you talking funny,  
mouth out of shape and smooth body twitching.

Don't you flow; don't you bore into me,  
take what I say and bend me up.

You wet lips; you broken baby.  
Tie you down you open wet like water rushes out  
like paint.

You fished out, hair dripping  
and we all watching from the bridge  
like I was standing over your bed  
had to squeeze you tight  
had to cover your mouth with my hand.

You on the streets in big letters.  
Have to rip you up  
break you open so you can say something.

Feathers on the kitchen floor.  
You white, beside the sink, naked,  
telling me to do something, do something.  
Have to pry the bars open and work its head loose,  
push my thumbs in, let it fall,  
reach in with a paper towel and not let you see.

*THERE IS AN ISLAND*

*Fly me to the moon  
and let me play among the stars  
Let me see what spring is like  
on Jupiter and Mars*

—Bart Howard

There is an island I want to remember.

The moon bleeds through the bamboo blinds.  
I think about a rattan chair,  
a fly-fan, a parrot;  
but I want to remember.

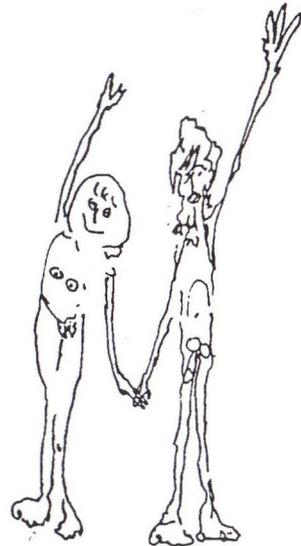
There's a country I want to go to.

I concentrate;  
I bear down; my body pulls;  
every muscle tightens; and slowly  
I begin to lift.  
The toes of my boots leave tracks in the dirt  
while men with machine guns  
spray the clouds with bullets.

My ceiling has gold sparkles that look like stars.  
I draw my own constellations,  
put my own planets in orbit around cracks in the plaster.

There is life on other planets.

The mother-ship comes  
to disintegrate our houses  
and blow up our cars.  
The weak ones are blown up too,  
the children, the old people.  
The rest of us are led into small ships.  
We have smiles on our faces. We are content.  
We stare blankly at glowing kitchens,  
melted tractors.  
We remember nothing.  
We are all excited about the future.



Bob Flanagan lives in the Los Angeles area. He is 26. He teaches in the *Poets-In-The-Schools* program, and has been published in several small press magazines.



## Bombshelter Press

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