

## Living Alone · *Hayden Carruth*

*For John Cheever, from whose writing this epigraph is taken:*

A few minutes later a miscalculation of the helmsman sent a wall of water up the side of the ship and filled the stern deck with a boiling sea. Up swam the Ping-Pong table and, as I watched, it glided overboard and could be seen bobbing astern in the wake, a reminder of how mysterious the world must seem to a man lost overboard.

Mystery! Seed of every motion.  
See out there beyond the thermal-  
pane that last chrysanthemum  
in the bed frozen by the concrete wall  
swing wildly its lavender  
and shattered head. How fast  
the wind rises! How the mud  
elaborates in patterns of ice!  
A gull, hovering, shudders and cries.

\* \* \*

And what if as often does  
this epiglottis fail to close  
once for all  
and need is final,

comfort, alas, who will me then?  
Or otherwise that time soon when  
writhing by wayside clover  
I shall be like the snake run over?

\* \* \*

Jettisoned in one night  
from her house by my  
successor I was as if  
falling as a parachutist might  
in vacant air, shocked  
in the silence, nowhere.

\* \* \*

No more than a bad  
cold and a deep cough? Suppose  
really it might be

pneumonia? No one  
to call; phone useless; fever  
smoldering. I see

the winter sunset  
behind my curtain casting  
its thin light on me.

\* \* \*

No. Experience is unique and equivalent.  
I have always asserted it, I won't  
look for similitudes on other gallows.

O Villon! O Spartacus! Yes,  
I know. And also I know this other,  
a cruel, stupid, and bat-sighted lover.

\* \* \*

Flu, bronchitis, pneumonia  
("a touch of")—as I thought  
timid to seek help. Being right  
justifies me some. Euphonia—

but I am done with you! Weak  
as a kitten. My Song, you alone  
not faithless and more or less at one  
with me, let us not be to seek

timid any more, but tough  
in our own melodiousness  
toward everyone. The hell with her madness,  
you and I in each other being enough.

\* \* \*

Peculiar now I have come among  
all these so laboring and academic young  
my own language is to me (although  
intermittent, it's true) easy, strong,  
and flowing in natural cadences of song.

\* \* \*

Let go, goddamnèd Fate!  
Sixty years sufficient! Eleven  
women, how many jobs, and still I wait  
for one free choice. Ah, heaven  
only can be this earth, the best  
lost years of life. What's the rest  
but now, now, eternally too late?

\* \* \*

These walls are I think well insulated,  
not much sound comes through, except  
the American ubiquity of flushing water,  
yet down in this one corner voices float  
as if telephoned from Hell. "Shut up!  
Shut up, you little bitch!" I hear.  
A woman screaming at her wailing daughter.

\* \* \*

Housekeeping an endless joy.  
Endless *and* a joy, maybe  
*because*. No use for the coy  
poets who say they've finished  
something. So this baby  
spider (small anyway) has made  
his web conveniently in my  
bath tub and has already waylaid  
two flies—in December! There  
in his solitude he sits. And burnished  
are his eyes in the small night light,  
complete his aloneness, complete his care  
for his bundled deaths to left and right.

\* \* \*

Rachel, your name won't rhyme, the language itself  
has given up on you. Zilch. You and your great fat  
stuffed bulging shapeless antique ego that  
you lug around like your grandmother's satchel.

\* \* \*

Depression—commonest word  
in smart vocabulary and never  
understood, though they regard  
their heads so snug and clever.  
I, I am depressed!—ready the world  
to murder or myself. Whichever.

\* \* \*

I feared death and I sought it  
like other men  
and doubtless like women too  
though I disclaim

whatever knowledge I thought once  
to have of them,  
but that was in the mid-years  
of anguish and pain.

Weariness at last  
overcomes all,  
six decades. Who cares  
if I fall

sick unto acceptance  
in this small bed  
indifferent now? Either I am  
alive or I am dead.

\* \* \*

Nevertheless one rebels. "I dis-  
acquiesce!" The funerary stars  
burn relentless over the dying  
earth that drops through silence—  
emptiness as the order of reality.

“What barbarism!” So slight the words  
they cannot flutter up the darkness  
on their shredding wings. Nevertheless.

\* \* \*

Matter? Does it? Anything  
in this world of equivalence  
 (“my only”), the one comprehensible  
in all incomprehensibility? No.  
Bare-ass in radiant fever, I  
shiver from window to window,  
twitch the drapes apart, look  
out to red-neon Pizza Hut  
in the rain, while the radio  
plays “The New World Symphony”  
all night long. Matter if it’s  
Vermont, a squalid farm, or here  
this two-bathroom squalor, this  
suburb? Don’t be fooled  
by “w/w carpeting” in the ads,  
what it means is wall-to-  
wall pins; also tacks; also glass.  
I put on slippers. All equal,  
all the same, and boredom  
no longer stylish, just necessary.  
Who, who could have foreknown  
the best of thought would come  
to this inevitable meaningless?  
Lord God, you who are not, we  
who are imploring go down  
on our meaningless knees to you.

\* \* \*

“All one can do is to achieve nakedness.”

And do you—  
You, Friend, Foe, Unknown—  
see me here in this garden apartment complex  
that is otherwise called forsakenness  
(no different, of course, than anyone)  
bare-ass in woe?

\* \* \*

The notion of an austere measure  
and speech once more purged  
of vulgar inconcinnity  
seems by solitude not only urged  
but offered as a negative pleasure.  
So I'll go back to it someday. Maybe.

\* \* \*

When the studio  
musician remarked  
that Russell had  
no technique, there  
in that dark room,  
Pee Wee picked up  
his horn and blew  
a mistake so lovely  
I saw a tear  
even in the eye of  
the idiot.

    O Monte-  
verdi. O Mahler.  
In the dark room.

\* \* \*

Sleeping, the lovers. In the wet dark of morning  
these millions, the young and fair who still outnumber  
the old and ugly, the abandoned and sorrowing.  
And insomnia's streetlights shine on the black  
peaceful windows of their slumber.  
It is four-thirty, hour of weeping or not weeping,  
hour of rhyme.

    And the neon is gone and the rain  
falls on the end of time.