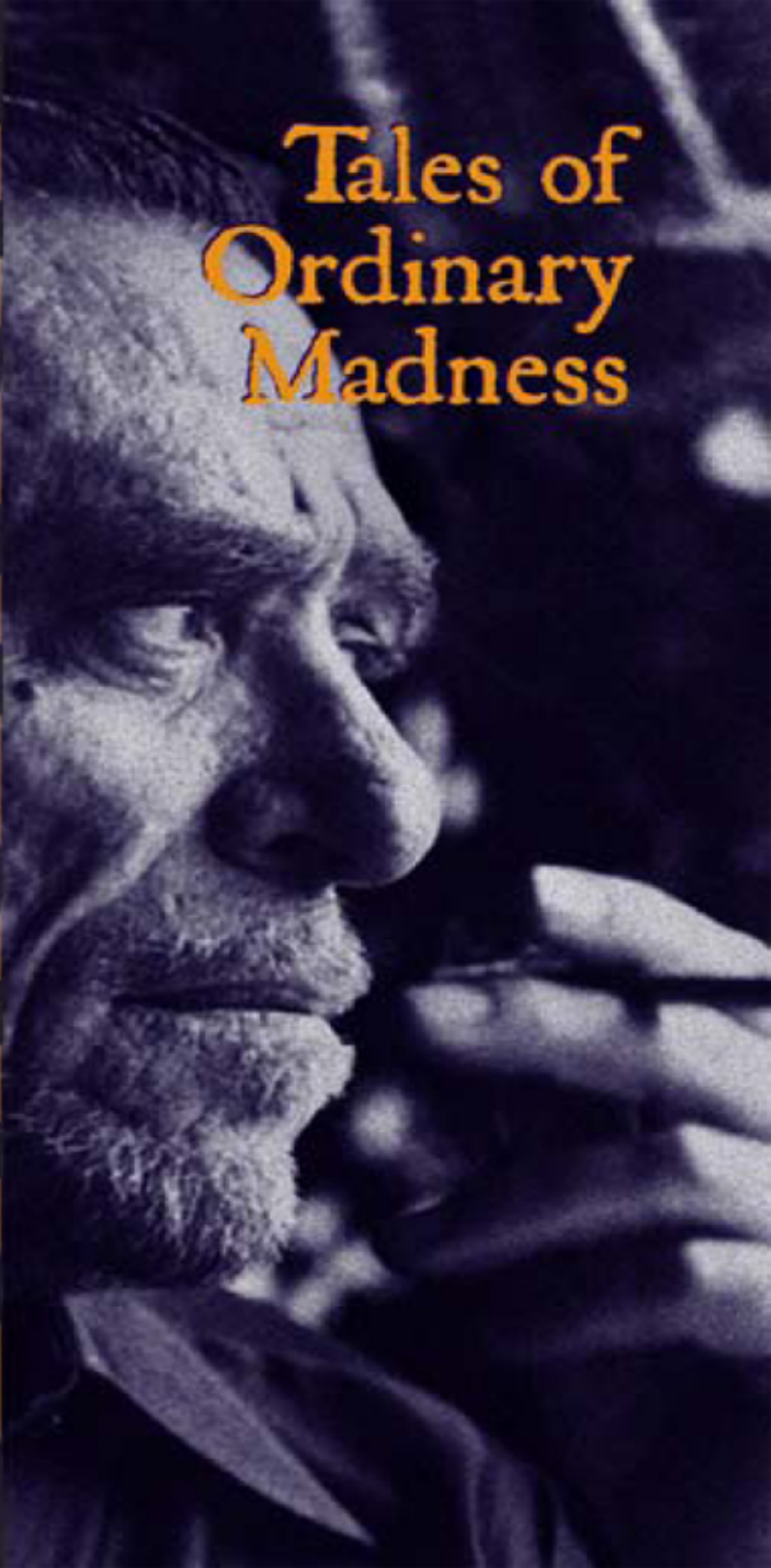
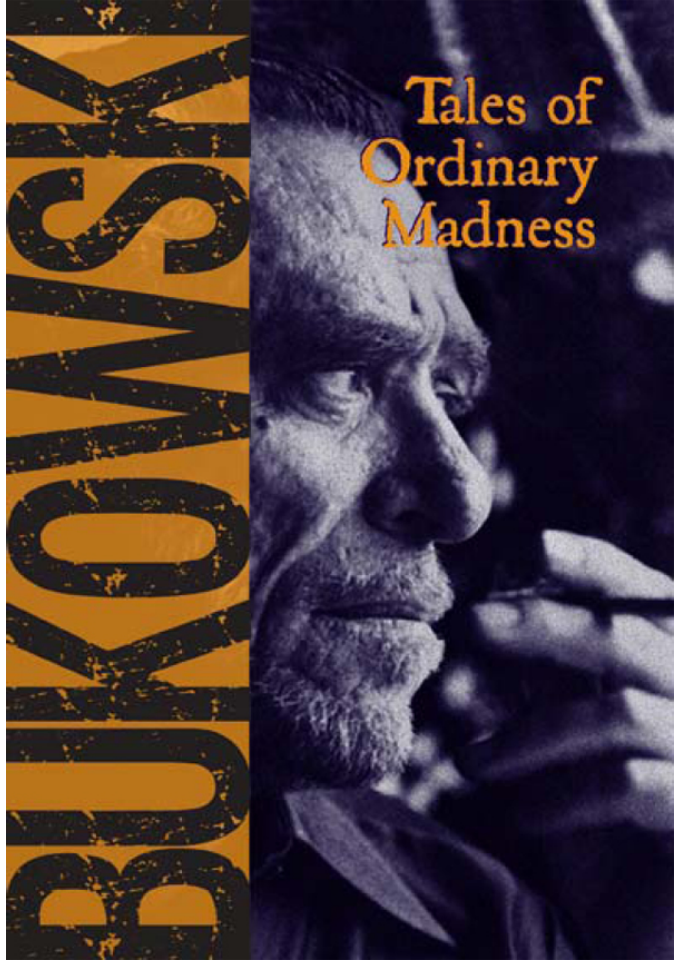


BOOKS

Tales of
Ordinary
Madness





TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS

by

Charles Bukowski

Edited by Gail Chiarrello



CITY LIGHTS BOOKS
San Francisco

TALES OF ORDINARY MADNESS

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A .45 TO PAY THE RENT

Duke had this daughter, Lala, they named her, she was 4. it was his first child and he had always been careful not to have children, fearing that they would murder him somehow, but now he was insane and she delighted him, she knew everything that Duke was thinking, there was that line that ran from her to him, from him to her.

Duke was in the supermarket with Lala and they talked back and forth, saying things. they talked about everything and she told him everything she knew and she knew very much, instinctively, and Duke didn't know very much but he told her what he could, and it worked. they were happy together.

“what's that?” she asked.

“that's a coconut.”

“what's inside?”

“milk and chewy stuff.”

“why's it in there?”

“because it feels good in there, all that milk and chewy stuff, it feels good inside of that shell. it says to itself, ‘oh my, I feel so good in here!’ ”

“why does it feel good in there?”

“because anything would. I would.”

“no you wouldn't. you wouldn't be able to drive your car from inside of there, you wouldn't be able to see me from inside of there. you wouldn't be able to eat bacon and eggs from inside of there.”

“bacon and eggs aren't everything.”

“what is everything?”

“I dunno. maybe the inside of the sun, frozen solid.”

“the INSIDE of the SUN ...? FROZEN SOLID?”

“yep.”

“what would the inside of the sun be like if it were frozen solid?”

“well, the sun's supposed to be this ball of fire. and I don't think the scientists would agree with me, but *I* think it would be like this.”

Duke picked up an avocado.

“wow!”

“yeah, that’s what an avocado is: frozen sun. we eat the sun and then we walk around feeling warm.”

“is the sun in all that beer you drink?”

“yes, it is.”

“is the sun inside of me?”

“more than anybody I have ever known.”

“and I think you got a great BIG SUN inside of you!”

“thank you, my love.”

they walked around and finished their shopping. Duke didn’t select anything. Lala filled the basket with whatever she wished. some of it you couldn’t eat: balloons, crayons, a toy gun. a spaceman with a parachute that flipped out of his back when you shot him into the sky. hell of a spaceman.

Lala didn’t like the woman cashier. she gave a most serious frown to the cashier. poor woman: her face had been scooped out and emptied – she was a horror show and didn’t even know it.

“hello little sweetie!” the cashier said. Lala didn’t answer. Duke didn’t prompt her to. they paid their money and walked to the car.

“they take our money,” said Lala.

“yes.”

“and then you have to go to work at night and make more money. I don’t like you going away at night. I want to play mama. I want to be mama and you be the baby.”

“o.k., I’ll be the baby right now. how’s that, mama?”

“o.k., baby, can you drive the car?”

“I can try.”

then they were in the car, driving. some son of a bitch hit his throttle and tried to ram them as they made a left turn.

“baby, why do people try to hit us with their cars?”

“well, mama, it’s because they are unhappy and unhappy people like to hurt things.”

“aren’t there any happy people?”

“there are many people who pretend that they are happy.”

“why?”

“because they are ashamed and frightened and don’t have the guts to admit it.”

“are you frightened?”

“I only have the guts to admit it to *you* – I’m so god damned scared, mama, that I think I’m going to die any minute.”

“baby, do you want your bottle?”

“yes, mama, but let’s wait until we get home.”

they drove along, turned right on Normandie. it was harder for them to hit you when you were turning right.

“you are going to work tonight, baby?”

“yes.”

“why do you work nights?”

“it’s darker. people can’t see me.”

“why don’t you want people to see you?”

“because if they do I might get caught and put in jail.”

“what’s jail?”

“everything’s jail.”

“I’M not jail!”

they parked and took the groceries inside.

“mama!” Lala said, “we got groceries! frozen suns, *spacemen*, everything!”

mama (they called her “Mag”), mama said, “that’s fine.”

then to Duke: “damn it, I wish you didn’t have to go out tonight. I’ve got that feeling. don’t do it, Duke.”

“*you’ve* got that feeling? honey, *I* get that feeling everytime. it’s part of the thing. I’ve got to do it. we’re tapped out. the kid threw everything into that basket from canned ham to caviar.”

“well, Christ, can’t you control the kid?”

“I want her to be happy.”

“she won’t be happy with you in stir.”

“look, Mag, in my profession you’ve just got to figure on doing a certain amount of time. you don’t sweat it. that’s all there is to it. I’ve done a bit of time. I’ve been luckier than most.”

“how about some kind of honest job?”

“babe, it beats working a punch-press. and there aren’t any honest jobs. you die one way or the other. And I’m already along my little road – I’m some kind of dentist, say, pulling teeth out of society. it’s all I know how to do. it’s too late. and you know how they treat ex-cons. you know what they do to you, I’ve told you, I’ve ...”

“I *know* what you’ve told me, but ...”

“but but butt butttt!” said Duke, “god damn you, let me finish!”

“finish then.”

“these industrial cocksuckers of slaves who live in Beverly Hills and Malibu. these guys specialize in ‘rehabilitating’ cons, ex-cons. it makes that shit parole smell like roses. it’s a hype. slave labor. the parole boards know it, they know it, we know it. save money for the state, make money for somebody else. shit. all shit. everything. make you work triple the average man while they rob everybody within the law – sell them crap for ten or twenty times its actual value. but it’s within the law, *their* law ...”

“god damn, I’ve heard this so many times ...”

“and god damn if you’re not going to hear it AGAIN! you think I can’t see or feel anything? you think I should keep quiet? even to my own wife? you are my wife, aren’t you? don’t we fuck? don’t we live together, don’t we?”

“*you’re* the one who fucked up. now you’re crying.”

“fuck YOU! I made a mistake, a technical error! I was young; I didn’t understand their chickenshit rules ...”

“and now you’re trying to justify your idiocy!”

“hey, that’s *good!* I LIKE that. little wifey. you cunt. you cunt. you’re nothing but a cunt on the whitehouse steps, wide open, and mentally siffed ...”

“the kid’s listening, Duke.”

“good. and I’ll finish. you cunt. REHABILITATE. that’s the word, those Beverly Hills soul-cocksuckers. they’re so god damned decent and HUMANE. their wives listen to Mahler at the Music Center and donate to charity, tax-free. and are elected the ten best women of the year by the *L.A. Times*. and you know what their HUSBANDS do to you? cuss you like a dog down at their crooked plant. cut your paycheck, pocket the difference, and no questions answered. everything’s such shit, can’t anybody see it? can’t anybody SEE it?”

“I ...”

“SHUT UP! Mahler, Beethoven, STRAVINSKY! make you work overtime for nothing. kick your whipped ass all hell’s time. and ONE word out of you, they’re on the phone to the parole officer: ‘Sorry, Jensen, but I’ve got to tell you, your man stole 25 dollars from the till. we’d just gotten to like him too.’ ”