

# Skinny Dippin' with Alligators

## A Redneck Odyssey



Satire in Verse in the East Texas Vernacular of My Youth



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*For (and with) my cousin Red Dog  
and in memory of Johnny, my Dad*

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<https://alteritas.net/entwistedtongues/skinny-dipping-with-alligators/>*

*“Poetry, schmoetry,” the poet Richard Wilbur  
quotes one [of his fellow WW2 recruits] saying,  
though he adds that he had “warm and amusing  
relationships with almost everyone, partly because,  
mostly country Texans, they were enjoyers  
of words — good storytellers and inventive cussers”.*

## *1 – Subject to the Urge*

Virgil and me set off to Sparks City.  
Ain't much of one, just an itty-bitty  
Bump on the road. The pit-stops in between  
Also leave much to be desired. You've seen  
Them, the most you can say is you've been  
There. Not remotely a sightseeing spin  
Through some piney woods, as I explained  
To the two fat cats who'd had the hare-brained  
Idea of joining our expedition.  
They had bankrolled our operation,  
Claimed that lent the inalienable right  
To accompany us. Try as I might  
I could not dissuade them from it.

Now Virg,  
Since his tender youth subject to the Urge  
And not as vestal as his name implies,  
Was practiced, by hook or crook or simple lies,  
At relieving others of the sorry state  
Of chastity, himself as pretty-boy bait.  
So he had a number of things that clouded  
His mind, which, unless too much crowded  
In or jumped the queue, worked fine, though ran  
Into trouble when issues grew to more than  
Two.

The buds, no longer hibernating,  
Tired of dreary hivernal waiting,  
Were burstin' through their waxy jackets.  
Glorious Spring with its wafting packets  
Of aroma was here! As always with life,  
Beneficent distractions were rife.  
Indian paintbrushes suddenly unclad,  
The ladies, even those who don't gad

About, were doing their damndest to show well.  
Such adversity can drive a man to quell  
His thoughts with hard liquor, keeping them few  
And scattered, stray and ubiquitous.  
So, wisely, I'd packed a ridiculous  
Number of pint hip flasks of Jim Beam,  
Plus extra baggies of the weed our scheme  
Was to turn a profit on. We hid the blocks  
Of shit in the pickup truck's locked tool box.

I'll tell you why we took the back route  
We did. Our Partners in crime were not about  
To let us abscond, so among the pretexts  
They came up with was to see some rednecks  
In the raw. You'd'a thunk a mirror would-a  
Sufficed, but that takes us into the could-a  
Beens

So I slammed it to the springs over miles  
Of broken asphalt, past ramshackle piles  
Of rundown shacks in the woods. Got somewhere  
You could damn well do what you please. I swear  
The whole place was run by rednecks.

But two

Rooms left in the motel, so we made do.  
Called the Poker House Motel (hardy-har!),  
A name not at all strange or bizarre  
Since there was catty corner a strip club.  
I wanted a drink and to get some grub,  
Virg, to see hisself ladies au naturel.  
The Partners sharing his taste, I fell  
Into line. Besides, it was purty hot.  
So we toked up, crossed the parking lot  
And plunged gratefully into a chill blast  
Of a/c.

Inside was the usual cast  
Of near nudes sitting in phosphorescent

Light, waiting impatiently for a gent,  
Nonchalantly flicking off ashes  
Into the dark, batting fake eyelashes  
At any male near. The main event was on  
The floor, where two ol' boys, cuesticks drawn  
What looked like menacin'ly, were in noisy  
Disputation. Y'all know how bad boys be.  
Both suffered noticeably from lack of blood  
In their alcohol streams.

Who was gonna stud  
That dirty blond standing there in the corner  
Watching the game like a mourner  
At her own funeral? "Dirty" here refers  
To her hair. Bear that in mind, voyeurs.

Paid to ward off untoward, uncompensated  
Attention toward the ladies, the bouncer hated  
Brawls. He was at first alarmed but then relieved  
When one ol' boy, apparently the one aggrieved,  
Invited the other to step outside alone,  
Jurisdiction different from the bouncer's own.  
The Partners, who could not hide their delight  
At the prospect of a bloody fight,  
Excused themselves as if to take a leak,  
Then headed out to take a quick peak.  
Always leery of stray gunshot I stayed  
inside. Virg, hopin' to get good and laid,  
Had anyways not gotten past the wenches,  
Arrested by whatever potentially quenches  
His thirst.

That was some powerful shit  
We had. I got lost in the thick of it  
All, caught up in what was flickering  
On the TV screen, and then considering  
The pithy words of a HubCap Brown  
Song on the jukebox giving the low-down

On Homer, his brother. At first didn't notice Virg  
Was gone. No doubt jess pursuing his Urge,  
I thought when I did. But then the ol' boys  
Came back with the Partners, making noise  
Like good business friends just wrapping  
Up a deal, buddy-buddy back-slapping,  
The female catalyst of what was not  
A brawl but a bargain she was bought  
And sold in also was missin' in action.  
Could only guess the grit of that transaction.

We closed the place down, me the last one out.  
The door to our room was locked: Virg no doubt  
Was in there and he had the key. I had half  
A mind to pound away. Good for a laugh.  
But I got it that more than a mere roll  
In the hay, something beyond control,  
Was going on. I stumbled to the truck,  
Fell hard asleep in the cab.

“Johnny! Fuck !”

First sounds I heard at dawn. Virg was shaking  
My shoulder, hand cupped on my mouth, waking  
Me up. Behind him the dirty blond who, closer-  
Up, had a lazy left eye. Anyone who knows her  
Would allow she was not much of a looker,  
Not at least a brazen big-boobed hooker.  
But every bodily part was brand spanking new,  
Waiting to be wore plumb out. Bea, as in bumble,  
Was her name, Beatrice in less humble  
Guise.

“Johnny, we gotta get outa here”,  
Whispered with more than a trace of fear.  
His shirt was inside out, like he'd pulled clothes on  
In a mighty hurry.

White knight Virg had chosen  
Beatrice as a damsel in distress,  
Dragging us both into what became a mess,  
As y'all'll shortly hear. She'd at least got dressed  
Right, with a white halter covering her pert breasts  
And jeans, from which I thought to avert  
my eyes. This Bea was not trying to flirt.  
She'd had some problems at home, not hard  
To figure what they were. She'd hit the road,  
Which had hit back. She was now in the charge  
Of those ol' boys, who had some kind of at-large  
Job for her further on, offer she had no way  
Politely to decline. We all try to run away,  
Sometimes too soon. Once you start to run  
It's powerful hard to stop. Now she needed someone  
To elope with. Why not Virg? But the Chevy  
Was mine. I had those keys, now jangling heavy  
In my pants.

“Hold your horses, Virg. Forget  
About them pricks. Worse would be those dead set  
On tracking us down, if we vamoose  
With the shit — our Partners. There'll be no truce.”

Bea'd got him in the sack, easy enough  
To do, then turned on the sweet sob stuff.  
She was, so Virg learned, in dire straits.  
The ol' boy Pimps'd *sold* her t'our associates,  
Though he'd been picked for the first test drive.  
She musta used any trick she could contrive,  
Then turned on the charm. Like lovers do  
On more than one-night stands, she breezed through  
Her story how she liked it told. A whole passel  
Of folks were hot on her tail, each a hassle  
Different from the other: Father,  
Brother, the Law. The twisted plot got rather

Fuzzy but the drift was: Bea had a friend  
In Sparks she trusted, who would take her in.

This Bea had sump'un drew me to her side,  
Though a voice warned me, stay clear-eyed:  
Virg was a door for me to hold open  
For just the while she barged through. Unspoken  
Was that the damn'd thing would then slam shut  
For good.

    We all know that feeling in our gut.  
I usta could fall in love, took the tumble  
Many times, saw so many dreams crumble  
That I get nervous going up where I might slip.  
Who am I to say? Someone wants to skinny-dip  
With alligators, that's their personal choice,  
Jess them listening to their inner voice.  
Like Virg was, Virg who was my bro.

So he was right, we had to go, and go  
Quick. I put the pick-up in neutral gear,  
The door open so's I could hop in once clear,  
We pushed her cross the empty parking lot,  
Clambered in, coasted out of earshot.  
I hit the switch. Thus began our odyssey.  
For which I utter no apology.

## ***2 – Moon Woman***

We high-tailed it like bats out-a hell.  
Burma shave signs, which Virg liked to spell  
Out one by one, flashed by so quick  
He couldn't keep up. He got a kick



Reading these road signs – 'bout the only thing  
He did read. Loving rhymes, he'd sing  
Lines like: A man, a miss, a car, a curve.  
He kissed the miss, and missed the curve.  
Or: He saw the train, tried to duck it,  
First kicked the gas, and then the bucket.

Despite that advice, I kept it floorboarded,  
I didn't look back, even when Bea accorded  
Her white knight some intimacy, the two  
Of them climbing over, as if on cue,  
Into the cubby hole. Nor was I gonna  
Stop. Our dope, the aromatic marijuana  
In the toolbox, was exceptionally fine,  
Hydroponically-grown. Those swine,  
The Partners plus their new partners, the Pimps,  
Were likely hot on our tail. Not a glimpse  
Of the buggers yet. But there would be,  
Because, besides the shit, we had Bea.

I had a road map we'd brung along, sought  
Out the least obvious path to some spot  
Where we could hole up, not some dead-end trap.  
Found a road that dwindled right off the map.  
We weren't goin' anywhere on it, just fast,  
And there was nothin' nowhere. Breakfast  
Was but a dream of food gnawing at my guts.

Asphalt soon gave out to gravel and ruts.  
Then a storm brew'd up, the sky grew dark,  
Then split in half. I pulled over to park  
And wait out a deluge the likes a-which  
I never seen. Once Virg had had his itch  
Scratched, him and Bea crawled back up front. Rain  
Poured down, fogging up the windshield pane.

A Texas turd-floater, enough to strangle  
Frogs!

But suddenly my nerves went all a-jangle  
Cause Bea was sittin' between us, her flesh  
Brushing up like accident'ly, moist and fresh  
Against my shoulder. She smelled mighty good.

Virg had a beat-up old eight-track he would  
Play HubCap Brown's "I'd Go to Jail for You"  
On, though I begged him pretty please not to.  
He got it out of the glove compartment, where  
He'd moved the gun, the sight of which didn't scare  
Bea at all. He slid it in, then made up  
his own mournful words to the tune, played up  
To Bea, croonin' at her: "I'll shut my eyes  
When I get there, thinking of your ... uh ... thighs."

Not HubCap's words, but Virg had done his time,  
Knew that in the pen, whatever your crime,  
Whenever they can, they do it to you.  
Up to you to figure out how to do  
It back again to them. Bea wasn't quite jail  
Bait, plenty old enough to act female,  
Just enough to do so legally. Even  
Out here in the sticks, folks don't believe in  
Poaching on the young — lessun you're related.

After a while the sky cleared, the storm abated.  
We drove till we got to a broken-down gate.  
A piece behind: a trailer, whose weight  
Sat on concrete blocks, surrounded by shacks.  
All around was rusty junk and knick-knacks,  
Plus, on the porch, a geezer, a crusty coot  
On a rocking chair, shabby and hirsute  
With round spectacles and a scraggly beard.

He looked us over good, stood up, peered  
Into the cab, then almost had a hissy fit,  
Said, like to long-lost fam'ly, "Howdy, d'jeet yet?"  
He sat us right down, went for a mess  
Of bacon and beans, homemade bread and, yes,  
A clay crock of the best, mellowest moonshine  
Served up in Mason jars among the pine  
Trees in his cluttered yard. Homer, his name,  
Didn't think much of folks. Most folks thought the same  
Of him. S'why he lived way out here, his best  
Friends, pythons, kept in barrels, not in jest  
He claimed. Them and the cat he'd let out to play  
At night. "She keeps the pole cats away.  
Personally, I sorta like their smell. She dudn't.  
She's pretty picky, she don't like the scent  
Of nobody but me."

Now humankind,  
When he had music to play, Homer didn't mind.  
Cuz that's what music's for, to share. Whiskey,  
Weed too. Anything that makes us frisky.  
Bea herself didn't care much for hootch  
And preferred to our stuff what Homer had a patch  
Of back in a plot hidden in the trees  
where the sun shined jess right.

Trying to please,  
We offered Homer some of ours, but he balked:  
"Affects me when I gotta play, I get blocked,  
Not like with Johnny Corn, which is my drug  
Of choice." Shootin' the shit, we finished the jug,  
Polished off the beans with crusts of bread.  
And without a thought to what might lie ahead  
We heard Homer on his ax strum a chord or two,  
And sing his version of "I'd Go to Jail for You".

When Homer had finished the song, Virg asked,  
"I know your given name but what 's your last?"

“Brown, I go by Homer Brown”, he replied  
Through his unkempt beard.

Virg’s eyes went wide:

“Any relation to HubCap?”

The old coot  
Stared off into empty space, stayed mute  
For a while, as if brooding over something  
Hovering on high.

“Lord, that man could sing.  
Can’t tell ‘xactly how, but we’re related  
For sure.”

Brothers? Cousins? Virg was elated  
To meet anyone sharin’ the blood of Waldo  
HubCap Brown, even if he didn’t know  
Precisely to the drop.

If me and Virg had been  
The Pimps (and had Virg not fallen in  
La-ove with Bea), we might-a cut a deal.  
Homer’s hankering for her out so real  
Even Bea could see.

Now Virg and me are  
Bad enough boys, but not the worse by far.  
You know we was slinging dope from a stash  
We stole. Yet I won’t cross, even for cash,  
Certain lines. Pimps are the scum of the earth,  
Leechin’ like the gov’nment on the worth  
Of honest folk.

“I know you’re on the lam”,  
Homer said. “If it helps you outa your jam.  
You can hole up a while, stay in the shacks.  
The snakes won’t bother you, you can relax.  
I’ll feed ’em real good, keep the cat in at night.  
She won’t bug you either. She don’t bite  
Humans. Anyone on that road, you’ll hear  
‘Em in time to hide. Jess park your truck and gear

Yonder out of sight behind them pines.  
Ya'll can camp here long as you're so inclined."

Now my Daddy used to take me out to hunt  
In the Piney Woods, where we'd confront  
Wild turkeys. Dad'd have a nip or few  
Of the bourbon of that name or some brew  
From a can. Good ol' time was had by all,  
Like we had at Homer's little bolthole,  
Where it was wise for a while to bide  
Some time.

                    We had what was needed to tide  
Us over. Virg needed time of his own  
To tame and train her. He had holt of a wishbone  
He hoped and prayed would break his way: shacking  
Up with sexy Bea. What was nerve-racking  
Was I seen her first. By rights, she belonged to me.

Gotta fess up. Been makin' fun of Virg, how he  
Thinks things through so careful slow, item  
By item, till a flash ignites in him.  
It was Virg whose lights went on, not mine.  
"Dummer than the dickens to make a bee line  
For Sparks City", he warned. The Partners could  
Ferret out our contact there. You know the 'hood,  
A buyer's market. To get their wish  
They'd jess wait us out. Easy as shooting fish.

He'd been talking with Bea about all this.  
She found it funny he'd stole her with a kiss  
Same time we stole the damned dope. Or vice-  
Versa. Thing about her friends, they were nice  
And reliable Indians who wouldn't traffic  
With white folks, let alone pornographic  
Scum like the Pimps. Cordin' to Bea, they had

A good eye for a deal, like everyone glad  
To roll smoke. They would bargain with Bea, one  
Of their own. When they learned what the Pimps done  
To her, they would deal with them too.

“Johnny, I saw her beautiful tat-too.  
She part Choctaw, Coushatta or sump’ m.”  
He didn’t spare telling me it was on her rump.  
"H – A – S – H – I   T – A – Y – I – K."  
He spelled the letters out one by one, way  
He does. “It’s some Injun lingo, means Moon-  
Woman.” Once we left Homer’s place (soon!)  
She’d call’em up, find a home for our shit.

Didn’t first buy that Bea was even a bit  
Native, tatoo or not, her Granny full blood,  
But Indians do look like the rest of our brood:  
Prob’bly a lot of peckers in their woodpile.

To get away from Homer’s place took a while.  
You know how it is: We had moonshine, dope,  
Everything in that department to hope  
For. Once we said we’d stay Homer made a run  
To town for provisions, procured a ton  
Of taters, bringing to mind the HubCap tune  
That Virgil under his breath loved to croon,  
Mangling the words of, HubCap’s “Mashed  
Potatoes and Gravy”, as usual unabashed  
In so doing: “O, I usta chomp on meat  
Back when I had teeth, now all I can eat  
Is taters and gravy....”. I’ll spare you  
The rest.

          Couldn’t believe that Bea knew  
How to cook from scratch. To make porridge,  
She’d go into the woods for stuff to forage,

I dunno, mushrooms, things like mushrooms,  
Nettles, berries, stuff to serve as legumes  
In something homemade. Whenever she could get  
Virg satisfied, she'd even endeavor to pet  
The pythons, following them around, spying  
On what they did and didn't do, also trying  
To make friends with the cat. When she'd go cook,  
Barefoot in the kitchen, it was worth a look.

Homer liked his meat, though he cared which kind.  
He preferred his squirrel to birds, didn't mind  
Armadillo or things fishy. I learned  
That like me when a boy, he yearned  
For crawdad gumbo, victuals to be caught  
By knowing how to tease them out  
Of the ditches from their holes behind  
Mud clump mounds with bacon bits on twine.  
Bat was Homer's meat of choice. Cudn't stand  
To shoot them, and they're hard to catch by hand.  
He made do with nutria, a tasty swamp  
Delight. It was pretty good the stew he whomped  
Up with those water rats, though not as good as cow.  
Between the two of Bea and him, we had good chow.

I was high most the while, Virg, gone on Bea.  
Homer and I got a tiny bit testy,  
Frustrated's more the word. But I coaxed  
Him into singing lots, playing along on his ax  
Many of his favorites, especially  
"Ain't Got Much Living Left Inside of Me."

### *3 – Ala-ga-zam, the Alligator Man*

First we had to find a phone booth, then dimes  
To make it work. Bea had to try three times  
Before she got through. No need for wiles.  
She talked direct to the Chief. Came back all smiles.  
The Indians were buying in. We'd rendez-vous  
At a road show in Noosetown, they'd preview  
The goods, we'd fix a price.

I'd heard of Noose,  
A town where everyone played fast and loose.  
Only way to bring some law and order  
In was to string up the scum and ordure  
One by one — talking about white ones too.

Nowadays Noose was no longer the zoo  
It was. It'd become a fine place to raise  
Big families. How come Swamp Carnival stays  
So long and comes twice t'a year. Young'uns  
Got nothing else to do. Sure, it's tons  
of sport to frolic in the bayous with gators,  
Snapping turtles, whatever the Creator's  
Put swimmin' in there — cottonmouth water  
Moccasins! — things you don't want your daughter  
Or even son to play with. Swamp Carnival  
Was good, clean family fun. Nothing carnal.  
No kootch shows. Though I'd bet on this:  
A road show that don't smell of puke and piss  
Ain't much fun either.

The Chief had said  
To keep close to the Tomahawks and Head-  
Feathers stand. They'd find us, cause they'd know  
To recognize Bea. We found their sideshow  
On the midway. First had to get past queasy  
Rides and game booths there to lure easy



Marks like Virg, who stopped to throw enough  
Softballs at bottles to have won silly stuff  
For Bea. She got her choice of a prize  
On the top row. What came as a surprize:  
Jess like a little girl, she chose a pink  
Teddy-bear. Made me stop and think.

“Ala-ga-zam, come see the Alligator-Man”,  
A carny barked out. “See the Crawdad-Woo-Man,  
Lovin’ Werewolves, Amorous Pythons, Siamese  
Triplets!”

Truth be told, don’t go for all that sleaze.  
Presty-digitation, cutting ladies in half,  
Pullin’ things out-a hats — just makes me laugh.  
But that’s where the Indians had set up shop.  
When Swamp Carnival came to Noose they popped  
Over from the Rez, dressed up in buckskins  
And head-dresses. Then's when the fun begins,  
Cause with fanfare and panache they’d pick  
Volunteers to show off this and that trick  
With tomahawks or bows and arrows.

Real Indians dressed up to perform in shows  
As if they were Injuns? That didn’t make no  
Business sense. A cheaper way to go  
There had to be. But I’m not here to blame  
Anyone. If you’re one by that or any name  
Better to get paid to act out who you  
Are, as opposed to “Workin’ Hard at Who  
You Ain’t” — in the words of maestro HubCap.

The Chief had suffered some kind of mishap,  
Was short his right arm. Either he’d under-  
Estimated a gator’s reach, or, I wondered,  
Had something gone wrong with the throw

Of a war axe? Chief threw good southpaw, though  
Couldn't have been the left limb he started with.  
A gator wud-a chomped that one off forthwith.

We didn't get to watch the show much before  
They spotted Bea. Doffing the head-dress he wore  
One of them invited her up to applause.  
Seems Bea did this kind-a thing. After a pause  
She dropped a curtsey and bowed, went right  
Over to the target, without showing the least fright,  
Refused the blindfold. She stared right back at  
The Chief, who'd donned a feathered black hat.  
With Bea smiling, not even a flinch, he spun  
Tomahawks at her, perfectly landing one  
Close as a shave next to each of her cheeks.  
The last, to show off his avanced techniques,  
He threw over his shoulder with exaggerated ease,  
Putting it delicately between her knees.

At this point I began to think I'd had too  
Much to smoke. So I turned to Virg to  
See how he was takin' all this, love's slave.  
Fortunately, there was a strong-looking brave  
Standing between him and the stage stairs  
Bea'd been escorted up. But Virg was without cares,  
Smiling like a goon at Bea, who was a jewel.  
Woman could do that could break any rule,  
Do anything. Virg, you see, he really loved her.

The Chief came down once the first act was over  
To talk to me, not to Virg. He done right.  
Bea must-a tol' him I was the white  
Boy he should deal with. I had the keys.  
It was my truck.

The way that amputees

Do, he took my right hand in his left,  
Shook me warm greetings with a manly heft.  
“Got the samples?” he asked.

“Shore do,  
But right in front of Christian fam’lies?”  
“Don’t chew  
Worry,” he replied. “Rednecks can’t tell the diff’rence  
‘Tween one smell and the next. They got no sense  
Of odor.”

What he proposed was to try it  
In their peace pipe. If they liked it, they’d buy it.  
Right up on stage during intermission!  
Folks expect Indians to smoke. It’s an old tradition.  
They don’t expect them not to drink. Indians do  
What they wanna. So he climbed up and drew  
A circle round Bea.

Sump’um should-a warned  
Me. Didn’t know where they came from: Bea was adorned  
With beads.

Out-a his pouch the Chief pulled a bone  
Pipe which dangled feathers: same colors as Bea’s own  
Beads and the head-dresses too. He thumbed  
A pinch of the shit into the bowl, then hummed  
A blessing — I figured, don’t know their lingo.  
Holding over the bowl what looked like a Zippo  
He lit up, took a toke, held it in for  
A good long while and exhaled before  
Passing the apparatus on around  
The circle. Everyone including Bea found  
Some deep thought to reflect on. Solemn enough  
These Indians, contemplating the stuff  
For its own pleasure and for its market worth.  
Second round they burst into hails of mirth  
As one by one they each took a deep toke,  
Lost in a rapturous world of smoke.  
A good sign for our business venture,

I thought, not knowing our adventure  
Had just begun. Knew it was strong shit  
but had no previous idea how it  
affected Indians, sensibilities  
Different from ours, if only in degrees.

Bea came down from the stage, tol' us deal done.  
They'd cancel the last show, meet us in one  
hour at a clearing in the woods known  
As Humma Ofi. Bea, who had grown  
Up playing there, said it meant Red Dog.  
Why? She didn't know. Jess some swampy bog.  
Weren't no dogs, though the soil *wuz* laterite  
Red.

Long as the buyers could check right  
That the shit they were gettin' was the same  
Shit they had on stage .... Wasn't runnin' a con game,  
So that was fair enough. Knew it was, had  
Had plenty of it.

On our side, Virg was glad  
To count the money, cause numbers come  
One after another in rows, easy to sum  
Them up. Twenty grand! You might think a lot  
for Indians to have on hand and trot  
Out all-a a-sudden. But these Indians'd been  
A long while in bid'ness. Sure they indulge in  
Drink and smoke and other sins. Who dudn't?  
But Indians got lots going for them, wudn't  
You say?

When we were finally shakin'  
hands, the Chief's missin' one respectfully taken  
Into account, jess then (I swear you not!)  
Fireworks started goin' off, almost out of earshot.  
Last night of the traveling roadshow. Swamp  
Carnival was moving on to new stompin'  
Grounds. Bangs kept floatin' in seconds

After the eruptions of light. Virg reckons  
Distance by counting out Mississippi's, the way  
He does, so he informed us, "Five miles away."  
We watched these blossoms of light flower,  
Bursting over the pines round our bower,  
Heard their faint booms, the streamers already ash.

We found a fancy motel we now had the cash  
For, took a whole suit, ordered room service ice  
And whiskey, plus Coke for Bea. Worth the price.  
Food weren't no good. We didn't care, all tired  
Out from our long day. So Virg and Bea retired  
Through the door to the other room, "Virg, you keep  
The stash bag," Made him proud. Then I fell asleep  
In front of the boob tube.

#### **4 – *"The Road's My Only Home"***

"Shee-it, Johnny,"

First sound I heard, a curse but more of a plea.  
It was dawn. Virg was shaking my shoulder.  
"We got trouble big time. I reached to hold her  
But she gone." Then: "She took the cash." He didn't go  
Into detail but seems she'd put on quite a show  
That night, took him on a ride, using all her charms.  
They passed out in a tangle of legs and arms.  
He'd held her close, her body not her soul,  
Most of the night long, but not the whole.  
Soon as he pried his eyes open, groping  
for her missing warmth — maybe he was hoping  
To do it again — all he got: a handful of sweet  
Nothing, jess a cool rumped sheet.

Gone too was the stash bag which held the loot,  
Took him a while, lyin' there, to compute.

Bea had taken not just Virg for a ride  
But me. In my mind's eye I saw her outside,  
Stash bag hanging across her comely frame.  
First I thought she might be sole to blame  
Might still be out there trying to hitch  
A ride with the next guy she'd bewitch.  
But someone musta been in cahoots with this thief,  
Partners, Pimps, or her cousin, the Chief.  
We weren't gonna go to Sparks to find out.  
Better sometimes than dying, to live with doubt.

Virg didn't care 'bout the money or the weed.  
All that mattered for him was that Bea'd  
Left him. Crippled sick with grief and sorrow,  
He sang made-up words for tunes he'd borrow  
From HubCap, repeating like a broke record —  
Hell! A whole broke jukebox — the Lord  
Knows how many errant versions of  
Of HubCap's best hits: "Just Testing My Love"  
"Wherever I Look All I See Is You", plus  
An other fav, "Why You Makin' All This Fuss".  
Born into heartbreak, heartbreak brings us song.  
Those who can't sing for shit jess mumble along,  
Bunclin' the words, like Virg does.

Don't matter.

Lyrics of love lost are pitter-patter  
We all know by heart, all who've been compelled  
To lose what we want and, too briefly, held.  
The rest is jess so much yakety-yak  
Virg knew, we know, they never come back.  
Nor do we. Only life left to Virg and me,  
Was running the road before us. And it's easy

To lose the way when you cross a zone  
Of hovels someone else calls their own.

I was riding shotgun, Virg at the wheel.  
Herds of clouds stampeded across a surreal  
Purple sky, squalls driven by gales of wind.  
Gripped hard to the naugahyde-wrapped rim.  
Virg's knuckles turned white as he fought.  
Against the gusts, the big storm's onslaught.  
Hail piled up in slush on the cracked asphalt.  
Virg turned and said, "'Screwed up Bad'. My fault,  
Johnny.'" Quoting HubCap, but that's allowed.

Then at that very moment, things got real loud.  
A twister crossed the road a football field  
Ahead. Through the hail pelting the windshield  
We saw it turning into junk what there  
Was before, tossing around in the air  
Lord knows what-all. I saw the makings  
Of a house whirl by, human undertakings  
Unmade, dish-pans, an ironing board, a closet  
Without clothes. I swan a barbecue pit  
Flew by. The Chevy rattled and shook but she  
Stuck to the ground.

Then, suddenly, Virg tossed me  
the keys, leaping down from the cab, heading  
Off the direction destruction was spreading,  
Single-mindedly striding away, a white knight  
Advancing into a strange new twilight.

So I rev'ed her up, peeled out. Where I go  
Now or will, there's no way I can know.  
In HubCap's words, since I'm forced to roam  
— Please sing along! — "The Road's My Only Home".