

You Don't Know What Love Is

(an evening with Charles Bukowski)

You don't know what love is Bukowski said
 I'm 51 years old look at me
 I'm in love with this young broad
 I got it bad but she's hung up too
 so it's all right man that's the way it should be
 I get in their blood and they can't get me out
 They try everything to get away from me
 but they all come back in the end
 They all came back to me except
 the one I planted
 I cried over that one
 but I cried easy in those days
 Don't let me get onto the hard stuff man
 I get mean then
 I could sit here and drink beer
 with you hippies all night
 I could drink ten quarts of this beer
 and nothing it's like water
 But let me get onto the hard stuff
 and I'll start throwing people out windows
 I'll throw anybody out the window
 I've done it
 But you don't know what love is
 You don't know because you've never
 been in love it's that simple
 I got this young broad see she's beautiful
 She calls me Bukowski
 Bukowski she says in this little voice
 and I say What
 But you don't know what love is
 I'm telling you what it is
 but you aren't listening
 There isn't one of you in this room
 would recognize love if it stepped up
 and buggered you in the ass
 I used to think poetry readings were a copout
 Look I'm 51 years old and I've been around
 I know they're a copout
 but I said to myself Bukowski
 starving is even more of a copout
 So there you are and nothing is like it should be
 That fellow what's his name Galway Kinnell
 I saw his picture in a magazine
 He has a handsome mug on him
 but he's a teacher
 Christ can you imagine
 But then you're teachers too
 here I am insulting you already
 No I haven't heard of him
 or him either
 They're all termites
 Maybe it's ego I don't read much anymore
 but these people who build
 reputations on five or six books
 termites
 Bukowski she says
 Why do you listen to classical music all day
 Can't you hear her saying that
 Bukowski why do you listen to classical music all day
 That surprises you doesn't it
 You wouldn't think a crude bastard like me
 could listen to classical music all day
 Brahms Rachmaninoff Bartok Telemann
 Shit I couldn't write up here
 Too quiet up here too many trees
 I like the city that's the place for me

I put on my classical music each morning
 and sit down in front of my typewriter
 I light a cigar and I smoke it like this see
 and I say Bukowski you're a lucky man
 Bukowski you've gone through it all
 and you're a lucky man
 and the blue smoke drifts across the table
 and I look out the window onto Delongpre Avenue
 and I see people walking up and down the sidewalk
 and I puff on the cigar like this
 and then I lay the cigar in the ashtray like this
 and take a deep breath
 and I begin to write
 Bukowski this is the life I say
 it's good to be poor it's good to have hemorrhoids
 it's good to be in love
 But you don't know what it's like
 You don't know what it's like to be in love
 If you could see her you'd know what I mean
 She thought I'd come up here and get laid
 She just knew it
 She told me she knew it
 Shit I'm 51 years old and she's 25
 and we're in love and she's jealous
 Jesus it's beautiful
 she said she'd claw my eyes out if I came up here and
 got laid
 Now that's love for you
 What do any of you know about it
 Let me tell you something
 I've met men in jail who had more style
 than the people who hang around colleges
 and go to poetry readings
 They're bloodsuckers who come to see
 if the poet's socks are dirty
 or if he smells under the arms

Believe me I won't disappoint em
 But I want you to remember this
 there's only one poet in this room tonight
 only one poet in this town tonight
 maybe only one real poet in this country tonight
 and that's me
 What do any of you know about life
 What do any of you know about anything
 Which of you here has been fired from a job
 or else has beaten up your broad
 or else has been beaten up by your broad
 I was fired from Sears and Roebuck five times
 They'd fire me then hire me back again
 I was a stockboy for them when I was 35
 and then got canned for stealing cookies
 I know what's it like I've been there
 I'm 51 years old now and I'm in love
 This little broad she says
 Bukowski
 and I say What and she says
 I think you're full of shit
 and I say baby you understand me
 She's the only broad in the world
 man or woman
 I'd take that from
 But you don't know what love is
 They all came back to me in the end too
 every one of em came back
 except that one I told you about
 the one I planted
 We were together seven years
 We used to drink a lot
 I see a couple of typers in this room but
 I don't see any poets
 I'm not surprised
 You have to have been in love to write poetry

and you don't know what it is to be in love
 that's your trouble
 Give me some of that stuff
 That's right no ice good
 That's good that's just fine
 So let's get this show on the road
 I know what I said but I'll have just one
 That tastes good
 Okay then let's go let's get this over with
 only afterwards don't anyone stand close
 to an open window