

In 'the shoelace', Charles Bukowski emits a stream of consciousness, a spontaneous outpouring of his inner thoughts. One seemingly trivial thing can cause a person to snap:
"it's the continuing series of small tragedies/ that send a man to the/ madhouse . . . not the death of his love/ but a shoelace that snaps/ with no time left . . ."

Romance, illness, politics, car repairs, dental expenses, fake friends, deaths of loved ones, blocked sinks... you name it, this poem includes it in the avalanche of daily worries. Bukowski concludes with a dire warning: be careful when next tying your shoelaces, because one more snap and the "madhouse" will come calling!

Happy almost-midterm-break, everyone!

Adapted from
the shoelace

a woman, a
tyre that's flat, a
disease, a
desire; fears in front of you,
fears that hold so still
you can study them
like pieces on a
chessboard . . .
it's not the large things that
send a man to the
madhouse. death he's ready for, or
murder, robbery, fire, flood . . .
no, it's the continuing series of small
tragedies
that send a man to the
madhouse . . .
not the death of his love
but a shoelace that snaps
with no time left . . .

the dread of life
is that swarm of trivialities
that can kill quicker than cancer
and which are always there –
license plates or taxes
or expired driver's license,
or hiring or firing,
doing it or having it done to you, or
constipation
speeding tickets
rickets or crickets or mice or termites or
roaches or flies or a
broken hook on a
screen, or out of gas
or too much gas,
the sink's stopped-up, the landlord's
drunk,
the president doesn't care and the
governor's crazy.
light switch broken, mattress like a
porcupine;
\$105 for a tune-up, carburetor and fuel
pump at Sears Roebuck;
and the phone bill's up and the market's
down and the toilet chain is

broken,
and the light has burned out –
the hall light, the front light, the back light
the inner light; it's
darker than hell
and twice as
expensive.
Then there's always ingrown toenails
and people who insist they're
your friends;
there's always that and worse;
leaky faucet, Christ and Christmas;
blue salami, 9 day rains,
50 cent avocados
and purple
liverwurst.

or making it
as a waitress at Norm's on the split shift,
or as an emptier of
bedpans,
or as a carwash or a busboy
or a stealer of old lady's purses
leaving them screaming on the sidewalks
with broken arms at the age of 80.

suddenly
toothache, and \$979 for a bridge
\$300 for a gold
tooth,
and China and Russia and America, and
long hair and short hair and no
hair, and beards and no
faces, and plenty of zigzag, but no
pot, except maybe one to piss in and
the other one around your gut.
with each broken shoelace
out of one hundred broken shoelaces,
one man, one woman, one
thing enters a
madhouse.

so be careful
when you
bend over.

Charles Bukowski