

# The Charnel Ground

Allen Ginsberg, The American Poetry Review (May-June 1994)

*"... rugged and raw situations, and having accepted them as part of your nome grounds, then some spark of sympathy or compassion could take place. You are not in a hurry to leave such a place immediately. You would like to face the facts, realities of that particular world..."*  
—from a commentary on *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*, Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche

Upstairs Jenny crashed her car & became a living corpse, Jake sold grass, the white bearded pot belly leprechaun silent climbed their staircase  
Ex-janitor John from Poland averted his eyes, cheeks flushed with vodka, wine who knew what  
as he left his groundfloor flat, refusing to speak to the inhabitant of Apt 24  
Who'd put his boyfriend in Bellevue, calling police, while the artistic Buddhist composer  
on sixth floor lay spaced out feet swollen with water, dying slowly of AIDS over a year—  
The Chinese teacher cleaned & cooked in Apt 23 for the homosexual poet who pined for his gymnast  
thighs & buttocks — Downstairs th' old hippy flower girl fell drunk over the banister, smashed her jaw  
her son despite moderate fame cheated of rocknroll money, twenty thousand people in stadiums  
cheering his tattooed skinhead murderous Hare Krishna vegetarian drum lyrics—  
Mary born in the building rested on her cane heavy legged with heart failure on the second landing, no more able  
to vacation in Caracas & Dublin — The Russian landlady's husband from Concentration Camp disappeared again — nobody mentioned he'd died —  
tenants took over her building for hot water, she couldn't add rent & pay taxes, wore a long coat hot days  
alone & thin on the street carrying groceries to her crooked apartment silent—  
One poet highschool teacher fell dead mysterious heart dysrhythmia, konked over  
in his mother's Brooklyn apartment, his first baby girl a year old, wife stoical a few days—  
their growling noisy little dog had to go, the baby cried—  
Meanwhile the upstairs apartment meth head shot cocaine & yowled up and down  
East 12th Street, kicked out of Christine's Eatery till police cornered him, top a hot iron steamhole  
near Stuyvesant Town Avenue A telephone booth calling his deaf mother— sirens speed the way to Bellevue—  
past whispering grass crack salesman jittering in circles on East 10th Street's  
southwest corner where art yuppies come out of the overpriced Japanese Sushi Bar — & they poured salt into potato soup heart failure vats at  
KK's Polish restaurant  
—Garbage piled up, nonbiodegradable plastic bags emptied by diabetic sidewalk homeless  
looking for returnable bottles recycled dolls radios half eaten hamburgers— thrown away Damen—  
On 13th Street the notary public sat in his dingy storefront, drivers lessons & tax returns prepared on old metal desks—  
Sunnysides crisped in butter, fries & sugary donuts passed over the luncheonette counter next door—  
The Hispanic lady yelled at the rude African-American behind the Post Office window  
"I waited all week my welfare check you sent me notice I was here yesterday  
I want to see the supervisor bitch dont insult me refusing to look in—"  
Closed eyes of Puerto Rican wino lips cracked skin red stretched out  
on the pavement, naptha backdoor open for the Korean family Dry Cleaners at the 14th Street corner  
Con Ed workmen drilled all year to bust electric pipes 6 feet deep in brown dirt  
so cars bottlenecked wait minutes to pass the M14 bus stopped mid-road, heavy dressed senior citizens step down in red rubble  
with Reduced Fare Program cards got from grey city Aging Department offices downtown up the second flight by elevators don't work—  
News comes on the radio, they bombed Baghdad and the Garden of Eden again?  
A million starve in Sudan, mountains of eats stacked on docks, local gangs & U.N.'s trembling bureaucrat officers sweat near the equator, arguing over  
Wheat piles stayed by bulldozers — Swedish doctors ran out of medicine — The Pakistan taxi drive  
says Salman Rushdie must die, insulting the prophet in fictions  
"No that wasn't my opinion, just a character talking like in a poem no judgment"  
"Not till the sun rejects you do I," so give you a quarter by the Catholic Church 14th St you stand half drunk  
waving a plastic glass, flush faced, live with your mother a wounded look on your lips, eyes squinting  
receding lower jaw sometimes you dry out in Bellevue, most days cadging dollars for sweet wine  
by the corner where Plump Blindman shifts from foot to foot showing his white cane, rattling coins in a white paper cup some week  
where girding the subway entrance construction saw-horses painted orange  
guard steps underground — And across the street the NYCE bank machine cubicle door sign reads  
*Not in Operation* as taxis bump on potholes asphalt mounded at the crossroad when red lights change green  
& I'm on my way uptown to get a cat scan liver biopsy, visit the cardiologist,  
account for high blood pressure, kidneystones, diabetes, misty eyes & dysesthesia—  
feeling lack in feet soles, inside ankles, small of back, phallus head, anus—  
Old age sickness death again come round in the wink of an eye  
High school youth the inside skin of my thighs was silken smooth the nobody touched me there back then—  
Across town the velvet poet takes Darvon N, valium nightly, sleeps all day kicking methadone  
between brick walls sixth floor in a room cluttered with collages & gold dot paper scraps covered  
with words: "The whole point seems to be the idea of giving away the giver."

August 19, 1982