

children & churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented
literary and art magazine

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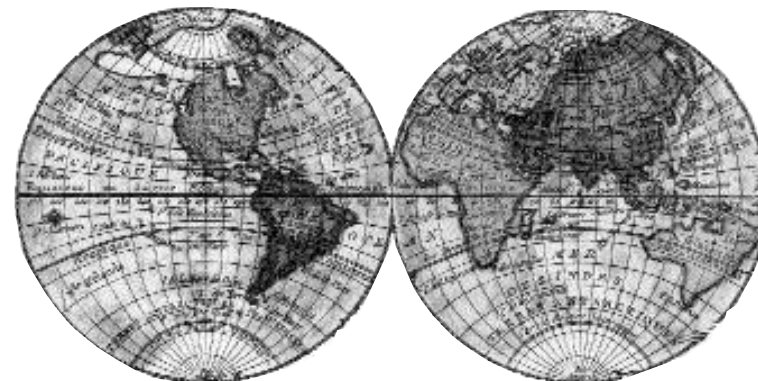
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it's amazing how much of
your life you can fit in a
single suitcase



poems by janet kuypers
scars publications and design

how to please a woman

i saw a movie once
can't remember what movie it was, but
i remember this one scene:
it was after the protagonist couple made love,
and it was the middle of the night,
and the man got dressed and went outside,
and no, it was not to leave
(i know half of you were thinking that, admit it)

but he went outside, into the garden
and picked a bunch of flowers
and put them all over the bed.
So in the morning, when the woman woke up,
she was still alone, but she was surrounded in flowers.

now, i know it's just a movie,
but i have these visions in my head
of how perfect life is supposed to be.
okay, okay, call it being raised on Cinderella
and Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, but
in the back of my mind i still have this vision in my head
of being swept away. Wake me with a
kiss. Ride me off into the sunset.

i don't want to tell someone how to
sweep me off my feet, how to be romantic.
Part of romance is the element of surprise.
yes, i know, this is the age of communication
and we're supposed to tell each other how we feel
but i guess, as unreasonable as this is
about to sound, i want you to be able to read my mind.
Or don't read it, and completely catch me off guard
(and i mean that in a good way - don't catch me
off guard, for instance, by watching baseball
instead of celebrating my birthday).

sure, it could be flowers, i guess, but don't think
that we're trying to get you to spend your money or
that we're trying to milk you for all you're worth
because flowers picked from your garden -
or someone else's - are often better than the ones from the store.
Maybe a bath. a picnic. those are even better
than flowers, because they give the gift
we really want - time. we want to know you
are not only taking time out to be with us,
but that you took the time to plan it to make it perfect.

we want you to tell us we look pretty
when we need to hear it. you don't know
when we need to hear it? just look into our eyes.
you'll know. we want you to look excited to
see us when you come home from work,
even if you're tired and just want to eat. we want
to feel like we mean the world to you, like we
mean more than a beer does to you while you're
sitting on the couch watching sitcoms.
we want foreplay to mean more than "oh, i've
grabbed her chest, now it's time to insert."

we want poetry written for us: the sun rises
and it means nothing without us, that kind of stuff.
okay, you're not a poet: maybe you could
write us a letter every once in a while. oh,
i know, it's that damn time thing again,
but that's what it takes, remember? even a note
just saying "i love you" on it would be enough.
here's an idea: drop it in the mail. i know you
see us every day; that's what makes it special.

i want love

i'm laying here in bed
and i'm looking over at him

he's sound asleep
perfectly happy

you know, i can't remember
the last time he's held me

he has no idea what i'm thinking
he's perfectly content this way

i decided to spend the rest
of my life with him

he's my best friend
but i don't know if he loves me

damnit
i want love

i want

i want a big house with filtered central air
and i want a big lawn so i can recreate nature

and i want a big fence so i'll know what's mine

and i want the evergreens trimmed into neat little
balls, because it has to look neat. plant everything
in a row.

and i want to spray chemicals on my lawn
to keep the dandelions away

and i want a plastic lobster bib
over my fancy dress at the fancy restaurant

and don't forget the hundred dollar champagne

and i want a big fat car, and i want
someone else to drive it

and i want the two kids, one boy, one girl
and i want a nanny to take care of them for me

i want to be famous
i want everyone to love me

i want it
i want it all

Knew All Along

So my friend Joe owned this bar, and Joe was a great guy, but he had this thing against guys with motorcycles. He didn't want motorcycles in his parking lot, he didn't want anybody in leather or heavy motorcycle boots in his bar. So I thought one day I'd get him for thinking like that - so I came up with a plan. It's like this: the bar is laid out with an entrance to the left of the main entrance. So I decided I'd ride a motorcycle through his bar, with a full leather outfit on and a helmet so he couldn't see who it was, and I'd go in through the main entrance and exit at the entrance on the left. So everything was in place, I was in the parking lot, then at the front door, ready to go. Then someone opened the door for me, and for some reason when I went through the front door, I couldn't turn my wheel, and I ended up running right into his juke box. And so I tried reversing my way out of it, and I ended up running into Joe's cigarette machine. And his wife was behind the bar screaming for Joe to come out - Joe was in back and missed all of this - while I managed to maneuver my way out the door on the left before Joe ever got out there. And Joe put out rewards for information about who did this to his bar, and he swore up and down about motorcycle riders. And I couldn't tell him that it was just a joke, that I didn't mean to break all of his stuff, right? So finally, after four years, I told him at a party it was me. He said, "I knew all along."

Knowing Kevorkian

Oh, I knew Kevorkian
he used to be a pathologist
he used to do autopsys
for my precinct

what I remember about
Kevorkian
was that he'd go out
with us, for drinks, you know

and he'd get a gin martini
but he would always have
just one, and he'd never
join the conversation

I never thought he had
anything to say, never thought
he'd have a cause
well, I guess he did

Leaving for work

you're walking down the street, it's morning, and a man tries to mug you with a knife. it's a nice street, you're thinking, there's no litter here. their garbage day is the same as your sister's in the suburbs. how strange. you pause, don't know how to react to this mugger-guy, and another guy walks up behind you, another regular joe, he's not with the mugger-guy, trying to jump you, he's just walking down the street, probably on his way to work, like you, so then the mugger-guy tries to mug him too. so the other guy pulls a gun, this regular joe, and then a lady from a house on the street calls 911. and you're thinking to yourself, why does this regular joe have a gun? and who should you be more scared of now? is any of this real? it almost seems like tv. then the police come in two minutes, you're safe then, and the mugger-guy is still there and the regular joe with the gun is keeping him there by holding the gun to him, and so then you're talking to one of the officers. and then the other officer on the scene sees the mugger-guy stab the regular joe, the guy with the gun, and then tries to wrestle for the gun. the mugger-guy then shoots the guy with the gun while in the struggle, then the cop, the other cop, shoots and kills the mugger. and you're just standing there, on the street, less than ten feet away from all of this. all of this just happened on the street, right in front of you. you didn't even get to say a word. who is dead? who is alive? what just happened? are you scared? this is america, you think, and you don't know whether to laugh or cry. then you hear a car engine start, and you look and just a few cars away a person is leaving for work.

letter, 4/14/95

Now it's just sort of a daily refutation of going ahead and cutting my wrists. But I really don't want to die. The intake dude at the clinic asked today, "Well, are you in immediate trouble? Are you into killing yourself TODAY?" "Well...I have IDEAS about how I might pull it off, and yeah, man, I do feel AWFULLY bad." But the doctor wasn't buying it enough to see me before Monday. I guess I should learn to froth at the mouth & pull a razor blade right out at the beginning of the interview.

i keep seeing reports
that there are going to be
more cutbacks
saving us from the horrid
government waste,
and being a taxpayer
that manages to sustain
myself, I often tend to
agree. I think, why can't
they get a job? I've done
it, why do I have to support
them? But then I see
you, and I wish there was
more I, or the government,
could do. I sit here, read
letter after letter, wondering
if this is the last piece of
mail I'll ever receive from you.

Wondering if that doctor
ever feels any remorse
when she hears that a person
she turned away died by
their own hand. If anyone
feels any remorse. Does it
take knowing someone to
worry about them? Probably,
we americans learn to close
ourselves off to everyone we can,
to avoid pain. I feel your pain,
and I don't mean that to sound
like some bad presidential
cliché. I wish there was something
I could give. Not medication.
Not words. Not even an
embrace. A new feeling. A
new lease on life. Anything.

letter, 4/14/95

I haven't worked in 8 months. I CAN'T. The despair & shame & guilt & sorrow & hopelessness & despair are immense. My family thinks I'm jerking off. They're TIRED of me being a problem. & they don't have the wherewithal to help me. What more can anyone else say? "Don't die. Get some help."

Every time I've felt the despair and pain
I knew it would go away. And it would.
I knew there was always hope, somewhere,

and I would be fine. I feel so lost now. I
don't know what to offer you. I feel a
little piece of your death in every letter,

only wishing I could take your pain and
pull it into me, then make my pain go away,
like I always do. I know I can't. But

I don't want to see you go, damnit, I
don't want to see you slipping through
my fingers just as your letters do.

My hands are tied, and the despair &
shame & guilt & sorrow & hopelessness &
despair are immense. I want to help you,

I don't want to be a victim, too, by having
to watch you die and not be able to do
a damn thing about it. Don't die. Get

some help. Don't die. Get some help.

letter, 4/19/95

The depression is so fucking bad I can't work. I'm applying for disability, but that may take months. I'm losing this place, & where I'm going is anyone's guess. I have a shrink appt on Tuesday, but how I'm going to pay for the medication is beyond me. It hardly seems worth it. I know I have things to accomplish; my soul knows it. But the doors of possibility are slamming closed one after another, & I'm not sure I can hang on much longer.

your soul knows it. hang on.
they say that a soul not at rest after
death will travel the earth through

all eternity, searching for peace
but never finding it. you want
your peace. i know it. this is

not the way. you have so many
things to accomplish. that
book, that lover. christ, that

extra six-pack stuck in the back
of the fridge. just find something,
anything, fix on that, and let that

take you to the next day. do that
for long enough and maybe you'll
find that peace you're looking for.

but don't stop searching. things
have to fall into place first.
they have to. they have to.

letter, 4/14/95

I'm kind of dead in the water. My burger-flippin' gig fell through, or I fell through it. The morning I was to start, I put on my idiot uniform & got into my car to make the gig, & I COULD NOT DO IT. Big time anxiety attack. Telling myself that if I don't get some bread together I'm gonna end up in various kinds of hell did not work.

is this what I'm reduced to? I can't go through with it, I can't, I just can't. I deserve better than this. More. Some thing rewarding, something fulfilling,

something not so empty, useless, life less like the feeling left in my stomach. At least I still have feeling, or is it just a numbness of sorts, a numbness and an

anger. Numbness alone isn't enough to kill myself over, apathy and lack of feeling doesn't promote action. What do I want? What can I do? What range of

emotions to I still have to go through, before I've hit them all? I feel like I'm near the end. When I get there, I'll know. Maybe it's anger. I don't know yet.

me or him

someone pulled a gun today
opened fire on a crowd
i suppose it's nothing new

we've all thought of doing it
before

what stops us

what makes one man
decide life is so worthless
decide that he is so angry

that the consequences
don't matter anymore

what makes him different from us
all he does
is do
what we've never thought
we could

who is more crazy
the one who acts on their violence
or the one who holds it in

I've thought of shooting
people before

of course, I keep that
locked away
inside of me

I don't act on my
impulses
of course not

who is more crazy
the one who acts on their violence
or the one who holds it in

who is more crazy
me or him

My motherMy motherMy mother

We went to see my mother this weekend. You see, my mother has cancer, and we decided to go across the country for a weekend to surprise her and see how she was doing. it was breast cancer, so it really was the best case scenario, i suppose, so i managed to put it out of my mind until we actually had to fly there

The night before i couldn't bring myself to pack. it was two in the morning when i finally pulled my suitcase out from the pantry shelf.

i kept telling people at work, "well, you see, I have to go visit my mother because she has cancer, so I have to miss a few days of work," but I was always able to say it so matter-of-factly until I had to actually visit her

In fact, when my sister told me the diagnosis, it was right around Christmas time, and there was so much work to do and I still had presents to wrap and a meal to prepare and Christmas was supposed to be a happy time

that I managed to postpone even thinking about it until we all decided to surprise her for a visit. And then I had to pack. To decide what to take, what to leave behind, put my life into a little black box with a handle and wheels, and go

It shouldn't be this way, and I knew that, I knew that I shouldn't be visiting my mother under these circumstances and I knew how she never wants to think about bad things

because they always make her cry and this would make her want to cry and cry because the only reason why we're there is because things are bad

But I wasn't supposed to think that way, things would be just fine.

So I finished packing at four in the morning and the next thing I remember is I was on the plane with my sisters, cracking jokes as we picked up the rental car. and then we got to mom and dad's house

and everyone was so happy to see each other, it was one big family reunion and we were laughing and talking and trying to figure out where we were all going to sleep

and the sisters and dad walked into the front room to see if the couches were good enough to sleep on or if we would have to get out an air mattress and I was alone in the den with mom

so I suddenly became serious and sat down next to her and asked her how she was really doing. And that is when she started to cry, saying that the cancer spread, but what she was most concerned with was the fact that she didn't want to spoil the time that we came to visit her. But what I don't think she understood was that we couldn't have come at a better time, and nothing she could do would spoil our trip.

no consequences

philosopher at the
blue note

he seemed so interested in philosophy, which seemed strange, sitting at a bar at about one-thirty in the morning, it didn't seem the time or place for philosophy. but i asked questions anyway, so do you believe in a god, and if so do you believe in a mono- or polytheistic religion? and he answered by saying that everyone has a god, whether it be their soul or an icon they pray to every night before they go to bed. and that it doesn't matter what form the god takes for a person, because the moral values are similar in most every religion, what matters is that we have a god of one sort or another. that most people don't pay attention to their spirituality, who they are or what they really want. no, they don't, i thought, and was amazed that this drunk man

was able to formulate cohesive thoughts at two-thirty in the morning. but then, of course, he had to mention something about sexuality, and then i realized that it was all one long, drawn-out come on, then he asked me for my phone number and i gave him a fake one, and then he tried to kiss me, and i pushed him away and he ended up running out of the bar. so much for philosophy, i thought, and i went home once again, alone with my morals, or values, or whatever the hell you want to call them, wondering if there is anyone out there like me.

the average child,
watching the average
amount of television
in their lifetime

witnesses eight thousand
murders
by the time they leave
elementary school

by the time they are
eighteen years old,
they witness
two hundred thousand
acts of violence

and they laugh
when they hear
their leading man say
"consider this
a divorce"
then pull the trigger

or
"do you feel
lucky, punk"

suddenly there's no
consequence to violence

no pain, no remorse

we're the mtv generation

we feel no highs or lows

we've learned life by watching it
not living it

"have you killed people?"
"yeah, but they were
all bad"

how funny, what wit

they witness
two hundred thousand
acts of violence

what are we teaching them?

suddenly there's no
consequence

on an airplane with a frequent flyer

"I was once on a flight to Hawaii and I was waiting in line for the lavatory. There was always a line for a flight this long, you know, it seemed the washrooms were always on demand on a flight this long. So I finally got into the washroom, you know, and I looked into the toilet, and someone, well, lost the battle against a very healthy digestive system and left the "spoils" in the toilet, stuck. Maybe it didn't want to go down into the sewage tank where all the other waste from this long trip went to. Can you imagine all the stuff this airplane had to carry across the ocean? Well, anyway, so I saw this stuck in the toilet, and I went to the washroom, and when I was done it still wouldn't budge, and so I opened the door and walked out into the aisle of the plane again. And there was this long line of people waiting to use this cramped little washroom, and I just wanted to tell them all, 'you know, I didn't do that.' And then it occurred to me that everyone, when they leave the bathroom on that plane, will think the exact same thing."

packing

there are too many times
when i've said this before

never thought i'd really leave you
and now i sit here

in this apartment
popcorn bowl on the cocktail table

eleven thirty at night
the television playing static

it looks too clean in here,
not lived in

so i decide to take a trip
get out of this place

into the bedroom, time to start
packing: two dresses, two

pairs of shorts, shirts, loneliness,
anger, make-up, extra socks

it's amazing how much of your life
you can fit in a single suitcase

Letter to a troubled friend



I've never been able to tell you how I feel, because you never let me. When I try to say something, and believe me, I try to do it in the most tactful way possible and I only begin to scrape the surface, you react in one of the following ways:

1) You cut me off, get defensive, say you never do these things.

2) You go through denial, and say I'm overreacting, because your behavior is normal.

3) You apologize, but the behavior never changes.

No one wants to deal with a sour reaction, especially when you're trying to tell them something is wrong. I've pussy-footed around you through subjects such as your work, your family, the men in your life and the men in mine, your surgery - you name it, and all because I can never tell you when there is something wrong. I've wanted to confront you, but you make it impossible. I really feel like I have gone above and beyond the call of duty when it comes to maintaining a friendship with you. In fact, I think that a lot of the time the work I have put into it has been very uneven in comparison to what you have done. But I was willing to do it; I cared about you as a friend.

I've noticed a change in you in the past few years. When you were in college, you were still being supported by your parents, you had the love

of your life with you. Since you have been on your own, you have no direction and no one to share your life with. From what I can gather, this behavior now relates to your feeling insecure about yourself and seeking positive reinforcement in men. They can be men with whom you have no future with, men that are gay and you have no chance with, men you have no interest in, or men who are abusive at best. You've gone after men that fit all of these examples. They can even be men I've expressed interest in, or men I'm dating - and then they would be an additional boost to you because someone would like you more than me.

I have seen this self-destructive behavior in you and I have known that for the most part there was nothing I could do or say about it, because you never listen to me. You don't want to hear it from me. You get angry when I try to tell you what I see. You call me a therapist. And I don't want to get the third degree when I'm trying to help you.

If you think you really need other people to boost your ego, maybe you should realize that the only person that can make you feel good is you. All

this work you are doing in manipulating other men only makes you feel worse inside - because it is costing you yourself. You have to start working on what the real underlying problems in your life are and finally face them head-on. Until then you are only going to lose more friends, be used by more men, and feel like you have gone nowhere in life.

I have overlooked many double-standards in our friendship. If I talk to my boyfriend more than you in a single conversation, you pout and get mad, but as long as you have another friend with you, you can ignore me for literally hours in a social setting, then ditch me, and I'm not supposed to be angry. Yes, this has happened before. My boyfriend putting his arm around me in front of you would remind you of your ex and depress you, but when you make out with a friend of mine - after he flies across the country to visit me for only a short time - I'm not allowed to react. You expect me to take all of my savings and my only weeks vacation and spend it alone with you when I could be with the man I planned to marry, but if you were still going out with your ex, I would never see you, much less have the chance to think about spending a vacation with you. In fact, if I ever suggested a vacation where your boyfriend wasn't allowed (and yes, you flat-out said my boyfriend wasn't allowed with us), you'd scream at how inconsiderate I was. You can call me every swear word in the book, but I can say one wrong word - call you child for acting like one, for instance - and you'll instantly be set off into another mood swing.

I flew across the country and entertained you for a weekend because I wanted you to be happy. It's not as if I've ever had anything but your interests in mind. Only now have I realized how much it has cost me. How much you have hurt me.

I've tried telling you over and over again when something is wrong, and your reaction is usually denial or defensiveness. Especially last time. A guy

I've gone on two dates with doesn't matter to me. You do. And that's why it hurt more than most anything any other friend has done to me. I saw your behavior. You were drunk, and paying every ounce of your attention to him. If you weren't planning anything, you wouldn't have waited outside my apartment after I said good-bye to you in order to see him. You did it secretly, behind my back, because you didn't want me to know what you were doing. You say you don't remember our discussion (if that's how

drunk you were), but in my bedroom, I told you about me and him, that we had gone on dates, that I was somewhat interested in him, because I noticed your behavior earlier in the evening, and it was hurting me even then. Your response was, "Oh, Janet, I would never do anything like that." Then that's exactly what you did. You threw any trust I had for you in my face. You really showed me in one evening how little you cared for me. You can't tell me otherwise.

If this is another example of how you seem to need attention from men, then realize that you were willing to jeopardize what you called your best friend for it, and that you have a problem. If you don't remember anything from the evening, then you may have a drinking problem. Either way, there are issues there that you have to address, and I don't think I am strong enough to carry your problems quietly for you anymore when you are unwilling to face those problems yourself.

I almost didn't write this letter. I've asked friends what I should do.

One person, who didn't know you, said I should give you another chance. They were the only one that said that.



One said that you didn't care enough about me, that I tried as hard, or harder, than was ever expected of me, and nothing will change with you, so I should just let it go.

One said it was about time I ended our friendship, because all I have been doing was complaining and struggling to keep you happy.

One said they can't see me as a difficult person to be friends with, because I'm forgiving and don't ask for much. That these problems in our friendship don't stem from a lack of my trying, and don't even stem from me.

One person, after seeing you at the party, was very disturbed with your behavior in general. They said they would swear you were on drugs, and I couldn't tell them if they were right or not.

They said you looked like you have seen something the rest of the world doesn't know about, and that it had made you very depressed, like you were over the edge, like there was absolutely no hope, and that you just didn't seem to care about yourself anymore.

I can't fight that. I can't fight feelings like that.

If you feel like you hate yourself, then there is nothing I can do for you. If you really think nothing matters, that you can't feel anything anymore, if you're not willing to help yourself, then I can't help either, and I never could. Trying to help you was then pointless. Trying to please you was pointless.

In all the times I've tried to tell you how I feel, I usually got defensiveness or denial from you. Never once were you concerned about how I felt. I told you over the phone that last time that you hurt me more than you



ever had - more than probably any friend ever had. You didn't care about that, though. I don't think you ever did.

And that is what also hurts. I don't think you do care, and I don't think you know how to care.

I don't know what to do anymore, and I don't know that there is anything that I can do. Or should do. The ball is not in my court, as you have put it in the past, but it is in yours. It always has. It is up to you to make yourself better. To help yourself. This is not a healthy friendship. You have to make yourself whole first.

I've seen you degenerate over the past few years. It was one thing when we were still growing up to not know what you wanted to do with your life. It was even normal to feel so confused that you'd go through mood swings. But it has gotten worse. Mood swings become event where you

have to tip-toe around, be careful of everything you say. Sometimes knowing that there's nothing you can say.

I don't know what to say anymore. You don't let me say anything. You don't listen. You need attention, but I can't give you enough. I don't think anyone can.

I'm not writing this letter in an effort to save our friendship. I've received no indication that you want to change, to help yourself. Even your last letter to me was only an effort to clear your name, to make you look better, to make sure someone knew what you thought. You didn't write that letter for me; I've seen you go through this with some of your men, wanting to write them letters to get the last word in. You wrote it for you, to make yourself feel like you've had your say. It wasn't out of concern for me. It never is.

You are the one that did this to yourself, and only you can change you. Remember that: you are the one that did this, to you, to me, to what friendship we had. All of this is because of you. There is nothing I can do about it anymore, and I'm not going to sit back and take your behavior anymore. I shouldn't have to.

You've been in therapy for years. You've spent a lot of time and money talking to a person every week for years. What has it shown you? What have you learned? You've told me that you sometimes won't tell her things solely because you don't feel like talking about something, or because you don't think she should know it. If you're not willing to share these things, how is she supposed to help you? She doesn't see a full picture of who you are. Are you just going to her for the attention?

I hope you actually read this letter, not read it and then throw it away because it's not what you want to hear, but read it, and listen to what I'm telling you. Show it to your therapist. Let her see a different side of the story. Listen for yourself to a different side of the story. You've never thought of how other people perceive you, at least not realistically.

Figure out what it takes to make you like yourself again. Or for the first time. I can't make you do that. No one can. Not your family, friends, not



your therapist, not your current abusive man. Most of those people are out for themselves as well, and might hurt you in the process. Find yourself. I don't know where your hope lies, or if you could ever still have hope. I just know that if you don't change, and I've seen no reason to believe you will, and if I still remain your friend, you'll only keep hurting me, having no regard for me. A friend shouldn't make me feel this way. I have to let go. You hurting me is doing neither of us any good. I've been a crutch to you; you've been a burden to me. I can't take that burden anymore, and you shouldn't have the crutch. Do something for yourself. I can't be your friend if you keep falling the way you have been. I don't want you to fall, but I can't pick you up anymore. Only you can help you.