

ONEACTS  
LIVEJANET  
KUYPERSAT  
WAITING4  
THEBUSJULY  
SIXTWENTY  
OHNINE  
CHICAGO

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*Images of Kuypers in this chapbook are of her meditating  
at a bus stop at Dearborn and Harrison in Chicago.*

# WAITING FOR A SIGN

I have been waiting

Sitting in suburban subdivisions  
Like shared cemeteries  
Waiting for a sign

Is that your voice  
resonating through the air  
Or is that just your heat  
I can see those waving lines of heat  
like the burning rays of the sun  
Sine, cosine  
Up and down,  
Back and forth  
Arcing, curling  
I can see those waves  
Like heat waves from the sun  
Burn though me

Is this what you do to me?  
I second-guess myself  
While I wait

###

I drive down the road  
See old jalopy cars  
Rusted dinosaurs on the roadside  
I see huge pick-up trucks  
With added exhaust pipes  
Sticking out of the top of their cab  
I try not to think of these men  
With tractor trailer fetishes

(CONTINUED)

And every time we pass a cemetery  
In some foreign town  
I think of a real estate agent  
Trying to sell you a home  
    You're in some foreign town  
    But look around this beautiful town  
    See all the town's amenities  
But every time we pass a cemetery  
I think,  
Here is where we bury our dead

###

So now I stand here  
We spin on our axis over a thousand miles an hour  
We revolve around the sun  
Sixty-seven thousand miles an hour  
Our planet is spiraling through space  
At six hundred thousand miles an hour  
Everything is spinning around me  
And I stand here  
Observing the world  
Feeling like I know less and less about more and more

My head is spinning  
And I'm waiting

Though I don't know what I'm waiting for

## LEAVING FOR WORK

(EDITED APRIL 2009)

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.

## FIRE ALARMS

(EDITED 06/02/09)

we were riding on a bus  
near Sequoia National Forest

up a winding road  
along the mountainside

and along the road  
a sign in the forest said  
“check your fire alarms’

and we looked at each other  
and laughed, and joked

because there are no fire  
alarms on a bus to check

## IN THE PROJECTS

(EDITED 04/22/09)

I saw a woman in the projects, by the apartments you were looking at. I was waiting at the bus stop, stuck right at the corner of the intersection, and she walked across the street, right in front of me. She was wearing a black jacket, falling off of one shoulder. She was wearing a black and white striped shirt. She was carrying a clear plastic cup in her left hand, like the kind you get in a bar. It was filled a quarter of the way with beer. And she walked across the street, holding her beer at the end of her straight left arm, and the sleeve of her jacket almost covered her hand. And her eyes darted back and forth, as if she knew she wasn't supposed to have open alcohol in public but she'd do it anyway, not caring for the law, but still being cautious. And I thought: I've done that before. We both have things we're running from. What makes her, in the projects, living off the government, any different from me, in the ugly new houses, living off someone else's ideals. Because she's living off the government, is that our only real difference?

# WALKING HOME FROM SCHOOL

(EDITED APRIL 2009)

once when I was little  
I was walking home from the bus stop  
filled with fear, like I always was

the other kids made fun of me  
they called me names  
sometimes they threw rocks at me  
once they pushed me to the ground  
went home, bleeding knees and tears

but once, I'll never forget, Patti  
from 121st street was  
walking behind me and threw  
her gym shoes at me

they landed right next to me  
as I was walking down  
that first big hill

I don't know if I stopped  
but I remember for a brief moment  
looking up at the tall tree branches  
next to the road

all the entangled dead branches

and I thought  
that all I had to do  
was pick up her shoes  
and throw them

as hard as I could

and she would never  
get her shoes back



I looked at the trees  
for only a moment  
and I continued walking  
as fast as I could  
as I always did  
and suddenly the shoes  
were long behind me

and the others were laughing

I look back now  
and wonder why I didn't  
do it

was I scared of them  
was I scared of myself

I still keep asking myself that

## DOWN THE DRAIN

(EDITED 06/02/09)

as I wait for the bus  
i hear water running  
what's that from?  
it's not the Chicago River  
it's running water  
like pouring out a water bottle  
like water running  
in an abandoned sink in a bar  
what a waste  
it sounds like Lake Michigan  
going down the drain

## PARK BENCH

I saw you sit at the park bench. Every day you would go to that one bench, reading the paper, feeding the pigeons, minding your own business. Every day I would watch you. I knew how you adjusted your glasses. I knew how you crossed your legs.

I had to come out of hiding. I had to know you. I had to have a name for your face. So before you came to the park bench I sat down and pulled out a newspaper. I looked up when I heard your footsteps. I knew they were your footsteps. You walked to another bench. No—you couldn't sit there. That's not how the story goes. You have to sit here.

The next day I waited for you before I made my move. You walked back to your bench. I strolled up to the other side, trying to act aloof. I sat down, only three feet away from you. I pulled out my day-old paper. My eyes burned through the pages. I felt your breath streaming down my body. I heard your eyelids open and close. Your heat radiated toward me.

I casually looked away from my paper.  
You were gone.

# LEATHER JACKET

(EDITED 04/27/09)

at five-thirty in the morning  
I sat on the bench  
straining to swallow the tears  
and you raced  
to get your luggage together  
before you stepped onto the bus

my mind wandered  
to the candles, the roses, the pizza  
and all I could think  
was that the best chapter  
of my meager life  
was coming to a pathetic end

I looked at you  
in your leather jacket  
and you took my hand  
and led me to dance

I really didn't mean to  
but I couldn't help but cry  
for the idea of our last dance  
destroyed me  
when that bus drove away

I dreamt that you came back  
and said you wouldn't leave  
but as the bus lights  
faded away in the morning fog  
and tuned the corner  
I fell to the ground  
screaming and crying  
I had no one to blame but circumstance  
and I couldn't fathom going on

When I was walking home once, I saw an old friend of mine, an all-star track buddy, running down the street. As he approached, I tried to be funny and said, “you know, it’s faster if you catch the bus...”

But then I remembered when another man told me his dreams once.

## HE TOLD ME HIS DREAMS ONE (EDITED APRIL 2009)

he was running to the bus stop  
near the white hen pantry on sixth and green

and they turned around the corner in the car  
opened fire on him

he was hit over and over again;  
his teeth were shattered by bullets

he said he died in his dream  
and he saw from up above his bloody body

he even saw his obituary

It’s always like this, he thinks,  
always running away from death

## JEREMY, OR STALLION?

I was in college, reading the Daily Illini newspaper one February morning, which was reporting that fraternity boys, an average, drank 30 beers every month. Now, I knew they have keggers at their houses on weekends, but when I read that, I thought, wait, I go to their parties, I probably drink that many beers, so I decided to actually keep a calendar for the next month of how much I drank. So throughout March I marked numbers on days of the month, I spent half of my Spring Break with my parents (so I didn't drink), but I spent the other half with my ex-gang member friend from Canada (which drinking-wise probably made up for spending time with my parents).

But on this year, March 31st was a Saturday, so me and my neighbor Tara were going to go out for the evening. I checked my tally on my calendar and saw I had only 6 drinks to go to match up with the boys, so I checked my wallet... And saw that I had no cash. I know the buses were free on campus, so I hoped I could ask friends for free beers for the night.

When Tara and I stepped off the bus and entered Cochrane's on Wright Street, she introduced me to one of her mild-mannered male friends. "Janet, this is Stallion."

So I asked him, "what's your real name?"

He said his name was Jeremy, so I asked him, "which would you rather be called?"

He said he really didn't care.

Well, the world knew I wasn't going home with this guy, and I needed some free drinks, so I asked, "Okay, in the heights of sexual ecstasy, which would you rather hear called out, 'Stallion' or 'Jeremy'?"

He had a stunned look on his face for about three seconds, until he finally said, "I'll be right back," and walked away.

I wondered if I pushed my luck too far until he came back five minutes later, introducing himself again, "Hi, my name is Jeremy."

That was a great way to start off that night, and everyone knew I was on a drinking mission then, and people bought me drinks until I surpassed the "frat boy" level (lucky me), until they poured me into another bus so I could get home.

## WARRING NATIONS

For us, it was cheaper to take a bus with a group VISA in your country.

I thought it was strange, we had been mortal enemies for decades, and now, here I am, on a bus. You try to show me your splendor, as I look through my rectangular window in this mass transport.

I watched the streets out the bus window. Thin black cords were randomly thrown, scattered along the edges of the grayed sky. When you looked to the sky here, upwards of fifteen cables for all of the power-generated trains crisscrossed the hanging light cables down every street, and cables multiplied at every intersection.

I wondered if the Marine I came with would have heightened defenses in this Cold War country. But I think he was more interested in buying a bottle of potato vodka.

The bus would stop. I would snap photos like some tacky American tourist, trying to photograph any low building I could. Here buildings could not be built tall. That is what protected them from air attacks during World War II. This bus drove me through the town highlights. After we'd turn a corner from the Government buildings or colorful churches I tried to catch photographic glimpses of paint-peeled, brick-exposed, dilapidated buildings, what this country was really about, where door steps cracked and separated from the sidewalks.

The bus wouldn't stop at Nevsky Prospekt to see Alice Rosenbaum's childhood home, so before we left, I wanted to ask the woman in charge questions. Her English was good. She even described the weather that day to me as "capricious," which impressed me.

Capricious. Impulsive, unpredictable. That's how she described the day.

(CONTINUED)

After photographing stop signs in foreign languages from around the world, I wanted to photograph a stop sign here. I asked her where there was a stop sign. She said they did not have stop signs here. Everyone just slows down for oncoming traffic. She also said that they also do not have parking meters in the city. People just park where they need to and go about their business.

She told me that in this part of her country, rent for one-bedroom apartments was about one hundred dollars a month. Factory workers, or mechanical employees, only made about three hundred dollars a month. This is why there are no at-home housewives — everyone has to work to afford keeping the children fed and clothed in their one-bedroom flats. She also said that people in service industries in this country, teachers, doctors, make only two hundred dollars, even less than factory workers.

I continued observing on this bus ride. They painted their buildings such pretty colors, yellow, pink. They painted columns on buildings, which had none. Anything to make things look more elegant, or more cheerful, I suppose.

I saw your weaponry on display, reminding me of when we were enemies. If you couldn't kill us in war, you were pleased with injuring us. It took more of our soldiers to help save our sick than bury our dead, leaving us weaker and more vulnerable to our enemies.

You still keep your war relics, I see.

Then again, so do I.

You show off your best features today. Your idolatry for your Motherland shows through in the way you prettied your exterior for us. But your country takes over half of your money and you can barely afford to live. They indoctrinate you by saying this is what's best for you. You have no other options. I suppose under these conditions you can become so dependent on them that you have no choice but to idolize them.



I saw a statue as we were leaving town on the bus, of a man helping another fallen man. It made me think of how all people in your country with next to nothing seem to have no choice but to help their fellow man, because they, like them, are falling.

I looked for happiness in these painted exteriors of your buildings. I believe that because of where you are from, because of what you believe, you only have happiness because you are so used to nothing. When you have nothing, anything is a gift. We Americans want too much, and always expect to be happy.

I suppose that means you're let down less often than we.

The marine bought his Imperia vodka. I bought a miniature Balalaika.

At a half hour before midnight here, it was still light out. After seeing how you lived for a day, I felt like reveling in capitalism. So at eleven thirty at night, in daylight, I sat in a hot tub while still docked at these communist shores.

## HURRY UP AND WAIT

People are rushing, don't have time for breakfast after you slammed the alarm snooze button three times, stumble out of bed, you're clean enough, forget the shower, clean up your face, smooth your hair, put on your work clothes, grab the briefcase, lock the door, speed up but avoid the sweat of a near sprint to make it to the el train, the bus stop. You can grab a muffin and coffee once you get into work, you think, as your light pant doesn't change once you've stopped at the stop you've still got places to be, check your watch, look down the street, where is your carrier, you need that vehicle to get you to where you need to be. Pace a bit. Adjust your clothes. Check your watch again. This is corporate America, you think, hurry up and wait.

The world rotates over a hundred thousand miles an hour. Everything is spinning. Observe the world. See more and more, but feel connected less and less.

Is it possible to relax where you least expect to?

When people would take smoke breaks at work, you know, 20 minutes outside their office highrise every other hour, I thought, if they can take smoke breaks like that, I can take one or two 40-minute breaks a day to walk up and down those 42 flights of stairs. At least it's healthier than smoking.

Well, if I can do things like that, if I can pick up recyclable garbage left on the street after thinking people are pigs for throwing recyclable trash out like that (because if I don't do something after I complain I'm almost as bad as they are), if I can make choices like that, maybe I can look for peace, or even meditate, anywhere.

Even at a bus stop.

If you could find some time to just stop, after an hour the earth would have moved one hundred thousand miles.

I wonder, when the world is spinning like this, if you could meditate, mentally step outside it all. Gain a new perspective. Come to peace with everything.

I wonder what people think of me if I do this.

But I wanted to see if I could finally relax.



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