

A QUARTER CENTURY
IN THE LIFE

THE 2004 SPAN OF THINGS
BY JANET KUYPERS

2004 CHAPBOOK

1979

UNDER THE SEA

I'd like to be
Under the sea
To see the fish go swim,
I'd like to squish
A jelly fish
And then let go of him.
I'd like to grab
A soft-shelled crab
And take him for a walk
I'd like to hurdle
Over a turtle
And teach dolphins to talk.
I'd like to see
A manatee
And then go play by him,
I'd like to do
All of these things
If only I could swim!

1982

SPRING

Spring
Hundreds of
Daffodils
in a
sunburst
of colors

Waving

Back
and
forth

in the
gentle
breeze
that cools
everything
under the
sun

the sun

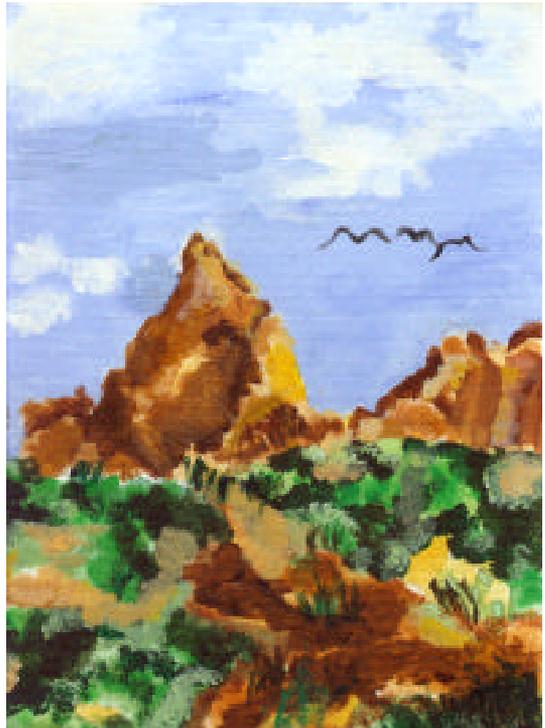
shining
brighter
than ever
before

the world
is walking
up

after a
dormant
six month
sleep

it is the
first
morning
of
a
new
season

spring



1983

MOONLIGHT

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to

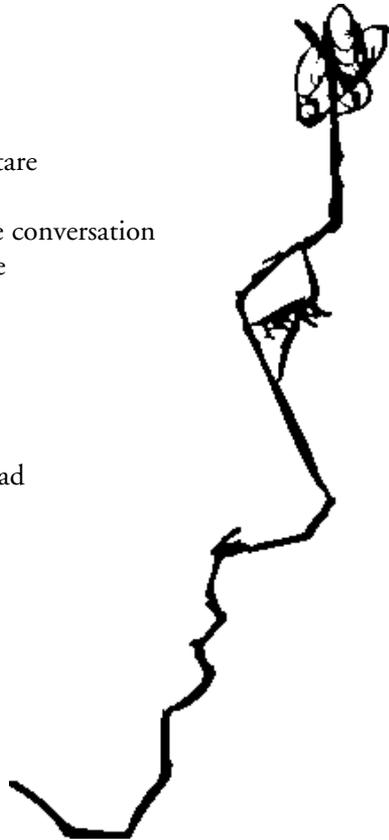


1985

AN INNOCENT GLANCE

An innocent glance
turned into a lengthy stare
A simple hello
turned into an intimate conversation
A common acquaintance
turned into a lover
My heaven
turned into my hell

for another woman
turned everything we had
into nothing



1986

THE JOSHUA TREE

1986

The Joshua tree
is a tree with long branches
said to point toward
the Promised land

You remind me of
the Joshua tree
because you help me
and lead me
in the right direction

THERE ARE TOO MANY POEMS ABOUT YOU, DAVID

Please --
stop killing yourself

You're changing --
you may not see it
but you friends and
family see it

I see it

Every night
I look at the clock
and realize
you're at it again

You're killing yourself

How many days --
weeks --
months --
will it take
for you to see?

Every night
I look at the clock
and hear for your life

you don't know
what you're doing

I loved a man
that was not
addicted to alcohol

I'm afraid for you

What will stop you
from stealing
or fighting
or taking drugs?

Or slitting your wrists
once again?

Every night
I look at the clock
and realize
you may be dead

I wonder if you
have
been dead

Every time
you take a drink
you push yourself
over the edge

And every times
I think of you
the knife
twists deep inside

When you kill
yourself --
you kill me

I care for you so much
--

I only wish
you cared for
yourself as well

Please --
stop killing yourself

1900

WRITING YOUR NAME

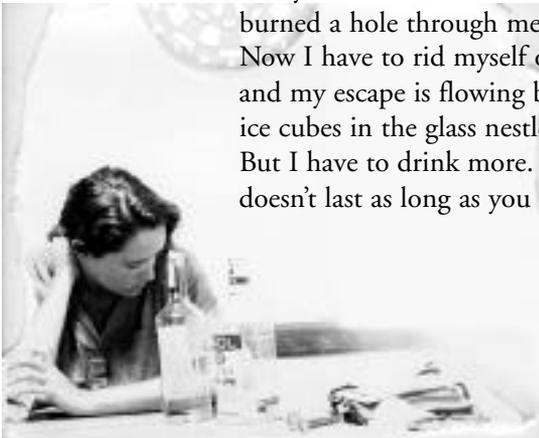
I sat there
in the shade
I took
a stick
I wrote
your name
in the ground
preacher says
the number one
sin is lust
then I am
condemned
to Hell
for
I
want
you
and I
don't care
what
preacher says
for if
the elements
wash away
your name tonight
I will
be back
tomorrow
to write it
again.

1989

THE BURNING

June 8, 1989

I take the final swig of vodka
feel it burn it's way down my throat
hiss at it scorching my tongue
and reach for the bottle to pour myself another.
I think of how my tonsils scream
every time I let the alcohol rape me.
Then I look down at my hands --
shaking -- holding the glass of poison --
and think of how these were the hands
that should have pushed you away from me.
But didn't. And I keep wondering
why I took your hell, took your poison.
I remember how you burned your way
through me. You corrupted me
from the inside out, and I kept coming back.
I let you infect me, and now you've
burned a hole through me. I hated it.
Now I have to rid myself of you,
and my escape is flowing between the
ice cubes in the glass nestled in my palm.
But I have to drink more. The burning
doesn't last as long as you do.



1990

HIGH ROLLER

I long to see you sitting again
cigarette in hand
walkman on the table

I want to be able to walk up behind you
rest my hands on your shoulders
lean my head next to your face

I long to have my cheek near yours
not touching
but so close
that I could still feel your warmth
your desire

our skin wouldn't touch
but I would still feel the rush
from your presence



I WANTED PAIN

You screamed at me to pull over.
You wanted me to stop.
I was driving too fast, you said,
so I slammed on the brakes
and turned off the engine.
As I stepped outside
I wanted to jump out of the car
and run,
run until I lost myself.
And yet I wanted to fall.
I wanted to fall to the ground.
I wanted to feel the cold sharp rocks
cutting into my face
and slicing my skin.
I wanted pain to feel good again.
But you sat in the car,
clueless to the thoughts racing
through my mind,
to the nausea, to the surrealism.
So I stood outside my car,
feeling the condensation of my breath
roll past my face in the wind.
It was a constant, nagging reminder
that I still had to breathe.



1992

CONFIDENT WOMEN

I met up with an old friend of mine for drinks last week. I knew her in high school, although we weren't close friends then. In those days she needed therapy, had problems with drugs, I think, or else it was just family problems. I was a bit insecure myself, shy, meek, scared of life. Since those days we matured, we're now more independent, self-confident, self-assured women. It was good to see her again. She just came back from camping in Australia; although physically I had gone nowhere, we both had our stories to tell over a bottle or two of wine. And we gossiped, she told me of the handsome Australian man she fell for, I told her of the roller-coaster I call my romantic life. And we laughed. And then the gossip changed, her voice lowered, and sounding stern but quiet, she told me of how a man broke into her apartment one night last summer and he tried to rape her, and after kicking and screaming in her underwear she managed to break free and her attacker escaped. She told me they found the man, and the trial is scheduled for later in the month. And she sat there, with

her wine glass in her hand, looking so confident, as if she knew she won this battle. Trying not to sound corny, I told her I could give her a hug. And she leaned on my shoulder, and she cried, hiccuping as she tried to catch her breath. They would make her recount everything on the stand, she said, and the defense lawyers would try to make her sound promiscuous because she slept alone in her underwear. I told her I would go with her to the trial. I told her she is winning by speaking out. Self-assured women. Confident women. How confident are we supposed to be?

1993 WEDDING LOST

And she sees herself in the
passenger seat at night, her fiance
beside her, and the lights seem

all too bright, and the rain seems
all too loud, like the thunder of
soldiers running across a field to

war, swept with the drunken feeling
of patriotism, charging toward their
unknown enemy. And so it happened

that night, the lights got brighter,
the car started to spin, and then
she started to dream.

And she sees herself at the
end of the church, the bridesmaids
have just walked down the

aisle, the music changes for her.
She feels swept with the euphoria
of love, and she begins to walk,

but she falls, the bouquet falling
from her hand. And in slow motion,
white roses and lilies

scatter along the aisle. And she
looks up, and the groom is gone,
and the ground is the ashes

of the house they bought together
after they were married. She
sits up, and she's at the desk at the

bank, trying to get the loan for the
house. His job is secure, we're young,
nothing could go wrong. Good thing

he wore the blue tie to the bank, and
not the red one. And she sees herself
waking up from sleep, the oxygen

pipe still under her nose, her husband
there, tie in hand, asking if she'd like
to hold their baby. But she

could have sworn she heard the
baby stop crying. And she panics.
And then she wakes up, her head is
bobbing,

but now she's back, back at the
hospital, looking at the tubes running
out of her fiance's arm.

1994

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The president says it's okay
to be gay, as long as you don't
tell anyone. Suburban husbands
are murdering doctors who work
at abortion clinics, because they
saved the world from a mass murderer.
Nineteen children are found in a
freezing apartment alone, sharing
one bowl of food on the floor with
a dog. People walk to the churches,
see Mary's statue crying. One lone
man in New York hears the voice
of God through his dog and kills.

Were the children saved from the
murderer, were they sharing their
food with God were they crying

1095

TOO FAR

When he met me
he told me
I looked like
Kim Basinger
long blonde locks
but as time
wore on I knew
I wasn't her
and I could never
be her and I was
never good enough
thin enough
pretty enough
I got a perm
straightened my
teeth
bought a wonder
bra but it wasn't
doing the trick
I bought slimfast
used the stair
stepper ate rice
cakes and wheat
germ but I wasn't
thin enough I
only dropped
twenty pounds

so I went to the
spa got my skin
peeled soaked
myself in mud
wrapped myself
in cellophane
bought the amino
acid facial creams
but I knew they
didn't really
work so I went to
the doctor got my
nose slimmed
my tummy stapled
my thighs sucked

thought about
getting a rib or two
removed
like Cher
but I figured
they've got to
be there for
something
and hey, that's
just going
too far

1996

HEADACHE

whenever i get a headache
it's right behind my eyebrows
and it's a dull, constant ache

so whenever i say i have a headache
eugene takes my hand
and uses acupressure:

he pushes his thumb
right in the middle of my palm.
the pain disappears almost

immediately. but eventually
i have to tell him to stop
pressing my hand, that my

hand now hurts. he lets go,
and the headache, almost
immediately, comes back.



1007

LAMBS TO HEAVEN'S GATE

They tell you the meek shall inherit the earth.
Then they lead their lambs to the slaughter
as I do, to the ones who will follow.
You see, the meek wouldn't know what to do
with their inheritance. They know nothing
of property, ownership, power. I teach them
not to understand these values but to fear them.
To sacrifice. To stay meek. I'm the one
who tells them how to dress, how to walk,
how to kill themselves. All they need is a reason
as long as they don't have to think it through.

People will believe anything if you
tell it to them the right way. Give them a few
tokens and they'll create icons out of you.
But not everyone can guide, can lead the lost.
Give themselves to the followers who need them,
with nothing in return. Like the stars,
which seem so small, so meek from here
yet are unfathomable, uncontrollable.
Like the shepherd, quietly guiding his flock
but holding a stick all the while. I'm the one
who guides them, who guides them to their destiny.

FANTASTIC CAR CRASH

and our life is one big road trip now
and we set the cruise control
and make our way down the expressway.

and most of the time we're just moving
in a straight line, and the scenery
blurs. there's nothing to see

but I know what's inside you and I
know what you're made of. I know
there's no such thing as a calm with you

you are a fantastic car crash. you stop
traffic in both directions as the gapers gawk and
the delay grows and they slow down and stare

everything shatters with you, you know.
it's a spectacular explosion. I try
to duck and cover as metal flies

through the air. and every time you leave
the scene of the accident
I am left picking up the shards of glass

from the windows. you know, the glass breaks
into such tiny little pieces. they look like
ice. it takes so long to pick up the pieces

even though I'm careful
I'm still picking up the pieces
and I'm still on my knees

and the glass cuts into my hands
and the blood drips down to the street.
think of it as my contribution

to this fantastic car crash
that is you, that is me, that is us
as I pull the glass from my hands

and I wave my hand to the line of traffic:
go ahead, keep driving, this happens
all the time, there's nothing to see here



I DON'T WANT TO

April 14, 1999

I don't want to make a million bucks
I don't want to worry about beauty first
I don't want to do everything myself
I don't want to let everyone do things for me
I don't want to help the poor
I don't want to give up what I have earned

But I don't think I earned this
I think I'm being punished
For a deed I did not committ

Who am I supposed to apologize to
Who am I supposed to accountable
Who am I supposed to forgive

I don't want to think about the bad stuff
But some things are bad and some things are worse
And it keeps coming back to haunt me
And I don't like it

I don't want to live this way, and
I don't want to keep paying for someone else's sins

people tell me I'm being pessimistic
when I say I don't want to
But at least it proves, at least,
That I am angry, and
That I live

WHAT IT FELT LIKE

i think i have felt it before
i think i remember touching it, and it was
well, it was soft, and warm, and fuzzy

that makes it sound like a blanket
but a blanket can only be warm for so long
and it never is long enough to cover you
and the cold air is always getting in
and you can feel the breeze
from where the blanket fails you

no, what i have felt before,
what i am sure i have touched before
is giving, and soft, and warm
but it doesn't give too much
or it would disappear

it is kind of like cat's fur
have you ever felt cat's fur before?
when you glide you hand along a cat with the fur
it is like silk, it is very,
well, how do you describe it

don't rub that cat fur the wrong way, though
because that's when it fights againsty you

it does not hurt you or give way too easily
it satiates you into feeling that life is good again
and when nothing seems to do that for you
sometimes all you've got is love,
i mean, that feeling of warmth and softness

do you know what i am talking abot
i am sure i have felt that feeling before
i must have

FREEDOM JUST PAST THE FENCE

01-13-02

After working for the Army
for years on repairing jet engines
I ended up being stationed
in Pennsylvania one summer
repairing air conditioners
and refrigerators.
I'd only do a little work
and then have nothing to do
for a day or two.
But the thing I remember
is that at the time Cubans
were defecting to the United States
by boat.
They'd sail to Florida,
most of them dehydrated
and all of them malnourished.
The U.S. government
didn't want them spreading diseases
in our country,
so when the Cubans would appear
off the coast of Miami,
the military would be waiting
to make sure they were healthy.
Well, all I knew
was that they got all these Cubans
into trucks we called 'cattle cars'
with only a few benches
and trucked them up to Pennsylvania,
where I was,
and the military gave them some shots
to make sure they weren't dying.
So these people, after

escaping their country
in a shoddy wooden boat
were taken by the U.S. military,
herded into a boxed-in truck
and shipped up the country
so they could be given shots
and detained.
These Cubans,
who came here wanting freedom,
now had to wait
in a fenced-in area
until they were tested
and given food.
And it was my job
to make sure that
their fridge and
air conditioner was working.
So I sat there for
a day or two at a time,
drinking cans of beer,
and looking out my window.
I had a view of the razor wire fence
and all I remember
was seeing all of these Cubans
leaning on the chain-link fence,
wondering if this was what it was like
to be free,
holding on to the metal,
looking out to what they were sure
was freedom.

JOY *12-15-03*

I wasn't a popular grade-school kid,
things were thrown at me,
I was knocked down once,
so I knew kids could be cruel.
But once I waslkd to a swingset at recess
and Joy sat there alone.
She was teased
because she was overweight.
So I asked her why she was alone.
She turned her arm so I could see
the two-inch long bruise there.
She then got up and started to speak
and turned and lifted the back of her shirt.
She said some kids started hitting her
with the chains from the swingset;
then I saw her back.
I could see how the foot-long bruises
matched perfectly with the metal chains.

I didn't know what to say.
These chains are for swings
so children could play.
This swing, this tool for joy
became a tool for unjust punishment.



WORN OUT

June 7, 2004

I recently heard the theory
that the dead follow you
they stay with you
for the rest of your life

and the pull at you
and tug at you
and wear you out
until you die.

And are you doing this to me?
Are you pulling the color out of my hair
because I only noticed grey hairs
on my head after your death.

And come to think of it,
my back started hurting
after you were dead for a while
and -

and it that because
I've been carrying you around?
Are you clinging to me after you left?

Please, I don't want to feel guilty
for leaving you.
Please don't haunt me like this.

Maybe I should have been there
to see them lower your casket into the ground.
Maybe I should have seen you
in your suit and tie
in your coffin -
maybe then you wouldn't tug at me
and wear me down
and make me feel old.

Because I recently heard the theory
that the dead follow you
and wear you out
until you die.

But I'm beginning to think
that the reason people get old
is because they've gone through too much.

And if the likes of you
leave the likes of me
you'll make me wonder
if I'll have too much baggage to carry.

a quarter century
in the life
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