

writing that  
makes you think

poem

1. A verbal composition designed to convey experiences, ideas, or emotions in a vivid & imaginative way, characterized by the use of language chosen for its sound and suggestive power and by the use of literary techniques such as meter, metaphor, and rhyme.
2. A composition in verse rather than in prose.
3. A literary composition written with an intensity or beauty of language more characteristic of poetry than of prose.
4. A creation, object, or experience having beauty suggestive of poetry.

janet kuypers  
2005 chapbook  
scars publications

# bio

Janet Kuypers (June 22, 1970), graduated from the University of Illinois in Champaign/Urbana with a degree in News/Editorial Communications Journalism (with computer science engineering studies). She had a minor in photography and specialized in creative writing. In the early 1990s she was an acquaintance rape workshop facilitator, and edited to two literary magazines.

As the editor the literary and art magazine *Children, Churches and Daddies*, Kuypers has been published in books, magazines and on the Internet over 8,800 times for writing or over 11,600 times for art work in her professional career. She has been profiled in such magazines as *Nation* and *DiscoverU*, has sung in the acoustic bands *Mom's Favorite Vase* (in Chicago), *Weeds and Flowers* (in Colorado) and *the Second Axing* (in Illinois), and has released performance art CDs with the musical groups *Pointless Orchestra*, *5D/5D* and *Order From Chaos*.

She has eleven books published:  
*Hope Chest in the Attic*  
*The Window*  
*Close Cover Before Striking*  
(woman.) (spiral bound)  
*Autumn Reason* (novel in letter form)  
*the Average Guy's Guide*  
*to Feminism*  
*Contents Under Pressure*  
*Changing Gears*  
*The Key To Believing*  
(2002 650 page novel)  
*Oeuvre* (poetry collection book)  
*Exaro Versus* (prose collection book)  
*L'arte* (art book)

In the spring of 1998 she embarked on her first national tour, with featured performances, among other venues, at the Albuquerque Spoken Word Festival during the National Poetry Slam, in 2003 she hosted and performed weekly at a poetry and music open mic called "Sing Your Life", and starting in 2002 was a featured performer, doing quarterly performance art shows with readings, music and images.

*right: Kuypers reciriting poetry at a political event in Chicago, 1996.*  
*bottom: Kuypers is a featured poetry reader at the Taste of Logan outdoors festival, 1997.*



# table of contents

Death Takes Many Forms.....	4
The Burning .....	7
Looking for a Worthy Adversary .....	8
True Happiness in the New Millennium.....	12
More Than We Should Have.....	15
God Eyes.....	16
Burn It In .....	19
Too Far .....	23
The Battle At Hand.....	24
The State of the Nation.....	26
Andrew Hettinger .....	28
New To Chicago .....	31
Last Before Extinction.....	32
Everything Was Alive and Dying.....	34

# Death takes many forms.

It is winter now.  
The trees have lost their leaves;  
the city is covered in a thin layer of soot and snow.  
The grass is dead.  
In the sunless sky black birds circle overhead  
searching for prey.  
An eerie cold settles over everything.  
Nothing is growing anymore.

Death takes many forms.  
For you, death first came when you were five years old  
and your mother had to give you three shots of insulin a day  
until you could take a needle to yourself.  
Did it hurt to push that needle into your arm, the first time?  
Or did it hurt you more to know you had no choice?

Death takes many forms.  
Death can be someone telling you without trying  
that they are losing their sight.  
Behind coke-bottle glasses you would see me and say,  
“That’s a nice black suit you’re wearing.”  
And I would tell you, “It’s green.”  
And you wouldn’t believe me.  
You wouldn’t hear the howling wind of the changing seasons.

Death takes many forms.  
I know what follows the autumn wind.  
It is winter now.  
Do you remember when it happened?  
The changes are subtle, the temperature drops,  
first only slightly. It’s almost imperceptible.  
Only when the first snow falls do you realize  
where the seasons have gone.

*(continued)*

Death takes many forms.  
Death can be a sweat-soaked shirt, the shakes, dizziness  
when you needed food.  
You would look as pale as a ghost  
as I would hold your cold wet arm and steady you.  
Quick, some sugar will make everything better.  
Isn't everything better yet?

Death takes many forms.  
The signs of death can come  
when you lose your circulation.  
"My feet are numb, Janet," you'd say.  
"I can't feel my feet anymore."  
And I would rub your feet for you,  
and you would say it makes a difference,  
you feel better.

If only I could do this forever.

Death takes many forms.  
I said good bye to you to travel my own road  
but I didn't think it was the last good bye.  
How was I to know?

When I left, I knew you didn't want me to go.  
And now it's my turn.

Why are we always saying good bye to each other?

Are you trying to teach me a lesson?  
Because if you are, well,  
I've learned it. Trust me, I have.  
You can come back now.

*(continued)*

Death takes many forms.  
And now, now it seems  
you've taken me down with you  
you've taken me into that casket with you  
and I'm running my hand along your jacket lapel  
and I can feel the coldness of winter all around me  
and I can hear them shoveling the dirt over my head  
and I want to get out  
and I want to take you with me.

Death takes many forms.  
Death can be that hole you left,  
you know, right over here, just a little to the left.  
I keep wondering when the pain will go away.  
When will everything be better.

You once showed me that winter could be beautiful.  
Instead of the dark and dirty snow lacing the city streets  
you showed me a quieting snowfall,  
over a lake at your parent's back yard  
glistening in an untouched whiteness.  
I told you I hated winters  
and you told me, "This you don't hate."

Well, I'm still learning.

It is winter now.  
And death takes many forms.  
The seasons change for you and I.  
It is snowing. And something is ending.  
It is snowing. Somewhere  
it is snowing.

## the burning

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.

# looking for a worthy adversary

I've been looking for a worthy adversary  
someone I can lock horns with  
because although my life makes more sense when I'm alone  
it's not nearly as interesting

I've been looking for a worthy adversary  
someone I can battle to the death with  
because it can't be about love, you see  
love can't exist on the terms I demand  
it's never that pure

I've been looking for a worthy adversary  
and so I slither up to you like a snake  
as you sit there at the corner  
of the bar drinking your gin and tonics  
and I tempt you with a golden apple

but all I was offering you  
was fruit from the tree of knowledge

I didn't know how willing you were  
to take from that tree  
I'm not used to that, you know

Did you know you'd need to come back for more?  
Did you know what you were getting into?

well, I didn't know you'd have  
a thing or two to each me too

and did I know I'd need to come back for more?  
Did I know what I was getting into?

*(continued)*



because as I've been looking for a worthy adversary  
all this time I've been playing a part  
an actress on a stage, spouting the lines on cue  
and that role was getting tiresome  
but those stage lights still came on night after night  
and I still had to play my part

until on my night off I saw your performance  
at the theatre down the street  
and you know, your protagonist  
was doing what I was doing  
right down to faking it with people who don't matter  
right down to going home and still feeling empty

and you know, I liked to see  
that boiling emotion underneath  
that no one else could see  
because only I had the knowledge to know  
what that emotion really means

and you know, I'm beginning to wonder  
if we can get together  
and write our own play

it would be a masterful performance, you know  
and as that curtain would close we'd hold each other's hands  
and walk off the stage  
and the audience would know that there is a happy ending

and now when I walk out on to the set  
and there you stand, in front, stage left  
I wait for my cue to make my move  
none of the rest of the scene matters to me, you know

maybe they'd like our little play, maybe they wouldn't  
who really cares

*(continued)*

because even though I came to you  
and tempted you  
you now tempt me and tease me and torment me  
and tell me everything I was too afraid to believe  
and show me the knowledge that always escaped me

and when you talk you reach your hand into my brain  
and pull out my thoughts and shove them into your mouth  
and spit them back at me

and instead of filling me with terror  
it fills me with joy

I've been looking for a worthy adversary  
and maybe you are much more than that

I've heard the words you say to me before  
I've said them to myself many times  
but why do they sound so much better  
coming from you?

I had been looking for a worth adversary  
someone I could lock horns with  
but now I'm no longer locking horns

now it seems I don't have to fight the battle alone  
now it seems that there's no battle to fight  
we know what all the lines from our play really mean  
and now we're performing for no one  
now we're just ourselves  
and now there's just understanding  
I don't even have to speak

and now every day is Valentine's Day  
and now it's like candy and flowers and springtime  
and hearts and cupids and sunshine  
and you know it's scary  
these clichés are actually beginning to make sense

I guess that's what the tree of knowledge does to you

*(continued)*

so this is what has been going on in my mind  
and now I've just spilled my guts  
and now I'm just a puddle on the floor

but now my performance of a lifetime is made  
I stand here like a statue  
and wait for my applause

and as I wait for the reviews  
on the performance I was made for  
I know what they're all going to say  
and none of that matters anymore

because I know what you are going to say  
because it's everything that I want to say

because now it's time  
for you to take my thoughts again  
and shove them into your mouth again  
and spit them back at me again

and now I wait for you to come on stage again  
for our next wonderful performance  
where we have our happy ending  
where you tell me what I already know

# True Happiness in the New Millennium

*"I ain't never found peace upon the breast of a girl  
I ain't never found peace with the religions of the world  
I ain't never found peace at the bottom of a glass*

*Sometimes it seems the more I ask for the less I receive  
Sometimes it seems the more I ask for the less I receive  
The only true freedom is freedom from the heart's desires  
And the only true happiness this way lies"*

*- Matt Johnson*

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
I'm the new savior the savior of science  
the savior of strength  
the savior of survival  
survival of the fittest  
survival of the best  
and I'm here to tell you we're starting anew  
so fasten your seat belts  
hang on to your hats  
place your seat trays in their upright and locked position  
for it's a bumpy ride, and I'll tell you why

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
the millennium of reason and logic and strength  
and I don't want to hear about your self-destruction  
I don't want to hear your whining, psychosis,  
your depression, suicide, alcohol and drugs  
and just what made you think that playing with needles  
and escape would make things better somehow  
God, I've always hated needles anyway  
what is it with you people

*(continued)*

well, you need a leader and I'm stepping up to the plate  
you keep asking for a big brother and I'm here to set you straight  
you want someone to wipe your noses for you  
well, pick up the damn tissue and do it yourself  
because when you give up your rights, you take away mine  
and we're not having any of that

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
and you say to me you need crystal meth  
    so you can stay awake through work  
and you say to me that you don't need to drink,  
    that you just like the taste  
and you say to me that with all your escapism  
    you still don't feel any better  
and you say to me that sometimes suicide  
    is the only answer

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
I'm here to usher in a whole new generation  
so stop asking for things and start working for things  
because X is for ecstasy as long as it's fast  
and X is for extra but there's always a cost  
and ecstasy doesn't come without extra work  
no matter how many corners you cut  
and you know, X is for X-Ray and I see right through that

they say that Eve ate from the tree from knowledge  
but you know, she shouldn't have stopped just then  
cause the loggers are raping the trees of knowledge  
the loggers are raping the forests of talent  
the forests of ability   the forests of reason  
of skill   of logic   perseverance   and life  
we're letting them rape the forests of excellence  
and you know it's now time to take it all back  
because I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
and I'm here to tell you how it's going to be done

*(continued)*

you're looking for peace in all the wrong places  
you're asking your leaders to save you from yourself  
but your leaders are losers and they're worse off than you

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
where it's time to take charge and it's time fess up  
only you can deliver you from your own sins  
but first you must know what sin really is

it's time to make choices and it's time to lay claim  
to everything we've been blindly giving away  
because I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
take charge of yourself, and I'll take charge of me  
I'm my leader, not yours, so wipe your own damn noses

take it in to your hands, people, mold your own tools  
this is the new millennium, and this is your chance  
because no one should be showing us how to fail  
people mastered that feat a millennia ago  
so set your own rules and do something fast  
cause it's time to take charge and it's time to be alive

I'm here to usher in a whole new millennium  
And I'm waiting for you to usher in yours  
Because true happiness this way lies, my friend  
and I won't wait long if you lag behind  
cause I'm setting my rules so step out of my way

I'm here to tell you there's a new sensation  
and I'm here to tell you there's a new salvation  
and that true happiness this way lies

# more than we should have

when i think of him i usually think about the drinking

actually, i never think of him as drinking  
come to think of it  
i just think of him as drunk  
i can't even remember seeing the drinks in his hand  
but his perception of the world is always altered

but someone reminded me tonight  
of when he would work outside in the the cold Chicago winters  
and he would come back with his moustache frozen  
and there would be little icicles hanging  
down toward his mouth

and then i thought of  
when i waited with him once at the airport  
because we were picking up someone  
and we sat in the shrimp cocktail lounge  
and he drank, and ate, and i waited

and as we left  
we tried to pay the expressway toll with pennies  
but some of the coins fell onto the street  
and we had to throw more change at the machine

we paid more than we should have  
i'm sure we did

# god eyes

It was a stupid point to argue about at 2 a.m.,  
sitting in the lobby of the Las Vegas Hilton  
listening to the clink and whirr of slot machines  
and the dropping of tokens onto metal.  
You believed in God, I did not. Even after two  
rounds of Sam Adams and three rounds of Bailey's  
I knew you wouldn't change my mind, and  
I had no desire to change yours.

You told me of a dream you had: in it you and  
Christian Slater played a game of pool. You  
won. He looked at his hands and said, "I've got  
a beer in one hand, and a cigarette in the other.  
I guess this means it's time for me to seduce  
someone." And he walked away. You're a funny  
man. You make me laugh. Your brother even noticed  
that. And you even spoke like Slater, rough, mysterious.

You were the optimist: yes, there is  
meaning to life. I was doomed to nothingness,  
meaninglessness. But to me you were the  
pessimist: you believed you were not  
capable of creating the power, the passion  
you had within you. I had control in my life, even  
if in the end it was all for nothing.  
You think we are so different. We are not.

It's now after three and we listen to music:  
Al Jarreau, Whitney Houston, Billy Ocean, Mariah  
Carey. Natalie Cole, with her father. "That's why darling,  
it's incredible -" you mouth as you walk toward the  
washrooms - "that someone so unforgettable -"  
take a spin, watch me mouth the words  
with you as you walk away -  
"think that I am unforgettable too."

*(continued)*



I tell you about the first time I got drunk - I was maybe ten, and asked my sister to make a mixed drink mom had that I liked. She made me a few. So there I was, walking to the neighbor's house in the summertime, wearing my sister's seventies zip-up boots, oversized and unzipped, carrying my seventh drink and sticking my tongue out to see the grenadine. You liked my story. You laughed.

Passion is a hard thing to describe. Passion for life. You must know and understand a spirituality behind it. You do your work, the things in life solely because you must - it is you, and you could not exist any other way. It is who you are. It is a feeling beyond mere enjoyment. You said that the spirituality was a God. I said it was my mind. Once again, we lock horns.

All of my life I have seen people espouse beliefs but not follow them. Tell me you're not like them. Our values are different, but tell me we both have values and will fight to the death for them. I need to know that there are people like that, like me. We are different, but at the core we are the same. We understand all this. I'm grasping straws here as the clock says 3:45 a.m. and the betting odds for football games roll by

on the television screen. You don't gamble. Neither do I. Why must you be so far away? You reminded me that I have a passion in life, that I have to keep fighting. But I get weak and tire of fighting these battles alone. I, the atheist, have no God and have to rely on my will. When I am low, I struggle. You have your God to fall back on, I only have me.

*(continued)*

And you looked into my eyes as it approached the morning. You stared. We locked horns once again. I ask you again what you were thinking. And you said, "I see God in your eyes." Later you said it to me again. I asked you what you meant. You said, "I see a God in your eyes. I see a soul." Whether what you saw was your God or just me, my

passion, well, thank you for finding it. "Good-bye, Ms. Kuypers," you said when you left for good that day. I said nothing. Good-bye, Mr. Williams, I thought, then I closed the door, walked to the window, started singing unforgettable. I was alone in my hotel room, and the lights from the Stardust, the Frontier, the Riviera were still flashing. I'm not alone. Good-bye, Mr. Williams.

# Burn It In

Once I was at a beach  
off the west coast of Florida  
it was New Year's eve  
and the yellow moon hung over the gulf  
like a swaying lantern.  
And I was watching the waves crash in front of me  
with a friend  
and the wind picked up  
and my friend just stared at that moon for a while  
and then closed his eyes.  
I asked him what he was thinking.  
He said, "I wanted to look at this scene,  
and memorize it, burn it into my brain,  
record it in my mind, so I can call it up when I want to.  
So I can have it with me always."

I too have my recorders.  
I burn these things into my brain,  
I burn these things onto pages.  
I pick and choose what needs to be said,  
what needs to be remembered.

Every year, at the end of the year  
I used to write in a journal  
recall the things that happened to me  
log in all of the memories I needed to keep  
because that was what kept me sane  
that was what kept me alive.

*(continued)*

When I first went to college  
I was studying to be a computer science  
engineer, I wanted to make a lot of money  
I wanted to beat everyone else  
because burned in my brain were the taunts  
of kids who were in cliques  
so others could do the thinking for them  
because burned in my brain were the evenings  
of the high school dances I never went to  
because burned in my brain were the people  
I knew I was better than  
who thought they were better than me.  
Well, yes, I wanted to make a lot of money  
I wanted to beat everyone else  
but I hated what I was doing  
I hated what I saw around me  
hated all the pain people put each other through  
and all of these memories just kept flooding me  
so in my spare time  
to keep me sane, to keep me alive  
I wrote down the things I could not say  
that was how I recorded things.

When I looked around me, and saw friends  
raping my friends  
I wrote, I burned into these nightmares with a pen  
and yes, I have this recorded  
I have all of this recorded.

*(continued)*

What did you think I was doing  
when I was stuffing hand-written notes into my pockets  
or typing long hours into the night?  
In college, I had two roommates  
who in their spare time would watch movies in our living room  
and cross-stitch. I never understood this.  
In my spare time, I was not watching other's stories  
or weaving thread to keep my hands busy  
I was sitting in the corner of a cafe  
scribbling into my notebook.  
I was sitting in the university computer lab  
slamming my hands, my fingers against the keyboard  
because there were too many atrocities in the world  
too many injustices that I had witnessed  
too many people who had wronged me

and I had a lot of work to do.  
There had to be a record of what you've done.

Did you think your crimes would go unpunished?  
And did you think that you could come back, years later,  
slap me on the back with a friendly hello  
and think I wouldn't remember?  
You see, that's what I have my poems for  
so there will always be a record  
of what you have done  
I have defiled many pages  
in your honor, you who swung  
your battle ax high above your head  
and thought no one would remember in the end.  
Well, I made a point to remember.  
Yes, I have defiled many pages  
and have you defiled many women?  
You, the man who rapes my friends?  
You, the man who rapes my sisters?  
You, the man who rapes me?  
Is this what makes you a strong man?

*(continued)*

you want to know why I do the things I do

I had to record these things  
that is what kept me together  
when people were dying  
that is what kept me together  
when my friends went off to war  
that is what kept me together  
when my friends were raped  
and left for dead  
that is what kept me together  
when no one bothered to notice this  
or change this  
or care about this  
these recordings kept me together

I need to record these things  
to remind myself  
of where I came from  
I need to record these things  
to remind myself  
that there are things to value  
and things to hate  
I need to record these things  
to remind myself  
that there are things worth fighting for  
worth dying for  
I need to record these things  
to remind myself  
that I am alive

## 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

# the Battle at Hand

I wanted you to know  
that I was on a mission when I saw you  
and that I was a warrior  
and you were just a helpless victim  
that couldn't fight my weaponry

that wouldn't fight my weaponry

I would come in to town  
and pillage and rape  
and rape and pillage  
depending on how you put it

and rape is such a hard word, you know,  
entirely inappropriate for this  
because I made sure that you wanted me  
before it was all over  
because I have a knack for doing that  
when I fight my battles

this is how I care to think of you.  
I was on a conquest  
and I came fully equipped with ammunition  
I had bayonets  
I had a rifle  
with rounds of bullets in a chain  
thrown over my shoulder  
I had a .22 caliber magazine loaded hand-gun

I didn't even need to use the hand-grenade  
or the tear gas

even before I started using my tongue as a weapon with a kiss  
I used it as a weapon with words  
and I knew I had won you won over from the start  
you looked at me when I spoke  
and I think you might have actually wanted to listen to me

and I would never have to resort to violence  
to get what I wanted from you

*(continued)*



we seldom had opportunities before  
and there wasn't much of an opportunity here  
but we made one  
and we somehow made it work

I know I wasn't ready for a battle before  
but I want you to know  
that I came ready to fight  
and I didn't care the circumstance  
or whether or not we had to be quiet  
    because we wouldn't want anyone to find out  
    and no one did

and no, it was not a momentous moment in my life  
it was just a moment  
a conquest, a battle,  
and in my own mind,  
I won the war

you still thought I was beautiful  
and that I was horny  
did I create a little monster in you?  
now I'm going to have to re-arm myself  
and use my stockade of defenses to push you away

but that is the cost of winning battles all the time, I guess

you thought I would always want you  
and you know, I liked winning the battle,  
but I'll have to work again  
so that you don't come back to haunt me  
because we weren't meant to be anything to each other  
and you were just a conquest for me  
a battle won

people thought we would never get along.  
but I know better  
I know there is no such thing as NOT getting along with me  
and I know I can make anyone like me  
as I did with you

you were easy prey, you know.

# the state of the nation

my phone rang earlier today  
and I picked it up and said “hello”  
and a man on the other end said,  
Is this Janet Kuypers?  
and I said, “Yes, it is, may I ask  
who is calling?”  
and he said, Yeah, hi, this is  
George Washington, and I’m sitting here  
with Jefferson and we wanted to  
tell you a few things. And I said  
“Why me?” And he said Excuse me,  
I believe I said I was the one  
that wanted to do the talking.  
God, that’s the problem with  
Americans nowadays. They’re so  
damn rude. And I said, “You know,  
you really didn’t have to use  
language like that,” and he said,  
Oh, I’m sorry, it’s just I’ve been  
dead so long, I lose all control  
of my manners. Well, anyway, we just  
wanted to tell you some stuff. Now,  
you know that we really didn’t have  
much of an idea of what we were  
doing when we were starting up  
this country here, we didn’t have  
much experience in creating  
bodies of power, so I could understand  
how our Constitution could be  
misconstrued

*(continued)*

and then he put in a dramatic pause  
and said,  
but when we said people had  
a right to bear arms  
we meant to protect themselves  
from a government gone wrong  
and not so you could kill  
and innocent person  
for twenty dollars cash  
and when we said freedom of  
religion we included the separation  
of church and state because freedom  
of religion could also mean freedom  
from religion  
and when we said freedom of speech  
we had no idea you'd be  
burning a flag  
or painting pictures of Christ  
doused in urine  
or photographing people with  
whips up their respective anatomies  
but hell, I guess we've got to  
grin and bear it  
because if we ban that  
the next thing they'll ban is books  
and we can't have that  
and I said, "But there are schools  
that have books banned, George."  
And he said Oh.

# Andrew Hettinger

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and why would you: you, who never had anyone, you, who always had the bad breaks. Everyone looked at you as different. Where would you have learned to trust. Who would you have learned it from.

I never really liked you. I met you through a friend and he explained to me that multiple sclerosis left you with a slight limp and a faint lisp. Faint, under the surface, but there, traces of something no one would ever know of you well enough to fully understand.

I never really liked you. You never revealed yourself to me and I never wanted you to; you scared me too much. You, plagued with physical ailments. You, with a limp in your walk. You, with a patch over your eye. You, who stared at me for always just a bit too long.

They told me the patch was from eye surgery with complications and now you had to cover your shame, cover someone else's mistakes, cover a wrong you didn't commit, cover a problem not of your own doing. The problems were never of your own doing, were they.

I heard these stories and I thought it was sad. I heard these stories and thought you had to be a pillar of strength. And then I saw you drink, straight from the bottle, fifteen-year-old chianti. And I saw you smash your hand into your living room wall. This is how you lived.

*(continued)*

The house you lived in was littered with trash. Why bother to clean it up anyway. It detracted you from the holes in the wall, the broken furniture from drunken fits. This was how you reacted to life, to the world. You didn't know any better. This is how you coped.

I never really liked you. You would come home from work, tell us about a woman who was beautiful and smart that liked you, but she wasn't quite smart enough. And I thought: We believe anything if we tell ourselves enough. We weave these fantasies to get through the days.

I never really liked you. Every time you talked to me you always leaned a little too close. So I stayed away from the house, noted that those whom you called friends did the same. I asked my friend why he bothered to stay in touch. And he said to me, "But he has no friends."

This is how I thought of you. A man who was dealt a bad hand. A man who couldn't fight the demons that were handed to him. And with that I put you out of my mind, relegated you to the ranks of the inconsequential. We parted ways. You were reduced to a sliver of my youth.

I received a letter recently, a letter from someone who knew you, someone who wanted me to tell my friend that they read in the newspaper that you hanged yourself. Your brother died in an electrical accident, and after the funeral you went to the train

station; instead of leaving this town you went to a small room and left us forever. Strangers had to find you. The police had to search through records to identify your body. The newspaper described you as having "health problems." But you knew it was more than that.

*(continued)*

And I was asked to be the messenger to my friend. The funeral had already passed. You were already in the ground. There was no way he could say goodbye. I shouldn't have been the one to tell him this. No one deserved to tell him. He was the only one who tried to care.

I never really liked you. No one did. But when I had to tell my friend, I knew his pain. I knew he wanted to be better. I knew he thought you were too young to die. I knew he felt guilty for not calling you. He knew it shouldn't have been this way. We all knew it.

I never really liked you. But now I can't get you out of my mind; you haunt me for all the people we've forgotten in our lives. I don't like what you've done. I don't like you quitting. I don't like you dying, not giving us the chance to love you, or hate you, or even ignore you more.

My friend still doesn't know where your grave is. I'd like to find it for him, and take him to you. Let you know you did have a friend out there. Bring you a drink, maybe, a fitting nightcap to mark your departure, to commemorate a life filled with liquor, violence, pain and death.

I never really liked you, but maybe we could get together in some old cemetery, sit on your grave stone, share a drink with the dead, laugh at the injustices of life when we're surrounded by death. Maybe then we'd understand your pain for one brief moment, and remember the moments we'll always regret.

# new to chicago

I'm still new to this city  
I know, I know, I've been here for years  
but I haven't gone to the Sears Tower Observatory  
since my Junior Prom

but when I walk by the First Chicago building  
the beams along the north side  
sloping up, parabolic pillars curving up to the sky

when I walk by the First Chicago building  
I walk up along the side  
and lean up against one of the sloping pillars  
press my body against the cold concrete  
feel the cold against my chin, my breasts, by thighs

and look up along the curve, stretching up towards the sky

you know, these pillars look like race tracks  
and I could see something come rushing down that curve  
a matchbox car, a race car  
a marble, a bowling ball  
a two-ton weight

I see the speed, the power, and it  
almost makes me afraid to look up

and every time I walk by the First Chicago building  
I do the same thing, I do this little ritual  
and it feels like the first time

# last before extinction

Now he has so many opportunities.  
He has nothing to lose. Why not  
come out of the wilderness, attack  
everything it sees. Kill something.  
Suck the blood out, make him feel  
alive for once more. Let them try  
to restrain him. He has nothing to lose.

And for now it can fly to the highest  
redwood, look out over the world.  
Despise the world, the world that made  
him be alone, leaving him alone. Who  
will carry his name? Who will care  
for him when he is old? Who can he  
read bed time stories to?

Now it can feel death creeping upon  
him, closer and closer. He wants to  
scream. He calls upon nature; the  
tides rise, earthquakes shatter homes.  
He does not feel vindicated. He has lost.

*(continued)*



And for now she can swim to the deepest  
darkest cave in the Pacific, hide from  
the solitude, swim lower and lower;  
can she find where all of the other  
animals of dying species hide, can she  
find them. There must be others. They  
can understand, they can live together,  
at the bottom of the earth. Could they  
show their pain for their species, share  
what is left of their love, create a new race?

Soon they will be no more  
and we will be taking their bones,  
reassembling them, studying their  
form, rebuilding their lives, revering  
them more than we ever did  
in life. This is what it all becomes.  
This is what it all boils down to.  
Study the bones. Study the mistakes.  
Study the bones.

# everything was alive and dying

I

I had a dream the other night  
I walked out of the city  
to a forest  
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths  
and trash cans every fifty feet  
and trash every ten

and then a raccoon came right up to me  
she had a few little baby raccoons  
following her, it was so cute, I  
wish I had my camera

and she spoke to me,  
she said, thank you  
thank you for not buying furs,  
I know you humans are pretty smart,  
you have to be able to figure out a way  
to keep yourselves warm  
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't  
do it for warmth,  
they do it for fashion, they do it  
for power. And she said I know.  
But thank you anyway.

*(continued)*

## II

Then I walked a little further  
and there was a stray cat  
she still had her little neon collar on  
with a little bell  
and she walked a few feet,  
stretched her front paws,  
oh, she looked so darling  
and then she walked right up to me  
and she said thank you  
and I said for what?  
And she just looked at me for a moment,  
her little ears were standing straight up,  
and then she said, you know,  
in some countries I'm considered  
a delicacy. And I said how  
do you know of these things?  
And she said  
when somebody eats one of you  
word gets around  
and then she looked up at me again  
and said, and in some countries  
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they  
love to see how you humans  
prepare them for slaughter, how you  
hang them upside-down  
and slit their throats  
so their still beating hearts  
will drain out all the blood for you  
and she said isn't it funny  
how arbitrary your decision  
to eat meat is?  
and I said, don't put me  
in that category, I don't eat meat  
and she said I know

*(continued)*

### III

And I walked deeper in to the forest  
managed to get away from the  
picnic tables and the outhouses  
that lined the forest edges  
the roaring cars gave way to the  
rustling of tree branches  
crackling of fallen leaves  
under my step

when the wind tunneled through  
the wind whistled and sang  
as it flew past the bark

and leaves

I walked  
listened to the crack of dead branches  
under my feet  
and I felt a branch against my shoulder  
I looked up and I could hear  
the trees speak to me,  
and they said  
thank you for letting the  
endangered animals live here amongst us  
we do think they're so pretty  
and it would be a shame to see them go  
and thank you for recycling paper  
because you're saving us  
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long  
embedded in the earth  
we do have souls, you know  
you can hear it in our songs  
we cling with our roots  
we don't want to let go

*(continued)*

and I said, but I don't do much,  
I don't do enough  
and they said we know  
but we'll take what we can get

## IV

and I woke up in a sweat

## V

so tell me, Bob Dole  
so tell me, Newt Gingrich  
so tell me, Pat Bucannan  
so tell me, Jesse Helms  
if you woke up from that dream  
would you be in a sweat, too?

## VI

Do you even know why  
we should save the rain forest?  
Oh preserve the delicate balance,  
just tear the whole forest down,  
what difference does it make?  
Put in some orange groves  
so our concentrate orange juice  
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers  
have a very, very hard time  
trying to come up with synthetic  
cures for diseases on their own?  
It helps them out a little if they can first  
find the substance in nature.  
A tree that appears in the rain forest  
may be the only one of its species.  
Or one like it may be two miles away,  
instead of right next to it. I wonder  
how many cures we've destroyed  
to plant more orange groves.  
Serves us right.

*(continued)*

## VII

You know my motives aren't selfless  
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life

I'd like to find a cure to these diseases  
before I die of them  
and I'm not just a vegetarian  
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal  
unless I have to  
I also know the excess protein  
pulls the calcium away from my bones  
and gives me osteoporosis  
and the excess fat gives me heart attacks  
and I also know that we could be feeding  
ten times more people  
with the same resources used for meat production

You know, I know you're looking at me  
and calling me an extremist  
but I'm sitting here, looking around me  
looking at the destruction caused by family values  
and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions  
are also those extreme ones

## VIII

everything is linked here  
we destroy our animals  
so we can be wasteful and violent  
we destroy our plants  
we destroy our earth  
we're even destroying our air  
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere  
we dump our wastes into our lakes  
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

*(continued)*

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me  
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think  
that we just keep doing it  
because we don't know how to stop  
and deep inside we feel the pain of  
all that we've killed  
and we try to control it by  
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer

we live through the guilt  
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine  
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin  
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning  
and when that's not enough  
maybe a line of coke

maybe shoot ourselves in the head  
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom  
or maybe just take some pills  
walk into the garage, turn on the car  
and just  
fall asleep

in the wild  
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized  
we create our own wild

maybe when we have all this power  
the only choice we have  
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do

po'em

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