

Getting *Wired*

A faded, light-colored Starbucks coffee cup is visible in the background, centered behind the text. The cup features the Starbucks Siren logo and the words "STARBUCKS COFFEE".

Janet Kuypers
poetry selections

from the 08/08/09

Starbucks Poetry Show

2023 W. Roscoe St. in Chicago
(between Damen Ave. and Seeley Ave.)

Manic Depressive or Something

while working,
one of my clients informed me
they have to take days
to move their ninety-one year old mother
(for the sixth time in ten years),
and he doesn't know
is he has the strength to do this sort of thing

and I was about to write him back,
saying that I'm sure I'm younger than him
(because we only correspond by letter)
and my mother is seventy-five
and is dying
so

you don't have it so bad
you mother's still living
and

and that's when I decided
not to write them back
I don't like revealing
that much of my personal life, you know

isn't that funny
I write, but I don't want
to reveal that much of my personal life
I know I'm writing now
but I'm not writing to anyone
I'm just getting it out of my system

that happens to me now,
I'll start to think about it
and it will bring me to tears
and then I'll have to clean myself up
and I'll have to readjust
to everyone else having a normal life

and I'll go about my day
and anything can happen
that will remind me again
and I'll fall apart
just a little more again
and I'll clean myself up again
and

well, you get the idea

it's like a cycle now
like I'm manic depressive or something
because when I forget about it
I can laugh and have a great time
and when I'm in those in-between stages
no one notices at the grocery store
that I'm losing my mother
I don't let it on
I don't act happy
I don't act sad
I just live in that in-between time
until I remember again
and drop down again
and I'm depressive again
until the cycle lets me go back up

Knowing Kevorkian

Oh, I knew Kevorkian
he used to be a pathologist
he used to do autopsies
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

was immune

I went to the outdoor courtyard today
the first time in i don't know how many years

i used to sit there, in the mornings
drinking coffee, writing, reading

and he would come up and sit there with me
and draw

it's the first time i've been there
since he turned on me

i knew him
and i knew he had the potential

potential for being a monster
i had heard the stories before

stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars
in merchandise

been in a gang
drove someone's mercedes over a cliff

but I thought I was immune
to his violence

I thought I could change him
I thought he cleaned up his act

I thought I could be safe
alone with him

a thief
an addict
a molester

I knew him, but I thought I was immune
and now

I see all the places
and they make me think of him

and I try to stop these places,
these memories
from making me cry

fireflies

So we went to an empty bar, like we normally do on a weeknight when we know we have to get up for work in the morning but we just don't care anymore, and we drank, and we made fun of the people at the bar, especially the men, like the bartender with the sagging butt that we had to stare at whenever he made a drink, and then we drank some more, and then she talked about the love of her life who just broke up with her. She said she would marry him in a minute if she still had the chance. I still didn't see it, he was a young, prematurely balding farm boy, but I just nodded. Yeah, it was love, and I knew where she came from, and we got depressed, and then we rambled on about how we hated our jobs, how we wanted to be independent, and then we started to laugh at everything, that's what drinking does to you, I guess, and then we drove home.

She parked her car at my house, so when I got us home (I still don't know how I did it) she stood in my driveway, looked up at the sky and said, this looks like a sky to sit on your driveway and drink coffee in tupperware bowls and look up. I told her I didn't want coffee, but I had an old blanket and we could sit in the lawn and watch the sky.

And we looked at the sky and found objects in the clouds (it didn't take long for one of us to find a penis), and then I chased a firefly, and then we sang songs from cartoons. And we couldn't stop laughing.

I told her about how my older brothers and sisters used to take the ends of fireflies and smear them on their shirts so their clothes would glow for a few minutes. Then I promised her I wouldn't smear any insects on her.

And we noticed after a while that the dew was settling on the blanket, and all over us, and besides, it was getting late, she had to take the train downtown early to get to work tomorrow, so I picked up the blanket, threw it to the side of the driveway, and waved good-bye as she drove down the road.

A week later I had a dream that I knew I was going to die. I didn't tell anyone else about it because I didn't want them to worry. In my dream I was making a videocassette message to all my friends. A good-bye message, so to speak. I told Sheri that I hoped her marriage went well, I told Kevin to not worry about business so much, I told Bobby I respected him. And then I got to you. I told you to really look at your life — was it so bad? Your boyfriend broke up with you. Your job isn't your dream job. But Christ, there are unwed 17-year-old mothers on welfare that kill their sick infant children because they can't read the directions on their prescription

bottle. Dream job? You've got a job, and it pays well. Boyfriend? You're talented and attractive, you don't have to be alone. We've got roofs over our heads. We've got food on the table, we've got clothes on our backs, and we have friends. We have reason to celebrate, not to cry.

Well, in my dream I was dying, so I wasn't going to have these things. But I'm not dreaming, I'm not dying, I'm not dead. I have all these things. We have all these things. And we have the fireflies.

service of others

Mary called herself the "handmaid of the Lord"

*Putting herself at God's service
she also put herself
at the service of others*

*Letter to Women, Message of His Holiness
POPE JOHN PAUL II, July 10*

coffee, tea, or milk
what could i get you
would you like fries with that
do you need another beer
here, let me take care of that for you
i did your laundry this morning
i hope your eggs aren't too cold
let me wash your feet

Key To Survival

last lines removed 08/07/09

I

Have you ever seen someone
who has a flock of people around them
and that someone is just naturally talking
but people are attracted to them like moths to a flame
people there are like sun tanning high-school girls
facing this person's bright light,
wanting to soak them all in
and hoping they're more beautiful for it

You see these people,
everyone smiling,
circled around this special someone
it's like an animal magnetism
you can't help but
try to nudge in,
to hear their words
to try to get a little of that narcotic for yourself

it's like being a child again,
with a ton of kids in a candy store
where someone's giving out free candy
and all the kids are so thrilled
and they're grinning from ear to ear

You haven't even gotten close enough
to hear their words,
but you're already starting to smile

II

have you ever seen someone
standing at the corner of an intersection
they look dirty and disheveled
and you try to keep your distance
'cause you're guessing they're homeless
and asking for money

but you have to pass them
they're right on the street in your way
so you try to walk
on the farthest edge of the sidewalk
but you watch them with your peripheral vision
and you see them making animated gestures
and you see their face contorting
like they're having a great debate
with no one
like they're giving the speech of their lifetime
to no one

because, you see, no one wants to listen
everyone knows this is a madman raving
so you just try to ignore them
you make a point to not listen
I mean, there's a Hell of a lot of noise
we tune out of our minds,
cars going by, honking their horns,
the low rumble of other people talking nearby
the shuffle of your footsteps
well, this is another one of those noises.

you don't want to hear them
you had a bad feeling about them
as soon as you saw them
just ignore them
and hopefully they'll go away

saw this woman weeks later
at a Starbucks
and she said she felt bad
but she never wanted to see him again
because during their date
they never talked about what they wanted
he just talked about what he wanted
like how she wouldn't work
because he even told her how many
of his children she would bear

III
I knew of a woman
who went on a date
with a male friend of mine,
and after the date
the guy talked about how great she was,
how they talked about their future
and what they both wanted
he talked about the inside of her place,
but after he left messages for her repeatedly,
she never called him back again

she wouldn't let him into her home
(does that mean he was looking through her window?)
and she said that after the date
she showered for hours
because she felt mentally raped

poor girl
she saw someone who seemed nice
but it took her only a short while
to know what he was really like

IV
sometimes you look at people
and you just know

sometimes it takes you a little while
but people can't hide their souls forever

everyone gets feelings about someone
whether or not they want to admit it

it's not women's intuition
men feel it too
you feel it in your chest
when you see someone good
and you get that feeling in the pit of your stomach
when you see someone bad

sometimes you look at people
and you just know
and you can try to avoid that feeling you get
and you try to shrug it off as nothing
and you try to run away from the feeling for years
but you can't hide from your soul forever
it'll catch up to you
when you least expect it

phone calls from brian tolle

edited 08/07/09

I came home the other day to find three messages on my answering machine, each nearly two minutes long. They were all from my friend Brian, who lives in Indiana and is working on a film. Now, Brian is a friend of mine from high school, in fact, I asked him to go to prom with me as friends, but he turned me down, saying he wanted to save the experience of prom for someone he was dating. But that was eight years ago, I went to prom anyway, without him, but I still think it would have been more fun if he was my date.

Well I got home the other night and had these messages on my machine and they were all from Brian, and I listen to the first one:

and he says “I’m sorry I haven’t called you in so long, and I hope you don’t hate me because I love you, and I’ve moved, and that’s my roommate you hear in the background, I don’t think you met him before but he knows who you are and he hears your voice on my answering machine and he thinks you have a sexy voice”

and then he says “oh, I really hope you don’t hate me because I didn’t mean to not call, there’s just a lot going on, and oh, I have a new email address so write to me, and I love you and I hope you’re not mad and I might be coming up to visit in Chicago. Well, anyway, call me if you don’t hate me, I love you”

and that was one of the messages, and then I listen to the second one:

and he says “hi, it’s me again, I forgot to give you my new phone number, since I just moved, so here it is, and did I tell you I’m making a film? I’m finally doing it, I’ve scraped enough money together so I’m doing that in the beginning of March and did you get my note? You said you didn’t before but I wanted to make sure. Well, call me”

and that was the second message, and then I listen to the last one:

and he says “hi, it’s me again, and I just wanted to get back to you and tell you that yes, I’d love to go to prom with you. I’ll wear a tux and get a tie and cummerbund that matches your dress. Yes, I’ll go to prom with you. Well, I guess that’s about all. I hope you’re not mad at me, because I love you, I really do, don’t hate me, I’ll talk to you soon”

And so I called him back and I told him, no, I don’t hate you, I love you too, and we all have busy lives and I understand why you haven’t called, I haven’t called, either, so don’t worry. Tell me about your film, I ask, and he says that he borrowed some money and saved some money from his last job and is borrowing equipment so he can do the filming.

“I have the production costs taken care of, but I have no idea where the post-production money is coming from.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know, maybe get some credit cards.”

“Maybe there are some companies that could use a tax deduction and would be willing to help finance your film.”

So we talk a bit more and I tell him that I wish I could help him out more, and he says that I have because I validate him and what he does in everything I say and that although he had no money he felt like finally he had control over his life. And that now he knows that no matter what he chooses to do with his life, and no matter what happens to him, that he has control over his life and he can handle anything. And I told him I was so glad he felt that way, because I think most people never get to feel that way once in their life. I was proud of him.

And then he asks if he could use a song of mine in his film, and I told him I would be honored, and he said, no, he’d be honored.

I guess it’s just nice to know that I will be a part of such an important film.

Listening to the Cancer Ads

every time I listen to the radio
and hear an ad for cancer research
(granted, it's usually for tumors)
well, now I listen actively

now, I know she had cancer before
breast cancer, cervical cancer
and after the surgery and after the chemo
she got a clean bill of health
and now she's got leukemia
cancer in the blood, not in a tumor
so there's no one spot to attack

but every time I hear a cancer ad
my ears perk up, like a Pavlovian dog
it's like someone's just rang a bell
and it makes me listen attentively

I know it doesn't make a difference
I think she was at one of the best hospitals
but I hear about these research places
and wonder if there are slivers of hope

but as I said, I know it's irrelevant
she's already gone through two types of chemo
and I know she's decided to stop the treatment
so I know there's no point in new therapy

but I still can't help it
I still am forced to respond to these ads
like some sort of stupid Pavlovian dog
I hear these ads that are supposed to mean

nothing to me

still, I listen

Gasoline

The stench of gasoline
makes me ill
as the song
pounces through my brain
**“I want you to want me
the way that I want you”:**
and I’m tired of fighting
I don’t think I can fight anymore
but I have to
I can’t let you do this
these are my rights
and you can’t hurt me like this
“Then maybe I’ll just force you”
you say
I push you away
I try to stop you
and all I keep hearing
is that damn song
I can’t escape it
**“I know that you need me
just tell me you want me
I want you”**
I’m too angry to cry
and too frightened to scream
I shove
I move
but nothing stops you
**“You are my sensation
a perfect temptation”**
I wish that song would stop
I wish everything would stop
your touch scares me
and your stare haunts me
so I scratch
and scream
until the novelty is lost for you
no
I will not tell you I want you
for I can’t let you do this
these are my rights
and you just can’t do this to me

How You Know When You're the Wrong Height

went to the unisex washroom
after drinking decaf coffee with vanilla
at a Chicago coffee shop on Chicago avenue

used the washroom,
went to wash my hands

there were two six-inch square mirrors
tacked to the wall over the sink

I looked at my reflection
in the two mirrors
the lower mirror showed a vision
from my breasts to my waist
the upper mirror showed the view
of the top half of my forehead
to the expanse of space above my head

after washing my hands
I stood on my toes
saw my eyes, caught a glimpse of my mouth
smiled

at where I found myself in the world
then started to laugh
before drying my hands
and leaving the unisex bathroom

bonus, read after the feature:

chicago, west side

she knew who they were coming for

she crouched in front of the window
straddling her chair she moved from the corner
her coffee sat in the window sill
the condensation rising, beading

on the window right about at her eye level.
she took the side of her index finger
periodically and smeared some of the
water away to look into the streets.

the snow was no longer falling on the
west side of Chicago; it just packed
itself darker and deeper into the ground
with every car that drove over it.

she gunshot was ringing in her ear
still. it was so loud. the earth cried
when she pulled that trigger. let out
a loud, violent scream. she could still

hear it. for these few moments, she had to
just stare out the window and wait. she
didn't know if she should bother running,
if it mattered or not. she couldn't think.

all she knew was that this time, when
she heard the sirens coming from the
streets, she'd know why they were coming.
she'd know who they were coming for.

bonus, read from memory after the feature:

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

bonus:

"Type A" Person

I was in my friend's car once, and she was driving through the streets of Chicago, and she was letting people in who were getting in the right lane at an intersection when that right lane really should only be used for turning right but they go straight and try to cut off the long line of traffic waiting at the light. Well, as I said, she's letting these people get in front of her, and she's stopping at four-way stop intersections and waving other cars to go in front of her, and when she is going she's going under the speed limit, and I'm thinking, my god, she's under thirty years old and she's driving like she's twice her age and I want to tell her to get going because damnit, I don't want to die in this car, I've got a lot of living to do, I've never jumped out of an airplane or made a million dollars or been in a lustful affair with a high-ranking political candidate, and if I am going to go out I surely don't want to die of boredom while someone else is staying in the most congested lane of traffic when they could just as easily get into the next lane and cut everyone off in front of them when they eventually have to merge, like I would most certainly do.

And then it occurred to me, and of course it filled me with a complete and utter sense of elation, because I just love being pigeon-holed into stereotypical psychological categories: I really am a Type A person.

There's an intersection near my house where from one direction you can either go straight or turn right, and there are two streets that merge into this one, both turning right, so the middle street has a "no turn on red" sign. And usually when I'm on this road I'm on the street that's going straight, the left-most street, and these two streets are on my right, merging into my street. And I always catch the red light on this street, it's like the traffic gods are displeased with my constant efforts to circumvent their wrath, so I'm always catching the red light at this street, so I've learned a new trick: I turn right, onto the first street on my right, but instead of doing a U-turn I turn left at the next block so I can get on that second street, all so I can turn right onto the street I was on originally before both of the other streets get to go so I can beat every one of those slow bastards to the next intersection.

I mean, yes, I'm the one that's yelling and banging the steering wheel of my car when people on the road are idiots. Yes, I'm that person who has to race so that I can slam on my brakes at that next intersection, only 100 feet

away, and yes, I am only driving a Saturn SL1, a sedan with about as much power as a 1982 Ford Mustang, but damnit, I won't go down without a fight, I will be out there cutting everyone off, weaving in and out of traffic; I will be the one getting there before you, trust me, I will.

And even when I'm tuning the radio while driving, because, you see, I do that and put on my make-up and take notes for work and check over my schedule and if I was the Hindu god BISHNU and had ten arms I'd get a cell phone and send out faxes and eat dinner and write a novel while I was at it, but, as I said, even when I'm tuning the radio while I'm driving I only let the first second-and-a-half of the song play before I'm disgusted and change the dial to the next pre-programmed station, just to instantaneously become disgusted another six times and have to find a tape to play because all those stupid corporate pieces of shit think they should play crap over and over again in order to keep the mindless tuned in.

Well, not me, thank you very much, I don't have the patience for that.

So, needless to say, I've discovered that this is a problem of mine, I wish there was some sort of therapy group for this so I could go to my weekly "Type A Anonymous" meetings, but we'd probably all be pushing each other out of the doorway thirty seconds before the meeting is supposed to start, saying, "Get out of my way ass-hole, you should have thought about being late before you tried to cut me off," and the meetings themselves would probably be filled with people yelling, "Hey, jerk, I think I was talking, what, do you think you're god or something, show some respect."

God, and I know this is a problem of mine, I know this "Type A-ness" transcends into every realm of my life. When I get on the elevator in the morning to get to my office on the eighteenth floor, I try to make the doors close as quickly as possible so no one can get on the elevator with me, because you know, I really do hate all people and surely don't want to be in a cramped confined space with a bunch of strangers. But when people do get on the same elevator as me, they invariably press the buttons for floors fifteen, sixteen and seventeen, and I start pursing my lips, stopping myself from saying, "Oh, you people couldn't stand to walk a flight of stairs, you just had to press all of these buttons and stop me from getting to my god-damned floor in a reasonable amount of time."

Even walking on the sidewalk in the city, I always get stuck behind someone that's a full foot shorter than me and a full thirty pounds heavier, someone who labors to walk very, very slowly, someone who actually sways rhythmically when they walk, like a metronome, or like a person standing on the edge of a dance floor, rocking back and forth, back and forth all too afraid to actually ask someone to dance, or else afraid to go out and dance and make a fool of themselves in front of the cool people who have figured out what rhythm really is. And I'm walking behind this person, almost tripping over myself because this walking pace is just unnaturally slow, so to pass the time until there's an opening on the left side of the sidewalk so I can pass them and walk like a human being again I start to mimick them, swaying with my walk, more for my own entertainment than anyone else's.

Yes, more than a human being I'm a human doing, and I hate having to depend on the schedules of others in order to get ahead of them all.

Yes, I am the person in line at the grocery store with three items, shifting my weight from foot to foot, frantically scanning the other lines, the person who wants to ask the person in front of them, "can't I get in front of you, I've only got three items and you have two full crocery carts full of crap like Cheetos, Pepsi, fish sticks and Haagen Daz Cookie Dough ice cream." Yes, I am the person who has four different sets of plans for any given evening because if any one event gets too boring I can pick up and say, "Oh, sorry, I'm supposed to be at a meeting by now," instead of having to tell them that they're too boring or that I just have no idea whatsoever of how to relax. Yes, I am the person who coasts toward an intersection when I know the timed pattern of the traffic lights, and know that I can manage to get to this intersection without ever having to make a complete stop so when that light does change I can accellerate faster than everyone else, pass everyone by, and have the open road to myself, wide open in front of me.

I'm already guessing that at my funeral, when the long procession of cars is creeping toward the cemetary, I'll be opening that casket up and whispering to the driver of the hearse, "hey, what do you say we floor it and blow everyone off in line? We could probably grab a beer at the corner bar and still be able to beat everyone to the grave site," because, as I said, I'm a "Type A" person, and I'm going to make damn sure I do as much living as I possibly can, I'm not going down without a fight, and wherever that god-damned goal line is, I swear, I'll beat everyone to it.

bonus:

Chain Smoking

He had been acting strangely for oh, the last six months or so, but I never thought much of it. He was the type of friend who was always doing everything -- he held two jobs, was a full time student double majoring in pre-med and Russian, he was in a fraternity house and was also involved with Air Force R.O.T.C. And he still managed to find time to go out on the weekends and flirt with every girl he met. He even hit on me three and a half years ago, while we were still mere acquaintances and not the closest of friends.

But he had been acting strangely, not calling me as much, not visiting or going out. After about a month or two of this he came over one night at about midnight and started complaining to me about the stress in his life. Then he started to chain smoke, the man who never smoked before, the man who was studying to go to med school, the man who wanted to be in tip-top shape for the Air Force. It made no sense. It was two o'clock in the morning, and he was still complaining to me, he was still wide awake, and he still looked like he needed something to hit.

I had told him before that he did too much with his life and that one day it would all catch up with him. I figured that's what was happening now.

Every time I saw him after that he was the same way -- irritable, chain smoking, telling me about how he's not sleeping a lot and how he's failing his classes. His girlfriend was studying in Russia for the semester. He flirted some without her around, but he didn't cheat on her. But he didn't miss her.

Recently a group of black guys beat him up on the street one night. They picked him out of a crowd and punched him in the face, the doctors figured the assailant had something in his hand, brass knuckles, a roll of quarters, for he made a clean break in his jaw. He had his mouth wired shut for six weeks. I thought maybe this was part of the reason he was on edge, sucking food through a straw for over a month has to be a pain in the ass. But his behavior changed before the accident. And he still chain smoked through the wires in his mouth.

I figured that it must be because of his family that he was the way he was. His father was a high ranking official in the Air Force, they travelled around constantly, his father was always succeeding, always being the stern perfectionist. He wasn't like that. He wasn't stern. He was sweet, and fun.

And now look, He's probably giving himself ulcers, if not lung cancer.

So I finally got back into town and I decided that I had to get this all figured out. The latest I heard was that he was getting back to religion and thinking of talking to his pastor for advice on some of his problems. It sounded like a cop-out to me, I mean, religion wouldn't give him the answers he needed but the answers they wanted him to have, so I was thinking that if he really needed help he should go talk to a counselor. He gets counseling services free through the student clinic. Oh, shit, I don't even really know what's wrong with him, I've got to try to talk to him, I hope he opens up to me, we've been friends for too long.

So I asked him to stop by and he came over to my place and he knew very well that I wanted the truth out of him. What was the stress from? Why did he just break up with his girlfriend less than a week after they were looking at engagement rings, why is he chain smoking, is the Air Force doing this to him, does he really need the money from his two jobs?

So he comes in, sits down on the couch next to me, and tells me that he's been coming to terms with the fact that he thinks he's gay. Or at least bi, he's not sure, everything's so confusing. What would the fraternity house say? What would the Air Force say, other than good-bye, and most importantly, what would his parents say? What would the world say?

Okay, so I was shocked, but this wasn't the time to show it. I gave him a hug, let him talk for a while, told him I was there for him. I suggested thinking about counseling. Then we went to a sub shop and had lunch, tried to get our minds off these things.

And we're at the counter of this sub shop and we're making cracks about a six inch versus a twelve inch sub. He told me I was ordering the six inch because I never had him. Fuck, he's doing it again, being his same old self, flirting with women that are friends, and I can take it in good fun and all, but this just seems a little too strange. So then I start thinking, okay, does he make these kinds of cracks to other men? Is he attracted to everything that walks down the god damn street?

So then we're eating our subs and we're sharing the same drink and I start thinking, should I be doing this? Is this safe?, and I still take another drink and try not to think about it. And then he says, "My problem is that I'm horny all the time." Then he tells me about his boyfriend Brandon and from then on nothing seemed real anymore. I had to ask if the gold necklace he was wearing was Brandon's, it's not his style to wear necklaces. It was. He was even borrowing the guy's car.

So I tell him to call me, and I tell him I'll help him look for a counselor if it will help him deal with the issue, and I tell him he can talk to me anytime. And I get out of Brandon's car and walk back to my place.

And then I just start thinking. This is the man who hit on me at a rock concert we went to three years ago by running his tongue up and down my face. This was the man that I visited on the east coast, we had a romantic dinner in a private room in the Air Force dining hall. We toured Salem, Massachusetts and took pictures posing in the witch racks they have on the sidewalks for tourists. We shopped in Maine and bought glassware and Christmas ornaments together. We went to fraternity dances, I was his date, hey, we even went to a military ball together. This is the man who would sit with me in my window sill, feet hanging out the second story, drinking fuzzy navel with me and singing rap songs. This is the man who was my roommate for a few months, we'd go to the local fitness center together and exercise, he'd be on the bicycles, I'd be on the rowing machine.

This was the man who sat with me one night in my apartment, like we were two kids in high school, and we wrote lists of all the people we made out with. His list of women was relatively short, but I didn't think much of it. He told me at the sub shop that his list of men was longer than mine.

This was the man I went to happy hours with every Friday afternoon. He carried me home once because I didn't eat that day and the beer went straight to my head. He called me spaghetti legs from then on because I lost all muscle control in the lower half of my body and couldn't walk. He carried me home and put me to bed.

Another day at another happy hour when we were both depressed because we thought we'd never find someone to marry he told me that if we were both single when we were forty, we'd get married. It was our little joke from then on to say that we were engaged.

I had a dream a couple of weeks before he told me this that he told me he had AIDS from a blood transfusion. The news tore me apart, my close friend, this couldn't be happening to you, I just can't believe it, it must be a mistake, anyone but you. I told him I'd be there for him, I wasn't afraid to hug him, I wasn't afraid to kiss him. And in the dream I wanted to marry him then and there, just so he didn't die alone.



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