

(the Poetry Wheel)

Mach 2

08/26/08 Janet Kuypers poetry  
read live at the Cafe in Chicago  
cctd magazine supplement issue

I S S N # 1 0 6 8 - 5 1 5 4

## Holding My Skin Together

i've been trying to remember  
all the little details  
that i'm supposed to take care of  
and i know i'm not even getting  
half of them done  
and i wonder if you feel what i feel  
is it just me  
is the stuffing falling out  
of my insides  
through the stretched seams  
holding my skin together  
because i keep finding  
bits of stuffing fallen out  
and i try to put it back in  
but damnit, i don't see the holes  
and i just have to work faster  
so that maybe  
i'll have a better chance  
of not losing my insides

is it just me?  
probably  
but i'll keep frantically trying  
to hold myself together  
so i can be a bit more normal,  
no, wait,  
so i can be a bit more like myself

## **Any Help At All**

I don't know when the bad stuff  
is supposed to end and when  
the good stuff is supposed to begin

maybe I've been failing in my efforts  
to find some good stuff, I don't know

I've been hoping for that happiness, though  
and I don't know where to look any more

I'm tired of doing things myself  
and I'm tired of looking for my own answers  
for all the troubles I experience  
I'm tired of looking  
I want someone to help me out on this one

I don't know where I'm going to  
find that help, though

maybe people kept seeing me  
with my head on my shoulders  
and they got tired of looking  
in my direction  
to see if I needed anything

but I always want  
what others don't expect me to want

**Conversations**  
**a day of grieving,**  
**1/22/94 three**

my father spoke polish  
and so did we  
until one day  
he decided

“we’re in america now,  
they should speak english”

so when he wanted  
to tell us something  
he would speak in polish  
and my mother  
would translate

i’m thirty now,  
and my father is sick  
and dying

and he can’t understand me

he’s here before my eyes  
and i can’t tell him  
all the things  
i wanted to

like i love you

looking back  
it seems obvious

we never talked  
like a family

we never asked  
each other  
how was our day

so now when i see him  
all i can do  
is hold his hand  
and show him  
the emotions  
on my face

i think he still understands

## transcribing dreams I

I was at a beach, I don't know why the dream was there, but it was, the dream I mean. And you were there, and your family too, and at one point your little sister, the one that isn't so little anymore, pulled me to the side and told me she was pregnant. She loved her boyfriend, she couldn't have an abortion, she didn't want to tell her parents. And she told me, and I didn't know what to do. Later in the dream, still at the beach, she told you, and your parents, and you were screaming that you were going to kill her boyfriend, and your mother was babbling what would the neighbors think and your father was speechless. And I know that all of you were hurting her more, that what she needed most was supportive words, someone to hold her. Didn't you think she was scared enough, I wanted to ask. But I didn't, I watched all of you do this to her, the poor little girl. How scared she must have been

## the flashback

Everyone at work wondered why she looked so down that day, and occasionally someone would ask her. “What’s the matter?” And she’d say it was just a bad day.

And she went through the motions, she did her work, she ate her lunch, even though the lettuce tasted bad, and then she had to run an errand for the boss.

And she was in her car, it was snowing, but not the pretty kind of snow, not the kind you expect to see on Christmas day. It was like the snow was already dirty and gray before it hit the ground.

And she was driving, and she didn’t even realize she was going under the speed limit. She was in a daze, lost, not because of depression, but because there was nothing she cared to think about. And so she drove.

And she dropped off the crate of flyers and the mailing list for the boss, and she drove back, but the whole way she was thinking that she should drive slower, so she wouldn’t be back at work so fast. And so she drove slowly, coasting now, watching the dirty snow touch her windshield.

And she looked over to her left, and there was an old man, lowering his car from the jack it was on. A flat tire. And then she had a flashback.

And it was no longer winter, and  
she was no longer driving -  
she was outside, while he was trying  
to fix the flat on his rusty white car.  
They were driving back from a park, it  
was summer in Monticello, it must have been  
ninety degrees, and there  
she was, sitting on a dirty beige carpet  
scrap from the floor of the car. She had  
taken the scrap and moved off the dirt  
road, about ten feet into  
the field. And she just sat there,  
watching him, shirtless, fixing the car  
so they could drive home. And she  
wanted to remember it, just like that.

Then the light turned green,  
she followed the procession of cars  
through the graying snowflakes. And  
she began to forget it was a bad day, and  
she didn't mind her daze.

## By Who I Don't Know

they told me that I needed to know  
what to do if there was a problem  
I didn't know they'd make a problem  
out of trying to tell me

now who do I get my nightmares from?  
are your problems from the people  
in the nightmares  
that should  
have given me that pain  
or do my nightmares come from you

are you the one that gave  
me that pain  
without trying

maybe you were trying  
maybe you weren't  
I can't think of it that way  
even after all these years

I just have to think  
that mistakes were made

by who,  
I don't know



## **Did you know I was watching?**

Did you know I was watching?

you know, i watch you  
when i'm sitting in the corner  
and you're in your circle.  
you know the circle, the ring  
around you

that's what I've been  
trying to avoid

and I've done a pretty good  
job of it, haven't I

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