

# St. Paul's 11/05/08

Janet Kuypers poems read  
at St. Paul's Cultural Center  
Chicago, 11/05/08

cc&d 11/05/08 chapbook  
scars publications

domestic violence in america  
nashville, tennessee

according to accounts, her husband  
allegedly locked her  
and their four-year-old son  
in their house for about forty hours.

They were essentially hostages.  
The husband then allegedly beat the woman  
while the son watched.

This is the stick  
he allegedly used to keep her in line,  
it looks like a metal broom or mop handle,

it's hollow, and you see, here is a bend  
in it from the alleged hitting.

The bend looks like a twist  
of a garden hose.

And this bloody knit glove,  
it was tied on here,  
at the end of the stick,  
so that when he allegedly hit her

it didn't scar her.  
Isn't that funny?  
You can tell that  
the son was there for it all, too,

he doesn't talk much at all,  
and he never leaves his mother's side.  
She limps down the hallway now,  
and he follows.

domestic violence in america  
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i have had my cheek bone  
and nose reconstructed twice

we're divorced now  
but he still keeps calling me

he keeps denying it in court

# farmer

And just north of his corn field  
there is a college, the university  
has bought up the property

right to the edge of his land. And  
at that university there is a man  
studying plant biology, he wants to

do research in food genetics, create  
the perfect ear of corn. And the farmer  
knows this.

All he wanted  
was to be able to make a  
living, maybe save up enough  
so his kid could walk over to campus

every morning, maybe meet some new  
kids. The government assistance has  
run out, the state wants to push the

school south an extra mile, put up  
a research lab, another dormitory. The  
drought has done nothing good for his

field anyway. And the doctors say the  
lump under his shoulder is from the sun.  
All of these years

he would wake up early Sundays  
to work, and he would find tire tracks  
from souped up cars digging in his

property edge. Kids leaving beer cans,  
junk food wrappers, condoms. And he  
would pick up what he could.

In the upcoming years, would his  
little boy do this to someone else?  
And this was his labor:

he had sewn the seeds; the plants  
running, hurdling the rolling hills,  
sprinters uniform in a marathon.

And all the way to the street at the  
edge of his property, the green sign  
reading “1800 S”, all the way to the

end is his life, his little earth,  
in straight rows, like the peas  
on his son’s plate when he used to play

with his food. And now the rows of  
corn are less straight, as if in recent  
years he didn’t care. This year it’s the

worst yet, he didn’t bother with the  
right chemicals, and there are weeds  
in between the rows. The grass next to

his house is almost up to his waist.  
And he’s awake now, it’s four  
in the morning, and he’s wandering out

in it all, and he’s almost crazy. The grass  
waves, almost staggers, like him. And he  
thinks:

let the weeds grow.

# 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.

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.

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 Deep End

love seems so appealing  
love is the bottom of the deep end  
love is what makes the kiddies  
    walk to the edge of the diving board  
    take a deep breath  
    hold their little noses  
    and close their eyes  
    and brace themselves

and jump in

but none of them stay under too long  
because they know  
even at an early age  
when enough is enough

## 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 the baby  
was never 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.

## decorating the lockers

Days when we sat in the gold gym,  
Friday afternoons, hot Indian summer  
days. Days with a pep assembly,  
there would be a contest, which  
grade could cheer the loudest?  
Those were the days when the  
cheerleaders lead us on in school  
spirit, and we wished the football team  
luck in the evening's game. The  
cheerleaders even decorated the  
lockers for each football player the  
night before a game. Streamers. Signs.

I think of this now, one of those  
players went professional, moved  
across the country, made it big.  
Had a friend from high school visit.  
And they drove out on a road together;  
could they still hear the cheering,  
the screaming, faster and faster,  
down the road,  
they're winning the big game,  
faster and faster, then black.

The football player, the hero  
walked away  
from the twisted mangled wreck,  
to find his friend  
could no longer hear the cheering.  
No one assembles for him now,  
for the loss of his friend.

There was no cheering,  
just the low, dull moan  
in his head as he  
ended his own suffering,  
his own guilt.

And we assembled again once more  
for him, this time not on a sunny  
Friday afternoon, not anticipating  
something. The anticipation is gone.  
All we can cling to are the lockers  
covered in streamers, the cheering  
from long ago.

## chances two: here I am

you asked me if you have  
only so many loves in your life  
and the answer is yes

and it's not because of fate  
or religion, or chance  
but the chances are just so thin  
that you can find someone  
that you can love, revere, respect

someone that always keeps on moving  
and someone that makes you feel alive  
just by listening to the things they  
say, to the way they think

that only happens so often, you know  
so I guess you do only get so many  
loves, so if you need one, here I

am

## loved you the most

I heard last week that you died.  
I called your office to ask you a question  
and the receptionist had to tell me.

Of course I didn't hear it from your family.  
How would they know to call me?  
They, who don't even know my last name  
and think I was a heathen and no good for you.  
They, tied to you by blood, never knew  
I wished for that tie to you too.  
They never knew I put you on a pedestal.  
They never knew I made you my god.

I went to your funeral today. I wore a veil  
over the brim of my hat and stayed in the back  
while they lowered your casket into the ground.  
When everyone was at your gravesite  
the minister talked about the ones you left behind:  
your parents, your brother, your sister.  
What he didn't know was that you left  
me behind too. What do I do with nothing to love.

I knew I could never have you in my life.  
But I needed to know you were alive, so I could go on living.  
And the minister spoke of how your family would miss you.  
And I thought, what about me.  
The one that loved you the most.

## sorry flowers

i bet you think a box of candy is  
all you need to make everything better  
and you'd still say i need to lose  
some weight, sure, feed me candy, okay.

i love "apology candy" as much as i  
love "sorry flowers" and people at the  
office keep saying i must be a great  
girlfriend because i get flowers at the

office but then i tell them that they  
are "sorry flowers" and that the  
worst kind of flowers are "sorry  
flowers" because you'd rather have no

flowers if it meant that you two were happy  
all the time. and when you say that, no one  
understands what you're talking about.  
and neither do you. so good-bye.

# The Messenger

It's strange,  
I've never been close to dad

and he called me  
from across the country  
minutes after mom died

since I work at home,  
he told me I was the only child  
he was calling  
so it's my job  
to tell the brothers and sisters

they're off to work now  
scramble to leave them messages somewhere  
call cell phones, act calm  
break the news to everyone

it's my job to be the calm one  
that's what I have to do

I have a flight to see mom and dad tomorrow  
I guess I'll only be seeing dad now

left messages for my sisters,  
the teachers at their schools

got through to one brother  
broke the news to him  
while he was standing  
in eight inches of water  
doing concrete work at his job



left a message with my oldest brother  
her first born child, a junior  
he called back shortly afterward  
I told him the news  
he started to break up immediately  
then told me  
“I have to hang up the phone now”

oldest sister called back  
I told her the news  
she just couldn't believe it  
mom was doing so well the day before  
this doesn't make sense

then she realized  
what I had to be going through  
that I had to be the messenger  
that I had to be rational  
and tell everyone  
that their mother just died

she's my mother, too

asked me if there was anything  
I needed  
I couldn't think of any words

I'm the messenger  
and I couldn't think of any words

children, churches and daddies *chapbook*

St. Paul's  
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**scarsuonpeagjand**

published in conjunction with

**children  
churches  
& daddies**

*the unreligious, nonfamily-oriented literary and art magazine*

ccandd96@scars.tv

ISSN 1068-5154

INTERNET ISSN #1555-1555

ccandd96@scars.tv

<http://scars.tv>

*Freedom & Strength* Press



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