

A photograph of a stone wall with a spherical metal ornament and a stone ledge. The wall is made of reddish-brown stone blocks. A large, polished metal sphere is positioned on the left side of the wall. A wide, flat stone ledge extends from the wall towards the right, with a deep shadow cast by its edge. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Janet
& Jean
together

poetry & Finnish
Translations

based on the
Finnish/English
(USA/Vlaanderen)
chapbook first released
by Jean Hellemans in 1997

cc&d, scars publications

table of contents

Janet Kuypers poetry Jean Hellemans chose to include in the 1997 chapbook: with you	3	Why I'll Never Get Married	20
		waarom ik nooit zal trouwen	21
		Writing Your Name	22
		jou naam schrijvend	23
Janet Kuypers poetry. followed by Jean Hellemans Finnish translations:		Janet Kuypers poetry Jean Hellemans chose to include in the 1997 chapbook: Accounts for the Need of Gun Control January, 1995	24
All Men Have Secrets	4	Acknowledge	25
iedereen heeft geheimen	5	And I'm Wondering	26
Children, Churches and Daddies	6	And what I want to know	28
kinderen, kerken en vaders	7	All The Loose Ends	30
I Wanted Pain	8	Apathy	31
Ik verlangde naar pijn	9	At Least I Have This	32
Tall Man.....	10	Christmas Eve	33
grote man	11	Death	34
The Burning.....	12	Find Myself	35
het verbranden	13	High Roller	36
the Carpet Factory, the Shoes	14	I Just Waited	37
het tapijten fabriek, de schoenen ..	15	I Listen	38
the Martyr and the Saint	16	Love Poem	39
de martelaar en de heilige.....	17	Moonlight	40
		Motorcycle	41
		Robert	42
		They Called It Trust	43
		You Are	44
		You're With Me	45
There I Sit	18		
hier zit ik	19		

with you

It's Friday again

the birds are singing this morning
the sun is out
it's warmer than usual

maybe it's always like this
maybe it's today

it always seems darker
when you're further away

All Men Have Secrets

all men have secrets and here is mine.
Strength is my weakness
and now my shoulders don't stay in place.
You ask me to open my eyes
but they are. At least I think they are.
Why don't you take me in your arms?
Why don't you seduce me?
Tear me in half. Rip me apart.
Just don't cast me aside.
I don't want to be strong. Be strong
for me, so that I can adjust my chin
and not have to worry about
whether or not my eyes are open.

iedereen heeft geheimen

iedereen heeft geheimen en dit is het mijne.
Kracht is mijn zwakke plek
en nu blijven mijn schouders niet op hun plaats.
Je vroeg me mijn ogen te openen
maar ze zijn open, dat denk ik toch.
Waarom neem je me niet in jou armen ?
Waarom verleid je me niet ?
Trek me uiteen. Scheur me in stukken.
Hou geen rekening met mijn kuisheid
Ik wil niet sterk zijn . wees sterk voor mij,
zodat ik me kan laten gaan
en nergens zorgen over te maken
of mijn ogen nu open zijn of niet.

(all men have secrets)
translated by Jean Hellemans

Children, Churches, and Daddies

And the little girl said to me,
“I thought only daddies drank
beer.” And I found myself

trying to make excuses for the can
in my hand. I remember being
in the church, a guest at a

wedding of two people
I didn't know. My date pointed
out two little boys

walking to their seats in
front of us. In little suits and
cowboy boots, this is what

is central Illinois. And my date
said he was sure those boys
would grow up to be gay. And

the worst part was their father
was the coach of the high school
football team. I think I

laughed, but I hesitated.
I remember being in the
church, it was Christmas

Eve, my date's family went up
for communion, and all I could think
was that singing the hymns was

hard enough, I don't know the
words, what am I doing here,
what am I supposed to do? And I

stayed seated, and everyone else
slowly walked to the front of the
church. Little soldiers in a

little line, the little children
in their little dresses walking
behind their mommies and

daddies. And the little girl
said, “I thought only daddies
drank beer.” And I found myself

trying to make excuses.

kinderen, kerken en vaders

(children, churches and daddies)

translated by Jean Hellemans

het kleine meisje zei tegen mij
"Ik dacht dat alleen vaders bier
drinken." En ik vond mezelf

zoekend naar excuses voor het glas
in mijn hand. Ik herinner me in de
kerk te zijn geweest, als gast bij een

huwelijk van twee mensen
Ik wist het niet. Mijn afspraak wees
me twee kleine jongens

wandelend naar hun stoelen
voor ons. In kleine witte pakken en
cowboy laarzen, dit is centraal Illinois.

En mijn begeleider
zei dat hij zeker was dat deze jongens
zouden opgroeien tot homo's.

en het ergste was dat hun vader
de trainer was van de universitaire
voetbalploeg. Ik denk dat ik

lachte, maar ik trad hem bij
Ik herinner me in de kerk ,
het was Kerstmis

de familie van Eve, mijn afspraak stond op
voor de communie, en alles waar ik kon aan denken
was het zingen van de liederen

heel luid, de woorden kende ik niet
ik wist niet wat ik daar deed

wat ik er verwachtte.

En ik bleef zitten, terwijl iedereen
traag naar voor liep
naar het altaar van de kerk

Kleine soldaatjes op een rij
de kleine kinderen in hun mooie kledij
achter hun moeders
en hun vaders.

En het kleine meisje zei, "Ik dacht dat
alleen vaders bier drinken."
Ik zag mezelf naar
verontschuldigen zoeken.

I Wanted Pain

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

Ik verlangde naar pijn

Je schreeuwde naar mij aan de kant te gaan.
Je wou dat ik stopte.
Ik reed te hard, zei je,
daarom stampte ik op de remmen
en zette de motor af.
Ik wou uit de auto springen
en weglopen,
lopen tot ik mezelf verloor.
Ja ik wou vallen.
Ik wou op de grond vallen
Ik wou de kille scherpe grint voelen
die in mijn gezicht sneden
en mijn kin openhaalde.
Ik wou pijn om me weer goed te voelen.
Maar jij zat nog in je auto,
klaar om te racen
mijn geest aan te porren,
tot waanzinnigheid, boven alle grenzen heen.
Ik stond geleund tegen mijn auto,
voelde mijn verzwakte adem
mijn krullen vlogen door de wind tegen mijn gelaat
Ik moest me concentreren op mijn adem
de uitdaging in jou macht te geraken negeren
zolang ik ademen en denken kon.

(i wanted pain)
translated by Jean Hellemans

Tall Man

I can feel your presence across the room
a movement a stir

your long shadow stretches across the walls

an occasional glance
I'll take whatever I can take

a stranger
yet I feel I know you all too well

grote man

Ik voel uw aanwezigheid in de kamer
een opwelling een beweging

jou lange schaduw bekleedde de hele muur

een vluchtige blik
een vreemdeling

ja ik heb het gevoel je allang te kennen

(tall man)

translated by Jean Hellemans

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.

het verbranden

Ik nam de laatste slok vodka
voelde hoe het brandde in mijn keel
het verschroeide mijn tong
en greep naar de fles om mezelf te trakteren
Ik dacht er aan hoe mijn slokdarm schreeuwde
telkens ik de alcohol me liet verkrachten.
Dan keek ik hoe mijn handen -
- beefde - met het glas vergif in mijn hand-
en denken dat het de handen van een ander waren
die je van me moeten wegduwen.
Maar ik deed het niet. Me afvragend
waarom ik met jou door de hel liep, je vergif nam
Ik herinnerde me hoe je een weg brandde
door mij . Je chanteerde mijn ziel, en ik bleef komen
Ik liet je me verzielen , en nu heb je
een groot gat in mij. Ik haat het.
Nu moet ik mezelf en jou redden,
mijn vlucht is tussen de ijsblokjes
die zich nestelden in de palm van mijn hand.
Maar ik moet meer drinken. Het branden
duurt niet zolang als jou leeft

(the burning)
translated by Jean Hellemans

the carpet factory,
the shoes

i heard a story today
about a little boy
one of many who was enslaved
by his country
in child labor

in this case
he was working
for a carpet factory

he managed to escape
he told his story
to the world
he was a hero at ten

put the people from the factory
held a grudge
and today i heard
that the little boy
was shot and killed
on the street
he was twelve

and eugene complains to me
when i buy shoes
that are made in china

now i have to think
did somebody
have to die for these

will somebody have to die
for these

het tapijten fabriek, de schoenen

Vandaag hoorde ik een verhaal
over een kleine jongen
die slavenarbeid moest doen

in zijn land
kinderarbeid
in dit geval
was hij aan het werken
in een tapijten fabriek

hij lukte er in te ontsnappen
hij vertelde zijn verhaal
tot de wereld
op zijn tiende was hij een held

maar de leiders van de fabriek
hielden een klopjacht
en vandaag hoorde ik
dat de kleine jongen
dodelijk was getroffen door een gewerschot
op de straat
hij was amper twaalf

en Eugene maakt er een punt van
wanneer ik voor hem schoenen koop
dat ze in China zijn gemaakt

nu vraag ik me af
is daar iemand
moeten voor sterven
moet voor die schoenen iemand sterven

(the carpet factory, the shoes)
translated by Jean Hellemans

the martyr and the saint

they gave their daughter the name
of the Patron Saint of television

and the television's always been
one thing she hated about him

or was it the drinking that he needed
more than her

the business has gone bad
I'm a failure I'm not a man

he said he respected her
then he'd call her

a twenty dollar whore from Vegas

and the mother would hold
the child, the saint, the pure angel

hold her ears and hope she
couldn't hear

de martelaar en de heilige

Ze gaven hun dochter de naam
van de patroon van de televisie

en de televisie was iets
dat ze altijd haatte bij hem

of was het dat drinken dat hij nodig had
meer dan hij haar nodig had

de zaken gingen slecht
ik ben een mislukkeling ik ben geen man

hij zei haar te respecteren
dan belde hij haar

voor twintig dollar gewonnen in Vegas

en de moeder wou het kind, de heilige, de echte engel hield haar oor
in de hoop iets te kunnen opvangen

(the martyr and the saint)
translated by Jean Hellemans

There I Sit

there I sit

I sit alone
separated
isolated
away from my only love
my obsession

I pull out
a fountain pen
I look
at the lines
the contours
of his face

defining
the piercing
eyes
the pointed
nose
the tender
lips

I feverishly
draw
I sketch
I capture
his image

I stare
I gaze
I memorize his every detail
but he never looks back

so I will draw
until my
fountain pen
runs dry

hier zit ik

hier zit ik
ik zit alleen
apart
soleerd
weg van mijn enige liefde
mijn obsessie

ik neem
een vulpen
ik kijk
naar de lijnen
de omtrekken
van zijn gezicht

afbakent
de omvang
de kin
de zachtheid
lippen

ik vergelijk
teken
sketch
ik omlijn
zijn beeltenis

ik staar
ik glunder
ik onthou ieder detail
maar hij keek nooit om

daarom wil ik tekenen
tot mijn
vulpen
droog loopt

(there i sit)
translated by Jean Hellemans

why i'll never get married

at work we've been looking
for a new employee
we've sifted through resumes
we've interviewed a few

and some were good
some were very good
and we took some time to decide
and then we called our #1 choice

and they said they wanted
more money than we offered
so we said our goodbyes
and we called our second choice

and they said they couldn't work
at such a small place
so someone at work said
we should interview some more

and that's when i knew
at the rate we were going
we'd never find anyone
and no one would want us

waarom ik nooit zal trouwen

op het werk zochten we
naar een nieuwe bediende
we hebben er een paar bekeken
we hebben er enkele ge interviewd

en sommige waren goed
sommige zelfs heel goed
en we namen onze tijd om te beslissen
om dan onze eerste keuze te bellen

ze zegde meer geld
te willen dan wij voorstelde
we lieten haar gaan
daarom belde we onze tweede keuze

die zei niet te kunnen werken
in zo'n kleine ruimte
waardoor iemand van het werk zei
dat we er meer moesten interviewen

en dan beseftte ik
dat we op die manier
nooit iemand zouden vinden
en niemand ons zou willen

(why i'll never get married)
translated by Jean Hellemans

Writing Your Name

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

jou naam schrijvend

Ik zat daar
in de schaduw
ik nam
een stokje
Ik schreef
jou naam
in de grond
predikte
de eerste zin
van zijn verlangen
dan ben ik
gedoemd
naar de hel
en het kan me niet schelen
de priester zegt
voor alle zekerheid
voor andere
veeg ik zijn naam uit
vanavond
kom ik
terug
morgen
schrijf ik het
opnieuw

(writing your name)
translated by Jean Hellemans

accounts
for the
need
of gun
control
January,
1995

One day a man decided to kill people.
A shooting spree. So he went into a
gun shop, picked up a pair of assault

rifles, a number of rounds, each of
one hundred bullets. And he bought
these things, he didn't need a

permit or a license. Just walked in
and out. And he went to an office
building to take out his revenge

on the world. My wife was there,
took five bullets in the back. I wonder
if she suffered before she died. We went

on a ski trip together last Christmas.
She looked so beautiful with the
snow in her hair. This man didn't need

a license, and yet I needed a permit to
retrieve my wife's ashes from the
crematorium. He didn't just do this to

her, you know. Or to the other victims.
He's tortured me, and our baby girl. Our
girl is darling. She's blond, like her

mommy. We have to live with
this trauma forever. This should not
be how we have to live.

As my girl's second birthday approached
this year, I asked her what she
wanted. She said she wanted

to see mommy. Guess what
she is going to want for her
third

acknowledge

You're my best friend
my love
you make me feel alive

Thank you
my inspiration

Thanks for going to C Street
so many times with me

Thanks for talking to
strangers on the Quad

Thanks for spilling
your heart out to me

Thanks for being so caring

For buying me a
Dr. Seuss book

for sitting with me
by my Christmas tree

for inviting me to
basketball games

for all the pizzas

for taking walks with me
in the springtime
at three in the morning

I say you can be happy
for someone else's happiness

I feel that way about you

And I'm Wondering

I'm wondering if there's something
chemical that brings people together,
something that brings people to their
knees, somethings that sucks them in

And I'm wondering if you're sensing what I'm
sensing, is it just me, am I making this up
in my head, or when I glance up and catch your
eyes, well, are you actually staring at me

And I'm wondering if it could work out this
time, if we'd have one of those relationships
that no one ever doubts, especially us,
because we know we'll always be in love

And I'm wondering if you'd find
my neurotic pet-peeves charming
like how I hate it when someone touches
my belly because I'm so self conscious

And I'm wondering why you had to tell me
when we happened to be sitting next to each
other that the fact that our legs were almost
touching was making your heart race

And I'm wondering why I felt the need
to take your cigarette and inhale, exhale
while the filter was still warm from
your lips, there just seconds before

And I'm wondering if a year or two from now,
after we've been going out and should have
gotten to the point where we are bored with
each other and sink into a comfortable rut

if you saw me making macaroni and cheese
in the kitchen using margarine and water
because I'm out of milk and I've got my hair
pulled back and strands are falling into my

eyes and I'm wearing an oversized button-down
denim shirt and nothing else, well, what
I'm wondering is if you would see me
like this and still think I was sexy

When I glance up and catch your eyes from
across the room, when I see your eyes dart
away, when I feel this chemical reaction, well,
what I'm wondering is, can you feel it too

And what I want to know

I've been dreaming of you lately.
Usually, in my dreams, I see you
for just a short while,
then you have to leave.
Maybe you tell me you miss me.
Maybe you kiss me.
Last night, when you left me once again
I drove after you
to the airport so I could say
goodbye to you one more time.

In my dreams you're always with me.
In my dreams you're always leaving me.
In my dreams I run after you.
Just to say goodbye again.

And what I want to know is
when are these dreams going to stop.

And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.

I daydream about you in the mornings
while my legs are still tangled in my sheets.
I close my eyes, so I can feel you there,
curled up against me. Why -

why do I have to get out of this bed.

And what I want to know is
if you saw me hit by a car
my lifeless body lying in the street
would you hold me up against you,
would you hold my limp arms
in your coarse hands.
Would you rock me to sleep.
Would you cry.
Would you not want to say goodbye.

And what I want to know is
if you saw the car speeding toward me
would you instantly run to me
because life is no longer life
without the one you love.

I know what I would say.
I know my answers.

And what I want to know is
if I will live like this forever.
And what I want to know is
if I'm going to suffer this alone.

And what I want to know is
are you dreaming of me too.

all the loose ends

she bought her son enough clothes
to keep him tied over for a while,
made sure everything was in its place;

she went over to her parent's house
when she knew they would be out of
town for a few days, and only long

after she died did her parents come
home and find her in the garage. the son
missed a few days of school, and all

his teacher could think was that
his mother bought her son some extra
clothes; tied up all the loose ends.

apathy

The crowds were screaming
One side of the stadium
in orange and blue
The other side in red and white
Thousands upon thousands
standing, cheering, doing the wave,
screaming for their favorite team

Pom pons were waving
So were flags, banners,
Not one person was silent

Except for one
He sat between the roaring crowds
his grey shirt spilled with beer
from the overzealous people
next to him

He didn't care
He just sat there
wondering why these people
enjoyed this so much

at least i have this

how far will we push each other? i wonder
as we sit in the living room, waging this
emotional battle, knowing that in the end
it will still be with you having your sex
with me, leaving me when you're through
with me. that is what i'm here for. that is
my function. but at least i have this, at least
i can make you fight me a little more for
it. i know you'll win in the end, but at least
for these few moments, these few fleeting
moments, i have this control over you.
and then the pain of being with you comes
back, and you win. but let me have this.
just this. i know i'll get no more. please.

Christmas Eve

we made dinner
fettuccini alfredo
with chicken and duck

vegetables
bread

we ate
couldn't finish everything

we were putting on our coats
getting ready to go
to midnight mass

i decided to pack up
our leftovers
give them
to some homeless people
on the main street

we got in the car
and drove
to broadway and berwyn

i got out of the car
walked over to a man there

asked him if he was hungry

i got the bowl of noodles
and the gallon of milk
out of the car
another man walked over to me

i told them to promise
that they would share

i got in the car
we were just driving

and all i could think of
was these two men
in the cold
eating pasta with their fingers

on Christmas Eve

death

when he was a child, a little boy, he
would walk through the living room

over and over again
he would see the book on the shelf

a science book, a volume
from a set: a book about

how the world works

once he looked though the pages
found a drawing about the life

of planet earth, how it was
formed, how eventually the

temperature would rise, all life
on earth would eventually die

and reading that it was
millions of years away didn't help

with the fear, the instant panic:
so he took the book, hid the

one volume from the rest,
so he wouldn't have to see it

when he walked through his
own living room

Find Myself

I had my own ring
but on days I'd forget to wear it.
You had your own vows
but your memory seemed to fail you.
You were foreign to me:
a frightening foreign,
an exciting foreign.
Do I know your name?
Do I care?
Let me just take off my ring,
I thought,
and put it behind
the frame on the dresser
where I cannot see it
tonight.
I was only resigned to the thought:
if I forgot myself with you,
if I was lost with you,
I would only remember again
and soon find myself.

High Roller

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

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

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

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

I Just Waited

As I laid in the grass
as the breeze rolled past my face
you slept like a baby
and I just waited

I don't know what I was waiting for
a change that wouldn't happen
a smile of appreciation
a warm kiss in the cool afternoon breeze
a change that wouldn't happen

I could tell you I love you
but I'd be lying to the both of us.
I could tell you I need you
but you wouldn't listen.
Sometimes I need to sleep
while someone watches over me.

I could just walk away
and let you sleep
yet I can't help but hope
that soon you'll arise from your slumber
and actually notice that I'm still there.
And be happy that I'm still there.

I Listen

It always seems when we're together
you ramble on and on
and I just sit and listen.
You've often asked my why I don't talk as much,
or why I bother to listen to you.
I want to tell you why.

I like to hear your voice.
Your accent turns me on.
And every once in a while
you say something that I like to hear.
I like to watch the look in your eye
when you talk.
I like the emotion that wells up inside you.
There are two tiny little candle flames--
one in each of your eyes.
They flicker they jump
from one subject to the next.
The flame in your eye is hypnotizing.
Your emotion stirs me
and the love you possess
moves me to tears.

Besides,
I don't have to say anything.
I am content with merely
looking at your face and hearing your voice.
I, like you, can tell you how I feel
without saying a word.

Love Poem

You are the air I breathe.
you enwrap me
you consume me
your words
your eyes tear through me
Life is not I, but we.

I want you here tonight.
I won't fight it
I can't hide it
there's nothing
to subside it
I know that this is right.

I can't wait for the time
please just hold me
please just kiss me
please just tell me
that you'll miss me
When I can say you're mine.

Moonlight

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

Motorcycle

you scared me. but i liked it.
i remember sitting behind you
on your motorcycle. i think
my fingers shook as i held your waist.
and i remember looking at my head
on your shoulder in the rear-view mirror.
and i smiled, because it was your shoulder.
as i felt more comfortable with you,
i moved my head closer
to your neck, smelled your cologne,
felt the warmth radiate from your skin.

you scared me. i clenched
your waist every time
i thought you should have used the brakes.
but i still sat behind you. besides,
it was a good excuse
to hold on to you.

Robert

I stand in a room full of strangers
leaning against a wall
a wallflower
but I was content with knowing no one
with knowing you

beer glass in hand
you introduce me to
the vast assortment of drunken fools
you call your friends
and I stand there
merely happy to be by your side

a stranger
intoxicated to the point of being comatose
tells me I'm pretty
but I really don't care
because I have you
you are all I need

as the rest of the party imbibes to no end
and you take yourself
down the road to oblivion
I stay leaning
leaning against the wall
and I watch
you sing a song with your buddies
laugh at the stupidest jokes
eat dog food
and I keep thinking
that this was all I needed to be happy

you seemed to be
all that mattered in the world to me
how was I to know
that I was leaning against the wall
because you gave me no support

They Called It Trust

Do you remember when
it was 1:30 a.m. one rainy night
and you asked me what
I wanted to do?
I told you that I wanted
to take a bottle of champagne,
climb on to the roof of your house
and toast in the pouring rain.

You asked me why I said that.
I shrugged my shoulders flippantly
and said that it was something to do.
But I was testing you.
I was afraid to ask
if you would follow me
when I told you to trust me.

And that is why I trusted you
when you poured the champagne
and kissed my wet skin

you are

you're pretty as a picture
you're as sweet as candy

you are like a brilliant light

you have pearly white teeth
you have chiseled features
you have piercing eyes

you have a heart of gold
and a sandpaper voice

you're postcard pretty

you're as meek as a lamb
you're clean as a bone
you're as faithful as a dog

you have a steel will
you're as strong as a bull

you're drunk as a sailor
you're like an idiot

you're like a broken heart
you're like a zombie

you're with me

I sit in a chair
in a lonely corridor

I'm all alone
but I see you there

You're in my thoughts

I see your face
imagine your touch

I hear your voice
but you're no place

You're in my mind

I'm all alone
but then again, no

for even when
I'm alone

You're with me

Janet & Jean together

Janet Kuypers & Jean Hellemans

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