

# children CHURCHES & daddies

• Published since 1993 •

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Children, Churches and Daddies is published as often as we have enough material, so submit early and submit often. We publish every three weeks to a month. • No racist, sexist or blatantly homophobic material is appreciated; we do accept work of almost any genre of poetry, prose or artwork. • Do not send originals; include a SASE & bio with each submission. • Any work sent to Scars Publications on Macintosh disks, text format, will be given special attention. • There is no limit to how much you may submit at a time; previously published work accepted. • All material submitted is eligible for printing not only in Children, Churches and Daddies issues, but also in any other publishing ventures of Scars Publications. • Send all submissions, praises, questions and comments to:

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Chapbooks published in 1993: hope chest in the attic (chapbook and book), the gallery (computer program), knife, people today, dysfunctional family greeting cards, slate and marrow, dreaming of dandelions and ice cubes, addicted, new world order, gasoline and reason, the written word, the printed gallery, right there by your heart, rendering us, gabriel, magnolia christmas, how you looked then.

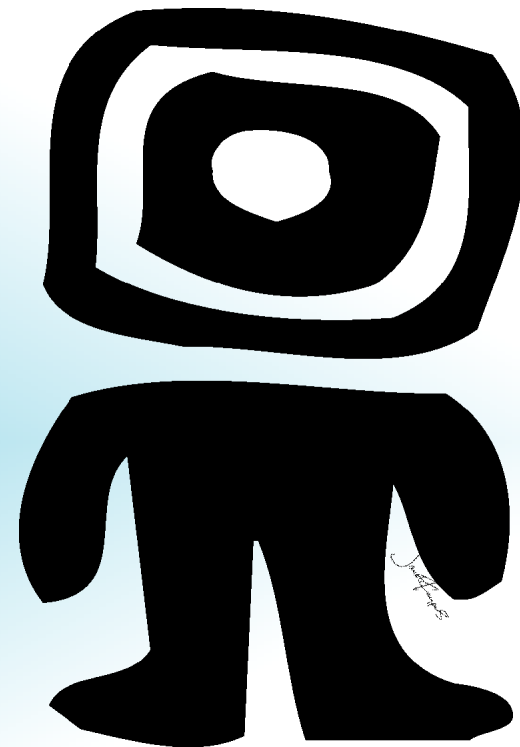
Chapbooks published in 1994: paper backbone, winter prayers, looking through their window, games, order now, a (fe)male behind bars, two year journey, they told me their dreams, the window (book), city, it was a perfect house, pictures from a still life.

Chapbooks/books from the 1995 Children, Churches and Daddies Poetry Chapbook Series: come into my garden, house of slavs, the things i saw alone, texas, new york, in these desperate times, before the storm, love letters, scratching, still had to breathe, wrinkles in the palm of my hand, some things instinctively hurt, proud to be a part of things.

also publishers of: the annual poetry wall calendar, "down in the dirt" poetry magazine  
"the burning" 1993 poetry mini books, "god eyes" 1995 poetry mini books

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volume x: electric

# Standing Tall

The night before the wedding  
was quite an affair. My usually  
conservative father drank drafts  
with us at the Duchess, laughed  
like hell when we stole the pool cue  
at Uncle's Place, drank some more  
at the Trade Winds, helped me up  
when I fell off the bar stool  
at the Tavern, kept the pace  
when we went to the Gag & Heave  
for fries and gravy and on the way back  
to the motel, I could see him  
in the rear view mirror, sitting  
between Hound and Carl, taking long  
slow hits off a bottle of Dewars.  
He was laughing at a lot of things  
I'm sure he didn't understand.  
The next morning I was dog tired.  
He roused me at six am  
for a prenuptial service and stood tall  
beside me when I slipped on  
that narrow gold band.

marc swan

Wormwood Review #127

**children**  
~~CHURCHES~~  
& daddies

# Club Comanche, Virgin Islands Still Life, St. Croix 1953

By the hotel pool, she is sun bathing in her  
one piece black suit. smoking cigarettes. eyes  
shaded by aviator lenses, sipping daiquiris  
one after the other, encouraging her five year  
old son to dive deeper, to have no fear of  
water. The water that stings his eyes and throat.  
that pops inside his ears as he dives down,  
unwatched, hyperventilating, working his way  
from the shallow end to the forbidden deep.  
A poor swimmer, he is afraid of anything he  
cannot stand up in, dives deeper, as instructed,  
at six feet and a half, hits bottom, head  
still pointed down and stays, stunned, at the  
base of the pale blue pool. His stinging eyes  
open, seeing his scream dissolve into bubbles  
that erupt on the surface, dispersed by filtering  
jets of water, sees the white distorted edges  
of the rippling clouds, his hands clutching  
invisible rope ladders that stretch tight  
against his mind, feet pushing against nothing,  
treading a darkness as heavy as the water  
inside his iron lungs.

alan catlin

**children**  
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# WAKE ME TO SLEEP

We are all Claire's coworkers. As people always do when they are put together to earn a living, we exchange our daily good mornings and pleasantries, but all of us secretly admire Claire. She seems to possess a certain strength and dauntless perseverance. There is a smile on her face every morning, even though we know the rumor of her husband's latest affair has just reached her ears, a bit of information casually mentioned by a well-meaning associate. We are not her confidants, just her coworkers. We hear and observe only bits and pieces of Claire's life.

"Yes, sweetheart. Of course, darling. It will be all right honey." These softly spoken affirmatives, she whispers to her children and her husband in hushed tones. Always she is quiet.

"We all go through difficult periods in life." She speaks these words as much to us as she does to soothe her own painful soul.

It seems the word inspirational was invented to describe this woman. Through all her hardships, and there are many, she continues to maintain her calm, soothing smile and gentle accepting manner.

It is this gentle smile that I see now, while I lie here quietly in the warmth of my own bed; and I am thinking of Claire.

The glimpses we get of Clair's life flash through my mind. We, ourselves, are a new experience for Claire. Claire enters our world of office work, and we all love her. She is always there, ready and eager to do whatever is needed to be done at the time. She seems to balance her new career and home life, and do it all so well. We know that things are rough at home; her husband has lost his job and there are bills to pay. We know her home is for sale. Without wanting to know, we know too much. We hold her in reverence. She goes home to cook meals for her family of four, and we go out to pick up take-out.

That slender, frail, powerhouse of emotional stamina never seems to need anyone. Her big brown sorrowful eyes are poignant, all the more so because of their lack of adornment. Claire wears no make-up. Her waif-like appearance is made complete by her long, straight, black hair. She appears so very young until you look into those eyes, deep into those serious eyes.

Claire never asks for a favor. We, therefore, never ask if there is anything we can do to help. She seems to grow thinner and more vulnerable every day, but she continues to keep smiling.

"No one ever promised us life would be easy." She seems to have a daily litany of inspirational phrases. But we know life should not be that difficult. What amazes us is that coping, for Claire, seems so easy.

In a corporate office such as ours, gossip travels fast. Everyone is acquainted with the fact that Claire's husband fools around. We are also aware of her teenage

son, and drugs, and his two suicide attempts. Her son is having a rough time, but Claire is miraculous. She just courageously takes one day at a time.

A dream-like quality always surrounds Claire. There is an aura of serenity about her. She never seems to ruffle, ever, until today.

Claire needs a ride home. It is a cold, raw and wet, bone chilling day. We all jump at the chance to be of some assistance; it is the first time we can ever recall her asking for a favor. I volunteer.

The beating of the rain against the windshield and the swooshing of the wipers are the only noise in the car for the entire ride. Claire is, as usual, very quiet. As we pull up to her home, Claire bolts out of the car. Illuminated by my headlights, lying on the road, is her beloved cat, apparently struck by a car on this awful night. I watch silently as Claire picks up the little injured creature and cuddles him against her breast, trying to warm him and protect him from the cold and rain. I believe he is dead. She begins to walk along the road still cuddling her cat. I get out of the car to follow her, but her walk quickens and she begins to run. She is running, running to somehow quiet the pent up rage building within her. She is biting her lip and trying desperately not to cry. I have never seen her cry. She has to compose herself, gain control, smile. As I try to catch up to her, Claire stops and turns to speak to me. The rage building in her heart is about to reach her lips when the headlights of an oncoming car flood our vision. Her face is a mask of terror. Her lips are quivering. Her eyes are glazed and her skin is pale, yet she is flushed with anger. But the car passes, and it is cold and dark again. Claire begins to walk silently back to her home cuddling and stroking her dead pet.

"It will be all right, darling. It will be all right." This is all she continues to say. She is not speaking to me, nor does she even realize I am still there.

I pull my hood up over my head, trying to shut out the wind and the rain, trying to make the night not as cold and dark and empty as it suddenly appears, trying not to look at Claire. She has refused my hug. She is smiling that quiet, gentle smile again. I am no longer inspired. I am only chilled, chilled to the very depth of my soul.

It is funny now, lying here in the warmth of my own bed, that I am thinking of Claire. I have not seen her in over ten years. My own teenage son has just come in the front door rousing me from that state of semi-slumber and dream-like thought by the comforting sound of the closing front door and his soft footsteps climbing the carpeted stairs. I wait for a kiss good night. I can now close my eyes and sleep. Funny how he must always wake me to sleep. Funny how now I remember Claire.

diana lee goldman

end of the line/umbrella laying across an empty bus seat

m. kettner

# signs of the times

The president says it's okay to be gay, as long as you don't tell anyone. Suburban husbands are murdering doctors who work at abortion clinics, because they saved the world from a mass murderer. Nineteen children are found in a freezing apartment alone, sharing one bowl of food on the floor with a dog. People walk to the churches, see Mary's statue crying. One lone man in New York hears the voice of God through his dog and kills.

Were the children saved from the murderer, were they sharing their food with God were they crying

janet kuypers

# REDIFORMS

Canning household nouns and verbs  
into green-glass Mason jars  
we are preserving this summer for ourselves  
nothing can stop the spider-lilies and begonias  
day-by-day opening like night-flowers  
we are the daffodils from spring  
speculating about tomorrow  
we yawn and stretch  
towards the ceiling and turn down the TV  
tonight, clean sheets and a particularly satisfying  
concerto of tranquil fluttering breezes  
off with the yoke of like  
as we idle down the mountain into dawn  
dreaming of biscuits and bologna for breakfast  
kissing me you rush out to celebrate July  
reunited with the small blue hours  
of aloneness I am brimming over with poems  
shaking them from my heart into a grocery sack  
believing in white light  
capped in the aura of time and place  
flickering in a labyrinth root-deep  
pristine and incomparable  
I am not interested in moving  
to higher ground.

errol miller

# IN THESE DESPERATE TIMES

Dear Alice a note of optimism and then despair  
as I stand among sunbeams dreams of Key Largo  
salvation isn't in the cards today divided Sunday  
the exact time of our demise too vague to comprehend  
outside our door a cunning beast manifests his message  
and we adapt ourselves to pout among the backyard roses  
if it pleases the landlord we may sell our country place  
Alexander the fetus tucked away in back rooms of night  
tragic this scene of innocent lambs stoned on sin  
once you were a flapper and I loved you  
breathing out of flashing neon sad cafes  
soon it was dark and cold in the Aircastle  
you rose from the bed before I was finished  
whispered derelict words that froze like frost  
in blue windows shimmering under the moon  
on the horizon a car in flames  
plunged over the edge of the earth  
and I was afraid for us  
afraid for us tomorrow  
when the young girl in you would move out  
and strike up conversations with one-armed men  
thundering beside me my heart could not stand  
the process of giving my lady away  
yet this is the planet of desire  
with swollen animals in the living room  
I cannot change the direction or duration  
for I am bitter and old  
fingering the spears in my body  
fumbling with my own future  
searching the musty walls  
of my hometown cave for  
some measure of domestic justice  
some message from the gods  
profound and worthy of thinking over  
in the silence that remains.

errol miller

## Okay, nilla wafer. Listen up and listen good.

### How to save your life.

Submit, or I'll have to kill you.

Okay, it's this simple: send me published or unpublished poetry, prose or art work (do not send originals), along with a SASE for response, to Children, Churches and Daddies, Scars Publications, 3255 West Belden, Suite #3E, Chicago, Illinois 60647. Then sit by your mailbox and wait. Pretty soon you'll get your SASE back with a note from the happy people at cc+d that says (a) Your work sucks, or (b) This is fancy crap, and we're gonna print it. It's that simple!

back issues: \$4; special issues: \$5

### How to get a chapbook of your work.

Get in with the 1995 Poetry Chapbook Series.

Okay, it's this simple: we'd love to print a chapbook of your work under our label. But here's our little dilemma: if we printed everything we wanted to, a lot of forests would be gone, as well as our drinking money. We can't afford the printing, so if we accept your work, we can design a chapbook, emblazon the thing with the tried-and-true cc+d logo, give it our ISSN number, and send the originals to you. You decide what paper you want, how many copies you want done - then print it, and send us as many copies as you darn well please. We'll distribute. Voila!

{all checks payable to Janet Kuypers}

paper backbone, looking through their window, order now,  
a (fe)male behind bars, two year journey, they told me their dreams.

### Holy Shit.

Now this is an impressive chapbook list.

mary winters: winter prayers, city, it was a perfect house

paul weinman and janet kuypers: games

cheryl townsend and janet kuypers: gasoline and reason

alan catlin: pictures from a still life

plus forthcoming chapbooks from

errol miller, mark blickley, gary a. scheinoha and others.

where can you get all this cool shit?

write to cc+d for a complete list. it's all at your fingertips. amazing.

## Okay, butt-munch. Tough guy. Listen up and listen good.

### How to win the editors over.

Hope Chest in the Attic is a 200 page, perfect-bound book of 13 years of poetry, prose and art by Janet Kuypers. It's a really classy thing, if you know what I mean. It's \$10.95 retail, but if you mention this ad it's only \$10 (aren't we so nice here?). An offer you can't refuse...

### How to read cutting-edge poetry...

You thought I'd say "read cc+d," but this is bigger. There's a new book out by Janet Kuypers. The Window is about 180 pages of her newest stuff. It's hand-bound, paperback, and she'll even sign it if you beg her enough. Man, it's groovy. And an even ten smackers. Wow! Bargain.

### and about ad pages...

yes, we do trades. send stuff to us and we'll send you a cool looking ad back! write to us for more information.

# NECESSARY EVILS

My father was all the best  
a Bohemian  
can be  
and sometimes,  
the worst.  
Like the time  
he flung Wettstein;  
a smart ass  
who'd been pelting  
him most of a day  
with cold water,  
into a vat  
down at  
Stella Cheese.  
Only to hear  
the man was killed  
later the same day,  
cocksure to the  
last, trying to outrun  
a train.  
Still, I prefer not  
to remember  
Dad for his  
slow storm into  
sudden thunderous  
slavic temper.  
He was, after all,  
like most of us;  
a mix  
of many  
traits.  
A gifted storyteller  
whose talent lay not

in the creating  
but the drawing  
together of many threads  
into a tightly  
woven tale.  
A Goliath among Davids  
whose shadow, to this day,  
casts a pall  
my size 12's  
in full motion  
could never fill.  
Besides, what  
steaming bowl  
of booyah  
contains  
ripest veggies  
and leanest  
chicken  
without an  
occasional  
bone?

gary a.  
scheinoha

# PLACHETNIK

We've sailed  
for too many  
moonless nights  
under heavens  
too dark  
and devoid  
of even  
a sprinkle  
of stars.  
Always  
the same  
wooden vessel;  
this rat-infested  
two by timbered  
craft hewn  
not so  
much from  
actual trees  
or deeds  
as dreams,  
hopes and words.  
Ah .. but  
when you open  
your smile  
full sail  
into a gale  
force  
emotion  
driven wind,  
then these

few creaking  
boards  
and canvas  
unfurled  
really  
carry us  
farther  
than  
anyone  
hoped  
we'd go.

gary a.  
scheinoha



# Pushed aside

No,  
I don't feel  
as if something was taken away from me.  
He pushed himself through me  
and he pushed everything that was inside of me  
off to the side.  
He just pushed me to the side,  
and all I feel is a hole.  
There is a void where he used to be:  
it's always there,  
and I wish that  
like a hole in the wall  
I could fill myself up with something  
patch myself up with something  
so that I would no longer have to feel.  
But I can't.  
Anything to repair my injuries  
would only remind me that I was injured.  
I only wish that  
I could push myself back to where I used to be  
where I should be  
and fill the emptiness inside.  
As I rest my hand on me  
I want to push myself back to where I should be.  
where I should be.  
But I can't.  
And every time I move,  
every time I turn, or sit,  
or cross my legs,  
I feel the void.  
And although the burning is less intense,  
it is always there.  
Where I was pushed aside—

gabriel athens

**children**  
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& daddies

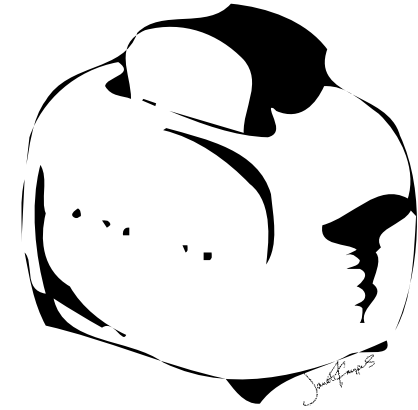
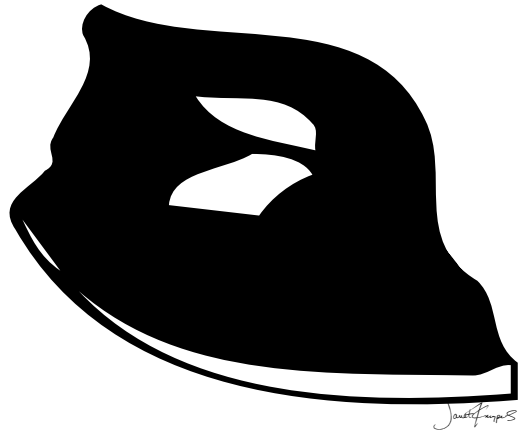
# oh mother

perspiration  
muscles tense  
bring it all  
in to the ground  
resistance  
fight the senses  
keep control  
as the energy  
slowly secpapes  
from the pores  
of your body  
anxiety  
frustration  
you can't run away  
you can't escape  
the pressure  
the conflict  
breath quickening  
heart beating  
faster and  
faster  
shake and  
shiver  
the trauma  
too great  
the exhaustion  
you can't  
give in  
but you must  
so you collapse  
at the stress  
and let  
the shovels  
throw the dirt  
over your  
head

gabriel athens

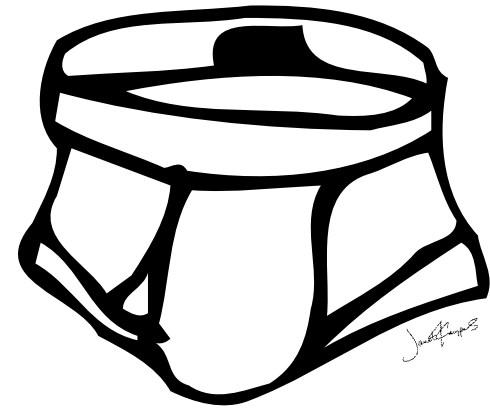
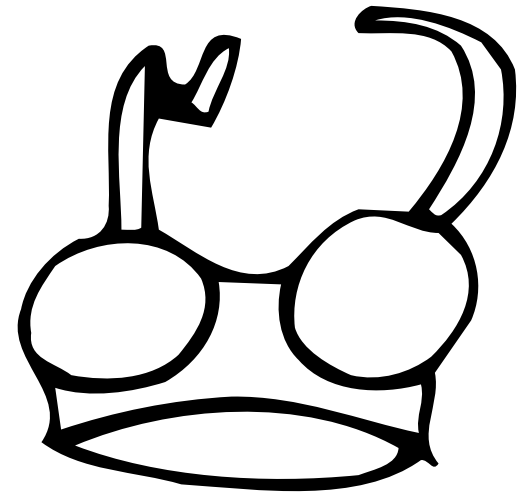
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& daddies

# REDNECK LITERATURE

Today I stepped out of  
a World of Fools, colliding  
with a falling star, agreeing with my father  
that South of here they seem to function  
in funny illegitimate rages  
looney, not complaining  
I went off to work at the cotton mill  
to spin exotic wondrous webs into  
platonic dreams of the silvery night  
and later, at the Bypass Tavern  
I met friends with dogs  
drinking Southern Comfort  
calling home collect to Mama  
there was no answer, solitary, out of ideas  
I wept loudly in the men's room  
as other greater daughters of Earth  
shuffled around like impatient brides  
waiting for their lives to happen  
for swords to all upon their nylon bras  
soon it was another golden era  
at dawn sensible people prepared bacon and eggs  
I unfolded a tired napkin with scribbled  
notes to myself, wanting more than  
these words of my own to set  
me weeping again.

errol miller

# SAND RIVER BLUES

Where two divergent paths merge  
the sojourner collides  
with the web of a golden spider, he  
says "well, I'm doing pretty good," not knowing  
if the slipper fits . . . , there won't be  
any perfect day with sunshine where  
every secret of the universe will be revealed  
we are all on call, sifting our frail pulse  
to the wind, off the coast of Leucadia  
I saw an ugly boat, I saw the Captain  
of the ship writing lonesome poetry  
I saw plants and animals dead and dying  
and an island, uninhabited, bobbing in the ocean  
a bell is always tolling, Cisco, pulsating out of  
the brownstone row-houses of Chicago, out of  
Des Moines on sleepless nights, grown  
so tall, we've grown so tall as children  
learning to cook nut-cakes and jello, tinkering  
with the canker in our brain, a cover-up, an  
exposure of the man as artist, running, running  
running for practice, running for "purpose," after  
Raymond Chandler's long goodbye, after the hero  
captures all the sex he wants, after the hot heroine  
is subdued at last, a cool wind blows down  
from the Boston Mountains, the tenants rather  
bruised and blue, Milady pregnant, wandering  
the silent streets of no understanding, how  
the feelings gone away, off the Catskills  
on an American Flyer, comes the bower  
of a Cebia tree, Johnny Appleseed transversing  
the alluvial Delta to higher ground, they'll  
never stop the music, convergence  
is all that's left, and deer tracks  
and the carcass hung out to dry  
for a few more days.

errol miller

# our anniversary

When they met  
to take us out  
for our anniversary

oh, it was so  
beautiful  
the boys are so  
thoughtful  
nothing could be  
better

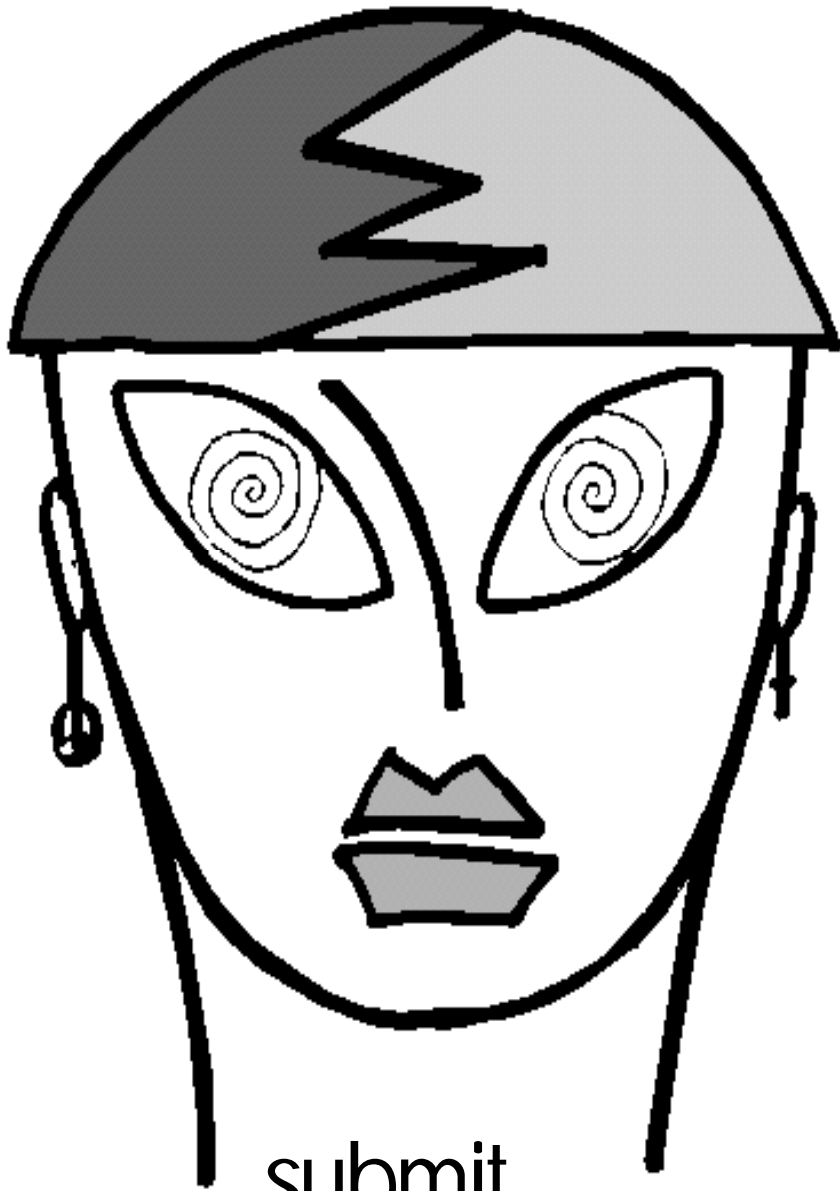
don't you think so, darling  
oh, you boys know  
he loves it  
you know he does

janet kuypers

# rain

The rain is coming  
down so hard now... I  
don't think it has ever  
been this hard. I have  
to stop it, I have to  
save myself from it.  
I can't drive like this.  
The wipers only brush  
it off after it has hit.  
I have to stop it, keep  
it away from me

janet kuypers



submit

Children, Churches and Daddies  
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*It's Art.*



*It's A Classic.*



*Submit To It.*

# Masquerade

You asked me to the masquerade  
and I willingly complied  
but I'm tired of wearing this dress  
for the feathers in my costume  
won't stop licking my face  
and you cannot see the tears  
falling behind my mask -

When you see the price they pay  
I'm sure you'll come and join  
the masquerade, you say  
but the price is too high  
for I don't want to wear a mask  
with you, and I would only hope  
that I don't have to.

alexandria rand

# naivety

The naivety is over.  
Now we must put our little toys away  
and stop playing house.  
This is the real thing,  
and I won't fool around anymore.  
Not with you.

You threw around the words  
"I love you"  
as if they were no more than water  
as if you really didn't know  
their value.

But this isn't a game,  
and when I get hurt  
kissing it  
won't make it better.

alexandria rand

# Love was Not Enough

captain with a quest as big  
as a full-rigged ship as big

as the Indian Ocean: Ahab's  
search for the Great White Whale

the one who wronged him — fish  
acting like some god took his leg

and wrecked his soul. Before the  
end crew gasped to see St. Elmo's

fire trim the mast and touch  
harpoons — your father saw the

same blue light when he was out  
at sea sixteen years old a Navy

man. "Ahab" — evil king from the  
Bible. "William" — "protection";

protection of a helmet over some  
one's naked head...your father saved

for becalm-ment wide Sargasso Sea of  
plain Midwestern suburb. No room

for giving it all away for taking it  
high and low no vows that soothed

the blood was gone — the scale too  
small — no one to blame.

mary winters

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& daddies

# A Man's Hardest Time

was after the divorce though  
he was the one who insisted —  
reverse chivalry; he was the

one who briefed the kids  
(her lunatic with grief).  
The man now had to learn to

wash dishes. A photograph  
shows him with bubbly hands  
in the sink, plaid dish towel

over his shoulder, careful and  
serious. He hoists a plate onto  
the drying rack; still quite  
a lot of black in his hair.

Family grapevine said he woke up  
crying in his sleep. One night

he felt his car drive over a  
human body — "couldn't have been  
anything else" — on a back road

near home. Police said the man  
was dead before he struck —  
anyway: it was the night he  
"hit rock bottom."

mary winters

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## Menace

Hard-staring divorce, then retirement  
— “golden handshake” age sixty —  
Northern man got Florida spread in  
shadow-free close-clipped  
beach community dealt out  
around country club; his lazy  
two-acre back yard’s sudden stop a  
brown-water canal — grass comes  
on a truck; held down with  
sprinkler system which  
rises on schedule to force a few

rainbows — ravish a grandchild —  
trees hauled in too, full-grown.  
Special cement keeps patio cool;  
trained cypress shades visiting  
daughter who watches a battle over  
the tip of a book — man versus  
pampas grass clump: every morning a  
showdown with machete and hoe;  
red ants at its base who scramble  
and run, birds keen overhead;

daily patrol for tiny-size snakes  
scouting cool garage floor — they  
meet with a shovel; back door, three  
locks against gators.

mary winters

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& daddies

## Struggle

Silent battle explodes in  
vacation house, great-grandparents’  
retirement home: which of  
four generations will rule; the  
living or the dead prevail.  
Night of their memorial service  
issue was joined: ghostly  
pounding in the attic the  
call to arms. The weapon:

re-decorating. Each visiting  
descendant returns the cottage to  
1960 or ‘70 or ‘80 or ‘90.  
Puts up or takes down needlepoint  
village scene bought by great  
grandmother in Nova Scotia, also  
stained drawing of windmill in  
Wellfleet. Gets out or else  
banishes television set, stereo.  
Ships in or carts back

trunkfuls of beach stones and  
shells — it can take hours.  
Great-grandchild paints  
clamshells with sea gulls and  
whales — next her aunt  
removes all signs of children and  
sobs at sibling’s re-wallpapering of  
kitchen with stylish chintz  
print which hides great-grandparents’  
caper jar pattern —

mary winters

**children**  
~~CHURCHES~~  
& daddies

# ikebana

Rolled up sleeves,  
Dark denim, strings pulled  
At the buttons

Your hands, the  
Rough edges, the nails  
Jagged, not cut

Your fingers, I've  
Noticed them: one has  
A long scar

Along the tip, and  
Your skin is rough  
Along the nails

Your hands, they're  
Skilled hands of an  
Artist at work:

And like a  
Conductor, you  
Orchestrate

Bring beauty  
From the dying  
Flowers at

The table. They  
Line up quickly,  
At attention:

Fall into  
Place so gracefully.  
You create

Symphonies,  
Move mountains, Seas  
Part for you.

You can do  
Anything. I  
See that now.

You must be  
My savior. Let me  
Follow you.

Let me create  
Beauty in your  
Name, let me

Feel your power.  
It's all in your  
Hands, your heart,

Your mind:  
I've seen you stop  
Wars, feed the

Hungry. Why are  
You so strong? Why  
Are your flowers

So beautiful

janet kuypers

# Spell Your Food

Pene looked at the steaming crud of college campus food. She plopped a metal spoon in it as a fat lady in what looked like a long body net starting at the tip of her hair opened up the gate-door. Pene looked up at the lit menu on the wall, then back at the crud. It was supposed to be chipped beef, but cows had diarrhea looking more pro-everything than this. The only morning rush was a tall jock grabbing a juice carton, so Pene snuck away into the back room for a quick to long smoke. Nobody would want her shit. She glanced at the Latin boy who was in her Advanced Business class. He was cutting into a four foot pan of orange Jello. But when he saw her, he gave it extra jiggles, and began to press his hot hands against the chilled desert. Pene came over and lifted the white apron from around his sickly thin waist. She felt his kneecaps, and saw an erection start. With all the force she had, Pene kneed into that groin like it was the last groin alive. The Latin's face fell into the Jello, and she was called to the front. She could always claim sexual harassment, because it was always a subjective art form, she knew.

Somebody actually wanted the mac and cheese. It bubbled in purple splotches. White beads ran over it like some kind of lice, and it probably was, but that's when Latin boy came out. He dumped his batch of green Jello into the first refrigerated section down the cafeteria line from Pene. Green, she thought. He must've had to do another batch.

Someone grabbed a Jello immediately, and Pene stayed at her post. She was busy for half an hour before sneaking another glance at the Jello section. Now it was red. Strange. - Then she heard weird strangulation noises from the outer room; the dining area.

"Quick! What's the number for 911?" someone burst in shouting. The fact that a dead lady in her 30s was in the other room, killed the chance that joke might've had. Everyone, including Pene, went out to look. The lady was clutching her napkin, the paper was to her lips, like the last dying act of that person was to clean her face. It was insane, Pene thought, but the police came and couldn't find anything wrong. So Pene cleared away the dishes. A chemist was on the scene, had tested all the foods. Nothing wrong.

Pene looked at the Jello. It was a very, very light green, almost tan. This was weird, she thought.

She went into the back room to smoke out her thoughts, on a ten minute break. The cafeteria stayed open. There was money involved. Not many customers though. But hot food was the most popular sporting event around there for a change, not the health nuts going into the boxed salad section. Pene needed to be relieved.

The Camel felt cool going down her throat. She was almost to the filter, almost ready to go back, when a box slid and hit the ground. Pene was supposed to be the only one back here; there was an afro sticking out from behind a carton of instant spuds.

“Hey!” she shouted. The afro disappeared. There was giggling; or was it whimpering? “Hey! Come on!”

Bill Cosby stood up, slowly, unsure of his chances anymore. He looked 75 years old, and a group of dirty, thin children gripped his long legs. Pene looked deep into Cosby’s eyes, and knew there was murder.

“We’ve got to have Jello, don’t you see?” he rhythmically insisted. There was a terror in his voice, and the veins on his neck and wrists were gray with use. He slumped in his stance, and every fiber seemed strained with insanity.

“What the hell -”

“I thought I could replace it,” Cosby squealed. The children began to cry, and he took their Kodak pictures with little cameras from his pockets; it seemed to quiet them vaguely. “Developed this cardboard substitute. Replaced it back when I found.. it..” Then he began to cry, unrestrained. “I didn’t know it would kill her!!!”

Pene smoked most of the pack. She had to lock the door to keep her supervisor from busting in; he kept calling and calling for her. Pene still had the metal spoon; she’d forgotten. But she was trying to decide. She needed time, and quiet, to think.

As if they were a troop of zombies of some sort, the little kids began to chant “J-E-L-”

“You hear that?” Cosby pleaded. It was a gun to his moral temple. They began to chant louder, and Cosby began making funny faces. His hair began to turn

white, and he took thousand dollar bills from his pockets. He tried hopelessly to stuff them into the kids’ hands, but they wouldn’t grip them, and the paper just fell to the floor. Pene looked into the squinting eyes, the decrepit frame the comedian had become, and she knew. She knew. Pene threw her cig down, and raced from the room.

She locked it from the other side, and called the cops. She didn’t dare go for the money the man had with him; she’d just have to cash in on the notoriety the news and sensationalist shows would give her, and the money they’d give her, for her story. She knew she was doing the right thing. As she slung the meats, and the starches into the plates so hungry people could take them to tables, she contented herself with waiting for the cops. Waiting for a dream. She figured the little bastards were stupid little bastards if they couldn’t shop around for at least one place where you can get two boxes of Jello for \$1000.

No room for compassion. The chipped beef began to look better. She’d have some later.

ben ohmart