



Nerves of a Poet

Janet Kuypers feature
11/21/14 at Cafe Ballou
live for "Cafe Cabaret"

cc&d chapbook
#1068-5154

jabbed into an open nerve

I am afraid of what I might say
because it may sound like how I feel
like someone has jabbed a metal pin
against the open nerve of the exposed cavity
in my rat-like teeth

what does it feel like

to read a soul
a soul like mine

I don't know
but let me brace you:
rehashing this,
revealing this
it just
might
hurt

bruised

I think all feel bruised
deep down, but don't think of it
until times like these.

Eight to Sixteen

You came back again
from one of your trips
to the other side of the planet.

You know I love you
more than anything on Earth,
but... I'm getting used to your absence.

#

It's a terrible thing to say, I know,
but when you came back this time
and said you had a fever

I figured you ingested their toxic water
and you'd have the stomach flu
for days, but then you'd be fine.

But this time, with your fever,
I remembered how you drank the water
swimming south of the Equator,

and I thought nothing of it.
It would clear up in a week.
I'll just hold off on kissing you again.

#

But after eight days,
you went to the doctor,
told them of your travel and ails.

And that's when the doctor
called the CDC
and the Federal agencies swarmed in.

After you left for the doctor,
the next contact I had
was with men in Hazmat suits at my door.

They asked me if I was alone.
They asked me if I had any children.
Then they asked me to come with them.

I told them I needed to wait
for my husband, and they told me
you were now in isolation.

After hours, they told me
that you caught a nasty virus
while you were away on your trip —

But I said, “Wait a minute,
he was on a work trip, and his company
made him take a ton of drugs

so that he’d be immune
and wouldn’t catch anything —”
and that’s when they stopped me, right there.

They locked me in a room.
They told me I couldn’t leave.
Then they said he caught a bad strain

while helping a woman
he found on the street,
bleeding, pregnant, and in pain.

It took them two days
to discover the details
before they gave me the news.

“He’s in isolation,
we’re trying new treatments,
and hopefully he’ll be okay.”

But, I know of this virus,
it's usually lethal,
so... Please. Let me see him. Now.

That's when they said, "Sorry,
it's out of our hands,
but you must be quarantined too."

So I screamed at the medics,
all to no avail,
as they swore I had to stay safe.

So...
I paced in my isolation.
I watched the drive by news.
And I heard them say stats

that death from this virus
can come from 8, up to 16 days.

Eight to sixteen days.

It was eight days
before he even went to the doctor —
will this waiting do him in?

I couldn't talk to him.
I couldn't see his face.
I couldn't kiss him, or

tell him I loved him.
That I'll always love him.
That I'm nothing without him.

#

The morning of the 5th day,
still trapped in isolation,
that's when they told me he died.

#

My blood work was clean,
but they kept me in isolation
when they said they'd cremate my love.

And all I could think
was, 'after you're done,
send him to Arlington National Cemetery'

so the world will know
he's a hero to more than just me,
as you kept me away 'til he died.

And still, I continue to pace,
trapped in this room, alone,
with nothing to wait for

ever again.

fog

fog envelopes me
it's a thick, powerful force
that doesn't let go

Lord Have Mercy

Looked into the coffin
of a man who was once great,

at least that's what I hear,
but the cancer ravaged him

until his bones crumbled to dust.
The family then wondered how

the people at the funeral home
could make him look like *him*,

and as the family walked
into that room, they held their breath

for more reasons than death,
more reasons than their last

viewing of the man they lost, now,
once again with meat on his bones.

When the services started
we all had to follow

the reverend's laments by all
periodically proclaiming

"lord have mercy."

The man with the collar would talk,
and I would wonder what it would be like

to hold the job of applying make-up
to the dead, to try to make them look

not so dead. Puff the cheeks, apply face paint
to give them color. *Lord have mercy.*

Beforehand, a string of older firemen
came to us before the coffin,

with small black bands over each
of their badges. “When the fire station

started, before the town even had a
fire station, he used his red truck,

with ladders tacked to the sides,
and a trailer to haul a barrel of water.”

Lord have mercy. The man with
the collar started a hymn;

everyone in this small town
knew the lines and sang along

like little lemmings, and I tried
to remember the lines from

my childhood that I have no reason
to say except when people need

something, *anything*, to make them
think their life doesn't have to end.

Lord have mercy. The man with
the collar reminded the room

that people were created for life,
that death was not part of the plan.

But stifle the overwhelming desire
to caress the one you loved,

now in a coffin, for the coldness
would be too stark a reminder.

Lord have mercy. Wanted to try
to look into the coffin from a

different angle; maybe then
the deceased would look more real.

Maybe then I wouldn't see his lack
of hair from chemo gone wrong,

maybe then I wouldn't see
his hands clasping rosary beads.

Lord have mercy. I remember
the string of people waiting to meet us

before they proceeded to the coffin
(which reminded me of the procession

of people waiting to congratulate
the bride and groom immediately after

their wedding ceremony),
but in this macabre receiving line

all of the funeral attendants
were repeatedly saying to us,

"I'm sorry for your loss," and I wonder
how many times the man in the coffin

had to say those words
in his lifetime of service,

how hollow these words were
when *he* spoke them,

when the words then seemed so stifling,
and I think of how people

say this when nothing can express
how anyone is feeling, especially when

people don't know how to feel
anymore. *Lord have mercy.*

#

The chants now ended; the Knights
of Columbus stopped their constant

repeated prayers for the painted man
in the coffin, to help us justify

the pain we don't know how
to deal with. *Lord have mercy,*

was all I could think, not to call
a higher power, but to give empty words

at an empty time, with too many
injustices in this living death scene.

We're all players in this charade,
making up death in a way

that we want to believe is not ghoulish,
that's what we keep telling ourselves

unless we choose to ignore the macabre
while unsettled lives are still around us.

We mourn, or cry, and we try to fit
this piece into what we call life.

And for those who believe,
and even for those who don't,

these seem the only fitting words
to think, or feel... *Lord have mercy.*

pant

waves are crashing, and
the moon's phases are changing
to a rhythmic pant.

violent affair

how one-sided
is a violent
passionate
sexual affair

is it
a small metal boat
tied with a long rope to the dock
living
to react to the tide
trapped there
pounding against the ocean alone

then
with the tide

rushing in
seeping out
rhythmically

waiting for that tide
to rush it into the shore
save for that damn rope
holding it back
then being taken away again
to do it all over again

spending it's time
held back
and waiting

then almost
being
turned upside-down
by that rush

then recovering
and waiting
for it to all happen again

Translation 2014 haiku

This was only a
translation for trauma — and
I don't have the words

Wierwolves of a Poet

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scars publications

published in conjunction with **cc&d** magazine
the *UN-religious, NON-family oriented literary and art magazine*
ccandd96@scars.tv <http://scars.tv>
ISSN 1068-5154 INTERNET ISSN #1555-1555

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Magazines:

Children, Churches and Daddies (cc&d magazine), founded June 1993; Down in the Dirt, conceived 1994, founded 2000

Books:

Hops Chest in the Attic, the Window, Close Cover Before Striking, (Woman), Autumn Reason, Contents Under Pressure, the Average Guy's Guide (to Feminism), Changing Gears, the Key to Believing, Domestic Blisters, etc., Ouvre, Exaro Versus, L'arte, The Other Side, The Boss Lady's Editorials (regular and 2005 Expanded Edition), Duality, Seeing Things Differently, Change/Rearrange, Death Comes in Threes, Moving Performances, Six Eleven, Life at Cafe Aloha, Creams, Rough Mixes, The Entropy Project, The Other Side (2006 Edition), Stop... 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Compact Discs

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