like a Lamb
to the
Slaughter

Janet Kuypers

Poetry At The Gallery Cabaret

9/2/15
I’ve been taken away.
It’s against my will.
But I’m told it’s for the best,
and I always do what I’m told.

I look out the window, see a smattering of lights,
wonder where this tube is taking me.
On first glance, it looks like every other place.
Every place, except my home.

I’ve had to gently place all of my dreams,
my creations into this pristine box as tall as
the tallest skyscrapers, then bury it deep
in my chest, where all I love becomes a memory.

I don’t know what my destination will look like,
in the dead of night, when I arrive.
Everyone tells me I’ll love it there.
But an acclimated prisoner is still a prisoner.

I look in the mirror, try to gain my bearings.
My hair is starting to curl from the heat
and it makes me wonder if I’m Medusa
with snakes coming out of her head —

and here I am, tying to straighten my hair,
so people might not be so afraid of me,
so I might not turn everyone
who turns my way into stone.
But Medusa here has dreams,
creativity is crushed when I hide my heart,
buried in that box of gems, never to sparkle
again with a lack of light, or, the right light.

I know carrying past traumas
has always been my secret skill,
but Pandora here gave me a ball and chain
that drags at my ankle and stutters my step.

For now I’ve closed the box as tall as the sky
and my only choice is to enter Pandora’s Box,
where all of the evils of the world
will follow me wherever I go.
unless it happens to you

Janet Kuypers
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unless it happens to you,
you don’t think it matters,
and you think the violence
just rolls off you like water.

After your commute home
you flop on the couch
and grab the remote
to turn on the tv.
See the digital screen
and note how different
digital static looks from
your old cathode ray tube,
than flip to the news.
MSNBC has a talking head
relaying the injustices
of a black man shot dead
during a Ferguson protest,
shot after he pointed a gun
at a police officer.

Click.

Turn to FOX News,
and their talking head
mentions another attack,
a few Marines were killed
defending an outpost
on foreign soil.
You think for a moment
about the men you know
who went to war.
They fought for our country.
You sigh.

Click.

Wait, there has to be something
to relieve my sprits,
some comedy maybe, something,
but —

but watching actors
act like they’re someone else
is the last thing I need,
when that is all
all of us do
every day
already.

So, turn to the laptop,
scan the Internet’s stories.
Hmmm. They’re still
lambasting a dentist
who paid a ton of money
so he could trophy shoot a lion
and feel like a big man.
And the thing is,
people are in an uproar about this,
this one lion’s life is their crusade...
People living in Africa
kill lions for survival.
I’ll bet most of those protesters
still like a burger at lunch,
but forming flesh out of this one lion,
to them is just too unjust.
It’s like they idolize this lion,
like a drawing from the Lion King
and think this killer
is a noble beast.
And I’m sorry,
whether or not
these protesters support war,
I’ll bet they think more
about this one lion
than they ever would
about the death of our Marines.

I stare at my screen.
I don’t want to turn it off.
Because I think I can immerse myself
in other people’s problems
and not think twice about them —
because it doesn’t affect you
unless it happens to you.

All that’s stuck in your head
is the traffic on the expressway
that made your day late enough
to say, screw dinner,
I’ll just eat some leftovers
and try to unwind
in front of the boob tube.
So you dejectedly give up
and turn to the tv again,
resort to network stations
and bounce between shows
dedicated to Hollywood gossip...

Entertainment Tonight
highlights a movie star
(you don’t know if she was famous
before she got her boob job)
but this woman just found out
she has cancer.
And you think of the cancer
that has raced through your family,
picking out loved ones
like they were targets
in a firing squad,
and without remembering
the female actor’s name
you have to change the channel
and get away from this.

Click.

oh, now it’s *TMZ,*
and they’ve found Jenny McCarthy,
yeah, the playboy bunny,
the *MTV* girl, *that* one,
the one who had a child with Autism
and deduced that the Autism
had to be the fault of... *vaccination.*
She’s the woman who made it her crusade,
without any empirical evidence,
to convince squadrons of mothers
to not vaccinate their kids.

You know, there was a measles outbreak
recently, down at Disney Land.
Measles, in Disney Land. You heard me right.
There is now a Measles outbreak
in the United States.

But *TMZ* just went to commercial,
so time to surf until I stumble
on another web page
for another set of actresses
who claimed Bill Cosby
sexually assaulted them.
They didn’t know they were drugged,
which relinquished their right to consent.
*New York* magazine even showed
thirty-five of his alleged victims
all sitting in chairs,
in rows, on their cover.
And it made me think
of the women who came to me
with their stories of being raped,
some were sixteen,
their boyfriend was older,
they didn’t know what to do.
Some were given too much to drink,
while their housemates were given more,
so they wouldn’t be awake to hear.
All of them were scarred,
it wouldn’t go away,
and they didn’t even have
the physical bruises
to justify their constant pain,
and —

and I just wanted to watch
some mindless tv.
Even if it was about horrors,
I thought I could just tune it out,
because I’ve always thought
that it doesn’t affect you
unless it happens to you.
But I clicked and I clicked
until I made it relate to me,
and that made it happen to me.

All of their horrors
are now my horrors.
The protesting life now lost on the streets.
The ones who were armed,
killed for doing their job.
The cancer.
The disease.
The rape.
And the more I think about it, 
the more I think 
that we all go through this pain. 
We know someone who had cancer. 
We know someone who was raped. 
In a way, we've all been attacked, 
we've seen death up close, 
and time heals all wounds, 
they say, 
so we've learned to deal with it, 
to tuck those horrendous memories 
deep inside us 
and live with the pain 
that somewhere deep inside 
always burns, 
even as we try to forget.

We wear this like an old bath robe, 
an old pair of slippers, 
something comfortable, 
and all this trauma 
becomes a second skin. 
Some thing we've had for so long 
that we forget when it started, 
when it all first started, 
but good or bad, 
it's almost like 
we can't live without it now. 
We don't know how to go back 
and live any other way.

And we look at the tv 
and we blink blindly at the horrors 
and completely forget 
when horror 
stopped horrifying us.

We wonder.

And once again, 
we click.
I’ve put on my jacket.
I’ve set about my work.

It’s the same thing,
day after day,

I do my work, and...
everything feels heavier.

I don’t know
what is wrong with me,

I’m not sick
but I know I’m not well

and I know there’s
gotta be something

I can do about this.
It’s become so desperate

that I inject medication in me
to try to make the pain go away.

And I continue to work,
and the weight grows stronger.

Now, I know my soul,
I keep things hidden

but I’m otherwise
an open book —
I’ve worn my heart
on my sleeve,

and even kept a tissue
when the weight was too strong.

My book fills libraries.
It’s a never-ending epic.

And I look through the pages,
I look deep inside of me.

I scan the pages.
I scour the text.

And for the life of me,
I can’t find what ails me.

And as I said,
I’m an open book —

so someone should be able
to break the code of me

and figure me out
once and for all.

And all I get
are blank stares.

No one else seems
to have the answers,

so
I continue my work,
until I realize

that my jacket —
that my book jacket —

that this open book
becomes the burden.

Not because
of what I write,

but because the answers
may be buried so deep

in the reams
of written word

that no one will be able
to unlock the key

to figure out
what is truly me.
I’ve studied the science, 
and I’ve heard a physicist explain 
that when two solid objects 
are pressed together 
they never actually touch.  
Because electrons repel, 
all objects remain one molecule apart.*

All the molecules that make us 
us should always be pushing away.

But wait a minute.  
that can’t be how it works, 
because 
the electricity I feel between us, 
the magnetism that draws me to you, 
makes me do anything but repel.

And gravity can’t hold everything together, 
so all that can explain my attraction to you is this electromagnetism —
I’m telling you, it’s a fundamental force, and these electromagnetic waves are the light waves, so I can see you, the radio waves, so I can hear and sense you. The heat I feel when I’m close to you, well, electromagnetism brought it all together.

Now, when it comes to the science, know that when the Universe first started, electromagnetism is what drew protons and electrons together and that created any matter in the Universe.

And all that matter we think is so strong, your arms when you dip me when we dance, your hands when you hold me tight, your fingertips when they interlock with mine and we hold each other’s hands whenever we’re walking together in stride, keep in mind that right down to our electrons, microscopically we’re always in a battle to keep ourselves together when our molecules are trying to tear us apart.

But this electricity I feel between us, this magnetism that draws me to you, this electromagnetism wins the war —
when my heart quickens for you,
I know it’s that electric signal
that causes my heart to beat for you.
And when I spring forward to you,
it’s electromagnetism in action.

It’s funny, how I can use science
so succintly
to explain why I need you so.

And this is science, this isn’t theory,
because String Theorists may say
that we have always been bound to each other
because a butterfly beat its wings in Barbados,
and a sea lion saved her siblings
from predators in the Pacific,
after an Antarctic ice shelf started melting.

But I say it’s more fundamental than that.
Right down to my heartbeat,
right down to how you infiltrate my senses.
Right down to this electricity between us.
Right down to this magnetism we feel.

Now that I’ve found you,
I won’t fight the laws of nature.
The only thing I will ever do
is to only fight for you.

* lines from “Us, Actually Touching”
Like a Lamb to the Slaughter

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