

Taking off the Mask

Janet
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poetry

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The Gallery Cabaret

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Table of Contents

Vaccinated from What Happens in Wuhan.....	3
found pandemic haiku.....	6
Everyone's Afraid.....	7
Out to the Horizon.....	8
jar for my beating heart.....	10
Because of Fire.....	12
Underground History.....	14
Quieting Anechoic Chamber.....	17
No One Reports for Women.....	18
like nothing ever happened.....	22
United We Wonder.....	24
Knew the Word.....	25
Eighteen and Eight, Plus Eighteen: Where We've Been and What We've Seen.....	26
<i>about Janet Kuypers</i>	27

Vaccinated from What Happens in Wuhan

how do you think
lethal infectious diseases
are spread anyway

seminal fluids,
blood transfusions, or... not
washing your hands

did you think
you were safe vacationing
on a cruise ship

silly you, for you
forgot that we're now in that
global economy

and what happens
in Wuhan doesn't necessarily
stay in Wuhan

—

after thousands
recently died from a recently
discovered virus

it's discovered
this virus escaped from a bio
research lab

in China — not
Russia, not the middle East,
but a place where

they now say that
the Great Wall is only for show.
But is it really.

For the only
known bio lab in China, in Wuhan
recently re-issued

a statement on
cleanliness for the country,
to avoid disease —

released just after
this most-recent mass epidemic
was fully discovered

—

and you'd think a lab
would know how to be clean,
but that doesn't mean

that their well-paid
researchers wouldn't illegally
make an extra buck

(or would that be
making many, many extra Yuan)
that doesn't mean

these researchers
wouldn't sell these laboratory
animals, still alive,

for extra cash
because one Beijing researcher
said they once sold

live monkeys and...
rats for the equivalent of over
a million U.S. dollars

and yes, those
precious disease-ridden animals
made their way into

people's stomachs, and
maybe eventually to people working
on your cruise ships

and you thought
you were safe, silly you — you
should know better

—

you thought that
if you didn't swallow three gallons
of someone's saliva

you'd remain safe
from contracting those infectious
diseases, you've been

vaccinated, you even
go so far as to wash your hands
how noble of you

and you thought
that was enough — but as I said
this global economy

means it's almost like
we're all sharing one giant bed
together — we just

didn't realize
how messy that bed could really be
how messy indeed

found
pandemic
haiku

proliferations
of babies and divorces
follow pandemics

written after listening to author
and psychologist Esther Perel on
The Daily Social Distancing Show
with Trevor Noah, S5 E131 7/23/10

Everyone's Afraid

My immune system has been wreaking havoc on me (I can't say my father never gave me anything), for with his genes, my cells stopped fighting against viruses that wanted to swell my random joints into balloons.

Exhausting every homeopathic option I could muster, I finally relented, perusing the pharmaceutical library — took one drug after another, until they dropped me in a study for a regular injectable drug they say is set to save me.

I don't eat meat, I care for all the world, and my thanks is a virus trying to make me explode from the inside out. So me and my suppressed immune system saw no difference in a new pandemic. Now everyone's afraid... like I always am.

A year passes, and like a good little soldier I don't question what's in an untested vaccine, and I don't react to shots, but with this second shot, I was reminded of what this virus can really do, with every joint aching as I fever the pain away.

So as I lay here sick, only wanting to be better, I learn that there are more microbes in my body than human cells. We try to fight these miniature invisible monsters, but... if less than half of me is even human, then, what on earth am I.

Out to the Horizon

Driftwood disintegrated, out with the tide
like flotsam, wreckage from what we survived...
jetsam drifts to shore
while we all still so fall in love with the sea
and our essence drifts out toward the horizon
until I find myself lost,
wondering where on earth that damn land is
I know, I know, we are seventy-percent water
I can feel like a fish,
a dolphin, or even a bird like an arctic penguin,
porpoising our way through the deepest depths —
for water is our essence.
Too many times that ocean called out to me
and I dove in, head first, swimming out too far
until violent waves came
crashing into me, capsizing me deep into the sea
forcing down my throat an ocean of traumas
past, present, future
until I suddenly wonder if it matters if it rains
treading water; a cyclone, hurricane, typhoon
swells inside me, until
water overwhelms me. I start randomly swimming,
look for land, pick a direction, try to find that edge.
They say that land is vast,
but this water seems endless. So, I start to panic.
This is when I realize the edge is right there —
is it dirt, is it sand...

when I finally get there, I see the wrinkles
in your cupped hands, holding that water
holding that world
and now it all suddenly comes flooding back,
you saved me again, like I saved you before
our souls intertwined
we've lived for eons, nourishing each other
from climbing the Alps, to following Darwin,
Arbeit Macht Frei
wrought iron gates rattle in our hands,
we shiver together in midnight South Pole winds,
make music
before the one a.m. Arctic Aurora Borealis.
So what if armed Russian guards watched us.
Don't cry for me—
throughout the hemispheres, throughout history
we step over those gold bars to emperor rooms...
for as I said
we've lived for eons, nourishing each other
and now its your turn to hold that water, let me
swim to your hands
until I climb out, jump onto your earth, stand.
You can then turn your hands, spill that water
and finally embrace me.

jar for my beating heart

if i ever lost you
if you ever left me
i

i think

well

i think
i'd tear my heart out

i think
i'd tear my heart out
so i could put it
in a glass jar
and leave it
on a shelf

wait,
no
it'd be ceramic

if i put
my heart
away like luggage
that jar
would have to be
ceramic

i wouldn't want
to see
that heart

so
ceramic
it is

because
my once
beating heart

is only
baggage
on a shelf

but
really,
i think
i'd tear out my heart
and put it away

because
i see people
every day
and they all live
like they have
no heart

and after you're gone
i wouldn't hear
my own
heart
beating
any
more

so
after you're gone
what would i need
my heart
for
anyway

Because of Fire

written 10/8, for the start of the 1871
Great Chicago Fire, that lasted 2 days

When we see fire overtake
an 850-year old monument
to religion, beauty, history —

we are taken aback, helpless,
suddenly aghast, at a loss,
against that primal silent killer.

But we look at candles lit,
hear the crackling campfire,
we feel the fireplace warmth

and remember why a part
of us still loves fire so. At times
like these, we must remember

that although a mass fire
seems only a symbol for
death and destruction,



maybe, after that great fire
that took over the only city
I love, maybe that destruction

only leads to building something
bigger, something better,
something that made more sense.

Because when I stroll from
one neighborhood to the next
with diverse cultural backgrounds

until I get toward the Lake,
where I can turn back to span the
most beautiful skyline I've ever seen,

I have to realize that this history
of destruction allowed us to make
something so good. All because of fire.



Underground History

written 11/30 (the 1866 date work begins on the
1st U.S. underwater highway tunnel, in Chicago)

when I first took the L train into Chicago
to commute every morning, I would take
the Red Line along Lake Michigan for work

but in most of my years in the only place
I would call my home, I was taking the train
from O'Hare airport, taking the Blue Line

and all those years I took that train, I always
wondered why a small part of that train ride
took me underground but I

didn't ask questions, I just took the train and
never thought anything of it, I never thought
of all the concrete lining our way underground

—

Johannes immigrated here, and later
my father took over my grandfather's
concrete construction company

—

when my father flew us to Las Vegas
we flew over the Hoover Dam; his only
words were, look at all that concrete

—

but over 150 years ago, Chicago started work on their first underwater tunnel, under the Chicago River, a tunnel with 1 lane

for pedestrians and 2 lanes for horse-drawn carriages; anyone who knows Chicago now may think this sounds ludicrous, but after

the Chicago fire, people looked for more stable forms of travel, and underground, away from fire, seemed the way to go

they reversed the Chicago River a decade later, which lowered the water level, exposing the roof of the tunnel; and ships ran aground

so the Federal government had to close it down as a safety hazard six years later, so to reconstruct they changed it, added concrete

and after streetcars ran, it was converted for the subway - the underground parts of the "L" train us Chicago commuters know

—

a lot of construction and reconstruction
existed in the Chicago rail plans, and a lot
of plans were canceled, but it's cool to see

that this concrete that runs through my
family's veins was a part in making those
underground tunnels us Chicagoans use today

—

some people may say that only rural folk
are grounded in the dirt of the earth
and feel real roots to this land we live on

but I beg to differ, because some city folk
like me can actually feel grounded
with the concrete we pour, that pulls us in

and literally bonds us to this land, both
above ground and even below, where we least
expect it, to make our lives more complete

Quieting Anechoic Chamber

Once on the job
I had to go into an anechoic chamber
to remove a piece of machinery

You see, this room
had machinery that would test
if something could and would survive in space

They could make
this entire room shake violently
to see if everything inside stayed together

When that room shakes
so violently, there's a ton of noise,
so they created this anechoic chamber there

This room had all these
devices and slits and shock absorbers
inside it, so all of the sounds just... disappeared

This room had no sound,
I mean, no sound at all. And I had to
go in and remove a piece of equipment once

That work should take about 10 minutes

I didn't know
what losing one sense instantly
would do, would you feel lost, or panicked

With quieted footfalls
I worked in complete silence, until
I heard my blood coursing through my veins

After just a few minutes
without sound, I mean, almost no sound at all,
I had to get out

No One Reports for Women

I would start this like a news reporter, saying
“Dateline, *your town here*”,
but news about women’s issues is nonexistent,
which makes women wonder
if concerns for women are nonexistent too.

Recently I heard reports from multiple women
who had been on birth control
for 99% of their fertile lives—
they contracted the most recent variant of Covid-19
 (and yes, they got vaccines and booster shots,
 making Covid-19 like getting a minor cold)
but these women noticed a week after recovery
 (two weeks before their period should arrive)
they started spotting, which didn’t stop—
so after ten says, they asked around
 and found
that other women were having this trouble
with their reproductive health too,
and no one had researched how to solve it.

But really, think about it: who would have the time
to research something when they worked like mad
just to come up with a vaccine on such short notice?
No one has questioned men’s fertility after Covid-19
and enough immunization to protect you from this...

But maybe the question should be this:
after women can now control their reproductive rights,
does that mean that after following their government's edicts
to "protect" themselves and inject themselves,
they'll still get sick, but, added bonus,
they'll bleed *daily* for it?

Because this is exactly the type of problem
women *don't* want to talk about in public
and trust me, this *shouldn't* be a problem
any woman should *ever* have to deal with.

When women sit alone in their corners
with no support for their *very* personal problems,
they don't know that other women go through this too.
That little level of sympathy
may assuage their feelings,
but it may amount to only a fleeting gesture
to know they're not alone—
for the more you realize how common this may be,
the more any rational woman would wonder
why something isn't being done
to solve what is becoming a real
bloody
problem.

When many women's solution is to search the Internet
they may start to panic when they read reports
that birth control may increase blood clots,
and Covid-19 may exacerbate that risk further,
but, surprise surprise, more research needs to be done
to solve anything for women,
and this *still* doesn't solve
this daily bleeding that men are stating is harmless
(*fine, but men aren't the ones bleeding every day*).
So, this is beginning to sound more like
more of the same, women think,
we are in pain, and nothing is being done.

There may be theories that estrogen and progesterone
may play a role in the novel coronavirus

*(may this explain the Covid-19 reaction differences
between feminine me and my masculine husband?)*

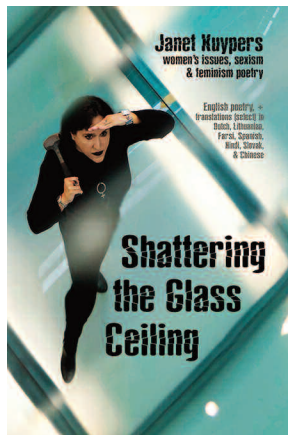
but *taking* estrogen daily, could that effect
the vaccine, *or* the virus?

Well, it doesn't matter if one doctor after another
hears a stack of anecdotal evidence from their patients,
because stories aren't proof,
and women are all still stuck,
bleeding,
with no way to solve their medical problems.

And for the men out there
that don't want to think about women bleeding
(even though men have no problem
with the same women bearing and raising *their* children,
which women have to bleed monthly for to make happen),
similar stories arise with young women,
possibly wanting to have children one day,
missing their period *for four months*
after getting Covid-19, with irregular periods resuming
*(though when one woman talked to her doctor about it,
they assumed it was from Covid-19, but to quote
the patient, "none seemed too concerned about it.")*

So, welcome to another case
of an unexpected medical problem for women
that no one can explain...

I jokingly said
that I'd like to start this story
by saying "Dateline (*your town here*)"—
but maybe I should have said all along:
Dateline, *your neighborhood*, or
Dateline, *your street*, or
Dateline, *your home*.
Because after only now hearing
the now upswelling cries
of women who follow the rules
and do what's best for them—
women only suffer for it with no explanation, and
(*of course*)
can't share their problems
in an effort to solve them.
If women *could* tell their stories
it may only be a stepping stone.
But if women *did* tell their stories,
you may only then realize
how serious
the problems women go through
can really be.



like nothing ever happened

In Waco, Texas
a grand jury
found enough
evidence
in the case
against a man
indicted on four counts
of sexual assault
to send the case
to trial.

*Now, usually,
when a grand jury
sends a case
to trial,
that usually means
there's enough
evidence
to convict.*

But I just heard
on the news
that instead,
he pled
no contest
to **one** charge
of unlawful restraint
in return
for the dismissal
of four charges
of sexual assault.

With this plea
from this fraternity
president rapist,
who had nothing
to offer the state
in a plea deal,
he gets this lower charge
in exchange
for
counseling,
a \$400 fine

*(which is less
than the fine
for leaving
a disabled car
to get help),*
plus three years
probation.
Added bonus,
if he stays clean
until probation's over,
his record
would be
expunged.

This means
he wouldn't have to
register as a sex offender —

it would be
like nothing ever happened.

This woman
was repeatedly
raped,
strangled,
and left
for dead
face down
in the dirt.
She was brought
to the hospital,
where *they*
called the police.
There's an enormous
amount of evidence.
A conviction
is almost sure.

Four counts of
sexual assault.
And they treat it
like nothing ever happened.

Women think
we've shattered
the glass ceiling,
but we still
have to shatter
the mentality
that women are objects
and rape is not a crime.
We try to plead our case,
but nothing ever happens.

Maybe we women
have to shatter
more than ceilings,
but also men's mentality.
Maybe we should
even shatter
a few of your bones,
the way you shatter our souls
with every act of rape.

Shattering your bones
would not even
cross the line
you rapists cross
with your misogyny
and violence.
Is that what we're left with?
Is that what we have to do?
Should we start to get down
as low as you
to start
to try
to even
the score?

If we're so equal,
is it not our turn
to exact our revenge?

(Former Baylor University Phi Delta Theta president and student Jacob Walter Anderson was arrested and charged with sexual assault in 2016.)

United We Wonder

spending all day
talking about
how people
can be united

I walked to
an American
Indian tent
and I waited

because these
storytellers
were ready
to talk to us

and I realized
then and there
that we all
have stories

about what
has been
taken away
from us

and how we
can keep
what is within
us to share

with all of
the world
so that we
can all grow

Did a man
from my very distant
familial past
know what he found,
discovering
this rich land with
so much to
offer — did he know
what he took
from the people who
knew this land
all too well... whether he
knew or not,
we remember those
once-holders
of this sacred land;
the Algonquin-
speaking tribes native
to this land
knew the word “Illinois”
really meant
“tribe of superior men.”
I cannot speak
for what any ancestors
did to you,
but just know that I
personally
hear your words, know
your meaning,
and will honor this land
as if it has
always been my own...
for to me,
Illinois is only my own,
which I honor
the way you did, as I now
honor you.

Knew the Word

written 12/2
(the 1818 day
Illinois became
the 21st state of the
United States)

Eighteen and Eight. Plus Eighteen: Where We've Been & What We've Seen

I have journeyed around the world with you
after all I've seen, I'm now an observer —
an astronomer looking out into the universe
out past the solar system, past the Kuiper Belt
trying to understand what makes everything
everything

I fly in airplanes, I jump from airplanes,
I pilot airplanes, getting closer to the stars

molecule by molecule,
we originate from stars
and we are all linked,
our bodies formed from stardust

but outer space is a violent place
violent explosions create the stars
and our earth has earthquakes, avalanches,
volcanoes, el Niños, tornadoes, tsunamis, typhoons

and in all this madness
somehow I found you

with you I have watched solar storms
from the Arctic Circle's Aurora Borealis
we've even seen it dance over Greenland
from our window, 40,000 feet in the sky

I've seen galaxies collide
I've seen comets smash into planets
I've seen supernovae and the death of stars
and in all of that, I still found you

as I said before, I'm only an observer
but I've found what I've been looking for

and with these observations,
I thee wed

and I'll tighten my grip on your hand
when we travel into the night together



About Janet Kuypers

<http://www.janetkuypers.com>

Professional performance artist and publisher, Janet Kuypers edits two literary magazines at Scars Publications (<http://scars.tv>). She has 100+ books of hers published, most on Amazon. She hosted *the Café Gallery* Chicago poetry open mic for years

(<http://scars.tv/thecafe>); since 2019 hosts the *Poetic License* Austin, TX open mic, now global via Zoom meetings (http://scars.tv/Poetic_License). Performing spoken word & music nationally (with music shows in Chicago IL, Round Rock TX, & Fairbanks AK), her 40+ CDs are on iTunes & Amazon. Her writing has been nominated for and won many international awards.





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