

Violence in America



Janet Kuypers
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soothe me just this once

when i called you from the pay phone
at the hotel
after he hit me

i got your answering machine
i tried to tell you
as quickly as i could

a woman came up to me while i was
in the lobby
asked if i was okay

that's when i realized i was scraped
up, bleeding
i told her i was fine

please just tell me you're at home
screening calls
pick up the phone

you think i brought this on myself,
don't you
please just this once

pick up the phone, listen to me
soothe me just this once
help me

i am the woman who loves pain

i am the woman who loves pain

i look for you
and i usually find you

one of you

i know you'll all do the same things
act the same way
i've gotten used to it

they tell me i should find someone
better
that i am settling
that this is not love

but i've never felt love
and although this is pain
although i am hurting with you
it is better than hurting alone

i swear it is

that's not what i'm here for

every once in a while
i want to talk to one of them

see if they'll actually listen

but i've learned by now
they're not interested in

what i have to say
that's not what i'm here for

they think they're using me
i guess they are

but what they don't realize
is that i'm using them, too

maybe that's why
they don't feel the pain i feel

but i still use them, they use me
but i do it anyway

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.

when you're gone

i know you'll be back
to take more from me

i always wonder
how much more i have to give
how much more i possess

sometimes i wonder
if i am spent
if i can take any more

but i always do
and you're always there

when you're gone
there will be

someone else

i know it

they never ask me

i get up to find my clothes
sometimes they stay asleep
sometimes they wake up

“why are you getting dressed”
they ask, and i tell them
that i have to get going

they never ask me to stay

gas stations and gun shops

there are more gun dealers
in america
than gas stations

in california, more children
are killed by guns
than by car accidents

the rate of violent crimes
went down last year, but
the number of deaths
by guns increased

gun shot wounds
to people under sixteen
doubled
in the past three years

a young person
commits suicide with
a handgun
every eight hours

five hundred thirty-eight of
four thousand, nine hundred
ninety-eight
gunshot deaths last year
were accidental

my niece was over
at her grandparent's house
she saw a rifle
sitting on the hallway floor

and she said to me,
hey, that's a gun
and i told her
not to touch it

guns scare me
but she was fascinated

and i was more scared

there are more gun dealers
in america
than gas stations

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

**domestic
violence in
america
nashville,
tennessee**

i have had my cheek bone
and nose reconstructed twice

we're divorced now
but he still keeps calling me

he keeps denying it in court

domestic violence in america nashville, tennessee

according to accounts, her husband
allegedly locked her and their
four-year-old son in their house

for about forty hours. They were
essentially hostages. The husband
then allegedly beat the woman

while the son watched. This is the
stick he allegedly used to keep her
in line, it looks like a metal broom

or mop handle, it's hollow, and you
see, here is a bend in it from the
hitting. The bend looks like a twist

of a garden hose. And this bloody
knit glove, it was tied on here, at
the end of the stick, so that when he

allegedly hit her it didn't scar her.
Isn't that funny? You can tell that
the son was there for it all, too, he

doesn't talk much at all, and he never
leaves his mother's side. She limps down
the hallway now, and he follows.

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.

here it goes again

maybe this is what i deserve
this pain
but i can't let you go

even if there is someone else
on the side
doing the same things to me
you do
i can't let you go

i need that connection to you
i need that pain
i can't be alone

even though i'm alone when i'm with you

i guess i feel
like i'm nothing when i'm with you
but then again
i'm nothing without you

so here it goes
here it goes again

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

chess game again

we all watched the case on the news together, the case where a man on a subway train opened fire on passengers in the car. nine people dead, i think.

they caught the man, they had their trial, and by right he could have a lawyer appointed to him. but no, he wanted to act as his own attorney. so every

day he would come into the courtroom in his suit, looking professional, and he would question each of the witnesses, the people that survived his shooting

spree and now had to look him in the eye and answer his questions. “so what happened then?” he would ask, and a woman would answer, “i saw you push

the woman to the ground, put your knee to her back and shoot her in the back of the head.” “can you point out the man that did this?” he would ask, and

a man would respond, “it was you.” some of the witnesses broke down under the emotional strain. and finally he had no further questions and the judge dismissed

the jury to arrive at a verdict. they found him guilty, and when the judge asked the defendant if he had any last words for the jury, he kept stressing his innocence,

and never apologized. the judge told him
he was disgusted. he saw no remorse in
the killer's eyes. and of all the violence
we see in the media, all the court trials

that are fed to us through our television
sets, our boxes of american dreams, i
don't think any of us were prepared for
this. how did those people feel, when

faced with the man that has brought them
so much pain, how did they feel when they
had to quietly sit there and answer his
questions, when he didn't even say he was

sorry? most of them sat there trying to
keep their composure when faced with a
man who lost all control. this twisted tale.
they were a pawn in his chess game again.

hancock suicide, chicago, december 1994

so me and the guys
were just taking a break
from the construction

on the hancock building,
you know they've been
doing construction work

there, right? they put
that big wall up around
the block, the tall

fence, and they've been
doing remodeling stuff.
well, i had been working

on some tile work and
we were just walking
around the building, me

and three other guys,
walking kind of like a
square, in formation,

sort of, and i'm at the
back and i stop and step
back to check some of

the grout work, so i just
kind of lean back while
standing still. well, one

of the guys says he heard

it coming, like a big rush
of air, like a whistling

sound, but much heavier.
i didn't even get a chance
to look up, though one of

the other guys did and
saw it coming a split second
before it happened. and the

next thing i knew there was
this loud cracking sound
and i felt all of this stuff

hit me, like wet concrete
thrown at me, but i didn't
know what the hell it was.

and i opened my eyes and looked
down and i was just completely
covered in blood

and there was just this
heap of mass right in front of
me. it took a while for me

to realize that a woman jumped.
she hit the fence, her head
and spinal cord were still

stuck on the fence and the
rest of her was just this red
pile right in front of me.

the police had to take all of
my clothes. every inch.
they say she broke through the

glass at the fiftieth floor, i don't
know how, that glass is supposed
to be bullet proof or something.

and the one thing i noticed was
that she covered her head with
panty hose, in an effort to keep

her face together. funny, she
was so willing to die, but she
wanted to be kept in tact. i know

i won't hear about this on the
news, they try to down play suicides,
but other violence is fine for them.

and they say she was handi-
capped, but then how badly, and
how did she get the strength

to break the window and throw
herself out of the john hancock
building? she must have really

wanted to die.

it really hasn't sunk in quite yet,
seeing her fall apart in front
of me like that. i don't think i'm

ready to think about it yet.

Filled with such panic

i heard a woman jumped
from the john hancock building,
fifty-something floors.
i work on the thirty-
second floor of the civic
opera building, it's older
than the john hancock, and
we have regular windows
there. you see, the john hancock
has bullet-proof windows
that don't just open up,
whereas we have windows
that just slide up and down,
like the ones you have in
your own home. sometimes
i open the window, stick my
head out and look at the
street. the wind is so strong
when you're up that high.
sometimes we spit out the
window. a few times we
threw a paper airplane out the
window, watched it soar
down wacker drive. i never
stick my head out past my
shoulders, and i'm one of the
more adventurous ones at
my office. i can't imagine
looking out the window,
then going out past the
shoulders, opening that
window all the way, and
just going out. i'd be filled
with such panic. i did the
wrong thing, i'd think, then
i'd struggle to find a ledge
to cling to right before i'd
start to fall.

i'm really going this time

i pack my bags
say i'm really going this time

you throw my bags
scream at me to leave

before you get more violent
and you mean it this time

i'm sitting in my car
outside the hotel

see you at the window
holding the drapes back

why do i have to think
that means you care?

why do i came back,
asking you if you realize

what you've done to me,
if you realize what

you're about to lose.
i'll bet you think

you'll call me once
and everything will be

forgotten. other times,
yes, i've forgiven you.

i've come back. but i
can't take being thrown

to the ground, strangled.
when i realize what i

lost that night, i'm
scared. but i have to

remember that you
lost more. you lost me.

i'm really going this time,
and you won't see me again.

carry this with you,
always. this pain, like

the pain you've given me.
you won't see me. carry this.

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