

children churches
& daddies

politics and violence

poetry by janet kuypers

it's always one thing or another. democrats like this program, republicans don't. republicans want to pot our money over here instead, but democrats don't want that.

they really have no idea of what we want, and they're really not interested, either.

One of David Letterman's top ten lists was for names for Ross Perot's political party. One of the top ten was "Dorkocrats."

And the thing is, both our major political parties support a certain set of moral choices, then bring them into politics. But the value systems they choose aren't even consistent.

And they wonder why this is such a violent country.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Fingers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

everything was alive and dying

I

I had a dream the other night
I walked out of the city
to a forest
and there were neatly paved bicycle paths
and trash cans every fifty feet
and trash every ten

and then a raccoon came right up to me
she had a few little baby raccoons
following her, it was so cute, I
wish I had my camera

and she spoke to me,
she said, thank you
thank you for not buying furs,
I know you humans are pretty smart,
you have to be able to figure out a way
to keep yourselves warm
without killing me

and I said, you know they don't
do it for warmth,
they do it for fashion, they do it
for power. And she said I know.
But thank you anyway.

II

Then I walked a little further
and there was a stray cat
she still had her little neon collar on
with a little bell
and she walked a few feet,
stretched her front paws,
oh, she looked so darling

and then she walked right up to me
and she said thank you
and I said for what?
And she just looked at me for a moment,
her little ears were standing straight up,
and then she said, you know,
in some countries I'm considered
a delicacy. And I said how
do you know of these things?
And she said
when somebody eats one of you
word gets around
and then she looked up at me again
and said, and in some countries
the cow is sacred. Wouldn't they
love to see how you humans
prepare them for slaughter, how you
hang them upside-down
and slit their throats
so their still beating hearts
will drain out all the blood for you
and she said isn't it funny
how arbitrary your decision
to eat meat is?
and I said, don't put me
in that category, I don't eat meat
and she said I know

III

And I walked deeper in to the forest
managed to get away from the
picnic tables and the outhouses
that lined the forest edges
the roaring cars gave way to the
rustling of tree branches
crackling of fallen leaves
under my step

when the wind tunneled through
the wind whistled and sang

as it flew past the bark

and leaves

I walked
listened to the crack of dead branches
under my feet
and I felt a branch against my shoulder
I looked up and I could hear
the trees speak to me,
and they said
thank you for letting the
endangered animals live here amongst us
we do think they're so pretty
and it would be a shame to see them go
and thank you for recycling paper
because you're saving us
for just a little while longer

we've been on this planet for so long
embedded in the earth
we do have souls, you know
you can hear it in our songs
we cling with our roots
we don't want to let go

and I said, but I don't do much,
I don't do enough
and they said we know
but we'll take what we can get

IV

and I woke up in a sweat

V

so tell me, Bob Dole
so tell me, Newt Gingrich
so tell me, Pat Buchanan
so tell me, Jesse Helms

if you woke up from that dream
would you be in a sweat, too?

VI

Do you even know why
we should save the rain forest?
Oh preserve the delicate balance,
just tear the whole forest down,
what difference does it make?
Put in some orange groves
so our concentrate orange juice
can be a little cheaper

did you know that medical researchers
have a very, very hard time
trying to come up with synthetic
cures for diseases on their own?
It helps them out a little if they can first
find the substance in nature.
A tree that appears in the rain forest
may be the only one of its species.
Or one like it may be two miles away,
instead of right next to it. I wonder
how many cures we've destroyed
to plant more orange groves.
Serves us right.

VII

You know my motives aren't selfless
I know that these things are worthwhile in my life

I'd like to find a cure to these diseases
before I die of them
and I'm not just a vegetarian
because I think it's wrong to kill an animal
unless I have to
I also know the excess protein
pulls the calcium away from my bones
and gives me osteoporosis

and the excess fat gives me heart attacks
and I also know that we could be feeding
ten times more people
with the same resources used for meat production

You know, I know you're looking at me
and calling me an extremist
but I'm sitting here, looking around me
looking at the destruction caused by family values
and thinking the right, moral, non-violent decisions
are also those extreme ones

VII

everything is linked here
we destroy our animals
so we can be wasteful and violent
we destroy our plants
we destroy our earth
we're even destroying our air
we wreak havoc on the soil, on the atmosphere
we dump our wastes into our lakes
we pump aerosol cans and exhaust pipes

and you tell me I'm extreme

and these animals and forests keep calling out to me
the oceans, the wind

and I'm beginning to think
that we just keep doing it
because we don't know how to stop
and deep inside we feel the pain of
all that we've killed
and we try to control it by
popping a chemical-filled pain-killer

we live through the guilt
by taking caffeine, nicotine, morphine
and we keep ourselves thin with saccharin
and we keep ourselves sane with our alcohol poisoning

and when that's not enough
maybe a line of coke

maybe shoot ourselves in the head
in front of the mirror in the master bedroom
or maybe just take some pills
walk into the garage, turn on the car
and just
fall asleep

in the wild
you have no power over anyone else

now that we're civilized
we create our own wild

maybe when we have all this power
the only choice we have
is to destroy ourselves

and so we do





{ this is art }



this is my burden

I managed to find a seat on the el
train, for once, I was going to work
early enough

so that it wasn't very crowded. And
the ride was the same as the el train
always is:

some people reading a paper, a woman
putting on her make-up, most
just staring

out the window at the aging, rattling
tracks, the smattering of gang
graffiti on the

nearby buildings. Ordinary day in
Chicago, slightly overcast. I wear
my sunglasses

just to avoid eye contact with other
train members. We all know this
code: we know

we have to somehow keep our
sense of personal space, our
sense of selves.

I hear a bit of a scuffle behind me,
more the moving of people than
an argument;

nothing to ponder over. Then
a gunshot rings out. I turn around
and catch

a glimpse of two men struggling.
Instantly I duck down, as most
others do.

I crawl down to the floor in front
of my seat, trying to protect
myself, having

no idea who has the gun or which
direction the gun is pointing. I
don't even know

if this seat in front of me could
protect me from a bullet. There are
screams everywhere;

the gun occasionally going off.
I try to look to see if anyone
was shot, but

am afraid of being in the line
of fire. Another few men jump
in the fight,

in an effort to stop the gunman.
Why is this happening? Was it
an argument,

or just someone on a shooting
spree? The el comes to a screeching
halt at a stop,

and now comes the question: do we
make a run for it, and risk death,
or will the

gunman try to escape out the doors?
The train ride to here seemed an
eternity,

and now none of us even knows
if we should try to get off the train.
The doors

don't open. I hear a few gun-
shots; two men scream. The doors
finally open.

A barrage of policemen cover the doorways. I could glance up and see them.

Many more screams. They don't seem to end. The policemen rush the

gunman, shoot him before he could shoot anybody else. It was over. The next two

hours were spent on the train and platform answering questions. I had nothing

to offer them; I barely saw what happened. They informed me that it was not an

argument but a man trying to stop a man about to go on a shooting spree. Then

the man that survived the struggle walked up to me, and when no one was listening

told me that the gunman walked down the aisle, stopped four chairs short of mine,

and aimed for my head. That was when he jumped up to stop him. That man

was out to kill me. But I've never met him before, I said, and the man said he didn't

need to know my reply, just wanted to let me know why all this happened.

This man's intentions were to kill
me. But why? Did he think I was
someone else?

And now I think of this every day,
the answers still not coming to me.
And I still

have this burden to carry with me,
that all these people died, all of these
people witnessed

this event, and in a way I couldn't
explain or justify, it was all because
of me.

And this is my burden. All this pain.
All this guilt. All these unanswered
questions.

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.



{ this is art }

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

people's rights misunderstood

I had a dream the other night
I was walking down the street in the city
and a man came up to me
a skinny man, he lost his hair
and he walked right up to me
and told me no one cares anymore
and he took my hand
and asked me to care about him
"I'm not supposed to be like this" he said
"I'm not homeless, you know
I have AIDS"
and I wanted to tell him that
someone did care,
that he didn't have to die alone,
but you know how sometimes
you can't do things in your dream
no matter how hard you try,
well, my mouth was open, wide open,
but no words were coming out

you know, I'm afraid to go to sleep tonight
I'm afraid that a pregnant woman
will come up to me
and ask me for a hanger
and I'll tell her there has to be another way
and she'll say this is the way she chooses

{ people's rights misunderstood }

I'm afraid a woman will come up to me
and tell me she doesn't want to live
because she's just been raped
and her world doesn't make sense anymore
and I'll tell her that she can make it
that one in three women are raped in their lifetime
and they all make it
and besides, the world doesn't make sense
to anyone
and she'll say that doesn't make me
feel any better

and I'm afraid that I won't be able to
walk down that city street again
without it looking like a Quentin Tarantino movie
where everyone is pointing guns at each other
ys, Mr. NRA
you are right
I feel so much safer
knowing everyone out there has a gun
that there are more gun shops than gas stations
and that everyone is so willing
to do the killing

taking out the brain

i'm a med student
and for the past few weeks
we've been working on a cadeavor

at first
i didn't want to know anything
about him
i covered the head of the guy
wanted to pay him some respect
i didn't want to think
tat this person lived
before i dissected him

i hhad a hard time
taking out the brain
cause you know, that's where
the memories are
that's what makes him
him

it's not so hard now
they get the bodies from the morgue
they're homeless people, mostly
no family
it's not so hard now

chicago, west side

she knew who they were coming for

she crouched in front of the window
straddling her chair she moved from the corner
her coffee sat in the window sill
the condensation rising, beading

on the window right about at her eye level.
she took the side of her index finger
periodically and smeared some of the
water away to look into the streets.

the snow was no longer falling on the
west side of Chicago; it just packed
itself darker and deeper into the ground
with every car that drove over it.

she gunshot was ringing in her ear
still. it was so loud. the earth cried
when she pulled that trigger. let out
a loud, violent scream. she could still

hear it. for these few moments, she had to
just stare out the window and wait. she
didn't know if she should bother running,
if it mattered or not. she couldn't think.

all she knew was that this time, when
she heard the sirens coming from the
streets, she'd know why they were coming.
she'd know who they were coming for.

the state of the nation

my phone rang earlier today
and I picked it up and said "hello"
and a man on the other end said,
Is this Janet Kuypers?
and I said, "Yes, it is, may I ask
who is calling?"
and he said, Yeah, hi, this is
George Washington, and I'm sitting here
with Jefferson and we wanted to
tell you a few things. And I said
"Why me?" And he said Excuse me,
I believe I said I was the one
that wanted to do the talking.
God, that's the problem with
Americans nowadays. They're so
damn rude. And I said, "You know,
you really didn't have to use
language like that," and he said,
Oh, I'm sorry, it's just I've been
dead so long, I lose all control
of my manners. Well, anyway, we just
wanted to tell you some stuff. Now,
you know that we really didn't have
much of an idea of what we were
doing when we were starting up
this country here, we didn't have
much experience in creating
bodies of power, so I could understand
how our Constitution could be
misconstrued

and then he put in a dramatic pause
and said,
but when we said people had
a right to bear arms
we meant to protect themselves
from a government gone wrong
and not so you could kill
and innocent person
for twenty dollars cash
and when we said freedom of
religion we included the separation
of church and state because freedom
of religion could also mean freedom
from religion
and when we said freedom of speech
we had no idea you'd be
burning a flag
or painting pictures of Christ
doused in urine
or photographing people with
whips up their respective anatomies
but hell, I guess we've got to
grin and bear it
because if we ban that
the next thing they'll ban is books
and we can't have that
and I said, "But there are schools
that have books banned, George."
And he said Oh.

arrowhead

you're used to seeing it, you know
people killing each other one the streets

all of my friends carry guns
i started carrying knives when i was eight

the blade looked like an arrowhead
and the t-shaped handle
fit between the knuckles in my palm

i was tough for a girl, i guess

i've only killed one person
it was when i was fourteen

there's one mad rush of panic
then you just finish the job
and run like hell

that's why i'm in this house, you see
they couldn't put me in jail

they've taught me a lot here

at first
i didn't want to get away from it all
from the violence
it was what i knew
it was what i expected

and then
someone killed my sister
and i knew what they were all
talking about
i missed her

suddenly i knew
i made someone else
feel that

i learned
what guilt and remorse were
and ever since
i've wanted to get out

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