God Is a Bullet

But what good's a gun against the subtle fascism creeping across America?

April 1, 1996 By Kiki Mason

My Dearest Darling Honey Lamb: How wonderful to arrive home from another day of bleakness to find your missive. Sealed with red lipstick, no less. Your story had me in stitches, and I was so proud of you for claiming you were Joan Crawford to a Spanish queen trying to pick you up.

I have a new fetish (or is it an obsession?); a need, want and desire all rolled into one. I want a gun. A sleek black .38, with a silencer of course. (Having a silencer for one's gun is so chic, don't you think?) Or perhaps a little silver pistol, like the one Nancy Reagan used to keep by her bed, "just in case."

The problem is that no one will give me one.

I was down on the farm with your mama and rabbits were chewing up the garden. "Oh, I guess I'll have to go upstairs and get my gun and shoot them," she casually announced. I begged her to let me do it, because I would enjoy it so much. "I know you'd like it," she replied. "You'd like it too much. That's what really scares me."

I asked my friend Tina, who lives in the South Bronx and is always saying the most powerful prayers for me. Tina and her husband are like Mr. and Mrs. Shaft. They are cool, stylish and always packing, even in church. Tina explained it to me this way: "Packing is just like insurance. You want to know that if some crazy motherfucker pulls out a gun, you have something, too. But I am not getting *you* a gun, Kiki, because you'd have a bad day and use it, either on yourself or someone else." I promised her that I would never, ever, bump myself off with a gun. Yech, what a mess. (No, if I ever do myself in, I'll take Seconal, like Sharon Tate in *Valley of the Dolls*. You know, put on a nice, lacey nightie, flutter my false eyelashes a few times, lick my subtly frosted pink lips and slip into eternal sleep.)

What would I do if I had a gun? Well, nothing really. It would just be comforting to know it was there. I could play with it while I watch that farcical tragicomic opera, the evening news. I watch a lot of news, political analysis and the like. I wonder as I watch: What country are they talking about? Certainly not the land I inhabit. I live in a land of great beauty and horrible despair, where the populace must battle the system even more than their illnesses, where every day brings a new struggle against a shrinking bureaucracy. Yet somewhere in this constant struggle, we find hope and courage and the ability to laugh.

On television I see America. They all have helmet hair and pinched faces. Pat Buchanan looks like he hasn't taken a good crap in years. There was a picture the other day, on the front page of *The New York Times*: Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich had just finished fucking over some unfortunate group and were celebrating, kind of a Republican version of Hitler's victory jig after the fall of France. I drew little pointy ears on Newt, and he was Satan. As for Bob Dole, I've been trying to figure out who he reminds me of for years, and it finally dawned on me. He's the spitting image of The Grinch Who Stole Christmas. They talk about God and country and family. Well, I believe in God. I was born in this country. And I have a family, too.

In the meantime, Hillary Clinton has a new hairdo, and *hoo-ee* did she need it. It's sort of like Jane Jetson's, with a little upbeat flip halfway down her face. There is a lot of analysis about why people don't like her, but really it boils down to this: Hillary is prissy. She's just a big ole prisspot. She always has a look on her face like someone just farted and she wants them to step forward and confess now.

Bill hosted an AIDS conference at the White House. The timing was very interesting to me. It was in December, before the election season began. He could throw us a bone and ignore us for 1996. But it won't work. The Republicans will still scream fag-lover at him, because to them this will forever be a disease of fags and junkies.

The audience was painfully, carefully handpicked, like a petting zoo. Everyone was very respectful. Bill made a great show of compassion and really, really listening. A normally cynical activist later said to me, "You know, he even used the word homophobia." *Wow.*

We all want to believe that someone or something will save us from this horrible grind. We want to believe that this is a good country, whose citizens will do the right thing. Our people feel a righteous anger when this doesn't happen.

When I was young, I used to imagine the arrival of fascism with tanks rolling down the streets and grim-faced men in brown or black shirts beating us up. I underestimated the cleverness of our enemies. I wish that there were tanks rolling down the streets. At least I could go out and throw a Molotov cocktail and die standing up, like a man, honey. But fascism in America is a more subtle thing. The iron fist is sheathed not only in a velvet glove but in an evening gown and diamonds as well. No one says what they mean or means what they say. It is more like Chinese water torture, slow and monotonous, the drip, drip, drip of lies and deceit. Come, says the enemy, we just want to help you. If we protest, we are being irrational and unreasonable. This is a terminal illness, they tell us, not a political disease. A friend called to report that her son, who attends an exclusive private school in Connecticut, has been cutting himself with razor blades. It has become quite fashionable at his school, and at the equally prestigious girls' school down the road (the same one that Jackie O attended). When she asked him why, he replied, "I just want to feel something." I said to her, "Well, what have we left them? What does any young person have to look forward to? Fear? Greed? Lies?" The truth is that somewhere along the line, we grew tired and abdicated. We turned away, because looking was too painful. The flowers that we planted have been ripped up, and poisonous weeds grow in their place. This is the essence of fascism. Silence. A quiet kind of

despair.

I am going to give you some advice, which I rarely ever do, because no one ever takes it anyway. But here goes: Stay in Europe for as long as you can, no matter how much you miss us. If I could leave this country right now, I'd be on the first plane out of here. A cowardly thought, but in the end, you can't save the world, but you can try to save yourself. Be free. I have felt trapped all winter, imprisoned by disease and cold and despair. I have felt as if I'm standing naked in the middle of the street screaming and no one, not a soul, is listening, not even God. This is what prison must be like, waiting, being beaten down at every turn, finding joy in any small victory. I refuse, however, to be a slave. I believe that all of the things that I have lost can come back again: Joy, sanity, hope, strength, humor and the will to fight. I will pray. I will heal.

My favorite quotation from Mao Tse-tung is: "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." Perhaps this sounds quaint and I'm just being maladjusted and old-fashioned. But again I say to you, they will not change. We are the ones who must change. We must pull up the weeds of ignorance and hatred so that flowers can someday grow once more in this land.

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