**THE PAIN OF OTHERS**

**(after Susan Sontag’s, *Regarding the Pain of Others*)**

By Carol Anne McGorry – Inspired by Eric Krebs

**This story is about?**

The complex, psychological effects of a viewer/witness of violence. How does a viewer imagine the torture/pain of others/victims and cope with a lingering sense of shame for her/his impotence—in this play, a failure to call out for help.

**How does the play begin?**

In the apartment of a newly married couple, two weeks after the wife had been woken up by screams from a woman/neighbor being attacked below her second story apartment window, saw shadows and didn’t call the police or fully wake her husband. She is tormented by the constant barrage of media attention (radio, TV, and newsprint) around the event and the apparent apathy and lack of response of neighbors and, moreover, by her husband’s dismissal/disinterest.

**What forces the play to continue?**

The developing post-trauma of the main character (the wife/the witness) who can’t move past what she saw and her inaction, traumatized and forever changed from a mix of confusion and shame. Her husband is indifferent to the attack and his wife’s response/needs. This pushes her post-traumatic response into a frustrated obsession with the victim.

**How will the play end?**

The wife will continue to devolve, to decompensate, losing her sense of self. The wife obsessively starts to spend afternoons drinking alone in the bar that the victim had managed. She hears the voice of the deceased. In her obsession, loss of self, she creates a tomb, of sorts, in her apartment…the perch from which she saw the somewhat ambiguous events/violence--photos of the deceased, news clippings, found objects pasted/hung on the apartment walls--projecting her inner world into her outer space.



**The New York Times**

The photo of Catherine “Kitty” Genovese that appeared

in the March 27, 1964,

New York Times article about her death.

**THE PAIN OF OTHERS**

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Inspired by Kitty Genovese ]

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**Character Breakdown:**

Susan 23, female, White, Irish-American

5’ 2, married, pink-toned skin, medium-brown long hair.

Jimmy 24, male, White, Irish-American

 5’ 8, thin, brown hair, cropped short

Phantom Voice/Kitty Heard offstage; only Susan and the audience can hear it.

Bartender

Three Bar Patrons

**“***Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism*.”

James Elkins, The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing

**Act 1, Scene 1**

*Kew Gardens, Queens, March 1964, two weeks after the murder of Kitty Genovese and the publication of a New York Times article reporting that “38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks…”*

*Early Morning. Second floor apartment, in a group of four, Tudor-faced, two-storied, attached units. Susan, wearing a chenille robe and smoking a Kent, sits at the Formica, kitchen table in front of a window that looks down onto Austin Street. Jimmy is offstage in the bedroom, getting dressed, putting on his uniform blue shirt and pants, black shoes. He works for the MTA fare booth at the Jamaica subway terminal.*

*The couple is newly married. Susan doesn’t work as they are planning to have a child. They usually have coffee together in the morning before he leaves for work. On this morning, the radio is on, repeating the details of the Kew Gardens’ murder and examining the apparent indifference/apathy of witnesses to the crime, people whose lights went on in their apartments, who looked on, who maybe yelled out at the ruckus below, but who failed to phone the police or interfere in the crime.*

**RADIO BROADCAST**

*Delivered in broadcast voice/mode.*

Two weeks ago, Kitty Genovese, a bar manager from Kew Gardens, Queens, was stabbed to death just feet from her home. We’ve discovered that more than 30 people witnessed her attack and no one picked up the phone to call the police despite the young woman’s cries for help.

*Jimmy enters, immediately turning off the radio.*

**JIMMY**

I am so tired of hearing about this.

*Susan stubs out her cigarette, not looking at Jimmy; she stands but still looks down onto the street.*

**SUSAN**

They’re still picking up that garbage, like nothing’s happened.

*Jimmy tugs on his blue, uniform collar; pops two pieces of white bread into the toaster.*

**JIMMY**

I don’t want to hear about it anymore. Don’t ya think there’s at least one murder a day in this city? No one cares. (*pause*) Guy just fell dead on the F train last week, drunk, laid across the seats and when they took him out on the stretcher, three people rushed in. Sat where he died. Stench and all.

*Susan gets up to pour coffee from a percolator.*

**SUSAN**

Jimmy, I woke up to those screams. I saw that man running. I was standing right here, looking down where they’re now tossing those pails. I coulda’ done something, Jimmy.

*Jimmy butters his toast.*

**JIMMY**

What were you gonna do? Run out there? Evveeer since the newspaper came out, everyone is feeling guilty.

*Susan pours coffee, walks back to the window.*

**SUSAN**

She lived right next door, Jimmy. Remember her? I didn’t call the cops? I tried to wake you, and you just rolled over.

**JIMMY**

Not our problem, Suzy. We’re all just trying to get by here. What was she doing working at that bar, anyway? You see I don’t have you out there working at night.

*Jimmy tosses the newspaper that had been opened to the photograph of Kitty—into the trash and leaves for work. After Jimmy leaves, Susan sits calmly staring into space -*

**SUSAN**

*(trying to remember)* Did I see *him*? I know I heard *her*, screaming. Help! Help me! I’m dying! (*pause*) But I wasn’t the only one who saw her. Lots of people up that night. Opening windows and looking down. The paper—a “slow” killing—guy got scared off twice. Still he came back and stabbed her some more. And, geez, they got him already.

*Susan remembers the paper and pulls it back out of the trash, rereads about the arrest of the killer, and says aloud, to no one in the room.*

**SUSAN** (*continued*)

Guy gets caught not six days later, and he tells the cops right off he killed two other women—a 24-year-old and a girl, 15. Who does that? Kills, then caught, says, *yeah, I did that* *and more*.

**Scene 2**

*Same day, later in the afternoon. Susan, still in her robe, sitting again at the kitchen table, consumed with the newspaper, with the story. She gets up quickly to grab a pair of scissors, sits back down and cuts out the haunting headshot of Genovese. Susan stares back at the now dead woman’s direct gaze, at Kitty’s slightly parted lips and then hears a voice.*

**PHANTOM VOICE / KITTY**

*Look at me. Look me in the eye*. You saw me and turned away. I was left then, after he pushed me into the hallway and stabbed me three more times, to look up the stairwell for you, for *someone* to appear before my eyes would close—I knew in that moment—for the last time in my life.

 *Susan begins to talk to the voice in her head –*

**SUSAN**

I wasn’t sure what was happening. You stopped screaming.

*Susan is jolted back into reality; gets up to shake off her now daily state of confusion and pre-occupation. But, she nonetheless pins the clipped image to a cabinet next to the window.*

**Act 2, Scene 1**

*Four weeks after the killing. Early afternoon. Ev’s 11th Hour sports bar. Susan boards the LIRR from Kew Gardens to Hollis. She goes to Ev’s 11th Hour where Kitty Genovese had been the manager.*

*Susan approaches the bar, the front door held open with a brick. She looks in; there are three people there this day. They are all men.*

*Susan hesitates, but walks in anyway.*

*Two of the men (patrons #1 and #2) sit at one end of the long bar where it curves around toward the small, galley kitchen—each eating a burger, each with a beer poured into a glass in front of them. They look up at her, only. The other man (patron #3) sits alone in the middle of the bar, his back to all, with a shot of rye in front of him.*

*No ones speaks. Susan walks in and sits at one of the wooden side tables, in a chair facing the entrance/exit. Bartender comes over, asks what she’d like.*

**PHANTOM VOICE/KITTY**

*You*? What are you doing here?

**SUSAN**

I don’t know. I just had to come. I wondered where you worked?

*The bartender hears Susan saying something, walks over to her.*

**BARTENDER**

*What*? Want something to drink? Eat? The menu’s up there, on the board.

*Susan orders a gin and tonic, looks briefly at the board.*

**SUSAN**

*Says absently.*

I’ll have a hamburger.

**BAR PATRON #1**

Can’t believe she’s dead, killed like that in the streets. Everybody watching; nobody calling the police.

**BAR PATRON #2**

Wish she’d taken a ride from the bartender that night. She shouldn’t a been driving herself home like that each morning…not a safe place out there at night. Everybody thinks Kew Gardens is posh, a bit of England in Queens, New York, no less. Gardens, my ass! Well gardens and tutor homes don’t guard against psychos. No keeping them off the grass.

**PHANTOM VOICE/KITTY**

*They* wouldn’t have just watched me die*,* Susan.

**Scene 2***:*

*Susan has been taking the train each weekday to Ev’s 11th Hour. She sits alone each afternoon, drinking, ordering the same burger that she half eats. The phantom voice isn’t always there, but Susan hopes so, as she simultaneously numbs herself.*

*One early evening, as she returns home to Kew Gardens, getting off the LIRR, she notices something shiny in the dirt and weeds in the corner of her apartment building, a corner space where debris blows up naturally accumulating from wind and rain.*

*It’s the arc of a gold earring, a broken bit—just the thread. Is it Kitty’s? Susan wants to believe this. She takes it upstairs to her apartment, washes it with dish detergent, turning it over and over. She fits the bit into the hole of her pieced ear, touches it, rolls it around then takes it out. She ties the gold bit to a length of kitchen cord and hangs it from the blind in front of the kitchen window that offered the view the night of the murder.*

*Jimmy comes home from his MTA shift. Walks around, looking once again at all the news clippings pasted up in the kitchen and into the hallway now—some photocopied and enlarged prints of Kitty Genovese, that single, published image—that direct gaze and those slightly parted lips. The news stories are taped up as well. Now there’s this gold bit, hanging from the blinds. Susan’s inner world is increasingly out…on display.*

**JIMMY**

Susan, what’s this piece of shit hanging here?

**SUSAN**

*Susan looks over at the hanging earring part*.

Found it. It’s her’s.

**Act 3, Scene 1:**

*Susan sits at her usual table in the afternoon at Ev’s Eleventh Hour.*

**PHANTOM VOICE/KITTY**

Why do you keep coming here?

**SUSAN**

I don’t know. I just need to know more. I need your help.

**PHANTOM VOICE/KITTY**

Some things you forget, Susan. A birthday cake—not important—got a photo of it anyway. This bar—maybe it’ll burn down someday. The building gone, but not the memory of the loneliness. *You’ll see*. Keep on coming here and listening to me, listening to them. Watch as it changes over the afternoon—gets as dark out there as it is in here. Then you see dark all the time—re-membering.

Come here each day, and I’ll give you my memories—til, you’ll see, they will be yours—You/Me;Me/You. It will happen again and again, each night. It will be waiting for you.

**BARTENDER**

Hey, want another drink?

*Susan stubs out her cigarette, says nothing, gets up and walks out.*