

and they make me
cry



poems and short stories
janet kuypers
scars publications & design

realistic dreams

I had a dream the other night; my dreams
are different from other people's dreams:

other people's dreams aren't realistic, but
mine always are. They stay with you longer

that way, they make you think they really
happened. Recently I had a dream that someone

wanted to hurt me; they wanted to hurt me
and they followed me and appeared in the

same town as me and one day I was standing
at a street corner and they were just standing

there, talking to someone else, on the other
side of the street. So I panicked, and I turned

around and started running, ran down the block,
dropped what was in my hands off at my house,

and kept running. I don't know how far I ran,
or where I was running to, all I can remember

is what I was running from.

resurrecting the dead

do i ask for too much
do i expect too much

i know it will be the same
as it always is

something will go wrong
and you'll come crawling back

do you expect me to pick up the pieces
again?

am i supposed to watch it all
fall apart

then make everything
right again?

you never give me
the benefit of the doubt

you think someone else is better
well, maybe i'm cocky
but i know better

and soon
your world will crumble again

and i'll come back,
because i have to

resurrecting the dead

some people want to believe

so we were sitting there at denny's in some suburb of detroit, i don't know which suburb it was, but we were there at like ten in the morning eastern standard time, i was grabbing a bite to eat before i crossed the ambassador bridge and travelled into canada. you know, i really only associate places like denny's with travelling now, i always stop at some place like denny's only when taking a road trip and just stopping for some food. i think if i went into a denny's and i wasn't travelling, i'd get really confused. well, anyway, like i said, we were at denny's, and it was morning, so the both of us got breakfast. being a vegetarian, i ordered eggs with hash browns and toast, right? and the waitress says to me, like they always do in some no-name town in the middle of america, "yuh don't want any MEAT?", like it's so unheard of to not eat meat at breakfast. so i say, no, no meat, thank you, and then my friend orders pretty much the same thing, and we sit for a while, and talk and

stuff, and then the food comes. so then she asks me, "you're a vegetarian, right?" and i say, yes, and then she goes, "but you're eating chicken." and i'm just like, well, no, i'm not, an egg is an animal by-product, not animal flesh, and i was about to say that that was the difference between being a vegetarian and being a vegan, and she says, "but if a chicken sat on it long enough, it would become a chicken." and i'm just like, well, no, it's an unfertilized egg, there was never a rooster around that hen, so it could never become a chicken. and she's like, well, it's a chicken, though, and she just couldn't think that this wasn't a chicken. and i'm just thinking, my god, does she really think that a chicken can lay eggs without them being fertilized? like only worms and stuff can procreate without two sexes present. so our voices start getting a little louder, and then it ends up where i'm saying "so are you having an abortion every time you have a menstrual cycle? are men who have wet dreams mass murderers?" and she's looking away and saying "i'm not listening to you -"

and then i realized that some people, with logic thrown in their face, will still believe what they want to believe.

still no answers

the parents refused to believe
that their son would kill himself.
it's not like our son; he was not

a quitter. the police believed the
blood on his shirt was from an
act of violence he committed

just before he went into his own
garage and fell asleep. he wasn't
willing to face the consequences

of his violent actions; maybe he
killed someone, maybe someone
would come forward and put him

in jail. no, no, his parents said,
there must be foul play here. and
they managed to have the case re

opened when they discovered only
trace amounts of carbon monoxide
in his blood stream. he was dead,

or dying, before he got to the
garage. the blood was probably
from a struggle he had in trying

to survive. this was murder,
made to look like suicide, but who
did this, is that their son's blood

on his shirt, did he suffer, did
her even die while he was in his
own home? still no answers.

The Last Time

The last time I remember shooting an
animal was with my
son. We were in our back yard, and I saw

a chipmunk moving around off in the
distance. Now, there
are tons of chipmunks and squirrels and
raccoons near our house, the chipmunks
mess everything up,
eat everything in sight, they're like rats.

So I pulled out my rifle, aimed at that
vermin at the edge
of my property line. Shot it. Killed it.

My son, no more than twelve or thirteen
at the time, was
halfway toward the chipmunk, walking

through the yard. And he just stood there.
When I walked up
to him, he turned around and looked at

me and asked, "Why?" And I had no answer.
I couldn't give him one.
And that was the last time I shot an animal.

tell me

envision a person unable to achieve their dreams. maybe it's due to forces beyond their control. maybe it's because of inner flaws. that doesn't matter. just envision a person that has a dream in life, and can work as hard as they can all of their life, but never achieve it. they are doomed to never getting what they think they want from their life.

now envision another person, who has the power, and manages to achieve their goal. and then they realize that achieving their goal did not make them happy. and so on to the next goal. and they work harder and harder and they manage to achieve

that goal as well. and achieving it did not make them happy, either. and then they do this until they realize that they will be unhappy all of their life, that none of the goals they achieve will make them happy, and they are doomed to this life of everyone else admiring their successes, but feeling miserable because nothing is capable of making them happy.

which of these people have it worse? the one who never gets their dream? but the concept of a dream exists, and it doesn't for the person who destroyed their dream by achieving it. is the second one better off because they can have wealth and admiration? but they aren't happy with what they achieve, in fact, it irritates them that others think that their life is so wonderful. they have no hope. but did they have hope as they were trying to achieve any one of their goals?

why am i even asking you these questions? i've been trying to figure these questions out for myself. if someone has any ideas. someone. anyone. tell me.

tanya' s story

(tanya's middle name is marie, and her sister's name tasha anna negron. she likes her sister's name, but i told her that her name was nice, too. this is a story tanya made up for me at logan beach cafe. she was eating nachos with salsa. tanya is nine, going on ten.)

this is a story about summer. phil was riding his bike. phil is my brother. (how old is phil?) phil is 17, going on 18 years old. so he was riding his his bike in the park, and it was sunny, and joe-joe, he's my other brother, he shot a bow and arrow at phil's tires. and he hit the tires!!!! and phil got MAD. phil fell over, he hit his arm, but he was okay. so, since phil was mad, he ran after joe-joe, and he caught up to him and threw him on the ground. they started fighting, and my sister tasha came and told them to stop. but they didn't stop, and so she called my dad. dad came came with the belt

(ooh! -that's my addition to the story. sorry.) it's really a mexican belt. (what's the difference between a mexican belt and a belt, say, not from mexico? am i asking too many questions?) it really big, and i got hit with it once. (ouch. -that's my addition again. sorry.)

(oh, wait, she had to go get a drink, she was thirsty. making up stories is hard work.)

(okay, she's coming back now.)

(so, what's the end of the story? what happened?)

my brother joe had a black eye, phil gave it to him. so dad came and he hit them. and they stopped fighting then.

(okay, so we got the good-guy/bad guy thing covered, and an action scene, and a resolution. so most stories have a moral, so what's the moral of this story?)

not to fight.

top of the mountain

so we were in the car together, Lorrie driving, Sandy in the back seat, the humidity from the Southwest Florida night seeping in through the cracks in the car windows. And it was quiet for a moment, and the lull in the conversation prompted Lorrie to ask, "so if you had an Indian name, what would it be?" and I was completely lost by the introduction of this question, I mean, where did it come from and what kind of Indian name was she talking about? Sequoia? And then Sandy says, "you mean like 'Fucking Dogs?'," and Lorrie laughs and says yes, a name like Running Bear or Soaring Eagle. So sandy didn't think Fucking Dogs should be her name, so she came up with "Teacher of Children," and I thought for a moment, tried to encapsulate my life one catchy little phrase, and finally I came up with "One who Rests at Top of Mountain." Lorrie then explained to us that the names were actually given to Indian boys as a rite to manhood by a mentor of theirs, often a grandfather-figure, and the name was a reminder to them of what they should become. So I changed mine to "Patient One," but you know, looking back at that night, driving through the musty sticky night, I still think that it is better to say that I shall rest at the top of the mountain.

too far

When he met me
he told me
I looked like
Kim Basinger
long blonde locks
but as time
wore on I knew
I wasn't her
and I could never
be her and I was
never good enough
thin enough
pretty enough
I got a perm
straightened my
teeth
bought a wonder
bra but it wasn't
doing the trick
I bought slimfast
used the stair
stepper ate rice
cakes and wheat
germ but I wasn't
thin enough I
only dropped
twenty pounds
so I went to the
spa got my skin
peeled soaked
myself in mud
wrapped myself

in celophane
bought the amino
acid facial cremes
but I knew they
didn't really
work so I went to
the doctor got my
nose slimmed
my tummy stapled
my thighs sucked

thought about
getting a rib or two
removed
like Cher
but I figured
they've got to
be there for
something
and hey, that's
just going
too far

tryi ng

trying to revitalize
this old, tired marriage

once I wore a black teddy
thong back
beaded front

walked up to him while
he was watching
a basketball game
on the couch

sat on his lap
straddled him

and he looked at me
and reached his arm around
and tried to
grab his drink

Watchi ng My Father Di e

my father had cancer
the doctors told us
he'd be dead in six months, but

after six years of pampering
and caring for him
we wondered how long this was going

to last. Not that we wanted
him to leave us, of course,
but did the doctor know what he was

talking about? but then
his condition started getting
worse, in the last two weeks especially, and

I just saw him in so much
pain I didn't know what to
do. After seeing him in so much pain, after

these two weeks, one night I
even prayed for his death to
come. Just to save him. Just to make his

pain go away. And the next
day, he was dead. After all
that time, the pain was over. Just like
that.

was immune

I went to the outdoor courtyard today
the first time in i don't know how many
years

i used to sit there, in the mornings
drinking coffee, writing, reading

and he would come up and sit there with
me
and draw

it's the first time i've been there
since he turned on me

i knew him
and i knew he had the potential

potential for being a monster
i had heard the stories before

stolen undreds of thousands of dollars
in merchandise

been in a gang
drove someone's mercedes over a cliff

but I thought I was immune

to his violence

I thought I could change him
I thought he cleaned up his act

I thought I could be safe
alone with him

a thief
an addict
a molester

I knew him, but I thought I was immune
and now

I see all the places
and they make me think of him

and they make me cry

Water on the Street

George Eastman
was dumping water
from his outdoor hot tub one day
and the water
was running
down the center
of the street.

Now, from a distance,
it looked like
George Eastman
may have been
watering his lawn;

but people were only allowed
to water their lawns
on certain days of the week.

So when I saw the water
and then I saw
George Eastman,
I said, "Hey, you know -"
pointing to the water

and
George Eastman
interrupted and said,
"I know what you're thinking, but

I'm not watering my lawn. I'm
dumping out the water
from my hot tub,
and I'm dumping it into the street
because I don't want the chemicals
to hurt my lawn."

Well, I didn't even mention the
sewer grate behind his house
he could have dumped the water into.
I just said,
"Well, if it will hurt your grass,
what will it do to the asphalt on my
street?"

And
George Eastman
started hemming and hawing
as I drove away.

seeing things differently

I was sitting at Sbarro's Pizza in the mall taking a break from shopping and eating a slice of deep-dish cheese pizza when I caught parts of a conversation happening two tables next to me. It was two-thirty in the afternoon, so it was kind of empty in the eatery.

"So what's it like to be back?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know, to be free again - I mean, to be back to the places you haven't seen for so long?"

"Well, of course I missed it. It's strange being back, actually."

"How so?"

"Well, everything looks different now."

"Well, it has been nearly six years, a lot happens, even to a suburb. There's been a lot of construction around here, and -"

"I don't mean it looks different because it changed. I mean it looks different because I have."

"How have you changed?"

"You mean how did being in prison for half a decade affect me?"

"Well, what do you mean you see things differently? Like colors look wrong? I don't get it."

"No, it's not like my vision is different, at least not literally. It's just that people seem

different to me now. The places all look the same, one street looks the same as the next, it looks the same as it did five years ago. But I see things about people now, things I never noticed before."

"Like what?"

"I don't know, exactly. But I read people. It's like I know what they're thinking without having to talk to them, or even know them."

Then they both paused. I guess their timed pattern of one person eating while the other one talked finally got messed up and they were both eating at the same time. Oh, did I mention that they were both women? One had a baby in a stroller sleeping next to her, that one was the one that didn't go to prison. They both looked like they were about twenty-eight years old. Regular suburban women.

"You see, it's like this: when I was in prison, I was all alone. Being in a federal prison means the crimes are bigtime, so everyone in there had a big chip on their shoulder and wanted to either have you for their girlfriend or beat the shit out of you when you were on laundry duty. And of course everyone knew that I was the cop killer, and everyone also knew that I swore up and down that I didn't do it. So when I went in there they all thought I was some big sissy, and I knew right away that I was going to be in big trouble if I didn't do something fast."

"So what'd you do?"

"Well, I figured they knew that I wasn't a tough bitch or anything, so the only persona I could put on that would make people scared of

me would be to act like perfectly calm ninety percent of the time, calm, but tense, like I was about to snap. And periodically I would have a fit, or threaten violence in front of guards, timed perfectly so that I would never actually have to do anything, but enough to make everyone else think that I was a little off the deep end, a bit crazy. Then they'd give me space."

"So... did that work?"

"Yeah, for the most part. But the first thing I had to learn was how to make my face unreadable."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you can see someone walk by and know they're bored, or sad or angry, or happy, right?"

"Well, sometimes..."

"Well, I had to make sure that when people looked at me all they saw was a complete lack of emotion. Absolute nothingness. I needed people to look at me and wonder what the hell was going through my head. Then all I'd have to do is squint my eyes just a little bit and everyone would see so much anger in my face, you know, because usually there was nothing in my face to give me away."

"And when you got angry -"

"- And when I got angry and threw a fit and smashed chairs and screamed at the top of my lungs and contorted my face all over the place, I just looked that much more crazed and in a rage. Like out of control."

"Wow. That's wild."

"And I became completely solitary. I talked to two other people the whole time I was there, at least in friendship."

"Wow, two people?"

"Well, in a screaming fit, or in a fight, then I'd be yelling at people, but yeah, I had to limit the people I talked to. Couldn't let others see what I was like."

So I was sitting here eating my pizza listening to this, and then I remembered, oh yeah, I remember this story from a long time ago, the convicted this woman of killing a cop, shooting him at point-blank range, and just in the local paper three weeks ago they found the person who really killed the cop, and they let the woman they convicted of the crime five years ago free.

It seems the cop pulled her over and had her license in his car when the murderer camp up in another car, and this woman managed to get away, but the cop died and her license was there on the scene. So I get up and go to the fountain machine and refill my Diet RC Cola and come back to my seat and I just start thinking that that's got to be rough, I mean, going to federal prison for over five years for a crime you didn't commit and then having them come up years later and let you out early and say, "oh, we're sorry, we had the wrong person all along." It's like, oh, silly us, we made a mistake, please do forgive us.

But how do you get those years back, and how do you get rid of those memories?

So I just spaced out on that thought for a minute and the next thing I knew they were talking again.

"And I knew from the start this one woman didn't like me, I could just tell from her face."

We never spoke, she was like my unspoken enemy. And so once I was doing laundry work, and there are rows of machines and tables for folding and shoots for dirty clothes to fall onto the floor and pipes running all along the ceilings and steam coming out everywhere. And there were others there with us, and guards, too, but once I looked up and it was totally silent and no one else was around except for her. No other prisoners, no other guards, nothing. And she was just standing there, facing me square on, and she was swaying a bit, like she was getting ready to pounce. And I knew that she planned this, and got some of the other inmates to distract the guards, so that she could kill me."

"Oh my God, so what did you do?"

"Well, I turned so my side was to her, and I grabbed a cigarette from my pocket and put it in my mouth. Then I said, 'Look, I'm not interested in fighting you, so-', and then I reached into my pocket, the one that was away from her, like to get a lighter, and then I took my two hands and clenched them together like this, and then I just swung around like I was swinging a ball-and-chain, and I just hit her real hard with my hands."

"Oh my God."

"Yeah, I was hoping that I could just get in one good blow then get out of there, like teach her not to fuck with me again."

"Oh my God, so what happened?"

"Yeah, so here's the punchline, so when I hit her she fell back and hit her head on a beam that ran from floor to ceiling, and just fell to the floor. So I go through a back hallway and find everyone in the next room and just

sort of slip in there, but then I hear a guard asking about Terry, that was the woman I hit. and everyone looks around and they see me, and I have no expression on my face, so they don't even know if Terry saw me or not, and so everyone starts to look for Terry and they find her dead, right where I left her."

"Oh my God, you killed her?"

"Well, she hit her head on the beam, my blow didn't kill her. But no one knew who did it to her, and of course no one bothered with an investigation, so there was no problem. But after that, no one ever bothered me again."

"Holy shit. You killed her. When did you know she was dead?"

"When they found her, probably. Not when they saw what kind of shape she was in, but the instant they saw her I thought, 'she hasn't moved.' And I knew then she was dead. It was kind of unsettling, but I couldn't react."

"Kind of unsettling? I think I'd be screaming."

"But that's the thing, all these women had killed before, at least most of them had. I'd be condemning myself if I reacted."

"Wow."

They sat in silence, the young mother staring at the other while she ate the last of her pizza.

The murderer grabbed her soda and drank in between words.

"Yeah, so prison - and everything after that, really - seemed different. I figured out how to remove all emotion from myself when I had to."
"...That's wild."

"And once I figured that out, how to make my face unreadable, it was easy to be able to read what other inmates were thinking. I could read anyone's face. Someone could twitch once and I'd know whether they were afraid of me or not. Any movement made it obvious to me what they thought of me, themselves, or their life. That's why I look around here and just see what everyone else is feeling."

"Really? What do you see?"

"I see some dopey men and some bitchy women."

"Shut up."

"No, it's true - and they care about little details in their life, but they don't give a damn about the big picture. They scream if someone cuts them off in traffic, they freak out if they have food stuck in their teeth after a meal. But they don't care what they're doing in their lives."

They got up and walked over to the trash can, dumped their paper plates and napkins into the trash.

"I see a lot of people walking around with a blank stare, but it's not an emotionless stare. It's that they're all resigned, it's like they all assume that this is the way their life has to be."

"Oh, come on, it's not that bad."

"Yeah, it is. It's like they all were in prison too."

And they walked out into the mall, and I sat there, staring at my drink.

children & churches & daddies

the unreligious, non-family oriented
literary and art magazine

Produced By

Scars Publications and Design

Editorial Offices

Children, Churches and Daddies
Scars Publications and Design
2543 North Kimball
Chicago, Illinois 60647-2559

E-Mail

c.c.andd@shout.net

Web Site

<http://www.shout.net/~ccandd>

Staff

Janet Kuypers, Publisher/Managing Editor
Eugene Peppers, Associate Editor

Publishers/Designers Of

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