

children *churches* & daddies



a 2000 chapbook janet kuypers

scarsuo!te3!!qnd

crazy

I got the chance a few years ago to meet with a group of people at Arronsville Correctional center in West Virginia - it's a mental institution for women who had committed particularly violent crimes. I was visiting West Virginia because some counsellors knew of my history with rape education and asked me to listen to some of the patients and see if I could give any insight. They paired me up with a woman named Madeline. She was thirty-six, and was sentenced to this place for life after she had, according to reports, brutally slain her boyfriend during sexual intercourse. According to police reports, Madeline sat with the remains of the man for three days after the murder until police arrived on the scene. They found her in the same room as the body, still coated with blood and malnourished. Three doctors studied her behavior for a total period of eight months, and they concluded that Madeline was not of sound mind when she committed the act, which involved an ice pick, an oak board from the back of a chair, and eventually a chefs knife. Furthermore, she continued to show signs of both paranoia and delusions of grandeur long after the murder, swaying back and forth between the two, much like manic depression.

Madeline had been at the Aaronsville Correctional Center for three and a half years when I saw her, and at that point she had shown no signs of behavioral improvement. She talked to herself regularly and out loud, usually in a slight Southern accent, although not in a very loud tone, according to surveillance videotape. Her family abandoned her after the murder. Occasionally she requested newspapers to read, but she was usually denied them. She never received visitors, until these sessions with myself.

The following is select excerpts from dialogues I had with her.

I know theyre watching me. Theyve got these stupid cameras everywhere - see, theres one behind the air vent there, hi there, and theres one where the window used to be. They've probably got

them behind the mirrors, too. It wouldnt be so bad, I guess, I mean, theres not much for me to be doing in here anyway, but they watch me dress, too, I mean, theyre watching me when Im naked, now whats that going to do to a person? I dont know what theyre watching for anyway, its not like I can do anything in here. I eat everything with a spoon, Ive never been violent, all I do, almost every day, is sit on this bed and play solitaire.

Solitaire is really relaxing, you know, and I think it keeps your brain alive, too. Most people think you cant win at solitaire, that the chances of winning are like two percent or something. But the thing is, you can win at this game like over half the time. I think thats the key, too - knowing you can win half the time. I mean, the last four rounds I played, I won twice. Now Im not saying thats good or anything, like praise me because I won two rounds of solitaire, but it makes a point that as long as you know what youre doing and you actually think about it, you can win. The odds are better.

I think people just forget to watch the cards. Half the time the reason why you lose is because you forget something so obvious. Youre looking for a card through the deck and the whole time its sitting on another pile, just waiting to be moved over, and the whole time you forget to move it. People just forget to pay attention. They got to pay attention.

You know, I dont really have a Southern accent. See? Dont I sound different with my regular voice? I picked it up when I started sounding crazy. See, Im not really crazy, I just know the kind of shit they do to you in prison. I think its bad enough here, I wouldve had the shit kicked out of me, Idve been sodomized before I knew what hit me. I think this voice makes me sound a little more strange. Im actually from New York, but I mean, changing the voice a little just to save me from going to prison, well, I can do that. Here its kind of nice, I dont have to deal with people that often, and all the crazy people around here think Im some sort of tough bitch because I mutilated someone who was raping me. Oh, you didnt hear that part of the story, did you? Those damn lawyers thought that since I wasnt a virgin I must have been wanting him. And he

wasnt even my boyfriend - he was just some guy I knew, wed go out every couple of weeks, and I never even slept with him before.

What a fucked up place. You see, I gotta think of it this way: I really had no choice but to do what I did. In a way it was self-defense, because I didnt want that little piece of shit to try to do that to me, I mean, what the Hell makes him think he can do that? Where does he get off trying to take me like that, like Im some butcher-shop piece of meat he can buy and abuse or whatever? Well anyway, I know part of it all was self defense and all, but at the same time I know I flipped, but its because of, well shit that happened in my past. I never came from any rich family like you, I never even came from a family with a dad, and when you got all these boyfriends coming in and hitting you or touching you or whatever, you know its got to mess you up. Yeah, I know, people try to use the my-parents-beat-me line and its getting to the point where no one really believes it anymore, but if a person goes through all their life suppressing something that they shouldnt have to suppress then one day its going to just come up to them and punch them in the face, its going to make them go crazy, even if its just for a little while.

Societys kind of weird, you know. Its like they teach you to do things that arent normal, that dont feel right down deep in your bones, but you have to do them anyway, because someone somewhere decided that this would be normal. Everyone around you suppresses stuff, and when you see that it tells you that youre supposed to be hiding it from the rest of the world, too, like if we all just hide it for a while, it will all go away. Maybe it does, until someone like me blows up and cant take hiding all that stuff anymore, but then the rest of the world can just say that were crazy and therefore its unexplainable why we went crazy and then they can just brush it all off and everything is back to normal again. Its like emotion. People are taught to hide their emotions. Men are taught not to cry, women are taught to be emotional and men are told to think that its crazy. So when something really shitty happens to someone - like a guy loses his job or something - and he just sits in

front of a friend and breaks down and cries, the other guy just thinks this guy is crazy for crying. Then the guy rejects the guy thats crying, making him feel even worse, making the guy bottle it back up inside of him.

I think people are like Pepsi bottles. You remember those glass bottles? Pop always tasted better in those bottles, you could just like swig it down easier, your lips fit around the glass neck better or something. I wonder why people dont use them anymore? Well, I think people are like Pepsi bottles, like they have the potential for all of this energy, and the whole world keeps shaking them up, and some people lose their heads and the top goes off and all of this icky stuff comes shooting all around and other Pepsi bottles want to hide from it and then the poor guy has no Pepsi left. And how can you do anything when you have no Pepsi left? Or maybe you do lose it, but you still have some Pepsi left in you, and people keep thinking that you dont have any left, and then they treat you like you shouldnt be allowed to tie your own shoelaces or you should be watched while youre getting dressed.

Sometimes I get so depressed. Its like Im never going to get out of here. I think I wanted to have kids one day. Its easier, I guess, not having to see kids, I guess then I dont miss them too much, but...

For the longest time they tried to get doctors to come in here and talk to me, and you know what they did? They got men doctors - one after another - and then they wondered why the Hell I didnt want to talk to them. Amazing. People really just dont think, do they?

I guess its hard, being in here and all, I mean. I was going to go back to school, I had already taken the GED and graduated high school, and I was going to go to the local community college. It was going to be different. Sometimes I wonder, you know, why this had to happen to me, why I had to snap. I really dont think I could have controlled it, I dont think any of this could have happened any other way. Its hard. I have to find stuff to do, because otherwise all Id want to do is sleep all day and night, and I suppose I could, but then what would happen to me?

It wasnt really my fault, I mean, I think we women have enough to deal with just in our regular lives and then they keep piling on this sexism crap on us, and then expect us not to be angry about it because we were taught to deal with it all of our lives. Maybe this guy was just the straw that broke the camels back or something, maybe he was just another rapist, maybe he was just another drunk guy who thought that he could do whatever he wanted with me because he was the man and I was his girl, or just some chick that didnt matter or whatever, but shit, it does matter, at least to me it does.

I know Ive got a lot of healing to do, but I havent really thought about doing it. I mean, what have I got to heal for anyway? To get out of here and go to prison? Then Ill just get abused by guards over there, have to watch my back every second of the day. At least here people watch my back for me. They think everything and anything in the world could harm me, even myself, so theyre so overprotective that nothing can go wrong, unless it goes wrong in my own mind.

medication

I

I set my alarm for 4:30 instead of 5:30 so I could roll over, take a pill, and fall back asleep. Id leave two pills on the night stand with a glass of water every night. I could feel the pain in my leg, my hand, when I reached over to take the drugs. Id feel it in my back, too. And sometimes in my shoulder. The water always tasted warm and dusty. It hurt to hold the pills in my right hand.

I closed my eyes at 4:32. I hated that damn alarm clock. And taking the pills early still wouldnt make the pain go away before I woke up. I knew that. But I took them anyway. And I tried to fall back asleep. And I dreaded 5:30, when Id have to move.

5:40, I couldnt wait any longer, I couldnt be late, we couldnt have that, so Id finally swing my legs to the floor. Id put on my robe and limp into the kitchen. The trip to the kitchen lasted for hours. And picking up the milk carton from the refrigerator hurt like hell. This wasnt supposed to be happening, not to me. Just pour the damn milk. Id wipe the tears from my chin and sit down for breakfast.

II

The doctor doubled the dosage, and he was amazed that I needed this much. He told me to follow the directions strictly, STRICTLY. “You cant take these in the morning the way you have been,” hed say. “You have to take them with food.” That doesnt help when Im crying from the pain in the morning. But I could get an ulcer, hed say. And I wouldn’t want that. Of course not. I just wanted the pain to go away.

Take one tablet three times daily, with meals.
Do not drink alcohol while on medication.
Take with food or milk. Do not skip medication.
Do not take aspirin while using this product.
Do not operate heavy machinery. May cause ulcers.

III

All I had to do was get through the mornings. The mornings were the hardest part. Just take a little more pain, and by the afternoon it will all be fine. Just fine.

An hour after the pills, and I'd start to feel dizzy.
Id stare at a computer screen and it would move, in circles, back and forth. I wanted to grab the screen and make it stay in place. But Id look at my fingers and they would go in and out of focus. Id feel my head rocking forward and backward; I couldnt hold myself still. I'd sit at my desk and my eyes would open and close, open and close. Before I knew it, ten minutes passed and I remembered nothing. I could have been screaming for ten minutes straight and I wouldnt have known it. Or crying. Or sleeping. Or laughing. Or dying.
I had just lost ten minutes of my life, they were just taken away from me, ripped away from me, and I could never get them back.

And I could still feel traces of the pain, lingering in my bones.

IV

Id sit up at night and just stare at the bottle. It was a big bottle, as if the doctors knew Id take these drugs forever. Hadnt it been forever already? Id open a bottle, look at a pill. They looked big too. Pink and white. What pretty colors.

And then I'd think: If one tablet, fifty milligrams, could put me to sleep in the morning, could make me dizzy, could take a part of my life from me, then think about what the other thirty-six could do. 1800 milligrams. It could kill me.

I wouldn't want that. Of course not.

But just think, the bottle isn't even full.

May cause ulcers. May cause dizziness. Side effects may vary for each patient. May cause weight gain. May cause weight loss. May cause drowsiness. May cause irritability.

Medication may have to be taken consistently for weeks before expected results. If effects become severe, consult physician immediately.

V

I began to count. In the mornings I took eight pills: one multivitamin, one calcium pill, one niacin pill, one fish oil capsule, one garlic oil pill, and one pink-and-white pain killer that I was special to have, because you need a doctor's permission to take those. Then I took diet pills: one starch blocker, one that was called a "fat magnet." As if the diet pills worked anyway. But I still took them.

And then I had to watch the clock, take a pink-and-white at one in the afternoon, a different pill at five o'clock, another pink-and-white at six o'clock, and there was also usually sinus medication that I had to take every six hours in there, too. Or was it eight hours? I started to watch the clock all the time, I bought a pill container for my purse so that I would always have my medication with me.

When I'd feel my body start to ache again, I'd look at the clock. It would be fifteen minutes before I had to take another pill.

on an airplane with a frequent flyer

"I was once on a flight to Hawaii and I was waiting in line for the lavatory. There was always a line for a flight this long, you know, it seemed the washrooms were always on demand on a flight this long. So I finally got into the washroom, you know, and I looked into the toilet, and someone, well, lost the battle against a very healthy digestive system and left the "spoils" in the toilet, stuck. Maybe it didn't want to go down into the sewage tank where all the other waste from this long trip went to. Can you imagine all the stuff this airplane had to carry across the ocean? Well, anyway, so I saw this stuck in the toilet, and I went to the washroom, and when I was done it still wouldn't budge, and so I opened the door and walked out into the aisle of the plane again. And there was this long line of people waiting to use this cramped little washroom, and I just wanted to tell them all, 'you know, I didn't do that.' And then it occurred to me that everyone, when they leave the bathroom on that plane, will think the exact same thing."

more than we should have

when i think of bob
i usually think about the drinking

actually, i never think of him as drinking
come to think of it
i just think of him as drunk
i can't even remember seeing the drinks in his hand
but his perception of the world is always altered

but someone reminded me tonight
of when he would work outside in the the cold Chicago winters
and he would come back with his moustache frozen
and there would be little icicles hanging
down toward his mouth

and then i thought of
when i waited with him once at the airport
because we were picking up someone
and we sat in the shrimp cocktail lounge
and he drank, and ate, and i waited

and as we left
we tried to pay the expressway toll with pennies
but some of the coins fell into the street
and we had to throw more change at the machine

we paid more than we should have
i'm sure we did

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.

Christmas Eve

we made dinner
fettuccini alfredo with chicken and duck

vegetables bread

we ate couldnt finish everything

we were putting on our coats
getting ready to go to midnight mass

i decided to pack up
our leftovers
give them to some homeless people
on the main street

we got in the car
and drove
to broadway and berwyn

i got out of the car
walked over to a man there

asked him if he was hungry

i got the bowl of noodles
and the gallon of milk out of the car
another man walked over to me

i told them to promise
that they would share

i got in the car

we were just driving

and all i could think of
was these two men in the cold
eating pasta with their fingers

on Christmas Eve

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

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