

# Scarecrow

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The eyes appear just before dawn. I sense their presence in my sleep. When I wake up I can see them hovering over my bed in a place that makes the ceiling seem to never end, rising like a mine shaft into infinity.

My first thought is always that they are devil's eyes, glowing red with animal-like hunger, cornering their prey, before pouncing on it to satisfy an eternal craving. Then they look vaguely familiar, like the eyes of someone I once knew, but can't remember now. They turn silver like mirrors and reflect my own thoughts back to me, bringing memories and long forgotten dreams to my consciousness.

The first nightmare I ever had was of a scarecrow. A red scarecrow with a face molded into sternness that cannot be broken. The scarecrow carries a yellow ruler that he uses mercilessly to inflict pain. The pain is more than just the force of the ruler on my flesh. The kind of electricity comes from the ruler and an excruciating pain travels up the spinal column before exploding in my brain.

A blue ghost tries to protect me, by hovering over me. The ghost gets on all fours while I hide on all fours beneath him. The pain stops for a while, but the scarecrow is always too powerful and pushes aside the ghost whenever he wants.

I never know what I am being punished for. When I was older, I reflected whether I was being punished at all. Maybe the dream was just to demonstrate the sadistic nature of the world and that I had to look for protectors. I must have been only three or four when I had that dream. It was recurring until I was older. I don't remember when it stopped. The eyes may have stopped it.

The eyes show me a corpse that is still half alive. From the back, it looks like a lover I once had, a beautiful woman with straight black hair and fair white skin. One arm on the corpse is shorter than the other, it's like a vegetable, but still has some feelings. I can hear people talking about it, as if they are at a dinner party, noises from the silverware and serving trays in the background.

"Too bad about the arms not being symmetrical," one man says sounding very much like a disappointed art critic.

"I always thought she much more beautiful when she was younger and so much thin-

ner," a woman's voice in that friendly female jealous tone.

"Pity, really. Too bad she just had to pop off like that," an English gentleman's voice, disinterested.

Every time someone says something, I can see the corpse respond. Its skin shrinks a bit or one arm moves toward the other arm or the head tilts in one direction or the other. I finally have to say something, too.

"Please don't talk about her that way."

I hear the dinner party stop for a moment, as if they all hear a gust of wind and are listening for a gale to follow. The the party resumes its dinning noises as the eyes whisk me away somewhere, to some other scene.

One time, I thought I witnessed the end of the world. I was driving my car at night and looking at the moon. Strange electrical pulses like lightning were emanating from inside the moon, making it pulsate with power and energy. Then the moonlight began to fade and darkness settled in. It was a thick darkness, so thick that not even the headlights of the cars could pierce it.

I was trying to pull my car over to avoid hitting any other cars. The darkness had produced some sort of barrier against sound, because I couldn't hear anything. No car engines, no brakes squealing, no horns honking. I finally get some place I can stop. It is so dark. There are no outlines of trees, no stars, no buildings, no sound. I look up and can't even tell if there is a sky. I look down and don't even know if there is a ground. It feels as if I am floating. All I can think about is judgement and the end of the world. I'm overcome with fear, as I fall on my face to pray.

Something must have happened to me involving a vacuum cleaner when I was very young. I hate the whirring and sucking sound as it glides across the carpet, the sound getting stronger when it hits an area that needs extra attention. It's the sound a car makes when the tires are stuck in the snow and the driver is trying to rock free. It always sounds as if the car won't make it. I think that the vacuuming will never be done and the sound is just going to intrude into my life forever.

Maybe as a kid I was laying in my bed or crib and I needed something. Maybe my mother couldn't hear me above the sound of the vacuum. She had to clean, clean, clean while I lay screaming my lungs out to be heard over the noise. I just know that all my life I've hated that sound. I'd just as soon live in a dirty house than have to listen to that sound again.

People say you should have dreams. That's what all the advice people say, those who love to give advice to everyone. "You should always pursue your dreams." Or "You've got to have have dreams." Or "It's great to have dreams."

What if all your dreams are nightmares? Should you pursue them? "Follow that

demon!" "Don't let that dead body get away from you!" "Stay lost in the old dark house forever!" I wish I knew how to have good dreams. Nice dreams. Dreams that don't leave you in a pool of sweat that feels like blood. Dreams that let you sleep though the night, that don't leave you exhausted in the morning and throughout the day. Dreams that don't make you afraid to close your eyes to sleep.

The eyes just watch. They are impassive, but frightening, not moving or changing until that image has been seen and thoroughly absorbed. Then they disappear slowly, fading like a dissolving video image.

A woman is seated and tied to a straight back, wooden chair. She is naked, with straight black hair that stops at her shoulders. Her green eyes shine with fear. A thin nylon rope is being pulled through her open mouth by unseen hands. Her lips are bleeding on both corners. I think I am going to have to witness her head being completely garroted off her body.

The the woman gets up, as if she's been in a play that just ended. I watch her being transformed into a man, like one of those computer morphing programs. Two other men come into the scene from offstage, wearing robes. The one closest to me sneaks a long finger out of his robe. The end of the finger is a crooked razor. He sticks it into the woman turned man and says, "Now the real horror will start."

Every house on the block now has a red scarecrow with a yellow ruler. No place is safe, not even my own home. I'm riding the little red tricycle I used to ride as a kid, only now it can move much faster. I pass every home. The scarecrows look like statues, but I know as soon as I come close they will become fully alive and start to come after me. If I could figure out what I've done wrong, maybe I could correct it or make restitution. It's worse because I don't know. Maybe I've done something so bad, I've completely blocked it out. I've never been able to understand how that works, but somehow there are things that happen - events, conversations, distresses - our minds will not let us remember. But they are still always there, always waiting to be called up to consciousness.

I'm waiting for a train with my parents. We're on one of those platforms that's on the same level as the tracks. Grey clouds cover the sky, huge cumulus billows that hang suspended without moving. A train goes by slowly on the tracks farthest away from us. No one else is around. Both my parents grab their bags and start running toward the far train, as it moves slowly away from us. I yell at them, "It's not time for your train. That's not your train. It's not time, it's not time." They either don't hear me or can't hear me. The train is very loud. I run after them as fast as I can force my legs to go, but I can't catch them. They run up ahead of me until I can't see them any more.

A little girl wearing robes appears before me. She raises her hands to summon great

powers. A being named Steven appears. He is naked with a continual erection. There is nothing human about him. The only way to stop him is to chant his name continuously, "Steven, Steven, Steven." As he backs up, he changes into the red scarecrow. His erection becomes the yellow ruler that inflicts pain.

I look at the little girl. I look into her eyes. They widen and turn red, becoming the animal eyes that hover every night above my bed.