

Ten Dreams That Raised Some Of the Dead

by Robert Crisman

Dreams will show you a life that might or might not be yours, but you better believe that they've got to serve when you're asked to come up with a story."

--Frank Baron, the night he made bail and left town

1. First Blood in Dreams Long Ago

The endocrine system of dreams allowed my lost love one last time in blue smoke in the old gutted building on Third as I stood transfixed in a doorway and waited. She wore her silken black hair as a crown that haloed her pale aristocrat's face, the skin tight over bone, from which she'd fashioned a mask of indifference--as all my loves do in my dreams--and she smoked cigarettes, and I knew that she waited as I did, and I saw her nerves *chewing*, and maybe she waited on me. To save her? I know I felt lust in that doorway and lust signals peril rather than rescue, yet with the lust I felt an ache stirring, and it was an ache that I'd felt through 10 lifetimes, an ache that had made me jump, dance, and sing to the music she'd played way back in Year One, when I saw that our sins would be written in stone from that moment.

My tears are silent, as unshed tears are, and dried to dust now, oh so silent, unshed--as if I could match her indifference then bleed her that way, and then walk away, free at last, free at last, from the fear that took hold of my throat that red night when she and I ripped at each other and she bled me first and gave me to know that first blood will last til the end of my time here on earth.

They told me revenge would come in a dream, downtown where my ghosts are, and so I stand in this doorway as she awaits rescue,

and I don't believe them, nor do I want to.

2. A Fine Yellow Dust

In the dream Yesler rolled, a broad avenue made of fine yellow dust, from Third down toward Second, and I made my way in the silence and bright morning air. To my left on the corner on Second stood the old Mocambo cafe and lounge, home to drag queens in plumage and closed 40 years, in whose windows I now saw the dead, standing and sitting in chairs and looking out blankly at nothing.

I felt their death crawl inside me, and just for a moment I *was* death, or all but the very next thing, so help me *God*.

Later, I'd feel the breath and the sex and the rot of a man whose life *I* had taken and placed below concrete, and I'd feel the fear of the death that promises not one iota's cessation of pain, in life or the dreams life inflicts.

I continued on down toward Pioneer Square, Yesler now thin cement, and I brushed through crowds that seemed to be ghosts, and were silent as ghosts, and their faces and bodies were those of the people who'd always looked through me and not even bothered to note my presumption in walking among them and breathing their air.

I slipped into Pioneer Square, a blackened brick warren, and bazaar of cafes and parties in clubs that people never attended.

I looked for Alicia through miles and miles, and maybe 10 cities, yet always within these same eight square blocks. Alicia, the beauty who'd loved me, then fled to this dream, to a home made of smoke, though I didn't know that til the night down the years when she cut my breath short in that doorway...

Dreams are places that gut you and spill all your secrets, so legend has it, and that's why fear shrieked here and why I redoubled my desperate efforts to hide, as I had in my life when I claimed her love, and that's when I knew that my search for Alicia was also a hunt for a death not yet named, and that this death would take place uptown in a dream, where the man that I murdered is buried.

3. Sendoff

I came to a place, a skid row hotel off Pioneer Square just up First, my new digs in this dream, and I had to crawl through a hard-packed dirt tunnel, the entrance, which closed on me there and blacked out the rest of my stay.

Still, you know how it goes: I *wore* my time in that place so to speak, through all dreams to come, and it strikes me now for the very first time that my silence, so deep that it echoed from this dream to that, was the silence of miners buried in rubble whose prayers have escaped them and fled down a tunnel.

I knew even then where this silence had come from. In a dream before this, I'd found myself on a deep swathe of manicured lawn imbued with midnight that could have been violins quietly sighing. My old comrades had set out the white-linened tables that signaled one of the public events that they hoped would serve as a prelude to war, and as always they ghosted among the few guests, serving drinks. Kim, the woman I'd loved beyond torture, passed by my table--yes, I too was a guest at this midnight affair--and she may have even worn a slight smile, but she didn't see me, did not even glance my way once and--was I dead?

Well yes, dead and *dead*, and buried in rubble and silent like graves, and the party waltzed on.

What a sendoff it was to all dreams that followed...

4. I Had a Date With the Man That I'd Murdered

I stood on a street stripped of light with buildings abandoned; Pike Street, the stretch between the Public Market and Third, where lifetimes ago I committed the sins that had marked me with stigma for ages.

There was no one at all on the street; could be the people I'd known had been hanged--and then, so help me, the dream turned to Christmas, perhaps Wednesday evening around eight o'clock, with--

not so much light but the aura given to that time of year to remind all the sinners that bankers and pimps are still the gateways to Jesus.

People appeared on the street now, shadowed but moving with purpose, and they were all men, clad mostly in suits, menacing really, yet carrying with them suggestions that women were near, including the one who would love me in my time of need, and I looked in a shop through a door up on Second, and there in florescent were women alright, *beautiful* women, raven-haired, lipsticked, high breasted, all that, and I looked for comfort among them--but they had the eyes of police, not so much the eyes of those who cracked heads, but of those who governed the temperature here in the dream and ensured the silence that rang all around me.

I sensed my friend Jeffrey, the one whom I loved, but he hadn't been down here in years, was long dead in fact, put in the grave by the eons of strafings he'd laid on himself; and perhaps what I'd felt was merely a whisper that brushed past my ear--yet I could have sworn that it said we would meet on a pier on a cold windswept day at the end of a dream down the road.

You'd think that this news would have put me at some sort of ease, but friends and lovers are daggers disguised, in life and the more so in dreams. Then too, I had a date with the man that I'd murdered, right up the street where the bright lights take over.

He rots under concrete and speaks to whatever it is that lies deepest, most restless inside me.

5. Sex Whose Sharp Teeth And Cold Steel Eyes Defined Beauty

I came from wherever I'd been, and found myself now on First in this time beyond time, a return to...roots of a sort, and here I gained some perspective on just where I stood in the big scheme of things.

I walked into Pennyland which stood, for some unknown reason three blocks or so up from where it existed in life. The arcade was stocked with a younger crowd now, but doing the things the old crowd had done--jawjacking mostly and waiting for some new

fantasia to take them away from all this--which should have put me right in among them as one of the gang, back from Paris or maybe the moon--but not one of them there knew my name, nor did they care, nor did they once look my way.

I accepted erasure the way one does in dreams, which is to say, I had no choice but to bow to the strictures laid down--I myself was of their mathematics, flesh of their flesh--but I hungered for contact and stared with big eyes at the people milling around me.

Outside the sky had been colored a perfect pastel, not blue but beige, evoking within me the feel of Sundays down here in the '60s, abandoned like deserts yet absent precise geometrics that beige lent the buildings, which now served as dreamscape as if they'd been placed there by Thomas Hart Benton.

It all seemed as empty as dreams in brown paper bags, the kind in overcoat pockets that hide the cheap wine, and I knew there was nothing here on this stretch of street, at least for me--except for the peace that is spawned out of nothing and returns to the nothing it came from--so I headed off, up toward Second, and I hoped toward darkness and night.

Night harbored past ghosts with knives, along with the dangers of sex on the wing, whose sharp teeth and cold steel eyes defined beauty and bequeathed me delusions that I'd learned to claim over time as my birthright.

6. The Roar of the Lights And Bitches I Wanted To Drink Like Ambrosia

The lights of a city that make the night yellow and white--they roar like a *crowd*, and here I stood, as if at the edge of a plaza, and yet it was merely the meeting of streets, Fourth and Pike, the crossroads of downtown Seattle, both channeling rivers of cars, much like the rivers of people that crowded the sidewalks at midnight around me... *wide* sidewalks and streets in this dream, wider even than Unter den Linden, the broad swathe of pavement that Hitler had licked and kissed in *his* dreams, like the Viennese

yokel he was...

I lingered there at the edge of the crowd as I said, in front of Sander's Cafe, content for the moment to soak up the sights and the roar of the lights, and I smoked there, almost at ease, at home as it were, on my turf; I'd been a Young King on these streets all the eons ago, dressed in gangster-lean rags and talking out the side of my neck with the fellas, and dreaming of Pussy and Power and Escape to some faraway port, where danger was fog and a shrouded embrace.

Dope helped those visions along...

But here now in this dream, my friends had gone out of the world, though the watering holes we flocked to and romped in remained, newly bejeweled as befit new perditions, perditions that whispered like all the poisonous bitches I'd wanted to drink like ambrosia.

I had to stay on alert; danger could fasten upon me that quick, and any one of a million strangers in shadows might knife me then fuck me, and I had only my wits and my long years of knowledge of shadows to keep me alive and intact.

I put out my smoke and moved to find distance from light.

7. The Faces I'd Kiss In My Dreams

Up ahead dawn came fast on what looked like another gray day, one which was taken right out of some autumn I'd lived and now was plopped down in this dream which, two blinks ago, had offered fantasia as hard urban landscape and midnight as sex backed by murder.

Dreams can do pretty much what they want, and I walked up Pike toward the corner of Sixth, and the street, with its cafes and juke joints and other low dives, and the Carcinogen Smoke Shop and Paradise Billiards ahead, looked as it had when I'd lived there. And then as if he'd been there forever, Richard McKenney, the Man Of 10,000 Moves, walked alongside me, lighting his pipe--and he was the only man I ever knew who could smoke one and not look as if he

was trying to be someone else, most likely the Fourth Duke of Leichester..

McKenney looked at me and he grinned, shook his head, and said, "You look pathetic." I laughed and said, "Man, you're still fat." We kicked it then for awhile, just like old times, and he told me Frank Baron, the pimp who talked just like Bogart and ran with Joe Harris who wound up a warlock in Berkeley, had come back to town after 35 years to duke me some big money action. When I asked McKenney where Frank hung his hat though, he just shrugged and stepped into nothing.

Something, a mean little nudge, told me I couldn't afford to let the grass grow on this corner, so off I went, up toward Seventh and maybe a cheap roast beef sandwich at Mama's Cafe. I figured I might even run into Tina up there, sweet prescient Tina who told me one time, there are two kinds of women downtown: doormats for love and those who are colder than dry ice and blackmail with wind chill thrown in, and that most were dopers, and I'd spend my life seeking love in wrong places and they'd give me faces I'd kiss in my dreams, until I woke up and laid hell to rest or died like an old broke-dick dog.

8. A Moment's Respite In Places That Never Existed

This dream circled back to the bright lights of town. And up Fourth from Pike, all the way up the steep hill to Union, the bright lights continued, and all the fancy hotels clustered there, along with the beautiful women of breeding that fools always hope will spring them from jail and cure their disease and allow them the Hollywood endings God promised.

I wanted those beautiful women as well, but in this dream at least I knew better..

I continued down Fourth to a part of the city I knew had never existed, but should have, a section that housed these big drugstores, *huge* downtown drugstores, from a mythical 1940 or so, with food counters, booths, and products that soothed, and which would allow

me to rest, for a minute or with luck forever.

The walls of the drugstore I parked in were yellow, like those in some Midwest Woolworth, and the shelves, piled high with comforts and sundries, formed mazes that swallowed the people who wouldn't go well with my ease.

Ah yes, 1940, the one that the calendars missed but was real as a dime, and right *now*, in this dream! Where silence, for once, was a soft feathered friend instead of just shards of dead noise.

And now it struck me that I would run into my other friend here, the one I can't name who looked like the Grim Reaper's double and had plans for a bank in a dream down the road, plans to finesse the bank's money of course, and I'd tag along, for want of anything better to do and to see how the killing went down...

9. The Blackstone Hotel

I walked to the Blackstone Hotel, two blocks on Eighth north of Pike, a stretch that... It is impossible, really, to convey here its flavor, or the dimensions and colors of buildings I passed, though I noted that each one was wood, which strikes me here now as quite strange... Nor could I begin to describe the people who strolled on this street, or even, God help me, tell you if any were present...

The Blackstone Hotel stood three stories, was brick with white trim, and had gray sanded steps that led to black doors with no locks. I stepped inside and knew many things all at once: that my room was somewhere off to my left and already paid for, that in each room an old man sat on the side of the bed, pasty-faced, skeletal, staring with no eyes at nothing, that some were former Young Kings like me, and that I shared their limbo though I was but 30 years old.

I settled into my room with its shaded high windows and nicotined walls and I waited. I knew that here in this building, perhaps in a closet shut off from all light, a girl wept and wept; young Alicia, who'd lived in blue smoke and who'd been my bride, and who'd bled me with long laquered nails and laughed, and then said she'd love me, then left me...

I felt *hate*, a hate like black vomit *choking*, and I ticked off the years that she'd played me, and then all those years that I'd played *myself*, like a clown with a zither who *pfizzes* off key...

I'd been a lost dog all my life, with no home to go to and no one to care when I got there--*and I'd told myself that I had my game going on all the while...*

10. Every Last Fear

I'd been convicted of murder in this dream, of the man who lay under concrete downtown, that much I knew, though the dream seemed far out of sequence, and I didn't know why it played here so early.

I knew I'd committed the murder, in much the same way as a homophobe knows that he's gay, and had in fact known long ago that my whole life would lead to the prison that stretched up above me.

I would stay there 'til memory ceased to exist.

We waited below for the freight elevator to get there, me and my keeper, a fat balding man in a soiled white shirt and unpressed black slacks, who looked like he worked at the Atlas Club Baths, pimping young runaway boys that he'd picked off the ho stroll by Penney's at Second and Union.

He's sucked my cock in a room down on First, I was 15 years old, and he paid me some money, which made me a whore, and it was the first time that I'd ever come, which meant that I'd been a virgin.

I'd *pay* to come if that's what it took...

And kill the first man who loved me...

The building we stood in was home to the prison, some Gypsies, and six cut-rate dentists, and put God knows where, but it still had the feel of downtown Seattle, as do the landscapes in all of my dreams, which stands to reason I guess; every last crime I've committed in life I conceived and committed down there.

The walls on this first floor were painted a light vomit green, the institutional color of choice in police states in life and in dreams, meant, I suppose, to prepare me for horror and death up above.

But I just stared straight ahead, my face the most perfect simulacrum of boredom you ever saw. It was the look I'd given the judge at my trial, the look I'd like to pretend even now sent this message--that I'd fucked his wife and his daughters and sons, and that he was next on the menu; I was a Young King after all, just 22 and I didn't mind dying--which is the story I'd subtly fashioned way back in the day to keep all the fucking wolves off me.

All I could say though, for real, was this: inside me the clock had stopped ticking, and the prison had already begun to take shape all around me, black as my sins and every last fear that has ever existed since people stepped out of the trees.

"We all write our own epitaph."
--Frank Baron, who ran 'til he died

