

Wild Dreams of Reality, 14

by Jerry Ratch

We both looked toward the house. We could just make out a light that was barely visible coming from the side where their bedroom window was. Slowly an evil grin appeared on Darrell's face. He looked at the knife in his hand. *"This will do it!"* he said. "I can do it, Philip. Watch." Slowly, very quietly and slowly, he began moving his feet.

Another whiff of the dog shit burst over us like an odor from some sickening, unearthly flower. I could see him looking around inside the white pocket of fog. He went toward that light like a large cumbersome moth.

"Darrell, wait!" I whispered.

But he kept moving toward the house. I had no choice but to trail along behind him, desperately trying to be as quiet as I could. We crept nearer to the side of the house where the light came from, but the fog was too dense and it masked exactly what it was we were seeing. Something seemed to move — or was it the light that changed? Or else it was true, something was moving.

Getting down on his knees, Darrell leaned all the way forward on his hands and I did too, feeling the cold damp grass. Darrell put the knife between his teeth, but as he crept forward on all fours his knee hit a rock, and I saw his eyes close on the pain as he hung silently on only three limbs, with his hurt knee held stiffly in the air. Then he forced his knee back down on the ground, putting his weight on it while his teeth grinned around the knife in his mouth. And still he kept creeping forward, focused on the light ahead.

It was only after crawling right up beside the house that we realized what we'd been seeing. It was Vivian's long white lace curtains blowing in and out of the open window with the slight wind.

Their bedroom was low to the ground. The lamp was on next to the window, but we couldn't really see anything through the

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lace because it acted as a scrim. We were right next to it on our knees now, and I realized that we also could not be seen. That was when the curtains parted slightly, and both of us saw them on the bed — Darrell's enemy and his wife — and they were stark naked.

The curtains closed in front of us, and the scene vanished.

'*Was this real?*' I thought. Or was I stoned from the toke I'd taken on his joint, and hallucinating?

I looked around behind us to see if Jeff's car was still there, but I couldn't see anything. It couldn't be that far away, I thought. Then suddenly I heard it. We both heard it at the same time — the unmistakable sound of a woman finding pleasure. Or coming to it, and being lost in the possibility of finding it. Darrell looked at me in stony silence. I thought he was going to burst out in tears.

Then the curtains parted again, and we saw them lying in the bed together, but they were side by side. Jeff was not on top of her. And the curtains closed suddenly, and we heard Vivian groan — "*Uh!*" — from deep inside her.

Then the curtains blew in with a gust, and we could see just well enough to see a rifle leaning against the wall, and they closed again. Darrell looked at me with his eyes bugged out, and I knew he had seen the same thing. For certain. It was a carbine, and it stood leaning against the bedroom wall. The knife dropped right out of Darrell's mouth.

I made a motion, and he leaned toward me. I whispered, "What the hell is she doing with a gun?" He shrugged and shook his head.

"Are you sure that's Jeff?"

"I think so."

"Is that him or not?" I asked in a whisper.

"I've never seen the guy up close before," he whispered back. "But that's his car. Sure that's Jeff, for Chrissake. That's got to be him."

I could feel that both of my knees were totally soaked from the wet ground. Darrell spit something out of his mouth.

"*Uh-h*," came the voice again from beyond the curtain. Then Jeff also echoing hers with his own: "*Uh-h*." Darrell waited, and when the curtains parted again, he peered through the crack. We both did. I could see the guy touching Vivian between her legs. She lay face up with her legs spread open on the bed, and Jeff was on his side touching her.

Vivian made that deep sound again, but I could barely see them as they lay in the shadows. I glanced over at the rifle, leaning upright against the wall. Then the curtains shut.

She was having pleasure, real pleasure. She was openly enjoying her moment of pleasure and so was Jeff.

In the distance we could hear the fog horn moan, and it occurred to me that it sounded like a cow. We heard Vivian groaning again from inside the window. The frequency of it started to get more rhythmic and predictable. When the curtains parted once more, we both peered through the slit, and I could see that Jeff's hand was barely moving. I could only get a glance at the side of the guy's face when they both moved.

We couldn't see Vivian's face or her hair. Deeper and deeper the passion came pouring out of her, and then the curtains shut. They opened again, and we could plainly see her stomach muscles tensing up rhythmically, and still Jeff did not climb on top of her.

Patiently he touched her on her opening. Then very deeply she cried out: "*Uh-hh! Uh-h-h!*" And finally she came, yelling out Jeff's name.

Darrell had absolutely gone silent, mesmerized by what we were seeing. Suddenly he got up from the window, holding his belly. He staggered toward a tree, and I heard the muffled sound of vomiting. I ran to him and tried soothing his back and his head. He flung my hands away but I held on, struggling to pull him toward his shop.

Once inside, I made him lie down on the couch, and found a blanket to throw over him. I ran to get him a bottle of beer. Darrell wept with the deepest sobs I ever heard come out of a man. I was

afraid he was going to crack a rib when he sucked in his breath. I held on, patting him like a child, letting him moan and sob. A strange wail would come from somewhere deep inside him. I continued holding onto him, and I listened to that long low wail that sounded as though it were coming from somewhere else.

Then suddenly there was a snap across the room by the wall.

We both went silent, and Darrell sat up on the couch. "It's a rat," he said. "I set a trap. *I got him!*"

Instantly he got up and went over by the wall where the sound had come from. I heard him rummaging around, then he came back with a large rat still twitching in a big trap. Its tail switched back and forth, back and forth, then stopped.

Darrell walked calmly out the door of the shop into the fog. I followed him out. "Darrell, where are you going?" I whispered.

I followed him as he walked toward the red Saab. He took the dead rat and placed it carefully on the driver's seat of his enemy's car. He turned to look at me.

"I just took a mushroom," he said. His deadly grin made me afraid. "Want one?"

I shook my head. "Not on your life."

But instead of going back inside the shop, he started walking toward where we'd left his truck. Suddenly he broke into a run. I took off up the driveway after him. We made a tremendous amount of racket in the stones of the drive. I knew he was going for his gun.

He had the truck door open and the pistol already in his hand when I landed on him. I don't know where I got the energy. Darrell was taller, but he'd grown thin lately. I ripped the gun out of his hand, and pitched it into the ditch next to the road. You could hear a splash when it hit the water. The ditch was pretty deep at that point because of the irrigation runoff from the fields.

"Sonofabitch!" Darrell yelled, jumping into the water.

I ran to the side of the road. He was sitting in the black water up to his neck.

"Darrell, for God's sake, what are you doing?"

"You sonofabitch!"

"You told me I had to stop you from killing this guy!" I yelled back. "Get the hell out of that muck before you catch pneumonia. Here, take my hand."

He looked up at me. I could see the oddity of a smile beginning to flatten out across his face, and I knew the mushroom was beginning to take hold.

"Darrell," I said. "Come on out of there. Come on. Hey, do you realize where you are?"

"Where?" he asked.

"No, I mean, do you realize what's happening to your life here?"

Then my brother said the oddest thing I'd ever heard him say. His eyes grew enormous, and his brilliant white hair stood out above the water.

"There's no problem," he said.

"Darrell, come on! Get out of there. What the hell are you doing?"

"I'm building a city in my right hand," he said, "and frying chicken in my left."

