

JANICE AND JANET COBIN

Janice Ann Cobin

Janet Cobin's body was found buried under a huge melting snowdrift in the hospital parking lot last Tuesday. An orderly found her booted foot when going off shift, and called security when he realized the boot was still attached to a body.

The hospital director followed up with a mass email describing the death as a terrible accident, while also stressing security was available to accompany staff to their vehicles at night. The email also stated a police investigation was on-going.

I didn't know the woman at all, although her photograph showed a pretty, blond, blue-eyed young thing somewhere in her mid-twenties, with pinkish lipstick and a bright smile.

Her body was found early last week. I have been questioned twice. I am sure this is because of my last name – Cobin. It is an uncommon surname, but Janet and I were not related. She worked in the administration section of the emergency department. I work in the mental health building at the opposite end of the hospital, and have only been here a few months.

One thing I didn't tell the police is that I have been having strange dreams. Dreams of Janet. I waken every morning in a cold sweat, but all I can recall is pleading blue eyes and a pink lipsticked mouth asking me something I can't hear. The dreams are vivid and intense. I have the strangest feeling I DO know her, even though I'm sure we've never met.

The dreams actually began weeks ago. Long before I heard her name. When I read the email at work and saw her photo, it felt like someone punched me. I doubled up at my desk and gasped for air.

It's now late January and I can't get rid of the haunted feeling. That's why I decided to write this down. It feels like Janet's ghost is looking over my shoulder. I not afraid of her exactly, but I get the feeling she's trying to tell me something. Warn me? I'm not sure how to describe the sensation.

When I say I'm not related to Janet Cobin, that's because I knew from an early age that I was adopted. My adoptive father once told me he too, was an only child and the last of his line. When my parents died in a car accident years ago, I was the only family member left. Now I half wonder if there were relations my father had lost contact with. Perhaps I should have asked more questions. I moved to Vancouver last year because this is where I was adopted forty years ago. I still haven't decided if I want to find out more about my origins or not.

I find it strange our names are so similar. Her name being Janet and mine being Janice. Janice Ann Cobin. No wonder the police wanted to question me twice. It does

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seem to be too uncanny to be a coincidence. It's also curious that Janet looks very much like I did at her age. Quite extraordinary, considering we can't be related.

Janet did try to meet me once. Funny, I just remembered that now. I do tend to forget things. It sometime unnerves me when I realize I've lost half a day, or can't remember doing something that someone else claims I did.

I've always had a memory problem. When I was a teenager, my mother called me too much of a dreamer. But my dreams of Janet and her strange, staring eyes are not like the forgetting periods of my life. Those forgetting periods are just not there, as if a chunk of memory is missing. Sometimes I find loose fragments of recollection floating to the surface of my mind, like I just did, while writing this.

Janet did come up and talk to me. It makes me shiver to remember it. I can almost recall seeing her, listening to her. When was that? I suppose it doesn't matter, since I can't remember anything we said. There's no point in changing what I told the police. They wouldn't believe me if I said Janet spoke to me but I can't remember when or where or what we talked about.

On the other hand, maybe my dreams are making me imagine I met her. That must be it. That makes more sense. I do get dream flashbacks during the day. At times, when I look in the mirror, I wonder if I'm really all there. Or here. But I've always been this way, so it must be all right. My mousy hair, grey eyes and squarish face have an ordinary look that makes me unmemorable. I like it that way. Sometime I pretend I'm invisible, until someone speaks to me and startles me back into the world.

I keep getting the feeling that Janet is telling me there's something I should remember. Maybe that's why I'm so unsettled these days. I even called in sick for work today because I feel shaky and almost sick to my stomach. I'm sure it's the dreams that are doing this to me. It's Janet. But she seems to be a sweet young thing from her picture, and I don't think she means to do it to me. So it must be that she's trying to tell me something.

I'm starting to feel guilty that I should have told the police something. Yet I couldn't have because I didn't remember this then. Even now I don't remember anything except that maybe she spoke to me. But what if she spoke to me in the parking lot? What if I was there and can't remember? Maybe that's why I'm having these bizarre dreams! The scary thing is that almost makes sense.

What if I saw something? What if I did something? Could that be why Janet's eyes are haunting me? Maybe that's why I can't remember.

This isn't making any sense at all. We didn't know each other. I don't know anything about the woman except that she died and she was found in the parking lot. The email mentioned accidental, but what if it wasn't? Maybe she had been there for weeks? No, that can't be true, because Vancouver's snowfall didn't begin until December 19th. No

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one said she was missing over Christmas, so she probably wasn't. I can't remember exactly what the email said.

Was she completely buried in the snowdrift or only partially covered? I wish I could remember.

Maybe I'm forgetting something important. The name is so unusual, maybe there is a connection to my adoptive family. Of course, Janet may have been married, so Cobin was only her married name. How do I find out about that? Maybe I should just bundle all these sheets of paper up and send them to the police.

Is there anything I know that they don't know already? Probably not. So I don't need to send them anything. Maybe I should just tear these papers up. Yes...that's what I'll do. And then I can forget I wrote anything. If I rip this up maybe the dreams will disappear as well. If I had anything to be responsible for, I'm sure my dreams would be different. After all, she's only trying to ask me something or tell me something I can't hear.

I probably only met her in my dreams. I've met other people that way and no one ever died before. I think that's what scared me. Yes...that must be why I've been so upset. I'll be OK now. I'll just rip this up and the dreams will disappear. Then I can go back to work tomorrow like nothing ever happened. Yes. Yes. That's what I'll do. It'll be like none of this ever happened.

After all, there's really nothing to remember anyway.

Janet Ruth Cobin

I don't know what is real anymore. I am not sure I can make a coherent tale of the past few weeks. My whole sense of selfhood seems to be undergoing some kind of transformation. I need to write things down – to put things into some sense of order.

How shall I begin? My name is Janet Ruth Corbin. I'm 29 years old and live alone. I work at Children's Hospital, as an Administrative Assistant to Dr. Bloomberg, Medical Director of the Emergency Department. All pretty ordinary stuff.

I was adopted as an infant, and, after my adoptive parents died in a car accident 6 years ago, I moved to Vancouver because this is the city of my adoption. Over the years I've thought about searching out my biological mother, but can't quite bring myself to do it. I remember Mom suggesting it, but I never really felt the need.

Anyway, when I saw Janice Cobin's name on the interoffice phone list, I thought someone had made a mistake. Cobin is an unusual name and I remember Dad saying he was the last of his line. When I realized that someone new was working in the new Mental Health Building with a name very close to my own, I felt excited – like we might be name-related. I just had to phone her and meet up for coffee!

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She turned out to be a nice lady, but a bit strange. Somewhere in her 40's I think, with a faded complexion and mousy hair pulled back into some kind of bun. Almost the reverse of me. I like bright-coloured clothes and take a lot of time with my makeup. Janet was turned out in browns and greys with not even a hint of lip gloss. Tidy and uninteresting. But it turned out that she was adopted too. What an uncanny coincidence. I wanted to ask more but she clammed up pretty fast and didn't really want to meet again. I thought that was the end of it, but as it turned out, it was only the beginning.

Not long after that I ended up on expensive antibiotics for a bladder infection. I mention this because it seemed I developed a rare but severe reaction to them. I had just finished the course of tablets and was feeling really unwell. Walking home from work on January 5th, I passed out in the parking lot.

It was dark and snowing heavily when I left work on January 5th. The huge amounts of snow we had over the Christmas week resulted in giant snow banks around the parking lot. Evidently an orderly tripped over my foot later that evening and found me half buried in snow.

The official version is that I woke up in hospital two days later. Hypothermia and drug-reaction. Whatever they want to call it, I have a whole range of memories and happenings from the days they said I was unconscious.

My first recollection was waking up in a narrow bed. There was another single bed on my left, with a man sitting on it, looking at me with some concern. He had short black hair and a pale, ascetic complexion. He said something like, "A fine time for you to be sick Jen...the meeting takes place in half an hour."

I glanced around the small room while trying to get my bearings. It felt a bit like a dormitory – small bureaus at the foot of each bed, pale green walls and what I knew to be a bathroom near the foot of my bed and an exit door on the far left. On my right, the window above my bed showed blue sky.

I tried to cry out and got some kind of mental 'shush'. I felt the body I was in answering the man, yet knew it wasn't me. "Give me a moment Brad. I'm OK."

There was a dizzy moment of reorientation, then clarity. I was in someone else's body - Jen's body. Jen began to sit up in bed. She gave her head a shake, and I felt her get out of bed. She got up, quickly pulling on a bluish overdress. I felt like I was scurrying to catch up, although it was she who was doing all the rushing.

<Not again>, I could hear her think, <I'm starting to feel schizoid. This is the second time this month>.

In the background, like a quiet echo, were thoughts about getting to the meeting on time. I figured it had to be a dream – I was somehow visiting alongside the thoughts of this 'Jen' person. I sensed her attention to my presence.

< Who are you? WHAT are you doing in my head?>

<Janice...Janice Cobin...>

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It was bizarre and a relief to be recognized. But somehow I felt amazingly centred (though where I was centring from, I couldn't guess). I was myself, inside someone else's body, beside their thoughts. I could see and hear, but somehow knew I was just visiting. And she thought SHE was going crazy! Now that I'm trying to write things down, it feels crazy, but at the time I didn't take it that way.

I kind of faded into the background after that, and can't actually remember anything visually. It was more like we exchanged blocks of thought and I became aware that Janet, Jen and I were somehow chips off the same block, so to speak. The fact that we were connecting like this was highly unusual. Jen figured she has some kind of window access in her psyche, because it had happened to her before, and in her world there was a kind of teaching for that, although our inside degree of communication was highly unusual.

That's when I found out she knew Janet. She thought Janice might have a 'window too, because they would often have cross-conversations of a kind, although it seemed to leave Janice a little unstable, because in our world, no one would believe her. Jen actually lived in another world! A parallel world she called it. Counterparts. That was the word that Jen used. We are counterparts. Very similar in personalities and exploring different sides of life through alternate personalities. I tried to ask one of my doctors about this, but stopped when I sensed him becoming quite alarmed. He asked if I wanted a psychiatric referral – which of course, alarmed me in return!

Jen was really surprised at our contact though. I now suspect it was because I actually did die in the snow bank that day, but in this reality I am alive. I get goose bumps every time I think of it.

I returned to work yesterday. Everything seems much the same, but curiously, I feel more alive and more easily excited about things, knowing that this really is a mind-boggling world.