

I wake up. I do the normal things that one does when they wake up- get ready for school, then go to school, then go to first hour, all the normal stuff that you would do. After school, I go with my friend Hazel to the bus stop near the school and we each put a bus token in the slot to get on the bus, and we get on the bus. Hazel says "Hey Kat, wanna go to my place or yours?"

"Yours, my brother's home early from childcare tonight." *Wait, what? I thought it was Thursday, when my mom works late and my dad is out of town.*

"Oh, I wanted to borrow your set of Sharpies for my poster that I have to do for Geography" *Didn't I let you borrow them yesterday and didn't you finish it last week?*

"You can, but only if you don't mind being interrogated by 'Sherlock Holmes.'" "

Hazel makes a face "Nah, let's go to my house instead."

"Good choice."

When we get to the bus stop, we stand up, then the bus stops and we both get off. We walk several blocks and get to Hazel's block where we look one way (it's a one way street, so you only need to look one way, right?) and start to cross the road when we hear a rumbling sound. I feel a push from behind. I stumble forwards, bracing myself for the fall.

I wake up to the sound of someone, probably Hazel asking "Kat, are you okay?" I groan "In theory." Then I hear another voice "Describe the person who hit you, did they happen to look like this?" I somehow see through my eyelids that my brother put a picture in my face "This isn't an interrogation, Aiden."

I wake up. I look around. I'm in the middle of the road. I walk, which feels more like floating. There's a car going the wrong way the opposite direction that the 'one way' sign points to. I see it's a Dark Blue Bentley driving by, its taillights burning into my retinas.

I wake up. Again. This time to the sound of various friends and family members saying "Kat, wake up." I see my cat lying on the road by Hazel's house. When she starts to get up, she yawns, stretches and starts to walk towards me, getting faster and bigger as she goes, her calico fur turning a tawny olive brown with black spots, until it looks like the ocelot that leaped at me in the zoo eleven years ago and almost gave me a heart attack and made me have nightmares for weeks. I still occasionally dream about

it (it also gave me the nickname 'Kat'). The ocelot is now only about a yard away when it leaps...

I wake up. The last thing I remember is a pair of big gray-green eyes burned into my retinas. I get up and look around to find myself in a big courtroom in the witness box with my cat sitting on my lap. I look at the "no pets allowed" sign. I look closer to see that "no" is crossed out. Everyone in the room has a pet with them, the judge has a tawny eagle, the prosecuting attorney has a candor, the defending attorney has a fox, the people in the witness box all have chameleons, same with the accused, the police have dogs, and the public gallery has cats. I look at the cat that stands out the most which is blue with what looks like four round eyes, two per socket, both glowing familiarly, but something about them makes me cringe, like the ocelot at the zoo that had jumped at me. The blue cat looks at me and I freeze like a deer caught in the headlights. I definitely know that I've seen those eyes before, but I can't seem to place them.

The defending attorney asks me whether the person who hit me had a cat in their car. I reply that I don't know, I couldn't see in their car and that I wasn't looking for a cat. The lawyer makes that face that you get when you mention that you're planning on dropping out of high school as soon as possible and then working at a fast food restaurant for the rest of your life. He asks me why I would ever not check if a car had a cat in it and if I didn't know that then why was I on the streets. I reply that I had never heard such a thing and didn't know why the question was brought up. The judge decrees that the accused would be released because I'm asleep.

I wake up. I do the normal things that one does with their cat when they wake up- get ready for school, get your cat ready for school, then go to school with your cat, then go to first hour with your cat, all the normal stuff that you would do with your cat. Except that you usually wouldn't do that with your cat. I feel like I'm betraying something but I can't figure out what, as Eminem said, I'm friends with the monster, but I can't help but think that if I'm friends with the monster, the monster must be very friendly.

I wake up. It's a warm sunny day, my favorite kind of weather in the Idaho canyons, where my family takes an annual vacations, which are the best couple weeks every year. I'm in the shotgun of a Dark Blue Bentley convertible with the top down and

the wind in my face. Hazel is in the drivers seat, she says "I'm getting my restricted drivers license in a couple of months."

"Don't you have to be sixteen?"

"Yeah, it's August."

"So you're saying I missed most of the summer?!"

"It's the sad truth, sadly."

"Time flies when you're having fun, I guess..."

"Or when you're sleeping."

"Sleeping?"

"Yeah, haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"You're asleep."

"Whaddya mean?"

"You're dreaming right now and have been for the past three and a half months."

"So you aren't real?"

"I am, and I'm talking to you, but the me that you're seeing right now is a dream, but the real me is talking to you."

"But if I'm sleeping, why can I hear you?"

"Remember that study that you told me about where they tested a bunch of people to see how responsive they were to sounds, smells, etc.?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So... Do you remember which group was the most responsive?"

"I think so... It was the comatose group, right?"

"Exactly."

"Wait, what?" I ask, it dawning on me that I'm the one Hazel's talking about.

"So there's just one thing I want to ask of you."

"What is it?"

"Please, just wake up."

"But it's finally a nice dream!"

"Yeah, I got them to take you outside"

I feel like I'm being pulled away, the colors all fading to gray, the sunny day

turning overcast and drizzly as the memory of Hazel and I driving through the Idaho canyons fades, and I feel like I'm backing out of it, its cold white doors closing in front of me.

I wake up. I'm at the Secret Society of the Arts (SSOTA) where they have a stage set up with a podium and a dais on it and a sign behind it saying "sculpture contest finalists." around the room are various sculptures, including metal, ceramic, glass, and wood. There are all types of sculptures, from utilitarian to impractical, symbolic to aesthetic, abstract to realistic. I recognize my entry as one of the few on the dais, in the third place. It's a big fish bowl filled with water, with smaller bowls inside it, there are miniature people swimming inside it, some in bowls with other people, others alone in their bowl but a few are floating in the big bowl. The top two are beautiful sculptures out of ceramic that are constructed of thin 'ribs' that form the shape of a big abstract thing that curves and flows in almost a fractal, with intricate glazes that look like they were splashed on rather than being painted on. The other's a cheshire cat with wires wrapped between ribs to imply more color.

A speaker steps up to the podium and says all of the normal stuff that speakers say, he's so glad that everyone who came came, he's thankful to everyone who came and he would like to introduce the real speaker, the only person to both have won five consecutive, is a judge and happens to be a good speaker, all the rest either are bipolar or stutterers. The real speaker is a fellow named David Flores (Flored) who makes a few jokes then 'gets down to business.' Flored turns to the dais and says that we have a *ton* of great entries and even though they couldn't all be in first place, almost everything was a close call and he considered calling it a draw... - ...and we have in third place a beautiful but also very symbolic sculpture that has a lot of meaning built into it, I think that it means that we're all in this together, and we're all in one big community. When he finally stops talking I want to scream at him: no, you idiot, that's not it at all, it's almost the exact opposite, are you blind!? I turn and start making my way to the doors, shouldering my way through the crowd, even though no one turns. As I step outside, my mom steps up to me and says "Katri - Kat, please wake up" as I feel everything fading away from me...

I wake up. I'm staring at a white tiled ceiling. I try to get up but I feel incredibly

stiff, as if I was asleep for a really long time. I feel a jolt, as if I'm being rolled somewhere, then I see that the ceiling tiles appear to be moving- two rights then a left, then I'm outside - partially anyways, the sunlight blinds me, so I flinch, which the doctors notice, one of them goes inside, probably to get someone, while the other asks me if I'm alright, I do my best impression of a nod and a smile when the other doctor comes in with a somnologist<sup>1</sup>, my mom, and Hazel. When my mom walks in, she rushes to my side and gives me a halfhearted attempt at a bear hug then asks me so many questions that they start to blur together, so I say "Umm... one moment?" my mom stops with a puzzled look "Yes?"

"I can barely hear you."

"Okay, I'll slow down."

"I also think Hazel wants a turn," gesturing to Hazel, who's standing politely but impatiently behind my mom, who turns and reluctantly lets her through to me. She says "Well that didn't work." I give her a puzzled look "What didn't work?"

"I tried to push you out of the way."

"Oh... I guess that didn't work."

"Yeah, I sorta accidentally gave you the short end of the stick."

"What happened to you?"

"Just a fractured wrist."

"Wow. So... How about those one way streets?" She sighs "I guess we should be getting home. My place or yours?"

"Yours, Aiden's home early today."

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<sup>1</sup> Person who studies sleep.