

# CAT-A-TONIC



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# CATATONIC

- 1. Having catatonia; a syndrome characterized by muscular rigidity and mental stupor**
- 2. Appearing to be in a daze or stupor; unresponsive**
- 3. Experiencing severe sleep deprivation**
- 4. Being completely blitzed from the excess consumption of alcohol**

The pale woman stares upward, trembling, heart-pounding.

*So many stairs. So steep. So dark.*

She reaches her right hand towards the stair-railing, grabs it. Slick with perspiration, her hand slips away. She grabs again.

“Must go. Must look.” She pulls herself up the first riser.

“*Need to know.*”

Looking upward, the stairs seem to disappear into the darkness. There is only moonlight. Moonlight filtered through tree branches and sheer curtains. It illuminates a little patch of the attic floor. If she can get that far . . . .

But wait! What is that?

In that patch of dim light, something is moving. It’s a small person, hunched over, huddled against the wall. Their eyes connect. The little figure scuttles away.

Her heart’s tempo picks up. It pounds so fast she can barely breathe. She bends over, panting.

She looks up. Where is it?

Gone now.

Heart tight in her chest, she continues up the stairs. *One riser at a time. Almost, there. Almost there. Keep going. Keep going.*

She reaches the top stair, gasps for breath.

“Where is it?”

There it is. A little door that opens to the space under the eaves.

She walks hesitantly towards the door. Something moves towards her. The little figure.

“Oh, god.”

It looks her in the eyes. It’s a young girl. But not a girl. Something else. . . . Small, slim, very pale. It points at the door, then scuttles back into the darkness.

The woman hesitates a moment, nostrils pinched, hands shaking. A deep breath, then she reaches for the knob.

It is cold. Very cold. Painfully cold.

Quickly, she yanks the door open. Nothing. It opens to nothing. Absolute darkness. No light anywhere.

But the nothingness is alive. It is pulling on her. Drawing her forward. Pulling on her soul. She fights . . . .

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“Spooky dream.” Marco comments. “Good beginning for a horror flick.”

“How long did you say you've been having these dreams, Kit-Kat?” Philomène asks.

In honor of my 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, my neighbors, Philomène and Marco have made me a special dinner. All my favorite foods in one meal: gumbo with shrimp and andouille sausage, sautéed mixed greens and hush puppies. Lemony madeleines and espresso for dessert. I supplied a bottle of Veuve Cliquot.

To be honest, if Phil makes it I'm bound to love it. She's a professional chef and food writer. Her creations lean heavily on her creole background. Spicy, rich, complex food. Perfect for chasing away nightmares. As is the dining room of their beautifully renovated Victorian. But most of all, it's their company. Marco and Phil love each other so profoundly that it just seems to flow out over everyone around them.

Leaning back in my chair, I surreptitiously pop the snap on my jeans and take a deep breath. I'm happy as an over-stuffed clam.

Phil sits directly across from me. The massive silver candelabra highlights her cheek bones and brings out the warmth of her honey-brown skin. To my left, Marco, her tawny, lanky, long-legged husband looks as content as I feel.

“Maybe I should celebrate my birthday more often. Twice a year? I've heard some people celebrate half-birthdays.”

“Bring along another bottle of Veuve Clicquot and we can have another birthday party anytime you want. But back to my question. How long have you been having that awful dream?”

“The nightmares started four days ago. The woman in the dream looks a lot like me. A very pale version of me. But she seems like someone else at the same time. What do you two make of the dark space under the eaves?”

“Something you need to know is hiding there.” Marco comments.

Phil adds, “Yes. But learning it threatens your very survival.”

“Comforting words!”

“Transformation is a difficult process. Think about the 'Death' card in the tarot. It's really about dying to your old life. Becoming someone new. You've been in the process of reinventing yourself ever since Charles died.”

“True. And the nightmares come at 3:05 every morning. He left at 3:05. I think he knew he wasn't coming back. He woke me up to kiss me goodbye. Normally he would just slip out.

When he left I felt too anxious to fall back asleep. I gave up on sleeping and got up to wash my face. His wedding ring was sitting beside the sink. He'd never left it before. At that moment, I knew. He wasn't coming home.”

A wave of horror passes over me. A wave with a strong undertow. I gulp down the rich velvety espresso. Somehow it brings me back to the present.

“Sorry. Pretty intense conversation.”

Phil reaches across the table and squeezes my hand. “You've experienced some pretty intense things, Kit-Kat.”

“Don't we have a gift for Cat hiding around here somewhere?” Marco asks.

“We do. As it turns out, it's very appropriate to our conversation.” Phil gets up from the table, opens the top drawer of the buffet, and pulls out a small, turquoise-velvet-covered box.

I pop it open. Nestled inside is a vintage rhinestone pin. A butterfly, picked out in tones of yellow, amber and topaz-brown.

“A butterfly. Symbol of transformation. Perfect.”

“Not just a butterfly. A Monarch. Perhaps a sign of things to come.” Phil replies.

Just then the candles begin to gutter and flicker out.

“Seems it's time to go. Thank you both for a lovely evening.”

It's after eleven o'clock when I head around the fence and unlock my side door. Sirius, my black standard poodle is whining, eager for a dash around the yard. Orion, my big, fluffy, Siberian kitten, stays with me. He's more interested in a cuddle.

Orion knows my routine. He speeds ahead of me and jumps up on the bathroom counter. He likes to watch me get ready for bed. Pulling back my unruly auburn hair, I look in the mirror. Normally my eyes are blue-green. My French-born Mom said I have the eyes “d'une chatte heureuse.” A happy cat.

Today they seem more pale and tired. Washed out blue. Red rimmed and grey shadowed. As tired looking as I feel. The grey circles made darker by the pallor of my skin. I *do* look like the wraith-

woman in my dream. No monarchs or happy cats in sight.

Honestly, Phil strikes me as being far more queen-like than me. Perhaps I'm still in chrysalis. Claustrophobic. Over-due to stretch my wings.

I say a little prayer: *Please, Lord, let me get unstuck.*

As they say, be careful what you wish for.