

PLASTIC MEOW

by chris roberts

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AWAKE

maybe it was the wallpaper.

once bright. now faded colors. happy frozen animals circle my room. what an organised parade. alphabetical zoo. marching marching marching to dim tin pan music. organ grinder music. tiny monkey tiny hat. dime? quarter? clink. anteaters, beavers, cats, deer... walruses, xanthippes, yaks, zebras. xanthippes are real. look it up in an encyclopedia. not like unicorns. at least not here or now. 26 smiling staring still. glued to wall forever. not moving. well... moving slightly. swaying in this near sleep. this long only-blinking. really. sharp blurry sharp blurry. twitch. eyes wide open. not where they were before. eyes dizzy. eyes failing. time for sleep. brief glowing image. animal parade. back of... heavy... dark... lids...

NEARLY ASLEEP

maybe it was mother. maybe it was father. mother's smile. father's nose i suppose. bad habits. doubt? could never tell with father. things they taught me. contradictions. ping pong patter mind fuck. pulled & twisted toaster coils. brain to point of snapping. mood swing. trust. never put sharp objects into your mouth. never. damage gums teeth. future as teeth model? lead in a fleeting movie of the week? starring who again? nice teeth whoever however. good parenting. off to the dentist? fuck. i hated the dentist. hate him still. always him. odd robot chair. deceptively comfortable. *clean teeth are happy teeth* and *3 times a day* posters on the ceiling of all places. should say *squirm sweat panic bleed spit*. mechanical chair. no shackles? hours in the waiting room for this? magazines you've never heard of before. mother doesn't subscribe. father? certainly not. no jugs in these mags. enter perfect clean dentist. hair just. coat just. teeth just. of course. white native. small efficient spear. counting teeth. poking prodding tender gums... one, two, good, three, four, nice... poke poke poke. tiny weapon breaking ground. tender mouth. tiny spots of blood you suspect. acupuncture jackhammer. tears gathering. tight fish net. more toys from tray. all sharp. every toy feels the same. seems to do exactly the same damn thing. missed a nerve. final nerve. pins & needles. deep. after rack hot coals chinese water torture. blood saliva spit. *that wasn't so bad was it? really?* must not recall *his* childhood dentist. hopefully i won't either. do recall mother's warning, father's warning. as mouth throbbed & ached, began to learn the importance of doubt.

maybe it was father/pastor/minister/reverend. my family attended. i accompanied voluntarily by force & or bribe. or else. ice cream. whatever. not my church their church. instantly recognised things that others didn't. or didn't see? lost blind robotic sheep. nice clothes. looking for god in words books songs hymns robes stained glass. take & eat. stale dead bread. take & drink the grape juice of christ? um. false luster of the collection plate. god doesn't need \$. people need \$. details. our father/pastor/minister/reverend had a personal relationship with christ. barbecues & such i reckon. poker on thursdays? i wouldn't play poker with jesus. walk on water, check. water to wine, check. back from the dead, check. poker... please. fold. apparently important to accept this stranger into our hearts minds lives. barbecues. poker night. eternal salvation.

never talk to strangers. even strangers that don't look like strangers. normal people can be strangers too. wise mother words. over & over. strangers are bad. got it. broken parrot. squawk. how about thin scraggly scantily-clad bloodied thorny fellows, mother? mother never answered because i never asked. morbid not stupid. doubt. continued to fester. prometheus scab. pick edge flick eat. same bat time. same bat channel. eating away. hot angry smoky moth.

take easter. our father/pastor/minister/reverend told us all about it one sunday. easter sunday. extra handsome. extra pretty. extra people. i listened & writhed & sweat & fussed. hard wooden pew. christ.

died many years ago for all us sinners. original sin. eve. apple. bitch. crucified tacked up to wooden cross to die. limbs stretching buckling aching under painful bloody strain of nine inch nails. crucified. dead. buried. 3rd day rose from this dead. cat nap. moved a huge rock from entrance of tomb. adrenaline. let me out of here indeed. thankful for the cat nap & all. some floating. more floating. descended upon some common folk. disciples. word or 2. no mention of initially scaring the bejesus out of them all. might have an origin there. after the jesus christ ghost moment. couple of words. poof. vanished gone forever. still in the hearts minds lives of those that won't let the poor man die. bumper stickers. bobble heads. action figures. car air fresheners. t-shirts. iron-on patches. all the kitsch keeps him alive & floating. hanging in there. cat on clothesline poster on dental ceiling. *hang in there* for christ's sake.

all a bit hard to swallow on the probable surface of reality. set aside walk on water, water to wine, lame to walk, blind to see, etcetera. who's to argue back then. voice of god in the father/pastor/minister/reverend. direct line. xm satellite radio. robed marionette. megaphone. wrath of god. wages of sin. fire & brimstone. too frightened *not* to believe really. afraid he kept some in reserve. behind pulpit. thermos. hot things hot. for those special blasphemous occasions. can i get an amen?

dark. camp. forest. counselor. black. hanging. crowd. chanting. jesus? anyone? front. kneel. confess. palms. nervous. shivering. black. jesus? hanging. voices. mumbling. trees. swaying. jesus? welcome? heart? yes. please. louder. swaying. dizzy. nauseous. crying. salvation. retreat. return. sit. cry. shake. fuck. give it away. him away. take it all back...

my doubt. safely locked up in an attic. top of my head. with boxes with dust. spiders & such. only i had the key to open it. unlock. brush away. duck. click. single hanging light bulb overhead.

easter seemed pretty cut & dried. bored in my pew next to father in suit mother in dress. attic of doubt a mess. already? bunnies of dust. rusty hinges. loose boards. nails come up. snag. tidy up. never know when company will drop in...

FADING

ride home was filled with an excited silence. some reason. darker half of easter over. hum in the silence. something a bit deeper hanging in the air. hint of scent after car freshener sucked dry. pine. cherry. vanilla. new car smell. couldn't put my finger on it exactly. lovely hindsight. patience. i could feel the silence breaking long before mother said a word.

she was bubbly. flipping ecstatic really. chipper as she chirped, *i wonder if a certain 7-foot rabbit left any goodies at home?* mood shifting. air lifting. long live the easter bunny! *guess we'll have to have a look see when we get home. how's that sound, son?* great dad! the easter bunny is our hop happy friend after all. moral bind released. doubt safely tucked away. i suffered through the remainder of the trip home. patience. focus. candy candy candy. time later to ponder abstractions. fact versus myth. horse versus unicorn. man versus messiah. did somebody say chocolate easter bunny? it all seemed so heavy & serious & daunting. i wanted so much to feel some sympathy, compassion, something for this great man & his great time. but there was one huge problem...

enormous hopping thumping silly happy bunny that delivered plastic eggs filled with candy & quarters to good little boys & girls all over the world. somehow the incredible tragedy that father/pastor/minister/reverend delivered earlier *easily* paled when held against grotesque wonderful monster rabbit. smiled from ear to phallic ear & brought sweet bliss to all who would search in grass & basket. oddly yet unevenly pulled between believing the bloody drama & taking the easy way out. accepting the fluffy-tailed myth instead at full furry face value. open freaking arms. give me your candy. buzz. your little yellow marshmallow chirping yummy birds. forget the blood. cross. rock. angels. ghosts like it's halloween. easter's for rabbits. trix are for kids. easy choice. unable to look back with regret. only humor. irony. myth for myth. not about which myth is more convincing. missing the point. which myth is

more pleasant? easy choice. light smirk as i look back at choosing candy over christ. really quite simple. gargantuan pink rabbit won. christ lost. lost christ. you can never stuff enough candy & chocolate into a crown of thorns to make a child happy. cross or carrot? easy choice. i smiled. a child. for the moment content with my decision.

FLASH CRASH

flash of lightning. roar of thunder. suddenly awake. eyes wide. adjusting. in a moment. flick of a match. light clear. dark blur. sad wet alphabet animal parade. puddle splat. puddle splat. wired tired. afraid that the storm has stolen any chance of sleep. twisted comfort in the many branches of the trees outside my window. intricate chaotic shadow puppets on the 4 walls in my cluttered room. should have been scary. but not. focus. blink. patience. tap. blink. tap. flash. crash. open. blink. patience... sleep arrived eventually. suddenly. silently violently dragging me from awake to asleep in less than a blink. quick blink. pulling me away from my shadow puppet distractions. abducting me playfully. unwillingly into a world of... nothing. then something. something familiar? nothing. nothing familiar? something. nothing again because memory doesn't work in this place. but when i woke. next morning. pool of my own sweat. blood. everything came crashing flooding back.

ASLEEP

quick look around the room dizzy. swallowed by a spinning darkness. whispers fill my ringing ears. ringing bell of a head. better. suppose. my name repeated repeated repeated. chanted like some sick sacrificial prayer. wrong word. words wrong. 100 million mad priests. eyes gouged. scarred humming & chanting my name. unseen. thank god. small favors. favor small... i know they're there. (there there) *hang in there*. dental ceiling. strangely only see when i close my eyes. trapped in this dream. voluntarily by force. don't want to be a rat in this maze. (shiver) prodded shocked teased. remote control. rat pellets. forward left jump freeze. zap. manipulated like so much wood & string. suspended & finger'd to bounce & dance. bow & prance. nimble fingers much too high to see. nose growing. lies i've only told myself. how does he know? god of all dreams. busy man.

everything completely black now. eyes closed or open. not just your regular breed of darkness mind you. mysterious blend of purple & ink & blood & nothing-color. makes common black seem white. transparent. so dark. can only *feel* your eyes. so dark. so young. fear the unknown. that which i can't put my finger on. afraid of the unknown. tilt-a-whirl gloom. afraid of the dark. not in my room. my real room. but here. small amount of goose flesh still finds my hand whenever i switch a light off. freezing shaking suddenly warmth. ahead. realised too late that i had only arrived at the gates of this hell. step. another step. nudge. creak. freeze. this hell awaited & the doors began to open. slowly began to feel nothing at all. normalised. composed. breathing slower. not normal. normal? here? creak. distant rustling. faint but constant sound. murmur like a billion matches swaying. warmth again. creak...

THIS HELL

the doors to this hell are massive. they are not made of rock or steel or bone or wood as some would suspect. bizarre. but i could feel everything around me. senses sharp as talons. razor blades. sensed a light. pin light. barely dropping to floor. dust too small to float across this light. this not-quite-slight-beam. sensed the low murmur of lost souls. nonsensical flicking tongues. miles away. started sensing outlines of objects? slowly slowly slowly becoming clearer. more defined. a lamp? broken mirror? dusty red wagon? what the not-hell? & the boxes on the floor. oh my the boxes. old. dust. hay fever panic. sneeze. bless you. my attic? single hanging light bulb overhead. *way* overhead. miles away. pin light. no need to duck in this attic. my attic. objects grasping memories. notice. order. name. mother's broken mirror. hopeless alcoholic phase. little red wagon. i'd soar. soar down massive concrete hills. closed course. professional driver. many boxes. oh my the boxes. tiny faded clothes. report cards. decorations from holidays that infect our calendars. one box in particular. oddly spot lit from somewhere. nowhere.

dead center floor. dull. motionless. glowing? just a cardboard box...

INTERLUDE

car horn? gun shot? dog bark? something sudden nearly woke. rolled over. brief disconnect. eyes rolling. flip book. hundreds thousands millions even. little plastic wind-up toys. made in china. made in japan. korea. indonesia. multicolored glistening plastic animals. gleaming jumpy bouncy flippy floppy things. need to keep them hopping or he cuts me. it cuts me. wind or cut. wound or wound. arm a bloody mess. pirate accordion. didn't do it to myself honest. wobbly weak arm. damaged dangly worthless snake. twist twist twist. keep em going. keep em going. some all 1 of them. wound tight. had nearly 100 going at once. all at once. awe. hypnotised. spaced off. moment to nap. whirr-flip. whirr-flip. whirr-flip. clang! clang! clang! tiny plastic gear'd chaos. so loud quiet. clumsy random lullaby. blink. pink hoppy rabbit. brown nutty chittering squirrel. yellow chirp chirp chirping chick. that monkey. that monkey with the hat &or cymbals &or drum. serial killer grin. you know what monkey i'm talking about that monkey. close your eyes. space out. awake. asleep. whoosh. slash. it came from above. no warning. only sharp & slick. blurry creature. too quick. never saw it. less than a blink. another gash. so clean. doesn't even bleed... for another blink. gush. blood on glimmering rainbow plastic. whirr-flip. whirr-flip. oh my the blood. ache. colder. twist. twist. gosh. wind-up toys flickering. here not-here. millions. thousands. hundreds. one. bouncy blue blurry cat. evil grin. holding a box? tattered box? beep! beep! beep! beep! blink. back on my back in my attic. whirr-flip.

ONE BOX

one box. of normal attic box size. seemed to speak to me for some reason. actually speak. one box. taped tight. one label on the side. one word. scrawled rapidly with wet-black marker. EASTER. reaction briefly rushes back to my sleepy head. twitch. jerk. one word. EASTER. in my dream. slight motion from within. weary imagination. sensed small sound. coming from this box. single soft scratch. purring of... cats? rustle of fur on cardboard. slightly screaming. *let us out! let us out!* haunted box. purr-ing & coo-ing. patient. caught in a box that couldn't possibly be holding the number of cats making that much noise. packed compact. all in a box label'd EASTER.

of course when i looked down there was a knife in my hand. looking back up at me. taunting me. pushing me. making me. *open me. trust me. that's what i'm here for.* box purpose. knife purpose. motive. reason for everything. nothing to reason. open the box. why not? only a dream after all. knife in hand. approached the box label'd EASTER. knife in hand... paused. purring continued. scratching continued. knife in hand i began to effortlessly slice through crusted masking tape on lid of box. mysterious contents buzzing bubbling pulsing. impatient now. forcing my hand forward. but then curiosity *did* kill the cat.

OPEN FREE

lifted the first flap. lifted the next. two remaining that covered the hideous meow-ing & mewl-ing. one dramatic ridiculous motion. expecting snake gag. joy buzzer to wake me from my peace-less slumber. dream breath. pause. nothing. purring stopped. head forward. scratching ceased. inch forward. silence but for my rapid beating heart. throbbing charlie brown head. sudden silence. freaked. heart mind racing because i expected everything but this silence. curled up invisible menace. bottom of box. silence didn't last. heart never slowed. thump thump thump...

COMING OF THE CATS

coming of the source of noise. didn't appear as slinking cats. but easter grass? plastic easter grass. meaningless. mindless. filler. tissue paper for easter baskets. blue/green/yellow plasti-grass. cling clung. magnetised plasti-grass. stick stuck to everything. static. same grass that showed up magically in other boxes. not-easter boxes. kitchen boxes. shoe boxes. epitome of fake false. easter bunny tacked to pastel

cross. half smiling. eyes closed ears bent. dulling pink fur. rainbow crown of thorns. pricking. poking. *find the eggs kids. step right up! he's fine. just a tiny bit of blood. here's a tissue!*

the plasti-grass leaked out of the box label'd EASTER. spreading menace across the weathered wooden slats of the attic floor. plasti-grass tumbling over itself. seething & wrapping around. each strand. every strand. blue to green to yellow. ever so slightly into more defined forms. slowly. slowly. taking its time. substance from nothing. writhing. twisting. paws legs bodies necks heads... eyes. finally, amidst the mass of blue/green/yellow plasti-grass. mock cats. emerged 2 brilliant eyes & 2 brilliant eyes & 2 brilliant eyes... yellow clear. sunshine. blinding. eyes that pierced my young soul. as if i'd turned the knife that i still held in my hand. frozen. on the throbbing muscle in my chest. smiling all. completely mad plasti-grass cats circling blinking wildly multiplying multiplying multiplying. first one. only one. then ten. possibly ten. lost count. gave up. 1 horrid had become 1 million horde. wet bent shattered series of flimsy fun house mirrors. floating. precarious. overhead. hanging from 1 million strands of fishing wire. razor wire. cats. shards. mirrors. eyes. strands. focused on 1 thing - me.

purring & scratching & yeowling & rubbing against each other. generating power. heat. electricity that shook the bending liquid air. body frozen to these stiff as boards. not-attic swaying floor. planted there. painted there. upright. rigid. the cats were getting closer now. circling like grounded wingless vultures. purring. meowing. humming. began to fear this slow procession. progression. worrying *here*. dreading *there*. feeling *here & there*. attic & bed. afraid i'd never wake up from this nightmare. that i'd die here now there then. this nightmare. this hell.

these cats. rippled. advanced. missing frames. too many to look at. take in. advanced. paused. slowly found that my finger could move. my hand. my arm. prepared to defend myself with this shrinking knife. lot of good i imagine. fear. prepared for the worst. tiny knife in hand. i had no idea absolutely no idea. could never have been prepared for what happened next. knife or knot. cats frozen. dvd pause. still. waiting waiting waiting to make their move. press play. shit! less than a momentary flicker-twitch of agreement crossed the crowd. quick ripple over poisonous water. half-purr signal nod. mass move in my direction. poetic. perfect. 1 cat pouncing on 1 mouse. i barely squeaked once. squeak-

REND TEAR RIP SHRED

many too many. hungry. plasti-grass cats engulfed me. swallowed me whole. hissing scratching lashing meowing smiling gnashing ripping glowing thrashing smiling licking flashing. i collapsed under the mass. limp & fetal. crash! closed my eyes. here. there. red white blue pain. betrayed. screaming so loud so quiet. mouth open so wide. this dream. this blood.

strings of cats. cats of string. wrapped up in strands & strands & strands. forgotten rotten mummy. wrapped so tightly around thin arms. pressure. chest. threatening to crack it wide open. bony oyster. creaking & bowing under immense pressure. eyes closed so they can't get into my brain. can't get into my head. already there. poised to popping. odd cork-gun sensation filling my soft neck melon. red. blood. brain. filled. water. balloon. squeezing becoming scratching. claws popping sharply into place. as one. a million. razor-edge. shards of glass. biting chipping this flesh. this paint. old. sun-dried house. rending tearing ripping shredding my skin into neat strips. prime strips. sharp butchers. pieces of me hung in the air for a brief moment. snapshot shudder. fell to the ground 1 after another. wet. splat. no longer a little boy. growing pile of red & pink. pieces of me. of meat. glistening wet gross. many-colored newspaper ribbons. slapping wooden floor. bloody. delicate. tasty. strips & straps & strands.

this attic. this trap i had fallen prey to. pray to. had become a blind butcher's messy shop. dollar thirty nine a pound. come & get it!

they had reached my neck my chin by then. drowning. head just above. my plankton & seaweed & kelp. don't scream, can't scream HELP! no lungs no throat no breath. gasping. choking. cats. gnawing &

munching. breaking me down into smallest parts. eyes wide open. all that's left. focus. 60 watts. light. swinging cloth wire. tattered string. cat shadows blocking. changing the light. me. throwing light & shadow in every direction. disco ball rave. around me. my torn & bloody heap. just my eyes. on top. from below. vein tendon muscle muppet sticks. to the right. to the left. all together now. moving maniacally. tracking. trying to find. breaks in the patterns. loopholes just loopy holes. no trap door escape. bleak blue/green/yellow sky. pin point stars from a 60-watt bulb. so very far away. wet. eyes. cry.

YELLOW CAT

cats lapped red milk. nuzzled & gnawed white chew-toy bones. began to purr as if they were finally satisfied. began to wander away from their kill. small scraps & snacks saved for later. tucked somewhere beneath within their plasti-grass not-fur not-skin. felt sick. felt numb. body paralysed in the waking world. post-shock. rigorous rigor mortis. think i was. believe i was truly dead in the waking world. for an extended moment. truly dead. unreal. real. world. blur.

as i lay dead or dying. eyes wide open atop muppet puppet sticks. all of the cats slowly abandoned what remained. my remains. retreated to a million corners in this small niche. this attic hell.

all of the cats save one. a peculiar little cat as i remember him. not blue. not green. dull yellow of old urine. stale butter. cigarette stain. much smaller than the gone cats. piece missing from my right his left ear. curious runt of a vast litter. but his face betrayed this rank. older than the rest of him could contain. his face was ancient. eyes wise. this peculiar old/young cat stared at me. curious. tilting his head this way & that. studying every strip & strand of my ripped body as if i were a laboratory specimen. dissected pig. for a time. him studying me studying him. little wise cat. wide eyes. sure i saw myself for a moment in those eyes. his eyes. twisted yellow'd reflection. flip. switch. he looked into my naked eyes with a playful familiarity. saw something in my eyes that i couldn't quite put my finger on. not that i had a finger to put. i held his he held my attention. for a time. nothing else existed. just brilliant/dull yellow cat under slightly swaying 60 watts. calmed me. comforted me. helped me to forget. earlier. penny for a thought yellow cat.

wish i could have taken a look beyond those eyes. tip of his tongue. just to know. *why?* yellow cat. *why?* but couldn't see a thing. not a single cat word or thought. would have said something. past tense mouth. so waited. until he got bored. snatched my eyes. later snack. just toying. but he didn't leave. didn't snatch. sat there frozen for a moment. pale yellow cat figurine. then he moved. mechanically. as if wound up & released. missing frames. slowly. stuttering. circling. purring thinking finally speaking? meowing & mewling, but i understood...

you don't know who you are do you child? couldn't possibly understand your place in this place. not a clue? even after all of this mess this pain?

i looked at him unable to answer. lack of vocal mechanism. he paused dramatically nevertheless. waiting for my reply. playing. toying. giddy.

you are very special. so special. brought us great joy. great joy in your coming to this place. finding this place. we've been waiting. stirring. open your eyes wider. wider still. look around. look familiar? familiar at all? this is your key, kitten. your key. it's been here all along. locked away inside a dusty cardboard box label'd EASTER. is that surprise i see in your eyes? come with me, kitten. join me. join us. gather your strands of sticky plasti-grass together. work yourself like clay into more comfortable form. stretch your eyes. arch your back. bend backside high into the air. bones of hands through tips of fingers. scratch your way. tear your way out of your human shell. pull yourself together for christ's sake. concentrate. move. learn. wrap. grow. plastic. meow.

i focused on the bottom of my pile. slowly learned. one strand at a time. others fell in line. obedient flat & clever snakes. bending & stretching odd sinews across invisible framework. muscle. bone. arms & legs

matched lengths. tail grew. all fours. tail above ass. oddly familiar. head pulled into sharp oval. top of impossibly long neck. ears sharpened. moved to top of twisting head. trained my eyes to spread & squint. slowly filled with yellow gel. attic turned canary. so sharp. knew in that moment what it was like to see through cat eyes.

welcome kitten! nicely done! not everybody pulls it together that quickly. i should know. ah. i remember when i changed. so very long ago. but i digress. slink my way if you would. follow me into your new home. your cardboard box label'd EASTER. your key. follow me. take your place in this place. among the others. king of cats. for a time. follow me.

i followed him. into that box. that darkness. took my place in this place. king of cats. squeezed in with the rest. all the rest. packed like peanuts. lid sealed slowly over our heads. new piece of sticky masking tape. we sat. waited. near silence. occasional twitch. sneeze. meow. letting this piece of quiet drip over my many strands. smiled a cat smile. blinked. napped. waited. wonderful quiet. napped here while sleeping there. nearly lost myself completely. *over* slept. forever.

SUDDENLY

gathered napping began to stir. move about nervously. i sat silent for a moment longer. compelled to join the agitation. me. not me. all twisted up. swelling. chaos cubed. could barely tell which strands of plasti-grass were mine. connected to my tossed & trampled head. almost didn't hear the click click clicking of approaching footsteps. cats calming calmer calm. catching timid steps. approaching stranger. ever closer to the box we inflated. inhale. exhale. cardboard flesh slightly rising slightly falling. nearly not alive. cats fallen deadly silence. excited electric pulse passes through the cats the cube. expanding. plastic fur on plastic back. bristles. tingles. tickles. as one. just one. not yet pause. still. waiting for trip for trigger. flip. switch.

tiny footsteps cease. edge of the box label'd EASTER. looked up when i could. thin light. me & millions of waiting hungry waiting hungry cats. hissing with delight as more light more light. new tape old. splitting dark. wider wider still. saw small sharp knife saw. 1 flap 2 flap 3 flap 4. peeled back explosive banana. brief glance nervous guest. could only make out slowly swaying shadow against spinning background. memories & trash. lid naked. shadow exposed. target.

cats paused. time. allow this shadow stranger a moment to sense. false. drop guard. drop knife. jaw hope onto wooden floor. barely noticed the blue/green/yellow plasti-grass seeping & leaking over the edges. of the cardboard box label'd EASTER. shadow stranger stumbled back. struck stopped stuck. frigid rigid. much like i had been. like i had been? so focused on me & us. never noticed. noticed now. hapless shadow was me. will be me. knew what was about to happen to this poor creature before it happened. it *happened* before.

my turn came. left the box reluctantly. clearer picture of our shadow stranger. corner of my cat eye. frightened little girl. all pigtails & freckles. ice tears. quivering pale lips. white as ghost. albino snow. alabaster. trembling as the snake sea raged forward toward her. foot bone connected to ankle bone to shin bone to knee to thigh. certain amount of pity for this poor girl creature. certain amount of pride? confused jealous hungry angry. empathetic pathetic. smack lick. confusion to jealousy to rage as a ripple ripped through the well-oiled plasti-grass machine. now!

POUNCE

she never knew what hit her. screamed silently as strands wrapped around her. claws embedded shredded. her tender skin. she screamed to wake the sleeping dead. her words like mine found no purchase no pity. no ear to listen hand to hold. no sudden wake from bloody slumber. i laughed long & loud. found the path to true madness. clarity. new claws found pale flesh. blood lust. impossible quick.

ripping tearing biting bending. her tiny body. thin strips & straps. wet & slapping wooden floor.

poor thing. yet to recover from the pain & shock. yet to find meaning. yet to find not-shiny key. her key. here all along. her all along. hidden. chaotic moment all connected. cats connected. strips & straps of plasti-grass. intricate. blue/green/yellow wires. wired. connected. entire. machine.

we all dream each other's dreams. in these dreams we are immortal, repetitive, infinite, boring, powerful, scared.

WAKING

as we walked away from our meal. shadow stranger little girl. snacks & yummy morsels. succulent strands tucked. calm hum in my stomach. satisfied. full. small. finger. twitch. distant. living. sleeping. world. time to return to sleeping self. sweating & shaking. bed i left behind.

looked around this attic. this hell. this home. noticed fur fading. dripping. melting. candle. vapor. vanishing into cat noise. attic noise. dream noise. low. murmur. whisper. noise in my head.

waking. mind. body. convulse. tremor. spasm. stomach. throat. mouth. taste. vomit. puke.

AWAKE

slammed into world awake. fell out of bed. covered in wet vomit sweat piss. as i lay dying not breathing. wounds i could feel but couldn't find. checking myself. touching myself. not there half there all there. loud scream in head. mad laugh instead. clock cower. lamp limp. animal wallpaper shook & tore in places. many animals retreating. mad giggle titter snort. horses & otters & bugs & snakes. ran from my echoing cackle. cackling echo. ran from true madness. sweat cry wet. middle of floor of room of night. dashed away dashed away dashed away all... all but one. save one. just one. letter C. *C is for CAT*. yellow cat. never noticed on wall before. cat sat fixed. looking at me looking at him. curious both. he smiled then. pointy ear to pointy ear. let out a titter-chirp of his own. i looked at him smiled my own. pointy ear to pointy ear. winked a broad yellow eye at my wise yellow friend. he returned the wink & with a flip of his tail vanished into wall behind paper.

i looked down. balled fist of right hand. opened to find a small key. dull key. my key. just the right size to open up the back of my mind. turned this key my key in my hand. over & over & over. hid & tucked away within the various strands & strips squirming under pajamas. hidden to this day. *today*. pulled it out. turned it in my hand. over & over & over. eyes bright. smiling wild cat smile. what happens when this smile threatens to rip my face apart? titter tip. shrink blink wink. meow. pounce. vanish into wall behind...

maybe it *was* the wallpaper.