

While You're Dreaming

Kat Brokaw

Soon, They will come.

I curl into the warmth of the Mommy's tummy while I wait, letting loose that low rumbling sound that she likes. She calls it "singing." It helps her go to sleep. So I sing to her, slowly stretching one long leg as she begins to dream.

My eyes open to mere slits, I watch my sister lounging on the windowsill, a blotchy gray silhouette all tucked neatly into herself. She's not truly my sister, we don't have the same queen, or anything. But we're part of the same household, so I think of her as my sister.

I open my eyes and crane my neck to see over the Mommy's hip. My brother's sprawled out on the other side of the bed, a brilliant white shadow against the darkness of the room. He seems asleep.

I know my grandma is already in the other sleeping room, with the Little Girl. Grandma is the eldest of us, and doesn't get around so well anymore. But she's very wise, and her big blue eyes miss nothing.

I lick my shoulder, relaxing a little. My elders don't yet seem concerned, so I still have time. They know this routine. I'm still learning. My eyes close again and I resume my singing. Okay, so I like it, too.

I've barely gotten into my song when my sister jumps down from the sill with a mew so soft it doesn't disturb the Mommy's sleep. My sister runs off to the Little Girl's sleeping room, the faint tinkling of her bell the only sound of her flight. I can hear grandma's low growling even from here.

Brokaw/Sleeping/2.

They have come. It's time.

I hear my brother moving around, waking up. I want to lie here a little longer; the Mommy is so warm and comfortable. But I hear the ring of my brother's bell as he cleans himself in preparation, and I know I can't.

They're here.

They come from the darkness, part of the shadows, part of the night. I used to think the Mommy created Them with her dreams. Now I think They live separate from her, and come to feed on her dreams.

My brother says it doesn't matter: They come, and we kill Them, that's what matters.

I asked grandma once, when she wasn't in a bad mood. She said They aren't of this world, and are jealous of the special breath that comes from dreams. She said that They are why the First Cat was asked into the First House; the mice were just a bonus for both of us. Then she said I should leave her alone to nap, or she would slap me a good one.

I miss the first one, because I'm caught up in my own thoughts. It coalesces out of the night behind me and whizzes past my shoulder, heading straight for the Mommy's face. My brother has to jump on the Mommy's chest to catch it before it slides up her nose into her mind. He hops off the bed with it caught between his sharp teeth. He's not as light as he thinks he is, and his heroic leap disturbs the Mommy's sleep. She rolls over, muttering something and swatting at her nose.

When she moves, I see another one sliding up the side of the bed. I leap over the Mommy's back and slash my claws through its middle with a hiss. It feels like a wet sticky fog as my paw slides through it, kind of like that smelly stuff the Little Girl squirts on her hair every morning. I know this because I got too curious and too close one morning, and I got squirted. It took me all day to lick that stuff out of my fur, and then I had an upset tummy.

Brokaw/Sleeping/3.

They keep coming, and we keep killing Them. It's a wild night, tonight, but we keep Them all away from the Mommy. And then finally, just before dawn, They're gone.

I'm exhausted and starving. I dive off the bed and race into the kitchen to be the first at the food bowl. My sister comes next, and stands aside patiently, cleaning herself while she waits. She practically glows with satisfaction, so I know they did not get through her to the Little Girl.

My brother is not so patient when he finally strolls into the kitchen. He shoulders me aside and devours what's left of the food.

I give my face a quick wash, licking any crumbs out of my whiskers, and I saunter back into the bedroom like I don't care that he pushed me. I don't, not really. The Mommy will fill the bowls again, when she wakes up.

I hop up onto the bed, singing loudly and nudging the Mommy's face. She smiles sleepy, and runs her hand down my back. Cuddled up against the warmth of her belly again, I wonder how people who don't have cats manage to get any sleep.