

Felix the Cat

by James Pagliasotti

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There was a time on the mountain when all the back-to-the-earth types, the peace bro, be cool, hang loose, watch your head, head, turn on-tune in-drop out, and let your freak flag fly folks who really had their shit together very early on and moved up out of the urban morass to the rural places of beauty where all of god's blessings could be embraced and worshipped in a compact with nature, where they could dig the grandeur and the mystery of the world, the enigma inside the riddle inside the puzzle, wrest it free from the wrong way the Man was taking the good green earth and begin the long, eventful path to gaining true enlightenment and a bit of Buddhahood, there was a time after a while when all of those seekers of truth were becoming just a little bit edgy and Felix foremost among them. He had good reason to feel the way he did.

There was nothing more embarrassing at that particular time in history, nothing more likely to raise questions among the members of the tribe, than being uptight. Relax his dear wife often used to say to him and other times he'd look at her and say you need to loosen up you know just fucking take it easy. Don't be so uptight. It wasn't part of the program, everything in the ethos of their community argued against it and yet Felix was feeling shaky at best. He was deep into yet another of the endless bags of blow that came to him. It was the intoxicant of choice in all the best circles and like so many other folks who were wrestling with that monkey at the time, he was selling a little on the side to support his daily dose.

The way they felt about the drug in those days wasn't really that well understood yet. Among all those very hip folks it was widely thought to be not habit forming but only wildly, compulsively attractive. So wildly, compulsively attractive in fact that just about everybody anybody knew was a slut for the stuff, which made selling it pretty easy.

It was easy except for the fact that selling it required sharing it first, a little bump between friends so everybody could try it on for size, feel comfortable with the fact that the seller, the buyer and anyone else in the immediate neighborhood who happened by at the time the sale was taking place all were snorting the same shit and getting off at the same time. This way it made for community. This wasn't some criminal enterprise or anything like that, after all. This was a little off the books commerce among friends. Somebody had the dope, somebody had the money, and everybody had the desire.

The thing about each of those little tastes though is that like potato chips on steroids you really can't do just one. So, after that engaging bit of camaraderie that was a custom of the sale, after the money changed hands and both the seller and the buyer by then had done many lines each and

they and everyone who joined in with them to any degree whatsoever was completely slammed, they were more than ready to go their own way and did, Felix by himself back to his stash and the buyer with an enthusiastic bunch of friends ready to hang with him come hell or high water until the last line was done or they rudely at some point got banished from the Temple of the Flake, after all of that the deal finally was done.

And each of them would be there in its grip until it was gone. Once you started, you were down for the day at least and maybe a couple of days or more depending on how much you had until you collapsed from exhaustion, fell into bed and ground your teeth for a couple of hours until sleep somehow snatched you from the willies; or, you ran out of blow and had to confront the choices, which were to either go out whatever the hour for more or scratch your way like nails on the blackboard through the process of withdrawing from the full speed ahead freak freeway and finally many anguished hours later regain a semblance of your senses.

Only to begin again. Felix had been there, day after day, over and over, again and again. He had lots of it. The sweet little cabin on the cusp of the meadow most of the way up Flagstaff Mountain that looked out over Boulder, Colorado when it was in its greatest rage, the one of legend, was not the peaceful place he had imagined.

Unless you've been there, you can't begin to know what it is like at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on a bright winter day to be vibrating at an extremely high frequency within a bubble of complete paralysis. From each cell of your body antennae extend, receiving sensations from all points of the compass and every corner of the globe. There is something like a full scale assault on every fiber of your being, a trembling of the neural circuitry in severe overload, shadows sliding past the corner of your vision everywhere you look, unseen clowns cackling and a rhythm of sonic booms rolling in from extra-solar reaches of the galaxy. You are rattled.

But Felix is a pro. He does this for a living. Or, rather, this is his life. That's a better way to put it. This is just an instance of his being at the moment, not the entirety of it by any means and rather like a waystation, but it is a lingering interlude for certain.

He knows from paranoia. He can handle the paralysis, disarm it nerve by nerve until he is able to function again. That is what it takes and he is equal to it.

He gathers himself, takes an inventory of the corpus, surveys his immediate environment, the room in which he sits, the rooms immediately proximate and the view outside the windows. Take my hand his higher self

says to his pathetic persona trembling in the miasma of the drug. I can show you the way.

There is a fear that attends the course you have taken. No one can know what you do, what it means to do it. No one has done it this way before. So no one understands! It is a generational thing, a new way of being. The signs are unknown, their meaning unknowable. We are throwing off the shackles, untying ourselves from the woeful example of our forebears. We are trying a new way to be free.

We respect what is natural and it is naturally scary to go about your life this way. You are a scion of east coast respectability. The world was your oyster. It was bought and paid for and you were trained from birth to swallow it whole. But it was not to be.

For whatever reason, and the reasons are as many as the people who are doing this thing that you too are doing, it was not to be. Something drove you away from the family tradition and into the arms of the movement. What else to call it?

There are some tens of millions of children all over the world, products of the fertile ooze that attended the end of the Second World War, all of whom are reaching adolescence and then adulthood simultaneously. There are certain codified ways for them to communicate, to stay in touch and aware of each other. There is a visual medium that never existed before, one that encourages in them daily the picture of themselves as stars of the little screen. There is a vast commercial enterprise aimed at the market they are becoming. And there is a sense that money is no object, not for them, not an object of worship as it is for their parents. It is an unprecedented and inexplicable movement. You are part of it, the higher self tells him, and you do what you have to do.

What Felix has to do is get past the fear and get back to enjoying the high. If money is no object, this drug will put that concept to the test. It costs a lot in a lot of ways. It takes a toll on the wallet, sure, but also on the heart and soul of the players. High ain't shy and it ain't cheap. It takes you and shakes you as part of the price of playing. It makes you feel like a king and like a king you come to sense the danger that surrounds you.

It's not that everyone is out to get you, no, but it is apparent that almost anyone among them might be. Those who are not with you just may be against you. It makes you very nervous when you think about it.

What you're doing is unprecedented. It also is illegal. So, sometimes it makes you nervous. When you've done too much coke for too many days in a row and the realization sweeps over you that no one other than some of the people your own age would fail to find you exceedingly peculiar, it makes

you nervous. It makes you self-conscious. It makes you feel as though everybody is looking at you, wondering what you're about and whether it might not be a good idea to take a closer look at what you're up to.

That, your higher self tells you in a manner that is both ironic and comforting, is what you have come to believe and that is why you are virtually paralyzed. You need to have a little bit of perspective in your life.

Look out the windows at the beautiful place where you live. Look at the scenery that surrounds you, the raw and jagged peaks of the Rocky Mountains high above the trees, the animals and the birds moving gracefully between them and the gentle sweep of the meadows dropping down to the town and the plains beyond this little stretch of the mountains where you live and where you now are cowering in fear. Look at it in this rare and beautiful light and remember the sense of oneness that is life. All of life. Look at it and see that there is nothing to fear.

Felix pulls himself together, has a strained laugh at his own foolishness, at the sheer preposterousness of his propensity to cower, and he begins to relax for just a moment as he looks out the window from where he sits. There are the peaks in the distance to his right, the meadow immediately in front of him where the bright sun reflects brilliantly off the deep crust of snow and to his left in the haze of the reflection there is the city of Boulder far below him and beyond it the sweep of the plains going on forever to the east.

It is a commanding and even majestic view, just exactly what originally lured him to this place, of a scale and scope that brought him satisfaction and the sense of even deeper relaxation just on the horizon of his consciousness, when there was a jerk of his thought process and a snap of his eyes to a place he'd looked over dreamily the moment before and which now he looked at more carefully.

When he was at his worst, when the drug overwhelmed him, Felix had moments of sheer terror, elongated debates with himself about whether someone was breaking into his house, was after him, was going to steal his stash, was looking to do him harm, or not. Maybe instead it was lots of people who were after him. He would lie in bed in the dark and listen to each and every odd sound, wondering which of them was the one he should have prepared for, which was the one that announced the assassin who was almost upon him, who slipped through the moment he let down his guard.

He would lie there in the dark, grinding his teeth, tossing and turning and thinking these thoughts until he heard the birds sing. He was still awake and it was morning again.

It was the paranoia. The dark side, the fear that someone or everyone is after you, coming to punish you for your transgressions. You are totally focused on yourself and you begin to assume that everyone else is, too. Focused on you, that is. You have these battles with your own insanity, the insanity the drug induces, and after a while you learn to laugh at yourself.

You are high as a kite, back from an afternoon with a small group of friends who sat down with you over a large hand mirror that was streaked with long lines of flake cocaine freshly flown in from Peru and passed from one to another to snort it deeply into their brainpans and fry themselves into a state of higher being of sorts. That is the ritual during which you sold them an ounce of blow and left them high as you were high and wended your way back to the mountain shaking mightily now that you were free of them.

You are paranoid because you are so high and have once again engaged in a felonious act with a group of your friends – well, you knew most of them anyhow – and though you’ve done it many times now it still is an uncommon act for a white boy to perform in America in the early 1970s and when you’re this high it sometimes makes you nervous.

But you do have perspective and a higher self that guides you, rescues you perhaps is a better way to put it, when you fall into this state of decline. A higher self that lifts you up and shakes you free of the drug’s delirium and that is what you’re experiencing just now.

Felix is listening to the voice of his rational mind, which thankfully is cutting through the fog of his fear and luring him toward a calm he knows, wants and needs, he is getting the first taste of laughing at himself and his predicament, he is feeling just on the verge of transcendence, which after all is what this entire effort, this movement, is about, when the recollection of a shadow that was out of place recalls itself to him and he looks again at the haze of the reflection where the sun is beating down at a sharp angle on the thick crust of snow in the meadow and his breath catches in his throat.

He sees the shape of a man a long way away moving at high speed across the meadow toward him. He looks again, more closely. It is a man in aviator sunglasses and a white jumpsuit riding a snowmobile through the snow and he is kicking up a big spraying rooster tail behind him. Worse still, he isn’t alone. There are two, three, at least four more and they are clearly headed this way. His heart is pounding like a bass drum in his ear. Kaboom, kaboom, kaboom! The volume and pace are rapidly accelerating.

Felix is still sitting on more than a pound of cocaine of the kilo that Ron fronted him. He’s sold quite a few ounces and snorted who knows how much more and has tens of thousands of dollars in hundred dollar bills

locked in the chest freezer in the basement and just when he was about to rise above the grip of fear that is inflicted on the nerves of people who do this sort of thing, he looks out his window and sees riding toward him on snowmobiles a group of men in dark glasses and white jumpsuits who look very much like the Alpine Gestapo and in every otherwise very much out of place.

There is an arrow of cosmic dimensions hurtling through space at nearly the speed of light. It has his name on it: Felix it says on the long smooth shaft and where it is tipped with a point that shines and shimmers like some sort of mythic titanium in the fire of the sun there is a drop of blood bled from the imagination of what is about to occur. Move or it will impale you! Move or it will pin you to this time and place forever!

He moves. Quickly. He moves to the place in the basement where he keeps the coke, rips it in one piece from its hiding place and heads for the john upstairs, panting heavily and having very strange thoughts about what is actually happening here. He is running like hell for the restroom in his modest little home on Flagstaff Mountain above Boulder with a pound and then some of pure flake cocaine in his hand and his intention is to flush it into oblivion as quickly as he can dump it into the toilet and pull the handle - that's what he intends to do, and he has the stash in hand and the intention in mind and he is in motion.

But he also is a pro in the strangest sense of that word. And so in the midst of this full blown panic and in the midst of his stride up the stairs from the basement and onto the floor whereat he welcomes visitors to his home if indeed anyone actually was to come there, in the midst of all this he has the presence of mind to stop, pause, relax, take yet another look out the window from the front of his home across the meadows and forests and little ponds and lakes and all the other stuff that constitutes the place where he lives and when just to be sure before he does anything foolish like flush away a pound of cocaine he looks out there very clearly, carefully and with the greatest composure he can summon, there is still a very vivid picture of guys in neat white jumpsuits and aviator sunglasses riding at full speed on their snowmobiles across the landscape toward him.

Now, he fucking freaks! He freaks and he flips out and he has some kind of comic book version of multiple heart attacks and then he gathers himself together and says to himself: what the fuck? What to do? Ditch the stash by any means available to you, my friend. Ditch the stash and suffer the fucking consequences.

So he does. Felix the Cat takes his big bag of coke to the john on the first floor of his very cozy home and lifts the lid of the toilet and with a very

strong sense of purpose dumps the entire contents of the bag being about 19 or 20 ounces of pure flake cocaine into the water of the toilet, reaches quickly for the handle and resolutely flushes it down. Flushes it down!

Just that quickly the coke is gone and he slumps to the floor with his heart pounding and his breath coming in big clumsy gulps, thinking about all of the implications of what is occurring to him in this supercharged afternoon and waiting for the knock on the door or the busted down door or however they do these things. But it never comes.

The coke is gone and just that quickly too are the men in the neat white jumpsuits gone. It is as though they have vaporized. Vanished without a trace. Disappeared completely and therefore must have disincorporated. They are gone. The coke is gone. The rats in the nearby sewers suddenly are getting hammered and acting very weird. It is a deeply changed day.

END