

Cat the Vamp



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*Thank you, Inanna, for giving me the chance of a lifetime
and many thanks to you, the reader.*

Catherine drank and immediately was filled with a warmth she had never known before. For a moment, it seemed that everyone else in the room had vanished. She was alone with Morgan, tingling with excitement and elation. She could feel every particle in her body changing, fulfilled and content at last. She traced Morgan's sides with her fingers until she came to his hands. She held them and felt his energy pass into her. Never before had she felt so satisfied, so happy, so perfectly complete.

Cat the Vamp

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Catherine Taylor had lived in the small cottage in Stoneysaever since she first came into the world. It was a charmingly simple home furnished with pieces made from the forest surrounding it. The large fireplace in the living room came alive with brilliant flames every night. A red and white chequered cloth covered the oak table in the kitchen, and curtains of the same fabric draped the large window. Catherine's bedroom was next to the kitchen, with her antique four poster bed, and shelves filled with her dolls and books. Catherine's parents, John and Aneese, slept in the master bedroom. Catherine knew that her parents' room had a bed, but there were many other things in there that Catherine didn't know about.

John and Aneese were hard workers, constantly away on business trips. When Catherine asked her parents where they went, they always told her that their absence had something to do with work, and that was all. Catherine knew that Aneese was a nurse and John was a carpenter, but she couldn't understand why they left her alone so often.

But it wasn't so bad when her parents left, because then Catherine's grandmother Alice came to watch over her. Alice was an amazing baker and she spent hours mixing ingredients in large silver bowls. She always let Catherine lick the batter off the spoon

she'd used to mix the cookies. It had become a kind of tradition, a good luck charm, to make the cookies turn out delicious. Alice arranged her cakes and biscuits on pretty plates with delicate roses painted on them, while Catherine boiled water and got out two fragile white teacups with hand painted flowers on their fluted sides. Then Alice and Catherine would sit down to an afternoon tea. As they ate their cookies they talked about the weather and how wonderfully the flowers were growing in the small wooden boxes outside the window.

Many careless afternoons passed by like that when Catherine was young and innocent, when little things amused her and nothing could rob her of her happiness.

As Catherine grew into a young woman, Alice became an old one, and with age, her body started to fail. She grew progressively weaker, and Catherine's eyes swelled with tears when she visited her grandmother. Catherine told her tears to go away. She told them that they weren't needed, but they still tried to break free from her eyes. Eventually, the tears gave up and stopped coming at all. Catherine could not cry, not ever. She wouldn't let herself become upset at what was happening to her grandmother. It was natural, after all. But crying was natural too, and because Catherine stopped crying entirely, a part of her became cold and numb.

The night Alice died, Catherine was sipping tea in her kitchen, studying the wilted flowers in the boxes outside the window. She heard Alice call her from the living room and went to her immediately. Alice took Catherine's hand and stared at her granddaughter with her weak, pale eyes that held so many memories.

"My dear Cat, I want you to know that I love you. You've always been there for me. You've always shared your heart with me. I cherish the moments we've spent together." She took in a slow deep breath. "You've been like a second daughter to me. It's your love that has kept me alive for so long." She took another deep breath of air and trembled slightly. "In time, you will know where they go. You will know the secrets."

“What secrets, grandmother?”

But Alice didn't answer. Her body was limp and her eyes stared blankly at the wall. Death filled the air and Catherine breathed it in.

Catherine gently let her grandmother's hand fall to the side of the sofa. She stood staring at the corpse on her couch for a few minutes, not knowing what to do or how to react. She tried to cry, but the tears were trained and did not come.

A few days later, after a rather depressing funeral, Alice's ashes were scattered over the cottage garden where they seeped into the ground and made the pale pink roses turn deep crimson.

For the next week, Catherine stayed in her bedroom alone. She didn't go to work. She refused to join her parents at the kitchen table for meals and only nibbled at bits of food that Aneese brought to her. She spent the first few days sleeping and thinking. The twinkling eyes of the dolls on her shelves seemed to follow her around the room.

How did grandmother know she was going to die? Where does who go? Mom and dad? What secrets was she talking about? Nothing makes sense!

After this dark period of silent contemplation, Catherine was frustrated, and even angry, that Alice had died and left her alone.

As a young girl, Catherine would sit playing with her dolls for hours, dressing them up in frilly pink dresses. She would sit painting colourful pictures of rabbits in sunny fields and be content. But now, nothing seemed to please her. She had lost her innocence and her passion for life.

On her seventh morning of solitude, Catherine stared at herself in her bathroom mirror. She gazed numbly at her long, sandy hair and the emerald green eyes that lately seemed more expressive than her mouth. When Catherine was upset, sometimes she couldn't find the strength to speak. She tucked a strand of hair behind her right ear, licked her lips unhappily and sighed. She knew she had to face her parents.

John and Aneese were in the kitchen talking quietly. When

Catherine entered the room, they became silent. They glanced at each other and then at Catherine, who was pouring herself a bowl of cereal.

“Cat, can you sit down for a moment?” Aneese’s voice was quieter than usual.

Catherine continued to pour her cereal. She closed the cardboard box, put it back in the cupboard, and went to the fridge for milk.

“Catherine, please sit down. We need to talk,” said John. “I know your grandmother’s death has been very hard on you, and we want you to know that we’re here for you.”

Catherine sat down at the kitchen table and dug her spoon into her cereal. She heaved a lump of flakes onto the spoon and stared at them for a while. Then she tilted the spoon from side to side and watched as droplets of milk fell and splashed on the mound of flakes like drops of rain on a hilltop.

“Catherine, look at me.” Aneese’s voice had risen slightly.

“Why should I look at you?” Catherine shouted suddenly. “You’re never here. You’re not parents. Don’t tell me to look at you. The one person in this world who cared for me is dead.”

As John and Aneese stared at Catherine, she stood abruptly, pushed back her chair, and left the room.

Catherine didn’t look back at the cottage as she marched down the dirt path, her worn black boots kicking up dust and rocks. Finally, she came to a small house painted robin’s egg blue with vines twisting up the walls. Catherine sighed as she knocked on the front door. A brown-haired girl, quite a bit shorter than Catherine, opened the door.

“Hi Rose.”

“Hey Cat. Just let me get a sweater.”—Rose returned wearing a brown sweater that matched her hair. Catherine was silent as she and Rose started walking along the dirt path. “How have you been?”

Catherine shrugged. “Okay, I guess.”

“I missed you. It’s been a whole week since I’ve seen you. That must be a record!”

Catherine laughed. Still laughing, she let Rose pull her into a hug. With the laughter finally came the tears that had been waiting for so long. Catherine pulled free of Rose’s hug and put her hands to her wet eyes. Salty tears flowed down her cheeks and into her mouth.

“It’s okay, Catherine, it’s good to cry, it’s not healthy to hold it all in.”

“You always make me laugh.” Catherine wiped her eyes with her sleeve. “I’m so glad I have you as a friend.”

Rose hugged Catherine again, and the girls stood with the wind whipping at their backs until Catherine was ready to continue.

Rose and Catherine had known each other since they first began school. They had bonded instantly and been inseparable ever since. If Catherine was not at home, she was likely to be at Rose’s house. Rose was such a frequent visitor in Catherine’s home that she often went unnoticed as a guest. Rose could walk into the cottage, grab a bite to eat from the fridge, and then go rest in the living room and no one would question it.

“You need to get your mind off all the sad things that have been happening recently.” Rose kicked a smooth grey rock off the side of the path as they walked. “You need to focus on something else. Let’s go to The Cove.”

Catherine just nodded, sliding her hands into her jeans pockets.

The girls hiked up the dirt path through the forest, the trees swaying in the wind. Catherine watched the dappled sunlight dancing along the earth floor, and listened to dry leaves crunch beneath her boots. She smelled the fresh autumn air and smiled, glad to be outdoors again.

The Cove, a cozy little coffee shop, was in a clearing just outside the forest, on a cliff with a large lake beneath it. Rose walked in first with Catherine following a few feet behind, scanning the place for

people she knew.

“What would you like, Cat? I’ll get it for you.”

Catherine brushed her hair out of her eyes and studied the menu written in white chalk on a blackboard. “I’ll get a hot chocolate.”

“Great. I’ll get the same, please.”

Rose paid the lady behind the counter and the girls shifted over to the side to wait for their drinks. Catherine surveyed the room. There were a few kids sitting with their parents whose faces she knew, but she couldn’t recall their names. A man sat in the corner staring out at the sun while he tapped a pencil on a crossword puzzle grid in a newspaper. A woman who Catherine had sometimes seen shopping in town was curled up in a large chair with a book in her lap. She was sipping from a large black mug and every so often she hummed part of a tune that seemed to calm Catherine.

When the girls received their drinks, they slipped out the back door to the patio overlooking the lake. Catherine licked some of the whipped cream off the top of her steaming cocoa as she leaned against the railing, focusing on the water below. “The lake is beautiful today.”

The sun was sitting low in the sky, casting a calm orange sheen over the land and water. The air was cool but refreshing and Catherine took in deep breaths of it.

“Hey Rose! Hey Cat!”

“Hey Jake.” Rose’s lips formed a wry grin as Jake walked toward the girls. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m just taking a walk, having a smoke, you know.”

Catherine smiled at Jake and he smiled back, but he didn’t say anything about Alice. When it came to talking about death, most people didn’t know how to begin.

“The wind is really starting to pick up.” Jake took out a cigarette and lighter.

He lit up, and took a deep drag, then turned to the girls to offer them a smoke. Rose and Catherine took cigarettes and Jake gave

them both a light. Catherine inhaled and felt the poison seep down her throat. She exhaled and watched the smoke travel in swirls to the sky.

“Are you okay?” Jake asked Catherine.

“Yeah. I’m okay.”

She was okay, but not great, and she wasn’t happy. She felt a constant yearning inside, like a part of her was missing. Catherine knew it had nothing to do with the death of her grandmother. That had hurt, but in a different way. The aching within her had been there long before, but now it seemed stronger than ever. It was a hunger for something she couldn’t name because she didn’t know what could possibly fill her, complete her, and make her whole.

Rose and Catherine walked back to Rose’s home to rest and talk. It had begun to rain, and with that and the wind, it was no longer very pleasant to be outside.

“Jake looked really good today,” Rose said. “He looked so cool and confident. He looks great in red. But I’m sure I didn’t appreciate it as much as you did.”

Catherine giggled as she looked out at the rain. Large crystal drops were falling hard and splashing against the ground. Puddles were beginning to form on the uneven grass, and in the places where animals liked to hide. Worms were starting to wiggle their way up to the surface, and the crows watched from high treetops with eager eyes.

The rain stopped after dark and took the clouds with it. Catherine had always imagined a scene in which a painter of night flicked his brush at the vast, black canvas of sky, causing millions of stars to become nightlights for children all over the world who feared darkness.

Catherine and Rose decided to camp out in front of the fireplace with sleeping bags. They made s’mores and told stories and talked about who they liked and the problems they had and what they were going to do with their lives. They had always questioned and learned from each other and basked in one another’s light.

“That’s why we get along,” Rose told Catherine. “You’re kind of like a child who daydreams and fantasizes about things and I’m the one who’s organized. We balance each other out.”

Rose fell asleep long before Catherine did. Catherine had always been a night owl. Her body craved the darkness. She felt her best at night, always wide awake and excited. No matter how many hours of sleep she got, she would be lethargic during the day. It was just one of those things she was born with. Her parents liked the night, as well.

When Catherine finally slept, she had a strange and vivid dream. She was walking along a hall in an unfamiliar house and she felt the presence of someone else very near to her. She turned on the spot, her eyes scanning the place for the other person, but no one was there. She continued to walk, but the feeling lingered. When she couldn’t take it any longer, she said, “Who are you?”

A man’s calm voice answered. “You tell me first. Why do you always follow me?”

Jolted, Catherine awoke. She was still in Rose’s house, camping on Rose’s living room floor. *But the voice was so real.*

When Rose woke up, she insisted on making pancakes, so Catherine stumbled over to the kitchen table, still groggy. She rubbed her eyes, her attention drifting off to the outdoors. Sun streamed in through the open window, its rays warming Catherine’s back.

The girls put maple syrup and strawberries on their hot fluffy pancakes. Catherine tried a strawberry, delighted at how the sweet yet tart juice tickled her taste buds and made her mouth tingle. “Do you ever have dreams that almost seem too real to be dreams?”

Rose was now plopping a berry into her own mouth. “Well,” she began and paused to swallow, “sometimes you know you’re dreaming and can control dreams.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I had this dream last night and someone talked to me. He asked me why I always follow him, but it’s strange because he was the one following me.”

“What did he look like?”

“I didn’t see him, but I know he was there. He seems familiar, too.”

“Do you think he was trying to contact you telepathically?” Rose was grinning.

Catherine grinned back and took a bite of her pancake before she answered. “Who knows? It’s possible.”

When the girls were done eating, they got dressed and went outside to take advantage of the glorious sunshine. Catherine felt better after spending some time with Rose. The day seemed brighter and Catherine felt renewed and energetic.

When Catherine returned home, John and Aneese were sitting quietly in the living room.

“Cat, honey, we’ve packed your bags with everything that you’ll need. We’re all going on a trip together,” Aneese said.

Catherine, feeling much more accepting than the day before, took a seat opposite her parents. “To where?”

“It’s a surprise,” said John. “You’re a smart girl, Catherine, and you’re old enough now to be informed.”

Confused, Catherine frowned and crossed her arms. She felt frustrated at how secretive her parents were being, yet at the same time part of her was eager for adventure and the unknown. She had spent most of her life in Stoneysa, only taking short trips to neighbouring cities.

“When are we leaving?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Aneese said.

“Just like that? What about work? What about my friends? I have to tell Rose! Where are we going?”

“You’ll see,” said John calmly. “Everything has been taken care of. I spoke to your boss at the market and he’s completely fine with you taking some time off. Business has been a little slow lately.”

Catherine shrugged and walked to her bedroom. She flopped down on her bed and reached over to her side table for her phone, and called Rose.

“My parents just told me that I’m leaving tomorrow with them.

They won't tell me where I'm going or what we're doing. They even packed my stuff, which I'm a bit upset about. I mean, it's my stuff!"

"Why won't they tell you where you're going?"

"I don't know. Maybe they think I'm upset because of Alice and they're taking me on vacation to make me happy."

"That would be sweet."

Catherine's eyes were searching her room as they talked and she noticed that some of her possessions were missing. She got off her bed and tripped on a large black suitcase, causing the phone to go flying. Half laughing at herself, Catherine crawled over and retrieved the phone. "I'll call you later."

Catherine placed her phone back on the cradle and then bent down to look at her new suitcase. She could tell it was full, but with what?

After considering a few moments, Catherine unzipped the zipper that ran all around the outer edge of the suitcase, lifted up the top flap and peered inside. A few pairs of pants and shirts were folded neatly along with her underwear, socks, notebook, and another book that she had never seen before. She pulled it out and held it up to look at. It was a clean black book with Catherine's name printed on the front cover in gold lettering. She opened the book to find that the pages were blank and smelled fresh. Catherine smiled—a nice, new journal. She closed the book and slipped it back into its original place. She ruffled through the layers of clothes and came to a silky black dress. She let the smooth fabric, like fine satin sheets, slide between her fingers. Catherine folded the dress and tucked it back into the suitcase. She searched for more new and exciting treasures, but there were none, so she zipped and buckled the suitcase closed and sat on her floor thinking. She felt quite confused and called Rose again.

"I just found a suitcase full of my clothes. And there was also a journal in there and this beautiful black dress."

"Do you think they're gifts from your parents?"

“I really don’t know. My parents are so weird. You’re lucky you have sane ones. I’ll call you tomorrow before I leave, okay?”

Rose agreed and the girls said good night. Catherine went to bed with her head full of unanswered questions.

In her dreams, Catherine walked down the same hall that night and once again someone she felt she knew was there with her.

“Who are you?”

“I’m right behind you,” the man’s voice said.

Catherine turned around and found herself facing a young man who seemed to be her age. He was tall and thin with dark hair and pale skin, but his figure was blurry. Catherine tried to focus on his face so she would remember his features, but it was no use.

Daylight came and Catherine returned to the waking world. Her dream seemed so real that she pinched herself several times before she was convinced she was truly awake.

John poked his head into the room. “I’ve made breakfast, Catherine. You’d better get up, we’ll be leaving soon.” Catherine nodded and rolled out of bed.

After some toast and tea, John and Aneese rushed Catherine out of the cottage with her suitcase.

“But I didn’t call Rose!”

“You’ll have time for that later,” Aneese said.

Catherine sat silently in the back of the car while John loaded the trunk with luggage. Aneese sat up front looking over a map of some sort. When Catherine leaned forward to see what the map had on it, Aneese quickly folded it up and placed it into her coat pocket. Catherine sighed loudly as John returned to the front seat and started the car.

There wasn’t really anything Catherine could do. She had just turned eighteen, after all. She closed her eyes and prayed that they were taking her somewhere exciting, somewhere she would like.

The trip seemed to take forever and after a while, Catherine stopped trying to decipher where she was and where she was going. Every tree they passed looked the same. Every house they went by

was plain, dull and boring. Catherine closed her eyes and let sleep come to her. A mass of green was the last thing she saw before nightfall.