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The background of the cover features a woman in a white, long-sleeved, high-necked Victorian-style dress. She is looking over her shoulder towards the viewer. To her right is a tall, ornate mirror with a dark frame. The mirror's reflection shows a man in a dark suit and a woman in a white dress, both looking at each other. The scene is set in a dark, atmospheric room with architectural details like columns and a balcony visible in the background.

Through a Mirror
Darkly

Emy Naso

THROUGH A MIRROR DARKLY

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Through A Mirror Darkly

By

Emy Naso

Strong hands dipped into the cream-colored bowl mixing flour, baking powder, butter and loaf sugar. Catherine waited, involuntarily licking over moist lips as she anticipated that bitter sweet taste. The eggs were cracked and fell into the mixture like yellow-white globules, binding everything together. Now came the essence of lemon. The young woman stood in the doorway, waiting for the ritual to be completed. Mrs. Gunnel's face animatedly expressed far more than the making of the simple lemon cakes. Everything she did was an art.

"Fifteen minutes," the cook announced with a touch of triumph, and pushed her hair out of her eyes. Floured hands flickered white streaks into her red hair. She was fifty-five. The deep color owed much to the henna she purchased from the apothecaries on the corner.

Catherine took a deep breath and the aroma of lemon inculcated her memory. She watched Mrs. Gunnel dab her hands on the yellow and black apron. The young lady shouldn't have invaded the cook's space in the kitchens below stairs. This was servant's domain, not the province of the mistress' daughter. At twenty-three, and the middle daughter, of the Macgregor family, Catherine didn't belong anywhere. Until her older sister, Amelia, got married at the end of the year, etiquette dictated she remain unmarried. Catherine felt conventions like that were outdated. This was twelve years into the twentieth century... The world was changing.

As Mrs. Gunnel bustled between the stove and the large scrubbed table in the center of the kitchen, Catherine was aware also of another pair of eyes. A man stood by the far door that led to the short flight of stone steps up to the street level. His station in life ensured his outward attention remain neutral and passive. But Catherine knew he surreptitiously watched her in the same way; she a young mistress of the house, kept glancing at him. But he was a servant. The lady longed to explore those sensations her body and mind told her about.

There were three people in the room. Only Mrs. Gunnel was at ease. It was her kitchen. Catherine's place was upstairs in the great house. Emmett, the chauffeur, belonged in what only a few years ago was the stable for the carriage, but which was

now a garage for the monstrous automobile. The horses were now gone from the end of the Mews. In a short few years, horsepower became mechanized, and it was another sign that the life of the MacGregor's was changing. Very rapidly, life had left its sedate path of predictability and now stood on the threshold of another dimension. It was to change the lives of not just this Mews, but also the world. But nobody in the household knew that within two years of 1912, everything would be shattered.

The fifteen minutes baking time tick-tocked on the big round clock on the kitchen wall. It's simple ash frame and sturdy hands were right for the servant's area. Nothing fancy, nothing lavish. Catherine kept looking between its strong, almost featureless face, and that of Emmett's countenance.

He wasn't made of wood. His hands were clasped in front of him. Catherine kept imaging those fingers touching her. It was in her imagination. She was sure he'd looked at her, but chauffeurs weren't allowed to admire grand young ladies. Many times, she'd sat in the back of the car and watched as his hands played the wheel, changed the gears and then when they dizzily sped through the countryside at over twenty-miles an hour, he would casually lean an elbow on the side.

"The lemon cakes are ready, Miss Catherine." Mrs. Gunnel's Scottish accent broke into the thoughts of the young mistress. That was why she was waiting. Her younger sister, Victoria was ill, and at seven years, was convinced lemon cakes were a cure. Every one humored Victoria. The illness wasn't pretend. The little golden-headed angel had consumption. The scourge of TB didn't exclude the rich. If she saw eight years, it would be an extra -bestowed blessing.

One final weak smile at Emmett from Catherine, then she took the plate of cakes, skipped out of the kitchen and up the plain, worn stone steps leading to the end of the main hall. At the far end was the solid oak front door, with its half circle top in an array of colored glass, turning the sunlight into a rainbow shaft across the diamond-patterned tiles. Late in the afternoon at this time of year, the low angle of the sun would penetrate deep into the gloom of the hall where Catherine now stood. It struck the large oblong mirror. It should have reflected a warm glow. Catherine was convinced its rays

buried into the mirrors interior and opened up some secret world. She knew it was mysterious. So did little Victoria. It was their secret.

The mirror had a dark wooden frame, with elaborate carvings on each corner representing some kind of mythological animal. It stood at least eight feet tall. The reflection wasn't the usual silver tinged image, but Catherine thought it a weird, even sinister, hue of multi-colors. She held her hand out, with the plate of lemon cakes. They both slid into the interior of the mirror. She pulled her hand back. Something made her turn her head. At the end of the side corridor, leading to the library and smoking room, stood the figure of Algernon Coniston. He was the same age as Emmett, the chauffeur, twenty-five. Her mother had said he was a cousin when he arrived six months ago to live in their house.

Catherine didn't like him. There was something of the night about the man. He saw her hand disappear. Why didn't he say something? She suspected him, but had no idea of what. Like the mirror, there must be evil in him.

* * * *

Dinner had ended; Alice, the parlor maid helped Ancaster, the Butler, clear the table. Down in the kitchen, Mrs. Gunnel waited for praise from the Mistress, Mrs. Macgregor. But once this had been conveyed from Ancaster, the cook bustled off to her own little room at the top of the house. Washing dishes was not in her duties. That was for poor Alice. Everything and everybody had an exact place and set of duties in the house.

"Come on, Amelia," Mrs. Macgregor called to her daughter, taking her arm and walking from the dining room, turning left and going to the drawing room. Mr. Macgregor, Alistair Duncan, who was Amelia's fiancé, Colin Macgregor, the son, and finally Algernon Coniston, turned right when leaving the dining room and headed for the smoking room.

For some reason, no one took much notice which way Catherine went. She

hovered in the corridor, gossiped with the maid for a few moments, then wandered past the four great portraits by the billiard room. They were her ancestor's pictures, cold and all seeing.

The door to the smoking room was slightly open. Catherine loved to know about the world. Her mother thought her only duty was to wait respectfully until her older sister was married, then accept a suitable husband for herself. If Mrs. Macgregor had ever found the leaflets about the suffragettes in Catherine's room, she would have been horrified.

"It's about time the Turks were sent packing from their European possessions," her father was saying.

"Maybe," she heard her brother Colin, tentatively venture, then add, "But now the Balkan allies have scored a victory. Mark my word; it will give the Russians more influence."

Catherine would have loved to rush into the smoking room and join in with the political conversation. After her father went off to his position as a director of the bank in the mornings, she used to creep into the drawing room, and as Alice cleared up, assiduously read *The Times Newspaper*. Sometimes she'd chat animatedly to the parlor maid, but it was obvious, Alice didn't understand. Catherine felt sometimes that Alice wanted to talk about things on her mind - not politics, but even though she encouraged the parlor maid, the divide remained. Even when Catherine explained about her ideas for the emancipation of women, Alice smiled in an incomprehensible way. Except last Thursday morning. That was different.

"They say a war is coming, Alice," Catherine said as she sat on the sofa, her legs tucked up under her. Mrs. Macgregor would have disapproved of her daughter's opinion and unladylike sitting position.

Alice was kneeling in front of the great open fireplace. She'd been up at five o'clock in the morning to clear out the grate, lay the new fire and start it burning. Now, at nine in the morning, she added more coal.

"Do you worry about a great war, Alice?"

"Who will we be fighting this time, Miss Catherine?"

"Father says it will be the Russians. But I think the conflict will come with the united Germany. He says that it is inconceivable we will go to war when our King and the Kaiser are cousins."

"Don't suppose it will effect me, Miss."

"Oh, Alice, but it will. If war comes, the politicians won't be able to ignore women. They will have to give us the vote."

"Will that be good, Miss Catherine?"

"Yes, Alice. We live in great times of change. Don't you think so?"

The maid pushed her auburn hair back under her hat. It was part of the female servant's white, pristine uniform. She stood up. Catherine realized how pretty she was. The maid shuffled and patted down her apron in a nervous fashion. If it had been anyone except Miss Catherine, she would have curtsied, smiled weakly and left the room. The young mistress was different. There was an irony in the situation. For two months, the miners had been on strike for better wages. Here was their black gold, dug dangerously out of the bowels of the earth, keeping the rich warm by the labor of equally low paid servants.

"These changes, Miss. Will it give the likes of me freedom to say no?"

"I don't understand, Alice?"

The parlor maid looked at the floor. Catherine followed her eyes down in an automatic gesture. She felt the hesitancy, but didn't know what to say. All she could do was wait.

"Is Mr. Coniston going to marry you, Miss Catherine?"

"Good God, Alice. What a strange question. Why do you ask that...and what has it got to do with you saying no?"

"Not really sure, Miss. Just something he said to me. But then, I probably got it wrong. I don't have any learning, so easily get confused."

Catherine held out her hand. It was an act born of puzzlement more than friendliness. What Alice had verbally stumbled into bewildered Catherine. She sensed

the tension in the maid's demeanor.

"When did Mr. Coniston talk to you about me?"

Alice moved back toward the marble mantle-shelf.

"No, Miss, he didn't say anything...well...not really." "Don't be frightened, Alice. Tell me what you mean?"

In the hall, the chimes of the clock echoed through the house, ten times. It gave Alice a few seconds to compose herself.

"It was when Mr. Coniston did things. I said he shouldn't have. Then, when I said that, he called me silly. Said one day he would..."

The words had come in a rush from Alice. Catherine only half understood.

"Would what?" Catherine asked.

"I must go, Miss. Mrs. Gunnel is strict about me finishing in the main house by ten o'clock." Alice gave pretence at a curtsy. Then she was gone. Catherine stood and looked at the half open door. Her thoughts hurried over the possibilities of what Alice was trying to say. She didn't like some of the conclusions. And she certainly didn't trust or like Algernon Coniston.

"The government is giving in to the radical elements in the country. Last year it was the National Insurance legislation, this year we'll probably have votes for women." Her father's voice brought Catherine back to the here and now. She turned and thought it time she gave in to proper behavior and join her mother and sister in the drawing room. They were probably discussing wedding plans for Amelia.

The cry from the top of the stairs seemed to carry pain without soul. It took a few seconds for it to penetrate Catherine's consciousness.

* * * *

Catherine got to Victoria's room first. Nanny Dangerfield stood in the middle of the room sobbing. The little child cuddled up in the adult's arms, coughing and fighting for breath. Immediately, Mrs. Macgregor rushed in, took her daughter and rocked her

gently. She spoke soothing words to the young girl. Catherine couldn't make them out. All she could tell was the anguish in her mother's face. Everyone knew Victoria was dreadfully ill. Each crisis brought the family to the edge of despair.

"She was so pale," Nanny Dangerfield said. Irene Macgregor smiled at the old woman, who had been in the family service for almost fifty years, being nanny to first the mother and now the children.

"Let her sleep," Mrs. Macgregor said, and ushered everyone out of the room, turned out the light and walked back down the stairs. Catherine watched her mother. She admired the courage, the ability to separate her life. In that moment, Catherine felt there was something about her mother she didn't know or understand.

After a few minutes, Catherine crept back into her little sister's room. She sat by the small wooden bed and looked at Victoria.

"There is hope in the mirror," the older sister said, knowing Victoria was asleep and couldn't hear her. "But only when the right light strikes it. I have heard the voices from inside. If I could take you into the world of the reflections, you would be better, Victoria." She had told this to Victoria before. Catherine couldn't explain her own belief. It was a feeling in her head.

* * * *

"Marry Algernon!" Catherine kept saying the same thing. Repeating it made the proposal even more ridiculous.

Her father and mother sat opposite, stern and resolute. The conversation had lasted for over an hour. She was still in shock.

"That is an end to the matter," her father said and walked solemnly from the room. Her mother lingered for a moment, smiled gently at Catherine, then hurried to catch up her husband.

Catherine went to the window and looked out into the street. It was late morning and the early vendors of milk, fruit and vegetables had finished their business. They

arrived every morning and hawked their good. Now she could see Jimmy Goram, the window cleaner, with agile grace swinging, leaning out from his ladder. She'd spoken to him once. He was a cheeky young man and even though their stations in life were very different, he'd flirted and told her about his life down in the sprawling district south of the Thames, where terraced houses were now being rapidly built on the land which only twenty years ago was small farms.

She envied his freedom, but not the poverty. Catherine could have refused her father. Then what would she do? He wouldn't throw her out, but the easy, comfortable life would come to an end and she would be consigned to some boring aunt as a companion. What sort of life was that? But then, what sort of life would it be with that unctuous Algernon? Mrs. Coniston? Never! She hated him. What influence did he have over her parents?

Catherine wiped away a tear and walked into the hall. The huge mirror seemed to shimmer as she passed. Turning slightly back, she looked at herself and wondered about the future. The door of the drawing room opened, and she saw Algernon. She wanted to either kill him or hide away. Shrinking back into the corner, her body pressed against the mirror. There was no resistance. She slipped through its surface and entered... nothingness.

* * * *

Catherine stood motionless in a place that was filled with a sense of otherness. Slowly, her eyes accustomed to the darkness. It was not complete blackness, but a gloom of silent moments. Not time, just spaces between your own heartbeats.

She had no idea which direction to move. With cold shudders throughout her body, yet sweaty palms, Catherine shuffled carefully along, feeling her feet touch a layer of thick dust, and her face brush eerily against the silken cobwebs of decay. She wanted to go back. But which direction was that? Taking a step, Catherine stumbled over something and fell into an overwhelming, head-splitting noise.

The room was full of lights, chatter and strange people. Catherine found herself sprawled behind a sofa.

"Too much to drink, love?" She looked up. A young man grinned down at her. *What was he wearing?*

"Come on, the party isn't that bad. No need to hide behind the sofa." He offered his hand. She accepted and stood up. Then nearly fell back down again.

"You sure, you're all right?" he asked.

"It's these...where?" Catherine couldn't find the words. Loud music invaded her head. No, it wasn't music, more like an assault of noise.

"Sit down here. I'm Chris, by the way."

"Catherine," she said in a daze, and tried to take in everything around the room. Accepting the offer, she sat on the sofa next to Chris.

"Do you like this music, Catherine?" "What is it?"

"Spinal Tap."

"What?"

"Not your scene, Catherine?"

She stared at him in total bewilderment. Then it struck her, this room was the library. *Where were the books, the oak sideboard, and the leather chair her father sat in when he was reading the newspaper?*

Before her mind could begin to think, it was assailed with something else. There was Algernon Coniston, standing in a corner, his cunning eyes surveying the room.

"You look as if you've seen a ghost, Catherine."

"Who's that over there, Chris?"

"Oh, that. Algernon something or other. A real weirdo. Why, do you know him? Hey, you don't look well. I'll get you some water. Stay there, be back in a minute."

Chris patted her hand and got up. As he left the room, Catherine stood, sidled to behind the sofa and noticed a large mirror on the wall. *So, that is where I arrived.* By the side of it was a small table with a pile of magazines. She picked one up, and had to refrain from a scream. It said the air crash had killed over two-hundred people. What

was this monstrous machine? Why did the top of the magazine display such a date?

Catherine felt ill. She looked around for Chris. To her horror, Algernon was coming toward her. Letting out a loud shriek, she fell back into the mirror.

* * * *

Once again, the gloom and sullen nothingness engulfed her senses. She was in the world of stasis. But to her horror, someone, something was moving in this void with her. Coming nearer, its damp, dark presence, breathing quickly, shallowly, and from its lungs came the stench of death.

There was no obvious escape. Catherine felt the thing coming closer. Out of the shocking, clawing mist, the figure appeared. She tried to cry out. Her voice was frozen. A cadaverous face suddenly pushed forward and a hand held her face. It was Algernon Coniston, dressed in a regal red cloak and his hair sleeked back like a prowling, ravenous cat.

"Catherine," he hissed, and she saw in his opening mouth, two fanged teeth. He was a vampire, and he sought her blood.

"I need your life, I want your body, I desire the warmth of your loins," he whispered lustfully.

Survival instinct made her lash out, and the need to escape, gave her legs power to run. Her pursuer was near. He seemed to glide and mock her efforts to run away. Fighting the vapor, she crashed through the barrier and...there she was in her hall. Back in her own time. She waited a few seconds to see if Algernon followed through the mirror. All was quiet. Catherine rushed to her room, laid on the bed and sobbed.

* * * *

Dinner was quiet. Mr. and Mrs. Macgregor talked about Victoria's latest treatment, Amelia looked, as usual, radiant, but she just listened to the conversation

between her parents. Nanny Dangerfield only sat down for the soup, and then made an excuse to go back to her charge in the nursery, Ancaster, the butler was his normal taciturn self, Alice whispered an occasional word as she served and Catherine glared at Algernon. Should she shout out and expose him? Who would believe her? He was the devil incarnate.

After almost two hours, the two men departed to the smoking room to play a game of billiards, and Amelia and her mother resumed their favorite topic of conversation --planning the wedding of the older daughter. When Irene Macgregor tried to include Catherine in the discussion and cheer her up with the news that her own wedding to Algernon would be within the year, the younger daughter scowled and left the room.

She walked up the corridor and passed the smoking room. The door was ajar and she saw her father sleeping in a high-back chair. Bored and still shaken by events in equal measure, she decided to get an early night's sleep. As she went up the corridor, on the next floor, she thought it would take her mind off the dilemmas she felt, by looking in on little Victoria.

The picture of the lamb on the nursery door made her stop and remember her own time in the care of Nanny Dangerfield. But, Catherine grew up. Little Victoria wouldn't see her next birthday.

Pushing the door gently, Catherine expected to see Nanny, sitting in her rocking chair, dozing gently. The chair swung slowly, but it was empty. Catherine looked toward the small wooden bed where Victoria slept.

A figure leaned over; head bowed, and hands reaching down for the child. It was the vampire shape of Algernon.

In blind panic, Catherine's blood chilled. Her eyes saw something. It seemed to demand attention. She picked it up. It was the bible given to Victoria at her Christening by Aunt Philomeana.

"Get away." Catherine held the bible high in the air and edged toward the bed. Algernon's eyes bulged, and he then brought his hands up to cover his face. Catherine

took the opportunity to grab Victoria and flee. Down the stairs she ran.

To her relief, she saw her mother and father standing in the hall.

"Please help, Algernon is trying to harm Victoria." Her parents stood impassionate, fixed expressions and staring forward. Catherine heard the steady tread of Coniston coming down the stairs. Without thinking, she ran along the hall, closed her eyes, gripped Victoria tightly, and plunged into the mirror.

* * * *

Running through the fog in the tunnel of a different dimension, Catherine held Victoria and hoped they were heading in the right direction. Whatever that meant in this world. She knew the evil of Coniston had also entered the corridor connecting her with this other place. His presence filled the space with the smell of rotting life.

It was impossible to gauge distance by the sounds. Without echo or substance there were no reference points to judge from where his footsteps were coming. Again, she heard that breathing wheeze, and although in real life he walked normally, now it was like the dragging of his sins.

Without warning, she fell through the mirror into the new world. Catherine was even more convinced this place was her own house, but subtly different. Staggering on, she went through the first room, where she had been on the previous occasion, and out into a hall. Yes, it was definitely her hall.

"How did you get in here? This is the second time you have just appeared."

It was Chris. What would she say? Did she understand enough to answer a sensible question?

Chris noticed Victoria.

"I was going to ask if this is your daughter, but you are much too young." Ignoring his words, she launched into her own questions.

"Do you live here in this house, Chris?"

"In this apartment. It hasn't been a house for many years."

"God, what's that!" Catherine stared in amazement.

"I know afternoon television is bad, but surely it's not that horrific." He tried a joke. She didn't comprehend.

"It's moving," she said, transfixed.

"Are you okay?"

"I saw something called a moving picture --it was not like this." Catherine was still fascinated. Then her mind returned to her problems.

"That Algernon Coniston. Does he live here?"

"Not here. He has his own apartment on the next floor."

Victoria awoke. She smiled at Chris, then went into a coughing fit.

"Is she..."

"Victoria."

"Is Victoria okay?"

"She has consumption."

"Then why isn't she in a hospital, Catherine?"

"We want her to die at home, not in a sanitarium, Chris."

He gave her a quizzical look, but remained gentle.

"Perhaps we can talk about that later, Catherine. Let's get Victoria to hospital."

He put on his coat and they went to the front door and Chris opened it. Catherine jumped back, clinging to this man. Machines were everywhere. She knew they were like the automobile her father had. But there were so many, so quick. Surely, everyone would be killed. The street was her street, but everywhere was crowded. Signs directed, lines were painted, people rushed, many cars moved and just as many parked all along the street. It was bedlam, it was monstrous. She shrank back and pushed the door shut.

"I think we need to talk first, Chris."

* * * *

Back in his apartment, Catherine tucked Victoria up on the sofa and turning to Chris, said, "Before we talk, can we do one thing?"

"What?"

"That mirror in your lounge, was it always there?"

"No, I think at one time it was in the hall. The developers wanted to throw it out when they converted this house into apartments. I said I'd put it in my room. Why?"

"Can we turn it against the wall, Chris? Please, don't ask. I'll try and explain later."

As they turned the mirror, Catherine slyly looked at Chris. He was about her age, very good-looking, and she loved his short- spiky hair. He didn't have a moustache, like all the men in her own household, but then his shaving wasn't that close. His manly shady beard intrigued her. *Wasn't his shaving razor sharp enough? Ancaster sharpened her father's razor nearly everyday on the leather strap.*

"You are looking at me in an odd way," he said.

She blushed. "It's just that you're...different."

"Is that a compliment?" Chris joked.

That made her blush even more. "I meant...well, clothes and things."

He chuckled. She noticed the dimple in the center of his chin. "I don't want to be rude, Catherine, but this is the second time you've come to my apartment wearing some very odd clothes yourself. Do you get them down at the market?"

She sat on the sofa. It was an odd situation in more ways than just clothes. Here she was talking openly and alone with a man. Catherine had never done that before. Chris began to mesmerize her. But first, she must talk and try to explain what was dawning on her...this was not her world. Somehow, she had jumped time. She didn't know by how much.

Where was Catherine going to start? Where was this going to end?

* * * *

"So, you've come from another time, and Algernon Coniston is a vampire?" Chris said after they'd talked for half-an hour.

"Don't patronized me, please, Chris."

"Sorry, I didn't mean it to sound that way. I'm just trying to get my head around this."

"Why do you want to *get your head around*?"

Chris laughed. "It's just a phrase." Catherine gave a conciliatory smile.

"So, what are you going to do now, Catherine?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want stay here for a while?"

Two cultures clashed. A modern man, who was easy-going and saw nothing wrong with a young lady sleeping over in his apartment, and a woman from a time where although females had begun to question their role, were still chained and locked into patterns of subservience. But, one thing never changed. If a man and woman are attracted, then barriers come down.

Recognizing Catherine's quandary, Chris moved to reassure her.

"I'll make you up a bed on the other sofa. I'll sleep in there." He pointed to the bedroom. He went into the other room, came back and handed her a white shirt."

"Can't offer you a nightdress, but this will do. Now, you tuck down and I'm just next door if you get scared."

He lightly kissed her on the forehead. By twenty-first century standards, very tame, by Catherine's age it was almost tantamount to a proposal of marriage.

After he'd gone, she shyly slipped out of her clothes and put on the shirt. Getting under the covers Chris had left for her, she looked around the room. Victoria still slept. She saw the machine that played the music, what Chris had called a CD player.

Everything was so delicate. Her house had been richly furnished with drapes and large chairs. Most of all she was fascinated with this thing he'd called plastic. *Had they no wood any more?*

She heard the door creek, and felt a panic. Perhaps it was that fiend, Coniston.

"Catherine," Chris called softly. "I brought you a drink of tea." She looked up. He was wearing a bathrobe.

"I'll leave it just here." He turned to go.

"Stay...for a little while," she blurted out. Chris smiled and sat on the side of the sofa where she lay all tucked up.

"I thought you were Algernon."

"Sorry to frightened you." Chris gently touched her auburn hair. No man had ever done that.

"Can we listen to the music?" Catherine indicated. Chris leaned over, clicked a remote, and it started. She was amazed. In that moment of wonder, Chris kissed her hair, then her cheek and as she closed her eyes, her lips.

"Would you like me to stay with you tonight, Catherine?"

To him, it was a simple question. A decision, maybe casually made. Catherine's world could barely conceive of what to say. She merely nodded demurely.

Catherine kept her eyes shut, as she felt Chris slide under the covers and their bodies touched. His arms went around her. Still she remained in a darkened world, her mind in a turmoil of apprehension, yet excitement.

"Does that make you feel safe?" Chris said.

The answer was yes...and no. His hands ran down her spine, got to her rear, then slowly pushing the shirt up, Catherine gave a short involuntary sigh as Chris's finger tip-toed over the naked skin of her thighs.

His lips sealed her gasp as he kissed her. It was only for a few seconds. The second kiss lasted for some time. The next held them in a passion, as he stroked her rear and pushed his body tight against hers.

"Shall I stop and just hold you?" he murmured. She didn't answer. Her experience didn't equip her to say anything.

"Then, if I do anything you don't want to, say so." His words melted into her skin and she hoped he would teach her so much.

* * * *

"Are you sure Victoria will be okay?"

Now they were back in Chris's apartment, after a morning at the hospital, Catherine relaxed. She'd been petrified when they went down what Chris called a subway and all that bustle and hustle at the hospital added to her panic. At least the doctors were hopeful Victoria could be helped. Leaving her there was a wrench, but Chris had said it was all right.

"What did they call it? Catherine asked for the tenth time.

"Antibiotics," he smiled and went into the kitchen, calling over his shoulder, "Tea would be good."

"That's a good idea," she called back, wondering when the mirror had been turned around to show her reflection again.

Chris never said another word. The fiendish Coniston stood waiting behind the door and hit Chris a fearful blow over the head with a lump of wood. Then he moved into the lounge where Catherine had started to come and investigate the noise.

"So, my lovely Catherine, perhaps now you will become my bride." She backed away, sweeping dread overcoming her heartbeats.

"What is wrong my beauty. Now you are no longer a virgin, your blood will be warm for the passion of my embrace." Algernon brayed like a wild donkey, teeth gleaming to taste her flesh.

"Yes, my Catherine, I saw you last night surrender to that man. Now, you have been penetrated and know carnal pleasure, I will teach you so much more in the world of the undead lovers."

They circled each other around the sofa. As Catherine passed the CD player, she grabbed the remote, pressed and hoped. The music blasted out at full volume. Algernon held his hands to his ears. In that pause, she leapt through the mirror and landed in the fog of death.

* * * *

In her own time, the house was a morgue of horror. She ran into the drawing room and shrieked. Her parents were sitting bolt upright, eyes open and without an ounce of living feeling. Both had blood running from their mouths. Wildly charging out and fighting to stop the nausea, she heard a sobbing. It was coming from the library.

Alice cowered in the corner, trembling in terror. Catherine picked her up and held the maid tight.

"Miss Catherine, oh if..."

"Tell me later, Alice." Catherine heard someone in the hall. In a blind dread, she pulled Alice with her and took the rear door down the back stairs to the kitchen.

Her mind whirled. Half-remembered stories came to her. She rummaged in the drawers, found what she wanted and grabbed Alice again. They headed up the stairs, and reached the landing. An arm shot out barring their way.

"So, now I have two brides for my quest into the world of the dying," Coniston laughed hysterically. "And we know you're not a virgin, don't we, Alice?" he shrieked dementedly. "Or haven't you told Catherine about the games we played late at night?"

Catherine, even though shaking with fear, took out the candle in its holder, lit it and walked forward, holding the flame at arms length.

"Get away, Coniston or I'll burn the place down. If we have to die to send you back to the undead world that is what we will do."

Slowly, they inched up to the hall and along toward the mirror.

"Now!" Catherine yelled, and jumped, taking Alice with her.

"Run for your life," she shouted and encouraged the maid to keep up with her. The heavy, relentless treads of Coniston were not far behind them, and all the time his crazy laughter filled their heads.

One final effort and the two women tumbled out into Chris's apartment.

"Quick, pass me those brown paper bags I brought from our kitchen," Catherine urged Alice.

Catherine put her hands back into the mirror and poured the weed killer and nitrate fertilizer, used in the garden.

"Help me turn the mirror, Alice." They struggled and pushed. Just before they finally closed it against the wall, Catherine lit the candle again, threw it into the void dimension, and with Alice fell to the floor.

* * * *

Catherine bandaged Chris's head. Alice sat, wide-eyed and metaphorically legless.

"So, you think the fire and explosion killed him?" he asked.

"Have you never heard of cleansing fire?" She grinned.

"What will you do now?" he asked, also looking over at Alice.

"We can't go back. Not only has Coniston murdered my parents, but the corridor into that dimension is destroyed."

"I'll look after you, Catherine."

"I have much to learn, Chris." He nodded.

"Yes, we must start with the history of the Great War and..." She put her finger over his lips.

"I had in mind lessons in our bed tonight, my modern lover."

THE END

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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Novelist, essayist and poet, Emy's work ranges from beautiful love laments to erotic short stories, novellas, and full length novels. Writing in many genres, Emy's distinctive voice covers humor, fantasy, contemporary, myths and historical work. Emy is a true Celt, born in the mountains of Wales, then living in London and finally on the remote coast of East Anglia.



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