

## Catherine's Dream

The shadow of Tessa got smaller and smaller, as Catherine gazed back to where the old barn was. She could hear Dan's chattering, echoing slightly in the light breeze. Heat created a blanket below her, soft and aromatic, a layer under her sister's chair. A smile crept onto her lips as she heard the woodlark's sweet song. The rustling of the tree's leaves, a distant sound, reminded her of the breeze slowly making her hair fly in the wind. Catherine watched a curlew glide into the almost barren trees, a symphony being created with the two birds' melodies. Her splashes resonated around her when the water reached the sturdy stepping stones, bristly bracken covered the riverbank, a gate to her old world. Her eyelids finally surrendered to the peaceful atmosphere.

Catherine found herself exactly where she had been, by the stepping stones, though, now she was with Tessa and Dan. Clouds blazed with the light of sunset, creating a warm glow around them, perfect, somehow too perfect. Inside, Catherine already knew it was a dream, but everything felt so real: the warmth of the sun hitting her face just right; her beloved siblings behind her. She wasn't ready to let it slip out of her grasping fingers.

"Now, shall we go?" asked Dan, his delighted face already securing Catherine's answer.

"Age, we shall," Catherine answered. The trio began hopping on the stepping stones, each one feeling more magical. Splash! Tessa had reached a particularly low stone, water flicking just above her ankle. Though some water reached Catherine, she didn't mind. Under the sun's gaze, the water was hot. A laugh escaped them both, one Catherine hadn't heard for quite a long time.

Fingers trembling with trepidation, the three reached the last stone, the one that would take them back home. Everything slowed around them as they stepped on the cool, soft grass of the village, the sweet song of birds stopping for just a minute.

"We're home," Dan said slowly, unable to comprehend it, "we're home!"

In the distance, three figures could be seen. Figures that perfectly shaped their mother, father and grandmother. In unison, their hearts nearly skipped a beat in pure joy.

"Cathy, Tess, Dan! Come home!" their mother's voice shouted over the field.

The sharp, beautiful sound of her voice evoked hundreds of memories. Without a minute's hesitation, the trio ran to their mother, who enveloped them in a hug.

Bees buzzed lazily around them, squirrels chattering from their trees. Dancing in the breeze, flowers and shrubs all watched the heart-felt scene. The sky was shades of red, yellow, purple and pink, a perfect ombre of gorgeous colours.

Finally, their mother pulled away, smiling brighter than the stars slowly appear. A trickle of water escaped their grandmother's shining eyes as she whispered breathlessly, "I knew that they all would come back. That did. We're all ok."

"We've planned a picnic with everyone," their father said slowly, his calm demeanor breaking slightly. The whole village. Grace and Henry Baker, Clem and his sister, it's times an' all.

Sharing a look, the three started chatting excitedly as they walked with their parents. The glow on their faces from the sun seemed to get even brighter, more ethereal. Their eyes couldn't comprehend the sight as they reached the village, thrills, cheers echoed in the air. All their friends ran up to them, smiles appearing in the corner of the trio's vision, left alone in front of them. Tears prickled behind their eyelids, full of elated bliss. Clem finally said, "Well, it's time for the picnic!"

Without a minute to process fully, everyone started pushing in one direction. Catherine's breath floated away from her when she realised which house she was standing in front of.

"Our house," she whispered, in awe, "I'm home."

Everyone had gone in to the garden but Catherine. She walked closer, the firm wood brushing over her fingers. Enthralled, she slowly went to the garden. The sight made a smile creep onto her face. While she was outside, a feast had been laid onto her most favourite blanket mattress. Chickens and bees created an aroma that motivated her to sit and eat. She watched Dan's eyes light up like lanterns seeing his favourite pudding with marmoset. A quiet hum of chatter and bees filled the space, serene and merry. Catherine wanted to believe nothing could go wrong in this moment. Even if, she could wake up any second.

Slipping into the side of Catherine's peripheral vision, Tessa whispered, concerned, "Cathy, that's ok? Are thee daydreaming again?"

"Yeah, ok," Catherine answered, leaving her melancholy train of thought. "Just need some water,

Hastily, she walked into her home, eyes travelling across every familiar corner. Her heart pounded behind her chest as countless emotions rushed through her. What is this heaven just stopped? What is she woke and everything had gone wrong? Catherine wasn't ready to leave, but she'd probably have to.

"Catherine, wake up! It's time or 'all! Wake!" her mother's voice pierced through the thoughtless silence. The time had come.

Without a minute to breathe, Catherine's vision turned black, and when she opened her eyes once more, she was back at the stepping stones. Tessa knelt in front of her, a basket full of eggs in her lap. When she saw Catherine, she smiled, face stretched in an annoyed expression, "Finally. Thae's been asleep for hours,

Disappointed, Catherine sat up, the wind flying through her hair. Her little paradise had now left her.