

## \*L'CHAIM\*-- TO LIFE

by Allison

Vincent rushed into a clearing and stopped. At first the clearing looked deserted, a pale moon lit up the area with silvery beams. His breath was labored as his eyes swept the landscape in search of Catherine and the stalker who had taken her. His sense of her led him to this strange area, but he could not pinpoint her location as he usually could. He heard movement in the shadows but wasn't sure of the source. He saw no sign of her, anywhere. All he could feel was her overpowering fear and he realized his sense of her was slipping away. He couldn't breathe. It felt like he was drowning.

"Catherine...", he whispered. "Where are you?"

He looked around the clearing again. As he started forward, his sense of Catherine disappeared. His legs crumpled beneath him. A blood-curdling, agonized wail coming from the deepest part of his soul split through the night ... followed by sobs which literally shook his massive frame.

"Oh. God! No!"

"Too late," he heard. "You're too late."

Vincent looked up and saw the Watcher standing over him. The Watcher's crazed eyes kept glancing from him to the shoreline and back. He grinned like the Cheshire Cat from *Alice in Wonderland*.

"She'd go to you but she wouldn't come to me." He looked at the water. "No more, Cathy."

The Watcher then turned back to Vincent as he rose to his feet.

"She's mine, now. No one, not even you, can take her away from me."

Again, the Watcher glanced over at the shoreline and then back at Vincent.

"I used to come here when I was a kid. Now she'll be here and I can visit her."

Vincent looked at the shoreline. That's when he spotted the chassis of a car nose down in the small lake. Vincent looked at the watcher in horror, suddenly realizing that Catherine was in the submerged car. Without thought, he annihilated the Watcher where the madman stood.

Vincent made a dramatic leap onto the car, his cloak billowing behind him. He ripped the trunk lid from its hinges and sent it flying into the distance. As he looked into the darkened interior, a sense of panic overcame him when he saw her under the water.

He couldn't believe his eyes. He didn't want to anyway. He'd never seen anything so frightening involving Catherine, not even in his worst nightmares. But that was only because his brain always woke him up before such a horrific image covered his mind.

Now he was seeing something his eyes wouldn't ever be able to erase.

He reached down into the icy water and gently lifted her up into his arms. Her body was as limp as a rag doll, her face a ghostly white in the moonlight.

Leaping towards the water's edge, he softly landed and shrugged out of his cloak one handed and managed to spread it on the ground before laying Catherine upon it.

Without thought, he started breathing into her mouth, watching for the rise and fall of her chest with every breath. Checking for a pulse in her neck, he couldn't discern one, so he started compressions on her chest.

But there was no response from her. He continued breathing into her mouth, caressing her neck, praying for some sense of her through their bond.

"You can't die, Catherine. I won't let you. Not without me. I NEED YOU. I... LOVE YOU. Come back to me."

He kept whispering as he continued to breathe life back into her body. Suddenly, he felt a small flutter through the bond.

*'Could it be?'* His mind cried out.

Vincent felt a slight puff of air on his cheek and the thump, thump of a pulse beat under his fingers. He massaged her arms and legs, trying to bring warmth to her extremities. When Vincent checked again, her pulse was stronger and her breathing seemed more regular. He carefully turned her onto her side as small amounts of water started coming out of her mouth. Vincent continued the massage as her body convulsed and brought up the water she'd swallowed.

Vincent wrapped her in his cloak and pulled her up close to his body. Her face nestled against his chest, her eyes closed, and her body slumped wearily.

"Oh, Catherine...," Vincent whispered.

"I...love...you...," he heard her whisper.

Vincent pulled her even closer, warming her body with his own.

"I love you, too. Always."

Fini