

Satin Nights...

By Judith Nolan



*"Nights in white satin, never reaching the end
Letters I've written, never meaning to send
Beauty I've always missed, with these eyes before
Just what the truth is, I can't say any more...*

'Cause, I love you. Yes, I love you

Oh, how I love you...

*Gazing at people, some hand in hand
Just what I'm going through, they can't understand
Some try to tell me, thoughts they cannot defend
Just what you want to be, you will be in the end...*

And, I love you. Yes, I love you

Oh, how I love you. Oh, how I love you..."

~ Moody Blues



New York, November 1972

Catherine began to sway to the music playing on her radio, unable to be a good girl and remain still, as she had been instructed. It simply wasn't possible.

In the next moment she rose from the stool and onto her toes, arms swept out dramatically. *'Nights in white satin, never reaching the end. Letters I've written, never meaning to send...'* Singing the opening two lines of her newly-favourite song, which had just risen to second in the Billboard charts, she executed a neat two-step dance across the floor of her bedroom.

"Child, please come back here and sit down." Her father's elderly aunt hurried after her recalcitrant charge. "We're already late, and I haven't finished your hair. Then there's still your dress. You know how your father dislikes to be kept waiting. It is opening night, after all."

"But I *hate* going to the opera, Aunt Karen." Fourteen-year-old Catherine made a face before she went on singing. *'Just what the truth is, I can't say any more...'* She made another pass around the room

before her great-aunt managed to catch her arm, and succeed in dragging her back to the stool. The radio was firmly silenced.

“That’s as may be,” the older woman replied with asperity, holding her charge down with a firm hand on her shoulder. “But you are far too young to understand such a powerful word as *hate*. All this teenage rebellion will just have to wait until another day.” She applied the hairbrush with unnecessary vigour, making her great-niece wince in pain.

“Well, I’m sorry,” she apologised brusquely. “But you brought that on yourself with such an unseemly display. Just as well you didn’t pull that stunt with your father around. You know how he abhors this new, popular music. You must forget it. I truly do not understand this modern generation.”

Facing her reflection in the mirror, Catherine shrugged. “*Just what I’m going through, they can’t understand...*” she sang softly. “Why must I do everything people tell me to? What about what I want?”

“Because it’s what all good girls must do.” Aunt Karen’s eyes met hers in the mirror. She shook her head. “For women like us, there is no other way. We must behave properly at all times, and know our place in this world. Leave everything else to your father, or your future husband.”

For a moment her lined face crumpled, before she stiffened and went back to her work. “Now, please sit still, there’s a good girl. You’re almost done. Afterwards, you may come to my room while I dress.”

“I wish my mother was here...” Catherine frowned at her own reflection in the mirror. “*Just what you want to be, you will be in the end...*” She inhaled a deep breath, releasing it slowly, before she rose to allow her aunt to dress her in the stiff, white chiffon the older woman had chosen for the evening. *It was all so unfair...*



Radcliffe, October 1979

Catherine removed the cream bathrobe she was wearing and stepped naked onto the podium. She kept her eyes fixed on the ceiling, studying the brush lines in the paint as she composed herself on a convenient stool, practicing the pose she had been instructed by the art teacher to assume. Below her she vaguely heard of rustling sounds and voices as the class settled themselves. Soon they would begin. She didn’t care.

Somewhere in the background Catherine became aware of music playing softly. Since this was a life study class, someone must have decided to break the ice with a little Moody Blues. *'Gazing at people, some hand in hand. Just what I'm going through, they can't understand...'*

Catherine tried to block out the words, even though they seemed to underscore her life right now. She was in a great deal of pain. She swallowed tightly, thinking how much she now disliked that song.

Almost on the point of withdrawing from this class today, her sense of pride refused to let her quit. She was made of sterner stuff, she just knew it. Besides, she had made a commitment.

She wanted to lift a hand to her cheek, but the class had already begun and she was forced to remain immobile. She bit her inner lip to stem the tears scalding her eyes, threatening to over-spill. It wouldn't do for the nude model to be seen crying, now would it? But inside her chest, her heart began to pound heavily and it hurt to breathe. It always did whenever her mind allowed in the memory of Michael...

Mentally she tried to push aside the bitter memory, but it arose none the less. *'And, I love you. Yes, I love you...'* the song continued. *No!* No, she didn't! She *hated* the man for dumping her for someone younger and smarter than her! At least that's what he had said before he'd left her heart-broken this very morning.

“Sally gets me.” Michael had shrugged aside Catherine’s protestations. “You rich girls are all the same. You always expect everything to go your own way. And get bitchy when it doesn’t happen. We never agreed we’d be exclusive.”

“How can you say that?” Catherine demanded, trying to block his path. “We have been everything to each other. *Everything!*”

But she was no match for his size and strength. Michael picked her up bodily by the shoulders, and put her aside like a discarded possession he no longer cared for.

“Get over it, Cathy.” He shrugged as he wrenched open the door to her apartment. “You’ll soon find some other sucker. Your daddy’s money will always make up for most of your...deficiencies,” he sneered nastily. His pitying gaze stalked over the smallness of her body, the neatness of her slender frame. Like it was a crime to be petite.

“Be seeing you...” He didn’t even flinch when Catherine’s thrown shoe connected with the door frame beside his head. He was gone by the time she managed to remove the other and hurl it after him.

“I hate you...yes, I *hate* you...” Catherine sat down hard on the side of her bed. She had finally learned the truly bitter taste of that word. She hurt too much all over to cry...



New York, November 1986

“So, after Jeff stood me up for the third time in a row, I told him, don’t expect me to call you any time soon.” Jenny Aronson took a sip of her coffee. She giggled. “He apologised, of course. They always do. Said he couldn’t meet me because his mother needed him. Then he thought he could win me back, by telling me how much I reminded him of her!”

Catherine laughed. “No!” She put down her forkful of food. “How did you deal with that?”

“After what we’d been doing to each other, every night and morning, over the last three months, I told him that was a decidedly creepy comment.” Jenny shook her head as she ate a spoonful of her soup. “But it gets even creepier. The poor guy just didn’t get the connection. He was devastated, wondering why he couldn’t win me back with the ultimate compliment.”

She pulled a face. “He said he didn’t know what he was going to tell his mother. Apparently I’m *‘The One’*, and he’d been planning a special weekend away, just the three of us!”

“Surely he couldn’t be that stupid!” Catherine dissolved into laughter.

“Oh, Jen, you surely know how to pick them. I don’t believe it!”

“Yes, well...Okay, Miss I-am-so-in-control-of-my-love-life...” Jenny pushed her plate aside to lean closer. “Enough of my problems. There’s plenty more fish in that particular ocean. So tell me, you and Tom, how’re you doing? When’s the big day? I am down to be your maid of honour, after all. I need to make plans.”

“Oh, Jen, I don’t know...” Catherine sobered quickly, returning her attention to her salad, but finding her appetite had suddenly fled. She put down her fork. “It’s...complicated.”

“So, what’s new? It always is with you. Is there a problem here?” Jenny put out a hand towards her. “I always thought you two were so well suited. But if you need to talk, you know I’m here for you. Always...”

“I know, and thank you.” Catherine sighed. “Tom says all the right things. His gifts are always perfect, and his compliments are right on the money.” She huffed a small laugh. “But it’s like he’s rehearsed everything beforehand, leaving nothing to chance. We attend the best parties, and we are seen in all the right places. He wines and dines the Planning Commission at every opportunity for each of his new projects.”

She hesitated, and then said, “And, of course, I’m expected to accompany him. Be seen by his side at all times. Like I’m on display, as if I’m one of his architectural models he’s always showing off.”

“And you don’t like that?” Jenny watched her closely, trying to decipher what her friend was not saying. “Okay, so just tell him no, once in a while. Doesn’t do them any harm to be put back in their box, if they become too annoying and needy. Come out for a night with me and the girls, and blow him off.”

“Sorry, Jen, but you just don’t know Tom. When he wants something he can be very persuasive.” Catherine pushed aside her half-finished plate, raising a denying shoulder. “It’s just that I...”

She lifted helpless hands. “Sometimes I feel like I’m drowning...in other people’s expectations. That I’m only wanted for what I am, not who I am.” She made a small moue of discontent. “Does that make any sense? Or am I just being paranoid?”

“Of course not.” Jenny shook her head quickly. “Your Dad’s money does speak to some people, good or bad. Fact of life, I’m afraid.” She tilted her head, studying her best friend closely. “But the guy for you won’t care about that. He’s out there somewhere, Cathy. I can feel it.”

She bit her lower lip. “I wasn’t going to tell you this, but I had one of my crazy dreams again the other night. And you were in it.” She raised a hand when Catherine was about to comment. “I know, but hear me out. You were in the dark, and you couldn’t see a thing. Like you were wearing some kind of mask, or something. And there was someone was in the room with you, watching your every move. You were hurt,

and so scared..." She shuddered. "I couldn't sleep for the rest of the night."

"Oh, Jen, you and your dreams," Catherine replied, not unkindly, shaking her head. "They don't always come true."

"Yeah, maybe..." Jenny shrugged. "But you still need to be careful. You always feel things more deeply than the rest of us. We skate happily over the ice, but you like to know what lies beneath. You were always a deep one. That can get you into trouble, looking too deeply into some things that are better left alone."

Her eyes narrowed. "Are you sure all this worrying about Tom isn't just nerves because you're thinking about finally tying the knot? From what I've seen, he's a great guy."

"That's what my Dad said the other day. Tom is his best client. It all dove-tails so neatly. A little too neatly. I know Dad wants grandchildren, and Tom has his eyes set on starting a Gunther dynasty. Right away."

"I can see your point there." Jenny caught her bottom lip between her teeth. "Look, from where I sit, you're both from old money, and Tom's a young man on the rise. But if you need a comparison, there's always Elliot Burch." Jenny's gaze became speculative. "If you like his kind of new money smell. I met him at a party the other night. Not bad looking, and he knows how to talk to a woman. You could do worse, if Tom doesn't pan out."

“You marry the man then!” Catherine flashed. She sighed. “Sorry, Jen, I’m just more than a little on edge right now. I just don’t know what to do for the best. I’m suffocating under the weight of it all.”

“Forget it,” Jenny reassured her. “You’ve got some free time after lunch. Go and see Tom, talk to him. Surely he would understand your concerns. Maybe you both must need to take a breather from each other. Date a few other people for a while. Work a few things out, and maybe you’ll see what you’re missing.”

She smiled. “Like that old song says...you know, that one you used to be mad about a few years ago. By the Moody Tunes or someone like that. “*Beauty I’ve always missed, with these eyes before. Just what the truth is, I can’t say any more...*” Maybe you just can’t see what’s been right in front of you all along, because you’re too close. Take some time off, gift yourself three weeks alone in Paris, and see just how much you miss Tom. If you’re back inside a week, problem solved.”

“The band’s name was the Moody Blues...” Catherine supplied absently. “*Nights in White Satin...*” She paused, looking inwards for a moment, and not liking what she saw there. “Funny, I haven’t thought about those words in years. Sorry, Jen. Great idea, but Paris at this time of the year...” She shook her head. “No, thanks.”

“I did my best, then...” Jenny sighed as she waved to the waiter for their bill. “Sorry to cut and run, but I have an urgent meeting with an author about sticking to a deadline he’s already missed twice. Lunch is

on me. You sounded like you needed some serious cheering up when you phoned this morning. And always remember that I love you madly...”

She stood, coming around the table to lean down and kiss Catherine’s cheek. “Call me when you’ve made up your mind, one way or the other. Or if you need some more sage advice from someone who truly has it all together. My door is always open.” She laughed deprecatingly. “You know what I’m saying...?”

“I know. Thanks, Jen, I will keep in touch.” Catherine grasped her hand briefly, before her friend left on a cheery wave.



New York, October 1987

Catherine sat before her make-up mirror, absently humming the tune playing on the radio beside her as she styled her hair. She wanted everything to be perfect tonight. Everything was perfect. She smiled at her mirrored reflection. She doubted she had ever been so happy in her entire life.

She wanted to jump up and dance to the music, but he would be here soon and she didn't have a lot of time. There was never enough time for them to be together. A quick glance through the gauzy curtains of her bedroom confirmed the sun was almost gone, long shadows marking a steady path across her balcony tiles.

She turned back to her reflection, considering her recent past as she applied her lipstick. Her troubled, emotional confusion about Tom Gunther had been resolved in a most unexpected and spectacular fashion. Now he was gone from her life, and he belonged to another time. It was a truth she couldn't deny. The new Catherine Chandler was nothing like the old Cathy.

Jenny's crazy, prophetic dream had come true in so many incredible ways. Catherine smiled wistfully. Her only real regret was she could not tell her best friend anything about her recent history.

She leaned closer to the mirror, looking into the clear green depths of her eyes as she applied just the right amount of shadow. Now she had a new love. Someone who cared for her alone. Someone who truly made her heart sing with joy.

It would soon be Halloween, and she had such plans. A walk through the city by moonlight might not be out of the question. And maybe they could even sit and watch the sun rise over the river. A unique treat.

What could be more romantic? If only her love could be persuaded to accompany her, abandon the shadows and the hidden places for once. It would take the same incredible leap of faith he had once asked of her...

She turned her head, tracing one fingertip down the line of the scar just before her left ear. She usually concealed it beneath the fall of her hair. Tonight she had swept her hair back, securing it at the nape of her neck with a black ribbon. She had nothing to hide. She'd kept the scar, as a constant reminder of how much she had truly changed. It was a part of who she was now.

On the radio the current song faded into silence and the DJ returned. "Well, we called this throw-back Saturday for a reason, so I guess it's time now for one of my personal favourites. I hope it's one of yours too. Almost twenty years ago this song first came out, and it climbed to number two on the Billboard charts here, and all the way to number one in Cashbox. An oldie, but a goody, folks. So, for all you die-hard romantics out there, I wish you happiness and love. Enjoy."

Catherine turned eagerly as the music began to play. There had been the sound of soft footfalls on the balcony outside. Someone was out there. She stood and hurried to the curtains, throwing them aside before passing through, and the lyrics flowed with her into the night.

'Nights in white satin, never reaching the end. Letters I've written, never meaning to send. Beauty I've always missed, with these eyes before.

Just what the truth is, I can't say any more... 'Cause, I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how I love you...'

“Hello, Vincent...” She went straight into his arms and they closed about her tightly. “Oh, how I love you...” She rested her cheek against his vest. Never before had the lyrics of the song spoken to her quite as they did tonight, here within the safety of his embrace. So much had truly changed, and yet some things remained the same.

The song she had first loved twenty years ago swirled around them, underscoring the quickening of their shared bond. She began to sway to the music, just as she had done all those years ago as a teenager. Without the need for words she moved slightly backwards, holding out her hands, palms uppermost, smiling her invitation through lowered lashes.

'Gazing at people, some hand in hand. Just what I'm going through, they can't understand. Some try to tell me, thoughts they cannot defend...'

Watching her closely, Vincent slowly nodded. Returning her smile, he swept a courtly bow, before coming forward again, placing one hand at her waist, and the other holding hers at his shoulder as the music played around them. And then they turned as one, sweeping across the tiles, dancing out into the moonlight, and a destiny neither could see. But they knew it was there. They only needed to believe...

As always, they went with hope, and they went with love...*'Just what you want to be, you will be in the end...And, I love you. Yes, I love you. Oh, how I love you. Oh, how I love you...'*

~THE END~

"Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone - we find it with another..."

~ Thomas Merton ~

