



Unlife

By Selina A. Fenech

Complete summary including spoilers.

Kitty French dreams of being rich and famous and eating at trendy restaurants. Good food, for Kitty, is better than sex—but right now, she is a struggling actor living with ten roommates in a three-bedroom apartment. She can't help but wonder if her agent, Harvey, is to blame for no work, and she wishes she had been brave enough to try for the Jenny Kurts agency.

When Harvey offers Kitty a roleplaying job for a high-end vampire LARP event for classy, rich businessmen, Kitty reluctantly accepts.

At a venue called Dark Raine, she dresses in a scanty, medieval-themed dress, and a group of men dressed as vampires pretend to chase her around and bite her. A few even nip at her for real, and she finds herself getting really into it.

Then one man claims her for himself—someone who seems more hardcore than the others. This one really bites her neck. She screams and tries to fight him off, but eventually passes out.

When Kitty wakes up, she finds herself hanging from her wrists on the wall as a woman tries to give her water. The vampire enters the room, and though Kitty tries to reassure herself that vampires aren't real, the man's skin is white and his eyes are an inhuman black. She is overcome with terror as she takes in the situation: she is a prisoner, and she has been kidnapped by this monster.

The vampire asks her what her favorite food is, and tells her that his is strawberries—or, it used to be, when he could still partake in food. He informs her that she is his strawberry now, and that he will keep her alive as long as possible because something about her blood is so delicious.

Suffering blood loss, Kitty drifts in and out of consciousness while the thrall—the woman who had given her the water—cleans and grins at her wickedly, refusing to help her. When the vampire returns, he yells at the woman, angry at her lack of proper care for Kitty. He moves Kitty to the bed where he handcuffs her and treats her wounds. He apologizes for not giving his maid better instructions for caring for her. Kitty demands to know how he can possibly treat her like this, and the vampire informs Kitty that she is nothing but food to him. She learns that his name is Owen Raine, and hopes that she can find a way to play off his humanity—if he has any. Her survival might depend on it.

Kitty assesses Owen's weaknesses and concludes that she might be able to escape during the day while he's asleep. She tests the boundaries of her reach with the chains, but finds that she cannot reach the balcony, so she works to push the bed across the room, hoping to make it onto the balcony where she can yell for help. She finally succeeds, but outside, she learns that they are situated on an isolated

property where no one would be able to hear her. Kitty makes a decision: she'll have to use her acting skills to play to Owen's sympathies. It's about to be the role of a lifetime.

When Owen returns, he moves the bed back, then feeds her delicious food. She attempts to find an emotional connection with him, but fails—so she tries something else: she pretends to buckle over with fake stomach pain. Using the element of surprise, she grabs the steak knife and stabs Owen in the chest, but cuts herself in the process. Owen simply pulls the knife out, then feeds from her.

The next morning, Kitty finds her hand treated and bandaged. Owen, appearing more vulnerable than usual, apologizes for hurting her. Through conversation, she learns that Owen is four hundred and thirty-one years old. Owen admits that he usually lets his victims go, but her blood is too delicious in a way that he does not understand himself. Kitty realizes that when he feeds, he seems to become warmer and more human. She fights off an undeniable attraction to the softer side of him that is revealed after feeding, and grapples with conflicting feelings.

Over the next couple of days, Kitty tries to interact with the thrall, but the woman ignores her, and she worries that the woman has gone mad under Owen's mind control. On the third night, Owen demands to know why Kitty hasn't bathed. Kitty has made a pact with herself not to shower until she is free, hoping it might deter him from feeding. Owen, however, brings her to the bathroom and forces her into the tub. After he bathes her, he shackles her back to the bed. This time when he bites her and feeds, it seems gentler than before—but when Kitty tries to play on his sensitivities, he gets angry and says she is food, nothing more.

Kitty recognizes desire in his expression, and in an attempt to reach his humanity, she kisses him, and is disturbed that when he kisses her back, her own body responds. Before things can escalate, however, Owen accuses her of trying to seduce him. Kitty questions whether she might have Stockholm syndrome.

The next day, the enthralled maid enters the room with a chicken and a meat cleaver. She hacks wildly at the chicken, and Kitty realizes that something isn't right. Kitty tries to make conversation with the woman and learns her name: Loretta. But soon, Loretta is babbling incoherently, and she attacks Kitty, biting her. Kitty tries to lock herself in the bathroom for safety, but Loretta starts kicking down the door. With no other choice, Kitty jumps out the bathroom window to escape the woman's relentless pursuit. She hangs outside by her chains in the icy rain as Loretta madly attempts to reach her. When Loretta leans too far out the window, the windowsill breaks, and she falls to her death on the tennis court below.

Owen finds Kitty hanging by her chains and brings her back inside where he warms her up in the shower. He admits that he had no idea how free from his control Loretta had become. Kitty pities the woman,

feeling that she most likely went insane because of him, but Owen informs her that Loretta had been a murderer, that he kept enthralled after the justice system failed to imprison her.

Kitty struggles with conflicting feelings about Owen, who sometimes seems so warmly human, but other times a total monster. Later, Owen offers to skip feeding after all she's just been through, but she insists that he does because she likes him better after he's eaten. As Owen feeds from her, Kitty is surprised by her attraction to him, and after, she finds that he seems quite human. He admits that her blood is doing something to him—making him feel warmer, and weaker. He doesn't like it.

Kitty tries to get to know Owen better, and learns that he fell in love with a woman he thought he would die without. Instead, he had to die to be with her. Eventually, he killed her—which reminds Kitty that she cannot forget her ultimate goal: escape.

As time goes by, Owen becomes gentler, and now the cuff is around her ankle instead of her wrist, which makes life easier. He continues to feed her magnificent food. One night, Owen uncuffs her and brings her to the pool outside so that she can go swimming. Kitty learns more about him. His previous lover, Adelle St Delaurents, was the daughter of a duke. He was the second son of a mere baron, which made the match impossible, and Adelle was already engaged to a wealthy man when they met. When Adelle's husband became suspicious of Owen, he took her away to France. When she returned, she had grown very ill—and obsessed with death.

One day, Owen found a vampire called Rene attacking Adelle, and he killed him with his sword, only to discover that Rene had already turned Adelle.

Owen takes Kitty back to her room, and they fall asleep together. Owen confesses he doesn't know what to do with her. Kitty awakes to find herself back in chains, so she locks herself in the bathroom until he leaves, angry at the treatment even after the previous night's heart-to-heart. The chain is a reminder that she can't trust her captor, no matter how much he might open up to her about his past.

The next day, Kitty spots something under the bedside table: the cleaver that Loretta left there. She takes it and gets to work hacking away at the bedpost that she's chained to. When it finally becomes free, Kitty flees the house without hesitating, but just as she gets one foot out the door, Owen grabs her, and begs her not to leave him. He brings her back to the room and chains her to a different bedpost.

Resigned, Kitty prepares for a fancy dinner he has invited her to, and is struck by how handsome he looks. He brings her to a mountaintop nearby where he treats her to a magnificent multi-course picnic. After the meal, Owen brings Kitty to the beach. He asks her what she would do right now if she could do anything, and she tells him she would escape. But he says that is not possible.

Later, she wakes up on his couch. Owen confesses that he has decided he likes what her blood is doing to him, but he doesn't know what to do about it, and it pains him that she only wants to flee. Overcome with emotion, Kitty and Owen kiss, and then they share an intensely passionate exchange. In the middle of it, though, Owen suddenly cries out in pain and jumps back, clutching his chest, and Kitty is certain that his eyes have turned blue. He flees the room, leaving Kitty feeling confused and ashamed.

The next day, Kitty inadvertently stumbles upon the diary of Adelle St Delaurents. Reading it, she learns that the love Owen had for Adelle was not mutual; Adelle simply used his feelings to manipulate him for her own enjoyment. After he turned, Owen drank but never killed. Adelle, however, hunted not just for food but also for sport and wealth. Adelle grew sick of Owen, and sought out another lover who she convinced to gather a mob to kill Owen. Owen escaped—and after that, the pages are missing.

When Owen finds Kitty reading the diary, he doesn't get angry; instead, he tells her what happened next, explaining that after the mob tried to kill him at Adelle's behest, he travelled abroad, seeking answers. He discovered that while vampires cannot kill one another by law, there was an ancient death curse for those who are corrupt, held within a ruby ring set in tarnished black silver. He found the ring, and Adelle was killed by it. He tells her the ring finds those who deserve it.

Owen also admits to Kitty that Harvey, her agent, sometimes sends him porn actors, but he never kills them. Kitty is distraught to discover that this whole time, Owen thought she was a porn star—and apparently, that's what Harvey told him she was. Owen confesses that out of all of them, Kitty is the only one he has slept with. He tells her he hopes she can forgive him one day, and he leaves.

The next morning, Kitty wakes up to find that she is no longer chained, and there is a letter from Owen telling her that she is free, and that she should not try to find him. Along with the note she finds a stack of hundred-dollar bills, plus piles of new clothes. Kitty does want her life back—but is confused and distraught at the abandonment.

Outside in the driveway, Kitty is shocked to find her car waiting for her, plus her fully charged cell phone. She learns that she has been missing for three weeks—and only has two voicemails. She decides that in the future, she is going to focus on forging real friendships. Maybe next time she goes missing, someone will actually care.

Kitty moves out of the crowded apartment she was living in, then pays a visit to Harvey, demanding to know if he ever bothered to report her missing—after all, he was the only one who knew where she had gone that night. That's when Kitty sees the ring on his finger: black tarnished silver with a bloody teardrop-shaped ruby. She wonders if the legend of the curse could be real.

A week later, Kitty goes to Owen's club, but Dark Raine is boarded up. With a little digging, she finds old obituaries of the business being passed on from father to son, showing that he'd been trading identities for centuries. She tells herself to get over Owen, but she can't.

One day she arrives at his house to discover that it's being sold, and she accepts that it is time to let go and move on.

Six months later, Kitty is doing well with Jenny Kurtz as her new agent. A movie in which Kitty plays a major role is about to be released in cinemas worldwide. What's more, Harvey was found dead in his office, evidently having died of a massive heart attack.

One day at the farmer's market, Kitty spots a familiar face: it looks like Owen, but different—tanned! Nonetheless, she follows him. It is Owen—and he's human now, thanks to her blood. Once he became human, Owen realized he was in love with her, but knew that he had to let her be free of him. Kitty tells him she didn't fall in love with the vampire that imprisoned her; she fell in love with the man who set her free.

Happily, reunited, Kitty and Owen decide to start over—together.

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