

Catherine's Dream

Praise For *Catherine's Dream*

This is a brilliant and moving novel, one that helps us step into the life and heart of a young woman with a powerful dream—and with all manner of obstacles in the way of her achieving that dream. Not only does this author bring Catherine, her Polish culture, and her journey to life so vibrantly, she takes us into a world in which women had few choices. And yet, this strong character holds on to her dream against the odds, and—well, you'll have to read this page-turning novel to learn how her amazing life turns out.

David Hazard | best-selling author and international writing coach

Catherine is a gripping novel full of the beauty and loss of a woman finding her way in an oftentimes harsh and cruel world. I found myself immediately on the farm with her, relishing in the new discoveries of a 1920s Polish orchard, the town, and a world far from my own. My heart ached with her, and I wanted to follow her journey all the way through. Beautifully woven with hope, faith, and perseverance, *Catherine* is a glimpse into history and a story of love and redemption despite the shadows in the light.

Ashley Logsdon | relationships coach/48 Days Eagles

Every once in a while you sit down with a book with no expectations. It fell into your hands unexpectedly, yet within a few pages you're deep into a world, and getting to know characters, you never want to part from. The story engrosses, it moves and delights and hurts and pulls you into lives and times that are unique, and real. It's the kind of book you look up from and realize hours have passed, yet you still don't want to put it down 'til "just a few pages more." *Catherine* is a woman you'd want to meet, and a book you'll want to share. It's just that good.

Nancy Roberts | producer/writer/video and audio editor

With so much against her,
can she reach her heart's desire?

*Catherine's
Dream*
A NOVEL

ROXANNE BOCYCK



NEW YORK

LONDON • NASHVILLE • MELBOURNE • VANCOUVER

Catherine's Dream

A Story of Spirit and Courage


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To my grandmother, Catherine. May her spirit live forever.

Chapter

1

The door clicked open behind her. Catherine froze, then quickly hid the paper under the ledger book on her desk.

“Did you get those receipts put into the Brzezinski account book?” her uncle asked, as he took off his cap and hung it on the coat rack near the door. She heard Marcin sit down in his swivel wooden chair and shuffle the papers on his desk behind her. She did not turn around but kept her head down to show him she was hard at work lest he subject her to his icy disapproval and criticism, which he was only too happy to deliver at times.

“Well, no. I have not finished yet,” Catherine responded, her heart racing. She continued to look down at her desk, pencil in hand. Her eyes glanced toward the paper hidden under the book. An edge of it was showing.

She heard Marcin turn his chair towards her, the irritation rising in his voice. “Why are you not getting your work done? What have you been doing?”

He leapt back to his feet and took the few steps towards Catherine’s desk to look closely in the wire basket where he had put the stack of invoices earlier. When he saw how many she had left to enter in the ledger, he looked angry.

“You had plenty of time to get those done.”

Holy Mother, I ask your help . . . Catherine prayed he would not look under the large, general journal in which she was entering figures. As he stood over her, she smelled the cigar smoke and vodka on his breath. Vodka made him volatile.

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“You’re not scratching out those foolish sketches again are you? If I find you’ve wasted time drawing when I’m paying you to work, I’ll send you back to slopping pigs on the farm. Is that what you want?”

Her hand was trembling and to hide it she set the pencil down and pretended to smooth her skirt. During the few minutes he allowed for her lunch break, Catherine had looked out the window at the horse in front of an open-bodied automobile parked just across the street. A vehicle without a horse! She wanted to capture an image of the changing times—from horsepower to automobile power. She was drawing the horse’s bridle when the door swung open.

She thought quickly, to distract her uncle.

“Speaking of farms, I overheard in the Market Square there is a large dairy farm near Płaszów on Gromadzko Street. Maybe they could use your accounting and bookkeeping services. That would be a new piece of income, would it not?”

A little of the perpetual irritation left his voice. “I see you had made *some* progress.”

Setting the invoices back in the basket, he continued to stand there. “What is that?”

“I’m sorry. What do you mean?” Her eyes searched the desk for something out of place.

He pointed to a folded piece of paper in one of the stacked compartments on her desk.

“Oh,” she breathed a sigh of relief. “It’s a flyer I took from an electric pole out on the street. Sometimes I use it for scrap paper.” By which she meant paper to draw on but didn’t dare tell him.

Her answer seemed to satisfy. “Good, you’re being resourceful. It was bad enough when my profits went to support the orchard and I had little left over for my own supplies. The orchard we almost lost during the partitioning of Poland. A country with no borders, only wars.”

Catherine knew only too well the family almost lost the farm more than once. Last year’s apple crop was poor due to a drought. They also had lost a large share of the younger apple tree saplings they’d planted. Her aunt had been in a panic, fretting loudly they would be driven out to live in poverty. Her two older brothers were forced to work at other farms to bring in money.

His arms were folded, and he was staring out the window. The early afternoon sun filtered through the dirty window and highlighted the aged lines of his face. She craned her neck to see what he was goggling at.

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Two men had the hood up on an automobile.

“It would be a fine thing if I could afford to purchase one of those. No more horses to clean up after and feed. I could ride in style.”

There it was again. His thwarted dream of becoming a wealthy man. The source of his constant frustration and anger.

Catherine glanced down and noticed the corner of the paper on which she had been drawing was sticking out from under the journal.

Marcin looked over at the calendar on the wall. It failed to cover the peeling, water-stained spot on the wallpaper.

“September already. There is so much work to do here, and soon it will be time to harvest the apples.” The irritation was back. “I cannot be in two places at once!”

He looked down at Catherine, who stopped entering numbers on the ledger page.

“I need you here to help me. The farm isn’t making us money. I cannot afford to get behind on keeping the books for my business clients. If the work isn’t done, we don’t get paid, and the bank will still want their money.”

Marcin continued to hover over her, and she looked up. Why couldn’t he go away?

“I do not want to go back to living in a peasant village.” He looked down at Catherine. “Do you?”

She shook her head. Catherine knew his frustration came from not knowing Poland’s outcome in the Great War, and it made him irrational.

Marcin went to his desk, grabbed another box with receipts and handed it to Catherine. To her relief and a bit of surprise, his expression had softened.

“You think I’m harsh and demanding—I can see it in your face—but I am only trying to help you. Wasting your time drawing will not earn you money or find you a husband. You don’t want to be a single, poor, peasant girl grubbing among the pigs and dirt on a farm your whole life, do you?”

“Of course not.” She didn’t dare tell her uncle her real hopes.

“I didn’t think so.”

Marcin’s voice once again became edgy. “I need to go get a newspaper. There is talk the war is ending and the Central Powers are collapsing. Russia has already withdrawn from the war. All those decades of no Poland, and now . . .” His voice drifted.

She could feel his eyes on her.

“Once you’re finished with those—” He nodded at the stack she had been working on and the box he had just given her. “You’re free to go. Tell your Aunt Eva I had

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to stop by the two Jewish businesses in town—she'll know what kind of mood that puts me in. Currently there are thousands of them living in Kraków, and they own everything, including the banks." He grabbed his cap from the coat rack. "Then I must purchase some supplies at the store. Not everything she's in need of, so that will put *her* in a mood."

He smiled a little at her. "You poor girl. Forced to work with your unpleasant uncle."

In a way it was true. She felt like a serf, forced to labor for Marcin, the feudal lord.

When Marcin left, she stared at the stacks of ledgers and box of receipts. She took a deep breath and watched out the window as her uncle untied the horse and climbed onto the wagon seat.

She slid the drawing she had been working on out from under the journal book, opened her bottom desk drawer, and tucked it under a canvas bag.

Yes, Poland was a newly formed government and society, but its economy was fighting hard to survive now in 1918, during the Great War.

Wary Marcin might surprise her by dashing back in for something he forgot, she closed the drawer quickly. A feeling of guilt rose, and she worked swiftly on the stack of receipts to make up for the time she had been sketching.

After the work was finished Catherine stood and stretched her arms up at the tin ceiling overhead. Out the window she saw the late afternoon sun now cast longer shadows on the street. She looked over at the wooden clock on Marcin's desk. It was just past three o'clock. The bicycle she rode to work was in the back hall. Her brother claimed the bike had been deserted on a farm outside of Kraków by a soldier from the War. She wheeled it outside and locked the door. *Free, at least for the evening.*

As she took to her seat and started pedaling, a feeling of independence came over her.

Marcin . . . one day . . . perhaps . . . he would know, though he could control her time, she would not let him rule over her dreams.

She weaved around people walking and held her head high as she rode past the Jewish men who stared at her as she traveled by their storefronts and taverns. Soon the cobblestone road turned to dirt, and the sounds of the city faded away. The roughness of the turf would challenge the rusted old bicycle, and her long-braided light brown hair bounced on her back. She hoped it would not throw the chain

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today. The rolling hills of Podgorzé surrounded her. Normally, it would take Catherine nearly a half-hour to walk home to the small farm surrounded by apple trees, but the bicycle was much faster.

The smell of fresh manure told her a horse had recently passed this way and was somewhere probably quite near and up ahead. Coming around a bend in the lane, she was relieved to see it was not Marcin, but surprised to see it was Dominik Bukoski, a young man her age from the nearby village of Bukowiec. The person her father had hinted more than once would one day become her husband. Dominik and his father often came to work at the orchard, especially at harvest time.

“Hello Catherine, nice day for a bicycle ride.”

Not wanting to be rude she stopped pedaling and coasted alongside of him. Dominik was always polite, sometimes too polite to her. Although he was considerate, there was nothing interesting about him. His face was flat, his voice was dull, and all he ever talked about was slopping or slaughtering pigs.

“Yes it is. It’s odd to see you not working but enjoying a horse ride on a country road.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Mama said I need to enjoy myself more. Get away from the farm. She insisted I go for a ride to clear my head.”

“I imagine your father didn’t like that.” Catherine knew his father worked him hard and the bags under his eyes showed it.

“My brothers Lukasz and Szymon are there. Besides, mama said the horse needed some exercise.” He patted its neck.

Catherine struggled to keep the bicycle from leaning and started to pedal.

“Have a good evening, Dominik.”

The farm hand quickly responded, “You, too. See you in a few weeks at the harvest . . .” His voice trailed off as she left.

Now she pumped the pedals past fields of yellow-brown grass where the poppies of spring blossomed, and a dirt road led to a village on the Vistula River. In the distance were several large rectangular peasant houses with wide, white-washed planks and uniformed square glass windows. She admired the tall, angled, thick brown grass roofs held together with dried clay. They spoke to her of an artistry different from her own, but an artistry, nonetheless. The house where she lived had wooden shingles made from pine slabs, and when it rained the noise always woke her.

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Finally, the familiar thin row of white birch trees at the edge of the orchard appeared. She passed an old barn with a straw-thatched roof and siding of weathered wood badly needing paint. With all the work to be done, no one had time and—as Marcin reminded everyone over and over—there was no money to pay workers “just to slather on paint!” The apple trees were laden, almost ready for the picking, and she thought about all the heavy, wooden crates stacked in the barn for the harvest. How her two older brothers, Antonio and Filip, would need to haul them out, and how much swearing there would be.

Was no one happy with their lot?

Catherine crossed the wooden bridge over the stream. The bluish gray jackdaws with their bright blue eyes chirped as they feasted on bugs hiding in tall grasses near the water. Her mother was outside, using an old pair of scissors to gather herbs from the small garden near the house. Climbing off the bicycle, she leaned it onto a tall shade tree whose leaves had started to change. Her father, who was outside talking to her mother, turned around to look at Catherine as mother waved and walked into the house.

“Hello, Papa,” Catherine smiled. At the entryway stoop, she removed her only pair of good shoes and put on the worn boots that had been dried in the sun. Hearing her voice, the pigs beyond the house grunted and gnawed at the fence post, as they did if they had not been fed recently. That, of course, would be one of her chores.

Her father’s jaw was set. “Marcin stopped by earlier and told me you were distracted today and didn’t get all your work done. He thought you took time from your work to draw... Did you?”

She stared, trying to come up with a way to explain herself—not giving too much away, but not lying or deceiving either. Otherwise, Father Jarek would be harsh with her when she made her next confession.

“Don’t you understand the good opportunity you have to help us earn money for the farm? Your dowry?”

She did not want to displease her father, but why was everything about money or marriage? And she was confused about his adamant she not “waste” her time drawing. Why could she not draw if it didn’t interfere with her work?

“Father, I do understand. But you’ve seen women from the city who aren’t dressed like peasants but in nice, fashionable clothes. Someone designed those

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clothes. And what about the beautiful artwork in the church? People are needed to be artists—why not me?”

John turned his eyes from Catherine to Dominik who now rode by on his horse and raised his hand at John. Her father signaled back and folded his arms across his chest.

“Because that is not the life God created for you, he wanted you to be a wife and mother, live on this farm and raise a family. Those people in the city you call artists, they came from a different place, they don’t appreciate our way of life.”

Catherine became quiet, but a wave of confidence was slowly growing.

“Father, may I have some of the money I’ve earned? I need to buy my own paper to draw on.”

John closed his eyes, and one hand went up to his forehead. “Catherine, are you not listening to me?” he said through gritted teeth. “There is no time to draw, and besides, it’s a useless pastime.”

“But father, I’ve been by the Polish art school in Matejko Square. The place named after the famous painter Jan Matejko, who created paintings of our history. Are those useless?”

He looked away as he stretched his right arm towards the orchard. “After work, you’re needed here for the farm work and in the orchard—also to help your mother with the housework and to cook. Before winter, new blankets must be woven on the loom. There is so much work to do.” His face reddened.

Catherine was not deterred. “I know, but I can stay up later or get up earlier. Drawing won’t interfere with my work.”

But it was too late. He had already turned and walked away.