

Bad Reputation

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Summary: Not everyone cares to have a spotless reputation.

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Author's Note: This is in response to Kerth Challenge #4, which had the prompt of using the lyrics of the next song you hear as the title of the story.

I'll admit it.

I have a bit of a reputation – not just here, at the office, but all around this town.

Maybe it's not the best reputation in some aspects.

In other ways, my reputation is impeccable.

I'm known for always, and I mean *always*, getting the story. Like a lioness on the hunt, as soon as I sense blood, I'm poised to strike. No one is safe from my scrutiny. No one can escape having their story plastered all over the news once I settle my sights on them. And why should they? Celebrities, government officials, artists, musicians, even other reporters – none of them are special enough to be spared when it comes to something newsworthy. I'm good at my job. Almost too good. And I pride myself on that.

But the tradeoff for being known as a reliable gossip columnist?

I'm only as good as my articles, at least, to the people who soak up every last bit of the juice I serve them. And I *always* serve up the very best. The praise my work and, by extension, they praise *me*. I'm their Gossip Queen and they flock to worship me by ignoring the front page in favor of my column.

Personally though? Like the way my coworkers, friends, and even some family members look at me?

I've got a bad reputation.

Not that I'm unreliable or that I'm bad at my job or anything. I'm not a monster – someone so utterly despicable that I can't be trusted. I'm not the kind of woman who would steal an article or go to the point of nearly breaking – or absolutely breaking, as the case may be – the law to get my story. I'm actually pretty upstanding in that way.

No. That's not the source of the tarnish on my reputation.

Most people see me – see the way I act, the way I dress, the way I speak – and the only word that comes to mind is

"trashy." Or, at least, that's to put it mildly. I've heard worse. Much worse.

"Oh look, here comes Cat Grant, the Daily Planet's very own..."

Insert your favorite derogatory word or phrase meaning "sexually uninhibited woman" here.

I get it.

I really do.

I've made the choice to live my life this way.

I knew what people would think and say about me.

I did it anyway. None of how I choose to represent myself is a lie. Not really.

I like my life. The partying. The schmoozing with the rich and famous. The sex.

Especially the sex.

I had my first experience in college, at the tender age of eighteen, with Craig, my study partner for French class. He invited me to his apartment on a chilly Saturday morning in late January. We spent about an hour memorizing phrases and names for inanimate objects – chair, bookshelf, loaf of bread, Excuse me, where is the hospital?, flowers, marker, My name is Catherine. The next thing I knew, he was pushing for a break, and honestly, my brain was nearly full to bursting with words. I said yes. He ordered a pizza and broke into his roommate's stash of booze.

One thing led to another and, well, we never got back to our textbooks.

I had already had a crush on him before that day. I left his place that night head over heels for him. But, as it turned out, I was merely a notch on his bedpost. He didn't care about me. Didn't want to date, didn't want to even be friends. I was just a conduit to getting his thrills.

I was angry.

I was ridiculed once people found out, all of it from him strutting around spreading the news like a self-important rooster. My intelligence was brought into question. I was accused of enticing him, of basically daring him not to sleep with me because I was an attractive woman.

"Didn't you think that's what he wanted when he invited you over?"

"Hey, Eric wants to know if you want to sleep with him. He heard you're easy."

"You should have saved yourself for your husband."

"Watch it, ladies, the campus skank might dig her claws into your man next."

And a thousand other things like it – all aimed at shaming me for satisfying a natural urge, while either praising him for doing the same, or at least not making him out to have done anything wrong. I was used to seeing double standards when it came to women's behaviors versus that of men, but this...this was something else entirely.

I was livid.

If only those people had known.

If only they'd realized that they wanted me to feel ashamed of the one thing I'd ever done for myself. The one time I'd actually felt in control of my life. Craig hadn't pressured me. He hadn't taken advantage. I'd wanted it as much as he had. I'd *been* wanting it for a long time. I'd just been too shy to be the one to make the first move.

Shocking, right? To find out that *I* used to be shy?
But it's the truth.

All my life, I'd been the quiet girl. The nerdy one. The one that never quite fit in with the other girls. Oh, I was never a tomboy by any stretch of the imagination. I actually did love perfectly normal, girly things. But with parents that never allowed me to wear makeup until I was in high school, who demanded that I keep to a ridiculously early curfew, who barred dating until I was at least sixteen...well, I didn't have as much in common with my peers as I would have hoped to. Even then, while they salivated over all of the teenybopper magazines, I knew the grounding I would get if I got caught with one. So I only ever read them on the rare occasion I could be absolutely *certain* I wouldn't be seen.

One thing became immediately clear the first time I picked up one of them. Most of those rags weren't worth the time and effort of painstakingly ensuring that I wouldn't be caught. I didn't care about the diet tips and makeup dos and don'ts. I didn't really care about the "I was sixteen and pregnant" stories. If I was going to read gossipy type articles, then I craved *real* gossip.

So I turned to other magazines. Ones that my parents found acceptable, if not in bad taste. Things like *People Magazine* and, much later, once I was out of the house and in college, tabloids. Somewhere in my brain, the first time I stumbled across a tattered old copy of *People* and read some article discussing some actor's dating life – I can't even remember who it was at this point – something clicked. *This* was exactly what I wanted. An obsession was born. I devoured any gossipy nugget I could find on anyone worth knowing gossip about. Bruce Wayne got a bad haircut? Lex Luthor was seen on the town with a Playboy Bunny on his arm? Diane Keaton's shoes didn't match her outfit and was that a sign of protest against the male/female wage gap? Any of it, all of it, I was on it. And I knew that this was something I wanted to be a part of for the rest of my life. I knew I could make a comfortable living for myself and get to enjoy all the endless gossip I could wish for.

It didn't take long before my school peers, both those in elementary school and eventually high school, realized this quirky little obsession I had. It became another piece of ammunition in their arsenal. Just another thing to mock me about. Paired with my then-underdeveloped body, my glasses, and my tendency to rarely speak up and never to defend myself, I was too easy of a target. For years, I was tormented.

The name calling was the least of my issues, though each creative or time-worn insult still cut me like a knife. There were the middle of the night calls to my house with seemingly no one on the other line. The TPing of my house. The eggings. Damage to my personal property – slashed bike tires, spray paint on a jacket I left in my locker, ripped books, defaced school projects that I'd spent perhaps too much time on. Some items were stolen – including my glasses once, which at the very least prompted my parents to *finally* agree to letting me get contacts. I was tripped in hallways, bodily shoved into the banks of lockers, targeted during literally anything we were forced to play in gym

class. Ever have the entire opposing dodgeball team aim at you at the same time? I still shudder when I think about the sound of all those rubber balls slamming into my body, all of them hurled with as much velocity as my opponents could muster.

I grew depressed. Not "diagnosed and medicated" depressed but sullen, withdrawn, even quieter than normal. I used to act and dress as blandly as possible to avoid drawing attention to myself. I lost myself as I faded into the background and wondered for a while what worth I even had. Come to think of it, maybe I *should* have been evaluated by a professional.

So when the bullying started again in college, all because I'd dared to step out of the comfort zone I'd always been forced to build around myself, something in me snapped.

I was done being the girl I'd been all my life. It was time to choose the woman I wanted to become. Did I really want to live my life the way I'd always had? Did I really enjoy being a part of the landscape, never standing out, never standing up for myself? Was I destined to remain a caterpillar all of my days, instead of blossoming into a butterfly?

No.

I wasn't going to stand for it. I wasn't going to be the meek, bullied girl of my childhood days any longer.

Right then and there, I killed the old Cat Grant and transformed myself into someone new. Someone I wanted to be. Someone I could admire for her unwavering and unapologetic loyalty to living life by her own rules.

Gone were my more conservative clothes. Gone was my quietness. Gone was the shyness I'd always hid behind.

Instead, I embraced bright, loud clothes. Skimpy outfits that fit like a second skin became my style of choice. From the very first strappy, barely-there top and tight leather mini-skirt I donned, I felt relief. Powerful. Sexual. Like a goddess. I let my hair down, both literally and figuratively. I got loud. Opinionated. Even raunchy at times. I refused to play the part of a demure little good girl and suddenly, I commanded people's attention. Men wanted me. Women wanted *to be* me.

I liked it.

No.

I *loved* it.

So that's who I've been ever since. Cat Grant, a woman who's gotten just about any man I've set my eyes on. A woman who enjoys intimacy without all of the strings attached. Gossip Queen Extraordinaire. Because when you're popular and attractive and willing to do just about anything with anyone...well, people's normally tight lips tend to loosen up.

That doesn't mean I don't have my insecurities still, deep down. It just means I've found a better way to camouflage them. For every low-cut top, every thigh-high split in a dress, for every pair of painfully high heels, I'm wrapping myself in armor. Every meaningless sexual encounter reinforces that I *do* have worth, that I *am* desirable, that I'm no longer a helpless school kid being verbally beaten into submission, let alone physically assaulted.

Not that I would ever admit any of this out loud, of course.

I have a new reputation to uphold after all.

I will never allow anyone to see me as weak or indecisive or deferential ever again. That Cat is long gone, buried in a forgotten grave somewhere in the mists of the past. This Cat is bold and brazen and yes, maybe even borderline inappropriate at times. But the thing is, I'm not even aware of that most of the time. It's like an addiction. You can admit you drink a lot but be completely oblivious as to exactly *how much* you drink at any given time.

It's given me a bad reputation.

But the thing is, I don't care. I finally feel like I'm who I'm supposed to be.

And I don't give a damn about my bad reputation.

THE END