

A NEW CHAPTER

GWEN LORD

Vincent and Catherine sat close together in their favourite place, far below Central Park. Here, the beauty of this place, could not be matched by anywhere Above. This was their special and private place.

Vincent sat, leaning against the cave wall, one arm holding Catherine very close, his other hand holding a book. His velvet voice gently filled the air. Catherine snuggled into his chest, his hold on her increased.

After a while, the story ended and Vincent put the book down. Then he put his head back against the wall and let out a deep sigh.

"What?" Catherine asked.

"If only we could make plans, like the couple in the story, plans that would give us 'A Happy Life.' It's what we both want and long for---yet, fate has decided to cut us adrift; has decided for us that we are to remain as we are, never truly one," he sobbed.

"Then we must find a way to be together Vincent, and we'll show fate what he can do with his...decisions."

"How can this be, Catherine? We both know it is impossible, everything is against us," he whispered.

"No, damn it! I won't accept that---not for us, Vincent. What we have is too special, we are something that has never been. You said it yourself. There are no guidelines for us to go by, there are no limits. So, we will make our own," Catherine urged.

"Oh Catherine---if only it were possible," he sighed, both his hands in hers. The air hung with unspoken words. Then Catherine began.

"I, CATHERINE CHANDLER, PROMISE TO LOVE YOU AND CARE FOR YOU, FROM THIS DAY ON THROUGH THIS LIFE, INTO DEATH AND ON INTO ETERNITY." Vincent let his thumb brush away a tear that ran down her face.

"AND I, VINCENT WELLS, PROMISE TO LOVE YOU AND CARE FOR YOU, FROM THIS DAY ON, THROUGH THIS LIFE, INTO DEATH AND ON INTO ETERNITY."

"Vincent, do you love me?" she asked.

"You know I do. I adore you."

"And I love you, with all that I am. I want no life without you," she whispered. "It is between you and me only; not Father, not Peter, nobody. We make our own rules, our guidelines, from now on."

"Oh, Catherine..."

"We will have a happy life, you'll see," she promised.

They clung together, as if to gain strength from each other. Then Vincent helped Catherine up, and together they stood---arms entwined.

A few moments later, Catherine stood in front of Vincent. Noe it was her turn to wipe a tear from Vincent's face.

He pulled her to him, his arms holding her tight, and they kissed; a kiss so full of passion and longing and hope. At last, both were filled with a new inner peace.

"I love you so much, Mrs. Wells," he smiled happily.

"Oh, Vincent---I adore you," she sighed.

"Come, we must go now---every marriage has a honeymoon, Catherine," he smiled mischievously, "and ours awaits us." With that, he swept Catherine into his arms before heading for his chamber---and their 'Happy Life'.

A Priceless Gift

By Gwen Lord

Catherine Chandler cleared her desk ready to leave for home; it had been another rigorous and nerve racking day. From the moment she had entered the office, until now, Joe had plied her workload without mercy. He had a deadline to keep, the deposition completion date had to be met, or heads would roll. Moreno was on Joe's back with this one and Joe, in turn, made free time and freedom of speech look like they were going out of fashion. Then, when 4.40 p.m. arrived and the ends were all tied up neatly, everyone breathed a sigh of relief and, only then, did the atmosphere of the DA's office return to its normal pace.

Picking up her briefcase, purse and file, she turned to grab her coat off the hook near the filing cabinet and, it was then she caught sight of Joe leaving his office, putting on his mac and straightening his tie, the ever cheeky grin on his face.

Cathy stood back and watched Joe as he approached. Here was a nice clean-cut all American guy, of Italian parents, dark curly hair, good features, a heart of gold ... and her friend.

"Hey, Radcliffe!" Joe looked edgy.

"Joe?"

"Isn't it time you gave me a break?" His hands were now on her desk as he leaned over towards her. "Yeah! A break. Let me buy you a pizza, hamburger, take away ... or even a meal at my favourite restaurant, the one my Uncle Petro runs." His dark eyes and curling lashes inviting a 'Yes!'

"Oh, Joe! You make me feel awful. Every time you ask, I'm doing

something. You have to believe me. I really do have a date. I am sorry." She covered his hand with hers and squeezed it lovingly.

His crestfallen expression betrayed what her rejection did to him, then to hide the hurt he bore, sarcastically challenged : "Bet it's one of those high brow types you seem keen on ... Funny, that one of them hasn't captured your heart, Cathy!" He now smiled nervously.

"Joe, he's not like that, believe me."

Then, as she moved to pass by him, a noise in the now empty office made them both look up at once.

"Hi, Cathy! Sorry I'm late. I got off on the wrong floor," he apologised, weaving his way towards them, between the disarray of office furniture and effects.

They watched as he strode towards them, a welcoming smile crossed her lips. Joe just stood back, a stunned look on his face; he was actually, at long last, seeing one of Radcliffe's dates ... This he must not miss!

Her arms went around him, Joe noted, in a very familiar way. They clung together a few moments, then with a kiss on her cheek they pulled apart.

"Joe, this is Devin Wells ... Devin, I'd like you to meet Joe Maxwell, my boss, my number one tormentor. He's also my best friend." Her face was beaming.

Joe held out his hand to take Devin's in a warm and welcoming manner.

"Pleased to meet you, pal."

"And you ... er ... Joe."

"Shall we go, Devin? I'm all in, this place has been a workhouse, I need to become a part of the living world outside. I hope it's still there," she quipped.

Joe leaned over and switched her desk lamp off, as he watched them make their way towards the door.

Suddenly Cathy stopped and hurried back. "Forgot my keys," she giggled.

"Hey, Radcliffe," Joe's voice was low. "I thought Mr Wonderful was called Vincent?" There was a grin on his lips.

"You're right, Joe, Devin's his brother," she smirked. "Good night, Joe."

"Nice one, Radcliffe, go wheel 'em in, cheaper by the dozen!"

Both laughed, but his smile hid the puzzle he felt. This wasn't the kind of person he knew Cathy to be. Something here didn't add up, it didn't add up at all!

* * *

It was late the following day, outside the lights were coming on all over the city, as the promise of evening drew nearer.

"File this, kiddo." Joe dropped a large overstuffed file on her already full desk.

"What's this?" Cathy questioned him.

"Oh! Just the Malison case. Steve won in court, so now it wants ..."

"Filing! I know." Both grinned. This relationship Cathy and Joe shared was easy and enjoyable, but Joe hoped for more ... one day! As Cathy made her way across the floor to the filing cabinet, Joe watched every move of her body ... boy did she have good packaging; lucky the guy who caught this chick! He wondered yet again who this Vincent character was, why was he surrounded in such mystery? Maybe he was married, a senator, who couldn't risk a scandal ... nah! Maybe he's - oh! What the heck, if she was married to one of these high flyers, Cathy wouldn't work her little tail off with him in the DA's office. Perhaps he was the lucky one after all, at least he saw her daily and, when things got too much, he was always there for her. But this Vincent guy got to him and the lawyer in him wouldn't let these loose ends remain loose for much longer.

"Joe ... Joe ... are you okay?" Cathy's hand was on his shirt sleeve.

"Eh! Oh yeah, sure, Radcliffe." He turned and walked away, his feet dragging, a sure sign to Cathy that all was not okay, not okay at all. As Joe turned to enter his office, a commotion at the far side of the room disturbed his reverie. He ran his hands through his thick dark curly hair. Advancing towards Catherine Chandler's desk was a huge flower display in a basket, complete with massive satin pink ribbons attached to the handle. It was so large, the carrier couldn't be seen, just two legs beneath it explained it wasn't an aberration.

"Elliot!" Joe heard Cathy's voice exclaim in amazement.

"Cath!"

"These are beautiful, Elliot." She threw down her pen and studied them, a head now looking at her from above the display.

"Thought you'd like a few flowers to brighten up your office," he

grinned. Then, placing them on the floor where both could see them, he straightened up, arranged his tie and ran his hand through his hair, which was just over the collar of his jacket.

"A few flowers, Elliot? What's the occasion?"

His face, unable to remain serious, was every woman's dream: his blue-grey laughing eyes, framed with dark curling lashes and teeth so perfect it all became unfair. The dimple in his chin offset his roguish appearance when his face became alive with his very attractive smile. No wonder he was known as the catch of the century. Every available female in New York knew and desired the Elliot Burch.

But he had only one love in his life who, so far, had evaded all his attempts to capture her heart. He had become used to her refusals, believing in the end he couldn't lose. He was willing - for now - to play the waiting game.

"The occasion Cathy, is ... your birthday!" he grinned and moved closer. Cathy was well aware of his attractiveness. If there hadn't been Vincent in her life then, yes, Elliot was a very eligible suitor!

"Elliot, my birthday is six months off!" she smiled.

"I know, this is for your last birthday!"

Joe turned away to hide his grin. Could this really be the fast hitting and hard dealing Elliot Burch now before him, grovelling very persuasively for the heart of Catherine Chandler? Jesus, what chance did he, Joe Maxwell, have against the likes of this wealthy, powerful and debonair mogul, hell bent on claiming her for his own!

"Oh Elliot ... please, I can't accept them. Please take them back, there is no need for any of this, truly."

Looking past Elliot's face, Catherine noticed more large expensive flower arrangements heading towards her. She stared in disbelief as one by one they began to fill her corner of the office. In all, eight more baskets.

"Elliot!"

"Well, these are for all the other birthdays I omitted to remember." Taking her hand, he raised it to his lips and kissed it, as his eyes were still locked with hers. Then he waited for her reaction, just like a small boy before his Headmaster, awaiting whatever lay before him.

"Please, Elliot, I really cannot allow you to do this, I work here. Look at this place, it's like Interflora. Please, I can't accept them."

"Yes you can, Cath, I'll have Manning get the men to collect them and deliver them to your apartment right away."

"No, NO!"

"YES and this, Miss Bossy Boots is not open to discussion!"

For now she was defeated.

"I've got to admit it, Burch, I like your style," Joe said as he shuffled past him, embarrassed to be caught up in all of this, but his comment went by unnoticed.

"What do you really want, Elliot, won't you tell me?" Her voice was softer now.

Elliot pushed his hands deep into his trouser pockets as he paced the office floor, while collecting his thoughts; also allowing Joe to reach the privacy of his office.

"You, Cathy, please ... at least let me take you out for a meal ... a concert? Anything at all, you name it!"

"Go for it, Radcliffe," murmured Joe within his office, to himself.

"Cath, my plane is fuelled up and ready to go. Let's take off, have a weekend away from this rat race. You only have to say the word, I'll take you shopping, I'll buy you everything your heart desires ... Please, Cath, give us a chance."

"Can you buy me the moon, Elliot? Can you buy me the wonders of a rainbow? The magic of a promise shared? You can't put a price tag on these things and Elliot, there is no US, you know that. My heart belongs to another, it has for over two years now. I do love you, but I'm not in love with you, there is a difference, believe me," she sighed deeply.

"Cathy, I know I could make you happy. I can give you the world and I do love you." His arms now held her and her face was level with his. "This is very important to me," he said, almost to himself.

"Elliot, you haven't heard a word I've said."

"Sure I have, honey, but I'm trained in the art of persuasion. I'm used to having to fight for what I want; everyone has a price!"

"I don't," she snapped.

"I've taken a lot of knocks on my climb to the top. Friends I loved, needed, trusted; all left me in the end, 'til finally it was me up there ... alone."

"Elliot, please." A tear now escaped and ran down her cheek. She brushed it away.

"But it is no longer enough. I need to share it all with you, Cath, I'm asking you to give me a chance ... please."

Joe had now returned slowly from his office, carrying his mac' and daily paper.

"Elliot, I'm sorry, truly sorry, please at least believe me; somewhere out there is the perfect girl for you ..."

"It's you I want," he pleaded.

"You think you do, but I'm not for you ... now or ever ... I am deeply in love, Elliot. His name is Vincent, he is my life. We share a bond beyond all reasoning or understanding, I'm not free to love you."

The grim realisation of defeat spread across his handsome face, as he knew once more his well laid plans had failed.

Looking into his face, Cathy saw the unshed tears, the pain her rejection had caused him. He took a deep breath and shook his head slightly, as if to rid himself of this mantle of regret and heartbreak he felt.

Then, he held both her hands in his.

"Forgiven?" he asked.

"Of course! Still friends?"

"How could it be otherwise?" he smiled. Then, turning quickly to leave the office, he clicked his fingers to summon his body guards and Manning to follow. With the swish of the door they were gone, swallowed up into the hub of activity as everyone made their way to the lifts and stairs at the end of the working day. Finally, Cathy and Joe were alone in the empty office.

"Are you okay, Radcliffe?"

"Yep, Joe, I'm fine!"

"Do you realise what you have just turned down ... we're talking big, here!" He grinned in disbelief.

"Not for me, Joe. I've already found my 'pot of gold', my 'Shangrila'; there is no treasure on earth that could ever tempt me away from Vincent."

"Gee, Cathy, what is it that this guy has that is so god-damn special?"

A few more moments passed and then quietly, she heard herself explain.

"He asks nothing of me ever, yet he gives me everything. Because of him I finally know who I am. Through his eyes I see things so clearly now, the magic of a sunset, the beauty of a moonbeam, the wonder of being alive. These are treasures money can't buy and to share these treasures with him, there are no words. What we feel is beyond words."

"You're serious?"

"I'm serious, Joe. I have no need for all the trappings of a successful life, I have the entire world in his arms and in his love."

"I give in, I believe you. What you have, Radcliffe, I envy!"

"Thanks, Joe."

Then picking up her things, she joined Joe as they headed out of the office, past the impressive array of flowers. Cathy stopped and

pulled out a single stemmed red rose. "I'll give this to Vincent," she murmured to herself; tonight was only a heartbeat away.

The following day, around 3.30 p.m. Joe was standing near his office door, playing nervously with a rubber-band, a habit he was well known for. He was trying to mentally untangle a testimony, which didn't ring true. A movement caught his eye; that of a tall, good-looking young man, wearing a blue jacket, jeans and cream polo neck sweater, making his way without hesitation to Cathy's desk.

This, he must see ... so, leaning to the left, he watched as this person came to a halt in front of Catherine Chandler's desk. Sensing someone was there, she looked up into a very familiar face; threw down her pen, spun round in her chair and hurried into his arms for a long and beautiful embrace.

Joe's expression was priceless as he watched the picture before him, curiosity was eating away at him. Acting on the spur of a moment decision, he advanced towards her desk, bearing a couple of files and a smile.

"Joe?"

"Can you file these away, Cathy?" he asked, then hung about hoping to be introduced. He didn't have to wait long.

"Michael, this is Joe Maxwell, my boss. Joe, this is Michael, a very close and dear friend." Joe held out his hand, this, he smiled to himself, was getting to be a habit.

"Nice to meet you, pal!"

"And you, Joe." His voice was gentle, warm and held Joe captive.

"Are you visiting, or do you live locally?" he enquired, eying him up and down.

"Hasn't Cath told you ... Sorry, I live with Cath at 21E. We share the same ... doormat!" Both laughed.

On the other hand, Joe's eyes grew larger and larger as his mouth refused to stay shut. He nearly choked on his intake of breath. Cathy felt the air become electric with unsaid words as she smiled to herself at the pictures that were now forming in Joe's mind.

"Can I take an early coffee break, Joe?"

"Sure, but have that file ready before you leave tonight!"

"Yes, Sir!" Cathy saluted him military style, then smiled as Joe sauntered back to his own office. She put her arm through Michael's and directed him to the coffee bar just down the passage from their office.

During the next few days both Michael and Devin reappeared; each time Cathy looked radiant in their presence. By the following weekend, Joe could stand it no longer, he had to find out what was going on. It wasn't going to be easy, as he could sense Cathy knew already how curious he was and she would be evasive on purpose.

He walked over to Cathy's desk, as she sat deep in thought about Vincent, enjoying their bond as they opened it wide, to share their feelings. She sat, eating her rye bread and salad as Joe approached.

"Radcliffe ... Radcl..."

"Sorry, Joe. I was miles away," she apologised.

"Who were you with, THIS time?" He didn't mean it to sound so razor sharp.

"Oooh! Nasty, Joe," she grinned.

"Is there any space in your packed diary for ... me?" He now perched on the edge of her desk and looked directly at her.

Cathy put her lunch away, then covered Joe's hand with her own. The contact made his blood turn to fire.

"If your offer is still open, I'd love a coffee and a walk by the lake in Central Park ... tomorrow?" Her question hung suspended in the air.

"Fine!" He ran his fingers through his hair. "Great, gee, Cathy, I can't believe this." His cocky attitude had now vanished.

"I'd like that Joe, really!"

"I'll pick you up about seven o'clock?"

"Hmmm, lovely ... I'll be there!"

Well, at least he was one up on Elliot Burch now!

A couple of days later, Joe was still on a 'high', he'd finally had his date with Cathy. They had met at the gates of Central Park, Joe was early but Cathy was on time for once. Even so, their greeting was awkward, this was out of office hours, office tactics didn't work here. They walked side-by-side, picking up on things as they passed by; a dog chasing a bird, a child crying, until the hot-dog stand came into view.

"Buy you a hot-dog, Cath?" he asked.

"Sure, Joe."

"Two hot-dogs, pal, with lots of mustard on mine!"

"Chilly on mine!" Cathy's eyes were aglow with the prospect of this treat.

They walked along eating and enjoying their hot-dogs, the tension now eased. Once the hot-dogs were eaten, Joe threw their rubbish into a trash can near a tree then, turning to Cathy, took her hand as they went deeper into the park, heading for the lake.

Cathy smiled to herself. This area was 'their' special place. It was here on this very spot that Vincent had point out the moon to her and asked her if she remembered when she had first seen the moon.

"Penny for them, Radcliffe."

"I was thinking about the moon."

"The moon?"

"Yeah! Can you remember when you first saw the moon, Joe?" she asked as she turned to face him.

"Pass," Joe grinned. "Why, can you?"

"Nope, but I know someone who can!"

"Vincent, I bet!" and he grinned.

Their walk was nice and easy, both felt at peace, the moon sent shafts of dancing light across the gentle ripples of the lake; it was beautiful. Cathy hugged the knowledge to herself that Vincent was

also enjoying this walk, as he silently kept up with them in the shadows that were his world. Finally, it was time to leave Central Park; it was almost 1 a.m. They had walked and talked non-stop, each dipping into tales from their past to explain the present and they touched on the future briefly.

"Thank you, Joe ...it's been lovely."

"Yeah, I finally had a date with you, how about that? Dare I ask for another, or am I coming on too strong?" He waited.

As Catherine wondered how to answer him she felt Joe's arms pull her to him and his lips found hers, warm and tender.

A rustle in the undergrowth brought Joe back to reality.

"Joe!" Cathy said breathlessly.

"Oh, Cathy!" Joe felt he'd died and gone to heaven.

"I really must go, Joe. I'll never be up in time for work, then my boss and number one tormentor will be cross with me," she teased.

"I promise you Cath, i won't," he teased back.

"But I really do have to go."

"Okay, but at least let me see you to your apartment," he pleaded.

"No, Joe. really, please."

"But Central Park isn't safe. You know that, come on - be realistic!"

"Joe ... trust me, ^please."

"Okay, but ring me when you're home please, at least do that," he asked.

"Okay, I promise. Good night, Joe."

She planted a peck on his cheek and then he pushed his hands in his pockets. At the park gates Joe went left and Cathy went right. Once he was out of sight, Cathy doubled back and headed straight for the drainage tunnel.

"Catherine." His velvet voice purred from the far corner of the tunnel. In an instant she was enclosed in his arms, his kisses covering her hair and face.

"You had a nice evening? Joe is a good friend, I trust him."

"Joe kissed me," she admitted.

"I know, I felt it and saw it," he murmured.

"I'm sorry, Vincent, I couldn't he..."

"Sssh, my love, no need to apologise. I know you, I know who you are and what you are. I love you with all that I am. You did right to allow Joe to kiss you."

"Vincent, what are you saying?"

"Joe is in love with you, Catherine, he is holding his feelings in check, it is not good to do this and the kiss helped unlock some of his pain," he explained tenderly.

"Oh Vincent, you know of this pain too, don't you? Thank you for trusting me, I will never hurt you ... I love you so much."

"And I you, Catherine."

* * * * *

A few days later, Joe was returning to the block that housed the DA's office and he passed the 52nd Street Jewellers. He looked up and saw inside the plush shop, Catherine Chandler with both Devin and Michael. Joe's hurrying feet ground to a halt as he tried to focus on the window display, but was really looking beyond at what was going on within the shop. All at once, Cathy spotted Joe and waved to him, then beckoned him to come inside. Joe felt very uncomfortable at this request because this jewellers was the classiest pad he had ever seen, the likes of which the Joe Maxwell's of this world would never experienced.

The door opened up a whole new world to him. The carpet felt feet deep, like walking through oceans of whipped cream. Crystal chandeliers hung low and glistened with quality and twinkling lights.

"Hi, Joe! Come over here," Cathy begged.

"Devin ... Michael."

Both greeted Joe warmly.

"Joe! We've been searching New York for days. Devin and Michael are helping me choose a very special gift. It is now time to make the final choice, your opinion is vital ... Please, Joe?"

How could he refuse those eyes; that mouth!

"Yeah sure, count me in."

"Which do you like best, Joe? The diamond pin set in gold? Or the diamond pin set in platinum, or the cluster of diamonds set in a network of platinum?"

All three heads turned to Joe to await his answer.

"Well, doesn't the price have something to do with it? I mean there are no price tags on any of these pins, Cath!"

"Joe, they are all expensive, but cost doesn't come into it. I only want to know which you like the best, okay?"

"Sure," he shrugged.

"So?" Cathy urged him on.

"Well, I like the cluster of diamonds."

"You would, Joe Maxwell. That's the dearest one and also the one we like the best!" They all laughed together at this revelation.

"Phew, well I did that right," he grinned.

"Chivers, we'll take the cluster, please."

Catherine handed the beautiful piece of jewellery to the old man.

"Very well, Miss Catherine."

"He knows your name?" Joe was impressed as well as stunned.

"We have been coming here since I was a little girl, Joe. My silver teething ring, my first bracelet; my graduation present; everything came from this jewellers. You see, Joe, Daddy and Chives roomed together at Harvard - many years ago."

Joe leaned near to Cathy and whispered in her ear, "You are loaded, lady, why work in the DA's office, eh?"

"It's where I can do most good, Joe." she whispered back.

"Here you are, gift wrapped and ready to give to the lucky man in your life!"

"Chivers, that is perfect. How much did you say it was?"

"Two thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars, Miss Catherine. Shall I charge it to your account?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," and she promptly planted a kiss on his cheek, as you would, an old friend.

Once outside, Joe seemed to vaguely remember Devin and Michael saying 'good bye' and he knew that he and Cathy were heading back to work. But he was deep in shock at the cost of the tiny pin that Radcliffe had just bought and was so very happy to part with all that mountain of lovely green money.

"He's one lucky guy, Cathy ..."

"No Joe, I'm the lucky one."

* * * * *

Vincent and Catherine sat close together in the tunnel below the bandstand in Central Park. The music flowed over them like a vintage wine, intoxicating them with the magic of its mood.

"Vincent, I have a gift for you. I wanted it to be something from my world that was expensive and extravagant; something you would never dream you could or would ever possess. Because you deserve everything I can give you so much, my love. Happy Anniversary, Vincent."

"Catherine, you are my greatest treasure, I want for nothing; now you are mine."

"I know, but this is special. Please Vincent, open it."

With great care, Vincent's large hands and menacing claws undid with ease, the delicate bow and finally the lid was raised and the pin lay exposed as it dazzled him. The lights within the tunnel caught the many facets in the cluster of exquisite diamonds.

"Oh, Catherine ... such beauty!"

"You like it?"

"Oh, it is beyond words."

Then Cathy flung her arms around her massive lover. Their embrace was total, no words were needed, their bond said it all. After a few moments - or was it a life time - Vincent spoke.

"I have a gift for you, Catherine, but it is not of the riches of your world of mine."

"Oh Vincent, what is it?" She pleaded like a child, her eyes alive with happiness.

Vincent pulled a small box out of his brocade vest and with a kiss, handed his gift to her.

"What is it, Vincent? It's so small."

"Perhaps you should open it, my love."

Catherine lifted the lid of the box to reveal a small locket.

"Vincent! It's beautiful," her voice was so tender.

"It belonged to Margaret. When Father gave it to me, he said I

would know when the time was right to pass it on. Catherine, that time is now. Please ... look inside."

A gentle touch on the catch at the side and the locket flew open to reveal a coil of hair. Catherine gazed in wonderment at the golden brown hair, which had been bound perfectly with strands of red-gold hair to form an unbroken circle;

"Vincent ... it's hair!" she gasped.

"Yes, it is, Catherine. Yours and mine."

"How did you get my hair, Vincent?" she asked, amazed at this disclosure.

"Over the past few months, Catherine, I have collected the odd stray off your coat, jacket or dress and saved them until I had enough to fashion a coil. For once my claws served me well when I used them to bind my hair with yours. Although it was not a task I would like to do often," he smiled.

"This is a treasure beyond anything, Vincent ... anything!"

"It did take many weeks to fashion the circle, Catherine, but it is a symbol of our love, no beginning, no end. I wish I could give you treasures accepted Above, wealth and position, but it is not within my power."

Vincent moved to take Catherine in his arms to hold her close as he whispered, "What I can give you, Catherine, is my heart, my all ... the promise of my everlasting love."

"To me, Vincent, there is no money on earth that could buy this, or our love ... riches like these are beyond price."

"Catherine," he breathed into her hair.

"Oh, Vincent!" She hugged him so tightly.

"I love you, Catherine Wells. Happy First Wedding Anniversary."

Then their lips met in a beautifully long and tender kiss, promising them both the fulfilment of their passion; reserved only for lovers.

The end.

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A VALENTINE FOR VINCENT

GWEN LORD

Joe seemed in a particularly good mood, as he breezed about the office. Catherine wondered if now was as good a time as any to ask if she could slip out to the store close by to get Vincent a Valentine's card. Gathering up a few papers off her desk that needed Joe's signature she headed for his office. Tapping the door she entered and saw Joe smiling as she faced him.

"What?" she inquired.

"I know that look, Radcliffe, you want something."

"Joe, you know me too well," she smiled knowingly.

"Give, come on, you are playing safe today, it's my birthday, so ask away," he made to sit down and signalled Catherine to do the same.

"I had no idea, Joe, 'Happy Birthday'.....21 again eh?" she laughed.

"Ya, something like that." He picked up his rubber band and started playing with it, a sure sign he was nervous, a habit he had with rubber bands.

"Well, first I need these papers signed, and second.....can I slip out for half an hour, I'll make up the time, but I need to buy a card."

"Hey kiddo, no need for that, I'm a big boy now, I don't sulk if I don't get cards," he laughed.

"Well, maybe I'll get you one, if you let me go, but it's a card for Vincent. I'm shopping for a Valentine card," she explained.

"For Vincent, the guy we never see."

She nodded her head. "Vincent has never had a Valentine's card and I need a special one because of this."

"Never had a Valentine? Where has this guy been, hiding somewhere, underground maybe?" his disbelief apparent.

"He's never had a real girlfriend before me," she went on.

"Cathy, are you sure this guy's for you? Hey pal, you're the girl your daddy launched into high society to wine and dine the New York elite, so where does.....?"

"Vincent!"

"Vincent fit in, if he's so unworldly. How come he gets all your attention.....when Joe Maxwell is here," he laughed.

"Oh Joe, he is so special, but so different, it is his differences that makes him so special."

"Differences? You've mentioned that before. What differences.....come on, Radcliffe, your wasted on this Vinny."

"Joe, please sign the God-damn papers and please, give me a break.....I need to shop!"

"Fine, okay, back off, I'm 40 today, take 40 minutes, I'm generous to a turn."

Getting up, Catherine slipped round to the back of his desk, and with both hands on his shoulders bent down and planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Happy Birthday Joe, you're the nearest thing I'll ever have to a

brother, thanks."

"I don't want to be a brother," he said sadly.

"I know, but you are, bye Joe, see you."

"In 40 minutes, starting.....now!"

"Slave driver," with that she hurried from his office, picking up her purse and coat and was gone in moments.

Catherine tried every store around and even though the Valentine cards were lovely, some very funny, some cute, some sexy, none of them were quite right. Purchasing a card for Joe, she made it back to her office only five minutes late!

"Get fixed up?" he asked from his office doorway.

"Nope,"

"After forty five minutes, Radcliffe, you could have done better than that."

"I know, but I did get one for you," and she handed it to him.

"Thanks, pal," he opened it and chuckled. "To my dear brother," he read aloud, much to the amusement of the others in the office.

"Have a nice day, Joe." Came the reply as she returned to her desk. Later that evening, Catherine rang Jenny and asked her if they could go shopping this coming Saturday, which was just two days away.

So big plans were made and by 10:30am on Saturday, Jenny and Catherine were having two black coffees and cinnamon toast at 'The Four Seasons'.

"How come you can't find this special card?" Jenny asked

amused.

"Oh, I don't know, Jen, I want it to be so special and all I've seen, cheap or expensive, are all wrong," Catherine explained.

"Girlfriend, I've never seen you like this. When do I get to meet.....Mr. Wonderful?"

"At the wedding."

"Wedding!?" Jenny nearly choked on her coffee. "Excuse me, did you just say wedding?"

"Yes, but Vincent doesn't know that yet, I have to work on him.

"You and marriage, I can't believe it."

"Me neither, Jen, but I love him so very much."

"You must and that has to be the first. So drink up, shut up and let's go shopping!"

Laughing together, the two college friends, now grown women, set off to buy the impossible card.



As the light streamed through her balcony doors onto Catherine's face, a sigh was heard as realization of her lack of availability to get a card for Vincent invaded her waking thoughts. Lying there she pondered what to do. Then, realization set in and her mind and thoughts went into over-drive. Why hadn't she thought about it before. A commercially made card would never do for Vincent, and she saw how wrong it would have been to buy one. It would have looked out of place amid all his treasures in his chamber. If a tunnel person wanted something like those Above had, they made it. And with that thought in mind, she jumped out of bed,

showered, dressed and then set to work. Catherine had always been creative at school and now she needed to re-kindle those talents and make her ideas work.

It took her over an hour to find all she needed and when she sat down to access her collection of items on the coffee table, she was keen to make a start. Ripping up writing paper into small pieces, she put them to soak in water. Then her old blue lace blouse was cut up and using the back of it, wet it and starched it, then laid it out to semi-dry. An hour or so later in its damp state, she cut it to size and folded it, leaving it to dry fully, as the outside of the card it would soon be. To hurry things along, she plugged in her hair dryer and soon the lace card was looking stiff and good.

The following day the paper, now was a pulp and she sieved the water away. She then lined her grill pan with tinfoil and then placed onto this surface the paper pulp. Once the surface was covered, she pressed it down with the base of her breakfast mug. Then tipping it sideways with care, run off the rest of the water. It took the pulp a couple of days to dry and when it was dry, Catherine eased the handmade paper out, it was perfect.

Using great care, she cut it the same size as the starched lace, then married the two together. The effect was wonderful. Finding a piece of blue ribbon from off a gift from Christmas, Catherine threaded the ribbon through the lace and the paper, tying it in a bow in the front. Then with her old school in pen she wrote inside with great care:

To Vincent

Made with love

Given with love

To the man that I love

With all my heart

Catherine XX

With only one day to go now to Valentine's day, Catherine longed for Feb. 14th to arrive. As predicted, the two met at the tunnel entrance close to the witching hour in the moonlight.

"Vincent, I have something for you. Something I wanted you to have, a part of me, for you, a card for Valentine's day," and she handed it to him.

"Catherine, you made this.....for me?" his eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, Vincent, for you."

"It is beautiful, so very, very beautiful."

"No, Vincent, it is you who are beautiful."

"You honour me, but this is beyond anything I have ever had." His fingers caressed the card.

"It's only a card, a symbol, but I made it like our friends Below would do. I wanted it to be special and I've had such fun doing it for you, Vincent."

"You could so easily have bought it, but you made it for me. I felt your excitement and I know you were doing something that made your heart sing, that gave you so much joy but I didn't know it was for me."

"Valentine's are once a year, time when we can express ourselves," Catherine went on.

"Yes, you're right."

"Well, Vincent, not only is it Feb 14th, Valentine's day, but it is also leap year!"

"Leap year! Oh yes, every four years is leap year. I remember Father told me about this when I was a little boy," he smiled.

"Will you wait till the end of this month, Vincent, when you can expect another surprise from me."

"Another?" he quizzed.

"Go and ask Father, but be prepared to get another card of me again then," she laughed.

"Really!?"

"Yes, I had better get busy, it's not long now Vincent, and this one will have bells on it and two wedding rings."

ANOTHER TIME
ANOTHER PLACE
GWEN LORD

Far below Central Park, down endless avenues of tunnels, there is a whole new world where life goes on, but not as we know it. It is a haven for those who no longer fit into the mainstream of society, socially or otherwise, in the bustling city of New York.

There are a maze of tunnels from various entrances around the city, that lead in one direction, and that is down, ever downwards into the bowels of the earth. The rough rock walls are damp, dark and coupled with the lack of pure fresh air, these tunnels do not invite company.

At given points along the way, primitive torches sit in boulders, lighting and illuminating the way constantly downwards, like beacons urging you forward, as they flicker and dance because the air about them moves restlessly, eerily, unsurpassed anywhere else.

Those who had no choice but to enter this secret world and live in this place, lovingly call it, their 'hole-in-the-ground'----"Home."

But it wasn't always a place you could think of as 'home'. Criminals, thieves and endless law breakers once hid in these secret tunnels. To be caught by the law would be their demise.

Into this den of thieves and vagabonds many years ago, came two men with a dream which altered it all. Their names were John Pater and Jacob Wells. Once friends from college days, and both rejected from their world Above, they pooled their immense knowledge, building a 'safe' place Below, a secret place. It took

many years to perfect, but with patience and a driving urge, they brought about a new community, a life Below, which prospered and grew into the place it is today. Sadly the two men fell out over a major issue Below, and John Pater, then known as Paracelsus, was banned from the home tunnels, so Jacob Wells, known as Father, became the figurehead in that secret place.



Tap.....Tap Tap.....Tap, the rhythm of the Morse code echoed, as it travelled the length and breadth of the world Below---Pascal was proud of the job he did on the pipes, sending messages and receiving messages, a vital link with others, to keep their home a safe place, and to also inform. He'd taken over from his father, Joseph Pascal after he'd died, but it was safe in Pascal's hands, as his father had taught him well, like an apprentice learns skills Above, so Joseph had passed on his skills to his son. Once the exchange of codes was done, the tunnels enveloped the silence like a well-fitted glove, and into the silence rushed Mouse.

"Father.....Fa...ther," he breathlessly spoke.

"What is it Mouse? Do calm down and tell me," the old man chided the excited teenager.

"Voices.....Father."

"What voices Mouse?" he asked questioningly.

"Mouse bad.....strayed beyond the boundary."

"Why am I not surprised. If I've told you once Mouse I must have told you hundreds of times in the last few years, that the boundary is there for your safety."

"Mouse sorry.....Mouse sad."

"What you think you heard, was most likely my voice in your subconscious, telling you not to stray," he smiled as he spoke.

"No, not Father's voice.....many voices," he stammered.

"Yes Mouse, my voice," he corrected.

Scratching his mangled unruly hair, Mouse left the chamber feeling frustrated, as this time he had got it right, and Father didn't and wouldn't accept it.

As he left to return to Arthur his Racoon in his chamber, Father was shaking his head.

"What am I going to do with that boy?" he pondered.



A few days came and went, then once more Mouse came crashing into Father's study again, his eyes alight with news he was eager to tell.

"Ah, there you are, Mouse. That Racoon of yours....."

"Arthur," he stopped to correct his elder. A questioning look on his face.

"Ah, yes.....Arthur, he's been seen in William's kitchen, stealing food yet again," Father scolded.

"Not important," Mouse dismissed the problem, with a gesture of his hand.

"Yes, it is, Mouse, it is extremely imp....."

"Voices!.....come back," he confided.

"Oh, not again, dear God, not again."

"True," he nodded the verification of his statement.

"Hasn't Vincent got jobs for you?" he urged.

"No job, voices more important," he pleaded.

"You have no business being in that area 'again', you know it is strictly forbidden. Do you ever ask why it is forbidden, Mouse?" he questioned the youth.

"Too far away for Father to catch Mouse," he smiled impishly.

"**NO!** It's dangerous, uncharted tunnels, we have no idea what is truly down there, and that is how it has to stay, Mouse," his voice now deadly serious.

"But the voices?" he urged.

"Please Mouse, if you go there again, you will be put before the committee, and you will be punished. Do I make myself crystal clear?" Father rapped his stick on the hard floor of his chamber.

"But.....?"

"Go Mouse, go and find Vincent."

And with that, Mouse once more left Father's chamber very upset. Because once more Father refused to listen to him.

As Mouse left the chamber, once more Father's head shook in disbelief at his insistance. But what if.....He sat down and began to think again about these two outbursts of the tunnels' rebel. Slowly Father began to turn over in his head all Mouse had said, and one thing Mouse was not, he had to admit, he was not a liar! What if there really were voices so close to their boundary,

that in itself could be a disaster waiting to happen, if the voices found their home chambers, their secret would be lost! Dear God.....

Armed with new logic on this situation, Father decided he had to find out for himself if it was fact, or Mouse.....being Mouse! The more he tossed the idea around in his head, the more he knew he had to investigate it.



Further down the outer tunnels, Vincent and two other strong men worked on the east side wall that had collapsed. Pascal was busy on the pipes, while William made bread and Mary was reading to the children. So the timing was perfect for Father, and armed with a drink in the deep pocket of his cloak, and two of William's biscuits, Father set off to find the 'voices' and solve the mystery once and for all for himself.

"Pssss, pssss," came unexpectedly from behind him, Father jumped in shock.

"Who's there?" Father asked in startled alarm.

"Mouse."

"What are you doing here? I thought I told you....."

"Mouse knew Father look for Mouse's voices."

"Really! Well, you can go back to the home chambers now.... er.....maybe after you point me in the right direction," he coughed, not wanting Mouse to know he would be grateful for some directions.

"Mouse come too, not far now."

"No Mouse, I need you to stop others following me."

"Important, job for Mouse, Mouse go back," he grinned.

"Precisely," Mouse came close and whispered in his ear.

"Go left at tunnel fork.....not far," he said, jumping up and down excitedly.

"Er.....Thank you, Mouse."

"You not get lost like Mouse," he laughed and like his namesake, was there one minute and gone the next.

"That boy," Father grumbled to himself yet again. Father had only gone a few steps when he again heard footsteps. Looking up and peering into the dark he made out Mouse in the shadows once again.

"Mouse! Come out immediately!" he scolded. Sheepishly Mouse emerged.

"Want to help.....Make sure you 'okay good-okay fine', only want to help," he said, head bowed, shifting from foot to foot.

"Very well, show me, by all means, then leave, and return to the home chambers," he spoke sternly.

Mouse was now happy and went ahead of Father, turning all the while to urge him on. Soon Mouse stopped and so did Father.

"Here?" Father asked in hushed tones.

"Here!" Mouse pointed to the wall, "Voices!" But no voices prevailed. So Father watched Mouse scurry away, then sitting on a boulder, he wedged the flickering torch in a crevice and rested. An hour passed, then a second hour, until finally he decided this

game was yet another of Mouse's daft ideas. When suddenly, he too heard the voices. A look of complete bewilderment came across his face.

"How can this be?" he asked himself silently. As the wall in front of him was solid rock. But the voices continued, so feeling somewhat perplexed, he left his seat by leaning heavily on his stick. the torch was still wedged between two small boulders, so advancing to the wall he poked it and prodded it with his stick. Nothing, so again, as the voices were surely there, he pushed his stick directly at the rock. It went into the rock like a knife into butter. Quickly he pulled it back, disbelief on his face and fear.

"Dear God," he muttered.

Again he repeated his action. Again it went into the rock. He kept it there and he added his foot and lower leg and it also went into the rock. Nervously he withdrew quickly and sat down, mopping his brow from the beads of sweat congregating there, ready to tumble down his face. The voices finally went away and when his composure had returned, he stood up, straightened his shoulders, took a deep breath and went to the rock wall, yet again. First the walking stick, then his leg.....then all of him melted into the rock and was swallowed up. Feeling no different, Father looked up, only to find himself on the other side of the rock wall.

Looking around himself in disbelief, he saw in front of him a small dimly-lit room, with a door on the wall opposite. Looking from side to side, he advanced to the door, which was mouldy and in places there were large cobwebs. The latch was rusty and inviting, so with care he placed his thumb on it, and this lifted the fixture and opened the door with a creak and it moaned, revealing.....surely not.....could it be.....a theatre dressing room?

Either side of the room he saw there were dressing tables with large mirrors which had a row of electric light bulbs all lit along the top edges, causing Father to squint with the sudden burst of dense light. Adjusting to the brightness, he was able to take in other things. He felt like Alice in Wonderland. The whole thing had to be a figment of his imagination,.....lack of food and drink he told himself. But his fascination was held fast as he saw play bills pasted on the walls from various performances. Advancing to each in turn he read with interest the different plays and the actors in them and the dates..... 2000! Turning now, he retraced his steps and once more found himself back in the tunnel, where he'd sat earlier.

"How can this be? How can this be?" he moaned, over and over again, until finally he was safely back in his chamber.



The following day, after the usual communal breakfast of fresh bread and home-made jam, washed down by gallons of herb tea, Father spoke directly to Vincent, who was sitting next to him, deep in conversation with Pascal, Winslow and Zack, leaning forward to share the joke.

"Excuse me, Vincent but, do you happen to know where all the maps drawn years ago, to show all the boundary tunnels, are?" he asked.

"They're in my old trunk, Father, along with my old toys and books. Why do you ask this?" he questioned the old man.

"Oh.....er.....I.....er.....thought it was time I checked them over," he tried to sound normal.

"Shall I get them for you?" he volunteered.

"Please Vincent, if you'd be so kind."

Jumping up, he was quickly across the floor, mounting the three steps in one and, disappearing from view, before anyone realized he'd gone.

It took 20 minutes before Vincent returned, armed with 10 or 12 parchment rolls under his arms. By now, everyone had finished breakfast and only Father remained at the scrubbed top table while William was at the far end of the room washing up the dirty cups and plates in a large tin bath.

Sitting down beside Father, Vincent allowed the rolls to land in the centre of the table, spreading out as they landed.

"There are many, Father, which area bothers you so?" Vincent asked as he unrolled the first one, handing Father one to check also.

Stroking the roll with his gloved fingers, Father said, "These maps are so beautifully done, look at all the detail.....John Pater might be quite mad now and dangerous, but when he first did these, his talent was unique.....sorry Vincent, you were saying?"

"Which area concerns you so?" he repeated, his head to one side.

"Oh, the lower east end," he paused. "Thought we might extend our boundary area a little as we seem to grow each year in number," he lied, trying to sound convincing,

"Extend?"

"You have a problem with that, Vincent?" he asked, raising his eyes above the top of his glasses.

"No Father, of course not, and if you need any help you only have

to ask," he kissed the top of Father's head, then slipped away, sensing a need in Father to be alone.....!



As soon as Vincent was out of sight, Father unrolled each scroll in turn until he'd found just the right one. He held back the rolled up map, and placing weights on each of the four corners, now surveyed the detailed plans before him. He found at last, the area in question, then followed the area with his finger. Yes, there was the theatre, built in 1894 named The Grand Rialto. His finger went to the back of the theatre and retraced the route to where he'd gone through the wall. Yes, it was all here, now he had to work out what plan of action he would take.



So as not to arouse suspicion, Father had to put his plans together slowly. They finally took him four days to complete. Then when the coast was clear, he once more set off to this strange place, wondering what else he would and could discover. As he approached the area, he heard the now familiar voices, so he waited patiently until all was silent once more.

Then slowly he stood up and advanced to the wall, and with expert ease walked through the rock face. The dressing room was the same, with the bright lights edging the tops of the mirrors and the smell of the grease paint the actors used potent in the air, while various costumes lay around. The air was full of possibilities.

Outside of the dressing room he discovered corridors which he cautiously ventured along to investigate. Then the stage lay before him, with its scenery and props and wires running along the floor like snakes, which would feed the high powered lights

that now stood lifeless.

At the side of the stage were steps that led down to the rows of seats for the audience. Father stroked the red plush of the tip-up seats, remembering fondly the days so long ago now, when he and Margaret would go to the theatre or ballet when they were first married. How he missed those days---he wouldn't, of course, admit that to anyone, but alone, here in this theatre, he could at least admit it to himself.

Sighing, he walked up the aisle to the back of the theatre and through the push/swing doors. Here was the ticket office and the walls covered again with photos and posters. The doors were closed and bolted, so Father looked through the glass windows. Outside it was now, present day and a street he knew so well.

Turning his back to the door he leaned heavily on it, and mopped his brow. The reality of all this he saw at once, this was a way he could to Above from time to time unnoticed. He would return Below now, in order to make plans to return here and he would use the props and makeup to produce his own disguise. The world was his oyster, and no longer his jail.



A week passed before Father could make his return trip and it felt to him like a lifetime. Meanwhile, Vincent went to speak to Catherine on her balcony on an urgent matter.

Tap, Tap, he tapped his claws on the glass of her balcony door. Catherine, who had been asleep, woke and dashed to join Vincent. Opening the door quickly she came face to face with Vincent.

"What's wrong?" she urged, a worried look on her face.

"It's Father," he said sadly.

"Is he ill, Vincent?" she asked, taking his hands into hers.

"No, I don't believe he's ill, but I am worried about him," he explained.

"Tell me," Catherine begged.

"He asked me to find some old maps."

"Of where, Vincent?"

"Of tunnels beyond our boundary," he explained.

"Really!"

"He said he was thinking of extending the boundary, to accommodate our growing community."

"But you don't think that is the real reason, right?" her face was now very close to his.

"True, Catherine, and since I gave him the old maps, he has disappeared three times."

"Disappeared?" her voice now rose in alarm.

"Yes, for hours at a time." Vincent left Catherine and paced the balcony.

"Did he say where he's been?"

"I didn't ask, I didn't want to worry him, or alert him to the fact I am worried." He stopped and took hold of her hand again.

"What can I do?" she asked.

"I don't know, but we have to do something."

"Leave it with me, Vincent, I'll think of something."



Father sat in the theatre's dressing room, at the dressing table, the wig patted into place. Then he added the thicker eyebrows and long beard and the transformation was complete for his first trip from the theatre.

As Father opened the theatre doors to the outside world, nobody took a second glance as Jacob Wells took his place on the sidewalk with the shoppers. This was to be the first of many visits Above, which gave him so much joy. To escape Above for a short while, and then return Below, he suddenly had the best of both worlds, worlds which he loved so very much, with every fibre of his body.



"Mary my dear, what a wonderful job you have done on my old tie," said Father as he checked over the alteration.

"Go on with you, Jacob. It only needed a stitch here and there," she admitted, embarrassed at his gratefulness.

"It looks like new," his fingers stroked the tie.

"But why do you need a tie, Jacob? You never, well rarely go Above, do you?" she encouraged him.

"Well.....come and sit by me Mary," he patted the seat next to him. Obediently Mary sat next to the man she had adored for the last 20 years or more.

"I've been thinking Mary, that maybe we ought to spend some time together.....like Catherine and Vincent!" he said as he

looked into her flushed face.

"Jacob, I can't believe this."

"Wouldn't you like to go Above and walk in the park and go to the theatre?"

"Stop, stop," she pleaded.

"Don't you want this?" he asked, a little hesitantly.

"More than anything, but have you forgotten, you're wanted by the Un-American Committee, and my family still look for me. We're exiles, Jacob, outcasts, and we belong Below. We have such a good life now, lets not spoil it all by acting foolishly."

"But what if I told you we could go Above as often as we wanted and nobody would notice us?"

"How can this be?" Mary leaned close to Jacob and covered his hand with hers.

"Tell me you would do this once, to please an old man," his eyes twinkling with delight.

"Well, it is very tempting," she had to confess.

"Good, that's agreed," he jumped in with his reply.

"It is?"

"Tonight when the children are settled, come to my chamber," excitement could be clearly heard in his voice.

"Until tonight then.....Jacob," and at that Mary hurried out to make plans.



"Radcliffe," Joe Maxwell said aloud, "you have a call on line two."

"Thanks Joe," Catherine smiled as she lifted the receiver and held it to her ear.

"Cathy?"

"Hi Jenny."

"Sorry to call you at work but I've got two tickets for the theatre, fancy sharing them, old pal?"

"When is it, Jen?" Catherine asked excitedly.

"Tonight," she quipped.

"Tonight? That's a bit short notice."

"Are you seeing.....er.....what's his name?"

"Vincent, his name is Vincent, and no, I'm not seeing him tonight."

"So we're going out, right?"

"I guess so," Catherine's eyes lit up at the chance to go visit the theatre.

"I'll pick you up at 7:30 and be ready."

"Sure, thanks Jen," then Catherine hung up the phone. She grinned to herself then she glanced across and saw her boss busy on his computer. She hid her grin, not wanting him to see her joy.

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The day wore on and finally all was ready.

"Ah, there you are Mary," Father's voice was gentle.

"You look nice Jacob, seems strange to see you in topline

clothes."

"You look lovely as ever Mary," he replied, and Mary coloured up with a girlish blush.

"Come, lets go," Father said, as he pushed a handkerchief in his top pocket.

"But where, Jacob?"

"We're going to the theatre, I have tickets." He handed Mary the two tickets for 'Dear Liar' at the Grand Rialto Theatre, seats 28 and 29.

"Jacob, this sounds wonderful," tears filled her eyes.

"Come, we must get underway," he pleaded with urgency.

Together they left his chamber and made for the east side area and down endless dark tunnels.

"Are you sure this is the right way?" Mary asked worriedly as they didn't seem likely to house a theatre down here.

"Trust me Mary dear, trust me," he urged.

At last the now familiar tunnel area came into view for Father and he stopped.

"Where on earth are we, Jacob?" Mary begged.

"At the theatre, don't you recognize a theatre when you see one?" His old eyes twinkled with boyish mischief.

"This is a joke, isn't it, Jacob?" her voice was now sad, as her spirits dropped, thinking her night at the theatre would never happen.

"Give me your hand," he said as reassuringly as possible.

Obediently she did his bidding, and he led them to the rock wall. Mary cringed as her face and body were suddenly only a fraction from the damp wall, but he'd asked her to trust him, and she did with all her heart. As they stepped through the wall, Mary held his hand so tight her knuckles went white.

"How on earth did we do that, Jacob?" she said in wonder.

"Don't ask, I really don't know," he confessed honestly.

"But I.....?" Mary stammered.

"I found all this a few weeks ago, and it has opened up a whole new world to me," he confessed.

"But I.....?"

"Sit down here Mary and put on one of these wigs, like I'm doing, then quickly follow me, because the play's already to start!"

As they left the dressing room, Jacob held her thin little hand in his and lead her down the passages to the theatre itself. The house lights were already down and the curtain was going up, so the lights on the stage shone directly onto the first few rows of the audience, lighting their way to seats 28 and 29 on row C.



At the intermission the lights went up and some people left their seats to buy ice creams and popcorn or visit the bathroom. But some stayed behind like Mary and Jacob.

Suddenly Mary's hand covered Jacob's and squeezed it tightly, as she indicated for Jacob to look at the two people directly in front of them---Vincent's Catherine and her friend Jenny.

Speaking in a tiny whisper, Mary said, "We must leave or be found out," she urged.

"No Mary, we stay," he said firmly in a whisper in her ear.

Just then, the programme on Mary's knee slipped to the floor and drifted under the seat of Jenny. Mary leaned forward to recapture it and the movement made first Jenny then Catherine turn around.

"Can I help you?" Jenny asked Mary.

"My programme has gone under your seat." Mary said in a newly acquired accent. Leaning down, Catherine picked up the programme and handed it to Mary.

"There you are," she smiled directly at the gentleman, handing over the programme.

"Thank you my dear," he said also in a disguised voice.

"My pleasure," said Catherine smiling.

Then Jenny turned around and offered them sweets. This broke the ice and soon the four were talking none stop. The bell rang and everyone returned to their seats as the house lights went down and the curtain went up once more.

"Phew!" Jacob said in Mary's ear.

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As the actors took their final bows, the occupants of seats 28 and 29 left and made their way down the corridor to the dressing room, depositng their wigs and other items, then with agile speed walked through the wall, and were once again back in their tunnel world, below Central Park.



The following night, Vincent met Catherine in the park, as New York slept.

"Did you enjoy the theatre with Jenny?" he inquired.

"Yep, it was great. It was packed, house full and we met such a lovely couple who were sitting behind us, Vincent. We talked like old friends throughout the interval, and the strangest thing Vincent, I felt I knew both of them, yet I'd never seen either of them before."

"Father's behaviour is still very odd," he confided.

"How odd?"

"He's found a tunnel that runs behind the Grand Rialto Theatre."

"That's the theatre Jenny and I went to last night."

"Really Catherine?" Vincent found all this even more strange.....

"This is so odd," she said.

"Next time Father acts strange, or up to something, I will follow him, and we'll only then unravel this mystery." Vincent promised Catherine, and she readily agreed.



They did not have long to wait, as one evening a week later Father told Vincent he didn't want to be disturbed as he had a lot of paperwork to sort, and Vincent agreed. Then he contacted Catherine to ask her to come Below. Together they laid in wait for Father to leave his chamber, and when he did they followed him at a safe distance.

"Where is this place?" Catherine asked quietly.

"It's not far now Catherine," he assured her, remembering the parchment scroll.

Then suddenly Vincent put out his hand to restrain her, as the light on the tunnel wall revealed Father had stopped also. They watched him stand tall, shoulders back, then walk into the wall and was gone.

"Did you see that Vincent?" Catherine said amazed.

"I did, but my eyes won't accept it."

"Come, lets check it out," she urged him excitedly.

Together they prodded and poked the wall, but it was unrelenting, solid and held no opening for them.

"Why?" Catherine asked perplexed.

"Some things we are unable to offer up an explanation for, they are beyond our grasp."

"But we saw him go through solid rock, Vincent!"

"Did we Catherine, or did we see what we wanted to see?"

"I know what I saw, Vincent." Just then, Father walked back into the tunnel.

"Vincent, Catherine, I thought I heard your voices."

"Father, this is....."

"Magical!" Father smiled.

"Yes indeed, magical," Vincent's voice was soft and gentle.

"I have found something, Vincent, that can and will enrich your life and Catherine's, also mine and Mary's."

"Tell me, Father? Please," she urged.

"Come children, and as we walk along, back to our home tunnels, I'll try to explain it all to you."

Father walked between them as he started to unfold the wonders of the past weeks to them.

He told them it was beyond his explanation and that magic was at work here, of that there was no doubt. But he said that

"Sometimes one has to accept unconditionally the unexplained."



As the weeks and months unfolded into years, this magical place became their special place. This was a door opening to offer Vincent and his Catherine, as well as Jacob and his Mary, a rare chance to escape the chains that bound their lives daily, to enrich it so much. It set new boundaries beyond their wildest dreams. Could forces beyond their control give them this happy life, as they slipped through the wall? And could the theatre maybe know they were playing host to love in its purest form, to such special people?

Whatever the reason or logic, love has no boundaries and will always find a way/ Sometimes we simply have to accept the unexpected.

"When you really want love, you will find it waiting for you."

AS TIME GOES BY

GWEN LORD

The dark eerie tunnels lay bare their emptiness containing a deep chill. Above, the evening mist gathered and swirled around and around, casting shadows across Central Park. Only the tapping Below, at irregular intervals broke the silence, as messages and answers travelled along the miles of tunnels, networked beneath the hub of busy New York. There echoes and vibrations conjuring up a symphony that only the trained ear could appreciate or understand. To Pascal, and his father before him, these sounds were life itself, even the sentries found a magic in their different sounds, as the tapping travelled from different parts of the city, coming together in a grand finale which only the chiselled rock face of the tunnels was privileged to witness, truly a symphony of unique sounds.

These imposing tunnels, with their rough surfaces and mould, were a good deterrent to the would-be intruder into this secret world, this haven of outcasts of today's society. Set at intervals along these dark chilly tunnels, were torch-like beacons, driven into place by the early tunnel dwellers, their glow was as if from another age, to highlight the way for the tunnel dweller, as he or she went about their daily duties, or to guide them 'home' after a visit Above, back to their new found Shangri-La.

Muffled voices now penetrated the still air, as if expectant for more, to reveal the source of the intrusion, moments passed and the voices became clearer, it was no longer a secret. These walls had grown accustomed to this good humoured and happy volley of talk over the years of this nightly vigil, as slowly, oh so slowly, two cloaked figures emerged out of the darkness. Lights from the

torches picked up the gold in their long hair and swaying cloaks, which moved as one as they walked along like pendulums. Both these men were like warriors, above average height for even tall men, broadly built, truly a force to be reckoned with, medieval and foreboding. But as Father had said over the years, so often 'NEVER JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER'.

Directly under one of the torches their faces clear now, declared them to be father and son. Vincent was still the tall proud man he had always been, 6'6 tall with movement as graceful as a Panther. Peter was now 24 years old, and he was even taller than his father, but each wore their hair the same, dressed identically, the only visible difference was Peter's face, so like his mother, Catherine. He had her soft and gentle grey/green eyes, that were hypnotic and held your attention. Father and son toured the outer tunnels every night about this time, midnight, as they returned from their walk in the shadows of Central Park. Now all was secure as they returned Below, the tunnels could sleep, knowing all was well.

"Vincent.....Vincent my boy, is that you?" a now frail voice broke the silence. Without a word passing between them, the two men entered the chamber the voice had come from.

"Father! Are you unwell? What troubles you at this late hour?" Vincent asked as he went to turn up the wick of the lamp. Peter, with both grace and speed, rushed to the bedside.

"Grandfather, what is it that troubles you?"

"I need my tablet, I dropped it, now it seems to have rolled out of reach," he pulled the crocheted shawl tighter around his thin shoulders.

"I'll look for you, Grandfather," Peter crouched down and in an instant had the tablet safely in the old man's outstretched hand.

"There you are," he smiled lovingly, his head to one side, so reminiscent of his father.

"Ah! Thank you Devin.....where is Mary? She's late coming to bed. Spends too long tucking the little ones in, she'll be chilled to the bone when she gets back," he muttered to himself, as he put the glass of water down. Vincent went over to his father and pulled up the comforter, then placed a tender kiss on his forehead, while Peter turned down the lamp once more. Then without another word, both left the chamber, to continue their journey to their own chambers, not too far away.

"Poor Grandfather, he hasn't been the same since Grandma died," a sadness tinged the deep velvet voice.

"No, he truly loved Mary, her loss has touched him deeply, he gets so mixed up, we must be patient with him, he cannot help it, old age will come to us all, we must guide him safely through this stage and make his days a joy, we must ignore the imperfections." His son nodded agreement.

"Well, I'll say goodnight, my son." They stood facing each other, then hugged and finally parted, as they made their way to their own homes, within the tunnels.

Stooping as he entered the chamber, Vincent sighed..... was it him, or did these evening walks cover more ground than they used to? He unclipped his cloak and hung it on the hook by the entrance, then closing the curtain silently, he smiled as he contemplated the facts.....'I must be getting old.' Here he was a Grandfather himself, head of his family, with children and

responsibilities, how wondrous his life had been. Yet he could remember so clearly, when he and Catherine nearly didn't have a life together, when it all seemed 'an impossible dream'. He thanked God every day for the miracle of Catherine's love and devotion, he was truly blessed.

"It is I who is truly blessed, Vincent." Her voice interrupted the silence. His head shot up as Catherine turned over sleepily in their bed to face him, her beautiful eyes found his, in a moment of deep understanding.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, my love, you felt my thoughts through our Bond, I'm sorry," his arms went out in apology. Then he went to the bed and sat down, and taking her hand in his, he turned it over, slowly he bent his head and kissed the palm repeatedly. A shiver went through her, it always did when he showed this kind of affection, and Vincent was well aware of what it did to his beloved.....

"Oh Vincent, you are so romantic, a real Renaissance man, if I didn't know better, I'd swear you were making a pass at me," she chuckled mischievously.

"Catherine," he sighed, "would I do that?"

"Hmmmmm."

"And what does 'hmmmmm' mean?" he whispered in her ear. She could feel his hot breath on her cheek as he planted butterfly kisses on her eyelids and nose.

"Maybe you're getting past it," she chided, as a chuckle once again escaped her lips. Teasing Vincent was a pure joy, which she loved doing.

"Really!.....Well, we'll see about that, shall we." Quickly he tore at his clothes until they lay in a heap where they fell, at last he was rid of them, then his boots. As he quickly climbed into their large soft bed to be with his beloved.

"Help!.....Rape!.....Help!" she pretended to cry, but Vincent's lips soon silenced her. After all these years of marriage, their love was still special enough that at the end of each day, they thanked the gods for allowing them such a 'Happy Life', then entwined in each other's arms they drifted off into.....near sleep.

"Vincent?"

"Hmmmmmm?"

"Have you ever wondered.....?"

"Wondered what, Catherine?" he whispered near her ear.

"How many times we've made love," he felt her smile.

"Catherine!" she never ceased to amaze him.

"No Vincent," she turned within his embrace until their faces were a heartbeat away. "I meant it, in all these 25 years of our marriage....."

"It isn't 25 years, my love, until next week."

Catherine opened her mouth to speak, then sighed, re-thought the situation, then continued after rephrasing it.

"Somewhere, there is a total, a grand total.....it must be..... oh! Vincent, it must be thousands and thousands....." she chuckled at his embarrassment.

"Shhh, my love," he kissed her lips, "whatever the number is.....it

is nowhere near enough!"



Elliot looked exasperated as he and Gus battled once more over his future.

"Dad, I'm 22 years old, I'm not a kid anymore.....why can't you see it my way, just this once?" he pleaded.

"Your mom and I want you to have all the chances that lay open to you, as my.....no.....our son." Elliot paced the kitchen/dining area, obviously desperate to get his feelings across to Gus. Amy came in from her shopping trip, loaded with arms full of assorted packages, but when she heard the raised voices, she knew instantly what it was about, again!

"You two, you are so alike its unbelievable, you're both pig-headed, stupid, and arrogant. Look at you both, like two kids.....grow up!" she teased.

Elliot ran his right hand through his hair as he put his left hand in the trouser pocket, then with a sigh, left Gus without another glance and went straight to his beloved Amy, his wife of now 23 years.

"The Queen of 'The Greasy Spoon', she returns," he recited in a broken Italian accent. This never failed to melt Amy's anger. Then leaning down he nuzzled a kiss in her neck. "Okay, you win.....for now.....but you two have to stop this, before you destroy all we have."

Then as Elliot left the room, Gus strolled over to his Mom. Amy watched him as he approached, he was so like his Dad, that it was like going back in time to when Elliot was a young man. She

noticed, not for the first time, that he had the same clean cut image, wore clothes with the same flair, all neatly packaged with shoulder length hair that fell on his shirt collar in the same way. There was also the unmistakable dimple in his chin and that roguish smile which lit up his eyes, no wonder he was the local heartthrob, Amy thought to herself.

"Mom, Dad won't hear my side of it.....why is he always so certain he is right?" Elliot returned to the room at that moment, his eyes blazing.

"Because I am. I can give you power that you would never have dreamt possible, things I never had at your age.....I know you don't agree with all I do.....but I do love you, Gus, and I am so proud of you. Please give up being a nickel and dime lawyer and join me in the Burch Empire.....Burch & Son," he held out his hand to Gus.

"Dad, you have not heard a word I've said."

"I sure as hell have and I don't like.....I won't accept your answer, when I know what I offer you is best." Elliot ran his hands through his hair again in desperation.

"See Mom, it's impossible!" and with that he dashed from the room.

"Where the hell are you going?" demanded Elliot.

"Out."

"Don't walk away from me....." Elliot dashed out of the room in quick pursuit of his son. "Where are you going, I asked you, who is it tonight, eh?" Turning to face his Dad, he said in a now softer voice.

"Oh, she's nice, Dad, really nice," and he patted his father's arm.

"Do we get to know her name?" he quizzed. Elliot smiled a knowing look at Amy, she knew he was now having fun with his son.

"Dad, I'm late, and Lucy will be waiting.....please."

"Oh! Oh! So we have a name, I do believe we could know this Lucy, Amy, she's the Mayor's niece, right? Well done, at least you're moving in the right circles, and you will make a lot of good connections there." Elliot's eyes were now full of pride for his son's choice.

"Sorry Dad, that Lucy is a spoiled brat and a bore. No, this is another Lucy."

"Oh! And who is she, do we know her, who is her father, is he someone I should know?" he demanded.

"Dad, do you really have to have her pedigree?" Gus looked good in his clean jeans that fitted him well, and the white shirt looked good against his tanned skin, then he swung a blue sweater around his shoulder. "See you later, folks," and he was gone whistling into the distance. Elliot tried again, he never liked to lose, and he he was, losing.

"Where are you taking her, do you want some money? Here, 100, 200, how much do you want?" his voice rose so Gus could hear him.

"Keep it, Dad, it's a walk in the park." And with that, he was gone, swallowed up into the night.

As the room now was silent and Elliot saw the sadness on Amy's face, he strolled across the short distance to enfold her in his

arms. They both sighed, his lips kissed her hair, then she looked up into his eyes and they both froze at the same moment.

"Oh Elliot, are you thinking what I am thinking?"

"Yes, it couldn't be.....our Lucy.....Cathy's daughter, could it? Oh dear God no, not that I have anything against her, them, bit if he got serious, if there were children, our grandchildren.....they would be....."

"Shhhhh! Elliot, we will have to wait and see, we must play it cool in order to win his trust, stop all this fighting with him, believe me, it will be all right."

"Hmmmmm," was all Elliot could say.



Vincent had taken himself off down to the Mirror Pool, a place he could always count on for time to himself. Everyone knew he needed these times, ever since he was a small boy, they were a time to reflect, to reason with, to make plans for, to dream. And today was no exception, the waters rippled almost silently, and the light from the torches cause flashes of colours to play on the surface of the water. Then a sound as someone did invade this private moment disturbed his thoughts.

"Mouse sorry, didn't meant to intrude." Looking up, Vincent smiled at his old friend.

"Please sit with me, really, I would enjoy your company," he held out his hand in a manner that was an invitation.

"Good, Mouse like that," then quickly he sat down across from his friend. "This place, good to think in," he smiled knowingly.

"Yes, we have spent many happy hours here, you and I over the years."

"Do you remember, Vincent, when Catherine was sick with Peter and you.....very sick. William got cross with you, thought you hated his cooking." A smile crossed Vincent's face, at the memory of those early days of marriage.

"I remember, and all the ketchup, on everything," he laughed. "I have always disliked it and yet at that time it was all I wanted."

"William was friend to Mouse too, William liked Arthur."

"He was a friend to us all, he was always so kind to Catherine, she would tease him so much. He never married, and he didn't have a family."

"William had special friend once.....Holly, Mouse saw them together up top sometimes, she Helper from shop on Catherine's block."

"I did not know that," Vincent confided, amazed he had missed that.

"Vincent not only one to know things," he grinned.

"I wonder why he never married?" Vincent said, half to himself.

"Mouse know, no bed big enough for William and wife." Vincent laughed out loud. "True, Mouse told William, William agreed.....said bed better hold just him, said Father get mad if bed broke." They both laughed at this, as they thought of their friend. How they missed him, his happy smile and his wonderful chocolate chip cookies.

"Why did he have to die and leave us?" Mouse turned all serious.

"Death comes to us all, Mouse, in time."

"Not fair, William was only sick two days, made Mouse sad."

"It was his heart, it gave up on him, I miss him too, you know."

Vincent took his friend's hand in his. "We must be grateful for the time he was with us, to fill our lives, to be there when we needed him most." They sat in silence for a while, then Vincent spoke again.

"I miss Devin so much, we were so close when we were growing up. We would go on such adventures. He tried so hard to make up to me for all the things I missed when I could not go Above in the sunshine. Father would not allow it."

"What happened? Here one day, gone the next, no one tell Mouse, Mouse felt it must be Mouse's fault."

"No! No! Oh Mouse, all these years you have thought that, I am sorry, I thought you knew, Devin mixed with the wrong company, he enjoyed the thrill of danger, Father had warned him so often, as I did, but he didn't want to hear. Then one day he got mixed up with the 'SILKS', the ones that held me captive, so long ago. But this time they got their revenge, Devin lay injured for so long with no help, that when help did finally arrive, it was too late to save his legs. The wheelchair was the part he couldn't accept.....one day when he was alone, sat near the Abyss, he took off the brake." A tear filled Vincent's eyes, as the pain of it was still so hard to bare. "Mitch is now their leader, he knows never to come Below, he will never return."

"Mouse never knew this" he said, wiping a tear away with the back of his hand.

"Come, we will be missed, and I believe we are to have company

Below, we must be on our way."

"Vincent, we still hang out.....right?"

"Yes, my friend, we do."

//

"Hmmmmmmmm, I like it, it feels good, better then I thought it would," Jamie confided in her husband. "To think for all those years I lived below ground, like a little animal, and now here I am practically living in the clouds. How many floors up are we, Joe?"

"Err, 36, 37, give or take a few," he laughed. "Sure have to hand it to Burch to build 'em high" he continued, the cheeky grin was still there. Outwardly Joe had changed little over the years, since Catherine Chandler had entered his life, and knowing her had altered the whole direction of his life forever. He was now District Attorney, also Deputy Mayor, and on every board of directors. He had gained a reputation as a fair and just man, one to be trusted. But all this had taken its toll on his dark curly hair, which was now sprinkled with white, making him look very distinguished, and still a very attractive man, by any standards.

"I don't expect Peter will come to visit us here Joe, he hates heights, not a bit like his father in that way. I can't believe Vincent climbed 18 floors every night and down again, for three years to see Catherine."

"Yep, five will get you ten, he wished she'd lived in a second floor apartment" both nodded in agreement and laughed.

"Don't forger Joe, we are invited to supper tonight, Below, 7:30 sharp."

"I'll remember.....what time was it?" he laughed, and Jamie

playfully hit Joe's backside with a cushion.



"Da, Da,.....Da, Da," the sweet little voice repeated, "Da, Da."

"I'm here little one, what troubles you so?" the soft cultured voice replied. Slowly the sound of a baby growl could be heard, as the effort involved, made this possible. Peter looked up as his son finally made it to the haven of his father's arms, on very unsteady little legs.

"There, wait till your grandfather hears of this, he will be so proud of Ben." Then lifting his son onto his knee, he held him close and kissed the top of his head, nuzzling into a halo of golden curls.

"What am I going to be proud of?" Vincent's immense frame suddenly filled the doorway.

"Father, he walked again, unaided, his legs are uncertain but he was determined to do it. I felt it in him, I knew, I felt him drawing strength from me."

"I had these same feelings when you were much the same age, I felt you telling me without words."

"Hmmmmm."

"I felt your joy my son, that is why I came by, and also to avoid your mother for a while, she's not well pleased with Lucy."

"Why is that?"

"Lucy has another date with Gus Burch, Catherine feels as long as Elliot remains in the dark over their love for each other, that trouble will only result. Elliot Burch and his son are an issue I want

to stay clear of, so I left your mother trying to get Lucy to encourage Gus to tell his parents, after all, marriage is in the air."

"Marriage!" Peter's head shot up.

"I believe so," Vincent smiled.

"I see reticence, Father."

"I see trouble, Peter."

"But the Burches have always been our friends, Father."

"Yes, this is true,.....friends,.....but marriage would make us family, and families have children, and....."

"Now I see, you are right, Father, to want to prolong the day of judgement."

"When this day dawns, I will need you beside me, for your support, Peter."

"You need not ask that, I am your son, you are my Father, we are one." Little Ben decided to grab some of the attention, and his eyes filled with tears and he cried.

"And here, Father, is the one who will one day take over down here, your grandchild."

"One day, when he is a man, fully grown, he will rule this place Below with love and understanding. These tunnels and chambers, ageless in time, will see history repeating itself, as Benjamin Wells, with his features inherited from me, lives his life Below. I wish for him a 'HAPPY LIFE' and for him to find his Catherine, I will not live to see this take place, but know that I will always be close by."



"Mother.....Mom, please don't worry, I promise you I'll talk with Gus and will make him see, we have to tell Uncle Elliot and Aunt Amy, I promise you, trust me." Lucy pleaded with Catherine.

"I do, it's just I want it to be perfect for you, pet."

"Why are you smiling?"

"Oh, I was just thinking, when Elliot and Amy will no longer be Aunt and Uncle, they will be Mon-in-Law and Dad-in-Law."

Looking at each other, they both burst out laughing until tears ran freely down their faces, then both lapsed into silence as Catherine continued to brush her daughter's long hair.

"What was it like, Mom, you and Dad, wasn't there doubts? Didn't you wonder, what did your friends think, what.....?"

"Hey, hey, hold it right there, first of all, it was never easy. We loved each other straight from the start, but your father kept us apart for three years. He wouldn't let our relationship progress because of how he looked and the uncertainty of who he was."

"So, what happened?"

"What happened was, I gave him all the love I had through our Bond, so he knew in the end that it was him above all others I wanted and desired."

"What did Grandfather Wells say to that?"

"He tried everything to stop us, but in the end he could see his efforts were useless, and he started to accept me. Then, when he heard I was pregnant, he was livid and said we hadn't taken enough care, and that the child could look like Vincent and to put

a child through that, was totally irresponsible."

"So, what happened then?"

"We got married in secret."

"You're kidding.....in secret? It's like a best seller."

"Yes, there was just the two of us, Uncle Mouse was our witness, then later we had a huge celebration. William baked two wedding cakes, as the first he dropped! From that day I've been accepted, loved and totally fulfilled."

"When we were born, did you worry or wonder how we'd look, tell me Mom, please."

"Lucy, my precious, I wanted you both, and how you looked wasn't an issue, we wanted our children, and we wanted to love you so much, the product of our wonderful love for each other." Looking up Catherine saw tears running down Lucy's cheeks.

"Oh, don't cry!"

"I'm not unhappy, I'm crying because I'm happy, you and Dad are my world."

"Oh, you are so special." Leaning forward they hugged each other. "Better?"

"Yep," answered Lucy, "when we were born, how did.....we look?"

"Oh, pink, new, cute, cuddly, looked adorable," Catherine teased.

"Did we have.....?"

"I think I can see where this is going now, okay, you win. Both my children had hints of their Father, but mostly of me. You had your

father's claws, only on your hands, you conceal them well with nail varnish. But Peter had claws only on his feet, which as you know, clipped back, allows him to wear normal boots like your Father wears. You both had masses of golden curls. When you went to sleep and you were happy, you would purr, but apart from that you were normal all American kids."

"So, when did Peter change then?" asked a very interested daughter.

"That was when he was about 15, I remember, it was the very day you got your period. Peter came in upset from the pool, saying the kids were getting at him, being so hairy."

"And, was he?"

"Funny, until then, we honestly hadn't noticed it, but yes, he was, and so we started to keep a check on both of you. Vincent watched over Peter, I watched you."

"And, and.....?"

"You, my dear at puberty, became a woman, but you also developed a terrible temper, so bad was it that if the slightest thing annoyed you, you would fly into a wild cat rage, where no one dared go near you."

"I remember that time."

"Don't we all, it was a dark time for us all. Until your Grandfather Wells arranged for a friend of his to see you, an old and wise Chinese doctor, who taught you the art of self-control, an art in China, and to this day your temper is controlled."

"I still get knotted up inside if I'm mad."

"When do you feel the need to get so out of control these days?"

"Oh Mom, it's nothing, I just get mad with Gus and the way he won't stand up to that arrogant Elliot Burch."

"That arrogant man could so easily have been your Father!" Catherine smiled.

"Oh No! Oh Mom, thank you for not marrying him." Both found this very funny and dissolved into fits of laughter once more. "Tell me about the changes in Peter."

"Yeah okay, well, your Father noticed that he was growing at an alarmingly fast rate. Within just a few weeks, he had gone from level with your father's shoulder to one inch above his head, then it suddenly stopped. Next we noticed that nothing in the clothes he wore, normal topside clothes fitted him anymore, so Mary, your Grandmother made him the same kind of clothes she made your Father. They had to be a little bigger for Peter, and Olivia helped her. So the next step that came along seemed so right, he decided to wear his hair long, just like your Father, and bit by bit, he fashioned himself to be the shadow of his Father, and the Bond bound them together as one."

"Is there more, Mom?"

"Yes, his body started to have a covering of fur, not much at first, then as he got older it went even thicker, but his face never altered, it remained like mine. His training as a teacher, and then these changes in him, made him decide to be a teacher Below, just like his Father, and in so doing, found his vocation in life."

"Yes, he is lovely with the little ones."

"How did he then meet Ruth if he didn't go Above often?"

"Oh, that was easy, Ruth was Joe and Jamie's daughter, and your Father and I were their friends, long before either of us were married. Then we had you two, and they had Ruth, so you all grew up together, you were all like one big family. Then when Ruth was ten years old, they sent her away to a school that Joe felt would give her the best start in life, one where she could meet all the right people, mix with a bit of class, something he never had himself. She returned one day, the perfect 'woman' and the first thing she wanted to do was to go and visit her old and dear friends Below. Within half an hour of being home, she was running across the park to the drainage tunnel, she ran faster and faster down the tunnels, and straight into Peter's arms, and has stayed there ever since."

"Did they mind, Jamie and Joe, that Ruth and Peter were dating. Edward's parents are sure to be really mad with Gus and me," she looked worried.

"No, there was never a moment when that came across, they were delighted."

"But their baby, Mom, it is.....it is....."

"Ben is like your Father, yes."

"Do they mind?"

"They wanted it that way, would you believe it, my boss, my number one tormentor of old, cried with joy when the baby was born, because he felt he owed your Father, somehow he felt he could never repay a debt, and the baby did just that. This was something that money couldn't buy, the ultimate, a legacy to the tunnel world, to see it continued unhindered, and he, Joe, had helped, he had passed on his genes to create this, and he was so

proud."

"Oh Mom, that's lovely, I hope Gus's Dad feels that way about our baby."

"YOU.....W H A T!?" Catherine choked.

"Oops!.....sort of slipped out.....yes, I'm pregnant, and Gus is scared sick to tell his parents, as life there is one battle ground."

"That prospect looks like fun."

"What shall we do, Mom?"

"I think, Lucy, this is where I should help, this is an area i can deal with, I'll go and see Elliot, leave it to me."

"Oh please, you are a Mom in a million."

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The clanging on the pipes woke everyone up, as the message said 'Grandfather's study now'. Soon groups of tunnel dwellers appeared at intervals along the maze of miles of tunnels below Central Park. Quickly these groups made their way in one direction, and that was to the old man's study, where they knew they would find Vincent waiting for them. That is what the continued message repeated. The hour was late, 4:27am, but young and old alike, in their patched and worn nightwear, wrapped up well against the bleak air in the tunnels so late in the night, one by one they assembled in the study. Some carried torches, some candles, but all carried the knowledge that this was what they had been dreading.

Vincent stood tall, but his shoulders drooped much, with the weight of the deep sorrow he now bore. His normally bright blue

eyes held tears, as he tried to find the words to speak to them all, now all assembled. Their worried chatter died down, as Vincent looked up at them all.

"Thank you.....for coming so quickly, but the matter is urgent. These things don't come to order" he paused, "my Father.....Jacob Wells, the man we all love and know as FATHER,.....is dying, His time is drawing close, it cannot be long now, I felt you would want to see him before he leaves this life for.....ever." Sobs from the women and children filled the air and their muttering of sorrow blended together. Then all fell silent.

"Come, follow me, be very quiet, please stay until he goes, this is his wish and mine."

Louder sobs could be heard, while the men blew their noses into their handkerchiefs.



The bed chamber was alive with light from endless candles, no shadows lurked here today, only the sound of the old station clock, keeping and marking time broke the silence. In the corner of the beautiful mahogany bed, lay a familiar face, a much loved man. Now that face, so wrinkled with age, and his frail body, well wrapped and protected, awaited the inevitable, as death avoids no man, not even FATHER!

Catherine sat perched on the bed, holding the thin sinewy hand, which gripped her hand as if afraid to let go. When everyone was within the chamber, Vincent swept in, with the swiftness of a cat and the grace befitting this place of grief. He joined Peter at the opposite side, together they stood and watched. Vincent then reached into the pocket of his cloak, and took out a folded piece of

paper. Slowly he unfolded the small piece of parchment, his large fur covered hands shaking as he prepared himself for the task ahead, which he had to see through. Looking up into Catherine's eyes, now also full of tears, she held the moment with Vincent, as he drew strength from her through their Bond.

He started to read aloud-----

"OUT OF YOUR WHOLE LIFE GIVE BUT A MOMENT!
ALL OF YOUR LIFE THAT HAS GONE BEFORE,
ALL TO COME AFTER IT, SO YOU IGNORE,
SO MAKE PERFECT THE PRESENT, CONDENSE,
IN A RAPTURE OF RAGE, FOR PERFECTIONS ENDOWMENT!
THOUGHT AND FEELING AND SOUL AND SENSE,
MERGED IN A MOMENT WHICH GIVES ME AT LAST
YOU AROUND ME FOR ONCE, YOU BENEATH ME, ABOVE
ME----
ME, SURE THAT, DESPITE OF TIME FUTURE, TIME PAST,
THIS TICK OF LIFETIME'S ONE MOMENT YOU LOVE ME!
HOW LONG SUCH SUSPENSION MAY LINGER? AH, SWEET,
THE MOMENT ETERNAL---JUST THAT AND NO MORE---
WHEN ECSTASY'S UTMOST WE CLUTCH AT THE CORE,
WHILE CHEEKS BURN, ARMS OPEN, EYES SHUT, AND LIPS
MEET!

Robert Browning 1812-89

All the time Vincent had been reading the lines, Father had been looking forward, now, as the clock continued to measure time, Father slowly made to sit up, Vincent eager to help, made this easy for him, then Father held out both of his hands, and a smile came across his face, the weariness now seemed to have gone, in its place a look of peace. All looked on in silence, even the children were totally silent.

"Mary, my dear, I've been looking for you.....so.....long..... I have.....missed you so much,.....so lonely without you, my dear."

Peter lurched forward, worried for his Grandfather. "Gran....." Vincent put his large hand on his son's arm, to stop him, whispering to him, he said.

"Leave him,.....she is here, can't you feel it, she has come for him,.....believe that.....it is true."

Then Jacob Wells closed his eyes for the last time, a lovely smile on his face. A chill wind blew through the chamber, that wasn't there before, which nearly blew out all the candles,..... then it was gone, Jacob Wells had gone home.



"Mr. Burch, there's a lady to see you," the voice from the next office announced.

"I told you Sandra, I wasn't to be disturbed." Elliot's polished but annoyed voice sounded.

"But, she says it is important."

"No Sandra, not today, make an appointment for next week."

"She says to tell you it's.....Catherine." A silence descended, then Elliot controlled himself.

"Send her in, and have some tea sent up."

"Very good, Mr. Burch."

The door opened and Catherine entered the office, retracing steps she had taken in the office so many times in the past, but it was 20 years since she was last here, and memories flooded back.

"Catherine.....Cathy, how are you, it must be.....all of a year? Come, sit down, is it a social call or is it some request for my help, with no explanation given?" he smiled knowingly.

"Elliot, that was a long time ago, fancy you remembering."

"A beautiful woman asking for drills and requisite equipment, and offering no logical reason helps to keep a memory alive." He grinned, "Would you like a drink before the tea arrives?"

"Yes Elliot, that would be nice."

"A Manhattan, if I remember correctly."

"You remembered right, I'm impressed."

"I could never forget anything to do with you, Cathy." Lowering her head slightly, so as he wouldn't see the colour rising in her cheeks.

"How is Lucy?"

"Fine, you know Lucy, forever the human fireball, keeps me on my toes."

"And Gus, is he all right?"

"Yes,.....well, he is fine, except he won't listen to a damn thing I tell him, he's so stubborn."

"Then he MUST take after you."

"Oh Cathy, how come you are always so right?" both laughed, remembering times past once again, of skeletons in cupboards.

"So what do i have the honour of this visit for, or am I expected to guess?"

"Oh Elliot, being a parent is very worthwhile, but it can break your heart, it can give you impossible dreams, it can hurt."

"Why do I have the feeling you are trying to cushion the blow, what's wrong?" She sighed deeply.

'It's my daughter, Lucy."

"How can I help?"

"Elliot, there is no easy way to tell you this, so I have volunteered to come here today, to help you accept what I am about to tell you."

"It's Gus, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is Gus, he has fallen in love with Lucy."

"LOVE?"

"Yes, he loves her."

"How can he, he's not seen much of her."

"No! Not so, he and Lucy have been dating for over six months now."

"Six months? How come I didn't know, couldn't he have told me,

why is there always secrets?"

"Would it have made any difference?"

"How do you mean, Cathy?"

"Elliot, they want to marry and....."

"NO.....NO....." his fist hit the desk, and he loosened the tie that threatened to choke him.

"Elliot, they are in love" she pleaded, her eyes full of tears.

"They can't be."

"Why not? You an expert on that too?" she stammered.

"Oh, nasty, Cathy, nasty."

"No Elliot, all you have to do is trust me."

"That's all I ever asked of you, remember, and that didn't work either."

"Elliot, you and I, we loved each other, but we weren't in love with each other, there is a difference. Now our children, from two happy marriages, want their slice of happiness, and now.....there is a child."

"You mean, Gus and Lucy.....are?" Elliot sat down, silent, he clenched his fists, and rested his head on them. Many moments passed, then Cathy got up and went around to the back of the desk and put both her hands on his shoulders. She felt a presence.

"Elliot, let it go, let them also have a life, and all your fears, let them go."

"Fear, what do you mean?"

"Fear, you are afraid that the genes of Vincent will show in your grandchild, don't deny it."

"So!"

"They know the facts, they know the score, they look below the surface, and accept this, why can't you? Here you have a chance to heal the rift with your son."

"How did you know ab.....?"

"To meet him halfway with this, the biggest thing in his life, this could be the only time you have to come together and cement a Bond of your own, for life. Think of him, think of them and not yourself, I'm sure Amy will see reason, you my dear Elliot MUST do this, please." She pleaded, as she kissed the top of his head. Then returning to her seat, she saw waiting for the turmoil in him to find peace, looking up, she saw his shoulder shaking, his eyes filled with tears, she reached across the desk and took his hand in hers, and held it tightly, oh so very tightly.

"Help me Cathy, please."

"Oh Elliot, of course I will."

"Why not come Below tonight, you and Amy, bring Gus. Vincent and I will have Lucy there also, then as a family we will set about helping them to set in motion their new found happiness, with the blessings of the four of us."

"Yes, we'll do that, thank you, Cathy." Just then the desk intercom buzzed. "Yes?" he snapped.

"Mrs. Burch is here."

"Send her in, Sandra."

"Very good."

The door opened, and in walked Amy, very much the business woman in her town outfit.

"Cathy, its been ages, how are you?" The two friends hugged each other, then Amy looked at Elliot.

"What on earth is the matter with you? You look like you have seen a ghost."

"I've not seen a ghost, but I have laid one to rest," Elliot confessed, "Amy, my dear, we are going to a wedding."

"A wedding? How exciting, who's? Anyone we know?"

"Gus.....our son is getting married.....to Lucy Wells, and there is more, we're going to be Grandparents."

BALCONY LOVER

GWEN LORD

"Father, tell me, am I going mad.....please, put my mind at rest," Vincent urged.

"Come, sit beside me, Vincent, open your heart, tell me your fear. I want to help you," his voice was strong and true, echoing that deep love he felt. Patting the worn but comfortable old chair, Father signalled to Vincent to sit near him. With a sigh, he sank into the softness of the upholstery, then, leaning forward, placed his large hand over that of his father's.

The light from the candle on the locker by his bed, reflected in the spectacles, as Father leaned across, to place them in their usual spot, at the end of his nose. Then, looking directly into his son's face, saw a sight that filled him with sadness. Gone was the calm protector of the tunnels, gone was the fearless warrior, this fine figure of a man was reduced to a shaking wreck, his face wet with endless tears shed, hands and body contorted with shaking, a wild look of fear in his eyes.

"Tell me, Vincent.....please," he urged.

A few moments passed before Vincent lifted his head, to look into the old man's eyes, there he found a safe harbour to put his anchor.

"Father," he hesitated. "Once again, the hours when I sleep, have been invaded with dreams that haunt me, they will not let me be, they play games with my heart, seeing my very soul on fire. It is all so real, Father. I can feel, I can see, I can touch, I can smell, I believe it to be true. I rejoice at such fortune, my heart sings with the pleasure it brings me, of all people, me.....then I awake, in

my chamber, alone.....then I weep for my lost dream of hope."

"Vincent, how long have you had these dreams?" concern now paramount in his voice.

At first, he didn't think Vincent was going to confide in him, then raising his head, he whispered, "Over two months."

"That explains your restless sleeps of late, I've woken up often to your moans and cries, wishing I could help you," he sighed.

"Father.....I don't know what to do, I'm lost in the abyss of my inner soul."

"Can you tell me, Vincent, anything about these dreams? Maybe by sharing your burden, together we can solve the mystery.....try.....please," he sighed. Then taking off his spectacles, brushed a tear from his eye.

The air hung with desperate heartache, then slowly Vincent sat back in the chair, allowed his tense body to relax, stretched his long legs, then cat-like, sprang upwards, pacing the floor, searching for the right words to begin his explanation.

"There is this apartment block."

"Where, Vincent?" the old man interrupted.

"Here, near Central Park, quite near our tunnel entrance.... she lives there," his hand stressed the point.

"She, did you say SHE, Vincent?"

"Yes, she is very beautiful, a talented corporate lawyer, who works for the DA's office," excitement mounting, as his explanation became easier to tell.

"How did you meet such a person, can you remember?"

"No, I only know that every evening, when I close my eyes to sleep.....I'm there, with her. She feels as I do, her thoughts and feelings, reflect mine, there is a bond, a connection between us." Sitting down, and leaning near to Father, he continued.

"We spend each evening together, for nightfall to dawn. She accepts me as a man. She has no fear of me, my appearance doesn't scare her. Father, she loves me for what I am, she desires me and needs me.....as I do her," he sighed.

"Dear God, Vincent, this is very serious. Is it the same dream every night?"

"No, but it is the same balcony and the same woman, sometimes we just sit and talk about her day or mine, other times I read sonnets of poems to her, our time together is precious." A small smile now lingered on his lips, of the happiness such evenings brought.

"Does she have a name.....this woman?" his voice was eager for facts, in order to sort this out.

"Her name is.....Catherine," the way he said her name, in the velvet voice, spoke volumes.

"Father, each evening on my walks Above, before I go to my chamber to sleep, I retrace the path I travel in my sleep and dreams. When I get there, to where it should all be, there is no sign of it, no building, no balcony.....no Catherine." Lowering his head, his shoulders shaking, a few sobs left his body and Father knew how this was tearing at his son's heart. To have the impossible handed to him in a dream, then cruelly taken away from him on waking.

"This is very strange indeed, Vincent, have you thought of asking Narcissa's help and guidance? She is the wise one on such matters, where thoughts defy answers." He hoped Vincent would see his old friend, the wise woman of the tunnel world, with her potions and witchcraft.

"Maybe, I'll seek her out, when all else fails, till then, my heart is breaking, Father. It's dying. I want to stay with my Catherine, not leave her with the dawn, to make her mine. The torment I feel on waking alone, Father...it's heartbreaking." A tear rolled down his cheek.

Reaching out his hand, he clasped Vincent's huge clawed hand.

"We'll work something out, trust me, we've weathered many a storm in the past, and lived to tell the tale," he smiled.

"Thank you for your council, Father."

Then standing up, he lowered a kiss on the old man's head, wished him goodnight, then quickly left his chamber.

The air was still warm, from the heat of the July day, now, at almost midnight, the heavy scent of the blossom trees filled his nostrils as Vincent left the tunnels. Pulling his hood over his golden mane to hide his face, he took the now familiar route. In search of his lost dream.

Hours later, Vincent found himself near the warehouses that dominated this rundown area of New York. One warehouse that pulled him to it, revealed on inspection, a small side door. Vincent felt it beckoned him, so checking no one was about, he entered.

Using the torch he always carried in the pocket of his cloak, he aimed the beam of light ahead. Walking with care, he passed

crates, boxes and rails of clothes. Finally, he came to a control box near some ladders. Flicking the first switch, the whole floor lit up, allowing Vincent to survey the place in more detail. A door across the vast expanse of floor caught his eyes, so with cat-like grace and speed, he went towards it. Above the door it said: SOUNDSTAGE 6.

It wasn't locked and opened under his hand. A switch on the wall was flicked, this revealed a room full of cameras, microphones, sets and endless miles of cables criss-crossed the floor.

Fascinated, Vincent strolled around, taking in the delights of his find. Two chairs of canvas stood to one side, names clearly printed on the backs, PRODUCER, DIRECTOR. The L-shaped room veered to the left, and as Vincent turned into it, he stopped dead in his tracks, he couldn't believe his eyes.

There, in front of him, was a balcony----her balcony, behind were two sets of doors. Quickly he scaled the balcony wall, falling silently on the balcony, here was the wrought iron furniture. He ran his clawed fingers lovingly along it, the plants, everything. Looking through the doors, past the net drapes, he could just make out the furniture and fittings.

Turning with his back to the apartment, he placed his hands on the balcony wall, in front was a painted backcloth of the New York skyline. Dropping his head, he let out a deep, deep sigh and murmured.

"Oh, Catherine, Catherine, where are you?"

"I'm here," came the soft familiar voice.

Spinning round, his black cloak swinging, Vincent saw the apartment, now bathed in lights, the doors were open. Invitingly,

there silhouetted against the doorway.....was his Catherine.

"How can this be?" he whispered.

"I didn't know if you'd come," she cooed.

"You expected me?" he asked, unable to believe what was happening.

"Come, we can sit by the fire, you can finish "Great Expectations," she smiled warmly.

Taking his hand in hers, she led him through the door, into the warmth of the apartment. Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was playing on the stereo, reminding him of Rolley. Vincent felt at peace.

The night watchman, on his rounds of the T.V. studio and sets, shone his torch into the pitch black studio, called SOUNDSTAGE 6. As usual nothing amiss here, he closed the door, and continued his nightly inspection.

BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

By Gwen Lord

"Radcliffe, are you sure you're okay?" Joe's concern was very evident.

"Yeay, I'll be fine ... don't worry," Cathy tried to reassure Joe.

"You're a good liar, I'll give you that kiddo," he grinned.

"It's nothing, really, just a bad time of the month ... you know."

"Hmmm."

"Let me get my teeth into this lot, I'll be okay, really," her eyes smiled up at him.

"Have it your way," he shrugged and, picking up his papers he turned and returned to his office, shutting the door behind him, not convinced.

Cathy put her head in her hands, as her elbows rested on the desk. Her mind was in turmoil; no way could she concentrate on depositions, or anything else to do with work. One thought was in charge in her brain, it loomed imposing over everything else; even the dramatic happenings in the work load was as nothing, compared to her problem! She felt sick; this feeling inside, churning and burning. God, she felt awful ... how late was she? Six weeks! Normally she was as regular as clockwork. The awful truth hammered at her brain; her heart. It was all too clear. She was pregnant! PREGNANT! PREGNANT!

* * *

"Ah, there you are, Vincent; finished already?" Father had been reading, killing time really, until Vincent returned from working on the lower tunnels. He needed to speak to his son, but the subject in hand was delicate and needed careful handling; kid gloves in fact.

"Yes Father, finished. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must wash and change. Catherine expects me soon, I don't want to be late." He picked up his robe and made to leave his chamber.

"Vincent, I need to speak with you, on an urgent matter."

"Not now, Father, please."

"I'm afraid this won't wait, Vincent. It's of the utmost importance. I must insist you hear me." He leaned heavily on his stick. Vincent recognised this tone.

"Do sit down, Father." He advanced to his side and putting his hand on the old man's shoulder said, "Tell me, what weights so heavy with you?"

"This is very difficult for me, Vincent ..."

Sitting down close to the older man, Vincent put his hand over Father's and gave it a gentle squeeze. "Please," he urged.

A silent moment passed.

"I love you, Vincent and I love Catherine. I love you both." His voice was ragged and urgent.

"I know that; we both know that," he agreed.

"Your relationship with Catherine has deepened over the last six or eight weeks; I know, I've been in love too. I know how it feels to have the woman of your dreams adore you and need you, I'm not too old to remember," he smiled, knowingly.

"Margaret?"

"Hmmm."

"And Grace, Devin's mother. You had the love of two good women. You must count yourself lucky, Father."

"I do, I do, Vincent. But I am worried."

"Worried?"

"About Catherine."

Vincent's head shot up. "Why are you worried? Is she ill? tell me!" he pleaded.

"No, she's not ill, but one day she may be, unless the two of you are careful." He edged nearer to the issue.

"Careful? How do you mean?"

"If Catherine was to get ... pregnant. Dear God, Vincent. Think of the consequences. This is no light matter, it needs both of you to be very careful." There, he'd said it. All day this moment had loomed large in his mind. Now he had unleashed his burden and he felt the weight leave his shoulders.

A smile crossed Vincent's face; a gentle, understanding smile. Then, tilting his head to one side, he looked Father straight in the eye.

"Catherine's taken care of all that, Father. She explained it to me, so please, don't worry, all is well. We are very happy, truly we are one."

"I'm glad we've had this talk, Vincent. We used to talk for hours once. It's been like old times, but this time the subject was a little different." They both smiled.

Vincent stood and planted a kiss on the top of Father's head. "Now I must truly go and wash away the day's work, so if you will excuse me ..." he sighed.

"Of course. I'll leave you now. I must see Mary about some cough medicine for one of the children. Vincent, you both have my blessing."

"Thank you, Father." Picking up his robe once more, he hurriedly left the chamber to wash and change.

The hot steaming water washed over his aching body. The work Below had been particularly hard, he had pushed himself far too hard, doing the work of two men, to help Mouse and Winslow get the job done. He needed to see Catherine, he felt she was worried. Something was wrong, he felt her sadness and her joy; these two going hand in hand had him perplexed.

The water felt relaxing. He'd soaped his body all over and now lay submerged in its healing warmth; only his face visible. His thoughts - as always - were of Catherine. From the first moment he'd set eyes on her,

he'd fallen in love, but never in his wildest dreams had he ever believed they would share a life together; really together.

Over the last two months a mile stone had been reached. It was inevitable it should happen one day, but he had been scared to face it; afraid of the outcome. A life-time of can't be and shouldn't be, was the hardest of all barriers to overcome, but it was Catherine who had succeeded in the end, showing him how - with love - all things were possible. At last he had dared to dream; he had allowed himself to believe - even for him - that maybe there was a chance for them. Catherine guided and helped him through this testing time, her love was like a torch, lighting the way. He was drawn to it with a hunger for truth, to search for who he was and what he was.

With her love, the dark places deep inside were filled with light. Where anger and foreboding lay waiting, love entered, driving away all the uncertainties, filling his very soul with love and desire for the woman who made him - of all people like a man; a king among men. No longer did he desire another man's art or scope, he was at peace within himself for the first time in his life. His fears for her safety were unfounded. He was a willing pupil and learned quickly, how to please and fulfil her needs which matched his own perfectly.

Their happiness soared to new heights with each new day. To him it was a miracle that he should have the love, the total love, of this wonderful woman.

* * *

The lights from inside the apartment cast shadows in ribbons across the balcony. The air was filled with the scent of the blossom on the trees below, in Central Park; the fragrance drifted high into the air on this beautiful moonlit night, so still and peaceful.

Vincent tapped on the door. immediately it flew open and their arms were around each other.

"Oh Catherine, I've missed you today," he sighed.

"I know, I know. I've wanted to feel your arms around me so much. Hold me close, please."

"I love you, Catherine," his velvet voice whispered.

"Hold me tighter," she pleaded.

Their lips met in a warm and tender kiss which said everything. Catherine was the first to pull away a little. As she looked into the face of the man she loved, Vincent saw dancing lights in her eyes.

"Vincent come, let's go inside. I thought tonight we'd just curl up together in the candle light. I've got Beethoven and Liszt ready to play on the CD, wine cooling, everything ready. All I need now is to feel your arms holding me; to listen to your heartbeat."

"Come. If music be the food of love, play on," and together they went inside. Vincent closed the doors behind them.

The music, combined with the candles and the wine, set the scene for an evening to remember. Both were at complete peace with each other. No greater gift had any man.

"Are you staying tonight, Vincent?" Cathy asked in his ear as she lay curled up across his body.

"If you'll have me," he teased.

"Oh Vincent, you know I want you to."

"I know. I want to stay. Father has given up on me sleeping Below again, I fear." They laughed.

"How is Father? Is he well? It's a week or more since I last saw him."

"He is well, Catherine. In fact, he was in true war colours earlier this evening." He smiled as he recalled the memory.

"How do you mean."

"He was attempting to give me a ... facts of life chat. He was very concerned about you."

"Me? Why?" Her face was full of concern.

"Father was hoping we had taken precautions against you being ... with child."

Catherine nearly choked on her wine at that last statement.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. It went down the wrong way, that's all. "Taking her courage in both hands Catherine decided to broach the subject on her mind, making sure through their bond, that Vincent wouldn't pick up her anxiety or worry. "What would happen if I ever did get pregnant?" She kept her eyes down, not daring to look at him.

"Catherine, you must never let those words pass your lips! This is something that must never be, NEVER!" His voice was no longer velvet.

"I'm sorry, Vincent, I had to ask. How else do I know your feelings?"

"I'm sorry, but this I do draw the line at. There must never be another 'me'. I wouldn't want a child of mine to have to suffer what I suffered and still do; perhaps always will, to my dying day."

"Don't, Vincent. Don't punish yourself."

"Catherine, when I am with you, you make me feel like a man and as a man. Of course I would love nothing better than to have our child. I know how you long to have a family, but I also have to remember I am not wholly a man. You love me as a man, but others see me as a ... beast, an animal, even." He sighed.

"Stop it, stop it!" Cathy jumped up and held his face between her hands.

"I love you, my darling, I love you!" she cried, tears flowing freely.

"I know, but a child, Catherine. This can never be a part of our dream. This is one of the sacrifices we have to make. I'm sorry, truly I am. There is nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, except this," he sighed.

Catherine lay back across him, her body shaking with sobs. What was she to do?"

"Don't cry, please," he pleaded.

"I can't help it, Vincent. I cry for the child which will never be; for the son you'll never know or love. It is so sad, it breaks my heart."

"Oh Catherine, don't. My heart is breaking also. To think the pain you feel now, is all my doing."

"No, we are in this together; it's our problem, we will work it out, but we will need each other to release ourselves from this sadness which inhabits us."

"Yes. You are truly wonderful. Come, let us put the music and wine away and find peace in each other as we sleep."

* * *

Catherine tapped on the glass panel of Joe's office door before opening it.

"Hi Radcliffe, come on in."

"Hi, Joe. Have you got time to talk?"

"Sure. What's up."

"I ...er ...well ..."

"You're making me nervous, what is it?" Joe got up from his chair and walked round to Catherine. "Sit down, Cathy ...Sit!"

She did as she was told. Joe sat on the corner of his desk and started to play with a rubber band, twisting and turning it; a nervous habit he had in times of stress.

"So ...?" he prompted.

"Joe ..."

"Yeah?"

"I ... I ..."

"Damn it, Radcliffe!"

"I'm quitting ... not really quitting ..."

"Can we start again?" he urged and managed a half smile.

"I need to get away for a while, to sort myself out, get my act together. I can't do it here. Oh Joe, I'm going to miss you and all this, but I have to go," she sobbed.

"Here, use this." Joe handed her his handkerchief. "Is it something I've said? Maybe I worked you too hard. I know you were trying to prove to me - to everyone - gee, Radcliffe ... I don't want to lose you!"

"I know, Joe. Please, don't make this harder than it already is ... please!" The room suddenly seemed so hot; Joe seemed so far away, she felt she needed some fresh air so, handing him back his handkerchief, she made to stand up. Suddenly, nothing seemed straight, the world felt upside down.

"Hey, good job I was here to catch you! What is wrong with you? I know, you're ill and don't want to worry me ..."

"I'm not ill."

"Well you could have fooled me. First you're all pale and sickly, then you're ratty and no one dares talk to you. Next you're weepy and moody ... You want to throw in your job; almost passed out just now ... Radcliffe, if I didn't know better, I'd say you were pregnant," he laughed.

"Oh Joe!" she started to cry again.

"Here, you'd better have this back. Keep it," he handed her the handkerchief again. Then, it suddenly struck him. "No ... you couldn't be ... could you?"

"Yes, Joe. I am pregnant," she sobbed.

"So, what's the big deal here, Cathy? Won't the bastard marry you? Who is he? Do I know him? Let me sort him out! Where does he live, or has he gone to ground?" Joe fumed.

"It's not like that."

"Have you told him?" he asked.

"No."

"Don't you think he has a right to know? I'd want to know if you were having my kid." He coloured, as a secret desire surfaced for the first time.

"He doesn't want a child, Joe. There are reasons, they are good reasons, truly."

"Not want your child? He must be a monster, Cathy. How could you love such a guy?" His anger was now clearly evident.

"He's my life, Joe. I love him, but I don't want him to know, so I will go away, have the child, then return, if you'll have me." She looked longingly at him.

"Where will you go? Come on, this is crazy!"

"I will go to the West Coast. I'll need a transfer to our office there, for a while. Please, Joe, I need your help."

"You have it, kiddo." Then Joe held out his arms to comfort her.

* * *

"Catherine, you look delightful, doesn't she, Vincent?" Father smiled, as he signalled her to join them at the table.

"Yes, delightful," he replied sadly.

"How are the arrangements coming, my dear? We are all going to miss you, so much. I dread to think what Vincent is going to be like. At last it isn't for ever; six months I think Vincent said."

"Yes. It's one of the hazards of working in the DA's office, they can move you when you least expect it."

"Please Catherine, do we have to speak of this, your last night here?"

Vincent's voice was emotional.

"I'm sorry, Vincent."

"Come, open your presents from Father and myself." His eyes twinkled with anticipation.

"It feels like my birthday." Catherine picked up the square parcel first and read the card attached. 'To my dear Catherine, love Father. God speed you back home.' "Oh Father, thank you." The wrapping was soon removed to reveal a journal. "It's beautiful."

"Each day you're away, enter your thoughts, then you'll always be able to look back on them, when the memory fades."

Catherine started to cry and rushed into Father's arms.

"There, there. No tears tonight." He planted a kiss on both cheeks. "God bless you, we love you."

"I love you, I love my home here, I miss you already," she sobbed.

"Catherine, my gift is small compared to what you've given me." Vincent placed the box in her hand. She read the card. 'To Catherine, my life, my love, my all. Vincent'

She bit her bottom lip to stop it from shaking, then quickly she undid the present. The little box was carved in wood, which when opened, revealed two crystal pendant earrings, to match the necklace he'd given her two years ago on their first anniversary.

"Oh Vincent, they're beautiful, thank you." Leaning across, she kissed him on the lips.

Father coughed and spluttered at his embarrassment, but Vincent and Catherine had eyes only for each other.

* * *

The DA's office in Los Angeles was smaller than the one in New York and wasn't unfamiliar to her either, as she had worked there before but, as she recalled, didn't like it. Still, she had to make the most of it. It

wasn't for ever, thank goodness, so she decided to live a day at a time.

Joe had made sure an apartment would be available for her, so she didn't have to hunt for somewhere to love and she was glad. The flight had drained her, having spent most of it being decidedly sick.

Days came and went with slow regularity. A new routine was found. Catherine rose at eight, got to work for nine, lunched twelve to one and left at four-thirty and was home (dare she call it home) by five. Next would follow a quick meal and then she'd sit down and compose a letter to Vincent. Their bond would be open as she wrote; his presence would surround her. How she longed to hold him.

Next came the journal entries of the day, followed by a little TV and then, to bed.

As Catherine got larger, the problem of where their child would live became of paramount importance, until panic seized her. She mustn't leave it too long, plans had to be made, just in case she didn't go full term.

The idea came to her as she lay one Sunday morning in bed. Her Dad's sister lived here in LA; the black sheep of the family who was head strong and self-willed, had left the family home thirty years ago. No one ever spoke of Aunt Sonya, who was Charles' half sister.

Cathy went to the local library to look through records and employed an investigator to help her in her search. Where was her Aunt? She had certainly covered her tracks well, seeking no contact from the family at all. But money talked and her Dad's money that finally found her.

Cathy took the train to see her aunt. The journey seemed endless, the cities and towns fell away until only odd, isolated houses lay dotted in the scenery before her. The train pulled into the station and only Cathy got off. The door clanged shut, the wheels started to turn and it slowly pulled out of the station.

A battered old cab was parked near the ticket office, so Cathy asked the driver if he could take her to the address on the slip of paper she held in

her hand for him to read.

"Take a while to get there. I thought no one lived out that far any more."

"Will you take me, please?" she pleaded.

"Sure, lady. Hop in, I need the dollars."

"Their meeting was a success from the start. They seemed to share the same appreciation of things : music, poetry, even art. Yes, Cathy felt she had found a real 'Helper' out here at last.

The office life was behind her for now. Cathy moved in with Aunt Sonya who accepted the fact that Cathy had secrets she intended to keep hidden. Then, one night, while they sat, watching the sun go down, Cathy explained all about Vincent and the child she carried.

It was January eleventh when the pain hit her like a bolt out of the blue. "Oh,oh, oh!" she moaned, the beads of perspiration forming on her face, as wave after wave of pain invaded her body.

Hearing her cries, Aunt Sonya appeared. "So, it's time, child."

"Yeah, oh God, it hurts!" she stammered.

"Don't push, whatever you do. Not yet. I'll tell you when." Aunt Sonya was a qualified midwife, so the delivery didn't have to be in a hospital, with prying, inquisitive eyes, which was fortunate.

The labour was, Aunt Sonya decided, the worst she had ever seen. Poor child, she was worn out and still no baby. It was into the second day when finally Catherine's son was born, but it was four hours before she saw him for the first time, as sleep, from sheer exhaustion, had claimed her, directly the birth was over.

"You have a son, my dear. A lovely little boy."

"Is he ... is he ...?"

"Like his father? Yes my dear, he is." Then she handed Catherine the white bundle.

The sleeping baby was gorgeous; masses of golden hair, a flat furry kitten-like nose, furry hands and feet, with translucent claws on fingers and toes.

"Oh Auntie Sonya, he's beautiful! Just like his father! Oh Vincent, I wish you could see him." Tears ran down her cheeks as she kissed him and held him close, ready to feed him for the first time.

* * *

Two days before the baby was born, Vincent was sitting reading with Father, in his study. All was peaceful, only the tapping on the pipes broke the silence.

Suddenly, Vincent threw down the book, growled and held his stomach. He paced the chamber, then more pain claimed his body. Father was lost for words. He tried everything to ease his son's discomfort, with no success. Then, after two days, it left him as quickly as it had arrived.

* * *

When baby Jacob was four weeks old, Cathy decided to have him christened. How she wished it could have been a Naming Ceremony in the tunnels Below, with Father and all their friends. As it was, it was just Catherine, Auntie Sonya and a priest who was paid so highly by Catherine to keep quiet, he could now live a life of luxury, thanks to five minutes work.

The child was named Jacob Vincent Wells.

* * *

"She's coming back, Father! She's coming back!" Vincent's slow pace of late had the sprightly step of old.

"Dear God, at last," Father sighed. "Now maybe we will be able to talk to you again," he chided his son.

"It's not been that bad, has it?" he quizzed, smiling.

"Worse," Father admitted.

"We must prepare, we must plan," Vincent mumbled, as he dashed from Father's study.

"Vincent, you've been preparing and planning since she left! Everything couldn't be more ready, my boy! Calm down!"

"Oh Father, I've missed her so much!"

"I know. When do you expect her?" he asked.

"Tomorrow, at sunset."

* * *

"Catherine! Oh Catherine, you're home!" He gathered her in his arms with such love that he took her breath away.

"I'm back, I'm back. Oh how I've missed you, Vincent!"

"And I you. Come, Father waits."

"I want so much to see everyone. Are they all well? Tell me the news, while we walk."

His arm encased her shoulders, holding her close. "I am too happy for words."

"I too am lost for words, my love."

"Have you been well? You look well."

"Yes, I have, but being here is all I ever wanted."

"When do you have to return to work, with Joe?"

"I've given in my notice. I am no longer a working woman, I am unemployed and in love."

"Catherine!" Vincent stopped dead in his tracks. "What does this mean?"

"It means my love, I am moving in Below with you and my family. I'm home, Vincent, really home."

"Oh Catherine, at last."

* * *

The years came and went. Life for Catherine was filled with much love and happiness, for Vincent adored her. Each month, Catherine went away for a week. She told Vincent she went to stay with her Auntie Sonya, who was old. This much was true, but she omitted to tell him it was to be with their son who was now growing into a fine young man.

The time she spent with Jacob was special. She supervised his education and took tapes and books for Auntie Sonya to tutor him with, as school was out of the question. But, like his father, he was quick to learn and was a brilliant scholar.

Catherine noticed over the last few weeks that Vincent had been moody and irritable and couldn't understand why. They were like young lovers; that part was fine, so why was he as he was? Even Father, now a frail old man, but a wise old soul, couldn't interpret this change in his son.

Standing it no longer, Catherine decided to ask Vincent to explain it when next they were alone.

Their walk through the park, arm in arm, in the moonlight, was a favourite thing they both enjoyed and as they stopped by the old bridge, Vincent put his arm around Catherine's shoulder. She felt the moment had come, through their bond.

"Hmmm," he sighed.

"what?"

"Nothing."

"Vincent, we never keep secrets from each other, so tell me, please," she pleaded.

A long silence followed, but Cathy waited.

"Many years ago, we talked of having children, do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I told you we must never have any and how sorry i was that it had to be

that way."

"Yes ..."

"Well, over the years and more so of late, I have had cause to question my judgment on this matter."

"What are you saying, Vincent?"

"I am saying ... I wish with all my heart I could turn back the clock, go back in time. Catherine, we will now never know what might have been."

"Oh Vincent, don't torture yourself over possibilities."

"I wish we had a child, the proof of our love. I thought then it would be so wrong. Now, I'm not so sure I made the right decision for both of us and I feel I have ruined your life with my selfish act. Forgive me, please."

"Oh Vincent." tears streamed down her face.

"Why are you crying, when it should be I who weeps."

"I'm crying with happiness, Vincent."

"How can this be?"

"Trust me, please," she begged and together, arm in arm returned Below.

Three days later it was Jacob Vincent's twelfth birthday and it was also his father's birthday too. Catherine had decided, since their chat in the park, to give Vincent the best birthday gift of his entire life; one that all the money in the world couldn't buy.

Plans were hastily made, which fortunately, worked like clock work.

Catherine supervised all the birthday arrangements personally. The Great Hall never looked better. All the tunnel community were preparing to enjoy themselves; it had been a treat to look forward to, Vincent, aged fifty-five years.

During the early afternoon, Catherine told Vincent she was going Above to have her hair done and collect a new dress. She explained she'd be back in time for the six o'clock start. He walked with her to the tunnel entrance then quickly dashed below again to the safety of the tunnels.

The Great Hall was full now, the chatter of excited voices filled the air. Vincent looked splendid in his dark green tunic and ruffled shirt, black trousers and knee boots. His hair was still a halo of gold, but Cathy knew better than anyone that there was now silver strands amongst the gold.

At exactly six o'clock, Cathy entered the great Hall.

"Catherine," Vincent said aloud.

"Happy Birthday, Vincent," she hugged him. Everyone clapped. "Now for your present, my love."

"Where is it?" He looked deep into her lovely eyes.

"I'm here, Father." The velvet tones met his ears. Vincent spun around. Before him stood a tall youth, with long golden hair cascading down to his shoulders. His face was a mirrored reflection of his own, years back. Vincent's eyes travelled downwards. He wore a denim shirt, cord trousers and high boots. He held out his clawed hands. "Happy Birthday, Father."

"Catherine, how can this be?"

"Vincent, this is your son."

"My son?"

"Yes, our child. He is Jacob Vincent Wells."

"My son!" he repeated, wonder on his face. Then, without another word, he opened his arms and hugged him passionately. "Oh, I can't believe this," Vincent whispered in his ear.

"We share birthdays; January twelfth. I'm twelve today. This is the best present I could ever have."

"Your birthday too?" he stammered. "Happy Birthday, son," he sobbed.

Catherine put an arm around both the men in her life; the circle was complete.

"Jacob, we have so much time to catch up on. I want to show you my world - our world. One day all this, our kingdom will be yours," he sighed.

"Mom says the Whispering Gallery is your favourite. I want so much to see that, Father."

The word, Father, brought a tear to his eye. Yes, now he too was a parent. He was going to be the best of fathers for Jacob.

"Where's Grandfather, Mom?"

"Over in the far corner; the man with the stick. He's talking to Mouse and Jamie, can you see him?"

"Can we go meet him, please?" The way he put his head to one side as he said 'please' always made Catherine's heart skip a beat. He was so ... Vincent ... when he did this.

"Come, let us go and meet with your Grandfather." Vincent put one arm around Jacob's shoulders and the other around Catherine's waist.

Together they crossed the floor to the group at the table who had their backs to everyone, busy talking and laughing, so didn't see their arrival.

"Father."

"Yes Vincent, what is it?"

"There is someone here I want you to meet."

Leaning on his stick, the old patriarch of the tunnels rose and turned. The smile quickly left his face. "Dear God, Vincent!" Clearly the old man was shaken. Vincent supported him with his strong arms.

"Father, this is my son, Jacob." His voice broke with the enormity of the emotion he felt.

"Your son?" Catherine, tell me?" He sat down. He didn't believe his legs would support him much longer.

"Your Grandson was born on Vincent's birthday twelve years ago. Today, he came home." Catherine was clearly proud and choked with this meeting.

"Thank you for bringing him home, my dear." Jacob opened his arms to his Grandson, who knelt before him and hugged him. Father ran his fingers through the golden hair; the feel was the same, the boy was strong and full of life. How well he remembered Vincent at this age. The face that looked up into his had the same eyes and leonine features. Yes, he was his father's son, down to the last detail. "We have much to catch up on, Jacob," the old man said, clearly proud of his Grandson. "Can you play chess?"

"Yes. I enjoy chess, grandfather. I play with Mom all the time, she taught me to play."

"Really! Well, shall we go and see how good you are?"

"Catherine, I think it's time for the first waltz."

"Yes, I'd like that."

As Vincent led her over to the area set aside for the dancing, he stopped and pulled her to him. "What can I say?" he whispered.

"Look Vincent, they're getting on so well. I've waited a long time to see this." Her voice was so excited, almost like a child's.

"Come, let's join the others for this dance." He held her hand and led the way. His arms encircled her as they moved to the music of the Skater's Waltz. "Tell me, Catherine. Why now?"

"It wasn't right before," she explained.

"I've missed his babyhood, through my own stupidity. You should have told me," he urged.

"No Vincent, then you would have loved him because he was here. Now, this is right. You wanted to turn back the clock, to put things right. You wanted it. Really, really wanted it. That made it right, don't you see?"

"Yes," he sighed. "We have the rest of our lives. We mustn't waste it."

"He has all your poetry and readings on tape. He listens to them for hours and hours."

"How was this possible?" he asked questioningly.

"You remember I said I needed to tape you reading so when one of us couldn't read to the class, we'd have it on tape? Well, all those were for your son," she smiled. "He's grown up for twelve years surrounded by your voice, your guidance, your influence. He adores you. Even his room at Aunt Sonya's I had done out like a copy of our chamber, so it feels like his home already."

"How can I ever show you how special you are to me? You held out that torch to me so long ago to lighten my darkest corners. The rays of that light continue to burn. We are truly blessed, Catherine."

"I have the most wonderful family and now we are complete."

"Yes," he sighed. "We are at last a family."

The waltz ended and as Catherine and Vincent left the floor, Father was seen heading out of the Great Hall, his arm around his Grandson.

"I'm going to enjoy playing chess with you, my boy."

Vincent smiled. "Father's got a new pupil!"

"Yes, so I see, but Father is in for a shock, I fear."

"Why?"

"Our son is a very good chess player already." They both laughed.

"Oh Catherine, you are truly a wonder; the light of my life."

"I love you, so very much, Vincent."

"Come, let us go and watch our son beat his Grandfather at chess."

"Oh Vincent, our family is complete at last."

Together they walked the short distance to Father's study.

The End.

CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU

By Gwen Lord

"Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, you may now unfasten your seat belts." The calm voice of the pilot penetrated every part of the aircraft as it now cruised at thirty thousand feet. Catherine Chandler settled back in her plush seat in the first class compartment and smiled at the person next to her. Then, reaching for her custom made hand luggage, she opened it up, to reveal papers and folders. A sigh left her lips as she pulled out the notes Joe had given her when she left the office the previous night...

"Here, take these with you, Radcliffe. Shame to sit there with nothing to do, now you can use the time to catch up on a few loose ends." He smiled his twisted smile.

"You're a slave driver, Joe Maxwell... maybe I'll do them... and maybe I won't." She gave him as good as he gave her. Now it was her turn to look impish at him.

"Oh... playing difficult to control, are we?" he laughed.

"Joe, slavery went out years ago, but I love you just the same," her banter continued.

"My heart sings at your praise," he laughed, as he rounded the desk to where she stood. Then holding out his arms, he came towards her. "Take care, you hear me?"

"I hear you, Joe."

"Come back in six months to us, don't let the big boys convince you they need you more than we do, you hear me?"

"I love New York, Joe, I love my job here... and yes, even my boss, the slave driver, so I promise to return.., try keeping me away." She poked him in the ribs playfully.

They hugged each other, then pulled away. Joe had enjoyed the excuse

for a hug, but Cathy had tears in her eyes and they weren't for Joe Maxwell. He was well aware of that fact. He knew he was missing her already, deeply. Picking up the papers, Cathy hurried from the office.

"I'm gonna miss you like hell," Joe mumbled to himself... (what the heck, she didn't realise his need of her.)

As the aircraft continued on, Catherine spread out the notes and papers on the dinky pull down table in front of her. Where to begin! Sighing, she started sifting through them, fingering and separating them into some sort of order. One heading caught her eye, that of a Vincent Clarke. He had held his wife hostage to his sexual needs in their own home and, only the fact her neighbour popping in unexpectedly, had brought the whole nasty incident to a head. Catherine read his name again... Vincent... Vincent... again and again, 'til the name swam before her and in her mind's eye, a very different Vincent filled her vision.

There he was, tucked in the far corner of the aircraft, dressed in dark clothes, hidden from view. She caught her breath; was he really there? Their eyes met, he smiled a sad smile and was gone. Cathy swallowed the lump in her throat as the emotion she felt caused tears to invade her eyes. She couldn't keep them back and they silently spilled over, trickling down her cheeks. With the back of her hand she brushed them away, but what she couldn't brush away was the reason she was now high above New York City, heading for Kentucky, and a life without Vincent.

It would be half a year before she would be back... maybe not even then. *Life sucks*, she thought. Memories came flooding back of all the different reasons she was now here, in this mess. The mist in her mind cleared to a month ago, when it all started.

Elliot Burch, on a whistle stop visit to his beloved New York, and his office, from construction work needing him in Kentucky, had left a message on Catherine's answering machine, saying he had two hours to kill and would like nothing better than to use up this time in her company (the only woman he'd ever proposed to and been turned down flat). On her arrival in from work, she turned on the answer machine to listen to

the messages as she fixed a coffee. It made her smile... poor Elliot, would he never accept she had given her heart to another? But, writing down the number, she set about ringing him back.

"Elliot? Hi, I just arrived in and got your message."

"Well, hi yourself, long time no see... are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine."

"Good."

"Are you happy, Elliot?"

"I'm doing okay, honey, but only you back in my life would make me really happy."

She felt his smile and she imagined she could see the dimple in his chin, which always did the strangest things to her. She had loved that dimple; the things she had done to that dimple in the past... but that was water under the bridge, as since she realised it was Vincent she truly loved, Elliot could only ever be a friend, and this he found very hard to accept, after all the time they had once spent together.

"Cathy, are you still there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here, sorry Elliot, just got a little side tracked."

"Okay, well can we meet?"

"Yeah."

"I promise, no strings, just friendship... a shared meal, some good wine..., shared dreams... please, Cathy."

"Yeah! Okay, Elliot, why not. I didn't have anything planned for tonight, except a few papers to catch up on from Joe."

"Do you still see... what's his name... er..."

"Yes, I still see him and his name is Vincent, as well you know!" They both laughed. "I'm not seeing him tonight," *or tomorrow night*, she

thought, "So my time's my own. He's also away working, so looks like the evening belongs to us, Elliot."

"Fine, I'll pick you up about eight o'clock.

"I'd like that, bye," she whispered.

"Bye, honey. Take care now," and he was gone.

She would have to be careful that Vincent didn't pick up on this through their bond, and as always, totally get the wrong idea.

Cathy replaced the phone and stood thoughtfully for a moment, then walked over to her bedroom, throwing her coat on the bed, kicking her shoes off, to fall where they shot to, then unbuttoning her blouse, she hurried off into the bathroom. Her body needed the cooling cascade of water to remove the heat and dirt of a day working in New York City in the heat of July.

Following the shower, wrapped in a toweling sarong, Cathy fixed herself a snack in her small kitchen, then curled up on her couch to sort out the 'homework' Joe had given her as she made to leave the office - a trick he seemed to enjoy. Soon her eyes became heavy and, hugging a cushion, she drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

The phone woke her with a start and lazily, she picked it up. Jenny's voice penetrated her consciousness.

"Hi, Jen, how are you?" Her eyes sparkled at the pleasure of talking to her dear friend. On and on they talked, 'til suddenly looking down, Cathy glanced at her watch. "Oh no! Oh, Jen, I'll have to call you back tomorrow and we'll fix a day to meet for lunch.. stop grunting, I promise. I've a million things to do 'til my date at eight o'clock."

"This guy, Vincent, sure has you running hot, girl!" Jenny teased.

Before Catherine could stop herself, she rebounded with, "It's not Vincent... it's Elliot."

"Ho, ho, ho... go for it, gal!" came the quick reply.

"It's not like it sounds," she pleaded.

"Sure it isn't. You society friends of mine, sure make my life look like the pits."

"Bye, Jen, I'll fill you in soon... bye," and with that she hung up.

The next twenty minutes were hectic, but as the fingers on the clock showed eight o'clock, so a tap came at the door. Still fastening her earring in place, Cathy hurried to answer it and didn't notice the note which had been placed under it that now lay half under the rug, but still partly visible.

Opening the door, Cathy's breath was taken away. There stood Elliot, wearing a dark grey suit, white shirt and silver-grey tie. His hair was much longer than she had ever seen it before and she liked it, it suited him, sitting on his suit collar. He was no longer clean shaven, but now possessed a short beard, giving him an air of a swash buckling hero. Cathy felt her legs go weak, but quickly pulled herself together.

"Hi, Elliot, please come in."

He handed her a see-through box, which had one single red rose in it.

"For you, honey."

"Thank you, Elliot, I'll put it in water, then we'll go." She hurried into the kitchen to pop it in water, then returning, picked up her wrap and purse.

"Ready."

"You look lovely, a vision..." His lips twisted into a sexy smile, as only Elliot knew how.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome," and together they headed for the elevator and the evening ahead.

* * *

Far below New York City, in the tunnel world, a place of safety to all who called it home, life went on its way. The pipes tapped out their

endless messages and everyone went about the jobs assigned to them, in order to remain Below, in their safe haven.

The talented, lonely rejects of society, who were now a part of their new family Below, lived together in harmony, with Father as head of this subterranean life.

"What is it, Pascal?" Father asked as the small man hurried over to him.

"It's Vincent, he's sent a message on the pipes from the lower levels. Says the work wasn't as bad as we first feared, so they are returning early tonight"

"Good, delightful news, thank you, Pascal."

"That's not all. Vincent says will you send a note to Catherine, telling her of the change of plan, and that they can make it to the concert under the park after all. She's to meet him early for a walk first; eight o'clock, by the carousel."

"Of course, thank you, Pascal. I'll send Samantha with that right away."

"William said dinner will be early tonight, Father, it is warmed up soup from yesterday." With that, he was gone.

Father wrote out the message, Samantha delivered it; what could possible go wrong!

"Ah, there you are, Vincent. My, you look very grand tonight, is that the new tunic Martha's been making you?"

"Mmm. Her talents are a bonus to us all. I think she has excelled herself this time."

"I do indeed agree with you, Vincent." Father came up close to finger the wine coloured baggy shirt, belted loosely around Vincent's small waist.

"New jeans also." Father's eyes widened.

"You are very observant, Father," he said, leaning back as he combed his still damp hair from his much needed soak in the pool.

"I could hardly miss that, dear god, Vincent, they are... far er, far too

tight... may be the shirt should be allowed to hang a little lower. and less... revealing... I fear for your safety from Catherine in those," he pleaded, smiling, pointing his stick in the general direction of Vincent's crotch.

"Really, Father.. trust me, there is no need to worry so," he smiled.

"You have been warned, remember that. So, why is this evening so special then?" He waited for the answer.

"Catherine and I have reached a crossroads in our relationship. She has never asked much of me, but now it is her desire that we go forward, together... as one."

"Indeed."

"And I have been putting the matter off for weeks, but, working far below with only my feelings for company, I have felt our bond call me. I've wrestled with feelings I never dared allow to be mine, 'til now."

"I see... and these feelings... Catherine wants this... knowing the dangers?"

"Yes, but she will not wait much longer, I fear. Two years I feel, is quite long enough. Topsiders, Father, don't wait this long, I can't ask her to wait any longer... I can't lose her to another."

"To Elliot Burch, don't you mean?" Father's eyebrow shot up as he spoke.

"He can offer her so much, yet, she wants only me. We... have to take this step, we have to, Father."

"I see. I wish you'd reconsider this fool hardy idea, Vincent, I really mean that."

"Father, I'm a grown man... a virgin. I am not worldly, I know nothing of what is expected of me, except what I have read in books." He sighed.

"Catherine is a woman who has experienced these things; knows of them... desires them with me, with me, Father. Now I too want this and desire it so much. Give me your blessing, Father, not your disapproval,

please."

"Very well, Vincent, you have my blessing. Dear god, I feel you will need it. And Vincent, be careful."

"I will, thank you." Then, with a quick flick of his heavy cloak he was gone, almost running to the meeting place, by the carousel, to start a new and happy chapter in their life together.

* * *

"Shall we walk through the park and then go for a meal, or would you like a meal first and then a walk?" Elliot asked.

"I'd like a walk first. There is a concert there tonight, so that would be lovely." Catherine slipped her arm through Elliot's as they strolled towards their destination. "Look, Elliot, the carousel. Let's go and look, they are such lovely things." Cathy tugged at his arm.

"Sure, honey." He lowered his head near her ear as he spoke, 'til Catherine felt his warm breath. Danger signals made her withdraw a little, Vincent mustn't sense this, he was so far Below, where all the danger was, the last thing she wanted was for him to get upset, just when their relationship was finally taking a step forward.

"Oh, it's closed, Elliot, what a shame, it's so pretty. I so wanted to see it, I came to it a lot as a child, and have such happy memories of time spent on the horses.

"Who needs it, when I can look at you and see my whole world, Cathy."

"Please, Elliot, let's not start something we can't finish." She patted his arm.

"You're right, I'm sorry, but you make me feel like a sixteen year old kid; you know how I feel about you," then he bent his head and kissed her on her lips so gently, then it went deeper until Catherine had to pull away and smile. Then, without another word, they set off in the direction of their meal.

What they didn't see, hidden in the shadows, was Vincent, who couldn't

hear every word, but saw the kiss. Suddenly, his new found world started to fall apart. He'd waited too long to tell her; he'd lost her. All his tear-filled eyes could see, was his Catherine in Elliot's arms at last. He had lost her... his dream was gone, he no longer wanted to live without his heart's best treasure. Tears flowed freely down his face, wetting his new tunic and the jeans. What had promised to be the most wonderful night of his life, had become his worst nightmare.

* * *

"Vincent, is that you?" Father shuffled into his son's chamber. On entering, he saw his son sitting in his high backed leather chair, the cloak thrown across the bed. "What's wrong? What has happened? Tell me," he begged.

There was no response from Vincent, so Father eased his way nearer still, then placed a hand on his large shoulder. "Dear god, what has happened, tell me." Fear now loomed in his voice.

Vincent put his large hand over his father's, then looking up, spoke in a whisper. "It's Catherine. She chose not to share this evening with me. I saw her... with.. **him**."

"Hmm?"

"Elliot Burch.

"Oh, Vincent. I'm so deeply sorry."

"Maybe I was unwise to believe that... that we... could have a life together, a future. My life is over, my heart is dying." His voice broke with pent up emotion.

"I can't believe this of Catherine, it's so unlike her."

"She chose to ignore my note. It's over, Father, my heart lies in tatters, but I am not mad with Catherine, I love her and only want for her to have a happy life, even if I am not the one to share it with her. Don't grieve for me, Father, please."

Silently, Father left the chamber to allow Vincent to come to terms with

this new turn of events.

* * *

Later that evening, Catherine put the key in the door of 21E, opened it, flicked on the light switch and turned to Elliot. "Thank you for a lovely evening. We must do this again.. one day maybe Vincent could join us."

"I'd like that. Now, take care, honey." He planted a feather like kiss on her cheek, then Cathy watched as he turned and went in the direction of the elevator.

It wasn't until the door was closed and she leaned against it to kick off her shoes, that she saw a note half under the mat. Bending down to pick it up, Catherine expected to see Vincent's beautiful handwriting, but instead it was the scrawl she knew to be Father's writing. Father's! Panic besieged her. Was Vincent ill, hurt; had he had an accident? With the speed of light she ripped open the envelope and pulled out the folded piece of paper, then with eyes that went wider and wider, she read:

Catherine,

Vincent will be returning today and not in two days time as planned. He very much wants to take you to the concert tonight and asked me to pass this message to you. He would like you to meet him at the carousel at 8.00 pm.

Father

Suddenly the awful truth dawned on Catherine; that when she and Elliot met, walked to the carousel and kissed, Vincent had been there, waiting for her... he would have seen...

"Oh, Vincent, I'm so sorry," she mouthed to herself.

The single thing she had to do was to find Vincent and explain. She didn't even stop to shower, but quickly changed into jogging suit and trainers and hurriedly left her apartment for the tunnels. Her watch told her it was only ten fifteen, so everyone should still be awake. Her destination seemed so far away, would she ever get to Vincent's

chamber?

Sweat trickled down her face and body, tears filled her eyes. What had she unwittingly done to Vincent?

At last the living chambers came into view. She tiptoed past Father's chamber and hurried on to Vincent's, slowing down as she arrived, breathless. The tapestry drop hung over the doorway; a signal in the tunnels that was respected as a time to not disturb those within.

Catherine eased it carefully to one side and peeped in.

"There's no need to do that, Catherine, please come inside." His voice was unusually calm, which didn't go unnoticed.

"Vincent, I have to speak to you, I have to explain so much..."

"There is no need, Catherine." He stood with his back to her, facing the lovely stain glass window. She could see his shoulders were down, his whole body shouted his state of mind, echoing his loss. Bridging the distance between them, Catherine put a hand on his back between his shoulders, something Vincent loved her doing, but this time he flinched at her touch, causing her to frown.

"What?"

"Don't touch me, please. ~I feel your sadness, but truly you must not be so. I can see it all so clear now.. you **must** return Above, you have a life there, forget me like you would a dream. Pick up the threads of your life again, weave a new tapestry, but one without me. I release you from our bond. Rekindle all you gave up when our paths crossed. Your aloneness is over, go with my blessing... dearest Catherine." Then turning his head, he looked at her to savour the picture before him; to see her one last time. "Go, Catherine, before it becomes too painful for both of us."

"No... no... no... You can't mean this, how can you say this? Don't you know you can never lose me, I love you so much, Vincent!"

"Stop it, you must. We have always been honest with each other, Catherine, we both knew this day would come, when this dream of ours would end."

"Vincent, I've come here to explain what happened, to you. It is not as you think and damn it, Vincent, you will hear me out!" Her whole body was now shaking with emotion.

"I... saw you... with.. **him**." He sighed. "You both looked.. so perfect together... you were dressed so beautifully, Catherine. Elliot Burch loves you, he can give you everything I can't. It hurts me deeply inside.., but it is true. I would feel like a king if I could offer all that to you and look like he does... but we have to realise, what we shared was only a dream, a rare and beautiful insight into what might have been, had I not been born the way I am. You must go now, please." His voice caught in his throat and then he whispered, "If I hadn't come into your life, by now you would have been married to Elliot, even had.., children. Father was right, all this has caused you pain. I'm sorry."

Facing him now, she put her hand under the stubble covered chin, then eased his face upwards until their eyes met. A pool of unshed tears begged for release as Vincent struggled to keep control.

"I don't want Elliot, I only want you. If I can't have you, then I will have no one. I understand how it all seems, Vincent, I'm Daddy's little rich girl, I have wealth beyond understanding, I could have any man I choose. The fact I want you, with no money, no real job, no real home and, as you say yourself, not as other men, you can't believe that this is what I really want. But it truly is." She pulled at his tunic. "Why aren't you man enough to do something about this situation and stop using me and Elliot as your scape goat to hide behind."

"Please, Catherine...

"I'm out of here. I can't take this any longer and I won't be back. You know where I am when you come to your senses and change your mind. But make it quick, because only yesterday, Joe asked me to go to Kentucky for six months... I turned him down flat, but now I will reconsider. I have an excellent reason to leave New York, thanks to you."

Slowly, she turned and left the chamber, leaving Vincent speechless at

her outburst. It was all of five minutes before he realised Catherine had gone. Quickly, he picked up his cloak and threw it on, dashing after her. His long legs soon enable him to catch up to her.

"Catherine... wait, please."

His large hands stopped her, as he held her against the tunnel wall, his breathing was rapid and laboured in her face.

"Catherine, I had this evening planned, it was going to be... so beautiful., so... perfect. We finished our work below early, so I sent word to Father to send you a message. I know it was delivered. I felt so sure you would come. Then, as I waited for you, I saw you and Elliot together... I felt my heart breaking."

"I didn't find your note until I returned, Vincent."

"Why did you let him... kiss you, Catherine. If you care for me as much as you say you do?"

"It wasn't what you think."

"What was I to think? Him, of all people, holding you, desiring you, when I thought you belonged to me.

"You didn't trust me, did you? Why didn't you listen to our bond, or were you so mad that you couldn't feel it? Don't you know I would never cheat on you, damn you, Vincent, trust is a two way thing!"

"Your date... why Elliot Burch, if you love me, Catherine?"

"Elliot contacted me, he was on a whistle stop visit to New York, on business, from his construction contract in Kentucky. He asked me if I could see him and help kill two hours before his flight back there. You were away, and I was sad and missing you. I thought you were to be away for two more days, so saw no harm in agreeing to seeing an old friend. Was that so damn awful of me?" Her tears ran freely now.

"Our bond is my window to your feelings, I know you care for him."

"But I love you."

"He adores you, Catherine."

"Grrrr," she growled, gritting her teeth in frustration at being unable to make him see sense.

"My feelings shame me, they consume me, being not as other men, to me, Catherine, I cannot cope with sharing you with anyone. This is one of the differences you have to contend with in me."

"Plain old fashioned jealousy, Vincent. We all feel this, believe me."

"These feelings are new to me, I feel cast out, adrift on a sea of emotion, with no destination."

"Words, Vincent, words. I want more than words from you, I... want you, body and soul, as my friend and lover. When Elliot kissed me, I ached with all my heart for it to have been you."

"Catherine... I need you so much, I truly do."

"Then why are we not truly together, eh? Tell me that."

"At first it seemed not possible for me, then, with your love and understanding a change started within me... then tonight I dreamed a dream. I have always wanted you, but felt once you knew me as a... lover, you would quickly end it, so I hung on, so we could delay the parting which would surely come.

"Maybe this six months in Kentucky is what we both need, it will -"

"Kentucky! Elliot Burch is there. No, no, please don't go there, don't do this, Catherine."

"I must."

"Will you ever come back? Will you return to me?"

"I need time, Vincent."

"I respect your wishes, I will send you a letter before you leave."

"Yes, do that, please." And with that she was gone, leaving Vincent to

slide to the floor and weep the night away.

* * *

"Hey, Radcliffe, I'm impressed, in before me. Sure you're not sickening for something?"

"Hi, Joe, you know me too well," she smiled. "And I'm not sickening for anything but I do want something. Can I see you privately?"

"Sure, come in the office." Joe looked worried. "Tell me. You're making me nervous."

"Joe, I need to get away from New York... from all this. I've decided to take the job in Kentucky."

"Wow, you sure know how to surprise a guy."

"Can I go then?"

"You sure can."

"Thanks, Joe, I owe you."

"Can I ask you what changed your mind?"

"Sorry, no."

"More secrets, eh?"

"Fraid so."

"So what's new, eh?" he grinned. "Guess it must be a man, eh?"

"I really don't want to talk about it, Joe. Just... trust me."

"Okay, kiddo... I'm here whenever you need a shoulder to cry on."

"Thanks, Joe." With that, Catherine gratefully left his office.

Since that disastrous meeting with Vincent, Catherine hadn't seen him and, this morning, just before she left the apartment for the airport, a letter had been pushed under the door. She saw it as it came into view and quickly went to see who had delivered it, but all traces of the person

had gone. Shutting the door, she fingered the long cream coloured envelope with the scripted hand writing, which simply said:

Catherine

Elliot, now back in Kentucky, had received Catherine's urgent cable, which said:

COMING TO KENTUCKY FOR SIX MONTHS, PLEASE FIND
ME
ACCOMMODATION. SEE YOU ON THE 7TH.
CATHERINE.

As soon as Elliot received the cable, he saw his world at last taking shape. His Catherine was coming to him for a trial period of six months. This time he wouldn't let her slip through his fingers.

Manning quickly found a neat little apartment, which Elliot got tradesmen to transform into an even higher standard. *This is where money talks*, though Elliot. No expense was spared. Flowers were the final touch; they were everywhere. The wardrobe even had a new and elegant collection of clothes to greet her and, as Elliot looked around it, a smile of pleasure filled his face.

Then, he placed a small box on the night stand, which contained a flawless pair of diamond earrings, with a small hand-written note.

I chose these to welcome you, we will choose the ring together,

E

With champagne chilling in the fridge, the scene was set. Today she would be here with him; his dream was nearly complete. How proud his mama would have been to see him about to settle down with a girl like Cathy. The pain of losing her was forever with him. She had been the driving force which had got him this far; it had also been the time when his father had disowned him; when Stosh Kazmarek had died, and Elliot Burch was born.

After Elliot had given Manning the day off for all the hard work he'd

done, he went for a shower and to get ready to meet Cathy at the airport. The soft droplets of cold water eased the ache in his body for her. Soon she would be his and his alone.

Now dressed in a white polo neck sweater and fawn slacks, he left his suite and went to the parking lot and the car.

The cool air conditioning of the aircraft felt in sharp contrast to the searing heat of Kentucky, as Catherine disembarked. A small sea of people hurried excitedly, collecting luggage and greeting friends. She stood for a moment, not knowing quite which way to go, then suddenly, she felt a hand on her shoulder and another on her arm.

"Cathy."

"Hi, Elliot." Her pleasure at seeing him was reflected in her face.

"Good trip?"

"Yep."

"Welcome to Kentucky."

They both smiled and Elliot led her out of the terminal and into the waiting car. Once on the straight road ahead, Catherine was the first to speak.

"Do I have a place to stay?"

"You sure do, honey."

"I do?"

"I gave this little job my undivided attention." His face lit up, as only a man in love could look, with the woman of his dreams by his side.

"Why, thank you, Elliot. I do appreciate this. I'm sorry it was such short notice... something

came up."

Elliot leaned sideways, took her hand in his, turned it over and bent

down and kissed its palm.

"Keep your eyes on the road, Elliot, before we are both killed."

He stopped the car and taking her in his arms, kissed her on the lips.

"Welcome home to the loveliest person alive."

"Oh Elliot, please."

He smiled a knowing smile and started the car up again, easing back into the traffic. They exchanged an easy banter of news and gossip. The time flew by 'til they arrived at a two storey building. This was to be her home for six long months, without her Vincent.

"Penny for them?"

"I was miles away, sorry. Come, show me this apartment." Elliot got out the key and opened the door.

"Oh, Elliot, it's beautiful, it's beyond my wildest dreams... the flowers, it's all... Thank you." She opened her arms to give him a thank you kiss, which took Elliot off guard, but he quickly recovered enough to be instrumental in the return kiss he warmly gave back to her.

"Welcome to Kentucky."

"Thank you, Elliot. I really don't know what to say..."

"Don't say anything... just say you will have dinner with me tonight." She nodded her answer.

"I'll pick you up around eight, eight thirty."

"Yes, eight will be fine."

Holding the handle in his hand, he closed her door and, like a willo' the wisp, he was gone.

* * *

Catherine walked around the rooms inspecting them, opening cupboards and drawers until

her eyes fixed on the box on the night stand. As she read the note and looked at the earrings, all she could manage to say was, "Oh."

Her suspicious nature was confirmed with the note. Elliot was back on course, running favourite in the marriage stakes; his own private Kentucky Derby.

Catherine unpacked and showered, made herself a snack and coffee, then sat down and yet again fingered the letter from Vincent, which now lay on the coffee table, still unopened. Time passed by and soon it was nearly eight o'clock.

The tap on the door could only be Elliot, as she made to open it.

"Flowers for a lovely lady." He handed her a spray for her dress.

"Orchids, Elliot," she chided.

"Here, let me pin them on for you," he said and, as he stood back to decide where this should be, he took in the vision before him. Catherine wore a plain black cocktail dress with tiny straps that tied at the shoulder. "You look perfect..." He pinned the flowers to the base of her right strap. Then his hand ran down her arm. He leaned forward and looked down into her face. What he saw was sheer beauty. "I'm glad you're here."

"The earrings, Elliot, I can't accept them... they are too extravagant."

"You must. Please wear them tonight, please, honey."

"All right, and thank you."

When she had them in, she turned to Elliot to show him, but he only had eyes for her lips, which he sought with a hunger which scared her. All the pent up longing for Vincent, all the needs that grew for him alone since their paths had crossed over the last two years, came crashing down on her. And, unbeknown to Elliot, Catherine was kissing Vincent. She was exploring his face, her tongue played tricks along his eyelids, the dimple in his chin; Elliot was a lost case.

"Cathy, I love you so much, I need to love you."

Suddenly, Cathy felt through their bond, the hurt Vincent was feeling and her heart ached for him. Holding Elliot by the shoulders, she whispered, "Let's go eat, shall we, I'm starving."

The restaurant was lovely and the food a pure delight, with helpings like she had never seen before. But there was a sadness about her that worried Elliot. He put it down to being jet lagged. So, as he returned her to her apartment, he didn't stay for coffee and what his heart and body needed. Instead he left, with the promise of picking her up to take her sight seeing tomorrow.

Elliot sat up most of the night, trying to sort out his feelings and what was wrong.

* * *

Far below Central Park, Father and Vincent sat playing chess. It had taken Father a while to talk Vincent into sharing a game like old times. Vincent had agreed, saying, "If you insist."

"I do, it will take your mind off things... and I do miss our little games.

"I've neglected you, I know," he mouthed.

"No. No, never that."

"I'll take your pawn."

"And I take your knight."

Suddenly, Vincent felt a pull at their bond. He tried to ignore it, but it was hammering at his heart and wouldn't go away. As Father anticipated his next move, the bond truly opened up. Suddenly, Vincent knew what game Elliot had in mind for Catherine, as Catherine's feelings warned her of the danger, so Vincent picked up on this, which because of the distance, he was helpless to do anything about. An overwhelming all consuming jealousy took over as Vincent realised Catherine needed him and him alone.

"Grrrrrrr." The growl that started deep inside him went louder and louder 'til at last it was a full blown roar.

"Vincent! Dear god, is that what I have to put up with, just because for once I have beaten you," he chided.

"GRRRRRRRR."

"Tell me, what is it?"

Vincent rose and as he did so, caught the edge of the table, turning the chess board over and scattering the pieces on the floor. By the time Father had stood up, Vincent was long gone, but the roaring continued. Whatever stood in Vincent's way was thrown aside like a rag doll.

Finally, all was peaceful, except for the tappings on the pipes. Vincent at last returned to his chamber, after many hours deep in the belly of the earth. He walked slowly, his whole being weak from the stress of the last few hours. He had truly lost everything he realised as he threw himself on his bed and succumbed to a troubled sleep.

"Catherine... Catherine," were the last words he uttered as he slipped into a coma like sleep.

* * *

As the early morning light filtered through the window, Catherine sat up in bed. Where was Vincent? What was he doing? How she missed him. The letter..., she must read it. So reaching to the night stand, where she had put it late last night, she picked it up and with a deep sigh, opened it up.

Dearest Catherine

My heart is sad and lonely as I pen this letter to you. I knew one day I would have to write such a note, but I hoped, I dared to dream I would never need to. The last two years of my life have been the happiest, because you were there to share it with me. But I must now be the one to end it all. I have always hoped that one day a miracle would happen, so we could have and share a normal life together. It is what I longed for with all my heart.

But the world conspires to keep lovers apart and it would seem that

too, is our destiny. I know what I am, Catherine, I have no right to think I could be any more than your friend and protector. These last two years; seeing you, spending time with you, made my life more bearable. I came to live for the time we spent together. But when two people love each other as we do, then total physical love must be the next step. As much as we both wanted this, I could never allow this.

It's very hard to tell you, but I must confront you with the real reason. I've put this off to delay your rejection. I know what it is to love and I do desire you, my love, believe that, for it is the truth. Everything about my outward appearance is larger than the average man... except, Catherine, except the part of me you most desire. This breaks my heart. Forgive me, my Catherine. I'm glad you have found someone to really love you. Whenever you need my help, I will be here, to guard and protect you, to fulfill my promise to your father.

I love you. Have a happy life.

Love

Vincent

Catherine could hardly make out the last few words, for the tears made them swim together. Poor Vincent, hadn't he suffered enough, and now this. She had to return to New York, on the next flight; she needed Vincent now, more than ever before. If a union between them was impossible, she could accept that, but being apart she could not.

The doorbell rang and Catherine knew it could only be Elliot.

"Hi, honey." He stood there, in white shorts and a bright yellow tee-shirt, looking tanned and bursting with health and love for Catherine.

"Hi yourself."

"Is that coffee I smell?"

"Yeah. Sit down and I'll fix you a cup.

"Make mine black, my assistant drinks only black coffee, so I've picked up the habit." He followed her into the kitchen and, putting his arms around her, breathed into her ear: "Put your hand in my right pocket."

"Elliot, stop that at once!"

"Will you stop that and stop thinking you know best all the time! Put your hand in the goddamned pocket, will you woman?"

"Okay."

Slowly, her eyes fixed on his, she put her hand in the pocket of his shorts. There she found papers. Pulling them out, she looked at them.

"Elliot?"

"Tickets, honey, for you, out of here at noon today."

"Elliot?" she repeated.

"I love you like I will never love any other woman on this earth, but I'm no fool and you don't love me in quite the same way. It's this guy, Vincent. I'll never be able to compete with him. Whatever it is I sure as hell don't have it. I want only your happiness, even if it has to be without you by my side."

"What can I say, Elliot?"

"That we can always be friends.., maybe consider me for.., godfather one day?"

"One day you will meet Vincent, this I promise you."

"I know, but for now, get packing." He slapped her bottom with the tickets. "I'll pick you up at eleven on the dot. Be ready." They exchanged an understanding glance.

* * *

Vincent had, since his binge of destruction in the tunnels, and to himself, calmed down and was resigned to his fate. But it was a calmness which belied his true feelings. He stood now, by the Mirror Pool, one hand near the waterfall, the other on the rock face. His cloak flowed with the wind

as it gathered at this point from two other adjoining tunnels. The splashing waters drowned the tappings on the pipes as Vincent sought to calm his own torment.

"Vincent." A voice seemed to call him. "Vincent." A hand touched his arm. Turning slowly, he saw a vision before him.

"No, no more visions!"

"Vincent, I'm here, I've come home, forgive me, whatever we have, it's worth everything."

"Catherine, is it really you?" He straightened up to his full height and opened his huge arms to enfold this tiny precious gem that was his very life. "I thought I'd lost you forever."

"You know, Vincent, that is impossible, I love you so much." She snuggled up to him, her scent filling his very being. "I only read your letter this morning, I couldn't bring myself to read it before."

"I know of this pain.

"I couldn't bear the pain of losing you. Your letter made me love you all the more."

"And the problem I have?"

"Makes no difference to me, my love."

'Catherine, what ever did I do to deserve someone like you?"

"I'll take you anyway I can... trust me." She snuggled up, her body hugged and held him closer than before. "Vincent..."

He knew what she meant as, for the first time in his life, something stirred inside him, a part of him was coming alive.

"It would seem, Catherine, dreams do come true after all."

"I've dreamed of this, Vincent, I love you, so much."

They were last seen heading towards Father's study, to tell him of their

rare and precious love, which would overcome all life could ever throw at them. But father was a wise old man and no fool, he was waiting for them, with wine, not herb tea this time. This was a special day, a day to celebrate.

DEDICATION

GWEN LORD

Dedicated to my dear friend

Roy Dotrice.

*As a thank you for the warmth,
the love and the understanding he put into every
episode as Father, Jacob Wells.*

In the cult USA TV series

"Beauty and the Beast".

*The quality of his acting brought about a connection between
the fans and the character of Father,
that reached out to so many across the world
of different cultures and languages, as the
"Father" so many wished they had!*

ELLIOT'S DOWNFALL

GWEN LORD

Catherine's mind wasn't on the child abuse papers in front of her, that Joe had given her more than two hours ago. Her mind was in turmoil, as she tried to figure out what **really** made Elliot Burch tick. True, she was attracted to him---what woman wouldn't be----ever since she first saw him at the elegant cocktail party to celebrate a gift of artwork to the City of New York. She'd been talking to her friend, when she looked up directly into the eyes of the benefactor. Elegantly dressed, extremely handsome and the chemistry was unmistakable. Warning bells started to ring inside her head, but who listens to these when the heart has found a dream come true?

All her life Catherine had been schooled in what was expected of her, both in her private and public life. Since her mother's death when she was ten, Marilyn had been a 'stand-in' mother, whilst her father had been touring the world to lose himself in his work in order to hide, even from himself, the deep sorrow his wife's death had inflicted on him.

Then after Catherine had graduated, she went to work for her father, Charles Chandler, in the law firm, where she got good groundwork, but being totally spoiled, played on the fact she was 'Daddy's little girl', who could and did, twist poor Charles Chandler around her little finger.

Marilyn was not only Charles' secretary, but also Catherine's great aunt, so as Catherine learned the business, so Charles and Marilyn tried to guide her to a full and fruitful life.

Charles wanted his little girl married to a man who could give her

the standard of life he demanded for his 'little girl.' He paraded a string of likely suitors to Catherine, who went along with it all; 'the richer the better'.

Marilyn, on the other hand, wanted her to have a good life, but she wanted love to finally help the match---whoever he was. Charles wanted money and position for her and to this end, sought relentlessly for a suitor.

Elliot Burch was a major developer, with many irons in many fires, so when Catherine told daddy she's met this man and liked him, Charles was delighted. He immediately had a man put on the case to find out everything there was to know about Mr. Elliot Burch; his background, his plans and any dirt there might be, if they dug deep enough. Charles Chandler had to have all the facts in order to know the score of this highly successful man.

It had been about a year now, since Catherine had been attacked and dumped in the park. Vincent, who had found her and tended to her needs, had never experienced feelings like those he had when he was with her, before. He'd been told from early in his childhood that whereas others could find love and happiness in this world, heartbreaking as it was, he must never look or accept love because of who and what he was. Yet Catherine crept into his very soul until he was at one with her. The bond he knew, allowed him the miracle of knowing her every move and thought. Vincent had fallen in love.

Catherine felt there was something very special connected to her through Vincent, but she never allowed the word 'love' to become a part of it, as her upbringing and tutoring for a suitor never included someone like Vincent, with no money and no home. She was used to a society lifestyle, so Catherine continued to be a

social butterfly, but more and more, that kind of life seemed to hold less and less interest for her, as thoughts of Vincent invaded more and more of her time, with every passing day.

After Catherine's first meeting with Elliot at the cocktail party, it was only a couple of days later that he rang her at the office, asking her to have lunch with him. When she said she'd love to, but couldn't, because she was up to her eyes in work, Elliot brought lunch to her, embarrassing her in front of all her friends, but being a gentleman, he bowed out gracefully, though not before Catherine ran after him, apologizing when they kissed and made up.

Now as she sat back in her office chair, she contemplated all the different and manipulative ways he'd worked, to get his own way. He was a lot like her father, as he also felt money could buy anything and everyone, just as Elliot did. Once she would have gone along with this, but now, this bothered her deeply.

A date had been agreed after the kiss-and-make-up at the office, and the following evening both had enjoyed the elegant and lovely meal, followed by a walk in the park. As they stood by the fountain in the moonlight, Elliot kissed her and she returned his kisses as their arms locked tighter around each other. Was this love? she wondered.

Vincent's bond with Catherine had been getting stronger daily and when Elliot and Catherine kissed in the park, it was as if a knife had been plunged into his heart, when he realized what had just taken place.

A week had passed since the incident in the park between Catherine and Elliot, before Vincent met Catherine at the entrance to his world, within the tunnel. For the first time ever he felt

awkward and uncomfortable, knowing she had been in another man's arms, when he longed so much for those arms to be his.

SONNET XXIX

*When in disgrace with fortune and man's eyes,
I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And I look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
For in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From the sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.*

"Have you been well?" he asked.

"Yes.....I've missed you." Catherine felt the strain in their conversation.

"Do you love this man?" Vincent had asked, a question he'd dreaded the answer to.

"I don't know," Catherine had said, but was quick to tell Vincent that if she did, it would make no difference to their friendship.

Unable to stand the feelings he had, Vincent turned away suddenly and left her stunned, as he closed the cast iron gate to the safety of his home. Here he could weep in private, as he now realized he loved her deeply as a man, but his love could never be. Hadn't Father told him this at every possible opportunity? The pain he felt hurt deeper than any wound he'd ever had. It wasn't until a cave-in Below where Vincent and Father were in grave danger, that Vincent's bond to Catherine came full circle, as Vincent feared he'd never see her again and the pain that fear brought, was a pain so strong that Catherine, for the very first time, felt his pain and she knew, deep in her heart, Vincent needed her. Nothing and no one mattered, except Vincent, as she ran from the office to be by his side in his time of need.

Abandoning work, leaving Joe open mouthed, Catherine got a cab and made straight for her apartment and the threshold Below. Once down there, she tried to tap out one word. She only knew one word, and that was 'Vincent,' but even this one word received no answer. Desperation made Catherine wander off into the tunnels, trying to find her own way to the home chambers. It was only after many hours did she finally stumble across Mouse's chamber, where Catherine learned of the rockfall and the urgent need for equipment. So Catherine went back Above to get help, as fast as she possibly could and made straight for Elliot Burch.

Elliot was glad to give her the items listed on the scrap of paper. He found it strange and even laughed at Catherine's need of him, so nothing she wanted was denied her. But Elliot always had a price tag on anything he did for anyone, including the lovely and desirable Catherine Chandler, as time would reveal.

When Vincent and Father were at last found, the relief Catherine felt was beyond words. Then, as Vincent walked Catherine back to the threshold, he thanked her and she told him, it was love she felt for him. Vincent couldn't believe her words, as his heart sang with so much love for her.



Elliot Burch was the head of many companies and he was also a director on many boards. His work force was now huge which made it difficult to rule the empire he'd created hence, the people he employed to carry out his wishes had to be ruthless. This is what he paid them for; they had to be without hearts to get results. But one day these business tactics affected some old people who were close to Catherine's heart. So when Catherine found out---by accident---that these men were employed by Elliot Burch, the flame for him in her heart finally died.

But their paths kept crossing as the months unfolded, and every time they did, Catherine saw what a black sheep he really was. But still the chemistry was there and Vincent felt this in her and it troubled him deeply.

Months passed by, then one day, Elliot and his guards met Catherine in the parking lot. As Elliot emerged from the shadows, he asked for Catherine's help to get his father from hospital. As Catherine told Vincent about the meeting, Vincent felt duty bound to help him because Elliot had saved his and Father's lives

months before when they had the rockfall. But even then, with his father rescued from hospital, his associates were wicked and the result was his father was killed as his helicopter exploded. It was Elliot's insistence of her being on the dock to say goodbye to him that she was the innocent victim caught in the exchange of gunfire following the explosion, when Vincent felt she had need of him. As Catherine got Elliot to safety via the drainage tunnel, so Vincent was badly cut and injured in an alley, losing much blood from his hand which, when Father saw it, filled him with horror.

Why had she allowed this man, Elliot Burch, to capture her heart at the start? How Vincent had suffered and was unable to tell her of his heartbreak.

Catherine could now feel the bond, just like Vincent, because she loved him as much as he loved her. Vincent wondered where it would all end. Every time she was in trouble he cared so deeply and found himself dashing to her rescue but, if she fell in love with Elliot, if she should.....marry him, she would be lost to him forever.

One day while Catherine and Vincent were walking the tunnels to visit Elizabeth, the very fabric of the tunnels shattered, then the shaking stopped.

"What was that?" Catherine had asked Vincent.

He had told of the huge building going up above, on the ground directly above them. The foundations had to be so deep to take the enormous weight of such a building. As Catherine heard Vincent's sad account of how it could ruin all they had built over the years, Catherine knew she had to go something and promised Vincent and Father she would 'look into it,'

Investigation revealed it was Elliot Burch's new building that was causing the trouble and Catherine was at a loss as to what to do to stop it.

Elliot had a high level meeting in his office the next morning and Catherine burst in and interrupted it all. Ignoring those there, she threw abuse at him and left, leaving Elliot at a loss for words. Later that evening, as Catherine sat on her cozy little couch, wondering what she could do to halt the building, a knock at the door made her jump. Opening it, she saw Elliot Burch standing there. He looked sad and lost, so Catherine asked him in and offered him coffee. With coffee mugs in hand, she joined him on her balcony as he surveyed the New York skyline. He told her that seeing her today in his office made him realize how much he needed her and he wanted her to marry him. Reeling from this turn of events, she told him she'd think it over and promised him an answer.

Alone with her thoughts, Catherine saw fate had dealt her this card to save Vincent and all the wonderful people she loved deeply below Central Park. If she agreed to marry him, she would tell Elliot it was on condition he stopped the building. With this in mind, Catherine went Below to tell Vincent her plan. She cried in his arms as she unfolded her story and Vincent's tears fell into her hair as he held her close and begged her not to do it.

After a sleepless night, Catherine made straight for Elliot's office to tell him her terms for a marriage between them. But Elliot Burch wanted his building more than he wanted Catherine, he was single minded in his obsession to have this; no one and nothing would stop him in his quest for power.

But fate did hold the trump card. The building was stopped and

Elliot Burch was ruined. So his greed for power, for now, was crushed and Catherine went Below into the waiting arms of Vincent, whom she would never leave again.

OZMANDIAS

I met a traveller from a distant land who said:

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert.

*Near them, on the sand---half sunk---a shattered
visage lies.*

*Whose frown and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold
command,*

*tell that its sculpture well those passions reach which yet
survive.*

*Stamped on those lifeless things---the hand that
mocked them and the hand that fed.*

And on the pedestal, these words appear:

My name is Ozmandias, king of kings,

Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair,

Nothing beside remains.

*Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and
bare the lone and level sand stretch...far away.*

FATHER FIGURE

LYNETTE COMBS

ONCE UPON A TIME VOLUME TWO

It's given me some food for thought

this thing we're all a part of,

this splendid so-called fantasy

and what it's been the start of..

And sometimes still I wonder

at the power of your passion,

and what it is that draws us

is all together in this fashion.

It goes beyond the scope of

an outsider's first impression...

a league of dreamers, caught up

in a fairy tale obsession...

The truth beyond the knowledge of the folk,

who rise Above it,

is that we choose to be a part of

this because we love it.

The fairy tale tells us of a bond

that won't be broken;

*yet there's a greater magic here,
unnoticed and unspoken.*

*I see it in the way you've come
to trust one another,
and in the way you all have learned
to try and help each other.*

*And what it is, I think, is that
this "story" we've been sharing
inspires an especial kind of gentleness and caring.*

*You've found in it a richness,
more than simple recreation*

A family. A home. And friends who meet in celebration.

*And as for me, I find with every visit, card and letter
that what I thought was just a role I played,
is something better.*

If pressured for an explanation--well I haven't any...

*But never has one fellow been
a "FATHER" to so many!*

FREE SAMPLE

GWEN LORD

As the yellow cab drew up and stopped, Catherine leaned down to speak to the driver through his open window. "Bloomingdales," she said, then opening the door, she quickly got inside as the driver pulled away to join the ever increasing stream of traffic.

As she settled herself, Catherine noted that this was one of the older cabs, soon to be replaced by the New York highways division. It's black leather seats were worn and old, but there was something sort of friendly about an old yellow cab.

Her wandering thoughts were quickly dismissed as the voice of the driver swore and cursed about the build up of traffic so early. This is what she had hoped to avoid as she pleaded with Joe, to let her leave early today. She had quite a bit of time owing her with her very early starts of late, so Joe said "Sure", as she knew he would.

The only movement of any real kind, was from the cyclists, be they the push or motor type, as they wove their way like snakes through a dense jungle. A thud on the roof of the cab made Catherine jump, then smile, as the person looking at her and mouthing "Hi Catherine" was a face she knew well, that of Bennie, a Helper. Seeing him reminded Catherine of the Tunnels and Vincent who was her life. Tonight he was coming to see her, to spend time with her and to look at a box of secondhand books she had bought off Mr. Smythe at the bookshop that she and Joe visited from time to time. A smile formed on her lips at the memory of their first visit there, when Joe who didn't have much time for these kinds of bookshops, tried to tell Catherine they didn't have long, as they were due in court. Mr. Smythe had called Joe the

'TitWillow', of which she had teased him about ever since.

A few days ago, when she was almost ready for bed, the phone had rung and it was Mr. Smythe, telling her of a wonderful find; a box of first editions that had come his way should she want them for her 'mystery friend'. The following evening he had called round himself with a box, carrying it like a treasure trove, which to the collector, it most certainly was.

The old cab and speedless traffic were long forgot as Catherine continued to think of that night. After Mr. Smythe had left, she had sat by the fire with the old cardboard box by her side, as one by one she picked up the books enclosed. An almost magical feeling took hold of her, she lovingly brushed off the dust they had collected over the years, as they had sat on shelves, waiting patiently, as books do, until their cover is opened and their pages turned by the proper person. "Vincent is going to love all these," she whispered almost to herself. Did she imagine it, or did she hear a soft voice agreeing with her.

"Five dollars lady," the man's voice repeated, wanting payment of the now motionless cab.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" she asked.

"Gee lady, you really were miles away. I said five dollars, we have arrived," he grinned. She leaned forward, paid the man, then gathering her briefcase and purse together, she opened the door, stepping out onto the crowded pavements and heat. She half turned to watch the cab as it eased its way back into the mainstream of the traffic, to the blare of other drivers who didn't welcome his intrusion to rejoin them.

The store known as Bloomingdales was to her left, as she glanced

in front of her to the magnificence of the Rockefeller Center, where only the other evening, she and Vincent had stood behind the famous figure on a balcony, as they pointed out to each other, buildings and places of interest to them both, on this one evening the entire year, when Vincent could come above to share her world, without the fear of capture or rejection from his fellow man. Halloween had always held a magic of its own, but since knowing Vincent, it was a time when the walls between the worlds grow thin and the spirits of the underworld walked the earth. A spell seemed to be cast on Catherine as she relived such a wonderful memory.

"Free sample bubble bath lady, when you buy a key ring," the young voice invaded her reverie.

Looking around her and then looking down, she saw the face of a young boy, with the face of an angel.

"How much?" she asked as she bent down to more his level.

"Five dollars, lady," he told her as he sniffed, wiping his nose on his sleeve.

"How old are you?" Catherine asked kindly.

"What's it to you lady, you aren't the law, are you?" his eyes wide with fear now.

"No, it's just you remind me of someone I know, he's about your age and he's called Geoffrey."

"Do you want these or not?" he said as he pushed the goods into her hands for inspection.

"Here, take this 10 dollar note, and go buy yourself a burger, I'll take the FREE SAMPLE, but you keep the keyring."

Catherine smiled at him. He was a lovely child, but child he was, out on the streets trying at his tender age, to keep body and soul together by any way he could. He reminded her of the time when Eric and Ellie were the prey of men behind the scenes at the Bridgemont Children's Home, who used children for their wicked ways. She wondered if this boy was working for a similar gang. For now, this problem so close to her heart, would have to be put aside for another day, as for now, Bloomingdales called, as she slipped through the swing doors.



The small clock on her bedside stand said 6:20pm, she had long hours stretching out in front of her, before Vincent would be here, to spend priceless time together, till with the dawn he'd have to leave and return to his world. But tonight they had the books to enjoy together.

She wondered which to do first, take a shower then ring Jenny, or ring Jenny then take a shower, but the sight of the FREE SAMPLE bubble bath seemed to beckon her, changing her mind in an instant so picking up the small pink bottle she went straight into the bathroom to have a bath and long soak, instead of the quick shower.

As Catherine undressed, the bubbles were mounting as the water level rose and the sweet smell of apple blossom filled the tiny room. Stepping into the warmth of the inviting water and soft bubbles, Catherine felt she had made the right choice.

Time passed as the water cooled and the bubbles died away, till finally Catherine was forced to step out of the water and wrap herself in a huge warm fluffy towel. When she had finished towelling herself, she noticed large red patches on her skin, which

now all seemed to be itching at the same time.

"Damn", she said aloud as she itched and scratched away at the offending angry red areas. Even as she went into the kitchen to prepare a sandwich and Coke, the itching was getting worse.

As nine o'clock approached, she could stand it no longer, so reluctantly applied a lotion to the itching, which eased it a lot, but on drying, Catherine was covered in white lotion, looking just like a clown in a circus.

"Oh my God, what will I do? Vincent will be here soon, and look at me, I'll scare him half to death. I can't let him see me like this," she moaned to herself aloud.

Her panic and worry had not gone unnoticed by Vincent, who shared with her a very special 'bond'. First he'd felt her joy at the oncoming bathing time, so he also took a soak in the Mirror Pool, as he tried to do most times Catherine showered. This was a special time he could share with her, which she knew nothing about. But instead of her joy continuing it had turned to panic, so Vincent quickly left the Mirror Pool, intent on visiting Catherine earlier this evening, as all was not as it should be...

As the midnight hour approached, Catherine sat on her dinky little couch, still wrapped in her towelling robe, covered in white lotion from head to foot. She had decided not to see Vincent tonight, or until the rash at least had died away. She planned to tell him through the closed doors of her balcony, as with the net drapes, he would never notice the lotion. So, the moments ticked by, till she heard a gentle THUD. Her heart missed a beat, as it always did when he was near. A tapping on the glass, followed by "Catherine, it's Vincent." Getting up slowly, she went to the door and told him that something had turned up, that she couldn't see

him tonight. Tears filled her eyes, as she so wanted to see him and feel his arms hold her tight. Looking across at the box of books, waiting for them a sob shook her body, but she tried to hide it all from Vincent.

"I'm sorry Vincent, can we meet tomorrow?" she asked.

"Catherine, I MUST speak with you now, this moment, please Catherine."

"I can't, Vincent."

"What troubles you so, tell me, please?" he asked her tenderly.

"I'll tell you all about it tomorrow, I promise...." but she didn't have time to finish what she was saying, when the balcony doors burst open as Vincent made his way into Catherine's room.

"Vincent," she squealed, "I can't let you see me like this," she said as she tried to hide her face from him. But Vincent wasn't accepting her excuses. Taking her by the shoulders, he turned her around to face him. Then with such gentle fingers, he raised her face till their eyes finally met.

"Catherine, what have you done?" he asked, as his head bent low to take a closer look.

"I've got a rash, Vincent, from a bottle of FREE SAMPLE bubble bath I used tonight. I had this evening all planned and now it is all spoiled," she started to sob.

"I know you are not now in pain, Catherine, so why can't I stay with you like we planned." He waited for her answer.

"Because," she said.

"Because what, Catherine?" he waited.

"Because of how I look to you. I want you only to see me as I am, not like this when I am....flawed," she whispered the last word, but Vincent knew what she meant.

"You once told me of your love of Idylls of the King by Tennyson, how you dreamed some nights of Camelot and Lancelot. I reminded you how Lancelot was fatally flawed, destined never to find the grail. Then you, Catherine, reminded me that he was the greatest knight of all." Opening his arms, Catherine rushed into his welcome embrace. As he kissed the top of her head, he spoke close to her ear, taking in the scent of the apple blossom. "You accept me with all my flaws, which are with me to my dying day. Yours, my love, are here for a fleeting moment. Did you think my love for you so shallow, as to only love what I see? Beauty comes from within, you taught me that. And when this beauty from within is seen for what it is, the ugliness is of no substance. I love you, Catherine, I do not see or choose to see the imperfections."

"Thank you, Vincent, I'm sorry I didn't see the depth of such love you give me." She kissed his cheek. "Shall we sit by the fire and I can show you the box of first editions I've bought for you. They are magical, Vincent." She led him to the flickering firelight at the other side of the room.

"Don't put on the light, Catherine, the firelight is more than bright enough for my eye sight. Come, I will read to you, whichever is the first I pick up out of the box."

Once they were both settled amid a floor of cushions, Catherine felt Vincent's arm surround her, as with his other hand, he reached into the box and brought out a small brown leather bound book with gold leaf edgings. Vincent eased his thumb over the cover in a loving and appreciative way, then edging his claw under

the cover the page opened up to be read.

"It's Tennyson, Catherine."

IDYLLS OF THE KING

*But in her web, she still delights,
to weave the mirrors magic sighs...*

"Vincent, do you feel anything...?" she sat upright.

"Yes Catherine, I feel it, we aren't alone, I do believe the memories these pages hold, want to share with us this evening like your bookshop friend."

"Who? Mr. Smythe?" Catherine asked.

"No, Catherine, I mean Kristopher Gentian, he made himself known to you, didn't he?...in that bookshop because he knew you cared,...we cared, so they, whoever they are, must share some of our joy also." Catherine nodded then bent her head and kissed Vincent's hand, soon she was snuggled up and ready to let the story unfold...

GENESIS

By Gwen Lord

The graduation ceremony would soon be upon them; all the years of dedication and study had finally paid off. Today, with the highest of marks, John Pater, Peter Alcott and Jacob Wells, would leave this mecca of learning.... Doctors.

Room mates since day one, Peter and John - then lanky teenagers - had become close friends, each seeking and needing the brotherhood of true friendship found in each other. As the months came and went, the boys they were, became the men they turned into.

It was in the last and final year of their studies that they were joined by a new room mate, a chap from England! It was due to lack of space of accommodation within the living compound of the students, that a place had hurriedly been made for the chap from across the sea - a certain Jacob Wells. May be it wasn't as strange as it seemed at the time, to have a stranger thrust upon them in the last year ... may be fate was playing her hand... Who knew what trump card she kept hidden. But the friendship of the now three room mates was an instant success, as Jacob added stability, whilst Peter contributed the humour (a gift always there when they needed it) and John's wisdom was a tower of strength at all times. Known now for their inability to go or do anything unless together, the entire campus referred to them as THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

As John placed his tasseled cap on his head, he saw through the reflection in the mirror, Peter's unusually worried expression.

"Grieve not for yesterday, look only unto the morrow." John's deep velvet voice - as always -found exactly the right quote.

"I'm going to miss you, pal, I ..." His voice now betrayed him as words couldn't be found to express the way he felt, deep inside.

"Come now, dear friend, look not on this as the end, it is a beginning for us, our Genesis... There is a life out there waiting for us, we have to take it with both hands, be strong; go forward."

The two men now ready, looked elegant and very much the part.

"May be you should take one of these to calm your nerves." John held out a small antique pill box, tapping it with his finger.

"Those drugs will be your downfall, John," Peter warned.

"I think not ... I think rather they could be my very salvation," he replied as he replaced the small pill box in the inside pocket, patting the pocket flat to his chest.

"Where's Jacob...?" A worried look took over. "Shouldn't he be here by now?" Peter asked, looking for the tenth time in two minutes at his left wrist; the gift to himself of a very expensive watch.

"Have you forgotten? We are to meet him behind the stage, in line. He told us at breakfast he had to ring his brother in England."

"Ah, yes! Then let's go."

With robes swinging from side to side, they left their room, closing the door behind them. They joined a stream of uniformed clad figures like themselves, all going like programmed robots, in the same direction, their destination being the great hall, where families and friends awaited them.

On entering the side door, they were quickly caught up in the

steady hum of voices as excitement mounted. Last minute touches were made here and there. The two friends scanned the sea of heads until they finally located Jacob.

"Here he is, over there, John." Peter pointed to where their friend was frowning, red-faced.

"You're late! Where in the name of heaven have you been?" he greeted them sternly.

"Nice to see you too, Jacob," quipped Peter, then the tension broke and all three laughed as they got into line.

Following the impressive ceremony was the traditional cocktail party for the participants, families and invited guests.

"Hi guys.

All three heads turned at the familiar voice as their friend joined them.

"Charles ... did you get a good seat out there?" Jacob asked as he patted his shoulder.

"I sure did, pal ... Just look at you all, don't you look the part? Dr Alcott ... Dr Pater ... Dr Wells. First time I've seen you guys dressed anything like decent since I've known you!" he laughed. "What a shame your last name isn't Watson, you being English and all that, then we really could have pulled your leg."

"In which way?" Jacob asked, stone faced.

"Dr Watson, I presume," and at this all laughed, before quickly collecting their champagne as waiters carried endless trays laden with full glasses.

Charles was a little older than his three friends, having graduated, just as they had arrived. Their paths crossed at a baseball game. Somehow fate seemed to throw them together ... or was it by chance? Having shared the game, urging on their own teams, it followed that they have a drink together afterwards. Charles offered them a lift home, so only then did they all discover they were almost back-to-back neighbours. From then on, whenever Charles could get away from the law firm of Klass & Davidson, that he now worked for, the THREE MUSKETEERS quickly became THE FOUR JUST MEN.

Changed now into T-shirts and jeans, the four jumped into the only wheels they had, owned by Charles, a clapped out old Ford, but under the bonnet a lion ruled with power that never ceased to amaze them. Their destination was Sam's Diner, this had been their haunt since Charles had first taken them there, way back. On the outside, the building looked bleak and cold, but the outside needed to be this way to ward off the gangs that roamed the streets, hell bent on crime; jobless, no money and no future. As you passed the steamed up windows, the glow from inside offered a welcome. The badly scared wood of the door, when opened, offered a whole new world to the weary traveler.

A table in the far corner was classed as 'theirs'. So here the four sat, now enjoying a meal, as conversation drifted in the direction of the evening's entertainment. Starting at nine o'clock prompt was to be the Grand Ball. This was to be the hold the place had held on them since their arrival. All had to attend, so plans to make this a 'neat' evening, needed special plans.

As darkness fell and the clear dark starlit heavens replaced the sun of the day, streams of cars: Buicks, Studebakers, flash Fords, could be seen dropping off the cream of the social set for what promised to be the occasion of the year.

"So, who are you bringing, Jacob?" asked Charles, as he set

down his wine glass.

"Er ... well, no one actually, old boy ... Think I'll play the field tonight." He smiled a wicked smile. No one expected him to bring anyone, as Jacob wasn't ready to let go of his freedom to anyone; his ambitions came first ... well, for now at least.

"And you, John ... bringing anyone?" he asked with a knowing look, as he refilled their glasses.

"I shall darken the doors at midnight, with a raven haired beauty, you have yet to meet. Her name only will you know for now... she is called, Tamara." Mystery surrounded John; he seemed to feed on it, while an all powerful force seemed to guide him. As he said her name, it was plain to see, she held a special place in his heart... which was not like John at all.

"So, that just leaves you, Peter," Charles said, pointing a finger directly at his friend. "Will you have a lady on your arm tonight?" He kept up the demand.

"Yes, I will, as a matter of fact. You are a nosey lot!"

All three heads rose at once. "More, more!" they said in one voice.

"Before you all get really wild ideas, it's my sister, Caroline."

"Ah! Yes, I'd quite forgotten you had a sister," Jacob said as the red wine he drank loosened his tongue.

"She's been away at finishing school in France, she only came back to the States yesterday. Of course, I've kept quiet about her from you lot of rogues, but this seemed like a good idea for her to meet people and of course, to meet you lot," he laughed.

"This sounds fascinating, Peter... aren't you going to tell us

something about her? How old is she? Has she got a boyfriend?
Does she have gorgeous red hair...?"

"You'll all have to wait until this evening; not long to go, you guys..
and I'm warning you, she is my sister, my twin sister; you be on
your best whatever, you get me?"

John held up his glass. "A toast, I believe, is in order: to Caroline.
This evening holds more treasures than at first looked possible.
'Whose light in yonder window shines'."

"Caroline!"

The glasses clinked.

*

The well manicured lawns were now full of guests as they made
their way to the grand ballroom, the chatter and rustle of ball
gowns intoxicating. The friends made their way in their smart
tuxedos. As they approached the doorway, the fairy lights
festooned everywhere cast a kaleidoscope of colour of their stark
black suits. The long line of cars stretched as far as the eye could
see.

Drifting louder and louder was the lilting music from within; music
of the moment; that of Glenn Miller and other big band swing.
Once inside the doors, they were caught up in the spirit of it all as
they made their way to the bar, to the pre-decided place they had
agreed to meet up. Jacob felt Charles nudge him suddenly.

"Peter's here and... wow, hells bells! Get a load of..." Charles was
stumped for words... A lawyer, speechless!

"Hi, you guys. I'd like you to meet the other half of the double act.
Jacob, Charles, this is Caroline."

Jacob took her slim hand and kissed it. "I'm delighted to meet you."

"I've heard so much about you, all of you, I feel I know you already." Her voice was soft and happy.

"Caroline, this is Charles. Watch him, he is the legal eagle among us and has a way with words," Peter teased.

Charles saw before him, the loveliest vision he'd ever seen, his legs turned to jelly and his heart pounded loud enough, he swore everyone could hear it. She was so slim and dainty, about five feet four, he thought. Long golden wavy hair rested on such kissable shoulders. Her dress was ice blue net which revealed parts of her that set alight something in him, something new. When their gaze met, his brown eyes met her pools of green, which he would have willingly drowned in. He felt her hand, cool and soft in his. How could he let it go...? He wanted to speak, but where had his voice gone? Clearing his throat he tried in vain to say something.

"Charles, how is your mother? Peter tells me she's been very ill." She stood waiting for an answer, still holding his hand.

"My er... my mother... er... she's much er... much better thank you. How kind of you to ask. Can I get you a drink, or maybe you'd like to dance?"

"I'd love to dance with you."

And before anyone else could speak, Charles had taken her off in the direction of the ballroom. Mingling with the dancers, they slipped into each others arms as if destiny had made them for each other. MOONLIGHT SERENADE, STARDUST, I KNOW WHY, came and went. Caroline felt she'd waited all her life to have these arms around her. She looked up into the most gorgeous face she'd ever seen. With their arms around each

other, they danced the night away and, with eyes only for each other, the rest of the world was forgotten.

*

Like Cinderella at the ball, at the stroke of midnight, John Pater, a stickler for the dramatic made his grand entrance. Everything was in full swing and they stood in the doorway just as the music ended. All eyes turned to them, a gasp went up as the two stood, enjoying the effect they knew they were having. No one was in fancy dress at all, so their costumes stood out against the dainty ball gowns and tuxedos. Both were in dramatic black; John was a magician with long flowing black cloak; Tamara was a witch with long painted head gear, black dress and matching cloak. Everyone started to dap. He bowed to her and with her hand resting on his, held waist high, they entered the ballroom.

"John, over here," they shouted.

His guiding hand took them to the waiting friends and, once together, John spoke. "Taniara, these are my friends: Peter, Jacob... where's Charles?" he asked.

"Don't ask. He has been taken over by an all powerful force called... love."

"This then dear friends, is Tamara.

The music and dancing went on well into the night and early morning. One by one the band nodded off, unable to keep awake any longer. Then, even that ended and a stillness descended. The few people that were still awake found a corner to curl up in and sleep; on the floor, on top of the grand piano, behind the bar, it didn't matter.

Jacob was the first awake, the early dawn casting wisps of light across the wood. Slowly he stood to stretch and ease his aching

body. God, that was some bash, he decided, and I'm still alive, he smiled to himself. After a while, he found Peter sound asleep behind the bar, an empty bottle of vodka still in his hand.

Together they picked their way across the floor, looking for John and Charles. They couldn't find John.

"Where's Caroline, Peter?" Jacob asked when they couldn't find her.

"Charles took her home about one fifteen. Did you ever see anything like those two when they met. It was like destiny had them in its clutches. My little sister, gee, but didn't she look great last night?"

"Yes, she looked quite delightful. Lucky Charles, I never even got to have one dance with her," he smiled.

*

It had been decided earlier that all four would meet up in three months time to swap notes, news and information and it went without saying, that it had to be at Sam's Diner; it simply couldn't be anywhere else when this place held such special memories in their hearts.

The hour of their meeting was seven o'clock sharp. First to arrive were Jacob and Peter, who followed each other within minutes. The familiar chintz decor and friendly atmosphere was a haven for all those who found this unique place. Sitting at their table, they caught up on the last three months.

"Well, Jacob, so how goes it? Did you get that position?"

"Yes, I was accepted into the very research laboratory I wanted, at the Chittenden Research Laboratory. It's a brilliant opportunity for me, I love every moment of it. I've got on the nuclear physics

program, it's fascinating. I expect I'll stay there 'til I'm a hundred and... I've got a special person in my life..., she is called Margaret."

"That's such good news, Jacob, I'm so pleased for you. This calls for a toast, don't you agree?" he grinned.

"Of course. Now tell me, how goes it with you? Did you get that large teaching hospital you wanted so badly?"

"Yes... and no."

"How can this be? Tell me."

"Yes, I got it, and no I didn't take it, I know that sounds strange."

"But you wanted it so much, why did you do this, Peter?" he urged.

Leaning forward he started to explain.

"The way they treated their patients... the rich got it all, Jacob. The full works; nothing too much trouble. Best drugs, no waiting... money talks, believe me. The poor among us got different treatment, it made me sick. They told lies about drugs not arriving on time; poor quality food, long waiting lists which never moved; it made my skin crawl and my blood boil. I flew through the interview, but my first week was an eye opener and I'd had more than enough so I just left. I tried so many places, my shoe leather is inches deep on the sidewalks of New York, pal, you gotta believe me," he smiled.

"So you don't have a job then?" Jacob quizzed.

"Sure I do, I'm working as an intern at St Vincent's Hospital and Jacob, I love it. You really get to see life there; real life. The drunks, women of the night, poor nice people, those who really

need helping, and here I know I have found my vocation.

"You are a good person, Peter. This work will be so fulfilling to you."

"Jacob, I feel privileged to be there. Did you know, there's miles of tunnels down past the sewers, just below us, under our very feet. People who are homeless live there. Can you believe that? That is all they have in the world. While the rich buy large flash cars and spend fortunes on taking their bosses to lunch; buying expensive gifts for their mistresses, these people get nothing. Yet they are happy with their lot and will give to others. Doesn't that tell you something here, in your heart?"

Just then, the little bell above the door rang, announcing the arrival of new customers. Looking up they saw Charles... and Caroline, coming towards them.

"Sorry we're a little late, folks, but you'll have to excuse me, after all, a guy is allowed to be a little late on his wedding day."

"Wedding!" Jacob and Peter spluttered out together.

"Jacob, Peter, allow me to introduce you to... my wife, Caroline Chandler."

Why weren't we invited to the wedding, buddy? She is my sister!"

Caroline put her left hand on the arm of her brother, the new gold band gleamed in the light.

"You're all invited to the reception, here at Sam's Diner." She laughed as she snuggled up close to Charles.

Her husband took over. "We've been married exactly twenty-five minutes and they are the happiest twenty-five minutes of my life!"

He planted a kiss on the side of her head.

Again the doorbell rang. All heads shot up once more, as John swept in very dramatically, wearing a large floppy hat, flowing short cloak, dressed in black from top to toe and, sporting a beard.

"Dear friends, we meet again..., and the lovely Caroline, I see. Charmed, I'm sure," and with a sweep, he took her hand to his lips. "This time I'll monopolise your time, my dear, instead of old Charles here."

"I think not, John. She is now my wife, my heart's best treasure.

"Your joking is not funny, Charles. This time she will be mine, won't you, my dear and he took her in his grip. As Caroline tried to get away from him, he couldn't fail to notice the gold band and a frown crossed his face. He was not amused.

Releasing her, he sat down, reached into his pocket, brought out his pill box, opened it up and popped a white pill onto his tongue. Within moments, his ruffled mood changed and smiling at Caroline, he wished her and Charles a happy life.

Taking Caroline's hand once more, he fingered the ring. "Such a charming and pretty thing; surely you can't want Charles when you could have me."

"John, behave yourself, you're embarrassing my wife." Charles coloured at his choice of words.

"So, where are you employed then, John?" Jacob enquired. "Do tell us."

"I've landed the perfect job. You remember Tamara, her father runs the Melrose Drug Research Station. It's good to have friends and to make use of them," he smiled wickedly. "When needs must

and all that." A wicked smile tried to escape across his worn and lined face. "Tamara helps me with my experiments. A brilliant woman, she will do whatever I ask of her... not many like her around these days." John continued his self opinionated prattle about himself, whilst the others looked on, seeing a man who had been taken over by the drugs he took and worked with. He was a willing slave to the little pills he took and, unbeknown to Charles, Peter and Jacob, was still mad that Charles had taken Caroline from under his nose, when he so badly desired her.

*

Later on, John made a seedy collection of friends through drugs. His need of them for himself and his tests urged him into shady dealings that even put his job at risk. He started to steal from work; small quantities at first, which gradually increased until huge amounts were found to be missing and John was fired.

*

Jacob continued to do well at the Chittenden Institute. He became very liked and well known. He wrote about his findings and had them published. Life seemed almost too good to be true to Jacob, as since Margaret came into life, when he first saw her come out of a building and get into a cab, he thought she was the most lovely girl he had ever seen. It was love at first sight when they did finally meet and soon, they were married. Margaret had led a sheltered life; an only child doted on by her parents; but their life together was to be short lived.

Jacob's publication brought to everyone's attention, details that the Chittenden Institute wanted to keep under wraps. As a result, he was accused of being a communist; a thing of grave concern at that time. One thing led to another; he was charged and found guilty by the un-American Committee and left the Institute in disgrace.

Margaret was a loving, but weak person who, under pressure from

her parents, allowed her father to end their marriage. So Jacob lost his job, his home and the woman he truly loved more than life itself.

He took to living rough. The down and outs became his friends; the gutters and trashcans his place for survival. As the months passed and the snow came, the temperature in New York city hit a record low.

It was a woman who found him, almost frozen to death. She helped him find a warm place to lay his head; some food to eat and friendship to treasure. Her name was Grace.

*

Charles and Caroline Chandler moved into a nice apartment and were ideally happy. Within the first year of their marriage, Caroline gave birth to a very special daughter. They called her Catherine.

*

Peter Alcott continued to work at St Vincent's Hospital. Helping the needy was a special bonus to him each day. The people who hung around the food rubbish cans and hospital trash interested him a lot. He even left out good stuff to help them. He worked his way into their confidence until one day, they took him to their homes, far below Central Park. Here he found mile upon mile of tunnels, with people from all walks of life living rough. This was a very secret place, a place of hope and a place that would in the fullness of time, be the center of much in all their lives.

As his life was once more taking on some kind of meaning, unknown to Jacob there was also a friend living deep in the core of the earth. John had taken one of his teenage girls below with him when he had to leave his much loved work. She too, was an outcast from the main stream of society. The loving and caring

John showed her (even if it was false) made him very special in her life. He promised her marriage if she would live with him in his secret place.

An illegal marriage took place and Anna Pater fell in love with her husband. Even when she knew what he was doing, was wrong, she stood by him, at much suffering to herself, under his experiments.

His experiments on himself had made him unable to father children, but because of the state he was in all the time, on account of the drugs, he blamed Anna for failing to give him the son he wanted.

Anna would shed rivers of tears, then go above to seek the solace of the night as she walked the back streets and alleys.

It was on such a January night as Anna was rummaging amongst the 'goodies' at the back of St Vincent's Hospital, for her husband, that she heard a weak cry, almost like a kitten. Stopping, she listened and it came again.

Suddenly, she pulled back an empty carton and there, wrapped in rags, lay a very unusual baby. In the half light, she could see it was hairy, with claws, but she knew quite clearly that it was a baby and abandoned, most likely because of its differences.

Pulling the half frozen mite to her, she sped down the alley and into the drainage tunnel and home. When John saw her he knew something was amiss and when she opened her coat, he saw a child. The look in his eyes scared her, as she knew only too well what was going through his mind.

John did some tests on the strange child; he even, in his drugged state, felt it was his son. An overpowering affection sprang up, until Anna took it upon herself to take the baby away from him and

seek help. She had heard of a doctor who lived below; a man people called 'Father'.

The way was long and Anna was not a well woman. Many rests along the way to gather her strength were needed, but at last the glow of the chambers came into view, making her steps quicker. When Anna showed 'Father' the child, he was deeply moved and when she told of her husband's ways, it was agreed that the child should stay with him.

On Father's orders, Anna spent three days and nights resting before returning to her husband. She had no idea Jacob knew John and, that for a while, both had ruled below; Jacob plotting the positions of the tunnels; John perfecting a form of morse code that would be impossible for outsiders to read, thus keeping their secret world in tact. The two men worked long and hard getting the chambers made and a way of life set up that was a perfect haven for the 'lost'. But things came to a head the day Grace died giving birth to Jacob's son and John, in his drugged state had let his evil heart speak. Jacob banned him from the home chambers, to the place he and Anna now lived in.

The tiny waif cried nonstop for the three days and nights that Anna stayed; then, just as suddenly, the crying stopped, the tears ended and two very blue eyes looked up at Father. At that moment a bond was forged.

"What shall we call him? Have you any ideas, Anna? If you have, please share them," he begged.

"I found him outside the hospital called St Vincent's... why not call him, Vincent."

"I like that, Anna. That is what we will call him and, dear god, let him live, he is so small and so weak," he prayed.

When Anna finally returned to her home, John was waiting for her. He was so mad when he found out she had left his son with his enemy, Jacob Wells, that he vowed to get his revenge, one day. He hated Anna for what she had done. His world was in pieces yet again, so, when he gave Anna her medicine, it was laced with a deadly poison. Anna died in her sleep, but her soul was in torment.

Helpers within the tunnels heard of her death and Jacob wasted no time in going to see John over this. The fight Jacob had with John years before had resulted in his broken hip, so the long trek to see him caused him great pain and much suffering.

The green and murky light of their cave home, with bats flying around him made Jacob wince at the thought of Anna having to have lived like that. Once inside the main area, all was still.

"You are a long way from home, my friend. Why do you seek me out old friend, that was?" The large, imposing shape of John seemed to peel itself from the shadows of the rocky walls.

"I'm here because of Anna.~

"You took away my son, you poisoned her thoughts, you are the villain here. You and your do good to all, makes me sick. You delight in taking away all I ever held dear. We could have been like two kings here below, but you couldn't do that could you, old friend?" he scoffed.

"John, you killed Anna, you know that and I know that and I can't allow you to stay here any more." He leaned heavily on his stick.

"You can't allow? Who are you to tell me these things? For your information I am no longer John Pater, I am known as Paracelsus.

"You will leave this place today; you will never return and I will see

to it that the 'Silks' hear of what you have done. I don't hold with what they do, but they believe in a justice of their own and what you have done will cause them to track you down, so go... Paracelsus or whatever you call yourself and don't ever come back to these tunnels."

"I will go, but I will be back... old friend and I will want my pound of flesh." With that, he went into the laboratory where he was growing all the drugs, grabbed his hat and spoke to his assistant. "Tamara, we are moving on."

As John and Tamara made to rush past him, Jacob put his hand on his arm. "John, you tread a fine line here, between being a brilliant man and the downfall of everything. Remember that, learn from your experiences, be warned."

But John snatched his arm away and hurried quickly out of sight.
*

The years came and went, a whole new way of life evolved down Below. Vincent grew up into a strong and loving son to Jacob. His own blood son was unaware that Jacob was his father, as he felt, if he knew, all would know and he didn't want to single him out for special treatment. So Devin felt cut adrift and sometimes, unloved. He found friendship with a real wild boy called Mitch Denton, who told him of all he was missing living 'Below'. So, as soon as he was old enough, Devin fled the home he knew (the hole in the ground home he called it) and left behind a broken-hearted Vincent and Father.
*

Charles prospered, got his own law firm and took on a partner. But when Catherine was ten years old, Caroline died. Charles was so heart-broken, he wasn't able to share his grief with anyone, even his beloved Catherine. Losing her mother was a real shock to Catherine, which she kept bottled up inside her. Charles'

cousin, Marilyn, worked for him as his personal right hand, so when Caroline died, Marilyn became her stand-in mother. One day, when little Cathy was playing in the office, she saw a photo of her mother on her father's desk. Going up to it, Marilyn heard her say, "Why did you have to die, mummy?"

Marilyn turned away, crying.

*

Peter's daughter Susan, and Catherine, soon became very close; more like sisters, so slowly the gap caused by the death of her mother eased a little for Catherine, but she always felt she was searching for something; yet she didn't know what it was.

Far below the city, deep in the tunnels, another soul felt that he was searching for something and didn't know what it was. This feeling he had was sometimes so strong it almost overwhelmed him, but with each new day, he felt that whatever it was, it was now getting closer.

Then, one night, early in the month of April, Vincent had to rid himself of the tunnels. He grabbed his cloak and with his long, powerful legs, ran all the way to the drainage tunnel entrance in Central Park. His sensitive nose picked up the sharp clear scents of the night and he hung back in the shadows, waiting... for what?

Then Vincent heard a van stop just in front of him; saw the side door open and a body thrown out. It rolled over and over and over. The van spun its wheels and made off into the night. Easing himself from the shadows, Vincent ran with care - not to be seen - to the body. All the while, the feelings he'd been having grew stronger and stronger until they were almost exploding inside of him. As he turned the body over and touched the blood covered hand, a peace descended on him and he knew, in that moment, that this was what he had been searching for; this was his destiny; here was what was meant to be.

With tender loving care, he picked her up and carried her many miles below, to his world, where she was able to heal and here she too, knew when she awoke and heard his voice and touched his hand, that what she had also been searching for was here, in this place, wherever it was. Here she had come home, and a 'happy life' was just waiting to start.

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HEART LAID BARE

GWEN LORD

"Why do I feel the way I do, why...when I have achieved all this, all the dreams I cared about. Why is it I feel so empty inside, as if it was now all for nothing?" Elliot tossed his expensive pen across the magnificent piece of furniture that was his desk. A deep sigh left his weary and exhausted body.

Glancing up at the large old antique clock on the facing wall, he saw the time reflected back at him: 3:20am, it was inconceivable how the hours passed with such lightning speed, as if on wings of the wind. He stretched and rubbed the sleep away from his eyes, unable to allow it to finally take command of his body.

Sitting back in the ample black leather chair, he ran his hand through the mass of his hair, then allowed it to move over the new growth of beard, that shortly, would need his attention.

Elliot opened the drawer at the right hand of the desk and, without looking, felt for his bottle of whiskey---it was his second this week. Taking off the top with determined hands, he lifted it to his mouth, savouring, allowing the liquor to swirl and intoxicate before it went on its way to help fill a need, of which he knew not the source, then he continued his soul searching.

As a child, he had made promises to himself; he wouldn't be a carbon copy of all that made up his daily life, he was determined to carve a better destiny, than the one as Stosh Kasmarek. *One day...he vowed, I will alter all this*, and in his teens, set about bringing it to pass.

The first thing he did was to change his name, one he had decided on years ago was now his, Elliot Burch. The wrath that

this brought about, from his ailing Mother and his drunken Father, resulted in him leaving home---as much as it was; putting his past behind him---which was not easy to do, he found, but necessary---in order to re-carve his future.

Looking back, the road had not been easy and, more than once his life had been in danger because of shady deals he had to make, in order to go forward. And if he intended to get to the top, forward he had to go, to make his mark on his beloved New York.

Time and tide waits for no man, and Elliot Burch was no exception. He wined and dined and even slept with the enemy, but at least his dreams were starting to take shape.

The first building to bear the E.B. insignia was the City Planners new 'toilet scheme'. Not the best place to begin the ladder to the top, but everyone had to start somewhere, and he had put his foot on the first rung of that ladder.

Once this first step had been taken, more and more work came his way. He was keen to be way out in front and, if a building was not quite on schedule, then he would join the men on site and work alongside them, anything to get himself a good name and become trusted.

The emotion he felt on the completion of his first skyscraper was indescribable. He felt like he had given birth. At last he had arrived and, of course more and more buildings followed, all bearing the E.B. name. Now not only was he sought after for his buildings, but his bank balance, as mothers pushed their daughters forward to be in his company. The prominent men in the city looked on him as a possibility for their precious daughters. There had been a lot of talent about, and Elliot had to agree, he did enjoy this side of it all; a side that Stosh Kasmarek would never have seen. One

didn't look a gift horse in the mouth, and out of all these sweet moments and associations had come some pleasant memories. He smiled. How close he had come on more than one occasion to marrying one of them.

Elliot felt he was truly accepted, when the Mayor offered him the freedom of New York City for all he had given them and, in return, Elliot had offered to put a large slice of his art collection on display in the museum and then to donate it to the city.

It was while he was attending this glittering, occasion he recalled, that he looked up to see a vision of beauty before him, beyond his imagination, and lost no time in going over to speak to her. His charm and good looks held her captive, as he continued to hold her interest. For the first time in his life, Elliot Burch was falling in love.

He felt comfortable and at ease in her company, and the need to see her all the time, was the driving force to so many dates.

Looking back, he sensed she held back and never really gave all of herself to him, even on the one night that they shared in his penthouse suite. But Catherine Chandler had come into his life, and from the first moment that he saw her he was a lost cause. He decided early on in their relationship, that one day he would make her his bride, as only she held the key to his heart.

Never having asked the woman of his dreams to marry him, the thought of this task filled him with fear. He rehearsed his lines over and over again, until when he felt he had it right, he set off for Catherine's apartment at breakneck speed. Only, when he got there and discovered her not in, did he look at the time and to his shock see that it was nearly five in the morning. He was worried and decided to wait, and moments later she arrived, all flushed

with love which he mistook was for him.

As soon as Cathy had brought them coffee to the balcony he could wait no longer. He proposed and spilled out his heart. He pleaded with her to share all he was, all he had and, he tenderly told her. "And I do love you." This was the most important decision he had ever contemplated, as he offered her his heart. A lifetime was never goin to be enough time for prove to her how much she meant to him.

Her refusal was like a blow from some unexplained force. At first he couldn't take it in. He told her to sleep on it and not to decide right away.

The following morning she had entered the office very early, to tell him she would marry him, but only on her terms, but the terms she offered staggered him. How could he do what she asked, to stop building his pride and joy, his lifetime's ambition. He couldn't let go of his dream after all he had done to get this far. With her terms in tatters, she had hugged him and left him alone in his office, in shock.

There had been other times he thought on looking back, where he should have sensed his love was not returned, but he was in love, and a man like Elliot, only loves this way once, and so believes in dreams and in possibilities.

She returned the meal he had specially prepared for her, and even when they had nearly died together on the docks, and he had kissed her, he felt sure she leaned into the kiss; then it was gone. Later that same evening she told him there was no hope for them and a part of him died then.

She never knew his heart was broken and that even Elliot Burch

could cry.

Over the weeks and months that followed, they still met and had a meal together. She sometimes even appeared to flirt with him and his heart sang, but he knew her heart was bound to another. If only he could see his rival, but this was denied him. All his power and money couldn't bring him the happiness he craved, and the only person to bring him this peace of mind was in love with another.

Word got to Elliot that Catherine had left the DA's office and had gone to live with **HIM**. It cut like a knife, there was no one in this city that could give her more than Elliot, and yet she had turned him down flat, she had even told him once that Vincent didn't have a job and could not even offer her a home, but she said that did not matter, as she had enough for both of them. Yet, when ever she needed help, it was Elliot she turned to and he gave her that help, knowing that she would never give him reasons, and only said, "Trust me!" which, with his heart on his sleeve, he did.

"Oh, Catherine, why did you have to say...NO!"

Elliot replaced the cap on the bottle of whiskey, then returned the bottle to the drawer. Slowly he stood to his full height, then put on his coat and straightened his tie. Glancing yet again at the clock on the wall, saw that it was 5:17am; hardly worth going home to an empty house---the home he had built for Catherine, but had never got the chance to give it to her. She would never now see, each room furnished to perfection, a dream home. He had built it with such promise, with such love and attention to the smallest detail. Even the nursery lay in wait of its owner, a child's paradise with every soft toy money could buy.

Now he knew what it was that was wrong with him, he was lonely.

This empty feeling he carried around with him was the emptiness he felt without her. Didn't she know, he wasn't a bad guy...and to prove it, he would always be here for her, waiting to pick up the pieces of her life, if she even needed him, and until then...he would work deep into every night, to make his body so tired, that it fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, instead of into her arms.

He knew that one day, his dreams could come true, it did for Stosh, so why not for Elliot...

I WONDER

GWEN LORD

I wonder if he knew,
I wonder if he guessed,
The part of him she hungered for,
His dark and other 'self'.
I wonder if he dreamed,
I wonder if he planned,
To give her what she hungered for,
Both dark and gentle Beast.
I wonder if he cried,
I wonder if he wept,
to take that final step,
That seemed forever out of reach.

I'LL BE WAITING

GWEN LORD

All was silent in the ill-lit tunnels below Central Park. Then into the silence could be heard the shuffle of feet and the tap of a stick, an early warning of the approach of Father, the head of the subterranean population he'd ruled over firmly with love, for the best part of his life. When Devin, Vincent or Mitch were in their early teens and up to every trick in the book, Father, realizing the dangers lurking around each corner, for the unsuspecting boys, patrolled these tunnels often, but the tap of his stock saved the boys many a time from the sting of his authority, as they shot through nooks and secret places, only to reappear in yet another area of possible danger. But with the passing years, his pace had slowed down somewhat, much to the delight of a new generation of youthful tunnel children. How many more times he wondered, would he travel this same route.

A dim light shone in the darkness ahead of him, like a beacon, urging him on. But the nearer he got, the slower his steps became, 'till just before he arrived at the door entrance, he did in fact stop and, taking out a red spotted handkerchief, patted his face and wiped away a tear which slowly fell onto the cheek. Now a little more under control, he put away the handkerchief, pushing it deep into the inside pocket of his cloak. Two steps had him at the entrance where he was able to see fully inside.

"Dear God, she is still with us; a prayer answered," he mumbled to himself.

"Jacob, is that you?" the frail voice asked.

"Yes, my dear, I am here, close by you. Give me your hand," he

spoke in a whisper, as he eased his way into the over stuffed chair, taking her hand in his.

"How's Catherine and the children?" She turned her head as she spoke.

As he looked at her, he saw past the face nestled in the pillow and saw the pretty young woman who had come Below, so many years ago, following the death of her son. With nothing to hold onto, she had felt that life wasn't worth living or going on. But one of the helpers had seen her as she pondered whether to jump or not.

"Can't be all that bad." A voice had reached her inner thoughts.

"You don't know the half of it," she said in the saddest voice William had ever heard.

"I know I'm a stranger to you, but I am willing to listen if it would help." He waited, hoping she wouldn't jump. he couldn't swim and there was no one about at this late hour.

"Why would you want to hear my tale of woe," she said, as she turned to face the largest man she had ever seen. But she wasn't afraid, as his face was like a happy Santa, which quickly made her smile.

"Please tell me how I can help," he pleaded.

"It's a long story, I wouldn't know where to begin," she sighed.

"The begining is a good place to start." William pointed to the park seat.

So the two of them talked and talked the early hours away. As the dawn was about to show its face to the start of a brand new day, a

new voice broke the silence.

"Everything all right, William?" This voice was like liquid velvet.

"Oh hi, Vincent, you just back from one of your walks?"

"Yes, the dawn and the hours before it, are mine. Such wealth, I could never change my state with kings," and with that he was gone, as if swallowed up in the shadows.

"Who was.....that?" she asked.

"Oh, that was just young Vincent, on his way back home." William leaned forward and looked into her face; such a pretty face.

"You're coming home with me. There will be no arguing either, come on, I will see you have some of my home made broth and a glass of Father's wine."

"Your broth?" She looked puzzled.

"I'm a cook, can't you see the size of me? I like to sample all the fresh hot bread and the pies as they come out of the ovens.....and it's my downfall." He held out his hand to help her stand up.

She rubbed her arms as she realized suddenly how cold she was.

"Here, put my jacket around your shoulders, to keep out the tunnel chill."

"Tunnel.....chill.....where are you taking me to? I know a voice in my says 'don't go,' while another voice says 'I can trust you.'" For the first time she felt she had a friend.

"Tell me, what is your name? You know mine now, as young Vincent said it."

"Mary."

"My mother's name was Mary, too. She was such a tiny woman, not unlike yourself. I can see we are going to get along just fine," and with that, he led her across the park and down and down and down below Central Park, to where a new life was about to begin.

As Jacob held her hand, he felt her fingers tighten from time to time, as his thoughts somehow seemed to be her thoughts too. He patted her hand and leaning across, gently pushed a stray lock of white hair out of her eyes.

"You've always been a kind and patient man, Jacob," she said.

"I wasn't always so patient, but I had to learn patience, which you, my dear, showed me how this could be."

"William was so kind that night, Jacob. It was like it was meant to be; him finding me and all."

"I **thought** you knew what I was thinking just now; I didn't realize you could do that.....look into my thoughts." He was truly amazed at this finding.

"Vincent isn't the only one who can know what a loved one is doing or thinking, Jacob." Her smile was weak, but her eyes betrayed her love of this man.

"You mean.....over the years.....you have.....been able to know what.....I feel.....for.....you.....?" He stood and then sat down again, not quite knowing what to do.

"Oh yes, I have known your inner thoughts about me, but I never felt worthy of you, Jacob. I didn't want to be a burden to you, so I chose to be Mary, everyone's Mother, since I lost my own family. We've been Mother and Father to all the children."

"Oh, my dear, how parallel our thoughts have been, yet we both felt we couldn't reach out, just in case we were rejected. What a waste, what a waste!"

Out came the red handkerchief again, to wipe more tears away, followed by a large blow.

"I've been happy here, Jacob, amongst you all. I found a purpose in life; I saw how you all cared for each other, and the love you had for those you didn't know; there was always a hand to hold; a shoulder to lean on."

"Shush, my dear, you'll be tiring yourself too much," he scolded.

"My time is nearly here, I feel it. I used to wonder what this time would be like.....there is nothing to fear, Jacob.....I'll be waiting for you, just.....that I have to.....go first."

"No, Mary, don't leave me, not now, when we have found each other after all these years," he pleaded.

"We have a bond like those two love birds, Vincent and Catherine, and.....Jacob, look into your heart and you will see, you will be with me very soon."

He nodded. "Yes, I've felt for a while now, that my time was drawing to its end, but I chose not to listen," he smiled to himself at his own foolishness.

"Kiss me, Jacob, one last time."

"Of course, my dear." Getting up, he leaned over her and their lips met at last.

Suddenly, he felt the life in her suddenly stop and he knew she had gone. Sitting back heavily in the chair, he looked at her; so

peaceful, so lovely. Was that his imagination, or did he see an angel above the bed, holding out her hand and Mary reaching out to hold it.?

Just before she had gone, Jacob saw her turn to face him and smile.....he wasn't sad, he truly knew, very soon he would be with her for ever more. They had so much to catch up on..... and now they had an eternity to share. "I'll be waiting," lingered in his memory and he knew she wouldn't have long to wait.

IN THE NAME OF LOVE

GWEN LORD

As Vincent and Catherine left the warmth and amber glow of the tunnel world far below, their eyes took in the magical white scene, as it stretched out before them. As far as the eye could see, everything was covered in deep snow.

"Look Vincent.....it snowed," Catherine pulled at his arm in excitement.

"Yes, it's very beautiful....almost another world," he sighed, as his arm crept around her shoulders, holding her near, keeping her protected from the thin air.

"I always loved the snow as a child...did you, Vincent?" she asked, her face tilted up for his answer.

"Devin would sneak me Above when it snowed, or when there was an electrical storm. Father didn't often find out. Devin showed me the moon when I was about eight...I thought it was the most magical thing ever," he smiled as if recapturing long lost memories.

"More magical than the snow, Vincent?" she tugged at his arm.

"I'm afraid not...the snow, Catherine, and you, are a magic beyond the magician."

"What a lovely thing to say, Vincent, but it is you that brings the magic into my life." Then reaching up she planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Would you like to have me carry you, Catherine? The snow is deep at this end of the park," he bent, ready to sweep her up into

his arms.

"NO," she squealed, "I have my boots on.....let's stroll together and share such beauty, Vincent. Being so late, almost dawn, no one is about,.....look, we have the moon to light our way." She snuggled up to him.

"To share this with you Catherine, will paint pictures in my mind, to treasure when you are Above and I am Below."

The large flakes were still falling, each a filigree of snow lace, one of nature's own magical works of art. Vincent pulled the hood of his cloak, up and over his hair, as Catherine pulled the hood of her orange duffel coat over her shoulder length hair. To anyone looking at the footprints, they would have been mystified, as there was one set of small prints, but along side them were deep large prints that seemed to have been brushed over, as his cloak swept behind him. One of the bridges in Central Park came into view, as the park lamp glowed close by.

"Catherine.....shall we shelter for a little while?" he bent low to almost whisper in her ear.

"Mmmmmm, I'd like that, Vincent."

Once inside the archway, the chill wind and playful flakes were soon forgotten, as Vincent leaned against the wall pulling Catherine to him.

"What do you think of all this, Vincent.....tell me?" she pleaded.

"Blessed, yes blessed. To share this with you, has been a dream of mine. We have talked of walking in the sunshine, but this is....."

Catherine took his face between her small hands, easing it

towards her, till she could feel his warm breath on her face. His blue eyes caught the light from the park lamp, giving them an intensity all their own.

"I love you so much, you are my whole world, Vincent."

"As you are mine, dearest Catherine," he sighed.

Then as she stood on tip toe, he bent his head to meet her lips which felt warm and soft and offered so much. It was lack of breath that finally made them pull apart.

"I think we should go,.....it is late, Catherine, you will never waken for work, then Joe will become a task master," he smiled down at her.

"I don't want to leave you and our magical world. It's as if we are the only ones here," she sighed. Then pulling her hood back up, whilst Vincent did the same, hand in hand they left the shelter of the bridge and headed for Catherine's apartment.



It had been a week since that first fall of snow. Everyday more and more fell, turning everything into a winter wonderland. Most of New York had slowed down and stopped. The never ending noise of traffic had gone. The throbbing of the life blood of this vast city.....had been put on hold. She missed Vincent, because of the snow and ice, climbing to her apartment was out of the question. So was meeting him in the basement of her apartment, as this had, until today, been flooded.

The streets had exchanged cars for people, as everyone tried to get to work on foot or sledges. As she struggled to unlock the door of 21E, armed with three brown bags of food, the door opened,

the bags slipped from her hold of them, spilling bread, apples and other things into her doorway.

"Damn," she muttered to herself. It was as she scrambled to pick everything up, that she saw the note. She recognized Father's handwriting immediately and panic filled her being. Tearing open the long white envelope, she started to read, it simply said:

MUST SPEAK WITH YOU.

COME BELOW AS SOON AS YOU CAN.

PLEASE. FATHER.

Quickly she took the groceries into the kitchen then hurried into the bedroom to change into her jogging suit and warm jacket. Then armed with her torch, she hurriedly left her apartment and made for the basement. Everything was still sodden with the flooding, but no one was there now, the pumps were keeping it all water free. Opening the secret door, she climbed down the ladder with her torch on full beam, Once safely down, she turned in the direction of the home chambers. There had been a time, when this maze of tunnels and dark walkways would have scared her. But Vincent had taught her how to find her way and what to look out for. She knew them well now, they offered her no problem, as she hurried deeper and deeper below Central Park.

She had been a keen and eager pupil of Vincent's tunnel navigation lessons, now these were paying off, as Catherine dashed with ease and confidence along the various tunnels. The distance from her apartment's secret door to the home chambers was a long way down. If only her legs were long and strong like Vincent's, soon she'd be there. So, running, then hurrying, then running again proved to be a very tiring exercise. Perspiration

covered her face and the hair around her face clung to her skin like glue, but on she went. At last the glow of the home chambers came into view, as Catherine once more started to run the last few yards. Out of breath and with worry etched on her pretty face, she came to an abrupt stop at Father's desk, where Jacob Wells sat waiting for her.

"Is it Vincent?.....Is he ill?.....Tell me!" the words didn't come easy as she laboured for breath,

"Sit down my dear, would you like some herb tea?" Father asked, as he pointed to the tray all ready, brought in by Mary, when the pipes announced her arrival in the tunnels a short while ago.

"Tell me!" her voice was urgent, now an octave higher in sheer panic.

"Please Catherine, sit down and do take tea with me, till you get your breath back. Then I'll explain my need to see you..... please Cathy, humour an old man," he smiled at her, his kind eyes begging her.

"Very well Father, I will have tea, but no sugar."

Father positioned his walking stick, so he could put his weight on it as he eased himself upright. Then nearing the tray, poured tea for Catherine and himself.

"Vincent's not himself, he's really not at all well."

"How do you mean 'not well'? What's wrong with him? Please, you must tell me," she pleaded.

"He's.....changing, daily before my eyes."

"How?.....changing?.....I haven't seen a change in him."

Her eyebrows furrowed with worry.

"Exactly, because Cathy.....I can call you Cathy, can't I? When he's with you, it takes all his strength and willpower, to hide from you what is in fact, burning away inside him,..... consuming him in its wake. No, so far, he has kept this from you, but how long he can keep this up.....I fear for his sanity, I truly do." Reaching deep into the inside pocket of his long thick jacket, he pulled out a blue hand made handkerchief, to wipe away the tears that flowed down his lined face,

"Sanity, willpower, Father, none of this makes any sense. When Vincent and I are together, either here Below or at my apartment, we are both so relaxed and enjoy every moment,... it's the happiest part of every day for both of us. He never gives the impression of willpower, or pain. Are you sure about all this?" She asked, as Father gave her his undivided attention.

"What you and my son share is nothing short of a miracle. Over the years, as I've watched Vincent growing up, from boyhood into manhood, I've seen his.....differences become more and more noticeable. I had to watch his hands develop claws, his teeth altered as his large canines became prominent. Also his anger resulted in growling which rebounded off the tunnels.....it was scary until we all got used to it. But I knew then, that a normal relationship with a woman was utterly out of the question. There were other differences I saw, when we bathed together by the falls, his body hair.....down his back was so dense and thick. Also, I saw that he was very well endowed in one particular area, making a union with a woman a problem."

"He means everything to me, Father," she sobbed, ignoring this reasoning.

"I know, I know. I truly never, in my wildest dreams, thought there would ever be someone in his life like you, my dear." He smiled as he patted her hand.

"Until Vincent came into my life, I was lost to myself. Vincent has changed all that, he had changed me and guided me so much over the last two years. I needed to change, I was selfish, proud, and Vincent helped me look deep into myself to discover the real me.....I owe him so much."

He sighed. "Yes, alas, Vincent has also changed."

"Is that so wrong, Father? When two people.....love each other, surely change is expected." She smiled.

"In a normal relationship, this is to be welcomed, but.....this is not a normal relationship. You know that and I know that..... and Vincent knows that."

"But he's the most human person I know....." Father interrupted her as his hand raised to stop her saying more.

"Part of him is a man, the part that teaches the children in class, reads them poetry, plays chess and wins with me. And loving you, gives him human desires.....to have a home, a wife.....and yes, children."

"And the other part?" She waited for his answer, her eyes large with dread.

"The other part.....I can't say, because I have no answer, but all I do know is, because of his differences, he realizes that what he longs for most of all,.....can never be, and this is what is causing the change in him." He sighed, there, he'd said it at last.

"When my father died and I'd nowhere to go, Vincent brought me

Below to heal. Being so close to him made me realize how much I loved him, needed him and wanted to share his life, down here in these tunnels. One day we were sitting by the falls and we talked of a life together. Vincent said we could only go forward, when we fully accepted the changes and dangers we'd have to endure. He said we were something that had never been, and we must go with care."

An understanding silence followed then Father spoke.

"Vincent's fallen deeply in love with you, my dear, from the first moment he saw you, but as time has passed, he's changed from loving you, to being totally in love with you. He knows a life really together isn't possible, so the wants and the possibilities fight with the impossibilities. And he has to physically hold back the non human side, to protect you, Cathy."

"I know," tears filled her eyes.

"I care deeply for you, you're like the daughter I never had, I love you both and when I see the struggle you both endure, as you fight to cross that river to the safety of the shore..... I marvel at your strength, both of you."

"I don't see Vincent as different, Father.....to me.....he's Vincent,.....the man I love. Maybe it's the very differences that I love the most."

"Catherine!" His voice was shocked.

"It's true, Father. I love to stroke his hands, and his claws are so beautiful. His teeth, the growling, all excite me. I love all of him, truly love him, I would do anything to make him happy."

"Maybe if the two of you were to see a little less of each

other.....sort of cool it a little, then maybe his love for you wouldn't consume him, driving him to the brink of disaster."

"What you are asking would kill both of us."

"I think not. You see each other every day. You spend hours and hours together, wrapped in each other's arms, desire flares up. The need is there and you both have to deny it. You go to your bed alone and cry away the emptiness, Vincent comes Below. Once he is back home, the mask he wears for you is lowered. He paces for hours, he never sleeps, for his dreams are of your.....life together.....his urgent need to release himself, shames him. His growling is keeping everyone awake. It simply can't go on."

"What I want most in the world is to be with him. Under any terms. And you want me to slowly ease my way out of his life. That's really what you're saying. My ultimate sacrifice."

She sobbed and sobbed. Father eased himself up on his stick and put a comforting arm around her shaking shoulders.

"I know, but some sacrifices in life have to be borne for love, my dear."

"Yes," she sobbed. "I love him so much, I know what you're asking will destroy both Vincent and myself, Father."

"For a little while the pain will be excruciating, but in time..... time is a great healer." He swallowed to hide the lump in his throat.

"If it will help Vincent....." her tears flowed freely now, "then I have no choice, but you have to promise me one thing."

"What's that, Catherine?"

"That if we are wrong in agreeing to all of this, you'll contact me.....so I can come back, here, to you.....and Vincent. He IS my life."

"I promise....."



It was now many months since Catherine and Father had their secret meeting. Catherine tried slowly to ease up on their relationship, it certainly didn't come easy, but bit by bit. Vincent visited her less and less, as she pleaded endless work to catch up on, or friends to visit. The 'bond' was the tricky thing to control. But for the most time, during her waking hours Catherine blocked as best she could. So Vincent remained very confused at her attitude and consulted Father about it, as one would visit a wise guru for wisdom and advice.

"Why the long face, Vincent? What lies so heavy with you, my son?" Father asked one night as he looked up at his son sitting across from him, a half played chess game between them. "As if I need to ask," he smiled knowingly.

"It's Catherine,.....she's.....changed, Father."

"Changed.....In what way, Vincent?"

"I know she loves me deeply, at first I couldn't accept that someone, anyone, could love me, love me like that. Me of all people. But, yes, I accept this at last because Catherine made me, the lawyer in her was my judge and jury. We became very close, there was a pull.....we both felt it,.... then suddenly,.....I felt a chill in her, a distance. I know it's not my differences that has brought this about. I know this, but something has got to her Father."

"How long has this.....change been going on?" he asked, keeping his gaze off Vincent.

"Many months now. The pain is more than I can bear."

"Could she have found someone else?" he asked.

"Don't even think of it Father!" he blazed.

"But Vincent, she's a woman of both worlds, you've said yourself, maybe someone up top has taken a small part of her heart, and maybe until she can fully understand her feelings, this is her way of sorting it out."

"NO!" his voice boomed.

"Yes, Vincent. Women can be fickle like that."

"Fickle. Catherine is not fickle," he stormed. "She belongs to me, Father." He stood to his full height, shoulders back, teeth showing, like a warrior.

"Catherine belongs to Catherine, Vincent," Father urged.

"Here, Father, you are wrong. Catherine belongs to me, and me alone. Since that night I found her in the park, our paths crossed, our destinies joined. I loved her from that moment. Catherine's love for me grew over a period of time. She declared her love to me, and many times since then, she has declared her love. This was a spiritual union, we are one in that way, and so, no man will ever have her, ever."

"You still see Catherine?" Father asked lightly.

"Yes, but maybe only once a week, and never for long. Our meetings are few and over too soon."

"What does she do on the nights you don't see her, do you know this, Vincent?" he asked.

Vincent sighed. "Yes."

"Well?"

"She's seeing a man."

"There, didn't I tell you so?"

"But, she's not falling in love with him!"

"How can you know this, Vincent?" Father's anger was rising.

"Because....."

"Oh! I see,.....'Because'.....What kind of an answer is that then?" He challenged him.

"From waking to sleeping, Father, Catherine shuts off the 'Bond' completely, to spare me from hurt and pain, because of this man. This Joe Maxwell, it's her boss, she's dating. But as Catherine drifts into sleep her hold on the 'Bond' is relaxed and it opens to me as a flower. Here I can feel her thoughts and experience her longings, her desires and needs, and they are never once for Joe Maxwell, Father. They are for me....."

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A few days later a letter arrived for Vincent from Catherine, requesting a meeting at the threshold. But when they met, Catherine could not look Vincent in the face, as she told him of her forthcoming marriage.

"I'm sorry, Vincent, but I'm going to marry him."

"How can you,.....you don't love him. I know you. I know you

better than you think, Catherine, and I cannot let you go into a union without love to guide you through each day for the rest of your life." He held his hand to his racing heart.

"I'm marrying him, Vincent. Joe loves me, he'll give me a good home and make a good husband, provide for me."

"Tell me you love him, tell me face to face."

Grasping every ounce of courage she had she turned to face him and with tears in her eyes she said. "I love Joe Maxwell and I'm marrying him at noon tomorrow.....Give me your blessing, Vincent, I need that, please," she sobbed.

"You say you love this man, but you don't say you're in love with this Joe Maxwell." Vincent paced, kicking up the tunnel dust.

"You're twisting my words, Vincent."

She turned, so the tears as they flowed, couldn't be seen, but her shaking voice was a give away to Vincent, who knew his Catherine better than he knew himself. Then he watched her go, back up the ladder to her world.

Later that night as Catherine finally slept, she dreamed of her wedding day an looking at her new husband. But it was not Joe Maxwell, it was Vincent. Her heart soared and swooped. If only it were true!

Far Below in his chamber, Vincent lay on his bed and for once he tuned into Catherine's dreams through their 'Bond'. He saw her happiness as she gazed at her new husband, and he saw that it was he, Vincent. He roared with delight, waking everyone Below.

The noise brought Father and Mary scurrying into Vincent's chamber, both filled with anxiety.

"What is the matter, Vincent? Dear God, the very tunnels shook with the force of your vocals." Father chided.

"It is Catherine, Father."

"Is she ill?" he asked. Then he nodded to Mary.

"I'll go and make some tea," Mary said, as she hurried away leaving Father and son alone.

"No Father. Catherine is marrying Joe Maxwell tomorrow."

"Is she.....Well! Well! Well!"

"Is that all you can say, Father? Well! Well! Well!"

"Er....."

"And through our 'Bond' I know that the bridegroom she's dreaming of is me. Not Joe Maxwell, but **ME!** How can she marry a man she doesn't love? Tell me that," he stormed.

A pregnant silence followed. Then Father put his arm around his son's shoulder as he sat next to him. "I'm.....er.....afraidthat I'm partly to blame for all this Vincent."

"What!.....tell me." Vincent boomed, his eyes ablaze with anger.

"I.....er....."

"Tell me." Vincent grabbed Father by the throat.

"Tea anyone?" Mary said as she entered then stopped, seeing the awesome sight before her.

"Not now Mary, please leave us." He admonished her.

"Tell me!" boomed Vincent, then he growled loudly.

So Father unwound his tale of woe, borne of love, he dare not look into those heavenly blue eyes, to see the hatred there. But Vincent understood it all now. When you love, truly love, a deep and lasting love will endure much. It will overcome the pain and the hurt to replace it with understanding and hope. The months of exile were over, he and his Catherine were destined to be together. If their differences physically, mentally and socially were so diverse then they would have to work it out together. But they would have their happy life, meet whatever life held for them, but they would be together.

"Why are you smiling, Vincent?"

"Because, tomorrow Father, you will be marrying a couple in the Great Hall. In true tunnel style. I will be gaining a wife and you a daughter-in-law." Vincent beamed showing his large teeth, and for once, not ashamed to show them.

"Tomorrow.....I must alert the others. We have much to do,Vincent, where are you going?" Father's voice was questioning.

"Above Father, to tell my bride that tomorrow we will be one, in every sense of the word."

"Tell Catherine.....Tell her, her father-in-law's a stupid, old man. She'll understand."

"Goodnight Father, don't wait up for me, I may be a long while. I will return at dawn with Catherine."

"Then I'll get Mary to prepare the guest chamber for her."

"No. There will be no need for that. Catherine will be in our chamber."

"I see. Go, with my blessing, and my love."

"Thank you Father."

"Goodnight Vincent." But Vincent was gone, his cloak flying, there was new life in his heart, the future was opening up for him as he never believed possible. He was a man, different in many ways, but a man never the less.

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As Vincent dropped onto Catherine's balcony, she was looking out over the city. She heard the soft thud and turned.

"Vincent! I wanted to see you so much tonight. I didn't think you'd come. I needed to see you and be with you one last time."

"I'm here now and I've come to make you mine. No other man can claim you, you're mine as I am yours, we are bound to each other forever."

"I know," she sobbed. "I love you so much."

"Tomorrow, you are getting married."

"Yes," she sobbed.

"To me, Catherine. I'm taking you Below at dawn and we will be married."

"What about Joe? Oh Vincent, he'll be so hurt." Catherine felt guilty.

"Joe will understand, he's a good man. In his heart, he must have guessed. And now Catherine, we have much to catch up on." A smile was on his face and a look in his eyes that Catherine had never seen before.

"Vincent?"

Sweeping her up in his arms, he carried her inside and closed the doors.

LONGING

GWEN LORD

He could see it in her eyes,

He could hear it in her voice,

Her heart cried out for him,

To take her in his arms.

He could feel it in their bond,

He could share it in a dream,

Her tears upon her pillow,

He shared with her alone.

He could share her life Above,

He could mingle in the crowds,

Her eyes would paint the pictures,

Of a life they longed to share.

LOOKING BACK TO THE FUTURE

GWEN LORD

Sleep was impossible.....again!

Vincent lay on his back, stretched out amid the colorful array of patchwork bedding, which had been lovingly sewn together over the years by various tunnel residents and people whose lives had touched the people living Below. With his furred and clawed fingers interlocked behind his head, Vincent gazed up at his rock ceiling, thinking yet again of the very wonder of this place. The hour was late, as everyone slept but him and the silence crept into every corner, 'till you could almost touch it.

Vincent let out a sigh, causing the flame on the only lit candle to flicker and waver, casting dancing shadows on the rough stone walls. Memories that had been locked away in the corners of his mind for so long came flooding back to him in the eerie stillness.

Again he moved restlessly on his large bed, listening to it creak and groan under his immense weight. First his left foot and then his right, kicked away at the bedding until it tumbled in a heap on the floor. His inability to sleep sapped his tired and aching body, as the last hours ticked away before the dawn. He turned his head to gaze once more at the candle and looking through the flame, he picked out various items on the shelves, ledges and cupboards which reminded him of the first time in his life when everything changed.

How well he remembered how he came to have this chamber.. his chamber! A smile crossed his unique mouth, as he heard and saw in his mind's eye the many heated arguments that were exchanged so many years ago between Father, Mitch Denton and

himself as the two boys gave Jacob Wells such a hard time, with their wild ideas and rash adventures into the dangerous caverns Below, or secret visits Above where, Mitch knew quite well. Vincent wasn't allowed. Mitch's unwholesome influence on Vincent kept increasing, until one day, Father finally cracked and summoned the two boys to appear together in his study before him and a hastily convened council to consider their misdeeds.

Mitch had always been a wild boy and a real handful for Father, who was the highly respected head of the world below Central Park. People looked up to him and loved him but Father had long known the day would surely come when he would have to separate these two boys, and he ached inside at the prospect. Vincent was his adopted son and Mitch was the son of his old and dear friend Sam Denton, so the matter rested heavily upon his shoulders. The young boys had grown up together like brothers in many ways, with a bond between them that was strong. But Mitch didn't have the problems Vincent had, and didn't seem to realize the danger to everyone if Vincent was to be seen and possibly followed Below. Protecting their world and keeping their tunnel home a secret was a primary rule that all had to obey. Everyone appreciated the necessity with the exception of Mitch. The incorrigible boy refused to recognize the increasing danger to everyone and insisted all he wanted was for Vincent to have some fun!

To a rebellious fourteen year old boy, the fact Father had forbidden their visits above was the very thing Mitch needed to fuel his natural instinct to disobey.

One night while Above at the carousel in Central Park, the mounted police discovered them trying to enter the closed and shuttered roundabout. Whistles were blown as the police gave

chase to the group of boys which included Vincent and Mitch. The youngsters all scampered in different directions in order to avoid capture. In the confusion between boys running and yelling and horses hooves pounding in fast pursuit, Vincent and Mitch managed to escape unnoticed into the tunnel entrance, leaving the police mystified when they realized all of the boys had disappeared.

Once back in the safety of the deeper tunnels, the boys slowed down, all out of breath and dirty, grinning at their lucky escape. The dust that they kicked up as they ran, rose behind them but soon settled again, leaving no tell-tale signs of footprints, if anyone did follow them.

Breathless and giddy with success, they set off again, gleefully kicking up the tunnel dust once more into a cloud following them as they shot off at great speed.....until they ran headlong into Father, who decided then and there, enough was enough!

The Council, the acting body of authority for the daily way of life, was comprised of community members who were deeply respected by everyone Below. The head of the Council was Father, who ruled fairly, with a rod of iron in one hand and tender, loving care in the other. Among the Council members were Thomas Pascal and young Winslow, who was pleased to be considered an adult at the age of twenty-one. Narcissa, the old wise one who lived in the furthestmost chambers, and dear Mary, an adopted mother to so many of the children Below, were also part of the Council.

The chamber glowed in the bright flickering light of an abundance of candles, silhouetting the lines of stools, benches and crates set out for the assembly. One by one the seats were being filled with

not only men and women, but also numerous children, undoubtedly brought by their parents to observe an object lesson in obedience.

The gentle hum of voices rose and faded, as more of the tunnel community arrived to take their places. Then the talking stopped almost instantly as Father entered the chamber, leaning heavily on his unusual, carved, silver-topped walking stick. He nodded his head approvingly and acknowledged such a good turnout of friends. Propping up the walking stick against the oak chest, he eased his body down, sat on the corner of his large desk and looked out at his friends.

"Thank you.....er.....thank you so much, all of you, for coming at such short notice. I.....er.....do appreciate it very much. I've called this most urgent meeting because as you know, these two youths before you now, Mitch Denton, Sam's son and er.....my son, Vincent have disobeyed our rules once too often." He coughed as a muttering of agreement and nodding head encouraged Father to continue. "They have been warned time and time again but persist in flouting our authority. So, my dear friends, it is with a heavy heart, that I ask your agreement to sentence them to a punishment to fit this crime, as it were."

The boy's faces revealed their worst fears. Again every head nodded. Father shifted from one leg to another as his hip was giving him much pain of late, then stood awkwardly, and faced the group once more. With his odd spectacles on the end of his nose, he looked over the top of them and continued.

"I want these two separated, both for their own good.....and ours. I cannot allow this out and out disobedient behavior to continue a moment longer. I propose to send Mitch Above, to live

with Lin Wong, who with the help of Peter Chang and Dr. Wong will take him under their wings and give him a chance to learn a trade in their restaurants and other businesses. He will, of course, be allowed to return to see us from time to time."

"Vincent, on the other hand, who cannot go Above, will become an apprentice to Cullen who will teach him the trades he knew Above. We are all most grateful recipients of the beautiful things he's made for us over the years he's been with us." The hands clapping in agreement, gave Father a chance to take a sip of water from the glass Mary handed to him. "Thank you, Mary, that was kind of you."

"I now ask you to vote on this plan of mine. Those in favor of the boys taking this punishment, turn your backs to me, any who disagree remain facing me. Very well then.....er.....let the voting begin."

Father watched as every person turned around in agreement with the proposed punishment for the boys. "The decision is unanimous and this will take place within the hour. I thank you again for your cooperation."

At this point everyone started to move away, as Father finally sat down heavily in his carved chair behind the desk. The stress and emotions caused by the distasteful task only he could perform was clearly etched on his face.

" 's not fair. 's not bloody fair old man....Vincent and me, we're mates. We hang out. I'd never, ne-ver let him get caught, you knows that." Mitch sniffed, wiping an escaped tear with the sleeve of his ripped coat.

Vincent turned slowly to his father and stared at hm, long and

meaningfully before he spoke. "Don't do this, Father, please don't send Mitch away because of me. It's because of him..... and Devin, that I have any kind of life and feel accepted, but without him here, Father, I'm lost."

Father could see tears in his son's eyes. "Without him, Vincent, peace and quiet will return to our world....the matter is closed," he said with authority.

"I'll get you for this, old man. You'll not get away with this..... one day I'll be back and the boot will be on the other foot," Mitch threatened.

Yes, well, that's a long time off and at present we are dealing with the problem to hand. Fetch your things and then go with James along the B tunnel to the 14th street opening where you will find a blue door with the letter W on it. This is the entrance to Lin Wong's and he will be expecting you. If, after six months, you have proved willing to be less disruptive, then you will be allowed to deliver the free fruit and vegetables he sends us each week. At that time you and Vincent can.....er.... enjoy a little time together."

"Am I supposed to thank you for this, old man?" Mitch almost spat the words at him as he turned to run from the chamber.

Father had already dismissed the troublesome boy mentally as he rose from his chair and walked over to Vincent, who sat with his head bowed and his long, golden hair cascading over his shoulders, partially shielding his face.

"You, my boy, will go and collect your things from the chamber you've shared with Mitch and bring it all here to my chamber. You will have the smaller chamber that is next to mine. Once your things are here, you will clean out the chamber, then put in your

bed, chair and table, along with your chest and personal items. Anything else you need to make your chamber comfortable and truly yours will have to be made by you, under Cullen's skillful guidance."

A mumbled but respectful "Yes, Father," was all Vincent could say as his slim, boyish figure rose from the chair. Then, in the blink of an eye and with cat-like speed and grace, he was gone.

"Phew," was all Jacob Wells could manage, as he took out his red spotted handkerchief and wiped his brow. He was happy to know the negative influence Mitch wielded over Vincent was finally at an end. Also he was secretly delighted to have Vincent closer to him. Hopefully, he would be able to help direct the boy's thoughts and deeds in a positive manner as he advanced into manhood.

His adopted son was no ordinary teenager to be dealt with. He was visibly different and needed to be protected, not just from the world Above but from himself, when the dark side of his nature outweighed the caring and intelligent alter-ego and exploded like a volcano, causing Father to ponder what extent these outbursts would hold as he became a man.

Vincent cringed in pain, still unable to sleep

A sigh escaped him as he recalled that day, so long ago now. One day that had so drastically changed his life. His chamber was full of so many wonderful things he had made himself once Cullen's patient teaching had unlocked the hidden talents in Vincent's powerful hands.

On retrospect Vincent had to admit that deep within himself, he had been relieved when Mitch and the temptation for excitement Above was taken from him. He had never felt completely at ease

being Above, acting on Mitch's dares and inviting the anger of the father he loved so much. He envied the couldn't-care-less attitude of his friend and felt he was sharing this when they ventured Above. It was an experience any youth Above took for granted but for him it was more than that---it was acceptance; a feeling he was not so different after all.

What was the reason for the pains invading his body?

The choice of Cullen to be Vincent's mentor was a stroke of genius on Father's part, as the partnership brought about between the two was an extremely good one. Father was a wise and shrewd man who had held a position of responsibility and authority Above until his father-in-law found a way to discredit him. Virtually overnight his marriage and his work at the Chittenden Institute went down the drain and into the sewers. Dejected and rejected like those already Below, he had found the tunnels and made a new life for himself, bringing with him the skills he had used Above to help the lost souls Below.

Cullen, like Father, had arrived Below a disillusioned man who was welcomed as a person of value. It was soon discovered that he had a talent for fashioning beautiful things from the trash topsiders discarded for garbage collection. Once Below with the bags of trash, he soon turned the contents into useful items they all could use or share. He also repaired and rebuilt tools to use working on repairs to the pipes and tunnels, as a high maintenance level kept repair men from Above out of their world. Night after night the men from Below would forage Above in search of.....things, returning laden with bags full of discards for Cullen to transform into treasures.

Unable to sleep and still tossing about, Vincent turned his

attention to his table. Cullen had made him draw the design for it, then measure, cut, and finally construct it. Vincent at first felt it would never be a table, but after many weeks of work a table had been produced which to Vincent's amazement stood squarely on full sized legs. At one time he thought he would have to cut and re-cut the legs to get them even and envisioned the table being reduced to a large foot stool.

The flickering candle on the table cast eerie shadows across the journal which laid beside it and to a shelf not far away which held many more of Vincent's journals. Vincent had started writing in his journals when he was fourteen and his new life began without Mitch.

Vincent had been in a state of depression since Mitch had been banished from the tunnels and spent many hours by himself. He was lonely and with his inability to go Above with the other boys he felt rejected and worthless.

Old Joshua found Vincent one day at the Falls, wallowing in his aloneness. He sat down and casually started telling stories which painted vivid pictures for Vincent and stirred his interest. Soon Vincent felt enough at ease in Joshua's company to confide in him, telling him his troubles and overpowering frustrations, which from time to time drove him almost into madness.

One day Joshua gave Vincent a present of a brand new journal and encouraged him to write his thoughts and feelings in it at the end of each day. By writing them down, Vincent had an outlet for his pent-up emotions and frustrations. A boy Vincent's age Above would have girls, romance and social activities to occupy his mind. But, due to his differences, Vincent could not share these natural emotions physically, yet he had them, nonetheless. The journal

idea was a success and Vincent became a writing student under Joshua's instruction and his English skills improved considerably. This enabled him to enjoy reading the great classics from Father's library of used and much loved books.

Vincent and Devin sat by the Mirror Pool one day doing their reading assignments. Vincent was engrossed in his story and wanted to share it with his friend so he began reading it aloud. His velvet tones told Devin of a rainbow, whose colours formed an arch across the sky and at it's base was a pot of gold.

"Has anyone ever followed a rainbow to find a pot of gold?" Vincent asked, turning the page carefully.

"Nah! I don't think so, Vincent."

Vincent suddenly closed the well-thumbed pages. "I wonder why? I've seen rainbows here Below like you have, Devin, but to see a real rainbow up top must be magical," he sighed regretfully.

"One day I'll get you your own rainbow, Vincent, one that never fades away," Devin promised. "It's so unfair for Father to keep you Below all the time, almost as if you were a prisoner. There are so many things I would like to show you Above."

"You see so much," Vincent said enviously. "You are always going away."

"I have to, Vincent, this place drives me mad, this hole in the ground we call home. So I go on little adventures but I come back because this hole in the ground is home and.....because you are here," he said as he patted Vincent's shoulder.

"Some day when I'm older, Devin, perhaps we will have an adventure Above together."

"Yes, we will, Vincent yes we will." The two friends hugged each other as brothers would. "And one day I'll bring you a piece of a rainbow, all for your very own."

A sharp pain made Vincent groan, over and over again, then moments later he sensed Father's presence.

"Are you all right, Vincent?" The familiar voice brought Vincent's reverie to a sharp standstill as Father appeared in the doorway to his chamber. "I was passing by on my way back from checking on the children and I heard you groaning. Can't you sleep again, tonight?"

"It would appear not, Father."

"Would you like Mary to make you some herb tea?"

"Thank you, no. Don't worry, I'll be all right."

Father nodded and left him alone and the memories continued to bombard his senses. Soon after their discussion of rainbows Devin left on another of his adventures, leaving Vincent lost and alone once more. His misery sent him prowling down many unexplored and sometimes quite dangerous passages.

One day the sound of music had filtered into his thoughts. He stopped and listened, then fascinated, he followed the sound of the lilting music. Cautiously, Vincent edged close enough to look through the chamber doorway. Suddenly, there before him was a vision, an angel, a sight beyond his wildest dreams, dancing and swaying to the music as her flimsy dress clung to her body. She would have set the heart racing of any young man from Above but Vincent, in his innocence, was thunderstruck! He had never encountered such a sight and his heart leapt with joy.

The music seemed to be endless, to Vincent's delight. When it finally stopped, Vincent broke into applause, unaware of his involuntary action until she froze, suddenly aware of his presence.

Her secret discovered, she whirled and ran to a far corner, not sure what was best to do.

"Don't be afraid, please don't be afraid," he said, as he stooped and entered the chamber. It was bereft of anything really, except an old hand-operated record player complete with horn; a relic from a bygone age. A few boxes littered one corner and that was it, other than a few flickering torches on the rough walls.

"Who are you?" she asked hesitantly.

"My name is Vincent, I live here Below."

"I'm Lisa, I'm new here, just came the other day," she said as she advanced slowly toward him.

"Please, don't come any closer," he said, as he took a few steps backward.

"Why not?" she asked as she took a defiant step towards him.

"Because I don't want to frighten you."

"Why would you do that, Vincent?" she teased.

"My face.....is different," he almost whispered.

"Let me see," she bravely demanded.

"No!" In his agitation he almost snapped at her.

"Please, can't we be friends?" she pleaded. "I don't know anyone down here."

"It isn't possible for us to be.....friends, because of my differences.....I frighten people. Please don't come any closer."

Lisa took no notice of his pleas as she came straight up to him, and looking straight into his eyes she spoke softly. "Yes, you are different, but you don't scare me. I like a challenge and you can be just that," she said as she put her hands on his chest and stepped closer to him.

"Please.....Lisa, this cannot be, it isn't possible....."

"Says who, Vincent?"

"My father," he answered.

"Your father? You still listen to your father? My God, Vincent, you're old enough to decide things for yourself. You're almost a man, you're not a child.....oh, no, you're not a child," she said, pressing her body against his, noticing he reacted like any of the boys Above that she had played around with, as his desire fueled his body.

Stepping back from him, she turned and took hold of the handle of the record player, winding it up and then placing the needle on the record. Once more music transformed the barren chamber.

Lisa returned to Vincent. "I'll teach you to dance."

"M.....Me?" he stuttered, moving away from her.

"Yes, you, you dum dum," she laughed. She held one of his hands and placed the other at her waist so they could dance. Vincent clumsily followed her directions but he soon got the hang of it, and loved every moment of dancing with this new-found friend.

When the record ended, Lisa left Vincent and walked over to the

pile of records, selecting another to play. When the music began, Lisa started dancing alone while Vincent watched, bewitched by her, the music and these new feelings.

Over the next few weeks, Vincent visited the distant chamber every afternoon to watch Lisa dance for him. Her desire to have her way with him grew along with their secret friendship and her dancing became more and more a come-on-tease.

Vincent was totally unprepared for her advances. As she teased him in her flimsy, revealing short skirt and low necked top, Vincent's desires overwhelmed him as they danced close together. It was too much for him and his sudden, rough, inexperienced grab for her caught Lisa off guard. She tried to pull away from him causing his claws to pierce and scratch the skin of her back and shoulders. Her screams brought people running to her rescue.

Father happened to be close by and was one of the first to arrive. Seeing the blood on her shoulder and his son cowering in the corner in fright and shame, Father immediately took Vincent away from the chamber to council him about his unforgivable behavior. Never once did he listen to Vincent's side of the story, leaving the boy ashamed and feeling guilty about things he didn't really understand; believing everything had gone wrong because of his difference.

In Father's chamber a lengthening silence was broken. "She will have to leave this place, today, and I hope you will have learned an important lesson here.....that Father knows best! Dear God, you could have killed her!" he snapped.

"No! No! No!" was all Vincent could say, not even sure himself if he was protesting his innocence or Lisa's being sent away.

By the next day Lisa was gone, along with her music player and the old 78 records. Once more Vincent had lost a friend because, he thought of his differences. He pondered on how alone he was and wondered if this pattern would continue throughout his life---was this terrible aloneness to be his destiny?

Vincent went to fix himself a cup of the herb tea he had declined earlier. He returned to his bed and straightened the bedding before burrowing beneath its welcoming comfort, but the comfort was short lived.

Sleep was still denied him and his body ached with spasms of pain. Trying to distract himself he again gazed around his chamber, until his eyes caught the colours of his window reflecting the candlelight from the rough chamber walls.

The half-round window was the most beautiful object in his chamber and he loved it best of all his possessions. His left hand reached out and gently touched the glass as memories of how he got it filtered into his thoughts. Vincent was almost sixteen the day Devin burst in to see him on his sudden return from another of his adventures.

"Vincent, I'm back," he shouted, as Vincent turned to see Devin in the doorway to his chamber.

"I can't believe you're finally back. I've missed you so much."

"Me too, pal, but not only am I back but I've brought you that piece of a rainbow I promised you."

"How can this be, Devin? What are you talking about?" Vincent asked as he neared Devin and the two hugged warmly, patting each other's backs.

"I was on my way home from an adventure when I came across an old church they were pulling down. Vincent, it called out to me to go inside. The workmen had left for the day to go home so there was no one to stop me as I scrambled over the debris to investigate. I found many things we could use Below. Such an adventure it was." He smiled knowingly. "I wish you had been able to see it too, Vincent. Suddenly, there it was, propped up in a pile of items to be discarded or destroyed."

"What was it, Devin?" Vincent asked eagerly.

"A stained glass window with all the colours of the rainbow----your rainbow, Vincent, I had to get it for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, for you. I took it away from the rubbish pile and tucked it away for safety and then I came Below to get help to bring it and some of the other items Below. I asked Cullen's advice. Vincent, you and he are going to turn it into a window for your chamber. If you place it near your bed, where that thin sliver of sunlight filters through from Above, it will light up your window and you will have your very own rainbow."

"There are no words, Devin, my heart is so full." They hugged each other again. "Come, let us go and visit Cullen now and see this wondrous window," Vincent said. They walked along talking of Devin's adventure and what had happened in the tunnels while he was gone. They entered Cullen's workshop and saw Father was already there in deep conversation with him.

"Ah, Vincent, look what Devin has found," Father exclaimed, "a truly marvelous piece of workmanship! I remember the church well from when I lived Above. It is so sad to see such magnificent

buildings being torn down to make room for car parks or supermarkets instead of being restored to their former glory. There is simply no respect anymore, for things of beauty which are a joy to behold."

"Vincent, we are all going to be involved in making a wonderful window for you," Cullen said. "I have many pieces of coloured glass I have salvaged and these along with the unbroken glass still in this window will allow me to make a window for you to build dreams on."

"I am at a loss for words," was all Vincent could say, because truly his heart was full to overflowing.

"You'll have to help me, but we'll make it the finest stained glass window in the world, it will be like no other.....for you, our dear Vincent," Cullen told him with a smile.

Work began almost at once with Vincent carefully removing the lead and releasing the shattered panes of coloured glass.

"You're like a brother to me, Cullen, you do know that, don't you?" he asked one day as the window was taking shape.

Cullen put his hand on Vincent's shoulder and said, "I know. We have grown very close in the last two years and I'm proud to have you as a brother, also."

How well he remembered the day Cullen, Pascal and Winslow helped him carry the finished window into his chamber. As they leaned it against the chamber wall the sun ray from Above caught it for the first time and a galaxy of colours rebounded onto the walls. Vincent had never known a more magical moment in his life.

He rolled over and touched the window once more, admiring the blue and green glass, also the red and yellow.....his own personal rainbow. One day maybe he'd find his pot of gold even, as with love and hope all things are possible.

As Vincent approached the end of his teens, everyone began to notice the tanky youth had become a man. He was the tallest of anyone Below, with a broad chest nobody could match and had tremendous strength. He'd been working alongside Cullen for over five years. If he had lived Above, working like other young men his age, he would long ago have passed his apprenticeship with flying colours. Under Cullen's tutelage he had become a skilled craftsman and Father was very proud of him.

The collecting of things topsiders threw away was still the primary source of goods to be recycled and fashioned into items which were either breathtakingly beautiful or prosaically practical. The men, now joined by that natural scavenger, young Mouse, still went above one or two nights a week with their well-washed sugar sacks ready to be filled.

Always, they carried Father's warnings for extreme care, which guided them as they silently darted down alley ways and deserted factory yards. But, one night it had gone terribly wrong, and Mouse learned this lesson the hard way, Vincent remembered. Mouse had gone Above alone and he was very nearly caught. He was spotted by a warehouse guard on his rounds and the dog was let loose as the guard blew his whistle for reinforcements.

Mouse, with his namesake's speed and cunning, headed for the grill of the pipe he'd crawled through from Below but he wasn't quick enough, due to the weight of the sack he carried. Suddenly a hand grabbed him, almost pulling his jacket off his back. The

guard dog sat panting, awaiting his master's command to pounce.

"What do we have here?" the voice boomed.

"Not what you think.....not stealing," Mouose said.

"What is it, then?" snapped the guard.

"Helping," Mouse replied.

"Who.....just who are you helping, son?" the guard asked.

"Helping, not stealing.....tidying up for you.....maybe a crust to eat in return?" Mouse's fresh and ready smile of innocence melted the guard.

"Not stealing you say.....hmmmmm, come with me m'lad and I'll see if I can find you some food."

As soon as the guard and his dog set off across the yard Mouse whirled and yanked the grill open, tossed his bag into it, and quickly joined in, slamming the grill cover over the pipe and locking it from the inside.

The dog was growling and snarling as he pressed his wet nose against the grill, frustrated that his prey was out of reach. Mouse ran and ran until he was back, deep beneath Central Park, in the safety of the home tunnels.

Once more Vincent experienced a sharp pain and its source puzzled him.

On one hand Vincent questioned the sleepless night and the pain. Why did he now fear Catherine had vanished from his life and sleep had escaped him for so long that his health was beginning to suffer? On the other hand, deep in his heart he dared to hope the feeling was one he knew and loved so much, because he and

Catherine shared a Bond and this feeling was their link, the one that saved her from the dangers her job had inflicted on her. A feeling from the time when Catherine came into his life and shared her life with him, when new possibilities heralded a happy life.

But now with the steady return of this old feeling, Vincent again began to hold onto his dream, that she was still out there and needing him; a part of his life and he had to find her and help her.

When Vincent collapsed on his return from Above one night, he had to be taken to the hospital chamber. On coming round, he saw Father's face looking down at him and Vincent knew he was in for it!

"I'm glad to see you're with us again, Vincent; you're home and safe, but you cannot go on like this! Who knows what thispain you feel and the sleep that escapes you, can do to you. We both know of the dark side that is waiting to take you over. Dear God, Vincent, if you won't listen to me then go and see Narcissa, the wise one.....please," the old man begged, as he took Vincent's clawed hand in his.

"Thank you for your concern, but all will be well soon. Please trust me, Father."

"Very well, but do think about it." Then, turning away from his son, he made his way out of the hospital chamber in the direction of his own bed. When both the tapping of his stick and the glow of the candle he carried was swallowed up by the darkness Vincent was alone again with his memories. He felt everything to be surreal, like a strange dream he was passing through but was not really a part of.

Vincent went to the Mirror Pool for a bathe before going to his

chamber. He walked to the bed and gently stroked his patchwork quilt, which like Jacob's coat of many colours in the bible, each square held a memory. The blue striped one was from Devin's shirt and the pretty pink roses on a white background had been Jamie's first party dress. The plain green twill had been his old work trousers and the plum spotted material had been Rebecca's jacket while the grey and white striped material had been one of Father's shirts.

"Father.....oh, Father," he said aloud. How well he remembered as a small boy, sitting with Pascal, Mitch, Devin, Winslow and the rest of the tunnel children listening to Father's wonderful stories. Vincent, like all the others Below, agreed Father was the best storyteller ever, as he read with such a passion, bringing the characters to life before their eyes. He would sometimes read from his large collection of books and at other times the stories came from his head and his heart, as he sat with them and tried to instill in everyone, that this was their world now, and they were making their own history, to pass on to their children in the years that lay ahead. It was strange, whenever Father was telling one of his tales to the children, the group got larger and larger, as the adults joined the group; to sit silently, enthralled with his words.

Vincent now knew the story he hadn't told---of how Father had learned of the tunnels one dark and bitterly cold night. Then he'd been known as Dr. Jacob Wells, a highly successful research physician and chemist until his down-fall brought on by his father-in-law who objected to his only daughter, Margaret, secretly marrying a man he considered 'not good enough' for her.

He set out to destroy his son-in-law by starting false rumors that he was a communist sympathizer. Finally Jacob was black-listed by the UnAmerican Activities Committee. The Chittenden

Research Laboratory who employed him as their top scientist, demanded his immediate resignation and he left under a cloud of disgrace. With his reputation ruined and no means to support Margaret, her father used his influence to have their marriage annulled and she returned home as Jacob took to the streets.

One night as the full moon shone down on a cold and frosty New York night, those sleeping rough could find little comfort in their cardboard boxes in doorways. Jacob Wells did not even have that, and slumped behind trash bins, lightheaded from lack of food, shelter and warmth. It was at this low point, just when he had finally given up on everything and was ready to accept the inevitable, that his life was about to change.

Out of the haze of noises in his head he heard footsteps passing by and called out. "Help me, please?"

The woman stopped and said, "Dear God, what a night to be too drunk to go home."

"I'm not drunk---I'm sick." As Jacob tried to stand something in the cultered voice reached out to her and she offered him her hand.

"Thank you, dear lady." He stood but then his legs gave way and he sank to his knees, sobbing bitter tears at his weakness.

"You poor soul, we'll soon have you feeling better m'dear. Put your arm around my waist and I'll take you to a warm, safe place." Her voice was full of promise and he believed her, and followed her to a strange new world beneath the streets of New York.

His health did return after awhile with the loving care Grace showered on him. Eventually, he was well enough to explore his surroundings. Grace, like Jacob, had been rejected by society Above. As he wandered he soon discovered others huddled in

groups along the tunnels. Isolated human beings, so alone, yet united in despair.

Fear ruled, as footsteps could mean discovery by police or violent intruders. Jacob Wells decided to pull this community together and make it a safe place.....make it a home for all these destroyed souls. His heart cried out to help them, so he and Grace laid out the foundations of their world Below.

There was another man Below, about the same age as Jacob, who was also a scientist. John Pater and his assistant, Tamara were not liked, as what you don't understand, you fear. Jacob, however, made friends with John Pater and the two men designed secret entrances and invented their own version of the Morse Code which Thomas Pascal was taught to use on the endless pipes which zigzagged throughout the tunnels. This quickly became their method of communications as the pipes opened up a better life for them. They could now receive messages from the guards posted at certain places and from their Helpers Above, in fact the 'pipes' served as their lifeline.

Vincent raised himself up on one arm and looked about him. The pipes were silent now, sleeping as were the inhabitants of the tunnel world. He rose from his bed, pulling a quilt around his shoulders for warmth, and sat at his table, looking down at his closed journal. He stroked the cover with his thumb before opening it and glancing at his last entry. His whole life was neatly recorded here in his journals; his own history, entered day by day.

He wondered if anyone else would read them one day? He'd written about others as well over the years. In particular, his brother Devin, who was a hero in his eyes. He'd recorded the dark years in his teens, when boys became men, and he

became.....even more different!

Those years had been a nightmare for Father as well because he had been forced to restrain Vincent to keep him from hurting himself---or the rest of them. Vincent's alter ego knew no bounds, no limits, just power and rage. As the human side battled with the other side, Vincent was trapped within a body in torment.

When Vincent went through these dark times Father would sit and read to him, hour after hour, day after day, comforting and soothing his son who came to love most of the great literature and all of Shakespeare.

A deep bond developed between them that was beyond the usual feelings of a father and son. Jacob Wells, who had lost Margaret to her father, and Grace giving birth to Devin, now had Vincnet and for the first time in so long he felt wanted and needed.....and loved.

Vincent had never known a mother's love, never been held close to her breast or experienced her arms around him when life got too much for him as a child. These natural human longings tore at his heart, emphasizing his feelings of aloneness.

As an adult Vincent no longer abided by the strictures forcing him to remain Below. He would go Above as the world slept and walk the streets, look in the shop windows or stroll through the park, sometimes using the swings which creaked and groaned under his immense weight. The things up top everyone took for granted during the day became his wondrous, secret world as darkness fell.

One momentous night as he strolled across the grass, he was forced to step back into the shadows of a tree as a white van

came careening through the park. It screeched to a halt, dark figures threw something out and then the van raced off again.

Vincent was puzzled at the odd actions but approached cautiously as he heard moaning, until he could see the body of a woman on the grass, obviously injured and in pain.

His heart was beating like a drum as he got nearer and nearer to her. Within him a driving force urged him to hold her, touch her, and protect her and overpowered his fear of being caught.

As he picked her up in his arms, a feeling of completeness enveloped him and somehow he knew here was his destiny. Without a second thought for the safety of the tunnels, he took this stranger into their world Below.

He stroked the journal once more, Father was wrong, so very wrong about her. He warned me she could only bring me unhappiness, instead, she brought me all the joy in my life.

He recalled Father saying Catherine would go off and leave him heartbroken when she returned to her own kind, but she had rejected all other men.....for him. None of the handsome, successful attorneys her father introduced her to, nor her boss Joe Maxwell or even Elliot Burch had been able to win a place in her heart, as she loved Vincent only.

Father grudgingly admitted to Vincent one day that she was a very remarkable woman and he acknowledged the fact that she and Vincent loved each other totally, but he was still concerned about the possible consequences of this relationship. Mary, however, had always been their advocate.

His thoughts drifted to Mary.....dear, dear Mary, who had always been a mother figure to him, as she was to all the children. She

lost her own son in a school gang fight gone tragically wrong. When she lost her son, she lost herself, until she finally found a home beneath Central Park. Other people's lost and lonely children became her own and she lavished such tender and loving care on each and every one of them. she also kept a secret love in her heart.....her love for Jacob Wells.

It was Mary who was instrumental in altering Father's opinion of Catherine, for which Vincent would be forever grateful. He appreciated her uncritical support and subtle influence with Father. He well remembered overhearing a conversation between Father and Mary one night on his way back from Catherine's apartment.

"How is it, Mary, I see all the impossibilities and you see only the possibilities? I see all the potential harm from this relationship but you claim nothing but good can come of it."

"That's because I'm a woman, Jacob, and we truly are more intuitive about these things," she said, smiling at him. "Surely you can see how much happier and more content Vincent is since Catherine came into his life? She truly loves him and she will never hurt him---but they need your understanding and support, they both love and respect you."

"Hmmmmmm," was all he could manage, knowing but not wanting to admit, she was right.

Vincent rose from his table and paced his chamber, his feet and hands numb with cold. His breath rose in white puffs in the chilled air of his chamber. He pulled open a drawer and looked down at Catherine's nightgown, carefully folded away. How shocked Father had been to learn that during Catherine's weekend visits Below she had not always slept in her own bed!

Catherine often shared a chamber with Jamie, who woke one night to discover Catherine's bed had not been slept in and ran to tell Mary. Jamie was distressed when Mary appeared delighted with the news and told Jamie it was none of her business where Catherine slept. It was not until she saw the jealous scowl that she realized Jamie had a crush on Vincent.

Following that incident, Jamie's normally friendly nature became spiteful and vindictive. She took satisfaction in picking at Vincent and catching him out. One such time was when Vincent had promised to accompany a group to the Mirror Pool. When Catherine unexpectedly came Below, the promise was forgotten, and Jamie flew into a rage.

"What is it, Jamie?" Mary asked as Jamie stormed into her chamber.

"It's Vincent, he's broken his word! He said he would go to the Mirror Pool with Mouse and Cullen and I. Catherine came Below and he forgot us---he completely forgot us!"

"Have you considered he may have had a good reason? I don't think he just forgot you, Jamie," Mary said with a smile.

" 's not funny! A promise.....IS a promise!" Jamie half-yelled at Mary, tears of anger streaming down her cheeks.

"I'm sure he didn't mean to upset you, Jamie," Mary said, and put her arm around the girl but Jamie shrugged it off and ran headlong out of the chamber, knocking over Mary's basket of freshly washed laundry.

Father entered as Jamie ran out and seeing the upset basket asked, "What on earth is wrong? Are you all right, Mary?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Nothing is wrong----just impetuous youth."

Father's anger was evident. "I don't know what's gotten into that girl lately."

"It's called love, Jacob. Jamie's in love."

"Dear God! Surely not with that young scamp, Mouse!" he said, his face showing his distress.

"Mouse? Good Heavens, no. Jamie is in love with Vincent, or at least she thinks she is. It's the talk of the tunnels."

"Vincent.....?" he said in disbelief. "No.....No.....why am I the last to hear of this.....in love with.....no!"

"No one has told you because they knew you would rant and rave as you are now---sending your blood pressure sky high. Now sit down and calm down. It's not serious, it's puppy love and Jamie is acting out an emotion---one called jealousy."

"Jealousy?" Father repeated in shock.

"Oh, Jacob, if Jamie can't have him, she doesn't want to let Catherine have him either without her own little war."

"What do you mean, let Catherine have him? Vincent and Catherine are just.....friends, good friends.....but nothing.....er.....nothing more, if you understand me, dear Mary. Why, Catherine even shares Jamie's chamber when she's Below so even if.....We can be sure there is no.....er..... hanky panky!" he stated with authority.

Mary smiled at Father's willfull blindness. "Catherine's bed had not been slept in recently and Jamie had been extremely angry ever since she discovered this."

"I see.....I SEE!" Father fumed.

"Do you, Jacob?"

"Why do you look at me so?" he asked.

"Because Vincent and Catherine are lovers and you must accept this fact.....yes, lovers," she said as he shook his head in denial. "and it's about time, too!"

"Lovers.....not after all the repeated warnings I've given that boy! Has he lost all his senses?" Father raved.

"He's no longer a boy, Jacob, and I think he's finally following his heart," Mary said as she fondly patted his arm.

"The potential complications of this are enormous and deadly. Has anyone seen Catherine this morning? Is she well? Is she unharmed? There is no telling what Vincent is capable of with his strength and makeup when.....er.....when passion rules." Wiping his brow, he sat down, then quickly stood up again, then finally sat down again.

"Yes, I've seen Catherine and Vincent this morning but your concern is unjustified.....and untimely. They did not just become lovers last night, it's been going on for some time. They are so happy, Jacob, give them your blessing---not your anger, please."

Father stared at her in bewilderment.

Vincent wandered from his chamber to the tunnel entrance to Central Park. The first signs of dawn were showing but the Park still lay in a mantle of dew, shimmering in the fading moonlight. As he returned down the familiar tunnels he remembered Father's reaction to overhearing a remark by Cullen about a ring.

Father had sent a message over the pipes for Vincent to come to his chamber.....immediately.

He had run down the tunnels, his cloak flying out behind him, afraid Father was ill. On his arrival in the study he breathlessly asked, "Father, what is it? The message said urgent."

"Oh, there you are, Vincent. Where have you been? You're never here anymore when I need you," he scolded as he walked over to Vincent with the aid of his stick. "Sit down, please."

"Father, what is it?"

"Is it true?"

"Is what true, Father?"

"If it is.....why am I the last to hear of it.....eh?"

Vincent held his hand up in a helpless gesture. "Please, Father, I cannot give you an answer until I know the question."

"Very well. Have you.....have you.....?" he stammered to a halt and then asked the less explosive part of his question. "Have you asked Cullen to make a ring for you?"

"Ah.....who told you this? I,,,,,,,,"

Before Vincent finished his reply, Father interrupted him impatiently. "Is it true, damn it! Surely a question so simple deserves an equally simple answer?"

"Then the.....simple answer.....simply is yes."

a silence descended, you could almost feel and long moments passed before Father cleared his throat and spoke. "Is the ring for Catherine?"

"Of course."

"Er.....is it her birthday? No, a friendship ring.....that's it, no doubt. A friendship ring, I'm right, aren't I, Vincent?" Father pleaded.

"I think not, Father. I've asked Catherine to be my wife and she has made me the happiest of men by saying 'yes'," he said with pride. He rose from his chair and walked toward his adopted father. Once in front of the shaken old man, Vincent leaned towards him, and placing his hands on the chair arms, crouched down in front of the man he adored.

"Why didn't you tell me, why was I the last to know?" Father asked, his voice shaky with emotion.

"You are not the last to know, Father. I only asked Catherine last night. I met Cullen on my way back from escorting her to the entrance beneath her apartment building and asked this favor of him---it never occurred to me to ask him not to mention it, as apparently he had. I was on my way here to tell you but.....to be truthful, I was still wandering around the upper tunnels, daydreaming, when I heard your message."

"I see. Have you really, really thought this through, Vincent? The odds against this union are staggering. You have no idea of the problems you will have to deal with. She is so small and dainty, whereas you.....well, just look at you, Vincent!" he sighed. "You are not a small man by anyone's calculations."

"This is not a problem, Father, trust me."

"Hmmmmm, yes, well. Consider then the fact that Catherine is a very beautiful and extremely wealthy woman. A wealth beyond our wildest dreams and you, Vincent, through no fault of your own,

have so little to offer her."

"I know, Father."

"There are men from her own world she could and should marry, like Elliot Burch or her boss she talks of so much, Joe Maxwell. She has been schooled all her life to be the wife of a man of that sort. How can she turn her back on that life to live down here as your wife?"

"What you say is true, Father, even I cannot believe this could happen to me of all God's creatures. I was happy to watch over her, content to be there for her whenever danger was near. I would have continued to care for and watch over her if she made another life with such a man. I expressed all the drawbacks you have mentioned to her, plus some you haven't, but you have to remember Catherine is a lawyer. When I argued, I got a glimpse of her professional demeanor." He smiled with pride, "She must be truly awesome in a courtroom, Father, she won our case hands down."

"Well, what's done is done. You both have my blessing, of course."

"Thank you, Father. Catherine needs all the support we can give her. On her side she will have no one, she will be alone in this, unable to confide in her friends, sharing her joy.....or doubts."

"Yes, I realize that."

"It will be a trying time for her, Father, without any of her friends. Speaking of which, I owe an apology to mine. Yesterday, when she came Below, I completely forgot I had promised to go swimming with them. I hope they will understand and forgive me."

"When is this union to take place, dare I ask?"

"We spoke long into the night on this very point, Father, and the only answer I can give you is.....as soon as possible."

"Aside from the wedding itself, how do you intend to manage all this?"

"Catherine will still continue to work Above and live at the apartment during the week. Weekends she will spend Below with me, and with her new family. I will go Above each night as I do now, but I will stay with her 'till dawn, returning while it's still safe for me. It will be a bit complicated but by doing this, no one Above will know her life has changed. We will, of course, be married Below, and we hope you will perform our marriage ceremony, Father."

Tears came into the old man's eyes. "I'd be.....honoured, my son. Thank you for asking me."

"Catherine and I will speak to you about this later this week, about the arrangements and a suitable date."

"Why did Catherine go back Above? It's the weekend, surely she's not working?"

"No. She's gone to see Joe Maxwell, to explain to him that she is to be married and will not take any more dangerous assignments."

"I see." Father smiled approvingly at last. "You really have talked this through, haven't you?"

Vincent shyly hung his head and quietly said, "Yes."

A compatible silence followed as both men were wrapped up in their own thoughts.

"Have you considered that this.....marriage, may produce children, with every likelihood they could look like you, Vincent? The life you lead now, do you truly want that possibility for a child?" He had finally said it, forced out the distasteful words which seemed to stick in his throat.

"I was hesitant about this possibility too but Catherine is adamant on this subject. She welcomes the thought of any child we have. She even said she hopes at least some of our children will look like me.....can you believe that, Father?"

"Yes, I can. I haven't always been this age, truly, I was young once. I do know that love takes over all reasoning and it rules your very being. But in this case, I do honestly believe Catherine means it, Vincent. She loves you; so why should she not want a child in your image?"

A sudden noise in his chamber brought Vincent back to the present. He looked around him but there was nobody there. Then he realized the noise was himself, moaning as his body wrestled with waves of pain. His inability to sleep and his internal pains were linked but Vincent remained unable to understand the connection.

What was happening to him? Were these memories or dreams?

As soon as he lay still once more, his waking dreams of days gone by continued and their warmth gave him a measure of comfort. Where was Catherine? Why was he alone? Why could he no longer feel the Bond they shared? Why? Why? Why?

When he was still he could hear her voice, her laughter. The mist again rolled back to the day that filled his being with happiness beyond his wildest dreams.....their wedding day! One month to

the day after he'd asked Cullen to make a wedding ring, he and Catherine were married.

The Great Hall was packed with everyone who lived Below and some of the Helpers from Above. The profusion of candles everywhere lit up the large cavern like never before, highlighting the six large tapestries on one wall before which the ceremony was to take place.

Father had looked very regal in his wine coloured robe edged in gold thread. It had been lovingly restored by Mary when it was found among the discards behind a church.

Catherine had looked like an angel as she walked towards Vincent, and Father in her powder blue chiffon dress, carrying a bouquet of cream coloured roses in her arms.

Devin was to be Vincent's best man but when he was still missing, at the last moment, Cullen stepped in for him.

Jamie had finally accepted the fact that Vincent loved her only as a sister and, as she cared deeply for both him and Catherine when she wasn't in the throes of jealousy, she had made up the rift between them and agreed to be Catherine's bridesmaid.

In his reverie Vincent smiled as he fondly remembered Devin crashing in, mere seconds before Father declared Catherine and Vincent husband and wife.

"I now announce to the congregation here present, that you will live together, in love and harmony, as man and wife, to your life's end. God Bless you both.....Devin, you're late again, my boy!" he added as the crowd burst into laughter.

Trestle tables with snow white tablecloths, all neatly repaired and

starched, stood where they did at Winterfest. William had his helpers had been preparing food for days and everyone had helped with the festive decorations.

In the far corner was Mouse, with one of his contraptions which poured out music on old 78 records. The choice of music was decided on by what Mouse had.....acquired! Some were good and some were scratched but to Mouse, he was the disc jockey of the year, "Okay good---Okay fine! Music neat, Vincent," he had said when asked of the possibility.

Mouse had other things on his mind as well as he sat holding Jamie's hand and they watched the bride and groom dance to the words of love being sung on the old records. They meant something different to Jamie and Mouse who were in the first tentative stages of love's bloom.

The pains were very intense now and beads of perspiration formed on his face as he shook from head to foot. Every bone in his body ached and his muscles were in spasms of pain. Where was the calming comfort of his beloved wife when he needed her so much? He cried out, "Catherine!" Louder and louder his cries filled the air. "Catherine, Catherine!"

He felt a hand patting his face and a cooling cloth on his brow. He slowly opened one eye, then the other, in confusion. What was happening to him----where was he?

"Vincent, wake up my boy. Come along now, wake up."

"Father, what has happened?"

"You've been unconscious and muttering about the terrible pain you were in."

"The pain is gone now, Father. Tell me, am I going mad? Where is Catherine?" he asked.

"I'm here, Vincent."

Turning his head in the direction of the familiar voice, he saw his beloved wife, lying in a bed in the hospital chamber. "Catherine, why are you here? What is wrong?" Then suddenly, it all started to come back to him.

A few months ago Catherine had been to see Dr. Alcott and he had confirmed she was pregnant. He promised to keep a careful eye on her, as this promised to be a most unusual pregnancy.

Each month Catherine became larger and larger and at eight months went into labor early, as Peter Alcott had predicted. When Catherine's water broke, it was too much for her gentle giant of a husband, who passed out and banged his head on a rock wall as he sagged to a heap on the floor. Their Bond was so strong, he had been experiencing Catherine's labor contractions during his unconscious state.

Vincent got to his feet and staggered over to the bed, never once taking his eyes off his wife. "The baby.....is..... everything.....?"

"Vincent, calm yourself," Father said, "you have a daughter..."

"A daughter!"

"And two sons," Mary finished as Jacob choked up.

"I have what?" Vincent gasped and sank to his knees beside the bed.

"You have one daughter and two sons," Mary repeated.

"How is this possible?" Vincent asked in bewilderment.

"Catherine wanted the possibility of a multiple birth kept quiet, Vincent, knowing how worried you would be." Peter explained as he walked over rolling down his shirt sleeves. "Tests Above weren't possible as the results might have raised too many eyebrows and we simply didn't have the proper equipment to conduct the tests down here. We knew there were two heartbeats but couldn't be sure if there were more. It seems there were," he said with a smile.

Stunned, Vincent stood up and walked around to the three baskets on the other side of the bed, each holding a baby. They were so beautiful.....his babies.....his and Catherine's.

He turned to his wife. "Catherine.....there are no words. My cup is full and running over." He held her hand and raised it to his lips and kissed it so very tenderly.

"They are so lovely, Vincent, all three of them." She laughed softly. "No wonder I was so huge."

"What names shall we give them?" he asked, as one by one he touched his children, bonding with each one in turn.

"I think Mary for our daughter."

"And for our sons?"

"What would you like, Vincent?"

"For you to choose, dearest wife."

"All right then, the one who looks like you, we shall call Charles after my father and the other son we'll call Jacob after your father."

Mary and Jacob hugged each other and once again tears of such

happiness and pride flowed down their cheeks as they watched the new father.

Bending over the tiny babies before him, Vincent studied each one at great length, marveling at their beauty. Then slowly and with great care, he lifted them from their baskets. First he placed their daughter Mary in Catherine's right arm and then baby Jacob in her left. Next he took Charles tenderly into his own arms and gently sat down near Catherine on the bed.

Vincent silently made a mental picture of this moment, to treasure to his dying day. Fatherhood was something he had always felt would be denied him. His love for Catherine and her love for him had proved everyone wrong.....everyone.

"Mary looks like you, with her green eyes and fair straight hair. Jacob looks like.....you again, Catherine, only with blue eyes and curly hair," he smiled.

"And Charles looks like you, Vincent, with his golden hair and special little face."

"He is a miniature of me and he'll have a brother and sister to love and protect him all his life." Vincent kissed each baby's forehead in turn as little fingers touched his face. Then he kissed Catherine.

"We finally have our Happy Life, Vincent. My whole world is here with you and our children. You had me so worried when you knocked yourself out. I felt sure you would miss all this."

"Even in my unconscious state, I shared every pain, Catherine. Our Bond is so strong----it knows no boundaries."

"I love you so much, Vincent."

"I used to envy others so much, anyone with the freedom I was

denied, but no longer. You have made me a king among men, Catherine, with treasures in my life more precious than a king's ransom." Vincent carefully stroked his son's cheek with his thumb.

"We're going to need an endless amount of Godparents, Vincent."

"Well, I see no problem there, Catherine, do you?" With a wicked twinkle in his eyes he began naming names. "There's Devin and Rebecca, Jamie and Mouse, William and....."

But Catherine had fallen asleep. Now it was her turn to dream, to remember the past and go forward into the future.

LOVE AND HOPE

GWEN LORD

Joe tapped the pencil nervously on his desk, waiting patiently for Cathy to wind up the report on the Miller case. Everyone else had gone home and the office had taken on an unfamiliar silence that was broken only by the tick, tick of the office wall clock, which revealed the time to be five twenty.

The office lights seemed brighter now, as darkness pushed against the windows. Like a cloak surrounding the building and isolating it from reality. Joe and Cathy worked well together and had laboured hard and long on this case--testing the to the hilt. But at last, a witness had come forward, following their last line of inquiry. It had been their last hope and it had worked. Now, this person was the final link in their investigations; all loose ends were now coming together like a jigsaw. Cathy's determination and Joe's dedication had finally paid off. Justice could now be done, by putting that.....animal behind bars. He, who stalked young defenseless women as they walked along along badly lit streets and alley ways; who took a sick pleasure from their terrified screams and refusals, to feed his lust and desire.

"That's me finished, Joe."

Cathy's words brought him back to reality with a start.

"Thanks, Radcliffe. You've done a great job there...What'ya doing tonight? I was thinking we could maybe celebrate with a bite to eat and drink?"

"Not tonight, Joe. Thanks, but I'm bushed. I just want to get home, shower and curl up with a book." Cathy smiled as she made to leave his office and head for home.

"You want to curl up with a book.....? Radcliffe. I think I'm working you too hard. You have to go out; meet people; enjoy life; live a little. You get my meaning.....?"

Cathy smiled again. "Another time, Joe. Goodnight."

Picking up her purse and coat, she hurriedly left the office, missing the hurt look on Joe's face in response to yet another refusal to take her out. He was beginning to wonder if she would ever accept his invitations.

Joe had fallen in love with her the very first time he had seen her, almost two years ago now, when she had sat outside his office, waiting for her interview, nervous and apprehensive. Joe had prayed hard she'd get the job and his prayers had been answered. As the weeks passed by he slowly got to know her as a person; sensitive and caring. He loved every single thing about her, including her impish little smile when all was going well. He also liked it when things didn't go all that well, because it was then she would come to him for his help and advice, or, just for a shoulder to cry on. This made up for all his rejections at attempting to date her; being able to be there for her, when she needed him.

Her bed felt warm and inviting as she settled herself against the many lacy pillows to read from her beautiful old leather-bound book of poems Vincent had given her. These pages, now so worn and old, had given her much comfort when she lived Below, following her father's death. Vincent had read passages from them night after night; the words and his gentle voice offering her comfort and hope when she had needed it most. She read them now, slowly, enjoying and savouring the memories they brought back, of time spent together day after day, until she was healed enough to return Above. But sadly, she missed Vincent more and

more when they were apart, now living only for the times they shared together, which brought them much joy.

A tapping on her balcony door sent her heart beating faster. She jumped out of bed and ran to open it. Holding back the net curtain, she saw Vincent standing there, tall and noble against the night sky, his cloak and hair blowing out in the light breeze. Their eyes met in a knowing look as he stepped forward to wrap his arms around her. She snuggled up to him, enjoying the feeling of the rough fabric of his cloak, the softness of the leather on his tunic against her face. A happiness enveloped her and she cuddled up even closer.

"I didn't mean to disturb you, Catherine. I'm sorry, but it is such a beautiful night; the park looks so magical by moonlight. I wanted so much to share it with you."

Catherine looked up at Vincent and smiled lovingly.

"Oh Vincent, that sounds lovely. I'll get changed. I won't be more than a few minutes." She hurried inside.

As Vincent waited for her on the balcony, he looked down to the cars below---so small from 18 floors up; then to the skyscrapers in front which silhouetted the night sky. He could see Central Park stretching out ahead of him; below, all that flora and fauna was his home. He could only safely come Above as night fell, so the time he and Catherine shared was very limited. Oh, would that it could be different! He sighed.

"What's wrong, Vincent?" Catherine asked as she joined him on the balcony. "I heard you sigh. I didn't take that long, did I?" she teased.

Vincent made his own way down to the car park whilst Catherine

took the elevator. He was already waiting for her there, as the doors slid open and she walked towards him.

"Shall we go?" Vincent held out his hand.

They walked arm in arm through the park, following the path down to the river. The moonlight danced on the rippling water. Above them the moon was full; a perfect night for lovers.

"I treasure nights like these," he whispered close to her. She glanced up at him.

"I know. So do I."

As he looked down at her, an overwhelming desire enveloped him. He needed her closer. He put his arm around her shoulders, drawing her nearer, and sighed. He could feel her hair, soft against his face, her perfume filled his nostrils, tantalizing and teasing. Oh, what joy these stolen times brought them; but also such pain. He prayed this night would never end.

Suddenly, a blood-curdling cry rang out through the clear night air shattering the peace that had surrounded them. Vincent and Catherine looked at one another in horror. Then they heard a muffled cry for help, followed by distant running footsteps.

Each knew what the other was thinking as they set off together in the direction of the trees and bushes. Even though Catherine ran fast, she couldn't keep up with Vincent's long strides. But when at last she reached him, he was already crouched over the body of a young girl who was crying and shivering with fear.

Catherine bent down close to the girl to comfort her while Vincent looked around for any clues as to the way the attacker had disappeared. But the person had vanished into the night.

Disbelief crossed Catherine's face as the light from the park lamp lit up the girl's frightened face. It was Beth, her witness in the Miller case.

"Oh no. My God! Beth, are you all right?"

"Oh, Miss Chandler, I'm so glad to see you---I thought he was going to kill me. He would have if you hadn't come when you did."

"Did you see who did this to you?"

It was then that Vincent returned to them, his cloak flowing out behind him. He had been unable to track down the attacker who had managed to get away. Vincent overheard the girl telling Catherine of the man's description. Vincent's eyes grew wide with amazement at what he heard.

"Yes I did, I know him. He's tall, thin and walks with a heavy limp."

Vincent bent down behind the girl so that she couldn't see his face, now in the shadows. He spoke to her.

"Have you seen this man before tonight then? Do you know anything about him?"

Cathy helped the girl sit up, she took a deep breath, then in a slow upset voice she said: "Yes. I know he lives where he can, down by the river where it bends, near the disused warehouses."

"How do you know all this, Beth?" asked Cathy. She was very puzzled by all this intrigue.

"Oh, Miss Chandler," she sobbed. "He's my step-brother."

"Your step-brother?" Cathy whispered. "Why would he want to kill you? I can't believe this."

Vincent reeled in shock at this revelation.

"It's true, really it is. I found out by accident. It was him who was doing all the attacks in the park. I begged him to stop, said that the law would catch up with him, but he beat me, and wouldn't listen to me, ever. He threatened me so often and said if I told anyone he'd carve me up....Then he found out that I'd been to see you with my statement and that did it! I managed to run from him. He lost me twice as I headed for the park, but he wouldn't give up and when I stood on a twig, he heard it, turned around and saw me. That's when I screamed, and you heard me."

Vincent walked to the shadows as Catherine and Beth followed the winding path to the iron park gates. Vincent saw Cathy's signal to stay out of sight, now they were within safety of the yellow cabs which lined the road near the park gate entrance. Cathy and Beth climbed into the first one, telling the friendly old driver to go straight to St. Vincent's Hospital accident department.



The following morning as Cathy arrived at work, she couldn't help but notice everyone standing in groups; unfamiliar commotion and whispered conversations taking place as they observed three police officers and Joe in deep discussion.

"Joe, what happened here?" Cathy asked in amazement, as she noticed the burnt out filing cabinet.

"We've had company. Someone kindly removed the file on the Miller case and set fire to the cabinet, destroying all the other files to cover up any clues. All our work gone down the tube, Radcliffe. And, as if that wasn't enough, there was another attack in the park last night. Of course, it had to be our only witness, didn't it? She

was badly beaten up and is now in St. Vincent's Hospital."

"I know, Joe," Cathy blurted out.

"How do you know that?"

Cathy, realizing what she'd said, tried to look calm as she replied:
"I...er, heard it on my way in, Joe."

"Oh!" Joe looked satisfied with her answer and carried on with what he was doing.



Later that night when Cathy was reading on her balcony, Vincent came up behind her. She didn't hear him, yet, when he slipped his hand in hers, she wasn't surprised. Catherine was so pleased as always to see him! Getting out of her chair to embrace him, she noticed a troubled look on his face.

"What's wrong, Vincent? I feel your sadness."

"That person, Beth described to you, her step-brother, I believe we know him. He used to be one of us, living Below. It's many years ago now, but he betrayed us all and was banned from our community. I was only a teenager at the time. Father tried to help him, but some people thrive on evil, so helping them isn't easy, because they can't face their own fear."

"Do you know where I could find him, Vincent? Beth said he lives rough near the bend in the river."

"Yes, I know of this place, it's not a safe place for you to go alone, Catherine. I'll come with you and be close by."

Catherine once again found herself getting dressed to go out, even though it was well past midnight, but this was the life style

she now chose. Together they entered the ill-lit tunnels and seemed to walk for miles. Vincent knew all these tunnels so well, but they all looked the same to Catherine, who followed Vincent, hand in hand.

At last they came to a stop, with Vincent pointing to a small doorway.

"This leads to where he'll be. Take care, Catherine," Vincent whispered as he held her hands in his. "I'll be very close." She smiled up at him, then Vincent held her close, as she said, "I know."

The street was dimly lit as Catherine approached it from the warehouse tunnel doorway, groups of youngsters huddled together, some sleeping, some talking. Older men sat around small fires here and there along the roadside trying to keep out the cold night air, all seemed to have the same look of disillusionment on their faces. The world had no use for these dropouts who lived outside the mainstream of society. It was a big problem, which seemed to overwhelm everyone with its enormity.

Catherine felt very uncomfortable as she walked amongst them. Their eyes following her; some of them offering to keep her warm, laughingly. Her heels echoed on the street, drawing even more attention to her being there. Two girls were screaming at each other like alley cats.

Suddenly, Cathy's heart missed a beat. Coming towards her was Beth's step-brother---she recognized his awkward walk.

"We meet at last, Miss Chandler," he said in his chilling, mocking voice.

"Please, I want to help you, would you let me try?"

He laughed uncontrollably. Then his mood changed. He produced a flick knife, waving it about he baited her.

"Sure you do, pretty lady," he snarled.

"Please," Cathy tried to remain calm despite her fear. "I can help you, please let me try."

He lurched forward placing the steel blade against her throat.

"You know too much already---I can't take the risk."

Sheer panic seized her now. As she tried to turn away from him to release his hold on her, Vincent sensed his need to help her. A roaring filled the air as he ran, his cloak flying out behind him, toward the man. He grabbed him by the shoulders, throwing him to the ground. Then as he tried to get up, Vincent hit him and sent him reeling into the line of battered old trash cans and boxes piled high. Vincent moved over to him, snarling. He looked up into Vincent's face and recognized him.

"Vincent!" he exclaimed in disbelief.

A patrol car, passing through the district on its nightly beat, saw the disturbance. It swung towards them, stopping just inches away from them in a screech of brakes. Both officers jumped out.

"Everything all right, Miss?" asked the senior of the two men.

"It is now, thank you. Thank God you were there. Take this man downtown and book him," she ordered as she pulled her ID card out of her purse and showed it to him. "It's all right, I'm with the D.A.'s office."

The handcuffs now safely locked on his wrists, he was pushed roughly on to the back seat of the patrol car. Both officers

prepared to leave.

"We'll take you safely downtown, Miss Chandler. Get in," the younger one offered in a deep drawl.

"Thanks all the same, I have my own car there, I'll be fine, Goodnight."

And with that the car sped away down the alley, disappearing into the shadows.

Once the car had gone, Cathy turned to the old warehouse behind her with the tunnel door. As she approached it, Vincent stepped out of the shadows and put his arms around her.

"Catherine," he sighed. "This work you do puts your life in danger so often. I wish you didn't take so many risks. You could have been killed tonight."

"I know....."

"I couldn't live without you. You're my life. You must take more care, Catherine, please."

Cathy looked lovingly into Vincent's face and stroked his cheek with her hand.

"You are my life too, Vincent. But some times I have to take risks, because some are worth taking."

Vincent let out a deep sigh. "I know."

He took her hand in his and together they entered the warehouse door, closing it behind them, shutting out the world above them of hate, greed, lust, anger and envy. In their world Below there was only love and hope, which had so nearly been denied them tonight.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

GWEN LORD

It happened so suddenly, taking them both by surprise. After a leisurely walk in the park, arm in arm, they had returned to Catherine's apartment, the hour was late, after 1 am, but their spirits were high, the three half bottles of assorted wines awaited them in the fridge. Vincent got the glasses and arranged the cushions by the fire, as Catherine appeared with the wines...One drink followed another, as the fingers on the clock held the telltale secret of how late the hour was, but time held no meaning anymore.

Soon the wine relaxed them, words came easy, both agreeing that a life without each other, was no life at all. Finally they agreed a "Happy Life" could be theirs, they knew the risks, the dangers, but the possibilities and the hope shone through. Vincent asked Catherine to forsake all others, to be his and his alone. Tears filled both their eyes as they clung together, their "Bond" now fully open, all secrets and desires now fully known.

It was decided weeks ago, following that wonderful evening, that they would exchange rings on Christmas Eve, and read aloud the vows they had lovingly put together to use for this occasion.



Sizes for the rings had been a major problem, her fingers so tiny, his so large but, after a lot of searching, Catherine had found a split ring which fitted her finger and a large curtain ring which fitted Vincent's. Armed with her Grandfather's antique signet ring, Catherine entered the plush jewellers on 52nd Street, where you sank into oceans of carpet and voices were kept to a whisper. You

only visited such places when you were wealthy enough not to have a heart attack when you received the bill. Placing the antique ring in the assistant's hand, Cathy explained she wanted the ring made larger, to the size of the cheap curtain ring she now handed him. This raised an eyebrow, but not wishing to offend one of his firm's best customers, he smiled as he took it from her. She explained that after making it larger, she wished to have a small exquisite diamond set in one corner, and the initials V&C engraved in the other.

Vincent went to see Cullen, with his task for Catherine's ring, together the two friends pondered on different ideas and textures. Cullen was a fully trained craftsman, an expert in his trade, a teacher of his trade when he lived 'Above,' but one day circumstances beyond his control, made him decide to leave his world and join the Helpers he once 'Helped Below.' Here his talent was soon put to good use, with everyone benefiting from his carving and delicate engraving. Soon the products of his work graced every corner of the chambers. Chess pieces for Father, chess pieces for Vincent, carved beds, ornate shelves, brooches and candlesticks, endless items. Vincent had shown a keen interest in Cullen's workshop, visiting him whenever he could find the time. Father knew where to find his son, when his absence was noticed. After five years under Cullen's guidance, Vincent had become a master of the same skills. He didn't have the certificates that Cullen had, but his craftsmanship was there, for all to see and wonder at.



Small delicate snowflakes began to fall soon after nightfall on Christmas Eve, on Central Park and surrounding areas, transforming everything into a Winter Wonderland. As midnight

was only an hour away the flakes grew larger and more demanding, falling gently and silently on the now deep virgin snow. A mantle of white enveloped every familiar sight, trees, benches, railings, hedges and road lamps.

The silence was so consuming, you could almost reach out and touch it, the very fabric of New York City life and suddenly halted in its endless noisy grind. Now a magic took over, allowing everyone to remember the magic of snow, of childhood memories, snowball fights, snowmen, sleigh rides, red noses, soggy mittens, carefree childhood memories.

As Vincent walked toward the tunnel entrance, his sensitive nose twitched at the sharp contrast of cold air, compared to the warmth of the chamber he'd left behind. Pulling his hood over his golden flowing mane, he set his feet in the direction of Catherine's apartment, which now lay ahead of him, the lights from her doors shining out like a beacon to him. The light of the full moon above sent glinting lights cascading over the smooth new snow, like a million tiny diamonds. His large leather boots cut deep into the crisp snow, it reminded Vincent of being alone on another planet, as life itself seemed to have ceased, he was the only one alive.

Behind him the telltale footprints were already disappearing in the onslaught of falling flakes, he battled on, holding one hand above his eyes to shield his face from the unending volley of flakes.

The light from the apartment sent a shaft of welcome across the deep snow of the balcony, Vincent descended with catlike grace in the far corner. Easing his way to the door he saw Catherine curled up snugly on the 'dinky little couch', a few candles were visibly lit, such a romantic sight to his eyes. Tap, tap, tap, in an instant his beloved Catherine rushed to let him in, as the door

allowed his imposing frame to enter, the swirl of snowflakes followed him in.

"Catherine, you look so beautiful," he whispered in his velvet voice, smiling at her.

"Thank you, Vincent. Come, take off your cloak." Unclipping it, he carefully took it into the bathroom, shaking it over the bath, then hanging it on a hook behind the door.

"Come, sit by the fire, Vincent, and get warm, your hands are frozen." Holding his hand she led him to the fire. Vincent sat on the floor and removed his boots, placing them next to the basket of logs, then stretching out his long legs, allowed his toes to line up with the warmth, letting life return to his frozen feet and limbs.

"Hmmmm, that feels good, Catherine," he murmured. Crouching down next to him, on the assorted array of cushions, Catherine snuggled up to Vincent, as he encircled her in his arms, then he lowered his head and kissed her hair, her cheek and finally her lips. The Christmas tree stood on the other side of the fireplace, small and pretty with its tinsel and ornaments.

"Thank you for helping me do the tree last night, don't Cullen's carved tiny figures stand out well?"

"Yes, he's very gifted, with a generous heart." Looking at the clock Catherine whispered.

"Vincent, it's midnight." She turned, kneeling before him like an excited child. "Yes," came the reply, then putting both hands on her shoulders, he pulled her to him, their lips came together like a butterfly's wings, followed by a deeper passion promising more.

Each taking out their slip of paper, they started to read the vows

they had carefully put together. Vincent went first, then Catherine, once these words were spoken, their vows made, they were one.

Catherine slipped the antique ring on Vincent's wedding finger, then Vincent slipped the ring he had made her, on her wedding finger. Looking up into each other's eyes, the moment was all consuming, their eyes told each other of the "Happy Life" they could now share, truly together.

"Happy Christmas, Mrs. Wells," he purred.

"Happy Christmas, Husband." They kissed with a new closeness, a new desire, a new beginning.

MY DEAR JESSICA

GWEN LORD

My Dear Jessica,

Life is starting to return to some kind of normal, following my return BELOW to the family that was waiting for me. It was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do, that of saying 'goodbye' to you in the park Above, the days I spent with you were so magical and over too soon.

I thought that at my age, love would never come knocking again at the door of my heart.....but I was wrong! You have made me feel complete and whole again, after so many empty years when a great aloneness took over. Wasn't it Frank Sinatra who sang about "Love being lovelier the second time around"? Well, I'm living proof this is so my dear.

I thought how very much our situation is like that of my son and his Catherine. She is a woman of both worlds just like you are. Vincent is also needed Below just as I am. It was only a pipe dream I had, that I also could be Above in the sunshine again. And just like Vincent, there are those Above who would lay wait for me to destroy us.

Our interlude together was very special for both of us, and we must savour all the memories, hoping that one day, maybe we will be able to be truly together. Have a 'Happy Life'. God bless and keep you safe always.

Jacob

NEW ASSIGNMENTS

by Gwen Lord

Father took a deep breath.

"I'm so sorry Vincent, truly; don't for a moment think I don't understand, because I do, I know how much Catherine means to you ... how close you are but, don't let jealousy cloud your vision, please," he pleaded.

"What am I to do, Father?" his strong hands tore into the air; for a moment, neither of them spoke.

Getting up from his favourite old chair, Father leaned heavily on his stick, as he shuffled towards Vincent's side. Placing a reassuring hand on his son's mighty shoulders, he spoke in a hushed voice, but with the conviction that comes from experience in such matters.

"This empathic bond you share, trust in it Vincent, let it guide you. Catherine's love for you will not falter or waver, because temptation is put in her way, believe me, your fears are unfounded. Why punish yourself so?"

Nodding his head in agreement, Vincent stretched out his arm, to hold Father's in his hand, then looking up into the old man's face, he let out a deep sigh, that seemed to come from the very depths of his soul.

"I know ... I know, but Father, it hurts. I wish it could be me that's with her, my heart aches for her, yet I must forever be in the shadows, unable to be fully whole, because fate has set me adrift in this world, because of who I am and what I am. It's so terribly unfair. If I was as other men, I'd be a king among men, having

Catherine's love, knowing she truly loved me," he sobbed, his tortured body shook. Father silently left the chamber, he knew his son needed privacy, time alone to collect himself.

The reason for Vincent's dark moods of late, was as always, his beloved Catherine. Over the last few months, their relationship had deepened. Both of them realised how dependent they were on each other. The fear both of them shared, should anything happen to either of them, was now paramount in their thoughts. So they had talked long and hard over her taking less demanding cases, so her life wouldn't be put on the line so often.

"One day Catherine, one of us won't be so lucky, for me, life without you would be no life at all," he pleaded, holding her tiny hands against his heart.

"Me neither, Vincent. You are my life," her eyes mirrored her pain.

So by mutual agreement, it was decided Catherine would put in for a less demanding work load. She would see her boss personally, over this now urgent matter.

Nervously, Catherine knocked on the frosted glass of John Moreno's office door; an impatient voice muttered her to enter. Her boss was on the phone, but he signalled her to sit down and wait, while he finished his call.

Looking around the office, Cathy noticed familiar things; the names carved in the wooden panels behind his desk, of past DA's; the Venetian blind sagged where repeatedly it had been pushed down, to view the happenings below; the worn carpet beneath her feet, reminded her what a busy office this was. How different it all was, from the tranquillity that had been her Father's office, of luxury everywhere.

His voice brought her back from her private thoughts.

"You said it was urgent."

"It is," she confessed anxiously. Shifting about in her seat uncomfortably, she finally got up, pacing the floor - a habit she'd picked up from Vincent.

Once she found the right words, the explanation was easy. John Moreno was visibly shocked, to think his number one investigator wanted out. But, he respected her wishes, knowing it must be of extreme importance to her, if she saw him personally over this matter, instead of using the usual channels to tunnel such a request.

The week came and went uneventfully, then Joe passed on to Cathy, the message the message that "The Boss wants to see you, Radcliffe," a twinkle in his eyes, suggesting he knew why, but wasn't telling.

"You wanted to see me?" Catherine asked, as she entered the DA's office.

"Yeah, sit down, Cathy. That matter about which we spoke the other day," he eyed her above his glasses, then loosening his tie, continued, "I believe I have a solution."

"You do?" Catherine wasn't sure what was coming next, but whatever it was, the look on her boss's face, told her it looked hopeful.

"How would you like to work along side Joe Maxwell, as special investigators. You'd still keep your desk of course, to catch up on the reams of paper work, but this job would fill your need for less danger in your life, at the same time, doing a vital role for this office, as undercover agents."

"Undercover, me and Joe?" she looked puzzled.

"The way I see it, it'll take a few weeks to set it all up and get it working," he explained, as he came from behind his desk and perched on the corner of it, nearest to Catherine. "I want you and Joe to be seen together, out on the town, a couple ... an issue," his eyebrows shot up in a knowing way. "Once this is an acceptable fact, we're in business."

"What business?" Catherine asked, now eager to find out more.

"There are worms and vermin in our society as you know, only too well. They get let off for horrendous crimes for lack of evidence; the courts are powerless without proof. The system cannot afford, neither the manpower nor financial implications required, and because of this, they go free ... This is where you and Joe come in." Getting up he returned to his seat and picking up his pencil, he tapped it a few times, as he collected his thoughts, ready to speak. "I think you'd make a great team with outstanding success, for all concerned. I have every faith in you both."

"Thank you ... What does Joe have to say about it all?" she enquired.

"Joe's in full agreement, if you are. Do I take it the answer's yes, then?"

Once more he left his chair and came in front of Catherine, who now stood directly in front of him. Holding out his hand, she shook on the deal.

"Looks like our expense bills will get high," she smiled. "And thank you for coming to my aid so quickly with my problem. I really appreciate it."

"This way we'll both win," he shrugged.

Smiling, Cathy left his office. Joe must have been waiting close by, because no sooner had she closed the office door, than he was by her side, nervously playing with a rubber band.

"Hey Radcliffe ... are we partners?" he smiled cheekily.

"Looks like it, Joe."

"So, I finally get to take you out, eh? Wine and dine you, with the tax payers money and Moreno's blessing ... I'm impressed." His grin was even more cheeky.

"Stop teasing, Joe. This is an assignment, remember that," she blushed, looking coyly at him.

"Hey hey, lay off, we're not married yet, Radcliffe," he teased, "But we'll make a good team, kiddo." Then turning, vanished back into his office.

* * * * *

The stillness of the empty tunnels, echoed Cathy's steps, as she descended down the ladder from the basement of her apartment. Catherine sensed Vincent was near, as he stepped out of the

shadows, to encircle her in his embrace, as she finally put both feet on the ground.

His arms held her close, then leaning from his embrace, she tilted her head up, as Vincent's lips sought hers. His immense size and power excited her; her smallness and beauty delighted him, her perfume intoxicated his senses. Their kiss deepened, until finally they had to pull apart, breathless with desire.

"I've felt your joy today, Catherine. Tell me, what is it?" his velvety voice was hypnotic to her ears.

Her whole face lit up, with joy and anticipation, as she unfolded to Vincent, the events of the day at work. Instead of seeing joy in his eyes for her, Catherine saw sadness, only for a fleeting moment, but it was there, nevertheless.

"What? Tell me, what's wrong, Vincent," she pleaded, her eyes full of love and concern for him.

Moments passed, unspoken words filled the air, then Vincent put both his powerful hands on Catherine's shoulders, for her undivided attention.

"This man, Joe - your boss - he will be with you, out of working

hours ... you'll be in his company most nights ... Catherine, I fear for us," he sighed.

"How d'you mean, Vincent?" Cathy urged.

"What if he should fall in love with you ... or you with him." He turned his gaze away from her so she wouldn't see the deep sadness this possibility brought to him.

Grabbing roughly at his chest, her voice almost out of control she spoke. "Vincent, stop it ..."

"Catherine, I'm not stupid, I know only too well what it feels like to love you ... to want you ... yes, even to desire you. But my hands are tied, because of my appearance, my frightening looks ..."

"Stop it, stop it," she pleaded.

"I know in my heart I have no right to speak to you like this, I am what I am. But deep inside me, I'm like any other man, with feelings and desires. Yes, I do love you, deeply. To lose you, would make my life meaningless, worthless, empty." A sob shook his body as he lowered his face into her hair, kissing the top of her head.

"Vincent, never let me hear you put yourself down like that ever again. You are my world, my life, without you there is nothing for me." Tears now flowed down her flushed cheeks. As she tightened her grip on him, she felt his body tense, then slowly begin to relax under her assurance. Both sighed deeply.

Catherine pulled back to look at him.

"Vincent, this new job, it's what we both wanted, it will take me away from danger yet, I'll still be able to help put away people who do harm. Joe is no threat to you, my love. I like Joe, we'll have fun yes, but you alone own the key to my heart, it is totally yours," she whispered.

"Yes," he sighed deeply. "I know."

"Vincent, the time we spend together is the most wonderful part of each day for me." She lifted her hand to his chin and made him look directly at her. Slowly he lowered his head, then his lips caressed her hair, her temples, her cheek. A moan escaped her lips as his hot breath came closer. The moment was intense, as tenderly his mouth sought hers; a light feathery kiss, as their lips touched, causing sparks of passion to pass between them. Then their kisses became more inflamed, as Catherine allowed him to capture her lips in total surrender ... Vincent was the aggressor now.

* * * * *

The humid haze that had lingered over the city all day, trapping in all the heat, was now causing the pace of life to slow to a crawl; the whole city seemed like a film in slow motion. Sharp contrast to the normal rat race of each day. The DA's office where Cathy worked, had a very expensive and superior air conditioning system, which was a life saver on day's like today. But once Cathy had left the building at 5pm, the intense heat hit her, like a smack in the face. The cab she finally hailed, crawled along at walking pace. In the traffic chaos, the air in the back of the cab was hot and stale; perspiration formed on her face, until finally it dripped off her chin. The dress she wore clung to her body like a second skin, silhouetting her lovely figure in no uncertain terms. Looking up into the driver's mirror, she could see the hungry eyes of the driver, drinking in her image, making her even more uncomfortable.

At last her apartment block loomed ahead.

"At last," she breathed, wiping away the sweat on her pretty white-lace trimmed handkerchief.

Once more the cab came to a juddering stop, surrounded by angry drivers, all hooting their horns and shouting abuse. Catherine couldn't stand it any more, so leaning forward, she tapped on the glass, indicating she wanted to pay and get out.

Slamming the cab door behind her, she slung her huge bag on her shoulder, tucked her shopping safely under her arm and made straight for the building ahead.

As the lift door closed in a near silent click, the wonderful stillness and peace surrounded her. The air conditioning was a life saver, the quiet was unbelievable.

Moments later, the lift door silently opened, delivering her to the 18th floor. After a quick fumble for the key, the door flew open of n° 21E. Once through the door, she kicked it closed with her foot, then dropping the shopping and bag on the dinky little couch, she kicked off her shoes, then ran into the bedroom, and under the shower, still fully clothed.

it was almost an hour later, when Catherine finally left the bathroom, a fluffy pale blue towel was draped around her body like a sarong. She felt relaxed and refreshed.

Cathy turned and mounted the two steps to the balcony. Opening the doors, the noise of the outside world reappeared, but now muted, as it all happened eighteen floors below her.

The sky was a symphony of light blue, orange and indigo as the twilight was dismissed by the powerful presence of impending darkness. Now the lights of the sky scrapers ahead showed up

against the skyline, like a treasure trove of glistening gems. Cathy took a deep breath, savouring its freshness as the gentle breeze teased her damp hair.

* * * * *

"Are you seeing Catherine tonight, Vincent?" Father asked, his furrowed brow anticipating his answer.

"No, not tonight Father ... at least, not till very much later." A moment of silence lapsed. "She's on another assignment," he sighed deeply.

"I see." Father uncanny perception at such times told him to tread with care. This was delicate ground. One false move - even though he was trying to help - could have the reverse effect, then everything would be lost; even the confidence they shared.

Father eyed Vincent over the top of his spectacles; he could see how distressed his son was, his heart cried out to him.

"Will you join me then, Vincent, in a game of chess?" He stood, leaning against the desk, now facing him, the question awaiting an answer.

After a moment, Vincent lifted his head, looking directly at Father.

"If you like," the velvet voice replied, but with noticeably lacking enthusiasm.

"Good, then let's get started," he urged.

* * * * *

Taking a careful and final glance at herself in the full length mirror, Catherine was well pleased with her reflection. Her mirrored image showed her a successful woman, very attractive, gorgeous figure, delightful hair, wearing a designer evening gown in dusky pink velvet, which had cost a fortune. The boned bodice was working wonders trying to hold up such a very brief and revealing top, exposing her gorgeous cleavage, leaving little or nothing to the imagination.

The skirt of the gown was pencil slim to the floor, with a curved slit nearly up to the waist at the front, allowing acres of leg to be revealed ... and more. Yes, she thought to herself, the money was well spent, the effect was perfect. Thanks to Daddy's money, outfits like these were as nothing. Opening up her jewellery box, Catherine selected a pair of long diamond earrings, a last present from her Father, before he was taken ill and died. As the last one was fixed in place, a knock at the door sent her hurrying to answer it.

"Hi Radcliffe ... Jesu ... you look gor...geous," his voice faded to a hushed murmur as he took in this vision of loveliness before him.

Running his hands through his hair, he tried to get his thoughts straight as his heart raced and thumped in his chest as never before.

"Why thank you, Joe. You look pretty neat yourself in your tuxedo."

Unaccustomed to flattery, especially from Catherine, Joe felt very hot and bothered. Fearing the consequences of further flattery, Joe reminded her of the car, waiting below for them.

So, picking up her wrap and purse, Cathy switched off the lights and clicked the door shut behind them.

"Assignments like this I could get to like," Joe cheekily grinned as they walked to the lift.

"Me too," agreed Catherine, smiling. Once inside the lift, Joe reminded her. "You do know what we have to do; you have the tape in your purse, wait till he's confessed everything before getting up and going to the powder room. There, your contact will take the tape from you. After a few moments, you'll return, claiming you have a headache; that's when we leave." He waited anxiously.

"Joe, I've got it, okay, I've got it. I'm just a little nervous. The last time we worked together like this on a drugs charge was when Detective Morelo was killed, as we investigated a source of the drugs that was mysteriously paid for in gold coins."

"Yeah. Sure, I remember, we never did find that guy," he mused.

The lift silently delivered them on the ground floor. The evening of new investigations lay ahead.

* * * * *

Following their game of chess, Father and son enjoyed an evening drink of hot chocolate and biscuits, before Father announced it was well past his bedtime.

"Good night, Father ... thank you."

"For what, Vincent?" his voice was so gentle.

"For being here, for understanding ... for caring."

Patting Vincent's arm in acknowledgement of his understanding, he left the chamber, carrying a candle. Vincent watched him shuffle down the passage until the shadow and candle light turned

into the chamber and was gone. Left alone with his thoughts, Vincent longed for the time to pass quicker, he longed to see her, hold her, feel her presence. He couldn't settle, so stalked the chamber, like a caged animal.

Sleep evaded Father, as he knew it would. He lay on his back contemplating the last few hours they'd spent together. The evening had gone reasonably well, even though Vincent was visibly miles away. How he wished he could help him through these dark hours. He didn't like to see him so unhappy, knowing how under stress his dark would jump at the chance of taking him over; controlling him. Jealousy was a new emotion for Vincent, that only he could deal with. Even Father's wisdom and guidance couldn't help here, this was new territory, new danger for Vincent.

Then the pacing stopped.

"Thank God," sighed Father.

The clock chimed one o'clock, but even before the chime was done, Vincent hurriedly left his chambers, his step disappearing into the distance. Now a calm returned, Father turned on his side for sleep.

"Take care, Vincent," he murmured, as his eyes closed.

* * * * *

Vincent paused and took his breath as he arrived at Catherine's building. He looked around him to check it was safe and slowly started to climb, keeping in the shadows. Over and over again, Shakespeare's words invaded his thoughts.

"With love's light wings did I o'er perch these walls, for stony limits cannot hold love out, and what love can do, that dare love attempt."

"Ah," he sighed, "Shakespeare knew everything!"

His large hands gripped the wall as he landed with cat-like ease in the far corner of their balcony. The apartment was still dark, so Vincent leaned against the wall in the shadows, waiting patiently.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted as lights switched on inside, lighting up the balcony, casting shadows of light everywhere.

Vincent eased himself forward to see Catherine, standing in her doorway. Joe at least had seen her safely home.

He watched discretely in the shadows, taking in the scene before him. Catherine looked so lovely, so desirable, so happy, so at

ease with Joe! Vincent's gaze turned to him. Here was a man who clearly adored Catherine; his every look told of his feelings. Then taking Cathy's hand in his, he raised it to plant a kiss on it, before his hands then gently held her shoulders, as their lips met, only fleetingly. But this sent a sickening surge of jealousy through Vincent's very being.

"No," he sighed. "No."

He didn't even notice Joe had gone, or that Catherine had closed the door. The black feeling inside him wanted to cry out. He tried desperately to hold in the deafening roar he needed to expel, that lay trapped inside him. His claws were grinding into the stone work, as he made a final attempt to control his pain.

What arrogant right did he have anyway, to be jealous? He wasn't this man's rival, how could he be. He couldn't take her out on the town, dressed in a tuxedo, or dance with her, holding her as they swayed to the music, or even offer her a life, with a home, family, car, holidays abroad. All the trimmings in fact, her childhood upbringing had prepared her for. Taking silent stock of the situation, he discovered that all he could offer her was his heart and his love; sadly, not enough.

With a sigh of realisation, Vincent knew, the only way to really prove his deep love of Catherine, was to release her from their mutual bond, so he could enjoy the life destiny had decided for

her at birth. A world apart from his. Clutching his hand to his heart, he tried to ease the stabbing pain as the tears over spilled down his lion features.

He must go now, quickly, before she saw his tear stained face, but in his haste, his cloak wrapped around the back of one of the patio chairs, sending it crashing to the ground with a clutter.

"Vincent? Don't go, don't leave," she murmured as she flung open the doors.

Caught like a naughty school boy, in the act of escaping, Vincent stood motionless, staring at her in utter wonder. She looked so beautiful, the most lovely woman in the entire world. Her dress took his breath away, never had he seen so much of her before, it being so revealing.

The split up the front showed her legs fully as she walked, arms outstretched to him. Her hands locked together around his waist as she snuggled deep into his chest. His right hand rested on her hip, as his other hand he allowed to trace across her bare back. Her skin was so soft to his touch. Controlled restraint was driving him wild. He wanted her like never before, yet, he knew he had to break her heart and his, bringing all this to an end.

Then, taking her small hands in his, he stepped back to look

directly into her eyes, so full of desire for him.

"Catherine ... please, we must talk," he tried to sound calm.

"What?"

"Catherine," he was breathless, trying to gain control. "I realise you do have a life apart from the one we share, a life that you must live to be a complete person. That is why, you have to forget about me, about us, even about our bond. It will be unbearable I know, but we both knew it would come to pass, when your life above would have a pull ... a call you would have to answer."

"No! Vincent ... how can you say that," she sobbed, aware that Vincent was deadly serious.

Lowering his voice to a mere whisper in her ear he continued. "Catherine, what we had, what we shared, will be with us forever, the love you showed me, I never believed possible. I will always be grateful."

"No! Vincent," she clung to his corded tunic. "No, I won't let you do this to us. I won't let you!"

"We must. When I leave you now, Catherine, this chapter in our lives will end. But you must see it as a new beginning for you. You have the strength, use our love we shared to guide you ... and know this, that I will always, always love you."

Then taking her face in his hands, he slowly lowered his head and kissed her. So consuming in passion was this final kiss, her senses engulfed her, her body begged for more, a flush crept into her cheeks.

When finally they broke away, Catherine was the first to speak.

"Vincent, we agreed, I only took this new assignment to keep me from danger. That was Joe you saw me with, Joe, my boss," she pleaded.

"I know, Catherine, but I'm not blind. I know he cares for you deeply ... what right have I to stand in your way?" he urged.

"You can't make me love someone else, just to ease your own conscience ... I won't let you do this to us ... You can't destroy what we have. I love you, Vincent," she sobbed, her body shaking. Then letting her head fall onto his chest, she sought his comfort as his arms held her tightly. "I'll give up my new assignment and go back to my desk job, nothing is worth the sacrifice of losing you ... nothing," she stressed.

"Oh Catherine, I so despise what I am ... it keeps us apart. I long to be as other men, to be acceptable in your eyes and that of your friends; also of society."

"Don't you ever speak like that again, Vincent. To me you are beautiful, you transcend all my dreams, don't you see, I wouldn't have you any other way, if I had the chance. Can't you believe that, can't you feel it?" Desperation hung in the air.

"Yes," he sighed. "I can feel it, but what use is it, Catherine? When I cannot offer you a life in the sunshine ... only a half life in the shadows," a sob caught in his throat as tears again made their way down his troubled face.

Walking towards him, Catherine took his large hands in hers, then slowly she started to kiss each finger individually, never taking her eyes off him, letting him know through their bond, that he and he alone, was the whole world to her. Then opening one hand, she kissed his palm. Vincent drew her to him, then resting his chin on the top of her head they clung together as one.

"I'm sorry ... I didn't mean to upset you like this, I felt by letting you go, to live your own life, I was doing the right thing. I only ever want your happiness, you know that."

"I know, Vincent," she smiled.

This feeling inside me, Catherine, has been burning its way through me, I had to heed it."

"What you felt, Vincent, was jealousy, a feeling you've never had to cope with before. It became a threat to you. Jealousy can eat people up, tear people apart, but not us. You know I would never look at another, but you must also know Vincent, there will be lots of times when Joe will take me on assignments. We are a team. Joe will also make passes at me, he does at every chance. He will flirt with me, even kiss me." She looked him straight in the eye as she set him straight, smiling.

Vincent put his head to one side, nodding now in agreement. Now slowly, a smile crept across his face.

"You will have to trust me, and I trust you, Vincent, to understand. Promise me one thing," she pleaded. "That you will always be here when Joe brings me back. I want you to see it all; no secrets, no mystery. I want you to see me say goodnight to him, then, send him away, so I can turn, and fly into your waiting arms, for all the love I need."

"Oh Catherine, I never dared dream we'd ever be so close," he murmured. "That you'd want me so much."

"I want us to get even closer, Vincent, I want to share the rest of my life with you, and you alone ... I also want you to share my bed."

A startled look crossed his face.

"I need you Vincent, so much."

"Oh! That need is within me too, Catherine," he admitted.

"I believe a new chapter is unfolding for us, Vincent. We'll look back on this night, in years to come, as the night when all our dreams started to come true." Then taking his hand, she led him willingly through the doors into their bedroom to start writing the first pages of the opening chapters of their lives together.

The End

NEW CHAPTER

GWEN LORD

It was five days since Vincent and Catherine had seen each other, their heavy workloads keeping them apart. Father had been pushing everyone to finish the work on the lower level, in readiness for the heavy rains, which were more than overdue. If the repairs weren't done in time, then some of the chambers on the outer tunnels would be flooded. Vincent knew how serious this would be, as a number of families lived there, and it would be the children who would suffer. So, even though every bone in his body cried out with extreme tiredness, he wouldn't stop until the job was completely finished.

Catherine had also been the victim of a grueling workload all week, every day seemed to get worse and today was the very pits. Moreno was pushing Joe who, in turn, was pushing Catherine and Rita. No matter how hard they worked, the pile of files never seemed to alter, as Joe almost wore a path to their desks with a never ending supply of fresh paperwork. His sheepish boyish grin was now replaced with a weary and worried expression as Moreno piled on the pressure with an unrelenting barrage of legal paperwork.

After what seemed like the longest day ever, Vincent found himself climbing slowly towards the warm amber glow that heralded the level that was home. Catherine also found her feet going in the direction of the elevator in her apartment block, which then took ages to arrive, and even longer to reach floor 18. At last she closed the door of No. 21E, and almost ran into her bedroom, throwing herself across the bed. How long she lay there she wasn't sure, but when she looked around her room, moonlight was

casting shadows across the floor. Rising from the bed, she quickly stepped out of her crumpled dress, and once inside the privacy of her elegant bathroom, she discarded her underwear. Closing the shower door, she sighed with relief as the water began to revive her aching limbs and she started to wash away the troubles of the day.

Far below, deep in the bowels of the earth was another world, so far removed from the life she lived above. It was a magical place, where love and hope went hand-in-hand with all those who called it home.

So many people brought together because society had turned its back on them, for many reasons. But questions were not asked here. This family Below helped each other, and gained strength from each other, where Father ruled with love and a firm belief in right and wrong. In this maze of tunnels and chambers Vincent also bathed away the trials of his day, dreaming only of going Above to his Catherine, just as soon as the mantle of darkness descended to replace the cold light of day. The darkness was his friend, where the lights and sounds of the city beckoned and welcomed him. He was at one with the night.

"Ah! There you are, Vincent." Father's voice greeted his son, as he prepared to meet Catherine.

"Do you need me for something, Father?" his velvet voice quizzed.

"Yes, I was wondering how the work has gone. Winslow has told me it is finished, but you know how I like to hear it from you," he smiled.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to tell you myself but, truly, I am running

late. The moment draws near to meeting Catherine," he finished, buttoning his wine coloured shirt and sat down to pull on his boots.

"Is it something special tonight, Vincent?" the old man asked, as he sat down in Vincent's large leather chair.

"Meeting Catherine is always special, Father, there doesn't have to be a reason to make it so," he smiled. "I haven't seen Catherine in five days, you can't imagine, Father, how I have missed her."

"Your friendship with.....Catherine, warms all our hearts. To see you love someone, and to have that love returned, Vincent, is something I never thought I'd live to see." He leaned heavily on his stick.

"I know Father, I well remember when all the young men in the tunnels used to talk endlessly of their sweethearts, their plans for the future.....I used to stand and listen to them.....and wish with all my heart that it could be happening to me.....we must have been in our late teens and early twenties at the time." He sighed as he rose from the bed and started to brush his hair. "It broke my heart too, Vincent, as your father, I wanted to be able to make it all.....right for you. I thanked God you had Devin, he used to cheer you up when you lost yourself in your aloneness."

"Devin used to paint pictures in my mind, taking me there with his words, I will never forget. I felt I could almost reach out and touch the silkiness of hair in the sunshine, smell perfume, even reflections in the rivers as the sun played on the ripples. I have missed so much," again he sighed,

"This is true, Vincent, but because of your differences, you are aware of other things that your friends never knew about. You

look out at the world and see possibilities, where they see hopelessness, you hear the rustle of autumn leaves, and the music they create."

"Yes, and then.....when Catherine came into my life, a change came over me.....I dared to dream.....me with all this," and he opened his arms as if to explain, "And she accepted me, flawed as I am, she saw me when I was truly lost in the darkness of my other self, and it made no difference." He stood tall as he reached for his heavy leather belt.

"Yes, Catherine is quite remarkable, you are indeed lucky, my son."

"Of all the men in this world, she desires my company, chooses me above all others." Reaching for a brush, he started to brush his cloak.

"Catherine loves you, Vincent....."

"As I.....love.....her, Father."

"Have you told her?" he asked.

"She knows.....and yes, I have ventured to express my feelings for her." Vincent began to look a little uncomfortable at the turn this conversation was taking.

"Good.....we wouldn't want her to think you were getting cold feet, I know how you feel about taking this relationship further."

"You.....know.....?" Vincent stammered.

"Of course I know, I used to dread the possibility of your relationship with Catherine going.....forward," he sighed deeply.

"I was wrong, Vincent."

"And what are you saying now, Father?" he asked as he placed the cloak around his massive shoulders.

"That what you have, Vincent, is a gift, a woman who truly loves you. I know that now and.....I wanted you to know..... you have my blessing." A tear rolled down Father's cheek.

"Thank you Father, to hear you say that, means the world to me.....and it will to Catherine." He bent down and kissed the top of Father's head and then, as he climbed the four steps two at a time, he told father not to wait up for him.



Vincent and Catherine sat close together in their favourite place, far below the bandstand in Central Park. The array of odd cushions and rugs, all helped to make this place their own. There was nowhere Above that could match it or even come close to it. This was theirs and all the money in the world could not buy this special place. Vincent sat with his back against the rough cave wall, one arm around Catherine's shoulder, holding her very close, His other hand was holding a book of sonnets. In the distance they could hear the music and this gave the perfect setting for the velvet tones of Vincent's voice, as he read to his beloved. Catherine kept snuggling into Vincent's chest and his hold on her increased. After a while, Vincent put down the book and rested his head against the wall as he allowed a deep sigh to escape him.

"What?" asked Catherine.

"It's these stolen moments.....I wish our time was.....I wish," he couldn't continue.

"You want this to never end.....you wish.....we didn't have to return to our separate worlds!"

"Yes! If only we could make plans, like other couples do, all over the world. Plans that would give us.....a Happy Life. It's what we both want, Catherine, I know it is. I long to be able to do this and yet.....fate has decided to keep us apart, that we are to remain as we are, never truly one." Vincent sobbed openly, for once, allowing his pent up emotions to get the better of him.

"Then we must find a way to be together, Vincent, and we'll show fate what it can do with its decisions!"

Looking into her face, so close to his, his heart felt it would burst. "How can this be, Catherine?" he implored. "We both know it is impossible.....everything is against us," he whispered in her ear.

"No, DAMN IT! I won't accept that. Not for us, Vincent, what we have is too special. We are something that has never beenm you said so yourself. There are no guidelines that we must follow, there are no limits.....so, we will make our own!" Catherine reached to hold his face between her small hands.

"Oh Catherine.....if only it were possible!" he sighed as he brought his large hands to cover hers.

The air was charged with unspoken words, with possibilities.

"Vincent, we can't go on like this, it's tearing us apart and if we allow it to continue, there will be nothing left for either of us and it would break our hearts." She was in earnest now, waiting for Vincent to answer.

"What can we do? We are victims of our love for each other.....if only I was as other men, you.....my dear Catherine, would not have to bear this burden," again he sighed.

Catherine shook him gently, "If you were as others, I wouldn't look

twice at you. Don't you know by now, Vincent, the very differences you hate, are what I love most about you," her smile telling this was the truth.

"I don't know what I have done to deserve you, how rare you are! Have you any idea how happy you make me?" and impulsively he leaned down and kissed her waiting lips.

"Oh, Vincent! Do that again, please," she pleaded breathlessly.

"Again?" he asked with surprise.

"Mmmmm, please, I want you to so much," and she closed her eyes and raised her lips.

The kiss was the sweetest Catherine had ever known and through their bond they both knew life now would never be the same ever again. They sat in silence, there was no need for words, until Catherine moved within his embrace and their faces were all but touching. She took a deep breath and then said....."I, Catherine Chandler, promise to love you and care for you, from this day forward, through this life, until death and into eternity."

Vincent's thumb brushed away a tear that escaped and ran down her cheek, as he replied, "And I, Vincent Wells, promise to love you and care for you, from this day forward, through this life, until death and into eternity."

Now it was Catherine's turn to brush away Vincent's tears.

"Vincent, I love you so much, more than life itself!"

"And I love you, my Catherine, with all that I am," his long arms enfolded her as they clung together in a close embrace.

At last Vincent spoke, "I now pronounce that we are husband and wife, in the names of all we hold most dear."

"I'm really your wife.....we've made it happen! The world would never understand that we are meant to be one, Vincent," and Catherine hugged him fiercely.

"I'm only sorry it wasn't quite the wedding you grew up thinking you would have," he said with a sad smile.

"No, this is true..... It's better, because we're only confirming that we have known all along, Vincent," she murmured tenderly.

"Yes," he breathed. "And I never dared to believe it possible."

"Let's go tell Father, Vincent, I want the whole world to know. Do you think he will give us his blessing?" she asked.

"Oh yes, I believe he will."

"We will have a Happy Life, you'll see," she promised.

They clung together, as if to gain strength from each other. Then Vincent helped Catherine to stand and, as he pulled her to him, his arms held her tightly against him. Their lips met in a kiss of passion that only their Bond could begin to comprehend.

When Vincent declared, "I love you very much, Mrs. Wells," his smile melted Catherine's heart and her response was immediate.

"Oh, Vincent.....I adore you!"

Now that all the tension had gone, they laughed together with sheer happiness. "Come, we must go and tell Father and then.....as in every marriage, there is a honeymoon, Catherine.....ours awaits us," and he smiled mischievously as he swept her off her feet and carried her in his strong arms all the way to Father's study.



"Father, are you asleep?" Vincent asked at the entrance to his night chamber, set at the side of the study.

"Of course I'm not. Dear God, Vincent, I couldn't sleep, how could I? When I felt in the very air we breathe that there was something.....something I couldn't.....Come in, come in, do." He leaned forward and lit more candles, then looked up and saw Catherine.

"Come in.....er.....both of you, come in my dears."

Father watched them come towards him, and it didn't take much working out, that this had to be very special. Why else would Vincent risk disturbing him, and Catherine here so late.....and the looks on their faces.....

"Father.....we are sorry to disturb you at this late hour, but we wish.....er.....we want.....er....." Vincent stammered.

Catherine sat down on the bed and taking the old man's hand in hers stroked it lovingly. Then raising her eyes to meet his, she smiled, then looked up at Vincent, who put a reassuring arm around her shoulder.

"Vincent and I.....we only wanted to be like other couples, but the world conspires to keep us apart. We don't ask that much of life, just to be together." Vincent's grip on her tightened, giving her the courage to go on.

"We didn't plan it this way but, suddenly it felt right."

Father nodded in agreement, he wasn't too old to remember what it was like to want, to need, to desire.

"Tonight Father, we exchanged vows to each other, alone and in our special place. To me, they are as legally binding as any made

in church or before a JP." She leaned into Vincent's chest and felt his love surround her.

"My dears, this is wonderful news, you make me very happy for you. I know only too well. I haven't always been in favour of this.....relationship. However, thank God, time has proved me wrong." He smiled now. "You have my blessing, and my love, you must believe me." Releasing Catherine's hand, he reached up to untie something from around his neck. Vincent realized at once what he was doing, but Catherine looked puzzled. Glinting in the candlelight, suspended on a piece of cord was a gold wedding band.

When Father spoke, his voice was husky. "It was Margaret's, ever since she died I have carried it next to my heart. I should be honoured if you would wear it, Catherine.....in a way..... it's a sort of family heirloom."

Vincent was the first to take it in his clawed fingers, turning it over and over, studying it in detail. He saw there was an inscription on the inside and he held it near to a candle, the words were clear.....**FOREVER TOGETHER.**

"Father.....there are no words.....Catherine, would this please you?" He waited with his head to one side.

"I just hope it fits, Vincent," she said, holding out her left hand.

Vincent moved to sit beside Catherine on the bed and, as he took her hand, their eyes met. "With this ring, I thee wed," and slowly he slipped the ring onto her finger. It fit as if it had been specially made and then in full view of Father, Vincent lowered his lips to meet hers.

Father wiped away tears that fell unbidden down his wrinkled face

and the three of them hugged each other. "Go, go my children, before we're all in tears. This is your wedding night. Go with my blessing and love."

They both kissed him goodnight and with arms around each other, they left the chamber, gazing down at the wedding ring, which fitted so perfectly on her tiny finger.

"Catherine, a new chapter is unfolding for us, one we never believed possible. We can, at last, go forward to a Happy Life and beyond."

"Yes, Vincent, we will never be apart again. I love you so much."

"I know you do, I truly know, and can at last accept that what we have is beyond words."

"Think of one, Vincent," she smiled up at him.

"Blessed," came the reply.

ON REFLECTION

GWEN LORD

"Get me Manning," Elliot's voice was strained as he spoke to his detective on the intercom. "I don't care where he is, just get him," he snarled. Then, as he loosened his tie and top button, he made his way to the office windows. It commanded an excellent view, being on the fortieth floor with all New York stretched ahead. Skyscrapers dotted the scene like a science fiction movie. Seven of the largest buildings were the handiwork of Elliot Burch.

The nearest one, however, still had scaffolding around it. This construction was Elliot's pride and joy---and the reason for his black mood of despair. Ever since the plans were first passed to build this masterpiece of architecture, Elliot had left no stone unturned, to stay on schedule; it had not been a easy ride. Now, when the end was in sight, a small technicality could lose him the accolade due to him, not to mention the huge bonus promised him, for completion within the agreed date.

Manning knocked and entered in his normal cool, unruffled manner.

"I came as soon as I could. What's wrong, Mr. Burch? What's happened?"

"Sit down, Manning," he breathed heavily. "This has to be the worst day of my life," pacing the floor Elliot continued. "We may not finish 'High Towers' on schedule after all...Damn it! I sweated blood over this." Turning to Manning, he continued, "There's been a dispute between the men working on the overhanging ledge that houses the glass summit. Feelings ran high between the foreman and the workers, now all progress has stopped. I can't afford a

hold up at this point." Throwing his arms in the air in desperation he returned to his swivel chair, "You know I've got everything investerd in this project; everything. You have to get me out of this, Manning. Do your job, I'll double your retainer, you have my word."

As Manning rose to go, Elliot flicked the switch on the intercom.

"Get me Moreno, I must see him today. Get me an appointment."

Elliot moved across the room to join Manning at the door, putting a restraining hand on his friend's arm, he stressed:

"This needs careful handling. If Mr. DA had done his job when the contracts were drawn up, this dispute would not have arisen.

Damn it, Manning, you have to get me out of this, fast."

Perspiration lined his brow.

Elliot opened the door for Manning, revealing Nanci in the next office.

"Mr. Moreno will see you in half an hour, Mr. Burch."

He nodded. "Manning, get Simmons to bring the car round. I'll join you in five minutes."

With a courteous nod he left the office to the echo of Elliot's door shutting behind him.



The DA's office was the same busy hub of activity he'd remembered it to be. Fondly he reflected on the day, a while ago, when he had arrived with a full meal, fit for a king; lobster, champagne, flowers, a fleet of waiters accompanying him. Cathy couldn't join him for lunch so he decided lunch could come to

Cathy. Their entrance had silenced the entire office, a sea of heads turned to watch. Catherine was terribly embarrassed, sending him and the meal away. But she did agree to dinner the following evening.

Now, once again in the same office, a voice deep inside him asked: *Where's Cathy, where is she?* Looking around as he strode across the floor, he spied Cathy at her desk.

Cutting through the maze of desks and filing cabinets, he approached her.

"Hi, Elliot," Cathy's voice was light and happy.

God, she's lovely, was his first reaction.

"What brings you here, it's been ages, are you well?"

"I'm fine, Cathy," his voice was gravelly. "I have to see Moreno on...nothing to worry your pretty head over," he smiled, his eyes revealing the pleasure he felt at seeing her. Then leaning close to her, he put his hand over hers possessively. "Cathy...have dinner with me, for old times sake...please. I'll take you anywhere you want to go: local take away, New York, Paris," then lowering his voice to a velvety whisper, "Can't you say yes just this once?"

"Sorry, Elliot, but I really do have a date for tonight. It's a special night at the Concert Hall. They are playing Chopin, we have special seats. But it was a lovely thought...no hard feelings?"

Raising both hands, he accepted defeat...for now.

"Okay, okay you win, but I'll never give up on you, Cathy." Then flashing one of his special smiles, which always turned her legs to jelly, he turned and quickly joined Manning. Together they entered Moreno's office.

Cathy put down her pen, then sitting back in her chair, she smiled to herself. Elliot never changed, always the hard business man, with a heart of pure gold. His effect on her never wavered. He was tall, incredibly good looking, wealthy beyond reckoning. What girl wouldn't be flattered with his attention? She liked to flirt with him, enjoyed his company, he even shared her bed one night. If she wasn't head over heels in love with Vincent, she'd have a tough time saying no to him. Cathy knew he still desired her, wanted her, living in hope that one day she would change her mind and marry him. Was it really two years ago, since he asked her to marry him on her balcony? After a night of soul searching, she had decided to accept his proposal. Not because she loved him, but because she saw it as the only logical thing to do, in order to help her "Below" family out of their plight, when danger from Elliot's new building threatened the tunnels and chambers.

They had given her so much. She owed them her life. Now when their lives were threatened, at last she saw a way to repay them, this was a debt she owed them.

She agreed to marry him, if he ceased construction on the tower, but Elliot simply couldn't do this, so Cathy didn't marry him. The building did get stopped through a small technical detail. Elliot lost the building but didn't lose the desire to make her his own one day. Anything he couldn't have, offered him a challenge...

"Penny for them, Radcliffe," Joe's voice brought her back. "I need these typed up and finished by 5pm."

Looking at her watch, she said, "Is it really 4:15pm? Joe, is Elliot still with Moreno?"

"Yes, he sure is; sounds pretty heated in there," he spoke as he fingered through the files he was carrying.

"Joe, is there anything I can take in? I need to get into Moreno's office while EB is still in," she said, her eyes glowing with curiosity.

"Sure, this file needs Moreno's signature. Be my guest."

"Thanks, Joe, I owe you."

"You bet you do, kiddo, but how come I have the feeling I'm being manipulated?" his voice broke into a cheeky grin.

Taking the file from Joe's hands, she hurried to Moreno's door, knocked, then opening the door, went inside.

"Joe said he needs your signature on these papers," her words seemed to echo in the room, as all talk abruptly ended as she entered. The air hung with unsaid words and hopeless answers. Moreno took out his pen and scratched his name on the three letters, then handed them back to her.

"Perhaps you'll give us the benefit of your opinion on a matter we are finding hard to agree on, Cathy."

"I'll try. What's the problem?" she tried to sound calm.

Moreno filled her in with the state of play in this stalemate situation, also how it needed to be resolved immediately.

After some thought, Cathy confronted them all, her eyes seeking out Elliot, who gave her a smile of encouragement.

"If you sack this man, the men will walk out...if you don't sack him, they'll still walk out. Why don't you create a new role for him, within the workforce; put a few men under him, then he won't lose face, everyone will accept this, and you will have everyone back on the job right away."

"Cathy, you're wonderful," Elliot said, as he got up and walked

towards her, hands outstretched.

Popping a feather-light kiss on her flushed cheek, he whispered in her ear, "Thanks, Cathy, I owe you."

"You owe me nothing. That's what friends are for," she whispered back.

As she made to open Moreno's door, Elliot spoke.

"Cathy, wait. When the building's finished in a couple of weeks time, I'll be throwing the usual bash. A large party on the top floor, the Mayor of New York will name the building, everyone's to wear fancy dress...Will you please say you'll come Cathy...bring...er...what's-his-name?"

"Vincent," Cathy helped him.

"Yeah, Vincent," Elliot answered as though the word would choke him.

The little boy hurt look was on his face, as he braced himself ready for another rejection.

"Sounds like fun, Elliot, I'll keep my diary free. Call me," she smiled reassuringly.

His face lit up with his boyish grin, unable to take in the bottom line. *She said **YES!!!***

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Cathy almost ran the last few steps to her door, a warm feeling enveloped her. Vincent would be waiting, with a meal ready and those wonderful arms to hold her and love her.

She didn't need to put her key in the lock, it pushed open at her

touch, she felt excited, like a child. It had been two whole days since she'd felt his arms around her, felt his breath on her face, felt his kisses...

Cathy lived below at the weekends, but during the week stayed at the apartment. Vincent came above to be with her two nights during the week, so as always their time together was still measured and precious.

Using her bottom to click the door shut, she turned into Vincent's waiting arms, feeling them tighten with desire. He kissed her hair, she snuggled deeper and with a sigh she murmured lovingly, "Oh, I needed that, I needed you, my day's been quite mad. Interesting, but mad." With a final squeeze, she released herself from his arms, then made for the kitchen. "Something smells good, what is it?"

"Mary made lamb casserole today for everyone. She made a special one for us. I put it in the microwave when I heard you at the door. It should be ready any minute."

"French bread too, oh I love big chunks of that, with butter on. I know I shouldn't, but once in a while it's nice to go mad," she giggled. "But after tonight, I must go on a diet and start my jogging again."

"Catherine, why do you plan to do this, you're perfect to me as you are," a puzzled look crossed his gorgeous features.

PING went the microwave. Vincent put out the meal while Cathy sat down at the table and buttered some bread for them both.

"Guess who came into the office today?" her voice, was happy and gay.

"Is this a game, Catherine?" he smiled as he handed her the plate.

"This looks gorgeous. Be sure to tell Mary, thank you. Is it Mary's night or Cullen's to look after Jacob?"

"Neither, Catherine, I've brought him with me tonight, I felt you needed to be near him."

Catherine got up at once, and headed straight for their bedroom. There, in his cot, lay their son, fast asleep, as always, on top of the bedding holding his toy lion, which had been Catherine's as a child.

Slipping his arms around her waist from behind, Vincent murmured in her ear. "He's looking more and more like you every day."

"What! With that thatch of golden hair, he's more like you, to me." She half turned in his arms and popped a kiss on his rough cheek.

Together they returned to the kitchen to finish their meal.

A knock, a few minutes later at their door, took them both by surprise.

"Damn it, who can that be?" Catherine demanded, as she got up to answer it in a huff.

"Hi, Radcliffe. I was just passing, thought I'd call...to let you know Moreno was impressed with how you handled Elliot Burch today. Got us out of what could have been a pretty nasty situation."

"Why, thanks, Joe," Cathy cooed.

It was painfully obvious he wasn't going to be invited in to sit on that 'dinky little couch'! so, taking his leave, he handed Cathy the

book back she'd lent him weeks ago, on another fruitless visit to her flat, on the pretense of spending some time with her, away from the DA's office.

"He must be one special guy, see you tomorrow...or will I?"

Cathy grinned. "Bye, Joe."



"So, you saw Elliot Burch today, that explains the feelings I couldn't understand," Vincent greeted her return.

"I started to tell you when I came in, remember? Somehow we kept getting side-tracked," she smiled.

Catherine sensed Vincent's feelings, he didn't exactly dislike Elliot, he really admired him, but if the truth was known, he was extremely jealous of him. Elliot was a man of the world, a survivor, had pulled himself up from his roots. A self-made millionaire, with power to do great things. He could offer Cathy the world, she could live like a Queen, the world was his oyster now; the only thing he wanted, he so far hadn't got was Cathy. He said he would never give up hope, so, as long as he continued to hope, then he was Vincent's rival...One day, his charm could tempt her to him.

A shiver shook his mighty frame as the impact of his thoughts invaded his very soul.

"What's wrong, Vincent, are you all right?" she asked, concerned.

Shaking his head, he lied, "It's nothing, really, don't worry."

After a romantic shower they shared, exploring and enjoying each other to the full, they dressed for bed, wearing matching Chinese dressing gowns. As Catherine joined Vincent on the couch, they

snuggled up together to watch an old movie on TV. It was one of Vincent's favourites, a comedy. Catherine loved to hear his deep chuckles and see his white fangs exposed as he laughed.

Reaching up, she kissed him. Vincent soon forgot the movie as he took the lead in the art he had become an expert at, that of making love to his darling wife.

Catherine enjoyed watching Vincent's passion rise, it matched her own perfectly, his lips covered hers as he claimed her need. Another knock at the door broke their mood.

"Damn it, it's like Grand Central Station here. Who can it be at this late hour?" Climbing out of his embrace, Catherine advanced to the door, annoyed at the interruption. Vincent slipped into the bedroom, disappearing into the shadows.

Opening the door, Catherine saw Elliot.

"Hi, what's wrong?, it's really late. Don't you ever sleep, Elliot?"

"Cathy, I've got to see you."

"Can't it wait until tomorrow?"

"No, Cathy, this can't wait. Can I at least come in, please?" he gave her a look she hadn't seen before, it worried her.

Then without another word, he pushed past her, at speed into the room.

He paced the floor for a few moments, near to where Vincent was hiding, then turning, he advanced to Cathy.

"Seeing you today, brought it all back. You have this effect on me, I feel like an out of control teenager. I never feel like this, ever, except---over you, Cathy. I feel we could...no, I feel we have a

future together, if only you'll give it a try, Cathy. I love you...No, it's more than that. I adore you."

Then taking her off guard; took her in his arms and kissed her hard and long, taking her breath away.

"Elliot, please, you know the answer, there is already someone in my life, someone I love, very much...I'm sorry, truly I am, do try to forgive me."

Putting her hand on his arm, she tried to lead him back to the door, but her touch was electric to him, sending shocks through his entire body. He wasn't going to accept her refusal. He put his arms around her neck, pulling her back to his waiting lips.

"Elliot, please, **NO**." The one thought in Cathy's mind...she hoped Vincent's anger and jealousy wouldn't produce a growl or roar. How would she explain that to Elliot?

"I've blown it again, haven't I? Damn it, why can't you say yes to me, just once?" a smile curled his sensuous lips. "Do we still have a date, you will bring...Vincent?"

"We have a date, in two weeks."

"Goodnight, Cathy. He's one hell of a lucky guy," then as quickly as he entered, he was gone, leaving Catherine flushed and worried.

"So, you have a date...come, tell me," Vincent held out his hand.

"I've been trying to explain since I first came home. It's not what you think, you know better than that."

Vincent smiled and nodded. "I know, but I'm intrigued. Where exactly are we going in two weeks?"



"Cathy, do you have Steve Payne's address? Moreno thought you'd have it still on file from last year," Joe asked, as he approached her overflowing desk.

Getting up and going over to the shoulder high filing cabinet, she quickly flicked through and found it.

Joe's eyes followed her, as she made her way back to her desk, making her feel more than a little uncomfortable.

Handing him the file she smiled hesitantly. "Something wrong, Joe?" Her eyes levelled with his.

"Nope, just double checking something. What you working on?" He moved round the desk until he was behind her, looking over her shoulder at the documents laid out. "Hmmm."

Her perfume filled his senses, as he knew it would, her hair gleamed in the sunlight and he longed to run his hand through it. The same old feelings rose up inside him, feelings he was all too aware of, whenever he was close to her.

"Thanks, Radcliffe," he tried to sound casual and normal as he turned and headed for his office.

Cathy didn't notice time flying by as she got to grips with the fascinating case she was on.

"Cathy? Cathy," a voice penetrated her thoughts and looking up, she saw Lena with the buggy.

"Hi, Lena."

Getting up, she quickly made her way around the desk to the double buggy. Then, crouching down, slipped her finger into the

chubby hand of the smaller of the two children. The fingers tightened their grip, Cathy leaned forward, placing a kiss on his mass of golden hair, then whispered in his ear, "Hi, Tiger." Such a lovely smile came across Jacob's face as she sneaked a cuddle. Then she gave little Cathy a hug too, before standing up to face Lena.

"Vincent and I are so grateful to you, for helping us with Jacob when you go above. He needs the fresh air and sun."

"Little Cath looks after him like a mum." The two mothers shared the moment with their children, lost in deep adoration.

"What's this then, someone opening a creche around here?," Joe smiled as he approached. "Aren't you going to introduce me, Radcliffe?"

For a moment, Cathy was taken by surprise, then quickly collected herself. "Lena, this is Joe, my boss and number one tormentor...Joe, this is Lena, a very special friend." The two shook hands, then Joe crouched down, to come face to face with the two happy children.

"And who are you then?"

Lena shot Cathy a glance Joe didn't see. Lena took the lead. "This is little Cath, she's two, then this little man is Jacob, he's nearly one."

Joe felt at ease with children. He came from a big family where children outnumbered adults. He hoped one day to have a home, a wife and children. Well, he'd found the girl, but too late, she was already hooked on some guy, so he'd kicked around a few romances, but no one could hold a candle to her, she was his hearts desire. Working with her was his one consolation, so for

now, it had to be enough, but he lived in hope, that one day he'd get lucky and it would all change. But until that happened he took every chance he could to be near her and around her.

In the back of his dreams, he could hear the two of them talking and laughing, bringing him back to reality.

"You have a great family there."

"Thank you. Nice meeting you, Joe. See you later, Cathy, don't forget, Mary said not to forget the orange card, three large sheets."

"I'll remember, I promise," Cathy assured her.

"Wave good-bye to Aunt Cathy," Lena whispered, then without more ado, was quickly gone.

"Somehow I never figured you to be an Aunt, Radcliffe. You learn something new every day," his face broke into his school-boy grin. "Do you think we could do a little work around here...Aunt," he teased.

Picking up a pen, Cathy threw it after him as he ran for the shelter of his office.

Left alone now, Cathy sat back in her chair, swivelling from side to side, as she took in the happenings of the last half hor. Letting out a deep sigh, she was glad Joe had accepted the children were Lena's. What a turn up for the books, if Joe had only known Lena wasn't married and that Jacob was her own child, hers and Vincent's!

////////////////////

The pregnancy had taken her by surprise, she'd felt under the

weather and run down, so had popped in to see Dr. Peter Alcott for some vitamins and a chat. He ran a few tests while she waited, then with a beaming smile, he took both her small hands in his.

"Congratulations Cathy, you're pregnant."

"I really shouldn't be surprised," she mooned to herself. "It's a miracle it hadn't happened sooner, on reflection."

Their love making was always very intense, after all, Vincent was no ordinary man making love to the woman he adored. No!

Vincent's capabilities in that realm were quite fantastic.

Sometimes their marathon love making would go on repeatedly for hours, all night, leaving them finally, totally exhausted and blissfully happy.

The news of the baby had quickly travelled along all the tunnels, great excitement was in the air. Vincent was seen during those days with a permanent grin on his face. At last, he felt a complete man; he radiated happiness.

Joe never ever knew or suspected Cathy was pregnant. She had been very lucky, in so much as she hadn't put much weight on in the early months. Also, fashion had been on her side, loose styles were 'in'. Being able to afford the latest styles, she quickly set the craze and soon the whole office were wearing similar styles...her secret was safe. So her little 'bump' remained unnoticed by all.

Joe couldn't understand why Cathy refused to take any leave, surely she wanted a break? Life in the DA's office was life in the fast lane at rush hour. Until one night, when Cathy was about six months; everyone had left, it was so quiet, Cathy went over to Joe's office and tapped on the door.

"Hi Cathy, come on in."

"Thanks, Joe. I need to talk to you."

Putting down his pen and sitting back in his chair, he observed her through quizzical eyes.

"Tell me, you're making me nervous."

"Joe, I need to take some leave."

A huge grin spread across his face. "At last, all work and no play Radcliffe, makes..."

"Yeah, yeah, it's just that I've been saving it up, now I want to take what's owing me and a bit extra...I really want four months leave," she'd finally said it, after practicing that speech all day.

"I can't believe I'm hearing this...four months...it's a joke, right?"

"No joke. I'm going to use some of the money my Dad left me, and go on a world tour," she smiled.

"You sure know how to shock a guy. Are you quite sure about this, a woman on her own, wealthy, unattached? Maybe you should take a friend...Jenny? Me even. I've never been out of New York," he grinned.

Cathy's farewell office bash went with a bang, everyone gave her cards and gifts. As she finally left the office, there were cries of good luck ringing in her ears.

In the weeks that followed, as her waistline expanded and her happiness increased, Vincent was magnificent, spoiling her unmercifully; their happiness radiated out to everyone else, a feeling of hope enveloped all their lives in the tunnel world.

Father kept a keen medical eye on her, watching out for any abnormality in this special pregnancy. Between him and Peter,

she was very well taken care of.

Then one night in April, a blinding pain woke them up, followed by another in quick succession, then another. Vincent ran for Father and Mary, expressing the urgency of speed.

Father, Vincent and Mary surrounded the bed she lay on, in the chamber.

"I'm afraid, my dear Catherine, this child can't wait to be born, there's no time to get you to the hospital chamber."

"Mary, hot water, quickly."

Vincent put a pillow under Catherine's head and got her a glass of water.

"Ahhhhh! Oh! Ahh!" Cathy hung on to Vincent's hand, digging her nails into his skin. Perspiration covered her face. As the moment of birth was now so near, Father summoned Vincent to assist him.

"I need you here, Vincent, please."

When Vincent stood at Father's side, he could see the baby's head.

"Push, Cathy, push now," Mary urged her. "And again."

"Come, Vincent, take the child's body as it comes into this world."

There wasn't time for Vincent to argue with Father as the shoulders and body appeared.

"...Cathy, we have a son," he proudly announced, wonder on his face.

Mary wrapped the child in a blanket, then placed it in her arms. Cathy held the tiny mite to her, Vincent's arms held her near, tears

ran down all their faces. Tears of pride, of joy, of hope, of love.

"Vincent, he's beautiful," Cathy whispered.

"I'm very happy for you both," Father said, his voice betraying his emotions. "I'm also so proud."

"Come, hold your grandson." Vincent gently lifted his son, placing him in Father's waiting arms.

"Father," Catherine spoke. "Vincent and I are agreed, we want to call him Jacob, after you."

"Thank you, both of you, dear, dear children."

"Catherine," Vincent whispered. "He was born on April 12, our anniversary; there can be no greater gift, ever."

//

The night of the masqued party drew near. Mary's chamber was a hive of activity as she, Samantha and Catherine worked on the fancy dress outfit. Catherine was to go as a candle, quite a clever idea, since candles now formed such an important part of her life.

The dress was to be a white tube-dress to the floor, but the headdress was to be a flame, made of orange cardboard, then silver shoes to represent the holder.

Vincent, of course, would go as himself, dressed in his best attire, his character to be that of 'Prince Charming', his clothes were now all ready, awaiting the evening, now only one night away.

Cathy continued to jog in the tunnels to get her weight just right for her tube dress. Vincent came with her. She jogged as he strode out beside her, then when she'd had enough they would collapse to the floor, sitting on Vincent's black cloak.

Sometimes the eerie quiet of the tunnels combined with their desire for each other became unbearable; that's when their passion took over, and these tunnels became tunnels of love. These walls could tell a few stories...but they kept silent, observing a very special love, of a Beast and his Beauty. Only the tappings on the pipes invaded their most intimate movements.

It was decided that Cathy should arrive first, then Vincent soon after. The lift to the top floor shuddered to a halt, the door slipped back, suddenly revealing music, noise, laughter. Wow, this certainly was some bash!

"Cathy, you came," Elliot Burch approached, his manner as always, total perfection.

"Hi Elliot, your outfit's fun, suits you, being a pirate," she giggled.

"Hey, a candle, how very appropriate, you're the light of my life...dance with me, Cathy. I want to show you off. You look delightful." Then putting his hand under her arm, guided her to the dance area.

Elliot's arms slipped around her so naturally, he held her close, not wanting to miss a single opportunity of being this close to her. The music was so dreamy and slow, Elliot bent his head down, planting a kiss on her neck and holding her even tighter. Then he looked directly into her eyes, his long curling lashes framed his smouldering blue eyes. Cathy tried to pull away a little, as the extent of Elliot's feelings were now becoming very obvious as he insisted on holding her so close.

As the music ended, Catherine felt Vincent's arrival. She turned, and there silhouetted in the doorway was her 'Prince Charming'. God, he was gorgeous, he looked magnificent in his attire.

Flowing black cloak, lined in white fur, white shirt with a cascade of lace at the neck and cuffs; white tight fitting britches, knee high boots in black, and a brilliant red cummerbund. His hair fell about his shoulders in golden glory.

Cathy held Elliot's clammy hand as she led him to meet Vincent.

"Elliot, I'd like you to meet Vincent. Vincent, this is Elliot, we go back a long way," she grinned.

"At last Elliot, we meet."

"You know of me?" Elliot was taken aback.

"Oh yes...I know of you."

"Well, how about that." Elliot was stunned. "Can I get you a drink?"

"Thank you, no, but I would be honoured, Catherine, if you'd dance with me. Will you excuse us, Elliot?"

At last, they were dancing together, to the music, not like before after Winterfest, when they danced to the music in their hearts, this was now, and it felt so good.

Vincent let out a deep sigh as he looked at her, then a smile crossed his face.

"Why are you smiling, Vincent?"

"I've never danced with a candle before!" Both clung to each other as they shared this happy moment.

"I love you so much," she whispered.

"And I, you."

Elliot continued to dominate Catherine's attention, even though she only had eyes for Vincent. He rained attention on her, until finally Vincent could stand it no longer.

"We have to tell him, Catherine, we really will."

"I know, let's tell him together."

So it was decided. Vincent and Catherine moved between the guests to join Elliot at the bar.

"What can I get you, a beer, Vincent?"

"Two glasses of sweet white wine would be most kind, Elliot," he smiled. Catherine nodded her approval.

"Elliot, we have something to tell you," she felt flustered. Vincent put a comforting arm around her shoulders, which didn't go unnoticed by Elliot. "Vincent and I aren't just friends. It's over three years since our paths first crossed. Since then, there's only been Vincent in my life. I tried to tell you, Elliot, I didn't want to offer false hopes, or hurt you. I know how deeply you care. When I said there was no 'us'. I meant it, you see...Vincent and I are married, there is a child---a son---he's so beautiful. We both owe you so much, Elliot, that we gave him your name as his second name. He's called Jacob **Elliot** Wells."

Elliot put down his glass, ran his hand through his hair, a stunned look on his face, then he quickly picked up the pieces of his shattered dream. He smiled---it was a front---to hide his weeping heart. Putting his hand inside Vincent's, he shook it warmly.

"Congratulations! I never suspected anything like this. For once, I'm lost for words." Then bending down, he kissed Catherine on the cheek and whispered in her ear "Now I'll never hear you say

yes." He smiled.

Elliot was later seen in deep conversation with the Mayor.

Suddenly, a drum roll attracted everyone's attention and Elliot handed the Mayor the microphone.

"Thank you everyone, for coming along this evening, I appreciate it. This building, as you know, has been Elliot Burch's most ambitious project to date. It is to be known as 'High Towers' and all but the first floor are to be luxury apartments. The first floor will be for conferences and will have facilities of the highest standards. This floor will be known as the 'Jacob Wells Suite'."

Everyone clapped then the music restarted. Elliot shook the Mayor's hand, then drifted over to Vincent and Catherine at the bar.

"Elliot, oh Elliot, what can we say..." Catherine put her hand on his arm. Looking down he could see quite plainly the unusual gold ring Catherine wore on her wedding finger.

Placing his hand over hers, he smiled. "I'm honoured you gave him my name, no one's ever done anything so kind to me before. On my way up the ladder of success, friends fell by the wayside. You wake up one morning and realize you're alone. Then suddenly, you do this wonderful thing...there's no words...When am I going to meet this little fellow then?" Elliot demanded with a smile.

"Catherine will get in touch with you, Elliot, we will plan a day soon. Now, we must leave, it's nearly dawn, our son will be waking and needing us." Then they slipped from the building into the early morning light. "Catherine, how will you explain to Elliot, me...and the way I am and..."

"He's no different from you, Vincent," she said, her voice full of conviction.

"Catherine...how can you say that?" his velvet voice asked.

"He's a man, just like you Vincent, only you're a little more hairy, a little more cuddly, much better looking, and very sexy," she grinned.

"Oh Catherine, Catherine, I do love you so much!"

ONE SOLITARY FIGURE

LYNETTE COMBS

These tunnels now stand empty, reft of love,
as dark and lifeless as the rock above.

No voices beckon down each corridor,
nor laughter echo warmly anymore.

The rhythm of the pipes is stilled, it seems,
the music of their message dead as dreams
that flourished here---oh, once upon a time,
illuming both the secret and sublime.

One solitary figure lingers yet,
unable to forsake it or forget.

In every chamber, gallery, and hall
he listens, hearing only silence fall;
a memory of echoes, and the sound
of his own walking stick upon the ground.

If some elusive magic lingers, too,
it follows gently, keeping him from view.

One solitary figure bids farewell
this underworld where dreamers dared to dwell,
now hollow as it was when he began.

At last he turns, a lost and lonely man.

The journey out begins here even so---

But, Father,

leave a candle when you go.

OUR GUIDING LIGHT

GWEN LORD

Central Park was looking at its very best this mild autumn evening. So many trees within the park had given such a varied show in the heat of summer. Some with unique shaped leaves, others with their exotic foliage. Now these trees were nearly stripped bare of their grandeur, weaving their magic in a thick crisp layer of leaves, in a kaleidoscope of colour that, in biblical times, would have done Joseph's coat of many colours proud. This carpet of colour stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction, now tinged with the last rays of the sun.

Those wishing to walk their dogs in the park hurried along, as the dogs scampered into the leaves, sending them up into the air, only to fall once again to the ground beneath. With the setting of the sun, so this wonderland would become a place of terror, where no one walked in safety, and thugs ruled a very different park.

Far below Central Park, another world existed, a secret place, where the tunnels offered the inhabitants a safe haven from a world that had rejected them, where they had been targets of abuse, ridicule and shame, making them outcasts from the mainstream of society. As these people lost everything bit by bit, so they were forced to live as best they could, hiding in alleys, in doorways, until driven by cold, they sought shelter in the tunnels that formed a network below all they had once controlled above.

It was into this environment that Jacob Wells had found himself over 25 years ago. He, too, had lost all. The job he had worked so hard for, his wife and all his friends. Like so many before him, in this same situation, he took to living rough. It was a kind hearted

woman returning to the safety of the tunnels who came across Jacob, heard his dreadful cough coming from the shadows.

Grace was a woman who couldn't ignore a person who was obviously very ill, so she parted the undergrowth and found a desperately sick man. Offering him her arm, she took him into the tunnels, deep into the safety of Mother Earth, where she nursed him back to full health again. As his strength returned, he began to explore this place, where no one judged his fellow man, but found instead that love was the kingpin to acceptance. It wasn't Utopia, but Jacob Wells, with his keen eye and sharp brain, could see the potential here. So armed with a few ideas, he quickly formed a Council.

One of the first members was Danial Ascal, whose wife had died giving birth to their son, due to living rough. Because society had made them outcasts, he was quick to want to make this place their home, even though it was where the sounds of footsteps could instill terror and knives were the language they used. His wife, Polly, had wanted their child so much that, in her honour, Daniel put the initial of her name in front of their name, to become Pascal.

A college friend, who kept in touch, was Peter Alcott, a doctor, who promised to help as much as he could, and he too, joined the Council, and so a new way of life was set in motion. Isolation and twisted dreams gone, enabling them to put aside their fears, as they each grew stronger, learning how to give help and be able to accept help too. Gradually they all became part of one another, one family, one community. Each year, after that memorable beginning, they held their own Thanksgiving calling it Winterfest. In the Great Hall, they would pool what little they had, to celebrate and thank those who had helped them. It became their time to

remind themselves that the greatest darking is NOTHING, as long as they shared the light.



In 1988, as if by some unseen force, a hand was guiding a certain man to write. Unknown to him then, what he wrote would alter the course of so many lives, bringing pleasure to millions and be a light at the end of the tunnels of our own mundane lives. In a world where daily we read of selfishness, greed, terror, rape, lust, robberies, murder, nation at war with nation, man against man, where morals and rules we used as guidelines to a moral society seemed lost forever, came this television programme. It entered our homes, it entered our lives and it captured our hearts. Week after week, we were shown that these people who lived Below had riches far beyond those of their fellow beings Above. We were reintroduced to morals, to loving, caring and sharing. These lost emotions felt right, they had been lost in what we call progress. Rekindled and re-nurtured, we once again felt pride in being a part of society at which so many scoff, but we got so much back. If only they had realized it, those who scoffed were the ones missing out.

Millions of us have been touched by "Beauty and the Beast" created by Ron Koslow and acted out by a chosen law, who were hand picked for this special mission. Those who couldn't see what we could were very quick to chaff and scorn, and bring it down on its heels. But those who had been touched by this strange and magical experience, are out there, day after day, helping and caring amongst us. Who, without this programme, would not have found the strength to look deep enough inside themselves, to see their God given talents, that they lacked the courage to use.

The people Below celebrate Winterfest, giving thanks for so much. So, we follow their example, attending conventions wherever they may be. Some travel halfway around the world to be there, it's like a Mecca for us all. We feel this driving force inside us, needing to keep alive these special friendships we have formed. The understanding and love we want to share, to make each day worth living.

Compared to the vast numbers of us on this planet, we are a small group. But, as our arms reach out, we have the strength and we are not quitters. We have been allowed a glimpse of this miracle and we will never let go. So to keep it alive in our hearts, we attend these functions, even the actors, who were hand chosen, agree that no one thought when the pilot was made that it would get any further. Then the magic touched them also, as now they are only too happy to grace these conventions, helping in their own way, to strengthen this family.

Working as a team, one day, we will get what we yearn to have. Jacob Wells is still there, in our mind's eye, holding his family together. Mary is there with her loyalty, Vincent with his wisdom, Catherine with her unshakeable dream, the light at the end of Vincent's tunnel. We are within a hand's grasp of having our dream come true, all we need to do is to hang in there, to be strong and not be swayed by those who do not understand, or blow hot and cold. We owe it to ourselves, to "Keep This Special Dream Alive."

Let's hope, when spring returns to Central Park, when the new leaves in all their splendour grace the park, that Vincent will be seen dashing along the tunnels to the threshold, to tell his beloved Catherine, that.....THE DREAM CONTINUES.

REUNION

PEG MCNABB

With the sultry reach of summer,
Summoned hearts turn one to all---
Drumming with a common cadence,
Listening to a distant call.

If we're lucky, we will listen
when life whispers in our ear.

"There are reunions that await you,
There is family for you here."

We are people rich in friendships,
Though tis easy to forget----

As our daily lives consume us,
Far apart from where we met.

But, like magic, at this time of year,
our spirits seem to waken,

With thoughts of leaving house and home,
And journeys undertaken.

From distant sea to distant sea
this loving web will guide us,
So look around and know that

family's sitting right beside us.
We may have started out to honor
Roy, our friend and "Father,"
but years have passed and now we know
The true joy's with each other.
So thanks to Roy, and B&B,
we've found a home secure----
Safe in each other's hearts,
this family ever will endure.

THAT HEAVENLY FACE

By Gwen Lord

Catherine sat close to Vincent, far below ground in the catacombs, where shafts of dancing light fell on the jagged rocks. The distant rainbow added a kaleidoscope of colour and only the gentle flowing water broke the tranquil silence of the stream, weaving its way to underground pools.

This special place had come to mean everything to them, since that terrible night when their paths had crossed over a year ago. It offered them what they most desired - the chance to enjoy time alone together, and rare moments away from the perils and urgency of the time they shared. It seemed enchanted; a magical place, a place of safety.

"What are you thinking, Catherine?"

"How lucky we are that our paths crossed that night."

"Yes. It's brought me great joy. I never believed it possible."

"I used to come here as a child. It's always been a magical place to me, a place that accepted me without question."

Catherine smiled lovingly at Vincent. But then a sadness crept across her face. It was just for a moment, but Vincent had sensed it, and put his head to one side, as if to ask why.

"I wish I didn't live in two worlds, Vincent."

"I know," he said gently.

"You don't know, how can you? You have only ever known the one, but I'm torn between both."

He turned his body to face her and placed his hand on her shoulder.

"I truly know how you feel."

His hand sent the shudder through her body that she experienced every time Vincent held her closely or touched her. She pulled away, not wanting him to sense her heartache and longing. Vincent put his protecting arm around her as she snuggled close to him. There was no need for words.

"I'm sorry. It's because I love you so much, forgive me, Vincent .."

He sighed. "Catherine, there's nothing I would like more, but you know it's impossible. These are rules we must abide by."

"Whose rules do we live by, Vincent? Those of the world Above, or those of our hearts? The choice is ours, we must listen to our hearts. You taught me that, Vincent."

"It's not impossible, Catherine. This is our destiny. We must endure the pain, and savour every moment of the joy."

"Now Catherine, it's time for you to leave, I'll guide you out."

"Why must I go?"

"Because of what I am feeling."

"No, Vincent."

"You must."

Tears sprang to her eyes, spilling over, and ran down her face. He held out his hand to her, and together they walked in silence to

the world Above. At that now familiar place, by the end of the tunnel, Catherine and Vincent held each other close, as if never to pull apart. Each felt the other's pain.

"I wish I didn't have to leave you here."

"I wish I didn't have to return to Below"

"I need you so much."

They stared longingly at one another.

"Til tomorrow Catherine. Be well."

"And you, Vincent."

*

Back in his chamber, all the hate and loathing he felt for himself, over spilt to anger. He crashed around, knocking chairs and candles over. Voices of past conversations echoed around his head. Beads of perspiration lined his brow, growling filled the air.

Father entered the chamber, carrying books. He leaned heavily on his carved walking stick.

"Which shall we use today, for the children's reading? Are you all right, Vincent?"

"Yes, Father."

"You look awful."

"Don't worry yourself about me, Father."

"How can I help not worrying? If you are troubled, so am I. Tell me, what is it?"

Vincent smiled sadly.

"As if I had to ask..."

"If only I was as other men, Father, I could be with her. We could have a life together. But this is denied us, and it gives us great pain and sadness. The burden we bear threatens everything."

"Vincent, the pain you feel now, will pass, as you both learn to accept..."

"Words Father, empty words."

He stormed out, crashing into the tunnel walls as he disappeared from view. Father was left yet again, with a feeling of complete helplessness.

*

Catherine sadly climbed the steps from Below, and closed the cellar door. She quickly made her way to the lift, so as to avoid the people in her building seeing her tear stained face. The lift quickly climbed the 18 floors to her apartment.

For the last three years this had been her home, a haven, a place to return to after her work day ended. She unlocked the door and entered, relieved to be back within its safe walls. She needed to collect her thoughts, to try to work out what both of them could do. The situation was becoming more and more hopeless each day. Why was life so unfair?

She showered and dressed for bed, in a flimsy, expensive white and pink lace nightgown. It was one of the many luxury items that being wealthy allowed. But this problem wouldn't be measured in money. This was a problem of the heart; no money on earth could buy her what her heart so desperately wanted.

Sleep didn't come easily. She tossed and turned, dreaming hopeless dreams. She woke in tears. Pulling back on the bedclothes, she climbed out of bed and wiped away the tears with her hands. Catherine made her way toward the balcony. The doors were already slightly open; the air was heavy with blossom from the trees below in the park. Only a breath of wind disturbed the net curtains.

The skyscrapers lit up the sky before her, their familiar shapes silhouetted against the night sky. They always gave her hope, but not tonight. Again the tears rolled down her cheeks. She sobbed and whispered:

"Vincent."

"I'm here ... I felt your sadness."

She turned and felt his reassuring arms. How safe she felt against Vincent's magnificent and powerful body!

"Why did you come? You know what I'm feeling, what I'm thinking and longing for. My heart is so sad, yet you came, why?"

She put her arms around his neck and whispered:

"What are we going to do?"

Vincent looked at Catherine's face between his strong hands. He stared lovingly at her as he slowly brought his head down close to hers, placing a kiss on her hair. Catherine, taken by surprise at this sudden show of emotion, looked up at Vincent. Tenderly he kissed her cheek; his grip tightened around her. Catherine could feel his warm breath on her face; emotion welled up inside her as she put her arms tighter around his neck.

Their lips met, very lightly, melting away the barriers of longing that until now had kept them apart. After what seemed an eternity, they pulled apart and looked into each other's eyes, both shaken by this turn of events.

"Come inside, Vincent, please." Cathy turned and entered the doorway, with her arms held out for Vincent to follow. "Please, just for a moment."

Vincent entered cautiously, but once inside, he saw a vision of loveliness beckoning him, inviting him...

Suddenly they were locked in each other's arms. There was no turning back.

*

The early morning light cast shadows across the room; gently the light caught Catherine's face. She stirred, turned over and smiled dreamily. But she realised she was not alone.

Pulling herself up on one arm, she looked down at this huge handsome stranger lying beside her. Who was he?

He stirred and rolled over. Their faces came close as his eyes opened. In that unmistakably gentle voice, he whispered:

"Catherine."

"Oh my God, what have I done?"

"What is it? Tell me, please."

Catherine couldn't find the words, yet Vincent sensed her fear. He put his hand on her shoulder to comfort her ... it was then that he saw his hand. He stared at it in disbelief, then the other hand. Next he felt his face. Utter wonder crossed his face.

"How can this be?"

'Oh no Vincent, forgive me, I am to blame, I should never..."

"I've always dreamt that one day this would be possible; but it was only ever a dream. Something to hold on to, to see me through each day; it gave me hope. I wanted you to accept me. I wanted to give you everything, yet was unable to fulfill even your slightest wish. That caused me the greatest pain of all. I always dreaded you finding someone else to share your life with. But now, don't you see, I'm free of all that.

We can truly be together - always."

"Oh Vincent, I didn't want you to change. I never hoped you would. Never once did I ever want you to be different. I love you for yourself alone, you must believe that. I am so sorry this has happened, Vincent. If you stay like you are now you won't fit in Below, or Above in my world. Don't you see, we have got to get what happened to you reversed. To me, you are everything. I will love only you, 'til the day I die."

*

Catherine got out of bed and started to put in motion the wheels that set the pattern for the day that lay ahead. First, she rang the office and told them she wouldn't be in that day, as she was feeling a bit off colour; maybe someone could call by with a few documents, she could then work on at home. That task done, she got ready and descended Below, into Vincent's world. Tapping a message on the pipes to Father, she told him that Vincent was well but wouldn't be returning Below until later.

When Catherine returned to the apartment, she found Vincent staring at himself in the mirror. He studied his face with a look of wonder; the unexpected texture of his skin, the fineness of his

hair.

Closing the door she removed her coat, throwing it down as she rushed up to Vincent. He embraced her and stroked her hair.

"I'll have a shower and change, then we'll go and see Narcissa, Vincent."

"Catherine, before we go, are you really sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. Aren't you, Vincent?"

"You know I'm sure."

They smiled, they kissed and Cathy ran from the room into the bathroom and closed the door. Vincent could hear the shower, as he settled down to listen to the music which now filled the apartment. A contented smile crossed his face.

Suddenly, there was a knock at the door. Vincent didn't know what to do. He went out on the balcony, but the knocking continued. Catherine couldn't hear it or answer it, so Vincent strode over to the door and opened it. He looked down at a man, holding papers in his hand. He had a very surprised look on his face.

"Hi. I'm Joe - Cathy's boss. She wanted someone to drop these papers by and as I was in the neighbourhood..."

Vincent held out his hand for them.

"Thank you."

Vincent took them from him and Joe realised what a fine figure of a man Cathy's friend was. Radcliffe had certainly kept this hunk quiet. Wait 'til he saw her next, he'd would enjoy teasing her over this.

Just then, Catherine came out of the shower humming a tune, wrapped only in a small, pale blue towel and looking very sweet. She saw Vincent at the open door and peeked from behind him at who was there.

"Hi, Joe."

"Hi, Cathy. How you doing?"

Joe, feeling very uncomfortable at this unaccustomed domestic scene, shuffled away and muttered something about seeing her tomorrow at the office.

Closing the door, a playful look on his face now, head to one side, "So that's Joe. I didn't realise I had a rival."

"Don't be silly, Vincent," she leased back and was gone.

*

Narcissa was asleep in her darkened chamber as Catherine and Vincent approached. The candles alight at one end of the far wall lit up shelves of potions and precious powders, that formed an all important part of her life. She had lived Below since her birth, over 70 years ago. She had led a lonely life below because of her near blindness and became both friend and confidante to Father. When he came Below to live 35 years ago, he had left the world he loved and his work; his home; his wife. He was devastated and came Below to heal. Slowly, his life took on a new meaning and he began to live again. Narcissa helped him through this dark period in his life and anyone else who needed her wisdom and help knew she was always there, just like Vincent and Catherine, now.

"Narcissa," called Catherine softly.

"Oh, you gave me a fright child, are you alone? Where's Vincent?"

"I'm here, Narcissa."

Vincent leaned nearer to her so she could see him clearly.

"Ok! Am I dreaming? I know the voice but not the face."

Catherine put a hand on her arm and bent towards her.

"We need your help, Vincent needs your wisdom, now, more than ever."

"What can a silly old woman do to help you this time?"

Catherine's voice was unsteady with emotion.

"Can what's happened to Vincent be ... reversed, can he go back to what he was?"

"Vincent, is this one of your jokes? You always liked your jokes as a boy, I remember ..."

"This is no joke. We truly need your help."

Vincent held out his arms to Catherine and lovingly held her close, as Narcissa pondered what to do.

Catherine and Vincent now sat closely together, his hand held hers as they watched Narcissa, mixing potions and muttering to herself. The aroma of different powders heating up in dishes and tubes, drifted across the chamber, making Catherine's head spin. After what seemed an eternally, Narcissa came towards them with a small arbour of black dust in a glass bottle.

"Take this child, mix it with water and see your Vincent drinks it."

You will need to be strong - this will give your Vincent a heavy fever, he will go to hell and back before this night is out. Be warned."

"I'll do whatever I takes. Thank you."

"Go now, child. Waste no time."

So together they left her chamber and the sweet smelling potions lingered behind them as they made their way back to Vincent's chamber. Along ill lit tunnels and the noise of tappings on the pipes, they made a handsome couple as they walked along, hand in hand. She, so pretty in her red coat and blonde hair; he so tall and broad with handsome looks and flashing smile.

Vincent's large bed creaked as his weight bore down on it. He settled himself among the many cushions and pillows. His fine features made Catherine feel uneasy. She added water to the effervescent potion which crackled and thickened as she stirred it. She walked across to him.

"Drink this, Vincent."

He held her hand. "Catherine, you really sure? It's not too late."

She put her fingers on his lips. "Sssh ..."

He took the glass to his lips and swallowed the foul tasting liquid. Their eyes met. Catherine held Vincent's large hands in hers and he soon fell into a deep and troubled sleep. She felt each of his pains too, as his body twisted, and moaned as his body suffered. Sweat came and went on his face; his long hair was dripping wet from the fever which enveloped him. Now his growling became so loud as to disturb Father, who dashed over to the chamber,

worried by the sounds.

"Isn't it a little late for you to be here still, Catherine?"

"Vincent wasn't feeling to well. I said I'd stay with him so as not to disturb you,

"You should have called me, could have given him something. What's wrong?"

"Oh, he'll be fine. He just needs to rest."

"Very well, but tell me if you need me."

"Don't worry, I will.

Vincent's bouts of pain finally subsided after many hours. The fever now broken, troubled sleep gave way to restless sleep. Eventually, peaceful sleep.

*

Catherine awoke with a start. She looked around her in bewilderment at the unfamiliar surroundings. Vincent had disturbed her. He was waking, tossing and turning. He broke the chains that had bound him to the fever which had claimed his body for so long.

"Catherine. Catherine."

She covered his hands with hers.

"I'm here."

She looked down. The hands she clasped were furry, with claws.

She glanced at his face. Oh! That heavenly face had been returned to her. Vincent opened his blue eyes.

"Catherine."

"It's alright, Vincent, I'm here. It has worked, thank God, it has worked."

Vincent eased himself upon one arm and Catherine moved even closer to him -both looked into each other's eyes. Vincent held out his arms to her and she hugged him, snuggling up close.

"Oh Vincent, I thought I'd never see that heavenly face of yours again.

"I have never been so afraid as I was last night; it was an awful pain we bore."

"I know."

Catherine pulled away from him to look up into his face; that face she loved so much and thought was lost forever.

"I love you so much, Vincent."

He lowered his head to kiss away all the pain and heartache. Now there was HOPE - the promise of a perfect life was theirs.

Both were unaware of Father's presence in the doorway; nodding in approval with a smile on his lips. He silently turned and left them alone.

THE BOND

GWEN LORD

Catherine called in the grocery store on her way home from work; she needed a few items, like milk, coffee, and...biscuits.

The milk and coffee was easy, but the biscuits were another matter. She felt like a change from the ones she normally got. Vincent was coming to supper so she wanted something he would enjoy. Nothing on the shelves seemed to appeal. She was about to abandon the idea when a packet of biscuit mix caught her eyes. "Chocolate Chip cookies", Vincent's favorite. Turning the packet over, she read the instructions. They seemed easy enough, even by Catherine's standards, so, armed with all three items, she made her way to the cash out.

After parking the car quite near her apartment block, she quickly made her way along the busy street to the entrance. The doorman greeted her warmly, then turning left she headed toward the lift, joining the others already waiting. A few familiar faces smiled back at her, then as if by public demand, the lift arrived, heralding its arrival by sounding a bell.

Once inside the lift, all stood in silence occupied with their own thoughts. One by one, they left at different levels, until finally Catherine was alone. She stood, gazing up at the number grid above her, 15, 16, 17, 18. At last the lift made its silent halt, the door opened as if by magic, and Catherine was able to step out into the familiar corridor. As she walked along to her door, she fumbled in her purse for the key, then once it was found, door number 21E quickly flew open.

The lingering smell of spray polish and air freshener still hung in

the air. Everything looked immaculate. What a god send the fleet of cleaning ladies were, that descended on these luxury apartments daily. The rent was astronomical but, to get everything done for you, this to Catherine was bliss and worth every cent. It was at times like this, when she was glad she was the daughter of a very wealthy and successful corporate lawyer, who spoiled her constantly. Even the apartment Daddy paid for, all the big bills he took care of.

Dumping the shopping down on the gleaming white work surface, she made her way across the dinette, switching on the stereo, then went on into the bedroom. Tossing her purse on the chair, her coat on the blanket box at the foot of the bed, she fell with a sigh onto the edge of the bed. Kicking off her expensive high-heeled shoes, she took each foot in turn between her hands, encouraging life into each foot then, with a quick wiggle of all toes, stood up and made for the bathroom, starting to undress as she went.

After a quick refreshing shower, she substituted her designer clothes for a pair of well worn jeans and favourite tee-shirt, then with a quick flick of her hair brush she was ready. Humming to the music she made her way to the kitchen.

First she put the milk away, then she unscrewed the jar of coffee, emptying it into the coffee canister she treasured. It was earthenware, hand made, given to her a few months ago after Winterfest. It was a small Christmas token from Father, on Christmas Eve. To Catherine, this gift was more like an acceptance of her. She **so** wanted him to like her, but always felt he didn't really like Vincent getting too deeply involved, thinking one day she would find someone else, leaving Vincent heart broken and inconsolable.

The packet of biscuit mix stood alone now on the surface, as if to offer her a challenge. Catherine wasn't in the least bit domesticated, but this looked like fun, so, armed with keen enthusiasm, she picked up the packet and prepared to do battle.

She switched on the cooker, whose lack of use echoed its immaculate appearance, then following all the clear instructions, quickly had the chocolate chip cookies ready to cook.

Opening the cooker door, she realized it was cold and dead.

"Damn it!" she said. Then, leaning over, she pushed gently at the plug, checking it was fully in.

There was a blinding flash of light, a loud bang, then everything went dark.

How long she lay on the floor she didn't know. She must have been thrown there. Hardly able to breathe for the thick choking smoke which surrounded her, the only light she could see, came from the burning plug. Everything seemed to go further and further away, like a dream, as Catherine finally passed out.

//

Deep below the city, through a maze of tunnels, was Vincent's home, in sharp contrast to Catherine's. Here, everything was not new, or all 'mod cona', but it was just as beautiful, with a warm feeling of love echoing in every candlelit corner. It was a haven of unimagined beauty.

Here in the kitchen chamber, sat around the table were Mary, Father and Vincent, talking and enjoying each other's company, over a cup of hot herb tea.

Father was reminding them of a day long ago, when Mouse had

lost his Raccoon, Arthur. No one could find him. All the tunnel children had been called in to help search for him, but still he remained missing. After some hours had passed, Arthur reappeared, apparently none the worse for his adventure...but his paws gave the game away. Quickly Father and Mouse set off to retrace the small pale blue footprints which finally led to Elizabeth's tunnels...Yes, the prints started here, at the upturned pot of paint. Elizabeth was upset but Father was very cross with Mouse, telling him, never to let this happen again.

"Mouse, I hope a lesson has been learnt here."

Mouse scratched his head, giving the question some thought, then he mumbled, "Yes. Teach Arthur to like dark paint, so footprint won't get Mouse in trouble."

They all laughed as they remembered, when suddenly, Vincent stopped. His expression changed to that of concern and fear. Almost dropping his cup on the table, he pushed his chair back, sending it spinning to the floor, as he dashed at great speed from the kitchen, saying only, "Catherine," leaving Mary and Father speechless.

As Vincent descended to the balcony, the stench of burning rubber filled the air. Opening the balcony door without a moment's hesitation, he sprinted inside.

"Catherine...Catherine," he called as panic gripped him. Why couldn't he sense her? What had happened?

Once inside the kitchen, all was revealed. Catherine lay unconscious on the floor. Scooping her up in his arms, he carried her at top speed to the fresh clean air of the balcony. Sitting her down carefully in the wrought iron chair, he bent over her.

"Catherine, speak to me...please." Then holding her hands in his, kissed her gently on the cheek.

Slowly her eyes flickered open, then as it all came back to her, her eyes opened wide, panic filled her; then taking in deep breaths, tried to control the coughing and the retching that the smoke had done to her, as it filled her lungs.

Vincent put his arms around her shoulders, as he knelt in front of her. He held her shoulders firmly as her body shook in wave after wave of coughing. Finally she stopped. As Vincent looked lovingly into her pale face, she started to cry.

"I'm here," he murmured in his beautiful velvet voice, then folded her in his arms. She felt safe again. "Stay here, Catherine, while I go inside and see what needs to be done." Catherine nodded in agreement.

It seemed strange to Catherine to see Vincent quickly disappear through her door into her apartment. A smile crossed her face...it was nearly worth all this trouble, just to have him here in her home, taking care of her. Oh! That it could be so, one day...

Once inside, Vincent put his hand deep into the inside pocket of his cloak, bringing out his tunnel torch. Flicking on the switch, he directed the beam in the area of the kitchen.

The tiles near the plug were blackened with smoke; the plug a melted mess. Uncooked biscuits lay dejected. Everywhere was filthy with the smoke.

Returning to Catherine on the balcony, he knelt on one knee beside her. "It's quite safe now, but the mess and stench is awful. You cannot stay here tonight, you must come below." Vincent inhaled deeply, enjoying the clean air in his lungs also.

"Vincent, I'll be all right, I have work to catch up on for Joe tomorrow, w..."

"Catherine, I must insist!" Then placing his clawed finger ever so gently on her lips to silence her, he continued. "Ssssh. Get your coat. Meet me below in a few moments. Please don't be worried. I'm here."

As Catherine descended the last few rungs of the iron ladder, Vincent took her arm to steady her. Once she had both feet on the ground, she turned to face him in the circle of light.

"Our bond saved me," she murmured.

Vincent nodded agreement, then a smile crossed his lips.

"What?" she asked, puzzled. "Why are you smiling?"

"Because, my dear Catherine, you have a black smudge on the tip of your nose." Both exploded into laughter as the tension of earlier eased away.

Then gently, with his large thumb, rubbed the offending smudge away. This intimate touch caught them both a little off guard. The moment hung in the air as if charged with electricity and endless possibilities. They stared at each other, their bond reaching out to both of them; longing to have more, their love consumed them. Vincent took her hand in his, then speaking in a whisper, trying to control the longing within him said, "Shall we go below?"

They walked in silence for quite a while, unable to find the right or appropriate words. At last, Catherine broke the silence, by telling Vincent how her day had been a total disaster. She woke late, skipped breakfast to make up time, and dropped all her notes in the lift. The work load Joe had given her was unbelievable, then

the mess in the kitchen was the last straw.

As they approached Father's chamber, they tried to creep past unnoticed, because of the late hour, but Father's hearing was extraordinary, so it came as no surprise to either of them, to hear his voice call out.

"Vincent, is that you?"

"Yes, I'm here."

The shadows on the tunnel wall announced his approach.

"Is Catherine all right, only when you..." his voice trailed off, seeing her standing there, hand in hand with his son. "Are you all right, tell me, what is it?" he urged, waving his hand in a gesture to sit down.

Vincent eased his heavy cloak off his broad shoulders, then placed it on the back of Father's old leather chair. Stepping forward he pulled a chair out for Catherine, then himself. Father crossed to the other side of the table, letting himself down heavily on his stick.

Leaning forward, Vincent added more candles to the two already lit on the table. This lit up the room beautifully with dancing light filling every corner of the chamber.

Catherine retold her tale of woe to Father. Her eyes filled with tears, as a single tear overflowed down her pale cheek. Vincent leaned forward, sliding his hand over hers, squeezing it gently, offering her comfort through their bond... their eyes met.

Father saw this show of affection, over the top of his horn-rimmed spectacles, which seemed to live, perched on the end of his nose. Never had he seen them exchange such a look before. A puzzled

expression crossed his face, but Catherine and Vincent had eyes only for each other.

A tapping on the pipes quickly averted Father's attention. All three listened to the coded message then, with a sigh, Father raised himself. "I must go. Pascal needs me. It must be about Old Sam. He's taken a turn for the worse over the last few days," and with that, hurried out down the passage and out of sight.

Vincent stood, holding his hands out to Catherine who took them, pulling herself up, she felt his arms go around her shoulders, sending a shudder through her body.

"Come, I'll walk you to your chamber."

The rough stone of the passage walls looked dark; lit at intervals with burning torches, reflecting strange shadows. Their footsteps sounded hollow as they walked the short distance, until the entrance of the familiar bed chamber presented itself.

Catherine eagerly went inside. She knew it so well, for it was here she had hid from the world, four months ago, allowing herself to heal, after the sudden death of her father, Charles Chandler.

Vincent lit a taper, then walked round the room, lighting all the candles dotted around the walls and surfaces, until the chamber came alive. It all felt so warm and welcoming, she felt at home, at peace here. Looking up she saw Vincent was watching her every move. He knew what she was thinking and feeling. They once again exchanged meaningful glances.

"It's better you stay with us below tonight, Catherine." He spoke as if explaining it to a child. Catherine nodded in agreement.

Walking over to her, hands outstretched he said "I'll leave you

now...sleep well."

"And you, Vincent," she replied.

"Good night, Catherine," then turning he left, not daring to glance back at her sad face.

Left alone, she slowly walked around the familiar chamber, touching items as she passed. Mary kept everything so beautiful, they had so little, yet it seemed so much; when love was the centre of everything. The small posy of wild flowers got her special attention; they smelled lovely. She ran her fingers along the well polished night stand, then finally, got undressed and slipped between the clean white cotton sheets.

Vincent returned to his chamber. Sleep was the furthest thought from his mind, so taking a taper, he proceeded to light some extra candles, then settled himself at his table, and opened his journal to record the happenings of the day.

For once, words didn't come easy for him; his mind was in turmoil. Catherine's presence here below disturbed him, like when she was here before, but this time, more so. Her nearness sent waves of emotion through him, that normally he could control, but somehow, tonight was different. He felt a fire in his very soul, eating away at him. What was he to do? Pushing away the journal, he laid the pen down, then with a deep sigh he stood up, stretched and started pacing the room. He always paced when a problem presented itself. After a while he sat down on the bed and bowed his head. A sadness filled his heavy heart. There seemed no answer to this nightmare of desire.

Catherine lay awake in the near darkness. She tossed and turned then finally gave up trying. Turning back the sheets, she slipped

out of bed, picking up the gown at the foot of the bed, put it on, tying it firmly at her waist, then taking a deep breath, headed for Vincent's chamber.

He sensed her nearness and looked up as she entered, standing in the doorway, silhouetted, looking like a small child, so helpless and needing attention.

"I couldn't sleep."

"I know. I felt your unrest; I felt your thoughts. Come, sit down beside me," he spoke gently.

Catherine walked over to him, putting her arm around his neck as she sat down, then resting her head on his shoulder, Vincent drew her to him. There was no need for words, he felt he was melting in their embrace.

"I think a little tea, Catherine, don't you? Come, we can make it together."

The kitchen was the one place Catherine had never been in, all the time she'd known Vincent, there had never been a need for her to go there, but she wondered often what it was like, especially when the smell of cooking filled the air, that William was preparing in his domain.

The difference of the kitchen was in sharp contrast to her own; this she noticed as she stepped inside. Vincent set to at once preparing the tea while Catherine took in the new surroundings.

It was smaller than she imagined, and was impressed by its clinical beauty---very sparse and immaculately clean. Only the bare essentials were here, no luxury items graced this kitchen.

The pans, all cast iron, hung on nails, two large bulbous ones.

One medium and two smaller ones. She expected more than that. Her eyes travelled along the nearside wall. Here an old whitestone sink was spotless, with its scrubbed draining board, almost white with years of endless scrubbing. Even the taps hadn't been forgotten, they shone afrom years of loving care, even if they weren't a matching pair!

A dresser stood opposite, full of colorful pots. What an assortment. Some pot, others china and very few matching, she noticed. Above her head, bunches of herbs, strung together, hung in groups, drying, filling the air with a lovely aroma.

Catherine's thoughts were interrupted abruptly.

"Your herb tea, it's ready," Vincent handed it to her.

"I feel at home, isn't that strange."

"No, Catherine, because you *are* home."

They sat down, then with an impish smile, Vincent passed her a plate of his favourite biscuits.

"Would you like some chocolate chip cookies?"

Both burst into laughter as the significance hit them.

They talked for a little while, Catherine confided it would have been better if she's stayed in bed all day, seeing that everything had turned out a total disaster.

"Maybe the end will be better than you think," he smiled at her.

"Come, I will walk you back. I think you will sleep now, it's very late," he said, taking her hand.

"Vincent, I love you so much. Hold me, never let me go, please."

His arms tightened around her, she melted in his embrace,

THE CHRISTMAS ANGEL

GWEN LORD

"How many need Christmas dinner?" William asked in disbelief, unable to take in Father's statement.

"Thirty three I'm led to believe, according to Zack," Father answered.

"The days are long gone when five or six chickens would feed us all on Christmas day," he put on his blue striped apron, tying it firmly around his ample frame. "I don't think I'll be able to cook the number of chickens we'll need, all at the same time, Father." William was clearly worried.

"Maybe we should have two sittings?" the older man offered a possible alternative.

"No, even two sittings wouldn't be enough. This year we have a problem." William sighed as he reached for a dish to crack eggs in, then as he whisked them he strolled over to Father, almost resting the dish on his stomach as he did so.

"Then what alternative do you suggest?"

"It's the latest lot of topsiders that came to us from Chang, that's what swollen our numbers."

"True, yes, it's true, but we have to open up our homes to them, because like us, this safe place is the only hope they have left."

"I know, I know." William was protesting, and agreeing both at the same time.

"Maybe Mary can come up with an idea?" Father beamed at his bright idea.

"I doubt even Mary can help here. I think we could do with some divine help, Father," he chuckled, and his whole body shook with laughter.

"Divine help?" Father repeated, equally amused.

"Yeah! You know the Bible story of the loaves and fishes and how suddenly they had enough to feed everyone. Sure could do with some of that divine stuff down here."

"We have three days, William, so I'll tell Pascal to send a message on the pipes for an Emergency Meeting in my chamber, tonight at 9 p.m. Between all of us surely we'll come up with a working plan?" and with that, Father left the kitchen.

At almost 9pm Father's chamber was overflowing with young and old. As the steady chatter of why this meeting was called filtered around the room.

Father seated himself in his old comfortable chair and addressed the throng. The candles around the chamber flickered at so much movement, casting moving shadows on the rough rock walls.

"We have a kitchen problem to deal with tonight," Father began. "It would seem that because there are more of us now than ever before, the small stove will not be able to cope with a sit-down Christmas meal for everyone at the same time. However, we do feel that several sittings might be an option."

Turning their heads to one another there were matters of discord at the thought of being separated for Christmas dinner. From the back of the chamber where Vincent and Catherine were sitting, her familiar voice called, "Would you let me help?" She was now standing on tiptoe so Father could see her.

"Catherine, I didn't know you were here, welcome my dear."

"Thank you, Father, we have only just arrived. I would like to help if you would let me?" Catherine looked at Vincent who was still holding her hand in his. She smiled at the encouragement she saw in his eyes and the love that was there too. Turning her attention back to Father she continued, "You have a problem which I believe I can fix."

As they made their way from the back of the chamber, Vincent whispered, "You are so wonderful, Catherine."

Again she smiled, "You have taught me to share other peoples' troubles, Vincent."

At last they reached Father who gave Catherine a hug and then slipped his arm through hers. He motioned for everyone to be silent and said simply, "How do you think you can help us, my dear?"

Catherine turned to look at all the anxious faces and told them, "I wanted to buy each of you a gift for Christmas, but I have an idea that one gift between you all would be better. Let me provide the food, as my Christmas gift."

Cheers went up and everyone turned to Father to see his reaction.

"Catherine, are you sure? This is a very generous thing you're proposing?" Father whispered close to her ear.

"I have more money then I will ever use. I want to put that money to good use and what better than to give all my special family a wondrous Christmas."

"God bless you, Catherine," a voice called out from the crowd.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Two days before Christmas Day, Catherine told Joe she needed a couple of hours off to do some Christmas shopping. As time was owing to her, he readily agreed. Catherine rushed out of the office so fast no one noticed she had gone. Several hours later she returned, all her shopping done, plans had been made and everything paid for.

CHRISTMAS EVE

It was now Christmas Eve and the long dark tunnels were bleak and cold with only the golden glow of the home tunnels ahead in the distance, but even these did not reflect any Christmas spirit. A few home made decorations, mostly paper chains, hung limply and a small artificial tree stood in one corner and had been decorated as best they could manage. A few of the children had hung up well-worn socks for Santa's visit. Suddenly the pipes came alive with loud tappings, telling everyone to assemble near Father's chamber at once. It didn't take long for the crowd to gather all waiting to hear Catherine's plan. Vincent came forward to speak, Catherine was by his side.

"We need everyone, except the little ones, they will stay with Father and Mary. The rest follow us."

"Like the Pied Piper of Hamelin," said one as the long line of excited people hurried to follow. Soon they were at the secret entrance to Chang's Store. Vincent knocked and Chang opened the door. There inside the now empty store were merchants and trades people, all Helpers from Above. They were all lined up with goods for them.

One by one all was passed to them and the chain line began.

Their voices were full of excitement and joy. Catherine's tears ran unashamedly, she was overcome with joy at the happiness her money had brought to these wonderful people.

Father could hear their voices now, so he and Mary stood to greet each one as they entered. As the goodies started to pile up, they were amazed that there was so much. Next came an eight-foot Christmas tree and a huge box of decorations. There were seven large freshly cooked turkeys, pans of vegetables, bottles of wine, and a box of large candles and box after box of brightly wrapped presents. Father's breath caught in his throat when he saw the boxes of Christmas crackers, the jars of fondant sticks, but tears filled his eyes when he saw the baskets of fresh fruit being carried through.

"Catherine, there are no words." No words could express the gratitude, or how thankful he was. Slowly he dried his tears.

"I have never been happier, Father."

"But the expense, my dear, even for you."

"What expense?" she said in a faint whisper.

Father's arms were outstretched as he tried to span everything laid out before them. "All this, my dear."

A silence descended on everyone Below as the bells rang out from a nearby church.

"I've learned from all of you that you cannot put a price tag on life or love. The heart has to want to share and mine wants to share with you. I used to think money was everything, but it is worthless unless it makes you happy. It makes me happy to help bring the magic of Christmas to you all Below. The Christmas Angels are

here, in these tunnels, can't you feel them? Can't you hear them singing? You will if you try." Slowly one by one, everyone started to sing Silent Night and a magic all its own descended on this happy group of people. The tree was soon dressed with all the decorations glistening in the candlelight, and the aroma of food was mouth watering. Tables had cloths placed on them and hours passed as the dark tunnels and chambers became alive with the spirit of Christmas. Parcels were laid among the tree and socks were filled. Four special parcels lay on Father's desk. They were for Father and Mary, from Vincent and Catherine, and the other two were Vincent and Catherine's presents to each other.

It was almost midnight when Vincent and Catherine finally found a moment when they could reflect on everything that had taken place over the past few hours. They were standing in the shelter of the tunnel leading out into Central Park. Vincent took Catherine's hand and kissed it whispering, "Your generous heart has made so many people so happy, Catherine. People, who had lost sight of hope, now feel that there is hope. They had lost love, but now know that true love still exists."

Catherine had snaked her arms around Vincent's waist as she answered, "What I have done is nothing compared to what you have given me, Vincent. Money couldn't buy the faith in myself that you have given me. You changed my life forever. What I have done is nothing compared to what you have given me." She reached up and kissed him.

Clearly moved by Catherine's sudden display of affection, he sighed, "I am so blessed, Catherine," and his arms held her close, not wanting this wonderful moment to end. When the first chimes rang out heralding the arrival of Christmas Day, Vincent and Catherine clung together as they wished one another "Happy

Christmas," knowing that this year it was going to be a wondrous time for this special community.

Vincent spoke against the softness of Catherine's hair, marvelling at the fragrance that was her, "You've certainly kept your promise, Catherine. it will be a wondrous Christmas for everyone," and softly he kissed the top of her head.

When Catherine raised her face to look at Vincent, the love in her eyes was unmistakable, everything about him was familiar and so dear to her. Deep in his soul Vincent accepted what he saw in her eyes. Gently he wrapped her inside the warmth of his cloak and bent his head to kiss her tenderly, savouring the joy of the intimacy that was theirs alone, and always would be. Slowly Catherine leaned back in Vincent's arms so that she could see the expression on his face.

"Vincent," she began tentatively, "I've moved my things out of the Guest Chamber....." She stopped because she had noticed a smile playing around the corners of his unique mouth. "You already knew....." she gasped.

Vincent took her hands in his and kissed them, "Of course! Did you think for one moment that I wouldn't sense what you've been planning for me, after all my love, you said it would be a wondrous Christmas for everyone!" Catherine dropped her head on Vincent's chest, for once in her life, she was lost for words.

Vincent's great shoulders started to shake, and his laughter was a joy to hear. He held Catherine at arm's length and then whispered, "Mind you, it did help when I found your clothes hanging in my wardrobe and your overnight bag underneath the bed. What was I supposed to think?"

Catherine grabbed a handful of his mane and pulled his mouth down towards her. "And it's what you want too, you're absolutely sure?"

Vincent growled playfully. "Absolutely! Absolutely!"

Kissing him quickly, several times, she took his hand in hers and began to pull him in the direction of the Home Tunnels. "Then lets not wast another minute standing here, let's go home."

Nodding his head vigorously, Vincent swept Catherine up into his arms, repeating over and over again, "Absolutely! Absolutely!"

Catherine's joyous laughter could be heard as they began the long walk back to their secret place, each knowing that for them it would be the most wondrous Christmas of their lives so far.

THE FRIENDLY MIST

GWEN LORD

*" And, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I left the forge,
So the evening mists were rising now,
And in all the broad expanse
of tranquil light they showed to me.
I saw no shadow of another parting from her."*

The approach of evening, after the heat of the day brought with it the final songs of the birds before they laid their head under their wing for sleep. Gone now were the children's happy voices. Now the park belonged to the night, no longer was it safe to walk carefree through it.

In the distance police sirens screamed their way through the early evening traffic while, above the mist, the skyline revealed the stars appearing and the tall giant buildings illuminated by thousands of lights, standing majestically over the city of lost souls.

As Vincent stood underneath one of the walk over bridges, he pulled his cloak more tightly round him, in the vain attempt to keep out the cold, which the mist brought with it. A twig breaking interrupted Vincent's thoughts, bringing him abruptly to a sense of caution. But it was only a squirrel dashing safely to his loved ones. A sigh followed, Vincent felt relief wash over him. No need to dash away or hide.

Silence followed; and Vincent relaxed as he once again waited until finally familiar footsteps sounded and he knew they belonged to his beloved Catherine.

"Vincent" The call at first was soft and quiet "Vincent are you there" an urgency suddenly in her voice.

"I'm here Catherine," he said as he stepped out in front of her. He was a tall, broad, strong man and he was her defender, her love, but most of all her life.

"Vincent, I wasn't sure you would come, this mist is so thick it's a good

job I know my way around".

" I think you would know it blindfolded Catherine, but next time we should meet at your basement".

His arms out begging her to come into them where she would be free from any danger. He loved her with all his heart and soul and knew she loved him back. Swiftly she moved into them and felt their comforting strength.

" There will be no music at the bandstand tonight Vincent, I saw the notice at the park entrance, it said cancelled," she said sadly.

"This makes you sad Catherine?"

"Yes Vincent, sitting with you, just being with you and the music makes me feel good inside, I love it so much."

"Father's having the children for song practice tonight, if you would like we could go there, I am sure Father wouldn't mind us being there."

"Vincent that would be great. I love you so much, I would go anywhere with you."

As they walked they talked of the children and the hard life they had, before coming to the tunnels, now each of them were cared for by loving people.

As they looked back Catherine shivered. The mist was really closing in.

"It's getting much thicker now Vincent, it makes the park look eerie."

" The mist is my friend Catherine, it enables me to walk freely through the city, to come to you."

Finally, as they reached the tunnels, they could hear the sound of children singing, resounding off the tunnel walls. It sounded like the voices of angels.

Taking Catherine's hand in his Vincent guided her through the tunnels to where the music was coming from.

"Catherine" Father's voice sounded genuinely pleased to see her.

"Welcome my dear to our little choral evening."

Vincent and Catherine found a place on the staircase where they sat and cuddled, listening to the beautiful music. They stayed until it was getting late, long after the children had gone to bed.

"Come I will walk you to your basement Catherine, I don't want you to walk through the mist."

Helping her to her feet and into his arms Vincent placed a kiss on the top of her head.

" Oh! Catherine it's always so hard to say goodnight to you."

"It is for me too Vincent."

They clung together, as if it was their last moment together. Then they made their way to the basement.

"I very much enjoyed tonight Vincent. The children sang so beautifully. It was wonderful being with you and your family, I am so glad the mist came down."

"Dearest Catherine, I am so blessed in you."

"It is I who have been blessed Vincent. I am so glad it was you who found me when I was in so much pain. You who saved me and gave me the courage to go on with my life."

" It was so different then my dear Catherine, my life only started when I found you."

For several minutes they clung together; each not wanting to break the spell and pull apart.

Vincent held her face up to him and tenderly kissed her lips.

" It is late Catherine and you should go."

" Yes Vincent, there is always tomorrow, if the mist is still with us, come to me I will be waiting."

And with one last look at the man she loved so very much, Catherine made her way towards the shaft of light and the ladder beyond, to her world Above.

THE PRICE OF LOVE

By Gwen Lord

As darkness fell over Central Park, the eerie damp mist which had lingered all day, came down heavy as a mantle of fog, encasing all in its wake. Such familiar sounds of traffic, people, dogs, aircraft all appeared muffled now. Even the park umps, close by, showed only a dim glow.

The abundance of trees and shrubs which surrounded the tunnel entrance stood motionless and sinister, as they shed their dampness to the ground below in a now steady, drip, drip, drip, onto awaiting autumn leaves which formed a thick carpet everywhere.

Vincent walked tall and proud, still a magnificent figure of a man, for all his advancing years, his thick buck cloak swinging from side to side as his urge strides took him along the half lit tunnels to his favourite park entrance.

These tunnels and chambers deep below ground had been his home for over seventy years now' what an abundance of memories they held for him.

There was father' ah! Dear Father. The man who had brought him up since he was found as a tiny baby, wrapped in rags in the snow, outside St Vincent's Hospital. Right from the start there had been a "bond" between them, you couldn't describe it, but it had been there and Vincent was showered with love and affection. Father was a scholar, a leader of men above, 'til he abandoned that world for ever, J0 years ago, seeking solace in the tunnels below the city he'd loved. He passed on this knowledge to Vincent, taught him everything he knew. When illness plagued Vincent in his childhood, then teenage years, Father nursed him through those dark and dangerous times. Their love was deep

and meaningful, special to both of them, a shining example to all Below.

Then one day - must be twenty years ago now - Father had been taken ill quite suddenly. He and Vincent had been having one of their chats between moves, playing chess, when Father gripped his chest, gave a shudder and quickly sank back into the high leather chair and was gone.

Vincent couldn't believe it at first; it hit him very hard, leaving him a lost and lonely soul. He'd not lost just a father, but also his best friend.

Then there was Elli, dear sweet little Elli, who caught that dreadful plague the Russian sailor had carried with him, when he spent some time Below, after he jumped ship, to find his Anna. Elli had died in Catherine's arms The mere thought of Catherine brought a tear to Vincent's eyes and a sigh from deep within.

Vincent's favourite student, Kipper, was even gone, lost to the abyss, as he slipped one day playing with friends; such a talented boy, what a waste.

He missed all the old familiar faces, but most of all, father's. Vincent was now the father figure "Below", even though everyone called him Vincent, he was the wise one everyone turned to for help, in times of need, guidance with problems, offering love and hope to all.

The responsibility weighed heavy with him, he never took his duty lightly and recently this responsibility weighed heavier than usual. To escape it all, he seemed to drift off more and more into his dream world, where anything was possible, to days that were and could never be again; days that included his own dear Catherine.

As he approached the familiar tunnel entrance he started to slow

down, then carefully arranged his hood over his long grey hair, still speckled with that golden hue which had always been a magical halo.

Mouse was pleased to see the approaching entrance. When Vincent always slowed down, it gave him time to catch his breath, because even though Vincent's pace was slower these days, his long legs kept Mouse on his toes to keep up with him.

It was on days like these that the leg injury Vincent sustained so many years ago, gave him much pain and because of this, he had taken to using father's old silver capped walking stick. It certainly helped and felt good in his strong furry hands. The intricate pattern on the silver had long since worn away but the outline of J.W. could still be seen in good light.

"Don't stay too long, not good." The words sounded miles away, swallowed up in the mist. A tug on his arm brought Vincent back sharply. "Not long Above, not good, hurry back," Mouse scolded.

Vincent put his head to one side, as he looked down at Mouse, now a chubby middle aged man; always a true and loyal friend, very dear to his heart.

"I promise," he said in a voice of deep velvet.

"Okay good, okay fine," replied Mouse with a cheeky grin; then like his namesake, scurried off back down the tunnels to Jamie.

They both took turns each evening, to accompany Vincent from below to the tunnel entrance; it helped to pass the time from Below to Above, which was quite a distance, but it also gave them time to reminisce on happenings of the day.

How well he remembered the day Mouse and Jamie married, the simple little ceremony in the tiny candle-lit cave, when Father had

proudly given Jamie to Mouse. Vincent had been best man, holder of the gold wedding band Mouse had so lovingly made.

The children had practised for weeks on end their music for the celebration that followed, in the great Hall. Even the old tapestries had been removed and cleaned by Mary and helpers in readiness for the great occasion.

Vincent, Pascal and William had rehung them when they were ready and they truly looked magnificent. As Vincent inspected them he stopped in front of one tapestry, letting out a deep sigh as he remembered. It had been the first Winterfest that Catherine had joined them for their celebrations; he had taken such pleasure in accompanying her around the Great Hall. This particular tapestry had taken her eye, so Vincent had explained to her, that as a boy, he would stare at this tapestry and imagine there were windows in it that would open and transport him to another world, then he would see it was only cloth and a dream. Catherine through their bond, had sensed how deeply it had hurt as they shared that moment. A tear rolled down his cheek and dripped onto his arm, but he never noticed it.

Vincent sighed, then taking a deep breath, slowly emerged into the awesome night. His determined steps were set in one, well worn direction, down past the carousel, along by the edge of the lake, then slightly downwards to the further-most corner of the local graveyard. Here, beneath the old large trees, surrounded by thick rhododendron bushes, was his Catherine. Quickly and silently he opened the small iron gate, then closing it behind him he advanced to the left a few steps. There in front of him he could just make out the headstone.

Putting the walking stick on the ground, Vincent opened his cloak, then reaching into the deep pocket, brought out the worn old torch. He pressed the button, letting a shaft of light illuminate the words inscribed upon it.

To my beloved Catherine,

Vincent.

Dec 23rd 1990

Could it really be 43 years since ... A tear rolled down his now wrinkled lean features. He brushed it away with the back of his furry hand, but another and another followed, escaping down his face. He dropped his head as his shoulders lurched forward, deep sobs shook his heartbroken body. Time had never healed this wound!

Oh that it could have been so different!

A few months after her father died, Catherine had moved down Below, spending every evening and each weekend with Vincent, but she still kept her apartment to use in the daytime, to entertain friends and to keep up appearances.

Father didn't approve of all this and was heard muttering to himself on the subject, but on the whole had accepted the situation and he was very fond of Catherine, also grateful for offering his son a dream he never believed possible.

Vincent knelt down to caress the stone, saying deeply and softly, "Catherine, oh Catherine."

His hand reached up to the leather pouch around his neck still holding the rose she'd given him on their first anniversary. He stroked the pouch, but tonight it offered no comfort! Tonight it tore his heart apart and he let out a full-blown roar, then sobs of

heartbreak followed.

The beam of light from the torch showed his wet face, as he spoke.

"Catherine, I'm so lonely without you, why did you leave me behind?"

It had been a few days before Christmas. Work in the DA's office was winding up for the annual break. Joe and Moreno were making plans for the office party the following day.

Cathy asked Joe if she could leave early; some last minute shopping to do. Joe teased her, saying she need not spend all her fortune on him, some small token would do just as well, then with a smile, she gathered her coat and bags together, quickly disappearing through the door.

The chill air took her by surprise as she left the office block. It was snowing very hard the sidewalks were deep in snow, traffic was crawling, but everywhere was a lovely feeling of Christmas.

Shops and sidewalks were crowded so she decided to pop into 'Limes' the big exclusive store Daddy had part owned before his death.

At the entrance the doorman had touched his hat as he recognised her, opening the door for her.

"Merry Christmas, Ted." she said, as she joined the other shoppers. Her list told her she needed seven small gifts, two large ones and something extra special for Vincent.

She left Vincent's 'til the last so she could spend more time on it, to get just the right item. It wasn't easy to find just the right thing, but at last she found it.

A leather bound book containing poetry by T. S. Eliot. The panes were in parchment, the words in script, it was expensive and perfect.

Her arms full of assorted parcels, she made to leave "Limes". The doorman called her a cab, wished her a Merry Christmas, then closing the cab door, turned and hurried back out of the blizzard into the doorway of the store.

After a few moments the windscreen wipers stopped. They couldn't cope with the blizzard, so the taxi pulled over and stopped.

As Catherine peered out of the window, there was an awful crash as the huge tanker ploughed into the taxi; all went black.

When Catherine came round she couldn't see very well, everything was blurred but she knew she was in hospital, connected to tubes and pipes and monitors. She drifted off again.

When she finally did waken to see things clear, it was dark outside, with a clock striking midnight, she turned her head.

"Oh Vincent ... you are really here?"

"I'm here, rest now," he laid his large hand over hers and she squeezed it so gently. Vincent looked down at her and he knew she was slipping away from him, she was leaving him. He leaned across her face, gently placing a kiss on her lips, she responded to the kiss whispering:

"I love you."

"I love you also."

Then Vincent felt the bond leave him, and knew he was alone.

"No! No!" he cried. His head sunk forward, resting on Catherine's shoulder, as he sobbed and sobbed.

*

When Vincent at last made to stand up, he was quite amazed just how cold and wet he was, yet it hadn't been raining. He must have been here hours, reliving his dreams.

Standing upright once more, he reached for his stick, then whispered "Goodnight, my love."

Then turning, left the graveyard.

It seemed such a long way back to the tunnels tonight, his steps were heavy and they dragged, when suddenly a figure appeared before him, which startled him, he growled.

"Vincent, scared me. Out too long. Not good."

Recognising it was Mouse, he spoke. "Sorry Mouse, I lost sense of time."

"Look wet, cold. Not good."

"You worry too much about me. I have my cloak, I am all right, I just need a warm drink of soup."

Mouse smiled, then put his arm through Vincent's and together they headed off for the tunnel. Mouse was pleased Vincent didn't walk so fast now, but he didn't realise it was because Vincent felt tired and old and lonely.

Jamie came to meet them, with a scowl.

"Oh Vincent, why were you so long. On a night like this, you'll be ill and then what will we do? Here, have this bowl of chicken broth."

Taking off his cloak he said. "Thank you Jamie you spoil me. I'm very grateful to you all."

Then the three settled down to talk and eat, enjoying each others company.

Much later, when the candles had burned low in the holders, Vincent got up, wished Mouse and Jamie goodnight, then slowly walked down to his chamber, close by.

For a while he sat on the edge of his bed, looking round his room, taking in the familiar things. His eyes came to rest on the large portrait hanging near his bed. It was of him and Catherine, that Kristopher Gentian had done of them. He got up and went over to it, leaning forward, stroked the canvas and sighed deeply.

Once in bed, sleep didn't come easy. He tossed and turned, falling at last into a troubled sleep from which, more than once, he awoke in a cold sweat, growling.

Hearing all the noise, Mouse lit a torch, following the noise, 'til he entered Vincent's chamber. Cautiously Mouse went up to Vincent, holding the torch high. He could see Vincent wasn't well. Sweat covered his face, he was pale, even his hair was wet with sweat.

Mouse turned and was just about to go for Jamie when Vincent's hand took hold of Mouse's arm.

"Vincent, you awake now, okay good, okay fine."

"Mouse," Vincent whispered. "My dear friend, I'm going to miss you ... I want you to promise me something."

"Anything," said Mouse.

"I want you to take my place when I'm gone. They love you and respect you. I want you to be head of this family, once I'm no longer with you."

"But ... b-"

"No buts, promise me."

"I promise."

Vincent put his hand in Mouse's and both men exchanged a smile of understanding. As Mouse let go of Vincent's hand he noticed it flopped onto the bedding.

"No ... no no, oh no Vincent!" cried Mouse.

*

"Catherine, is that really you?" Vincent asked, as his eyes made out the shape of his beloved in front of him.

He could see her clearly now, she was smiling and holding out her hand to him, quickly he dashed towards her, sweeping her into his arms.

"Oh Catherine!"

"Vincent, I've waited so long for you, but I never gave up hope. I had to see it through. You always told me to face up to my fears. I had a good teacher. I love you so much."

Suddenly, Vincent's lips covered hers, sending them into a world of their own, a world at last, they could share together.

"Come," she said, holding out her hand. He slipped his in hers as they gazed lovingly at each other. "There is someone else who's waiting for you, over here, look, Vincent..."

"Father."

"Yes Vincent, come along. We'll be late, everyone's waiting to see you."

Father led the way, with Vincent and Catherine following. Catherine brought her free hand up, which was holding a leather bound book of poems by T. S. Eliot.

"I never did get to give you this," she murmured.

"I love you."

"And I you, for all eternity."

THE UNSEEN VISITOR

By Gwen Lord

Looking out across the city as it slept, Cathy smiled as she thought fondly of Vincent, making his way home, after spending the last four hours together. The time they shared was so very special to them both, but why oh why did it have to pass so fast, as though even the gods were against them, speeding time up to cheat them even more!

As Vincent made his way home along the familiar tunnels, his cloak swinging from side to side in a rhythmic way, he sensed yet again, Catherine's deep sadness, now that he'd left her. He sensed her need, her longing and he had to shut it out of his mind before it drove him mad, knowing the reason for her sadness was him. It now haunted his very soul. He started to walk faster and faster, until finally he was running blindly down the familiar passages.

At last he arrived breathless in his chamber, then leaning against the rough stone walls, he put back his head, letting out a fearful roar, which ended in a sob, from his breaking heart. How could he go on like this, knowing the sadness he caused her ... and himself?

Her pain was his pain. Something had to be done, but what? A solution had to be found, before there was nothing left for either of them to share.

*

With a sigh that matched her heavy heart, Catherine turned and entered her bedroom, closing the door behind her. Its click as it shut, sent a shudder through her, it was as if she was shutting 'him' out, when all she wanted, was to have 'him' share every single moment, of every single day ... and night!

Her steps dragged as she made her way to her inviting bed, the peach coloured silk sheets already turned back. Slipping out of her robe, she let it fall silently to the floor in a heap then, climbed into bed.

She lay for a while with the bedside lamp on, but soon her eyelids became heavy, so she put out her hand to switch it off.

She almost knocked the lamp to the floor as she felt something touch her hand but, looking round the room she decided she must be over tired and in need of sleep.

Now in the first hint of early dawn, she lay looking longingly at the balcony doors, hoping to see his shadow appear. A tear spilled over her warm eyes and ran down her lovely cheeks. Why? Why, is it so impossible?

Cathy suddenly felt she was not alone. Panic froze her to the bed, her mouth went dry with fear, as she felt this awesome feeling enveloping her. She tried to gaze into the half lit room of shadows, caused by the moonlight filtering through the doors. There was no one there!

A hand touched her shoulder, she spun round.

"Aha a!" She jumped bold upright in one movement. "Who are you? Where are you? What do you want?" Shaking with fear, she leaned forward and fumbled for the light, switching it back on.

Shaking her head in utter disbelief, she took in the entire room ... She was totally alone! How could this be?

"Hmmm, very strange," she mumbled, then turning out the light once more, tried in vain to settle to sleep in the short time left before morning.

Catherine must have fallen asleep, because she didn't stir until she was awakened by the persistent ringing of the alarm.

Stretching across to press the button to silence it, Catherine felt restraining arms holding her ... ever so lightly. But still being sleepy, she dismissed it without much more thought.

Cathy lay a few moments on her side, gazing still at the balcony doors and felt the powerful arms tighten their hold on her. Without thinking, she nestled up close, it felt so good. Then a sigh escaped her lips; soft feather kisses touched her shoulders, lips nuzzled her neck, the scent of musk tantalized her senses.

Then ... she realised it wasn't a dream, she was awake, so turning within the embrace, she saw...

"...Damn." She was alone! "What's happening to me?" she spoke aloud to the empty room. "I'm coming apart. I know I wasn't dreaming, I know it!"

Looking around for clues to help her solve this mystery, her eyes came to rest on the pillow next to hers. She couldn't believe what she saw; a deep indentation of where a head had been!

Leaning over, she ran her hand ever so gently over the pillow, then leaning down, she was sure she could smell musk, the scent she associated with, Vincent!

A gasp of disbelief escaped her lips. How could this be? Running her hands through her hair, she anchored it behind her ears then, pulling back the covers, she climbed out of bed. Stretching and yawning, she made her way to the bathroom.

Cathy put on the light, turned on the shower, then started to remove her nightdress, when her eyes caught an unfamiliar sight.

There, on the top of the neat pile of fluffy blue towels on the stand, was a single stemmed red rose!

*

The work load was endless in the DA's office; Joe was away at a wedding and wouldn't be in until tomorrow. Escobar was off sick, so the workload landed on her desk in a never ending stream. Of course the interns were a godsend, but as 5pm approached, Cathy decided nothing on earth would keep her longer than necessary in the office.

The hustle and bustle of the journey home in the rush hour had its usual nightmares, but at long last it was over, and she was in the parking lot, locking the car up for the night.

The lift was empty, and took her quickly to the 18th floor. The apartment door clicked shut, as she pushed her bottom against it, then throwing her purse, coat and shopping in a heap on the couch, she almost ran to the balcony doors, flinging them open.

The noise of the traffic below and the lights of the skyscrapers in front of her, with their glittering cascade of colours offered her a safe haven. This balcony was theirs; hers and Vincent's. It was the only part of her world they could share totally together; she needed its welcome home.

As she stood, arms folded, taking it all in, Cathy felt two arms slip around her waist.

"Oh Vincent," she sighed. "I'm so glad you're early, I really needed you to hold me." Then pushing back, even deeper into his embrace, she could feel the strength of his body pressed against hers.

His kisses teased her hair, her neck; his arms tightened around her. Desire and longing started to mount inside her. Turning within

his embrace, eyes closed, Cathy tilted her head upwards for a kiss. His lips sought hers and claimed them. Cathy felt she had died and gone to heaven, she felt so happy.

Opening her eyes to gaze into his lovely blue ones, Cathy caught her breath ... she was alone! ... Again!

"What's happening to me?" she sobbed, tears now running down her face.

After a leisurely TV meal, a shower, then a read, Cathy now waited impatiently for Vincent. He wasn't due until midnight. The clock on the mantelpiece said two minutes to go. She tapped her fingers on the closed book of poems.

Almost to the second, the familiar tap, tap, tap interrupted her thoughts. Getting up quickly from the couch, she made her way to the balcony. Vincent stood in all his splendour, like a warrior, a god, with arms out stretched for her, his hair and cloak moving in the gentle breeze. She rushed into his embrace.

"Oh Vincent, Vincent, I'm so glad to see you. Time has gone so slow tonight, I was impatient to see you." She tightened her grip on him, snuggling her kisses into his neck.

"I didn't return with Pascal and Mouse until nearly ten o'clock. There was flooding in the lower tunnels, we had to divert the water. Then on my return I had to wash and change. You sound troubled Catherine, what weighs so heavy with you?"

"The strangest things have been happening to me, Vincent," she spoke almost to herself.

"Tell me."

"It's the damndest thing. I feel your arms around me. I feel your

embrace, I feel your kisses ... but you're not there! There was even the indentation of your head on the other pillow next to mine, Vincent. It always happens when I'm alone and need you so ... and suddenly you're there."

"You're dreaming, Catherine."

"NO, Vincent, I'm not dreaming. It happens when I'm awake." Catherine looked all frustrated as she tried to explain the incredible phenomenon to him.

"Perhaps, Catherine, you're over wrought. Why don't you have some time off work, allow yourself time to relax and unwind?" Putting his head to one side, Vincent studied her intently.

"I think that's a good idea, Vincent. I do have leave due me, I'll tell Joe. In fact, I'll ring him now," she said impishly.

"Catherine, the time, it's very late. Shouldn't you wait until morning?" he tried to reason with her.

"Nope, I'll do it now. I need to get my own back on Joe, he's always teasing me," she laughed, then quickly disappeared into the bedroom to use the phone.

Vincent waited on the balcony, he could hear her lovely, happy voice. It gave him great pleasure; her happiness radiated to him, he felt so blessed to know she was his and his alone. He sighed deeply with contentment

"That's fixed that. Joe's given me the week off. I feel better already and we'll be able to be together longer." Smiling, she let her hands encircle his waist, then lifted her head, waited with eyes shut, for the kiss she knew he'd give her.

The rest of what was left of their time together was spent sat on the huge pile of cushions and rugs, snuggled up close, with a traveling rug across them, chatting, laughing and loving, on their balcony.

As the first signs of dawn appeared on the horizon, Vincent hugged and kissed Catherine, then taking his leave, vanished the way he'd come, silently down the building.

It was noon when Catherine finally woke, her room was bathed in light. She blinked at the brightness, stretched and yawned, then lay on her back, contemplating her day of leisure and unwinding.

All of a sudden, she felt the bed on the other side go down. She turned her head in the direction of it, but her eyes were shut tight from fear. Then first one eye, then the other opened, to take in the scene. The bedding was moving, then she saw the indentation appear in the pillow. Cathy's eyes stared in disbelief. She reached down to grab the bedding to her, but unseen hands gently pulled it away from her, where it fell on to her lap in a heap.

"What do you want? Who are you? What do you want with me? Don't hurt me, please," her voice was trembling with fear.

There was no reply, but she now felt two hands on her shoulders, pushing her down against the pillow. Then she could feel a breath on her face; her senses were reeling. Lips found hers, oh, oh! Such unleashed passion. What love, what bliss, leaving her breathless ... Then it was gone and she was once more ... alone!

Catherine took a picnic, close to the tunnel entrance. It was so peaceful; little birds hopped close by, picking up the crumbs. The water on the lake lapped; it was all so perfect ... If only Vincent could share it with her, in the sunlight. She sighed.

"Oh Vincent, I wish, I wish you could share this with me, my love."

*

Over the next few days, Cathy was aware of this unseen person more and more; it's presence was with her through all the daylight hours, only leaving her as Vincent appeared. She was no longer afraid of it; she senses it meant her no harm. In fact, it truly adored her, sending her into a realm of ecstasy, with longing and desire, aimed at pleasing her. She felt quite guilty at the pleasure she experienced, she hoped Vincent wouldn't feel jealous, sensing it all through their bond.

The day before Cathy was due to return to work, it was late evening, the phone rang. She was already sat cross-legged on the couch, so leaning over, picked up the pale blue phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi Joe, what's this, checking up I'll be in tomorrow, my number one tormentor," she giggled.

"No Radcliffe, you're wrong. I just wondered if I could may be get you to come and join me over a takeaway, or something."

"Thanks Joe, but I don't feel like going out, then later on I have someone coming." Cathy could feel Joe's sadness over the phone.

"Oh come on Cathy," he pleaded.

"But we could talk ... Talk to me, Joe. Fill me in on all the gossip I've been missing," she begged.

They chatted away, none stop for ages, then suddenly, Cathy felt a hand stroke her hair ...she jumped, a panicked sound escaped her lips.

"Are you okay, Radcliffe?" Joe asked, puzzled at the sudden change in her voice. "Yeah, I thought ... I saw a spider," she lied.

Then the hands started to massage her shoulders, lips kissed her hair, a shudder ran through her whole body. Cathy moaned.

"Are you really okay, Radcliffe?"

"Course I am, Joe," she said dreamily.

Now the hands crept round her tiny waist, holding her tight, lips pressed into her neck, planting butterfly kisses everywhere. Putting her hand over the mouthpiece, she said, "Please don't go, don't leave."

"Radcliffe ... Cathy ... earth calling, do you read me ... anyone there? Did I call at a bad time? You should have said, see you tomorrow," he sniggered.

"Bye, Joe," was all Cathy could manage.

Putting down the phone, she closed her eyes, allowing the caressing to continue without hindrance, drinking in the raptures he was bringing her.

"If I open my eyes, you'll be gone. I don't want you to go, so I'll keep them tight shut," she promised.

Catherine felt the couch go down as he sat beside her, taking her hands in his. She could feel, yet again the claws, the tell tale sign of her mystery lover. His lips covered hers, his rough stubble brushed her cheeks, his hands weaving their way up and down her back. She couldn't resist any longer.

Slowly she opened her eyes. There, sat on her couch, making

love to her, was Vincent. He looked magnificent and he took her breath away completely.

Throwing her arms around his neck, she hugged and kissed him.

"Vincent ... why? ... How?"

'Ssh, my love. I'm here," his velvet voice stopped her questions.

"But ... explain it to me, please."

"Catherine, we both wanted to be together so much, our longing and desire was so intense, that our bond opened up, allowing our longing and desire to break through, showing us the way, letting us know, that with love, all things are possible."

"Vincent, dreams do come true. My heart wanted this so much. I love you, I love you.

"And I you, Catherine ... for always.

Then taking her in his arms, kissed her with a new passion, a new desire. From this night on they would truly be together.

The End

COME TO ME

By Katrina Relf

Come to me whilst I sleep
And let me dream of thee,
To dream a dream that we can keep,
Of a life that can never be.

Come to me, bring thy strength,
And thy gentleness too,
Enfold me, fill me with thy love,
I have no hope but you.

Come to me, share my love,
And help me dream the dream
Of things that are, of things that aren't
Of things that might have been.

Come to me, Vincent, stay,
Forever be with me,
If love can make a dream come true,
I'll live my life with thee.

THE VALENTINE GIFT

GWEN LORD

They sat as always, on fat squashy cushions that invited you to sit on them. A thick-fringed rug draped over their legs as they leaned against the balcony wall. They felt so relaxed as only those in love know how. Vincent's cloak embraced them both, keeping out the chill in the night air, they were certainly very cozy.

"What are you thinking, Vincent?" Catherine asked dreamily.

"How blessed I am."

"Me too," she whispered.

"Those city lights out there, I know everything about them, once that was my life, the high spot at the end of each day; to climb onto this roof, and imagine I was a part of it all."

"But you are, Vincent," she hugged him, her hand on his left arm.

"For most of my life I lived in fear of being seen, of being captured. Not for me to date and have a girlfriend, not ever to ride a motorbike, go to the cinema, or even a boxing match. It has always been hard to accept."

"Yes, Vincent, it has, but what you missed as a lad made you the man you are now, it also made you stronger."

"Yes, but look at me Catherine, all those things I missed in my youth haven't gone away, it hasn't changed my adult life..... until you came into my life and opened doors, and possibilities became a reality, that is why Catherine I am so blessed."

"You know, Vincent, if it were possible to have you change, become as other men I would beg you not to do it." There was a

look of determination on her face as she continued. "To me, you are superior to all other men."

"No, Catherine."

"Yes, Vincent," she stressed.

"No----I'm not," he sighed.

"How can you say that? Take a good look at my father. Ever since my mother died when I was ten, he has been channelling my way of life, so I would find his perfect idea of a husband, live in a fine house, servants, many cars, etc. etc. I could go on and on. I didn't know what I wanted. I had everything any girl would want, but there was always something out there that I knew I had to find." She ran her fingers along his cheek and her finger outlined his bottom lip. Tenderly she kissed him.

"I found all my hearts desire in you, you were what I was looking for even though our paths crossed in such a painful memory, I still bless the day you found me." Vincent loved her kisses and was eager to demand more.

"This life I lead now, Vincent, is my choice, the world Above holds no glamour for me. Everything I ever want in this life is here with you, holding me in your arms, loving me as I love you. I have wealth beyond dreams."

"I once read, Catherine, something in a book Father gave me. It said: 'A friend is a present you give yourself,' I think it was by Robert Louis Stevenson. You are that friend, Catherine, I gave myself that special gift----of you."

"Oh Vincent, you are such a hopeless romantic."

"Do you think there is any hope for me?" he teased.

"No, I think you are lost to all sensibility," she teased back. "Oh listen, Vincent, the clock tower, it is chiming midnight..... it's Valentine's Day."

"Yes, so now we must hold our once-a-year ceremony." Both dug into their pockets and pulled out an identical small box. Opening the lids, the contents lay nestled in velvet. It had been a few years now, since Mouse had found a crystal taht looked almost like a heart. This was a special crystal and Mouse had said 'It's for Catherine', but Vincent had taken it to Kanin and had him cut it in half. Mary had two boxes that were alike and he had put one half of the heart in each box. Then, when it was Valentine's Day, Vincent gave Catherine her half of the heart and they agreed that each Valentine's Day they would exchange hearts.

As they stood there holding one another, their crystal hearts held tight in the palm of their hands, they vowed that their love would last forever. They had no need for wealth or fancy gifts. They had each other and that's all that mattered. Another day was leaving, and another dawning. This was their world, this was their day, their love.

THE WALL PAINTING

GWEN LORD

As the evening mist made its way slowly across Central Park, its fingers seemed to stretch out and reach into every unseen corner of this very, special place. Soon, all the areas linked together, giving the park a strange and eerie feel, with its shoulder-high grey dampness that swirled everywhere. Above it, the sky was in sharp contrast, with its ever darkening sky and pockets of light, as the moon slipped in and out of passing clouds and then, the stars started to appear one by one.

By day, the park was a Mecca for so much of an ever changing galaxy of interest to the regular faces of the dog walkers, the children, the lovers, the office workers, the nannies with their charges and the down and outs from Cardboard City.

Then, as darkness slowly fell, one by one, the dogs, children, lovers, office workers, nannies and their charges, all exited the park, to be replaced by the seedy side of New York life, which made the park a very different and unsafe place to be, with killings, muggings, rape and fights. Nobody would ever willingly enter the park alone, even the policemen patrolled in pairs, either on horseback or on motorcycles and were armed.

The noise of the busy streets close by, with their hooting horns and sirens from police cars as well as ambulances, now pierced the air, punctuating the silence. Even the carousel was boarded up now in order to keep the beautiful carousel horses safe until daylight, and another day for children to ride the colourful horses. The carousel had been a gift to the park by the city's Mayor at the turn of the century, with the understanding that at dusk each day, shutters were to be locked in place until the night had passed by.

Yet to any regular tramp or bag lady who scoured the trash cans in Central Park, full from the day, the sight of a lone woman walking through the park didn't raise an eyebrow and wasn't thought strange, as she was accepted, like them; a regular to the night at the park at this time. Here, curiosity went hand in glove with indifference. She came and went like a pendulum and in this park that meant she had to be capable to dealing with anything that came her way. So, over the months, nobody even noticed her anymore, as she slipped into the darkness or into the mist of tonight.

Far below the park, the dampness and chill of the evening Above, had started to penetrate even these deep tunnels, causing Catherine to pull her coat collar up close to her face and tighten the scarf draped over her shoulders.

Catherine's steps took her with confidence down first one ill-lit tunnel to another, all the while going deeper and lower into a world apart from her own, Above. At intervals along the stone walls, torches flickered and blinked in holders made by those living Below, their contribution for the right to share a life in this underworld. None were of the same design, but the function they performed was vital, to light the way to the home chambers; their safe place which had to be a secret place. Catherine had no fear of the park at night, or the tunnels, because she knew the bond she shared with Vincent kept her safe.

The further down she went, the colder it became, and every now and again she met friends on their way out, like Mouse, who was now just a few yards in front of her.

"Catherine, dark, scary.....Vincent's near, no need to worry," Mouse smiled, as he scurried away like his namesake, to

scavenge Above, to visit the alleys and rummage the trash cans.

Soon the tappings on the pipes broke the eerie silence, as messages were transmitted to those living Below. It was a form of Morse code, which Paracelsus and Father had worked on together, so many years ago, in an attempt to create a place of safety for those who the world rejected Above, and when Below was a vital cog in their clockwork life to create a home, a safe place, to heal and then, prepare to return to one day. But there was no return for Vincent, Father's adopted son, who had been found outside St. Vincent's Hospital, over thirty years ago, newly born and abandoned in a cardboard box because of his differences. A kindly soul, Anna Pater, Paracelsus' wife had found him as she went Above that night and brought him Below. He grew up in this twilight world and, apart from his night visits to the world Above, Vincent was a prisoner in his home Below.

The pipes clanged their messages almost non-stop, passing news, warnings, creating a feeling of safety. Catherine could understand the tappings now; knew they were telling Vincent that she was now Below and heading towards his chamber.

Her brisk steps caused little pockets of dust lying on the tunnel floor to spiral upwards, then descend again, covering up all traces of her footprints, like a criminal covering up his tracks, which Catherine knew much about, as a corporate lawyer in the D.A.'s office, working alongside Joe Maxwell, her boss, who wore his heart on his sleeve where 'Radcliffe' was concerned.

Round the next corner found Vincent, waiting for her. His huge cloaked frame made an impressive sight as he peeled himself off the tunnel wall, where he'd been waiting for her. The torch light behind him made his silhouette awesome, but the Catherine, his

arms were her anchor, his love her one desire. He was her life.

"Vincent.....oh, Vincent, I came as soon as I got your message. What is it, tell me.....are you unwell?" she asked, her voice full of concern.

"Thank you, Catherine, I am well; just eager to show you something," his gentle velvet voice whispered in her ear as he kissed her tenderly.

"Well, I'm here now," she challenged.

"Yes.....come," he said as he took her small hand in his large hairy clawed one, and together the love they shared was obvious in their steps; just two hearts beating as one, as they went further and further down.

"Where are you taking me, Vincent?"

"Somewhere you have never been and much further than the farthest chamber."

"To Narcissa's chamber?" she asked.

"No, it's in the other direction," Vincent told her.

"You have me puzzled."

"We can rest in a while. I have been there earlier today and prepared a place we can rest at, with a rug to sit on, and food and drink prepared by William. Pascal sent a message on the pipes, and one of Ching's boys took some twigs and small wood cuttings so we can light a small fire," Vincent told her excitedly.

"You seem to have thought of everything, Vincent. Does Father know about all this?" she asked.

"It was Father's idea, Catherine, so we have his blessing on this trip."

"I didn't realize anyone lived this far down, Vincent."

"There are hundreds of people in these tunnels, Catherine, but we only preside over our area. In order to bring you here safely, we had to contact Helpers from Queens and Brooklyn."

"Queens.....wow, Vincent, I had no idea....."

"We know our secret is safe with you, and soon we will be at our place of rest," Vincent's arm tightened around her lovingly.

It wasn't long before the rock shelf they were walking along passed a gentle waterfall and a rainbow, then opened out into an area that Catherine recognized as what Vincent had prepared earlier for them. They spent two happy hours together, until the fire they had made was but a few glowing embers. Vincent had read Catherine some of his favourite sonnets and his voice had gently filled this special place, as Catherine lay curled up with Vincent, one hand holding the book he read from and the other resting on her breast.

"We must go, Catherine. We still have a long walk ahead of us."

"Please tell me where we are going, Vincent?"

"Very well. We are going to visit Elizabeth. I wanted so much to show you her painted tunnels, a true wonder to us all."

"Why does she live so far away from you all.....doesn't she get lonely?"

"Apparently not. She lives for her art, it is her life's work to paint the life we lead, for those who come after us, a sort of painted

history for future generations."

"Oh! That's beautiful, Vincent. Tell me about Elizabeth, the lawyer in me is curious."

"And the woman in you, dearest Catherine, is nagging away at the question, 'why',"

"Well, yes," Catherine confessed.

"Elizabeth came here at the same time as Father.

Grace----Devin's mother-----and Elizabeth were sisters who, when their father died in a car accident, suddenly had nobody in the whole world they could turn to. After spending many weeks eating from trash cans in the local alleyways to survive, Elizabeth got a fever and nearly died. Grace managed to nurse her back to health. She'd found a disused workman's shed down by the river and as that was better than cardboard boxes, Grace soon had it cozy and warm and Elizabeth slowly got well again. Then they left their safe haven and tried to find work, but they were street children, and everyone turned their backs on them. Until old Sam found them one night, took pity on them, and brought them Below. Mitch----his son----was much the same age and the three children became very close in their early years.

"Grace liked to go Above, but Elizabeth preferred to stay behind. Sometimes, to keep boredom away, Elizabeth would draw pictures on the walls with different stones she found Below, and later she would paint them. That's how it all started.....the painting. Elizabeth had a true vocation, a rare and precious gift."

"Vincent, how wonderful."

"When Grace died giving birth to Devin, Elizabeth was heartbroken, and decided to stay in the tunnels forever, never

going Above ever again. She brought the Above, Below, the blue sky, the green grass, painting life as it is up there, down here, for me really. There is a lovely portrait of Father with me when I was eight years old and other paintings depict the future. Elizabeth, like Narcissa, is far seeing."

"I can't wait, Vincent, I can't wait," Catherine cooed, as she hugged him.

It wasn't long before they could see the start of the painted tunnels ahead of them. These were Elizabeth's early work and very typical of a child's art.

Vincent and Catherine stopped and let the lamp Vincent was carrying cast light on her painted walls.

"They are so good, Vincent."

"Yes. She has a rare talent."

"Oh look, Vincent, the one you were telling me about, of Father and you at eight years of age."

As Catherine stopped to appreciate the breath taking likeness, she ran her hand ever so gently over the art, as if to stroke the past with wistful eyes, longing to have been there to see Vincent as a boy.

"Come, let us tell Elizabeth we are here."

"Of course, there's no tapping on the pipes down here, is there?" Catherine smiled.

"No, it is very isolated. Father wishes she'd come nearer the home chambers, but she won't."

"How sad, she must feel so alone."

"Mouse visits her often, and brings her supplies," Vincent reassured her.

"Is that you, child?" Elizabeth's kindly voice inquired.

"Yes, it is, Elizabeth, and I have brought a friend to see you." Vincent stood back to let Catherine come forward.

What Catherine saw was a lovely, gentle old lady, with white curly hair, dressed in flat shoes, thick stockings and a smock type of gown, tied at the neck.

"So, this is the child."

"I'm hardly a child, Elizabeth," she smiled.

"To me, Vincent is still a child and you also. When you're as old as me, everyone seems a child." Her tiny voice and her gentle laugh was like a dozen tinkling bells. "Come, children, let me show you my latest work." And taking Catherine's hand in hers, she led the way, with Vincent close behind.

After a little while, they stopped.

"Hold the lamp up, child," she said to Vincent. "Hold it high and tell me what you see."

Vincent spoke first. "Elizabeth, it is very beautiful and the detail is perfect. Is it meant to be anyone special?"

"Maybe child, I just saw it in my dream and I painted it."

"Isn't it magnificent, Catherine?" His lips were close to her ear, sending a shock wave of emotion through her, as his presence always did.

But Catherine didn't answer him.

"Catherine, are you all right?" Vincent asked.

"Yes, I'm fine," she stammered.

"Tell me, what is it?" Vincent demanded.

"Look at the painting, Vincent, really look at it and tell me what you see."

Vincent looked hard and long. "I see a tall man with dark hair, stood behind a sofa, where a lovely blonde-haired lady sits with a small girl on her knee, and.....and I see.....my toy, the one I found in the park as a child.....the velveteen rabbit. There it is, in your painting, Elizabeth."

"I'm glad you like it, child. We must show the Father. You get him to come visit me, Vincent." Elizabeth came to Catherine's side.

"What is it, child? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"I think I have, Elizabeth. The painting, it's like a photograph of my father, Charles Chandler, and my mother, Caroline. The child is me, wearing my favourite dress and the toy was my favourite toy, all worn and loved, a truly lovely velveteen rabbit, which I.....lost in the park one day."

"And I found," Vincent stammered, amazed at this revelation.

"But Elizabeth, how did you know to get their faces like a photograph? And my favourite dress.....it's uncanny."

"Well, child, I did have a little help, not with the painting, but with the advice about it. He comes to keep me company."

"Who.....Mouse?" Vincent asked in amazement.

"Why no, child. Mouse, it is not. Kristopher is a man, an artist."

"Kristopher Gentian?" Catherine asked nervously.

"Why yes, child, you know him? He is like a willo' the wisp," Elizabeth told them.

"Catherine, remember the warehouse?"

Vincent and Catherine exchanged looks, remembering the painting of them both they had come across, only a few weeks earlier. The oil on the canvas had still been wet. Looking up, Catherine saw in the shadows, Kristopher touch his cap, then blow Catherine a kiss, as he walked into the wall and was gone.

"He'll be back," Elizabeth declared with a smile.

"How do you know that?" Vincent asked.

"Because child, we are working on another wall painting, and this one is not about things past, or things now, but of things to come." She patted Vincent's arm warmly.

"Who's in this picture?" Catherine asked, her voice trembling with pent up anticipation.

"Why, you of course, child, and your children. Yours and Vincent's."

And with that, she left. Vincent and Catherine on their own as she walked ahead, her voice ringing out, like the peel of tinkling bells.

"I'll put the kettle on.....herb tea for three. Come along, children....."

'T WAS A DREAM---OR WAS IT?

GWEN LORD

'Beneath the streets of New York city, there is a place beyond imagination.'

Father could see that as a tiny baby, his beloved Vincent was no ordinary baby. His features were unusual and his genes held an unsolved mystery as to where he came from, how he was the way he was---and why?

As Vincent grew it became clear that a Demon lived within him, that tried to rule his life. Vincent wrestled with his Demon from time to time as problems, worry and fear chipped away at him. It became known as Vincent's 'dark side'. When this happened the battle within Vincent was so consuming, that everyone feared for their gentle giant. The time when he wanted to love Lisa in his teenage years and it was denied him. When Catherine wanted to take him Above to her secret place and this was denied him. There had been other incidents but those were the worst. Now, with Vincent falling in love with Catherine, this also was being denied him, his own Father, on endless occasions, had told him that a life others took for granted could never be his. So Vincent took on the role of protector, to keep his beloved safe. This is the only way he could love Catherine, but the cases she worked on had of late been more and more dangerous, putting Vincent in greater danger as he spent longer Above. Vincent was now dreading that one day she would be taken from him and die before he could reach her.

The straw that finally broke the camel's back came over two months ago. When the roof of one of the caves gave way beneath the weight of water in the ground above them. This was due to

His mind refused to accept a life without her, he blamed himself for the lack of being able to find her in time....she died because he wasn't there for her, just when she needed him. Where was the Bond? Again it had to be his fault, he could no longer sense her fear.....Why? He asked himself over and over again.

"Any change Father?" Catherine asked as she entered this now very familiar hospital chamber. Father looked up from the book he was reading, 'A Tale of Two Cities' and taking off his spectacles he told her kindly.

the years from sales or old book shops. He knew the truth in the saying:

'All books sit and wait until the right person comes along.'

He had read all the good books endlessly over the years, especially while sitting with his son in the times similar to this latest downward spiral in Vincent's other self. Nodding his head in answer to Catherine's question he added again.

"No my dear, but he is moving, restless and keeps murmuring odd words. I have no understanding what they mean.....or why." Closing his book with care he replaced the spectacles and made to get up.

"Don't get up," she pleaded, coming nearer to him. "Please stay.....I need to talk to you."

"Talk Catherine.....what troubles you?"

"I've brought a notebook with me Father, and I plan to write down and record all movement, or progress Vincent has, and yes, those words you speak of Father, that will be a starting point." The old man nodded in agreement.

"Writing things down can help enormously to solve things or understand them better. Maybe we'll start to piece this jigsaw together," he patted her arm, "dear God, I hope so" he smiled sadly.

"These words, what are they?" she asked him.

"Come, sit with me," he pointed to the seat next to him, as a sign he wanted her to join him.

The large leather sofa was a gift from his old friend Dr. Peter

Alcott, who had insisted on it being in this chamber, so Jacob's old bones would appreciate it, sitting as he did, for endless hours, watching over his son.

"These words?" her question hung in the air.

"Well.....as I said, the words were not clear.....mumbled but once in a while it is clear."

"Tell me these words," she urged.

"Book, he clearly said that today."

"Hmmmm."

"Last night he said, 'black', then moments later, 'book', maybe it's one word, 'black-book'?"

"Well, that's two words, so I feel it's an improvement on one," Catherine continued. "Any more?"

"He seems worried about the weather, keeps repeating 'Snow'." Catherine was now busy writing all this down in her notebook.

"Then 'helicopter'. I do not see any link, any connection to any of it."

"It will come to us, I promise. We have to try," she pleaded.

"Pascal swears he said, 'Gabriel' last week."

"Hmmmm."

"Jamie speaks of him mumbling, 'baby'. Who's baby can be so important as to worry him in this state?" Father pointed out in quiet anger.

"Zack said he repeated, 'dead'."

"Well Father, like Alice in Wonderland, it gets stranger and stranger."

"It does indeed, my dear."

Then while all was still, Vincent from the bed spoke clearly.

"My death" and then sighed.



A noise outside the hospital chamber quickly made Father and Catherine look up in surprise, to see the shadow in the doorway materialized into Mary.

"Hello Catherine. Isn't she wonderful to come and sit with Vincent, Jacob? It's wonderful to have you here," she said holding out her arms. Catherine smiled and got up to hug Mary.

"Indeed, we are most grateful my dear," Father told her.

"I've made herb tea for you Jacob and there is enough for you also Catherine. It is on your desk Jacob, so you two go and have some tea. There's some of William's freshly made biscuits, they smell delicious."

"What would we do without you Mary?" Jacob said with feeling. Sitting down, Mary took her knitting out of the bag she had brought with her, and she settled on the side as she proceeded to start to knit.

"Get on with you.....before it gets cold."

"Goodnight Mary," Catherine said with deep respect.

"Goodnight my dear, I thank you."

Catherine took Father's arm once they had passed through the

doorway, and together they walked in agreeable silence until they arrived at Father's chamber. Father went in first and turned up the oil lamp that hung from a peg on the wall. Then he lit more candles as he progressed in the direction of his desk, where the tray of tea and biscuits awaited them. Catherine had remained in the doorway, motionless. Turning in her direction Father looked worried at her not following him.

"Catherine.....something wrong my dear?" he asked.

"No.....no, not wrong. As I waited for you to light the chamber I saw all so clearly how magical a place this is."

"It's a haven, Catherine."

"It is like no other place on earth. Who would ever think such a place could be, down in the bowels of the earth?" she said with deep feeling.

"Took many years, Catherine, to get it to this you see today."

"Did you never feel it would never be finished, such a huge task?"

"No, when you have a dream, Catherine, and you want it with all your heart, then all the knocks along the way are meaningless."

"That's like Vincent and I, isn't it?" she smiled sadly.

"Yes it is. There was a time, I'm now ashamed to admit it, but there was a time when I never thought you would stay. I felt the love Vincent had for you, the love you have for each other would die, and leave Vincent heartbroken. Now I know different,"

"Thank you, Father."

"I learned from Vincent how different your life was to his, how rich you are, how well connected you are, with a father wanting you to

marry well. Then I looked at my son, who could never give you a life. He has no money, no car, no connections, no job, his features require him to live in a shadow world. All he has to give is his heart."

"And that, Father, is the greatest gift of all."

"I know. Come and get your tea before it gets cold," he chided.

"Shall I be Mother?"

"Please do," urged the old man as he eased himself down into his favourite chair.

"Milk?"

"Very little. It takes the taste of the herbs away." Catherine handed him his cup of tea, he thanked her and took the china cup and odd saucer, not a matching set.....but close!

Getting out her notebook once more from her brown leather shoulder bag, Catherine set about trying to decipher the connections between the words she had previously written down.

"Do any of the words mean anything to you, Father? The words that Vincent says, any connection, any idea?"

"I feel like I'm in court, with my powerful attorney," he chuckled. It was a rare sight to see Father smiling these days, thought Catherine.

"Who's Gabriel?"

"Gabriel, hmmm, his name is poison down here. That is one word that Vincent speaks of I do know."

"Really? Tell me," she urged, leaning forward.

"It all started years ago, with a man called Chang. A nasty vindictive Chinese Mafia man, who was head of a group of men dedicated to violence as the only answer to anything."

"I remember, Lin had a prearranged marriage made for her, but she was all ready in love with Henry, the restaurant owner. Yes, it all comes back to me." Her brow furrowed as she remembered Chang's Grandfather's commands. "So what is the connection to Gabriel?"

"Gabriel is Chang's cousin by marriage, his goal is to take over from the Grand Master when he dies. To do this he is out to impress the old man. Then, a few months ago Pascal noticed messages coming from a new area. Vincent, Pascal, Winslow and Zack went to find its source."

"And?"

"With Vincent's extraordinary keen sense of smell, he detected that acid was being stored near the Mirror Pool. One canister with its top left loosely set, was allowing small amounts of acid to drip into our main source of drinking water. This over a period of time would have killed us all."

"How did they know of this place?" she asked.

"Oh, Paracelsus of course, has to be at the core of this. His anger lies at my door. He aims to ruin all I love and hold dear."

"And?"

"He has never forgiven me for banning him from these home tunnels, to the outer tunnel perimeter."

"Tell me.....where can I find this.....Gabriel? I could bring him to justice."

"No my dear, draw attention to our secret place and we would lose everything."

"This black book, it must mean something?"

"I've no idea," Father stroked his beard.

"Maybe it has lists, names from Gabriel?" she smiled hopefully.

"Your book, Catherine, that's black."

"Yes, it's from work, we all have hard back black books. Oh no! Vincent's worried about something to do with my work?"

"Vincent is obsessed, Catherine, with the notion that one day you'll be abducted and the Bond will be broken. It is a nightmare he experiences often in his sleep."

"I had no idea I caused him such pain."

"I know."

"I love him. He is my life."

"And this Bond you share....."

"He told you, didn't he, that only he had this Bond with me? I have no power of knowledge with this Bond. Vincent can sense my danger, yet I cannot sense his dangers," this came out on a sob.

"One day, Catherine, you may both share this Bond equally." She looked at him and tried to smile.

"Until then I promise I'll be more careful, Father."

"We'll come through this, Catherine." She nodded in agreement.

"Years ago I knew Vincent had special powers. Maybe his differences heightened these senses. His deepest dread is that

one day he'll not reach you in time. Your job takes you into great danger, Catherine, and that danger puts your life on the line and Vincent's sanity too."

"What am I to do? I now think Vincent's word of 'death' is because of this."

"It is like a jigsaw," he replied. "What a wonderful lawyer you are."

"So?" she smiled at his compliment. "We have the 'black book', which to Vincent represents my work. The word 'death' is his dread of this happening. Gabriel is his worry of the safety of these home tunnels. Maybe the word 'snow' is also danger for the tunnels, should a heavy fall cut off all you need down here to survive."

"No, we've had major falls in the past, but it has never been a threat. I think the word SNOW is a name, a name that worries him."

Both deep in thought they didn't at first realize Mary had hurried in, all breathless and flustered.

"Jacob! Catherine! Come quickly, Vincent's coming round. Dear God, he's coming back to us! Come, let's make haste and waste no time," Mary said as she led the way back to the hospital chamber.

Entering the chamber they saw Pascal sitting with Vincent, his back to them as they rushed in.

"He's awake!" Father announced as he took Vincent's hand in his.

"Father?" Vincent's voice was rusty with lack of use.

"I'm here," Father assured him.

"Father.....I've lost her.....I've.....lost Catherine!" Tears were now running down his cheeks.

"I'm here, Vincent," Catherine said, keen to reassure him.

"NO!" Vincent boomed, followed by a snarl and a growl.

"Vincent, stop this nonsense at once!" commanded Father.

"Why do I live,.....when my heart's best treasure is dead?"

"Vincent," she said slipping her soft hand over his. "I'm here, you've been ill, lost to us.....for two months!" She tried to hold back two large tears that were forming in her troubled eyes.

"This is a dream.....or is this real.....how can I tell?" He tossed his head madly from side to side. Vincent suddenly tried to sit up and Pascal helped his friend. Father quickly pushed a pillow behind his son's back, as Vincent now sat up. Vincent relaxed into the comfort of the pillow. "How can this be?" Vincent asked quietly.

"Drink some liquid, Vincent," ordered Father. "Then, some food. When you have regained your strength, we will continue this conversation." Winslow, Pascal, Zack and William were summoned to carry Vincent back to his own Chamber, and his familiar surroundings, to try and help him get his muddled memories and dreams into some sort of order.

The first week passed, and into the second week nobody mentioned anything to Vincent about his ramblings, until his strength returned. Now, the mystery had to be unravelled, but how? It was the arrival of Father's friend Dr. Peter Alcott that was the turning point. He suggested Vincent spend time under hypnosis, as this way the whole root of the problem could be

brought out and finally rid Vincent of his demons.

"It's his dark side Peter, like before," he confided.

"No Jacob, not this time. We both know it is not that simple..... don't we?" he urged.

"But who? We cannot reveal our world to a stranger."

"He's my cousin, Jacob, and the soul of discretion. He already knows of this place. Please, let me bring him down here."

"Very well," said Father reluctantly, yet grateful for the help.

"Tomorrow, mid afternoon suit you?"

"Yes.....yes.....thank you, Peter."

"Lets save the thanks for if and when we achieve a positive conclusion."

The following day, Catherine was gentle and encouraging, but Vincent was uneasy near her, like she was a ghost. He remembered how such a person, dressed in white had led him through different places to show him what life without him would be like. Now Vincent saw her as showing him life without his Catherine. So he shunned away from her, so as not to take such a journey with this 'angel' again.

"Vincent, touch my hands, feel my hair.....I'm here," she smiled at her beloved.

"Leave me.....please.....leave me alone," he begged tearfully. Just then Catherine could hear Father approaching with a person who had an unfamiliar voice. Entering Vincent's chamber, Father spoke first.

"Ah, Catherine,.....how's Vincent?"

"The same," she replied sadly.

"May I introduce Dr. Ron Ratcliffe."

"Doctor.....I think we have already met.....in a courtroom, a few months ago?"

"Of course, you are with the DA's Office. I'm very pleased to meet you again." Father begged them all sit down, as Vincent lay on his back, looking at the roof of his chamber. All of them went quiet, Dr. Ratcliffe spoke.

"Vincent, look at me.....no, not like that, really look at me.....
LOOK INTO MY EYES.....tell me what you see."

Father suddenly shifted to the edge of his seat, intrigued at this doctoring. "What's wrong?" Father asked.

"Nothing's wrong, your son is now hypnotized."

"So soon.....are you sure?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Wells."

"Wow!" was all Catherine could say.

"Vincent."

"Yes?"

"That's your name?"

"It is."

"I'm here to help you."

"I know."

"Then, tell me, what troubles you?" Vincent's inner pain was now echoed in his face.

"Vincent, find the words."

"I'll try."

"Tell me the meaning of certain words that I give you."

"Yes."

"Book." There was a pause, a silence almost.

"Black Book, Gabriel, Snow, Death," More silence followed.

"Take your time, Vincent." There was a long pause and then the Doctor continued.

"From the beginning," he urged.

"Catherine, she is my life, we have a Bond, I can feel what she feels, her fears, her joy,.....yet we cannot have a life, truly together. So I protect her.....keep her safe from harm, her works put her in constant danger."

"Good, Vincent, continue."

"Then one night, I waited at our secret place and she never came. The Bond we shared was gone, so I had no idea how to find her. For months I toured the streets, searching for her. Then I found her, as Gabriel moved her further away from me. Again she was lost to me, I felt my life had ended. Then one night I felt a jolt, like a single heartbeat and it came again and again. I got my cloak and ran to find the source of this beat inside me."

"Yes, Vincent, go on," he urged encouragingly.

"It took me to a disused warehouse, not far from here, and I

mounted the flight of stairs. The strange beat inside became stronger and stronger until I felt it explode within me, then peace. Where was I? On a roof, and with a helicopter taking off.....then a voice I recognized said oh so quietly..... 'Vincent', It was Catherine, all white and dying. She told me we had a son and this Gabriel had kidnapped him, then in my arms.....she.....she.....died." A growl erupted, echoing around the chamber. Then when Vincent had gathered himself together he continued.

"I tracked this Gabriel down and his man friend SNOW, finally finding my son, alone in a cot, crying. I instantly knew that the Bond was back, in.....my son." Nobody said a word.

Dr. Ratcliffe clicked his fingers, and Vincent was out of his hypnotic trance.

Nobody said a word, moments lay in the air like rain clouds ready to drop their heavy load. Father coughed.

"Vincent, it is all over now and so very clear to me.....to us all, that those words you kept repeating were a part of your ongoing nightmare, Now, we understand their meaning and significance, and why it was you no longer wanted to live."

"Thank you, Father."

"But, but, my boy, it was only a terrible nightmare, brought on by certain incidents in yourself, when the dark side could see this was his big chance to devour you. He fed you your worse nightmare.....Catherine's death." Vincent looked at his Father and the look on his son's face stunned him as Vincent gave his answer."

"But she did die! Why won't you believe me? In my arms on that

cold and windy roof!"

"No Vincent, she didn't, it was all a dream, with no substance."

"So.....Catherine.....you are real?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"Yes Vincent, I'm truly alive."

"Catherine, oh Catherine!" Suddenly their arms were around each other, and not a dry eye was anywhere in the chamber.

"I think we should leave these two, don't you? They have a lot of catching-up to do and a lot to ponder over," said Father knowingly. Catherine got up and hugged Peter, then Father, and finally shook Dr. Ratcliffe's hand, thanking him warmly.

Finally all had left the chamber, and they were at last alone.

"Catherine, can you forgive me.....? Forgive the dream where I dared to dream and believed it.....possible?"

"Vincent, the fact you had those thoughts in your dream tells me this is what your hearts really wants.....what you long for, as I do."

"But look at me, Catherine, tell me what you truly see?" He waited with baited breath.

"I see the man that I love.....the only man I'll ever truly love."

"You are not afraid.....of me.....to love you as a normal man loves a woman?"

"Why should I be afraid?"

"My heart is yours," this was said with a world of feeling and emotion in his words.

"You said we had a child?"

"Yes, a son.....I called him.....Jacob." They hugged again as if they would never ever let each other go.

"I'm going to take a leave of absence, to come down here and be with you."

"But.....?"

"No buts Vincent, the time for buts is over. This is my desire, my decision."

"I....."

"I love you Vincent, and we can, and will have a life together.....and I also like the name Jacob for our first son."

With that statement, came a look on Vincent's face that no poet or writer could have done justice to. Their Happy Life at last was under way.

'TWIX BRUSH AND CANVAS

GWEN LORD

Frustration filled the air, far below Central Park for the seventh time in as many weeks. The normal calm of their home tunnels and chambers had, quite out of the blue, become a place of raised voices and short tempers as Father prepared to go Above yet again! For over twenty years, Jacob Wells had been happy, by and large, to remain in a sort of self-imposed exile, detaching himself from the world Above from a world which had rejected him and all his plans and hopes. However, of late, the unbelievable had happened. Jacob Wells had ended his exile and gone Above not once, not twice but, including tonight, seven times. Nobody minded Father going Above as he, better than anybody else, knew the dangers if he was caught "up-top." Hadn't he lectured everybody on this very subject frequently yet nobody was prepared for Father, a normally gentle, kind and tolerant man, to suddenly become so irritable, short-tempered and unreasonable. Clearly, there was a great deal on his mind. It was William who made the first move by calling on Pascal in the dank deep places where the pipes came together from all over New York, Manhattan and Queens, to express his concern. So down in his chamber, William asked Pascal to alert everyone through the pipes that there would be a meeting of the senior residents of Below to discuss a matter of great importance. Together the two men talked at length about how changed the head of this community had become since he had taken to wearing his suit, hat and highly polished shoes for his ritual of going Above.

"Do you think he is going to leave us, William?" asked the small, gentle and almost elf-like Pascal as, between words, he listened on the pipes to relate all the messages exchanged across the city

which was the only way the inhabitants of Below could communicate with one another.

"Leave---Father?.....Never, my friend! But I would dearly like, no love, to hear the real reason he had become so....."

"Frustrated."

"Impatient."

"Secretive."

"My feelings entirely," agreed Pascal.

"So we need to hold a meeting to decide what needs to be done," said William, arranging his apron over his ample stomach. Patting it as if agreement had already been reached, William turned to leave.

"Maybe, Mouse and Elizabeth could throw a light on the situation?" Pascal said, looking up briefly from his beloved pipes.

"Elizabeth rarely sees anyone and Mouse---well, Mouse is Mouse and the least said about him and that unruly racoon of his, the better!" he quipped as he stooped to exit the low doorway which Pascal's father had made for his small in stature family, Pascal having inherited the family physique.

"Yes, maybe you are right!" he agreed.

"See you in the Great Hall in, say, twenty minutes and don't forget. You and your pipes, you tend to forget the time."

"I'll be there, I promise."

"You'd better be or I'll.....I'll....."

Pascal smiled. William's laughter echoed round the tunnels as he

went on his way.



The moon made long shadows across Catherine's balcony from the plants, chairs and table which furnished the small, tiled area. Catherine sat on the arm of her "dinky little couch" as Joe lovingly called it, waiting for a different shadow to appear. Almost within a heartbeat, a huge shadow devoured the smaller ones, followed by a familiar face at the window accompanied by a gentle "Tap, tap."

"Vincent," she called with such feeling.

"Catherine," he replied as if the very word conjured up a magic of its own.

Leaving her room, Catherine opened the balcony door and slipped out into the cool, mild, moonlit night. His arms were outstretched, extending the welcome which no-one else could ever give her, as she pressed her small body into that of this huge, gentle giant of a man.

"Oh, Catherine, Catherine.....I live for these moments, they are so measured, but maybe because of that we value them so very much more."

"Yes, Vincent, that is so true. My days are so full, so tiring and so demanding that only when I am in your arms do I find the peace I need," looking up she smiled as Vincent planted a kiss on her hair, then her cheek and finally her waiting lips.

"You smell wonderful, Vincent, what is it?" Catherine asked.

"Something Father has taken to wearing of late, Catherine. I believe it is called 'Brut'."

"So, why are you wearing it? You know I love the fragrances that are you, musty smells, the smells of candlewax and leather." She nuzzled closer.

"I hoped, Catherine.....If I brought this---fragrance to you, then maybe you could help us all unfold a mystery."

"A mystery, Vincent, what mystery?"

"It's Father. He has taken to going Above."

"Above, Father?" her eyes were now wide with surprise.

"Yes, Catherine, Above."

"Do you know why?" she questioned.

"No. All he does is brush his topside clothes and bite our heads off." Vincent released his hold on Catherine and started to pace to and fro across the balcony.

"We *are* talking about Jacob?" she confirmed.

"The very same, Catherine."

"There has to be a perfectly logical explanation for his behaviour. It is not like him and after two years I feel I know him fairly well."

"William called a meeting last night while Father was Above for the seventh time, but we came to no conclusion."

"Have you asked Mary what she thinks, Vincent?" Catherine asked with new and eager hope.

"No, no I haven't, simply because these days Mary is as elusive as Father. She didn't even spare the time to attend William's emergency meeting. It has come to something, Catherine, when the older ones are a worry and the younger ones are trying to

understand it all," he chuckled, revealing his fangs.

"I wish you smiled more often, Vincent, so I could kiss your open lips and your teeth....."

"Please, Catherine.....control yourself," he chided, lovingly.

"Well, if you want my advice, I would ask Mary. She and Father are such old friends and quite close in age."

"Hmmm, hmmm," Vincent agreed, nodding at Catherine's words.

"Thank you for your advice, Catherine, I will go Below now and see what I can find out from Mary."

"Don't go, Vincent, please!"

"Then come with me, Catherine," he urged.

"Right, I will," she agreed.

"See you at the threshold in.....two ticks," and she was off into the bedroom leaving Vincent to make his way down the side of her apartment building and thence to their secret meeting place.

A little later, as they walked along the endless dark tunnels Below, lit only by torches set at various points along the rock face, their feet kicking up the dust which lay in lines down the centre of each tunnel covering their shoes with fine dust.

"Father cleans and cleans his shoes, Catherine," he said as he saw the dust swirling each time they passed a wall torch.

"Well, wherever he is going, he couldn't come this way, Vincent, not to cover clean shoes with this dust!" Catherine snapped back in true courtroon fashion.

"Think about that, Vincent."

"I, therefore, rest my case," Vincent smiled.

Once the old tunnels were behind them, a golden glow shone down each pathway almost like a welcome ray for the weary traveller as the home chambers came into view.

"Is that you, Vincent?" Father's voice was strained.

"It's Catherine and I, Father. Do you wish to speak to us?" Vincent asked as the two of them entered Father's study hand in hand.

"Ah, Catherine, how delightful to see you, my dear," he said as he rose to greet her.

"Are you well, Father?" she inquired.

"Well.....yes, I'm well, thank you." He looked very guilty, Catherine thought, so she continued her line of attack.

"Is that a suit I see hanging up there, Father?"

"Er, well, yes. It is what I wear when I go Above."

"Yes, I do remember when Margaret sent that message to you in the paper and.....sent it to you in a bottle."

"Er, ump.....true, but....."

"You're not getting into trouble again, are you, Father? Last time, Catherine had to pull so many strings for you.....?" Vincent asked.

"No, of course not!" the older man assured them.

"It all seems so mysterious," said Catherine as she sat down in the old over-stuffed and oft-repaired leather chair.

"Nonsense, there's nothing mysterious about it. It's just.....I

have.....things to attend to, and now if you will excuse me, I must get ready."

"Are you going Above tonight, Father? It is raining very hard," Catherine urged.

"When needs must, my dear. Vincent, have you found out who stole my handkerchief?"

"No, Father, and I cannot believe anyone stole it."

"Hrrrrmph!"

"I will help you look for it," Vincent offered.

"That's a good idea, Vincent." Catherine agreed, sounding relieved at the chance to leave the men together for a chat.

"Very well, Catherinem I shall be here when you return. Where are you going?" he asked curiously.

"Don't be nosey, Vincent," she teased as she hurried through the doorway.

"So, Father....." Vincent made an attempt to find out some facts.

"So, Vincent," Father replied as he peered over his spectacles, fixing his glare directly on his son.

"Ah, hrmmmm," he sighed. "Ah....."

"What is the matter with you, Vincent? If you have something to say, then say it!" the older man chided.

"We are.....worried," he stammered.

"Worried, Vincent, about.....me?" he queried as he removed his spectacles and nervously began cleaning them with a newly

laundered handkerchief he had taken from the deep pocket on the inside of his cloak which hung close to his left knee as he sat in his favourite chair.

"You're worried about me, are you? Well, don't be. Nothing to worry about," he said, trying to sound calm.

"I'm afraid there is cause for worry. It is not only me, us, who are worried, Father.....it is all of us here Below. We have noticed a change in you and all this going Above so often after being Below for so long," his voice trailed off as he awaited Father's explanation.

"I'm not in any trouble, Vincent, if that is what you think. Please, let me put your mind, minds at rest on that score," he smiled weakly.

"Then tell me, Father, tell me what is the reason for all this secrecy?"

"Sometimes, Vincent, parents are entitled to have secrets from their children!" he said, putting the grey handkerchief back in his pocket.

"But we are not children, Father, and we appreciate situations."

"Sure, I know that, Vincent."

"Well, then....." Vincent tilted his head slightly to one side in a questioning manner awaiting some response.

"No, Vincent, you have to trust me. You, Catherine, all of you, trust is a two-edged sword and I trust you so you trust me, end of problem."

"Not quite, not quite. Your going Above is acceptable,

understandable even, but your mood swings indicate worry, pressure and uncertainty and we care, we really care, Father," Vincent came and put his arm around Jacob Wells and the father wished that his son would not put him through this as very soon, all would be revealed.....



As the next two weeks came and went, so Father continued his trips Above and he tried hard, so very hard, not to show his unease at going Above.

It was as May eased its way into June that Father stopped going Above and all seemed to return to the normal way of life in the Tunnels, far below Central Park.

Vincent stood on Catherine's balcony looking out at the magical skyline of tall buildings of various shapes silhouetted against the almost inky blackness of the night sky. Some windows within the buildings were lit up on various floors as night cleaners prepared the office blocks for the oncoming day. Vincent exhaled a sigh.

"What is it?" Catherine asked him as she eased her arm around his waist and the two of them looked out at the sight spread before them.

"Your world is so.....beautiful, even without the daylight. I treasure moments like this, it is all so.....at peace."

"I feel it too, you know. My days are so hectic and quite crazy. Then I come home, open my doors and stand here, as we are now, and a peace comes over me. It never used to, before you came into my life, but you showed me how to appreciate all I used to take so much for granted and I will always be grateful for that, Vincent."

"Thank you, Catherine, but you have also made me see things I hadn't noticed before. You opened my eyes to so much, to things I never believed possible, for me, and who I am and what I am....." his head dropped forward as tears sprang into his eyes.

"We found each other, Vincent, we need each other. That is the miracle, truly it is," Catherine turned and kissed Vincent on the cheek.

"Oh, yes," was all he could reply as truly his heart was too full to put into words his completeness.

"I think we should go now, Catherine. I, we, have stayed too long here already. Father will be worried for us if we are much longer."

"Yes, I'll get my coat, Vincent, and see you at my basement in five minutes." With that, Vincent left Catherine's balcony as she closed the balcony doors, picked up her coat, switched off the light and closed the door behind her. She headed for the lift and as she entered it she saw Brian who lived in the building and who Catherine knew had a crush on her. So they chatted away until Brian got out and Catherine continued her descent into the basement of her apartment block.

As Vincent and Catherine walked hand in hand along the dimly-lit and dusty tunnels, Catherine told Vincent of her trip in the lift with Brian and how he was growing into a fine young man. They spoke of the time Brian had followed Catherine Below once and how since then Brian would come Below to see friends and enjoy some of their gatherings. He had been accepted as one of them.

"One day he will be a Helper, I know it," Vincent confided.

"He has a good heart and respects us all."

"Yes, he has a new life, a new family and whenever life Above is too much to bear, it will be a haven, a place to return to as I have found, Vincent."

The sounds of violins playing now familiar music greeted them around the next bend and in the distance the warm amber glow welcomed the lovers home.

"Ah, there you are, Vincent!" his father greeted them warmly.

"Father."

"Come, come, come, hurry. I thought you had forgotten. We agreed a time and it is well past that now."

"Sorry, Father," Catherine interrupted.

"We got carried away with the sights and sounds from my balcony."

"Sights and sounds, you say? Well, come this way for more sights," he spoke almost in a whisper.

"Lead the way, Father, and we shall follow."

As they entered the huge cave and started down the stone steps to descend to the Grand Hall so the winds which escalated down each tunnel met at this point. It was both windy and noisy, so noisy in fact that it was hard to hear anything for the noise of the wind and the dust which was blowing about. It made it hard even to see as they protected their eyes with their hands to help them travel down the steps towards safety. Once at the doors of the Grand Hall, Father knocked and William opened up one door just enough to let the three of them ease through and then he closed it behind them leaving it all behind. Inside, it was almost churchlike in its peacefulness. Everybody was there in this massive Grand

Hall which was used only on special occasions like Winterfest or some other such festivity. Now the violins were stilled and everyone sat waiting.

What's going on, Vincent?" Catherine asked in a whisper.

"I think we are about to find out," Vincent confided as they made their way to the front seats.

"Sit here, both of you, then we can begin," Father said as he lay his cane on the table and leaned against the large, carved table.

"As you know, dear friends, I have been going Above of late, a thing quite unheard of until recently and you have been worried for my safety, knowing there are people up there still looking for me. This had been worrying for me also..... hence my nervous behaviour and I do apologize for worrying you. However, as you can see, all is well. I am back safe and sound and my visits Above are over, which brings me to why I've asked you here today." Heads turned and voices exchanged whispers in a low hum of anticipation and interest.

"Many years ago," he chuckled. "Too many to recall I fear, I found a woman I loved deeply. I saw her briefly one day getting out of a taxi near the Chittenden Research Laboratory where I worked. She was so beautiful, my heart took wings. Every day after that I looked for her but never did I see her until a full year had past and there she was again. I made haste to speak to her, not wanting another year to go by before I saw her again," once more he chuckled and those listening smiled as well.

"We were married three months later. I had never been happier. I had a woman to love, a job I adored but life Above enjoys knocking us as we all know only too well and so my happiness

was short-lived. Margaret's parents were extremely wealthy and disapproved of our marriage and her parents decided to take matters into their own hands and bring about events to end it all. I was, at the time, the head scientist at the Chittenden Research Centre and I was working on papers about nuclear energy. I had been involved in it for many months and when I handed in my findings, Margaret's father was waiting and held an emergency meeting claiming my findings were stolen. The committee had no alternative but to try me in court and I was found guilty of misconduct by the UnAmerican Committee and I was struck off. I was completely innocent but her father had power as well as wealth. I couldn't get work so I could not provide for Margaret and so she left me and went back home. My money soon ran out and I was forced to take to the streets and hence my demise here. However, my partner at the laboratory was a fair man named Louis and even though he had spoken up for me at the tribunal, he was outvoted. He knew I was innocent and he couldn't live with the fact that he had been an unwitting part in it all. Consequently, he also left the laboratory. Some six months ago, a Helper Above got a message to me that Louis was trying to find me and he alerted me to this inquiry. Alarm bells started ringing and I feared for our safety here. What if this man found me? Anyway, I did finally go Above and met him," his eyes lit up with the memory of the meeting.

"It was like turning the clock back over thirty years. He told me that the injustice I had suffered had haunted him day and night and because of it he had given up the work he loved, as I had done, and he took up painting. He had lived a lonely life in a shack near the Bronx, almost like a hermit. Sadly, he only sold enough of his artwork to keep him alive and spent many fruitless and lonely years of rejection. Finally, his art began to earn him money

and one day, whilst clearing out an old box of papers and photos, he came across a photo of he and I taken in the lab toasting our success at a recent discovery. From the now yellowing photo, he began to paint me, his old friend, and the question of where I could be if still alive started to gnaw away at him. He made secret inquiries and that is how we met up again." Father stood up and stretched his legs then sat on the corner of his desk and continued.

"I began to tell him of my new life and we exchanged confidences and secrets, like we did so many years ago. Then he said a very strange thing. He said he was dying and all his possessions, which did not amount to a great deal, were now stored in a spare room in his flat and that he wanted me to have them. He then scribbled down his address writing on the back of a used envelope he happened to have in his pocket. All too quickly we said our farewells and he shuffled off into the darkness swallowed up in seconds. I returned here and some time passed. Then all at once I felt something was not right and so, two weeks ago, when Vincent and Mouse caught me going Above yet again, I was on my way to see Louis. I took a cab to the Bronx and soon I was on the sidewalk outside his brownstone building. I climbed the steps and rang the bell. I waited and waited and was about to leave when I felt sure I had got the address wrong, when the door opened and a man in his eighties stood looking at me. I asked him if Louis Mann lived there and he said he had sone so but no longer, because he had died. He asked me who I was, and then told me that Louis had left me his keys to be given to me so I could clear up his personal effects. I agreed, of course, and made my way to the cast iron and very noisy elevator. His room was on the top floor and I was very grateful I didn't have to walk with this old hip of mine," he laughed.

"I found the door, number 9, with its peeling bright green paint. I put the key in the lock and entered. Such a bare room with not much to show for a lifetime on this earth but the door in the corner seemed to draw me. Using the second key I opened this door. The room was very small and full of canvas paintings covered with sheets to keep the dust away. Gently, I pulled the sheets to one side to look at his handiwork and what I saw shook me to my very soul....."

Everyone started to say, "Why?"

".....I therefore decided to bring all these paintings Below and one by one for the last thirteen nights that is exactly what I have been doing. One at a time by taxi was all I could manage. A trusted Helper met me and carried them Below for me, each one securely wrapped, and here they are behind me ready for me to show to you all!"

Vincent got up to give his father a glass of water to drink. "Drink this, Father, you must be dry with all that talking."

"Thank you, Vincent.....that was a long speech, was it not?"

"Indeed, and very intriguing."

"So, now is the moment of truth."

Father and Vincent began to remove the sheets and there, one after another along the wall of the Grand Hall were revealed the most beautiful portraits. A gasp went up as those assembled were confronted by.....themselves!

"Hey, look, that's Mouse."

"And Mary."

"And the children."

"Pascal, you are in this one."

"And your ugly mug, William," cried Cullen laughingly.

"Elizabeth and her painted tunnels."

"Catherine, look, you and I are together," said Vincent as they viewed each one.

"Father," said Vincent, "how can this be?"

"I am at a loss, Vincent, as every detail is so accurate, even down to the cameo brooch on Mary's shawl."

"Father, we have to find the meaning of this."

"I agree, Vincent, but how do you propose to do that?"

"Would you take me there, we can go through the Tunnels to the Bronx and we will take Winslow and William."

"Then let us go now and sort this out as soon as possible," agreed the old man.

So that party prepared to go Above and investigate this unexplained mystery. After warm drinks, the four of them wrapped up well and left the home Tunnels heading for the Bronx. The short cuts which Vincent knew shortened the journey and after not too long a walk they ascended to the surface and were close to the artist's home.

"This is the street and this is number 35.....here is 33, yes, it is this way. 21, 19, 17, where is it?" The block was not there, only rubble indicated that a building had ever been there in the first place.

"I was in that building last night, I saw the old man, went up in the lift and brought out the last picture before coming home. How can this be?"

"Father, there has to be a logical reason. Let us go back and try to work it out," said Vincent in a loving and caring way to his father.

Accordingly, the four of them set off back to the home chambers expecting to find the artwork had disappeared as well as the building, which had originally housed the same. However, on their return, they heard banging and knocking sounds as they entered the final tunnel, and once in the Grand Hall they saw the last of the paintings being hung on the wall.

"Well, at least they haven't dissolved into thin air," said Father as he sat down, glad to get the weight off his feet.

"Father," asked Catherine, "What did you find?"

"Nothing, my dear, the building has gone, vanished."

"Because, look at the art now hanging in a line along the long wall." Looking up, everyone gasped.

"Dear God," was all Father could explain, "Dear, dear God."

Each one of the portraits which had been hung up randomly sat close to each other on the rock face wall and it was as if it was one picture, a continuous painting---a permanent record of their life in oils, of each and everyone Below.

"How can this be, Father?" asked Vincent.

"I don't know.....you tell me....."

ANY IDEAS?

Well, take your mind back to "When The Bluebird Sings," and the artist Kristopher Gentian. He was.....dead.....yet painted Catherine.....And the old warehouse with the Vincent and Catherine oil painting.....still wet!!!! He was even in Vincent's chamber, so he was able to capture all their faces for his friend, a fellow down-and-out artist who also died, leaving his work to.....Jacob Wells!

VALENTINE DANCE

Gwen Lord

"Hey, Radcliffe, you comin' to the Valentine Dance?" Joe Maxwell's voice was carefully nonchalant but a bit wistful as they sat on the sofa in his office.

Catherine Chandler looked mildly regretful as she said, "I hadn't planned on it, Joe."

Taking no chances to miss this God sent opportunity, Joe chimed in with, "You know, Radcliffe, you really owe it to this office."

"I owe it?" Catherine looked flustered.

"You sure do - big time!" he quipped, a cheeky grin tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"How come, Joe" she asked, her eyes now dancing with the fun of the moment as they kidded each other.

"Every holiday we have celebrations. We have Christmas parties,

Thanksgiving lunches, 4th of July and Easter Egg picnics even ... and a Valentine's Dance. But you, Miss Secretive, always manage to wriggle out of attending."

"I'm sorry, Joe," she looked sad, as she realized, now on reflection, she had been avoiding all the office festivities.

"We're not good enough, for Miss Debutante, is that it?" Joe teased as he tried every trick in his book, to get his dear friend Cathy to see him socially, out of office hours.

"It's not that, Joe," she said, as she playfully swatted his shoulder but she felt a twinge of guilt as she realized what interpretation could be put on her past actions.

"So what is it then, tell me, I sure would like to hear this one." He turned serious and got up to perch on the corner of his desk as he awaited her reply. He picked up his ever present rubber band and manipulated it through the complicated finger exercises that Cathy always found fascinating.

"How do you do that Joe?" she asked.

"Don't change the subject, Radcliffe."

"Sorry." A pause followed, then slowly Catherine stood up and moved in front of Joe. She took a deep breath and looked into his eyes, trying to think of a way to explain the unexplainable.

"I'm waiting," he said with a 'this better be good' smile.

Catherine suddenly looked at Joe from a new perspective, as she realized, deep down he really cared, and her flippant attitude had hurt him. He knew full well she had a special someone in her life, and he accepted this reluctantly, but ... an office party. This was his territory and he had no special someone of his own to attend with him. He not only cared deeply for Catherine, he thoroughly enjoyed her company. Her presence would make this a pleasant experience instead of a tiresome social obligation. Catherine could see this, and understood how an innocent office dance would give him such pleasure ... so how could she say no? Also, although unintentional, her past behavior shamed her and she did not intend to appear to be standoffish, ever again.

"Hey, penny for them," he said, nudging her back to reality.

"You're on, Joe Maxwell, I'll come to the party but you had better behave yourself," she said and pointed her finger at him, "or my special guy will be on your case." She gathered her purse and coat from the chair and turned toward the door.

"I'll call for you, Cathy," his voice suddenly husky.

"Say sevenish," Catherine said over her shoulder.

"Make sure you're ready," he shouted triumphantly, as a few heads turned in the outer office at his raised voice. Joe shut his office door behind her so she didn't see him punch the air saying, "Yes, yes, yes!"

As she was walking down the corridor to the elevator, the reality of her accepting his invitation, (or was it a challenge?) hit her. Now she had to quickly hide her apprehension about tonight, lest Vincent read more into it than there was.

Outside the office building, the normally busy streets were now becoming jam-packed as people poured out of the buildings and made their way to the car parks, bus stops and subway, heading for home. The snow that had fallen early that morning and given everything a Christmas card look, had been churned into dirty slush by the heavy New York car and foot traffic.

Pulling her collar up to keep out the icy winds and damp air, she hailed a cab and soon was heading for home and a much needed

coffee. As the taxi stopped in front of her upscale apartment building, the doorman opened the cab door for her, touching his hat in an old-fashioned, deferential manner.

"Evening, Miss."

"Good evening, Charles." She smiled and took the arm he gallantly offered to assist her across the slippery sidewalk.

"What a day it's been," he said, initiating a conversation since she was one of his favorite residents. Someone who treated him like a person instead of a faceless convenience.

"Yeah, and it's not over yet, unfortunately there's more snow on the way." She waved bye cheerfully and crossed the lobby. She stepped into the elevator and punched the button for her floor but before the doors slid shut, an impetuous youth squeezed through, eager to share an elevator ride with the object of his teenage devotion.

"Hi, Brian." She'd had a few major crushes of her own in her adolescence and tried to be patient with him.

"Hi, Miss Chandler." His expression left Catherine in no doubt as to his thoughts, as this love sick teenager tried to act blase and

hide his infatuation.

"Late home from school?"

"Yeah, I had to pick up some stuff from the Deli for Dad."

"How is your Dad, is he well?" she asked, silently willing her floor to appear fast. Conversations with Brian were always difficult. He contrived situations to be in her presence but then became too embarrassed and tongue-tied to talk to her.

"He's okay, I guess."

The doors flew open and escape was eminent. "See you around, Brian. Bye." The doors shut and he was gone. Catherine fumbled in her purse for her keys and opened her apartment door.

Once inside, she hung her damp coat on the coat tree by the door. As she passed by she flung her suit jacket and purse on the 'little dinky couch' and headed for her bedroom, kicking off her shoes and beginning to unbutton her blouse. She hands froze in mid-unbuttoning when she heard a familiar tap on her balcony doors.

Breaking into a carefree run across the floor, she quickly opened the door and flung herself into Vincent's waiting arms.

"Catherine," he whispered in his velvet voice.

"Oh, Vincent, I needed that hug," she said as she nestled against his chest.

"I felt conflicting emotions from you a short while ago. That is why I'm here now ... I fear for you constantly, Catherine. Tell me, is everything as it should be?" he asked with deep concern.

"Yeah, sure, Vincent, no problems."

Placing both his hands on her shoulders, he gently eased her away from him so he could look directly into her lovely face. "Tell me," he pleaded.

Catherine turned away, and clutching her arms with her hands to ward off the cold, she left Vincent and stood looking out at the night sky and the buildings which were lit up like a fairy land before her. "I have a date, Vincent," she reluctantly confessed.

"A date?" he repeated in disbelief.

She turned back to look at him. "With Joe Maxwell ... it's not what it seems, Vincent and I don't want you going off half-cocked over this."

"Cather..."

"Hear me out, Vincent, before you get upset."

Vincent was new to all these emotional upheavals. Jealousy was one he particularly did not cope with very well. He couldn't have Catherine in the true sense of the word, his decision, but although he couldn't have her, neither was he willing to share her. Especially not with Joe Maxwell, who he suspected loved her deeply.

"It's just a simple Valentine dance, Vincent, in our office. Well, not in our office exactly, same floor but in the empty offices at the other end. For the three years since I've worked there, I've refused every off-hours activity. Knowing you can't be there it holds no interest for me, so I don't go. Well, today, to my chagrin, Joe pointed out it wasn't fair to all those who support these get-togethers if I constantly refuse to attend. It gives the appearance I think I'm too good to attend, or that the people I work with aren't important enough for me to make the effort."

"I see." He looked thoughtful as he mulled this over, then spoke in slow deliberation, "Then you must go, Catherine." His voice was steadfast but his mind was reeling, protesting the idea of Catherine dancing with another man.

"I said I would, but I won't go if you're too unhappy about it."

"I'm sorry your secret life with me causes you so many problems, Catherine. If I may quote Sir Walter Scott, "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"

"I didn't know you read Scott, Vincent."

"Father was very keen I sample all types of literature."

"So I see," she said, returning to his warm embrace. She added reluctantly, "I must hurry, Vincent, I just have enough time to shower and change, and have a quick sandwich before Joe picks me up."

"What time will your dance be over, Catherine?" Vincent asked suddenly, as an inspired idea invaded his jealous thoughts.

"Well, it starts at seven so I guess it'll be over easily by ten. After

all, it's not a formal dance, just an office party."

"Could we meet after your dance?" he urged.

"Why yes, Vincent, if you like."

"It isn't too late ... you will come, Catherine?" he asked insistently.

"Of course, I will. I'll meet you Below, Vincent. I'm only guessing at the time but I'm sure I'll meet you by eleven at the latest."

"Till then, dearest Catherine." With a brief hug, he was gone.

The mad whirl of shower and nibbling at a sandwich as she put on makeup had Catherine almost ready, when a loud knock at the door announced Joe's arrival. Still putting on her earrings, she headed for the door, checking through the peephole to see it was Joe before opening the door to let him in.

"Woweee, Radcliffe, you look like a million dollars," Joe exclaimed, thinking to himself that she could probably make rags

look elegant.

"Well, thank you, kind sir," Catherine did a little curtsy, then spoiled the elegant effect by giggling.

Joe's left hand appeared from behind his back and he thrust a bunch of red roses into her arms. "For you," he said gruffly, suddenly rather embarrassed at this unusual act for him.

"Joe ..."

"Cause it's the custom, see ... red roses, Valentine's Day and all that jazz," he added nervously.

"You old fashioned romantic thing you," she grinned and planted a kiss on his cheek as she took the roses to pop into water, until she could arrange them later.

As she filled the sink with water, she looked up at Joe, standing in the kitchen doorway, waiting for her. She very much liked what she saw. Joe was a very good looking Italian and tonight in his dinner jacket he was a heart stopper. Had she not had a great, golden lion in her life, then Joe would certainly have been relationship, and possibly husband material, of that she had no doubt. But Vincent was in her life and they were two halves of a

whole. Tonight she realized that Joe would always have a very special place in her heart and her life, as well. She had always intended Vincent and Joe should meet one day and eventually perhaps they could even take him down to show him the world below Central Park. She mused dreamily ... if she and Vincent married ... had children, Joe could be uncle, godfather, the possibilities were endless and

"Radcliffe, you need to give them water not drown them," Joe laughed.

This brought Catherine back to reality with a thump. "Sorry, Joe, I was daydreaming." She picked up one perfect rosebud and clipped the stem short, then dried it carefully before walking over and placing it in Joe's lapel. "Just the touch you needed, handsome," she teased.

To get a taxi at that time of night would have been like expecting the moon to shine brightly at midday so he had kept his cab waiting, meter ticking away while he collected Catherine from her apartment.

The party was well under way when they arrived. Rita, Edie and a few of the others watched in utter shock as Joe proudly entered

the room with Catherine on his arm.

Catherine thought it felt very strange to be here this late and not be slaving over paperwork. The lights were dimmed and glasses clinked as the drinks flowed and someone's tape deck played romantic music.

"Let's dance," Joe said, hanging up their coats and wasting no time making his move.

"Sure," she readily agreed.

Suddenly his world was complete as his arms encircled Catherine and he held her gently but close. When the slow dance ended they had a glass of punch. When an upbeat number started they returned to the dance floor that had been created by shoving desks to one side.

In between dances, Catherine chatted with her fellow workers, determined to show them she was 'one of them'.

Edie drifted by. "Hey, girlfriend," she teased, "how come you're slumming tonight?"

Catherine's eyes flashed as she retorted, "I'm making points with the boss - aren't you jealous?"

Edie laughed and went on her way.

Catherine politely danced with a few of the men who got up the nerve to ask her but mostly she danced with Joe. She could relax and have fun with him. He was surprised to learn that Cathy loved all kinds of music, not just that 'high-brow stuff' as he had assumed.

After the party Joe faithfully delivered Catherine back to her door. He stood before her a happy and contented man and Catherine cupped his face between her two hands and kissed him gently on the lips.

"Goodnight Joe, and thank you for shamelessly blackmailing me into a wonderful evening."

"Goodnight Cathy, you know I ..."

"Shush, I know."

He took her key and unlocked the door, then handed the key back to her, turned and sauntered to the elevator whistling. He knew in his heart she would never really be his, but for one magical evening he had been able to pretend.

A short time later Catherine met Vincent Below as planned. No words were spoken, none were needed, just a tender hug. Together, hand in hand, they walked along the dimly lit, dusty tunnels, heading for the home chambers.

"I have a surprise for you, Catherine."

"Oh, Vincent, what?" she asked, her eyes aglow with anticipation.

"Wait and see," he teased.

"I can't ... tell me, Vincent, please?" she cajoled.

But no meant no and he would not surrender to her begging. Eventually they reached Father's warm and cozy study.

"Ah, Catherine, you look delightful, my dear. What a pretty dress, Vincent tells me you've been to a dance."

"Yes, a Valentine Dance at my office."

"Somehow," Father teased, "I can't imagine a group of attorneys dancing the night away. It seems a bit too frivolous or something. Tell me, do they argue over each song to be played?"

Catherine laughed. "No, but they're not exactly the most convivial party animals I've ever seen."

Vincent was nervous over the plans he'd made and was becoming a bit impatient with the social pleasantries. "Come Catherine, Father we must leave now, please excuse us."

"Of course, of course, you two must go and enjoy the rest of your evening," he said, smiling at Catherine, who suddenly felt that Father was well aware of Vincent's surprise.

"Where are we going, Vincent?" Catherine asked as they strolled

down a tunnel that wasn't familiar to her.

"To a special place, just for us," he replied.

"Really?" She cautioned herself against getting her hopes up, but Vincent was usually reluctant to be completely alone with her so she couldn't help speculating.

As they rounded a bend in the tunnel, the chamber in front of them stood out; the entrance was framed in red and white roses and lit by wall sconces. Inside there were candles everywhere, giving a soft and gentle glow. To one side, rugs were spread on the floor and huge cushions were there to sit on. The small table had a battery run cassette and at the flick of a switch, it clicked into action and romantic music filled the chamber.

"At Winterfest we danced when everyone had left the Great Hall. The memory of it will live in my heart forever, Catherine, but tonight I would like for us to make new memories."

"Yes." Catherine's lips curved into a smile as she nodded and her eyes filled to overflowing with tears of joy.

"May I have this Valentine waltz, Catherine?" he asked

"It will be my pleasure," she replied.

His arms opened up for her and she filled them to perfection. They held each other tightly as they swayed to the music. They danced until the tape ran out and clicked off. Reluctant to part, they continued to stand with their arms around each other, her head resting against his broad shoulder.

"Catherine ..." he said huskily.

She raised her head from his shoulder and tilted her head back to look up at him. "Yes, Vincent ...?"

As he stared into her fascinating gray-green eyes her 'yes, Vincent' echoed through his mind. Suddenly he knew with every fiber of his being that she truly loved him and would wholeheartedly say yes to him no matter what he asked. He gathered his courage and leaned down and their lips met for the first time. It was as if a million fireworks had suddenly exploded. Time stood still as they shared kiss after fevered kiss.

On shaky legs Vincent led her over to the cushions and they gratefully sank down on them. Wrapped in each others arms, both breathless from the experience, they knew this was the turning point in their relationship.

"Will you be my Valentine, Catherine?" he whispered softly and beguilingly as he nuzzled her ear.

"Will you be mine?" she responded instantly.

"Forever, Catherine, if you'll marry me."

"I thought you'd never ask," she said. She couldn't resist teasing him a bit, "I literally thought you'd never ask."

Catherine smiled to herself. Thanks to the Valentine dance and Vincent's jealousy over her 'date', the next step in their lives had suddenly and rapturously begun. She felt utter contentment as well as raging excitement when Vincent's lips met hers again.

THE END

WHEN DARKNESS ENDS

GWEN LORD

It had been another lovely evening spent together, listening to the music drifting down from the bandstand above them in Central Park, New York.

Catherine had spent all day in court on a child abuse case, one which proved a hard and difficult one to win, but win she did, leaving her drained physically.

Vincent had spent endless hours with Devin, Michael and Kanin strengthening a tunnel wall, which had promised to collapse unless reinforced, due to deep foundations being dug Above for an underground car park, in yet another huge shopping mall.

All Catherine could think about as she left the court with her boss Joe Maxwell, was to get a cab to her apartment, take a quick shower and go Below to Vincent.

Vincent's idea was running on similar lines to Catherine's, as the thought of an evening with Catherine filled his every moment.

They had met as always at the basement of Catherine's apartment, the one Daddy had bought for her two years ago.

Stepping down the iron rungs of the ladder, Vincent's hand steadied her as her feet came to rest on the dusty floor of the building's basement.

"I'm so pleased to see you, Vincent," she said smiling.

"Come, the concert is ready to begin."

"Did you get us good seats, Vincent?" she teased.

"The best," he jested with a smile. "I do believe I got the last two, at great expense."

They both laughed happily, as they re-enacted their little game, to make their strange life feel more normal, had life been different for them. Hand in hand, they hurried down sark familiar tunnels, until they came to a dead end, where rugs lay spread, and cushions lay in wait for their special task, to be their booked seats, for the concert above them in Central Park.

Vincent seated himself first, then holding out his hand, guided Catherine to sit against him, as he then folded his outstretched cloak over both of them, to keep out the chill of this underworld, that very few people knew existed.

"This is so perfect, Vincent," she said as she lifted her head to see his face. "And the music tonight has some of our favourites, so we will enjoy it so much."

Looking up, Catherine could see the grid near them, where people walked and talked, and beyond it, the inky blue night sky sprinkled with stars twinkling in the galaxy and beyond.

Suddenly the voices and rushing feet ceased as the music began in the bandstand.

"Peer Gynt! Oh Vincent, I love this one so much."

"I believe Father also loves this particular piece." He planted a gentle kiss in her hair which smelled of roses.

"I feel so safe and secure here, Vincent," she whispered almost to herself.

"It is our safe place," he said in a very soft voice. Then they settled back to enjoy the music.

As the evening programme wore on, thunder rumbled and lightning flashed, followed soon after by a few large drops of rain.

"It's been so humid today, I'm not surprised we're in for a storm," Catherine bent forward to see more clearly through the grid.

"Oh! Here it comes." The rain cascaded down in torrents, and soon found its escape into the grid near to them, but in no way would it spread to where they were cozy and snug.

The music was now silent and the people in the park had all run for shelter, so once more the silence enveloped them.

"It feels so fresh when the rain falls, cleansing the world above us, renewing the city for tomorrow."

"You make me see things so differently Vincent, things taken for granted, like the rain. You make it seem, so beautiful."

"No Catherine, it's you who paints pictures for me with your words, of places and things I know I can never share with you." He looked sad for a moment.

"We help each other, Vincent, to see the beauty around us."

"There is only one Beauty in my world, Catherine, and that is you," he confessed bravely.

Turning within his arms, Catherine lifted up her head to face him as he looked lovingly at her. Their eyes met with a longing only lovers know when magic fills their hearts. Her eyes pleaded to be loved, as his eyes told of his need also, but tinged with sadness. Because at the back of his mind he could hear Father's words telling him, over so many years that he could never have a normal life as others do.

Sensing his turmoil, Catherine knelt before him, cupped his face between her small hands and brought her face close to his.

Vincent moved back in panic, feeling the tension of this moment. Could he escape? Too late, his eyes opened wide in panic as slowly she kissed his lips with the tenderness of a butterfly.

He didn't return her kiss, she didn't expect it, so once again her lips found his and she lingered there, long enough to feel him start to return the kiss.

This was all so new to him and he was grateful Catherine allowed for this.

Breathless they parted, and before Vincent could say a word, Catherine kissed him again. This time Catherine was in no doubt that Vincent was a quick learner.

"Oh Vincent, we have so much love to give, let me love you. I love you so much."

"I know," Vincent mouthed.

"Tell me you want me as much as I want you," she pleaded.

"You know how much, you are my life. I do love you with every fibre of my body. Catherine, is it possible.....we could share a life?" he asked hesitantly.

"Yes Vincent, I knew this from the first time I saw you, but I had to let you find this out slowly, so you wouldn't bolt on me like a horse refusing to jump."

"Tell me, why me Catherine? Why me, when you could have your pick of men, wealth and a privileged lifestyle in the world your family ordained for you?"

"Yes Vincent, I could marry Elliot or Joe or even Tom, but I chose you, because without you, I have no life."

"They can give you a home anywhere you choose, cars, holidays, gifts and a lifestyle beyond my wildest dreams."

"Yes, and I want none of it! It's all false and shallow. I want to be with you, in your world. With my money I will make Below better for everyone."

"How, Catherine?"

"I would never want it to change things Below, as what Father has created is a home we all can share. But when people like Michael need to go Above to college or university, I can pay for it. I can buy medicines and equipment for the hospital chambers. I can provide cozy rugs and warm bedding and a library for the children."

"And you'll do all that because you love me?"

"Yes, Vincent."

"I have wanted to love you so much as a man, but felt I would never have this dream. Now the dream feels a real possibility, I am truly blessed." Catherine felt his pain. "So often I have found myself by the Mirror Pool, trying to find a way to love you."

"Now we have." She kissed his lips with such passion.

"We have to take a leap of faith, Catherine, will you share my dark passage into the light?"

"There is no darkness, when I'm with you," she smiled through her tears.

Leaning forward, Vincent tasted her salty tears as he kissed them

on her flushed cheeks.

Suddenly his eyes glazed over and he looked through her as if she wasn't there. Then before her very eyes, a change started to take place; Vincent's face changed from love to anger and his pale face grew darker and darker.

Undeterred, Catherine remained knelt before him, staring directly into his eyes, almost in an hypnotic state. Then she could hear a low growl developing deep within him, which grew until a full roar ripped the air. Still Catherine remained unmoved by this. Now she saw his face lose the darkness, and the growl returned to the place it lived until awakened.

Blinking repeatedly, Vincent's gaze, centred on Catherine's, whose eyes were now full with unshed tears.

"Vincent, are you all right?"

"Yes, thank you Catherine. I have never felt better. I'm free, I'm free. The dark side of me is gone forever."

"How Vincent? Tell me."

"Evil is only strong when love is shut out. You taught me the true meaning of love which I could not accept, because of my differences. This never stopped you believing in me, and the evil in me saw you would never leave me. He fought and lost. He is gone forever, he ruled me and became me, now those chains are gone."

"Your fear kept him alive, Vincent."

"Love in its purest form knows no limits. Until this moment I did not see this clearly."

"Does this mean what I think it means, Vincent?" she asked hopefully.

"I'm free to love you, as you love me, if you can accept my differences."

"To me, there are no differences, you are so beautiful, please never change."

"Very well, if that is your wish."

"I love you, Vincent Wells."

Vincent eased Catherine to one side as he stood up, then he held out his hand to get her to her feet. Now their arms held each other closer than ever before, as their lips found sanctuary at last.

Then hand in hand they made their way to the home tunnels, knowing that their love story was now starting to be written, here at chapter one.

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

GWEN LORD

"The music was lovely, Vincent," Catherine whispered, clinging to his arm as they left their special place in the tunnels directly below the old bandstand in Central Park.

Catherine looked particularly pretty tonight. She had dressed with care, not just for herself, but because she wanted very much to please Vincent, to excite him, to have him desire her...She had chosen a gown of midnight blue velvet. It clung to her figure beautifully, with its low cut neckline that revealed her cleavage so well; the crystal pendant fell tantalizingly between her breasts.

She wore her hair longer these days. Tonight she had it slightly curly and it swayed as she walked, picking up the highlights from the wall torches that lined the tunnels at intervals as they walked along.

Vincent had also dressed with care tonight, to impress his Catherine. He knew she liked to see him in light coloured clothes, so he had chosen a shirt of fine cream cotton. The cuffs and ruffles near his neck were of exquisite lace. His trousers were of beige corded velvet which fitted him to perfection. The knee boots were very grand in a deeper beige leather, with a deep turnover cuff. Finally, there was the cloak, special for tonight: black as always, but lined in white fur.

Slipping an arm around Catherine, Vincent drew her closer to him and wrapped the cloak around her also. They walked along, completely at ease with each other, no words needed to be spoken.

They took the long way back to the basement of Catherine's

apartment, so that they could spend just a little more time together. As they approached the shaft of light, they slowed down and finally stopped, then Vincent gently turned her to face him. She slipped both arms around his waist, snuggling up to him, as though this would bond them together. Vincent held her tightly with one strong arm while his other hand ran up and down her back, his touch sending shivers through her body. He sensed her feelings through their bond, but he still continued savoring these special moments that meant everything to both of them.

Catherine finally pulled away a little. Leaning back on his arm, she gazed up into his face smiling down at her. Oh! Those hypnotic eyes. If only he knew what they did to her.

"Vincent, I wish...I wish I didn't have to leave you," she whispered, snuggling even closer to him.

He sighed. "I know...I know, such pain we share when parting. I live only for the time we spend together. It is the most precious gift in my life---your love." Then taking her face in his hands, he slowly lowered his head to kiss the top of her head, her nose, and ever-so-lightly, her lips. Catherine wanted more, her body cried out for more.

Vincent took her hands in his and held her at arms length.

"You looked so beautiful this evening, a vision of loveliness. You intoxicate my very soul." Then kissing her hands he said, "Good night," in a soft and gentle voice.

"Good night, Vincent," Catherine said, almost to herself. She didn't want Vincent to notice the tears that lay waiting to spill.

Sadly, they parted, but after only a few steps, both turned round to watch the other and smile...then both were gone. He to his lonely

chamber, and she to her lonely apartment.

Opening her door, the silence of her apartment and the emptiness made her even more sad and unhappy. She wished they could share a life together. He was her life, her reason for living, she wanted nothing more than to share her life with him, yet this was denied her, causing her unbelievable sadness.

A tear fell down her cheek, her lip trembled, she brushed the tear away, then took a deep breath, trying to control herself, but the tears welled up again---oh, the pain! The pain!

She busied herself getting ready for bed. It was already 2:39 am, so she wouldn't have long anyway before the alarm would awaken her for the day ahead.

Maybe first she'd have a shower, (a cold shower?) to calm her desires, but on reflection decided against this, and settled for a warm steamy one, which helped her to relax and ponder on things.

Then, wrapped in a towel, she padded across the bedroom to the new nightdress that lay on the bed. Catherine was very extravagant with her luxury nightwear, she could easily afford it, and often treated herself to gorgeous items, such as this pale pink, pure silk creation. She always bought her nightwear with great care, as this was really the only time Vincent ever saw her and she always wanted to look her best for him.

Letting the towel slip to the floor, she put on the elegant nightdress, with its fine lace rosebuds edging the hem and neckline, thin straps holding it in place. The fit was perfect...If only!

Sleep didn't come easy to her troubled mind and she tossed and turned. Finally she lay on her back, remembering wonderful

moments they had shared. A smile crossed her lips and soon she fell asleep and dreamt...

It was Vincent on the balcony, she could see his large frame casting a shadow across her door, then came the familiar tap tap. Ever so gently, he opened the door and slipped inside, closing the door behind him.

Crossing over to the chair, he swiftly removed his cloak. Catherine couldn't believe her eyes.

Slipping silently out of bed, she crept up behind him and put her arms around his waist. He turned, holding her tightly against him.

"Catherine, oh Catherine!"

He scooped her up in his arms and carried her back to the bed where he lowered her carefully down before stepping back to admire her beauty. She held his hands, afraid to let him go. He knelt down beside her and kissed her passionately and longingly. Catherine returned his kisses.

It felt so wonderful to have him so near, he must have felt her need of him.

Quickly, Vincent joined her beneath the satin sheets...The alarm rang. Catherine sat up and realized she was alone. A sadness enveloped her, it had all been a dream! But it had felt so real.

Sadly she climbed out of bed with a sigh.

She was running late now, Nanci had phoned her from West Point and had kept her talking for too long, over breakfast. So now she had to catch up quickly, or be late for work. Joe wouldn't be pleased if she was late, they were due in court first thing.

Gathering her coat, bag, purse and keys together, she headed for the door. There on the floor, pushed under her door was a note. She recognized the handwriting that simply said: *Catherine.*

She picked it up and opened it. There in Vincent's beautiful handwriting she read aloud the message.

Last night I shared your dreams,

Tonight we will live the dream.

Vincent

WHEN FATE PLAYS ITS HAND

GWEN LORD

"Radcliffe, I can't believe you are asking me this." Joe Maxwell declared as Catherine Chandler stood before him in the DA's office, it was early one Monday morning in late July.

"Joe.....please, I'm asking you as my friend.....okay, I'm begging you, please let me do this assignment, which I know came into the office late Friday. I've had the whole weekend to toss this idea around, and I really want to do this," Catherine pleaded.

"Hey, time out here, I see why you are so damn good in court," he teased her.

"Excuse me?" she questioned her boss, eye to eye, her green eyes flashing, housing a hit of mischief as always.

"This urgency scares me, normally when one of these special assignments comes up from Moreno and I need you, Radcliffe, to win it for us, I get a string of excuses why you 'cannot', 'will not,' do them. Now.....all of a sudden you're 'begging' to do one, come on, the lawyer in me cries out 'why?'," he stood waiting.

"So.....suddenly it's a crime to change my mind and say 'yes,'" she flung up her arms in an act of despair.

"Not exactly, but I can't help feeling this isn't really anything to do with work, and more to do with.....What's his name..... Vinnie?" Joe sat down at his desk and Catherine took a few steps nearer to him.

"His name as you **damn** well know, Joe Maxwell, is Vincent, and I will be honest with you. Yes, it has everything to do with Vincent,"

a pause and then she continued. "I need to get away.....to be alone with my thoughts, and to evaluate my future." There, she had said it, and strangely.....it felt good.

"Hey, big time emotion stuff this," his lips curled into a teasing smile. "Sure, I can go with that, Cathy, but WHY, after so many excuses not to go? Something tells me I'm not getting the full picture here, yet I'm expected to make it possible. I need answers that satisfy me enough to give you green for go."

Stretching out his hand, Joe picked up a rubber band from the four or five in a small heap on his desk, near to the desk calendar. Then he forced the rubber band between his fingers in a complicated finger movement. Joe did this when he was worried, and he genuinely was now; he played around with the band unaware of doing it.

A lapse of silence hung in the air which felt charged with expectancy, giving them both time to collect their thoughts and decide on their next move, as one does in a 'chess' like situation.

Catherine was all too aware of how careful she now had to be in her explanation, so as not to arouse in Joe too much interest. While all at the same time she had to keep a tight lid on her emotions, in case Vincent picked up on her feelings, and came to her rescue because of their 'Bond'. Joe's voice was the first to break the silence.

"Cathy, this is me, Joe.....tell me, kiddo," he smiled a reassuring look directly at Catherine.

Her heart missed a beat, he must never know how close he was to being 'Mr. Right' for her. Had Vincent not stolen her heart first, she could so easily have fallen in love with him. He was such a

lovely guy who would have been the perfect partner, lover, husband and father. But she needed him as a friend, the brother she never had.

Of all the eligible men in New York, Catherine Chandler had fallen in love with a man who refused to accept that they could have a life together, or a future. Week after week and month after month their feelings took root and grew. But Vincent made the rules, and beyond that certain point was forbidden territory. This was why Catherine needed to get away. Maybe they both needed space.....a time to see if absence made the heart grow fonder, or if it was impossible. All these feelings were eating away at the very fibre of what, and who she was.....Catherine Chandler.

"Trust me, Joe," she repeated.

"Well, when you come back, I want.....I need answers," he said encouragingly.

"You've got it, Joe. When do I leave?" Catherine continued to force this issue.

"Tomorrow, kiddo. I'll do the paperwork today so feel free to do this assignment. No, better still, we owe you time, right? You take two weeks starting tomorrow."

"I owe you one."

"You better believe it!" Joe said teasingly.

After Catherine left his office, Joe was already pulling together a plan of action which had to begin in Central Park. He knew the connection was in the park, now he had to find the key as to why! Turning to his computer, he started to feed into it certain facts which hopefully would shed some light on solving this situation.

He gazed at the screen for a while then started to add data to it.

1. Name---Vinnie (then smiling impishly he changed it to Vincent)

2. Never seen by anyone---why?

3. Radcliffe over protective----why?

4. So, subject needs protecting----why?

5. Turned down marriage to wealthy Elliot Burch----why?

6. Never leaves the city----why?

7. If I visit her, I feel I'm being watched----why?

8. Her balcony is totally out of bounds----why?

9. Does this person live with her? Maybe he hides on the balcony when I visit?

10. Could be deformed----nah!

11. Ugly?----nah!

12. Married?-----nah!

Joe now sat back and surveyed the list on the screen, tapping his pencil on the surface of the desk. He read and re-read the list before him, looking for the merest clue. When none came, Joe decided to visit the park as darkness fell.

So when work was over and the moon rose in the sky, Joe entered the park with a confident air. As he walked a little way into the park, the eerie mist combined with shadows and the moon, gave Joe shivers down his spine. Yet he reasoned to himself that Cathy roamed this park at night and no harm ever came to her, why? This factor alone was spooky he felt. Here he was, a grown

man with beads of perspiration now lining his brow, as drug pushers, gangs of youths and weirdos took over from the daylight park visitors of joggers, children playing, dog walkers, picnickers and families enjoying the green of the park, against the contrast surrounding them, of skyscrapers in concrete and glass.

"I'll try another day," he told himself as he decided to quickly abandon this line of enquiry. When suddenly he felt very aware that someone was very close to him, watching him. "Man, this is creepy," he mouthed, as he sped up his exit from the park, hailing the first passing cab in order to make his escape. He felt like a thief in the night returning to normality, whatever normal was in New York City, the city that never sleeps.



The following morning, Catherine came into the office to clear her desk, and to say her good-byes to everyone.

"Hi Joe!" she raised her voice so he'd hear her above the phones.

"Radcliffe!" he strode over to her, glad to see her. "You all set now.....any ideas where you are going yet.....if you need company?" he teased.

Smiling she replied, "Naughty, Naughty. Yes, I'm going to stay with my friend Nancy Tucker in Westport."

"Didn't I meet her once, when she came and visited you a few months back?" he moved nearer to Catherine as he spoke.

"Same one, fancy you remembering that Joe, I'm impressed.

Grinning, he continued, "I'm like an elephant.....I NEVER forget." His face wrinkled with an enormous smile and suddenly any tension between them eased away. "If I can ever

help.....I'm....."

"I know, Joe, you are the best. But all I need right now is to get away before I go nuts. I must unwind, then, and only then, I can look my life head-on and find a way to....."

"Running away won't help, you do know that. Problems need facing, Cathy."

"I know, Joe. I tell everyone to do just that, yet here I am unable to take what I dish out to others." Catherine looked suddenly sad and thoughtful.

"Has this guy, this....."

"Vincent, Joe, his name is **VINCENT**."

"Sure, okay, keep your hair on. This guy, Vincent.....has he hurt you in some way?"

"No Joe, it's nothing like that."

Undetermined, he continued. "Is he blackmailing you?"

"NO, JOE," she stressed.

"Do you.....love this guy?" The words were hard to say. Silence had never sounded so loud.

"Yes.....I do love him," Catherine confessed.

"So what the hell is the problem here? Am I missing something?"

"No, of course not, it's just not that simple a problem and would take forever to tell."

"I'm listening here, what is this not so simple problem?" His expression was that of keen eagerness and interest.

"Sit down, Joe." Catherine's tone altered to one of gentleness. Then taking his hand in hers she looked down at their entwined hands, as her thumbs moved across the backs of his hands. Almost whispering, she started to tell him.

"All his life, his father has told him that it is impossible for him to have a normal relationship with anyone."

"Some father, eh?" he quipped.

"Well.....these facts may not sound as bizarre once you know all the issues, because to some extent, there is logic there."

"This is totally beyond me," he confessed.

"Vincent is flawed Joe, but to me he is not at all flawed, but beautiful."

"Flawed as in crippled?"

"No, not as in crippled," she screwed up her lips in an effort to express it better.

"So?" he urged, keen to learn the answer.

"He's very tall and very.....immensely strong, yet with features that are.....a mistake."

Sighing with relief, Joe responded fondly. "You should see my Aunt Maria. Man, she is the ugliest woman you have..... EVER seen, yet my Uncle Pablo adores her.....we all do. She is the anchor of our family."

"Really Joe? That is so sweet, but Vincent isn't.....he's....." and at that, Catherine's emotions were too painful as tears over spilled and ran down her flushed cheeks. Then, quickly she pulled herself together and Joe was amazed at the speed she changed back

into being in control again.

"Man, how do you do that?"

"Do what, Joe?" she looked up through the tears.

"Turn off the sadness."

"I have to, because.....Vincent and I share a Bond, we're connected. He knows when I'm happy or sad.....or in danger," she confessed.

"I'm starting to build a picture here.....that is, who helps you get out of mega danger, when on assignments and you winning each time. It's Vincent, tall and strong, who is keeping you safe?" he challenged her.

"Yes."

"Man, this is awesome," his face turned serious. "When can I meet him, Cathy?"

"He lives in a secret place Joe, where no one can find him. Because if they did, he and his Father, and the whole family would all be in great danger of people finding out about them."

"Why is it a secret? You can tell me.....come on, give me some slack here," he pleaded.

"Joe, I've already told you more than I ever should, but I'm trusting you, to tell no one.....nobody.....right?"

"Right, you got it," he assured her. "Maybe one day you'll let me meet.....Vinnie."

"Maybe."

"Hey! What's wrong with now? My desk is almost empty, Rita can

finish what's here. You are already on your way for your 'find yourself' vacation.....so?"

"I'd have to ask Father," Catherine confided.

"Father? What's Charles Chandler to do with all this? Man, this plot thickens every moment."

"Not my Father, but Vincent's Father, Jacob Wells. He won't allow anyone 'Below' unless he vets them personally."

"This is like the Mafia, and I'm scared Cathy, scared you're into something you are already over your head in."

"No Joe, truly this is not what it must seem to you.....if only there was a way to show you," she confessed.

"Did you sat Below just now?"

"Did I say that?" Catherine now felt flustered.

"You sure did.....and I know....."

"What do you know, Joe?"

"I know all this problematic thing centres around Central Park." Her face became deadly serious.

"What do you know, Joe? Tell me!"

"Hey, time out.....I know you walk regularly through the park at night and nothing happens to you. I know you're also scared of being alone, and spiders and all that good stuff. Yet you walk in the goddamn park at midnight, looking as lovely as ever, yet nothing happens. It's as if it was a warm sunny day and the park was empty. Come on, I don't have to be Einstein to work out things aren't what they seem here."

"Have you been **following** me?" she spat at him.

"Don't be mad.....just the once, and man, when you vanished I felt scared and totally unsafe. I couldn't see you anywhere, so I beat the hell out of that place I tell you."

Tapping her hand nervously on her folded arms, she spoke again gently. "Well, maybe it IS time for you to meet Vincent."

"Yes!" he clenched his fist and hit the air in triumph.

"Okay, okay Joe, but you will have to promise that you will **NEVER**, ever, repeat to a living soul where you have been or what you saw."

"You got it, hand on heart." Joe placed his hand quickly on his chest.

"Then come back with me, Joe, to my apartment, and we'll take it from there."

"Hey, I'm liking it already," he once more smiled boyishly. Catherine said a few goodbyes, then picking up her jacket and purse, joined Joe and together they left the office, this was to more than one raised eyebrow.

"Did you see those looks we got, Cathy?" he teased.

"Men!" she flashed him as they entered the elevator which took them down to the entrance of their office block. Hailing a yellow cab, they made their getaway.

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"Catherine, I felt your turmoil today, I felt your need of me, here Below.....tell me, what troubles you so?"

"My heart Vincent, it needs to distance itself from all this..... I need to get away for a little while."

"Away, Catherine.....from.....me?"

"Away from.....partly you, but really it's myself I need to find out about.....I need time alone."

"I see." He looked as if his world had fallen apart.

"I've asked Joe for time off, it seems there was time owing me and I took it. But like you, Joe sensed in me an unrest. He knows more than I ever imagined about me, and my walking the park. Even about why I come out of dangerous assignments unscathed. I feel, Vincent, in my deepest heart, we should allow Joe to know more, he's on our side, he's my friend. Also, he knows how to keep silent.....I want Joe to meet you, Vincent," she ended out of breath.

"No! Catherine, how can you ask?"

"Yes Vincent, how can you say no when you say you trust me?" she asked and continued. "Father let Lisa go Below and others, please Vincent, will you go Below now and ask him? I have Joe in my apartment, tell Father Joe would never betray us."

"Very well, I'll go and find him. Then I'll tap the reply on the pipes."

"Thank you Vincent," she turned and returned to Joe.

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Opening her door with the key, she looked up to see Joe on her balcony, looking out at the city by daylight, the same view she and Vincent shared by night----while the world slept. Seeing him standing there made her stop in her tracks and really look at him.

He truly was all she could ever have wanted at one time, had Vincent not entered her life. She was very drawn to him, maybe.....she mulled, he could always be in her life, their life, her and Vincent's.

"Hi Joe," she breezed as she walked through the balcony doors.

"Hi yourself.....that was quick. Can I see this 'new world' now?"

"Very soon Joe, Vincent has gone to ask his Father and he'll get back to me soon, so lets have a coffee."

"Fine, okay, good.....Can I use your bathroom?"

"Sure, first door on the left."

Meanwhile, Catherine went into the kitchen to make the coffee. She completely overlooked the fact the message would be quick in arriving, and didn't tell Joe to expect a message in tapping to arrive loud and clear.....in her bathroom!

No sooner had Joe closed the bathroom door, when a loud Morse code message ran loud and clear in the tiny lemon and powder blue bathroom, scaring him to death. Suddenly all Catherine could hear was-----

"Jesus! what the hell WAS that?!" as he joined her in the equally small kitchen and vaulted onto a surface to sit near her.

"You need a fix-it bloke for your pipes, they are clanging and banging!" Laughter filled the apartment as Catherine saw the funny side of the situation.

"Excuse me, did I miss something?" he asked.

"That was Vincent."

"If that was Vincent, man, you sure do have a problem, Radcliffe."

"No, that was a coded message to say Father has agreed to this meeting."

"No kidding!"

"We'll go straight after this coffee.....sugar Joe. is next to you," she added handing him his beaker of hot black coffee.

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They took the lift to the basement, then Catherine held his hand, leading him through a broken wall of bricks. As Joe followed her, they descended a ladder to Below.

"Are you sure, Cathy?" he said very apprehensively.

"I do it all the time."

"You do? Man this is weird!" With that he also descended the steps.

Vincent's hand helped her down the last few rungs of the ladder. Then together they watched Joe Maxwell enter their world. Vincent once again offered help off from the last few rungs to safety, placing his hand on Joe's arm.

Joe felt relieved to feel the comfort of this hand, until he looked down at the hand. All covered in fur and with deadly looking claws, the sight was such a shock to him he missed his footing. Going down the last two steps in one go, he landed hard on the dusty ground.

Details that Catherine had given him flashed through his mind at the speed of sound, and suddenly he felt trapped and scared. Then from behind him came a velvet voice speaking to him.

"Welcome Joe to my world, welcome as a friend of Catherine's."

Feeling less worried, Joe turned to finally meet this man who stole away his Cathy. Joe only came up to Vincent's chest, so his eyes continued upwards, taking in the unusual clothes and unique smell of candlewax that Vincent carried. However, he was not as prepared as he thought, when his eyes came to rest on Vincent's face, yet fear was not there. He saw beyond the lion-like features, the blue eyes so full of love and compassion, and it all began to slot into place like a jigsaw puzzle.

By this time, Vincent was aware via his keen sense that he need have no fear of Joe. So he stood, allowing Joe to take in all he saw. Catherine slipped her arm through Vincent's as together they watched Joe, and after what seemed like forever, but was only moments Catherine spoke.

"Joe, I want you to meet Vincent. Vincent, this is Joe, my boss, my friend, my tormentor."

"Vincent, gee pal, I'm so sorry to stare, forgive me please," Joe stammered.

"Give me your hand, Joe." Vincent's voice was full of understanding.

"Sure." Then Vincent took hold of his hand and placed it against his face.

"Better you feel, touch and see. I am real, Joe, I am what I am, no more, no less."

"I'm honoured to meet you," Joe expressed sincerely.

"Welcome to my world, come, we must go now and meet Father, he awaits us."



The three set off down the dark, dusty tunnels, where their feet kicked up fine dust, which lay where their feet walked. Reaching out for a burning torch from a bracket on the rock wall, Vincent then held it high, so all three could walk safely.

Turning to Catherine, Joe whispered, "How on earth did you find this place? Man, it's awesome,,,,,,,,,does Spielberg know of this place or Disney?" Catherine laughed out loud and soon all three laughed as they headed for Father's study.

Joe kept looking around him in total disbelief, then he occasionally looked behind at what he'd recently passed by. Then, a glow ahead which got larger, held his interest until it became the home chambers. It was a world that Catherine knew and loved, also a place where he felt drawn to.

Vincent released Catherine's hand as he entered Father's study. Catherine held back to let Joe follow, then she followed in last.

The contrast was amazing to Joe. Here really was a different world, a world apart from his. The old books, hundreds of them, keepsakes, trinkets, scripts of readings, all married into old carpets, quilts, leather, and candles everywhere, they formed a safe haven, ever for him.

A huge leather topped desk stood before him with an old man sitting on a comfortable old leather chair behind it. The welcoming smile and greeting came from Father.

"I'm Father, you must be Joe."

"That's me, F.....Sir."

"Catherine asked me to allow you to share all this. Not a thing we

undertake lightly, Joe. Our very world down here could end in hours, if those Above heard of us here Below. Please know, to be a part of us, you have to keep this place our secret. Do you give me your word?" He waited.

"Absolutely! I see the need for this Sir, and I will never let you down."

"Then consider yourself one of us, Joe." Then, as Mary entered on cue, Joe leaned over to Catherine, whispering in her ear.

"I feel I've graduated, I feel so good."

Mary advanced, carrying the tray, she looked at Jacob Wells smiling, then onto Vincent and Catherine. Taking the tray over to Joe first, him being the guest, she held out the tray saying....

"Welcome Joe, please take tea with us, also do try William's biscuits."

Taking a cup of herb tea, Joe saw the quality China, yet all odd, not matching pieces. The tray was lovingly repaired, like he noticed the chair had a leather patch, the carpet lovingly repaired. Man, the hours saving all this was so bizarre yet fascinating. Looking finally at Mary, he said, "Thank you..... say, do I know you? You look like I should know you?"

"I think not," Mary said, very flustered at the attention this drew to her.

Joe let it drop as he chatted to Father, Vincent and Catherine, and Mary picked up her patching, threading the needle with spectacles on the end of her nose. Then suddenly, Joe clicked his fingers, saying, "I've seen you in a photo someplace. I believe it was in the old family albums my Mama keeps. I remember, if you are this

person, then as a child I saw photos of you. then what I couldn't get, was suddenly you were not in any of them. I remember asking where you were, but all I was told was you hadn't died, but nobody knew where you were. Are you.....Mary Anna Rossini????"

Laying down her sewing, Mary put her hand in her apron pocket and pulled out a lace handkerchief, dabbing away unshed tears. Silence was golden and only the tick of the clock's pendulum disturbed it all.

"I am she.....but who are you to know all this?"

"I guess you must be my Aunt. My mother was Bernadette Marie Rossini, before she married. My papa is Guesseppe Maximilano Fiore DeMalva."

"You are my sister's boy, aren't you? My Bernadette had a child called Joseph. Oh Joe, it is so good to see you!" Then they hugged, as this strange turn of events took place before their very eyes. At last they spoke.

"So why did you disappear then.....why?"

"Oh Joe, it is a long story, a long sad story, only Jacob here knows of it. You don't want to hear all this after so long."

"I've all day and I want very much to hear it." All waited the answer as Father blew his nose on a large red spotted handkerchief, which he took from his cloak pocket.

"I'm not sure this is right, Jacob, to bare all this again after so long," she looked at her friend for guidance.

"Mary my dear, this is the time, trust me."

"Very well then, Jacob took me in twenty years ago, when my life fell apart."

"Why? How did this happen?" Joe asked.

Taking a deep breath, then looking up at everyone she began a story which she needed to share, after 20 years of carrying it around, like a heavy mantle about her shoulders.

"As a child brought up in a very strict religious family, I seen felt the need to be a part of the church. I joined the choir with Bernadette and taught the little ones in Sunday School, right up until I was 15. By this time all my brothers and sisters were married, yet I felt a need to take my belief further, so I entered a convent with every intention of becoming a nun, and God willing a Mother Superior.(She took a sip of tea and continued).

"First I became a novice, which thrilled me, then because I loved children, Father Michael, the parish priest, asked me if I would help them out for one year, to teach the small ones, giving them basic knowledge to love their belief. I was flattered, also at the end of the year, I would take my vows, so I agreed to do it.

"Father Michael found a person to help me, a local young man who was also thinking of the priesthood for his vocation in life, his name was Eddie. We were instantly attracted to each other and I was very shy, so for many weeks we spoke only of the job in hand. Then one night, when I was asleep, Eddie came into my room. He sat on the bed, which woke me, I clutched my bedding to me in horror.

"Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you---I can't get you out of my mind, I need you, Mary.

"I can't do this, I'm going to be a nun.

"And I, a priest one day.

"Don't you wonder sometimes what it would be like?(He smiled at her lovingly)

"No.....yes.....maybe.....Then he kissed me and for a short while we lived a once in a lifetime experience. Suddenly reality arrived and I felt so ashamed, what had I done? In the heat of the moment, our passion had enveloped us and taken us over.

"It was many weeks before I had enough courage to go to confession, to have my sins absolved. By then I had more shame to bear-----I was pregnant.

"Meetings were held and Eddie was confronted by Father Michael, but Eddie swore it wasn't his and how he'd seen me talking to another boy so it could be his.

"I managed to escape my duties to find Eddie and personally confront him, but he had gone, like a ship in the night. I was forgiven my sin and told the child would be taken from me at birth, and given to a childless couple. But at eight months I miscarried, I fell scrubbing one of the floors which was my penance, it was to encourage the miscarriage. Not only was the child stillborn, but deformed. I then knew my vocation was not to be, and this was God's anger at me personally. So I left my hospital bed and crept away into the night. I had nowhere to go, I felt so alone and so empty inside. Jacob found me huddled in a cardboard box down an alley close by. I believe I was crying, wasn't I, Jacob? That is how you knew where I was."

"Yes, you were cold, thin, ill and heartbroken. I brought you Below to heal, like Vincent brought Catherine after her attack in the park."

"Of course!" Joe said to himself, he was remembering the fuss in the press over the missing heiress Catherine Chandler.

"And," continued Mary, "I've been here ever since. This is my home, these are my family now, and I still look after the children. They are all my children," her face was wet with tears.

Her tears were matched by Catherine's, who once Mary had finished, let go of Vincent's hand and rushed over to Mary, to hug her as if squeezing the life out of her.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Catherine whispered in her ear.

"It's in the past child, but sometimes U-turns in our life redirect us into unexplored places. Here with Jacob, he and I have found our Shangri-La. My vocation is no longer to be a nun, it is to be here with all this."

Father cleared his throat to speak. "So Joe, this was all meant to be about you joining us Below."

"Sure was, now more than ever. I will never give away to anyone the secrets of this place, I swear!"

Mary looked at Joe. "You look so much like your Mama, Joe. Please come and see us when you can, we have so much to catch up on, after all, it is 20 years."

"Hey, you can bet on that one."

"That's settled then," Father announced with glee.

"I believe Catherine is leaving us for a while, is she not, Vincent?" Father ventured to say.

"Indeed she is, Father," his voice was depressed.

"No Vincent, I'm not leaving, I feel I have found all the answers here today. This IS where I belong and the vacation I am taking will be spent down here with my family," Catherine faced Vincent. "Can I stay?"

"Need you ask? You know you can, Catherine."

"Then I'll leave now," said Joe, "If you'll show me out." So following endless good-byes, Joe left to return Above, very keen to return soon.

As he left Vincent and Catherine at the tunnel entrance, Joe put his hands on Catherine's shoulders then kissed her cheek, then whispered in her ear, for only her to hear. "Now I understand, marry him Cathy, live Below and work Above for me. Think about it, kiddo."

"Goodnight Joe, and thank you." Catherine kissed Joe's cheek.



As Vincent and Catherine walked back together Below, Vincent slipped his arm around her shoulders, holding her tight.

"I like Joe," Vincent said slowly.

"I'm glad, and what a turn up, he and Mary," Catherine smiled.

"Some things are meant to be."

"He's a good man," Catherine added.

"He will always be a part of us now," Vincent said knowingly.

"Yes."

"He also gave you good advice as he said good-bye?"

"You heard!.....You heard?" she was impressed.

Not only did I hear every word, I also agreed with him. You should live down here and work Above."

"Am I finally hearing this right, Vincent?"

"Maybe we should have a wedding first," he said. Suddenly all Catherine's dreams had come true.

"Please share this dark world with me. I cannot offer you riches, fame or fortune.....just my love," Vincent whispered into her hair.

"That's all I ever wanted, Vincent. I wanted that from the first moment I saw you. There is no darkness when I'm with you, you are the light of my life."

"I couldn't face your rejection," he said.

"I accept----I will marry you." He held her close and their love now was destined to last through eternity and beyond.

"I think I'll ask Joe to be my best man." Vincent announced happily and with that, they went to tell Father and Mary their news.

YOUR TIME WILL COME PASCAL

By Gwen Lord

The gentle scent from the blossom trees in Central Park drifted forever upward in the direction of Catherine's apartment making the air seem to come alive with a collection of fragrance that only nature could take credit for. The sun had set on yet another hot and languid day which had tempers frayed and endless showers were a necessity in order to keep a modicum of sanity. With the onset of evening a slight, but very welcome, breeze played happily with the hem of the long net drapes, which hung against the open doors on Catherine's balcony. Coming from within, was an amber glow, reminiscent of the home chambers far below them, as a few candles lit the apartment that the music now embraced. Grieg, Strauss, Beethoven had all had their place in this magical evening. Now as the hour drew near for Vincent to return to his world, the strains of Schubert's unfinished symphony painted the perfect picture, that any artist would have desired to capture.

"Catherine."

"Umm."

"Catherine, the hour is late ... and I must return below." Vincent's soft voice was like velvet against her ear."

"Oh! ... just when it was all so perfect." Catherine turned her head so she could look directly into the face of the man she adored. His deep blue eyes met her soft green eyes with a look so full of love.

"I must Catherine ... with the dawn, ... there is danger for me, you know that. But my heart wants to stay with you." Vincent placed a soft kiss on the top of her head, as his strong arms held her with a possessiveness he never thought would be his.

"I'm sorry, I'm being selfish, ... it's just that the time we get to spend together is so short, so measured, ... and never enough." Catherine leaned up within his encompassing arms to bring her lips to his. It was as gentle as a feather, yet it sent shock waves through both of them. Then Vincent returned her kiss with a passion that knew no bounds.

"I love you Catherine, with all that I am."

"I am so lucky to have you all mine." She held his gaze as she let her feelings flow to him through their bond.

Getting to his feet, Vincent turned to Catherine, to offer his large clawed hand. As Catherine placed her small hand in his, so he pulled her up and to him, which resulted in yet another wonderful embrace.

"There's a concert in the park tomorrow evening, would you like to share listening to it, with me?" he said as he picked up his cloak and placed it about his huge shoulders.

"Really, tomorrow night, oh that would be lovely, Vincent, I'll look forward to it." she linked her arm through his as they made their way to the balcony.

"I'll be waiting for you at your basement about seven o'clock."

"I'll be there."

Now as they stood together against the wall of the balcony, looking out into the night, the silhouetted skyscrapers could be seen, as the dawn sky drew them out of the darkness it had pulled them into, hours before. Vincent's arm crept around Catherine's tiny waist.

"Till tomorrow my love," he whispered.

"I wish it was now! Vincent why does the world conspire to keep lovers apart?" she asked with a sadness born of a love so deep, there were no words to describe it, ever.

"I sometimes feel it has to be a dream I'm living through ... yet when I look into your eyes, I know it's for real. I ask myself all the time ... WHY ME, ... there are no answers to that. Except that love is blind," he sighed.

"It is I who am the lucky one, Vincent, out of all the women in this huge world, you chose me." Her arm tightened around Vincent's back.

"The sky gets ever lighter, my cover will be gone soon, I MUST GO."

Taking her hands in his, he brought them up to his lips and kissed them. Then almost as if he had never been there, he was gone, swallowed up into the darkness he came from. His incredible eyesight, cat like grace and speed, soon had him back within the safety of the home tunnels. Once the huge iron gate had clanged shut and, only then, could Vincent ease his pace. The vapour from his breath puffed out into the cold tunnel air, as he sought to regain his breath and calm his racing heart. The fear drilled into him as a small boy by Father, of being captured above, still loomed as a warning within him ... what they would do to him if they caught him above. Father's words echoed in his head always, 'til he once more felt safe. Ahead of him after the long walk, lay the amber glow of the chambers which, for all of his life, had been the only home he had ever known. Whenever Vincent had been Above to be with Catherine, he would marvel at the stillness, the deep silence of it all,

"Could the world above offer a prayer more perfect, than this tender silence."

Vincent drew comfort from the words he loved of Walt Whitman's. The world Below slept, as the pipes also slept. So, Vincent allowed his thoughts to turn to the woman he loved, to the wonderful evening they had just spent together. The feel of her small hand in his, the scent that was Catherine, the looks she gave him, the love she wanted to give him alone, forever. Yes, forever, ... forever was such a long time, yet she wanted to love him even beyond the grave into eternity itself. A love like this was special, but for it to be for him, it was every dream he'd ever had come true and he feasted on it, he now knew without it, he would die. Their souls were joined and he thanked God for just ... being. To feel her complete trust in him and with him, brought tears to his lovely blue eyes, as they swam around before spilling over and down his cheek, he was indeed blessed.

But his reverie was abruptly cut short as he approached Pascal's chamber. What should have been in darkness, was lit within, as a single candle flame played against the rock walls of his chamber. Silently Vincent came to a stop at the doorway. Then with both hands on the opening, he eased himself into the entrance to see what was wrong within.

"What troubles you so Pascal?" Vincent's soft, but concerned, voice broke through his friend's thoughts.

"Vincent ... you startled me ... I was miles away. I'm sorry, is there something you want?" Pascal rose from the small stool he'd been sitting on. Worn away it's from continual use, but bore a wonderful shine, telling of the use it had had with Pascal and his father before him. Stretching and yawning, Pascal indicated to the soft over stuffed chair close by.

"Come in Vincent, take the weight of your feet."

"Thank you, I was on my way back from Catherine's returning to my chamber ... when I saw the flicker of your candle at this very late hour, ... I wondered if you were unwell?"

As Vincent sat down so did Pascal, a silence descended in the chamber, then Pascal broke the silence.

"You say you are only on your way back from Catherine's." Pascal said as he pulled out his gold watch on a chain, attached to his tunic pocket.

"Yes, ... it's almost dawn. I didn't want to leave her and yet, with

the dawn, I am forced to return to my world."

"Good job Vincent, Father didn't catch you coming in this late, for as old as you are he would still have had a go at you my friend, like he did when we were small."

"Yes," was all Vincent could say, nodding his head in agreement.

"I think I'll make some tea, would you like some?" Pascal asked.

"That would be most acceptable, thank you."

Pascal picked up the earthenware pitcher from the floor and poured some water from it into the small gleaming tin kettle, then, placing it on the burner, lit the flame and set about getting down two mugs from the cupboard. An old oxo tin held the tea bags from which he popped one into each mug, then stood back and turned to Vincent.

"Some of the ideas they have above are ingenious," he smiled weakly, as he reached for the jug of milk.

"So tell me, what lies so heavy with you this night?" Vincent asked as he made himself more comfortable in the old easy chair.

"Life Vincent ... life." Pascal shrugged his shoulders and also gestured with his hands.

"Philosophy in the small hours can only mean a heart in turmoil. We have been good friends all our lives, as well as working along side each other. I know you, I know you as well as I know myself. I sense in you a great sadness ... we've always been able to share what life threw at us, why not now?" Vincent took the mug which Pascal now handed to him, filled with steaming hot tea.

"The cup that cheers, eh Vincent?" But Pascal didn't drink, instead he left his mug on the surface along side the kettle and milk. Sitting down he reached into a tunic pocket to pull out a large homemade handkerchief. First he wiped away a tear, then blew loudly into it. But the tear didn't go unnoticed by his friend.

"I'm waiting ... share it with me, please," Vincent urged.

The silence that followed was charged with sadness and, at the same time, with an air of a secret about to be shared. Vincent sensed the difficulty his friend was having to find the right words. Even the still pipes, seemed ready to burst into the symphony, that they were to Pascal.

"Very well, I can see you want to help, I also know when I see that

look Vincent, if it takes all night, you intend to hear my story. I'm ..." He cleared his throat, "I'm so ... very alone ... I'm lonely Vincent." There, he had finally said it, but with the announcement came more tears.

"I know that feeling ... oh so well. You can be surrounded with friends and those you love, yes even family ... yet still be ... alone."

"Yes, yes Vincent, that is exactly perfect, you HAVE grasped how I feel."

"I've had a lot of practice at being lonely and alone," Vincent sighed.

Picking up his tea, Pascal took a sip then set it down again. Vincent had already finished his, so sat back patiently waiting for him to find the right words, which would allow him to open up his heart, in order for his heart to start to heal.

"As boys, remember Vincent, we gave Father many a tense moment or two."

"I remember," Vincent smiled, as he too remembered fond and also painful memories.

"Mitch, Devin, Ruth, Stanley and yes, the small Indian boy ... Yano. We were a formidable gang, were we not." His eyes shone for a moment with the memory, then the sadness returned.

"Yes, we all spent many happy hours skinny dipping in the falls, discovering the forbidden tunnels, like Columbus discovered life Above."

"Then ..." Vincent whispered encouragingly.

"Then, one by one ... they left us, until only the two of us remained," Pascal ran his hand over his face, then leaned forward to Vincent.

"Yes." The sigh told of the pain remembering was costing them.

"It was ... because we were both different, in a way from the others."

"Different ... ME yes, but ... not the both of us," Vincent was quick to point out.

"Oh yes Vincent, BOTH of us. You used to say you felt you were

flawed, that the differences angered you and because of that, no one would ever want you. That you felt your life was an empty shell."

"That was true ... that is how I felt ... until that magical night I found Catherine."

"The change in you started there and then, she certainly brightened up all our lives, that's for sure." Pascal was almost his whole self again, as he chatted to Vincent.

"That was a wondrous time for me, as I felt my life change. She opened doors I never dared hope would be there for me. Our 'bond' told me how special it really was."

"You have Catherine... but ... I have no one. Who wants me, look at me, the exact opposite of you. We are like before and after, the Laurel and Hardy of the tunnel world." Both smiled at this, a little light relief amid this deep sadness.

"All the women want a big man to protect them, they want a man skilled with a trade. They want a home and garden, holidays. I'm nothing, amounting to zero ... who wants me? I'll tell you ... no one."

"Pascal, if Catherine can love ME, with all my flaws, then, out there, unknown to us now, there has to be someone, for you."

"I wish I had your faith, Vincent, I really do," he sighed.

"You do yourself a injustice my friend. You have a wonderful talent with the pipes. Without you we wouldn't have any communications down here. Your father passed those talents on to you, as would a father Above would pass on to his sons, the skills of the family business. You have a kind and generous heart, that tells the world you are special. You see Pascal, I've learnt something from Catherine, that took a long while to accept, beauty shines from within. We have to look beyond the surface we see. Not everyone can do this, that's why so many people move away from love, instead of towards love. We have to ... turn our disadvantages into our advantages." Vincent was up and pacing Pascal's small chamber.

"We are both nearly 40, almost confirmed bachelors. Yet Pascal, I hope one day to ask Catherine to share a life with me."

"I'm happy for you Vincent, but where is this woman for me? I don't see any Catherines hanging about for me."

"You ..." but Pascal stopped him.

"Once I thought maybe there was someone ... you remember her Vincent, she was called Ruth. It broke my heart when at 16 she decided to go Above to look for a better life for herself."

"Yes, we were all saddened when she chose to do that. But father said everyone should be allowed to try for a happy life and if that's what she desired, then he allowed her to go. If I remember rightly, she went to stay with a helper, then after a while she moved on." Vincent once more sat down next to Pascal.

"Since my father was killed in the rock fall, I've tried to hide the loss of him as he was such a good man. I was only 15, but I had to grow up fast. I regret not being here when he died, but we were off exploring the tunnels and it wasn't until we returned, that we learnt of his terrible death, I'll never forgive myself that you know," he confided.

"Yes he was a pillar of life down here. With Father and Paracelsus they designed the code we still use today. You must be very proud of your father," he said brushing the cushion.

"Did it ever bother you Vincent when all our friends got married? Did it make you sad?"

"In a way. But Father always gave me to believe, that a life like that would never be mine. So, from an early age, I had accepted

it, but deep in my heart I too wanted that too."

"Vincent, I seem to be everyone's favourite Uncle, when ... what I really want is to be a father to my children." Again out came the handkerchief, to wipe away the tears.

"One day, someone will come, and you'll live another dream, both you and your heart will know when it happens, trust me on this."

"I lay awake like tonight, unable to sleep, longing to hold my woman close and call her mine. I long to have children, to hear their voices echoing along the tunnels, like ours used to do. "

Vincent nodded.

"Then it would be OUR turn to worry what they were up to," both laughed at that, as the truth of it was so clear.

"Aloneness is a sadness born of faded dreams. You have to have HOPE, to make a dream come true."

"Yes, maybe you are right, I should heed your advice," Pascal grasped Vincent's large hands.

"I'm running along the same parallel lines as you, so I see all too

well, believe me."

"I think we should call this all for tonight and catch some sleep while there is still time. Remember Father's called a special meeting in his study for nine sharp."

"In that case, I agree with you, we must rest while, I will see you in Father's study. I believe he said it had to do with someone who used to live in the tunnels and went Above to live, but now seeks sanctuary back among her family."

"Good night then Vincent."

"Good night my friend." Then picking up his cloak, he quickly left the chamber.

Once outside Pascal's chamber, Vincent continued his way along the familiar tunnels. Passing first Mouse's chamber, then Zack's, a little further along was the nursery, which joined with Mary's chamber. As Vincent approached Father's the boy in him still hoped against hope he was asleep. The snoring and occasional breaking of wind, told him all was well, as he silently slipped into his own domain. But sleep wouldn't come easily this night, too much talk, too late, had Vincent's mind in overdrive, for his friend. Deciding this was as good as any time to catch up on his journal, Vincent sat down and opened the pages, ready to continue his

personal feelings. Sitting back in the tall carved chair, he closed his eyes in meditation, then picked up his pen started to write.

The hum of excited voices ebbed away as Father, leaning heavily on his old carved stick, limped across the worn old carpet, which covered most of the floor. Following behind was the reason they were all there. A small woman of about 35 or so, with short red curly hair, with a face that was pleasantly pretty but not quite beautiful. She looked nervous, as she followed Father never taking her eyes off the floor. Father coughed, then tapped his stick to get attention, a command which was instantly observed.

"Thank you all for being here as I asked. The hour is still early, but this is a matter that needs attention. We have here among us ... someone who knew and loved these tunnels all her life. She was brought to us when she was only six and a half. A frail little mite, beaten into submission by her step father, after her dear mother died. Old Sam found her in the alley, near the disused theatre. I remember it was New Year's Eve, snow was falling thick and deep Above, but this little child wore only a torn cotton dress, no shoes just socks and bruises. She had a happy childhood with us all, then when Ruth was 16 she wanted to have a life 'Above'. One of the helpers offered her a home, also gave her a job. Then one day, she met a man and fell in love. He was a lot older than her, a father figure. He promised her a life she felt she had to accept. But all his good looks and charming manner, hid from her the

shallow man he really was. A man of no substance, who treated her abominably."

Pascal and Vincent stood motionless, as her life was laid bare before them all; a necessary channel all had to go through, to be accepted back into life Below.

"I want you all to welcome home ... Ruth. Welcome my dear." Father hugged and kissed her. Then, one by one all greeted her back. As their voices drifted away, so Ruth stood alone in the centre of the chamber, as Father sat down at his desk and Vincent and Pascal emerged from the shadows.

Turning her head she saw Vincent.

"Vincent, my special friend, how tall you have become, come, hold me," she begged. As Vincent's mighty arms held her tenderly, she felt she was finally home. Then out of the corner of her eye, she spied ... Pascal.

"Oh, my God Pascal, it's you!" Leaving Vincent's arms, she went and stood before Pascal. They stood looking at each other for what seemed like a lifetime, or was it a heartbeat.

"Welcome back Ruth." Pascal's face was glowing, his eyes alive

with genuine pleasure for the only woman he ever loved and lost as the world called her Above.

"Pascal, it's been so long. I have missed you so much. The three of us used to have such wonderful times together."

"Yes, we were only talking about that together last night, weren't we Pascal," Vincent encouraged his friend.

"Yes, that's right Vincent, I believe we did touch on the subject." Vincent concealed a chuckle as he remembered their discussion.

"Tell me about yourself Vincent. I have so much catching up to do. And you Pascal, I want to know everything," she implored.

So, as Mary joined them with a tray of cups, full to the brim with steaming hot chocolate, the five of them caught up on the last 20 years.

"So, you have romance in your life Vincent, I would love to meet your Catherine."

"That you will my dear," Father told her. "Vincent and Catherine are inseparable, you will see her soon, as I believe she is joining

us for dinner tonight. Isn't that so Vincent?" Father asked.

"Yes, Catherine will be here about seven o'clock."

"Good, then I will look forward to that very much." Ruth now turned to Pascal, "Is there a woman in your life? I expect you, like Vincent, have been captured by some lucky woman."

Pascal blushed to the very centre of his being. But it was Vincent who answered Ruth, "No, Pascal remains alone, waiting for the right person, to steal his heart. Well, I must go, I will see you all later, but I am expected on the lower level, they will be needing me so, 'til later," and with that, he was gone. Father stood and also excused himself, saying he had to see Cullen and suddenly he too was gone and they were the only ones left.

"It would seem Pascal, we are being left alone, to catch up on all the missing years."

"Come I will show you my pipes. There are many more since when you left."

"Do you still clean the copper ones near the home chambers, so they ring clear?" Ruth asked him.

"You remember that!" Pascal was surprised she remembered.

"I remember it all so clearly. I've had a lot of time to perfect my memory," she looked sad and suddenly alone.

Pascal ventured his arm around her shoulder.

"I missed you when you left. I felt as if a light inside me had gone out," he confessed.

"Did you really miss me? Because I used to cry myself to sleep at night, wishing I was back with you all, Father, Vincent ... but most of all ... You."

* * * * *

It is now five years since Ruth was returned to the welcoming arms of her family 'Below'. The tunnels are alive with the sound of happy voices. Vincent and Catherine have a home in the tunnels, where they bring up their son Jacob, now just turned three. He has two play mates, much the same age, they are twins; Lian and Lilly. These are two of Pascal and Ruth's four children. The three remind Pascal and Vincent of what lies ahead for them, as when they are old enough, they will explore the same tunnels. But until then, Ruth rests as her seven month old son sleeps, called Devin J, and two year old Molly eats William biscuits.

"Hello Vincent, you waiting for Pascal?"

"Yes, if I may."

"Would you like a drink," Ruth asked him kindly.

"No, thank you, Catherine's drinking cold tea with orange in it. She was just the same when she was expecting Jacob. It makes me feel very unwell, so to answer your question, no thank you, nothing to drink!"

"At least Catherine's not too sickly with this baby, so that's something isn't it?"

"You know Ruth, there was a time, not too long ago, when what we four have now, was just a dream. How very lucky we all are to have found such happiness."

"To have my Pascal, I feel like a queen. When everyone rejected him to go above, they went looking for ... life. But they left the best reassurance behind. Pascal is the sweetest person in the world. He is taller and bigger, than even you are, to me. He is my knight in shining armour. He taught me to really see a rainbow, the beauty of a daisy, he sees beauty in what most people never see. He is

wise ... and we love each other so much deeply."

"Pascal and I have so much ... yet there was a time when we went to the very brink of despair," he confided.

"One thing I've learnt over the last few years Vincent, is never to judge a book by its cover. It's what we are inside, that shines through, which makes us special," she smiled.

"Now our children will be our legacy. We have much to teach them, about the ways we hold so dear," Vincent smiled, a thing he never used to do.

"Pascal wants a large family, Vincent, to replace the one he never had. And I want to give him that so much."

"We also want a large family, I think we can all thank God, that we have indeed been blessed, with ... our HAPPY LIFE."

The End.