

# A KNIGHT TO REMEMBER

by A.N.D.

"The lights are so beautiful tonight," Catherine murmured as she looked at the view from her balcony.

Vincent made no answer. There was no beauty in his world this evening, as he felt the distance between them so acutely. Catherine was as gentle and loving to him, as always, but he was consumed with a mix of jealousy for Michael's stolen kiss and sorrow that he should be so unwilling to share Catherine's love with another.

Some day she would leave him, he was sure of it, leave him for a normal man who could offer her all she deserved. All he could offer her was his heart, and Vincent was sure that offering could never be enough. He closed his eyes against the pain of it and sighed.

Catherine came to him then and rested her head upon his shoulder. A hug was the only touching he would allow between them but, as he glanced down at her lovely face, he wondered what it would be like to kiss her as Michael had. Perhaps, if she were to leave him, he could at least keep the memory of her soft lips, perhaps that memory would be solace enough. Perhaps. He pushed the thought away with another sigh. Theirs was a love that could never be, should never have been, and these stolen moments and heartfelt hugs were already too much to ask of an unkind fate.

Catherine heard his sighs, felt his sorrow, and thought she knew the cause. "You're still upset about Michael, aren't you?" she asked softly.

"I have seen him, spoken to him," Vincent replied. "He has promised to come back Above to accept the chance at college you have given him. He will be fine. It's just that..." his voice trailed off.

"What?" she urged softly.

"He still fears me somewhat," Vincent finished miserably. "I have told him that I understand what he has done, that I understand what he is feeling. And I do! But he fears my anger, just the same."

Catherine stroked his hair in sympathy and said nothing.

"He told me he had a dream of the two of you -- together. Only. . ." his voice broke, and he paused for a moment, breathing heavily. "Only, I broke in, in a jealous rage, and

attacked him.” Vincent’s head slumped forward. His next words were whispered so quietly that Catherine barely heard them. “I told him I forgave him, but when it first happened, a part of me wanted to do just that, so that I could have your love all to myself.”

Vincent was too big for Catherine to get her arms completely around, but she hugged as much of him as she could with all her might.

"Oh, Vincent. I told you before those feelings are natural. They're the other side of love, and I've felt them too. I've been jealous of Father, and the love you two share on a daily basis, without anyone trying to tell you 'it was never meant to be.' And when you first told me that Lena wanted you, I hated her with all my heart -- and myself, too, for bringing her to the tunnels."

"Catherine, no!" He sounded shocked.

"Yes, Vincent. So I know how you feel. But think of this." She leaned back to look directly into his tear-filled eyes. "Michael had to steal that kiss from me because I don't love him and I don't want him. If there is a part of you that still envies that kiss, then I am willing to give you all that he took -- and more."

"No!" Vincent burst out, and Catherine couldn't tell if the sound was more a snarl or a sob. "Catherine, this cannot be!"

"Why not?" she cried back. "I love you. You love me. What could be more natural? But you won't even come into my apartment when you visit! Are you afraid I'm going to drag you, kicking and screaming, to my bed?"

Vincent plunged from her grasp, pacing nervously to the other side of the balcony.

"Catherine, you must be free, to live your own life. Someday a man will come who can offer you all the things you deserve, a man who can sample with you all the pleasures of your world, a man who can offer you a normal life and family. I must not stand in your way of finding this man!"

Catherine stared at him in shock, then went white from fury. "Vincent, I don't believe this! I didn't drive all the way from Connecticut in the middle of the night to be with another man. I came to be with you! I realized then that you are the only man I have ever really loved, the only man I ever will love, so will you please *stop* trying to throw me into the arms of someone else? I. Love. You. I. Want. Only. You!"

"But I am..." Vincent made a vague gesture at his feline muzzle with clawed, furry fingers.

"You're beautiful," Catherine told him flatly.

Vincent dropped his eyes before her, shaking his head as he had done earlier in the tunnels, when she told him to reach for her love, that he deserved her. He had cried on her shoulder, but he had not believed her then, and he did not believe her now.

He was too wrapped up in his misery to pay close attention to her, and so was taken completely by surprise by the kiss. Her arms wrapped around his neck to pull him down to her level and, without thinking, he hugged her back for a moment. But at the end of the moment, he jerked back and tried to break free. He stumbled, catching himself on the planter and dropping gracelessly into the lawn chair.

Catherine followed and curled up in his lap before he could rise. His instant protest was muffled against her mouth as she feathered kisses all over his face. One hand trailed back into his hair, while the other tenderly cupped his chin, preventing him from shifting away. He reached for this hand and gently pulled it from his face -- and surprised both of them by kissing her palm. A part of him was terrified at his own audacity in touching her. He hesitantly met her eyes, and all fears were stilled in the brilliance of her smile. She kissed him harder then, and he murmured a last incoherent protest at her ardor.

"Shhh," Catherine whispered into the ear she was nibbling. "Stop trying to think. Just feel."

He did, and her mouth on his neck felt wonderful. He could ask no more of life than to sit and cuddle Catherine like this, and he probably would have remained quite happily in the chair for hours. But Catherine shifted in his lap as she felt his erection growing, and he felt instantly ashamed.

Tears were welling once more in his eyes as he breathed, "I'm sorry," and tried to rise.

Catherine grabbed the arms of the chair and leaned forward, anchoring him down. "You're not getting away so easily," she told him merrily, "not while I have you where I want you." She gathered him into her arms and whispered, "I love you. Did you know that?"

Vincent had to smile at so obvious a question and, satisfied with the smile, Catherine slid from his lap. Slowly, assuming that the glorious interlude was over, Vincent rose. But before he could turn to the edge of her balcony, Catherine caught his hand and tugged him in the direction of the French doors. Panic and anticipation froze him, and he looked hard into her eyes.

"Catherine, are you sure?"

Catherine smiled, obviously amused at his continued nervousness. "Vincent," she said in mock exasperation, "you are the last person I thought I'd have to reassure. You feel what I'm feeling, right?"

"Yes..."

"Well then, you tell me. What am I feeling right now? Do I feel like I'm not sure?"

His own emotions were so chaotic that they almost blocked hers, but he concentrated and reached out through the bond. Love, passion, desire, and an unmistakable serene

assuredness exploded through him. It shook him and elated him all at once, and he gazed at her, mute from the intensity of her emotions.

"Trust me," Catherine told him and led him into her apartment.

The rest of the night was a marvelous jumble for Vincent who could never clearly remember what happened. Catherine was gentle, and their loving was long and slow, drawn out to let him savor each new and glorious sensation. Their bond did amazing things to his perceptions; empathy became almost telepathy as they became more involved, to the point where he felt her sensations as strongly as his own.

They took their time several times, and when they were finally too exhausted to continue, Vincent lay beside his love and gathered her to him. He nuzzled her neck sleepily, and she kissed the tip of his nose, then reached over him to the nightstand. He blinked in that direction and saw that she was pulling single rose from a bud vase.

Catherine smiled down at him and tapped the spot she'd kissed with the bloom.

"It's lovely," he said drowsily.

"It's for you," she told him. "I bought it for you earlier, but with the flap about Michael and all, it didn't seem appropriate to give it to you then.

One claw delicately touched the tip of a multi-colored petal. "A minute rose is a most rare gift."

"I know," she told him, "but I read a poem the other day that made me think of it -- and you." Catherine tenderly brushed his face with the flower as she softly quoted:

*"The red rose whispers of passion,  
And the white rose breathes of love;  
O, the red rose is a falcon,  
And the white rose is a dove.  
But I send you a cream-white rosebud  
With a flush on its petal tips..."*

*"For the love that is purest and sweetest*

*Has a kiss of desire on the lips."*<sup>4</sup> Vincent finished, and swept Catherine to him.

The rose lay forgotten on the pillow as he saluted her once again with all the purity, sweetness, and ardor of his love.

END

iThe White Rose, John Boyle O'Reilly, 1844 - 1890