

# Eulogy for a Nemesis

by Alan T Branhill

The creature stopped, finally reaching the top of the tall building; it had met many adversaries to protect the frail and beautiful thing it held in its hand. Whenever danger had come across her path, it had always been there for her, the risk to itself was immaterial compared with saving the life of its prize.

The pair of them had nowhere to go. Suddenly great birds of metal screamed high in the air. Taking a marksman's inspection of their target, swooping down one after another, they pumped hot lead into its huge frame. As they passed, a large paw of enormous strength managed to swipe a wing, sending its cold metal bulk crashing to the street below - but the battle was being lost. The hapless creature gave one final look at the sweet and lovely thing which had brought it here; and for that it had broken all the rules by which it had once lived.

Clouds of red covered its vision. Then, as it fell, blackness....

In her apartment, Catherine switched off the TV. She was tired, it had been a busy day, being an Assistant District Attorney was no job with expectation of relaxation to follow, she knew, especially if you brought some of the files home with you. She smiled. She always brought the files home with her. But the fact that she was able to help people in trouble made it all seem worthwhile.

She looked at the blank TV screen and tried to calculate the number of times that film had been shown. It had always made her feel sad to see that big ape cut down to size and become nothing; how something of strength and greatness could have a weakness. But only out of its own territory. She thought of her own weakness, three years ago when she had met up with monsters from her world, had felt the cold metal blade on her face; and a name that did not belong to her. 'Carol.' A mistake, but left for dead just the same, just like the big ape.

Until rescued. Rescued by someone different though more human than she could ever imagine. From a world under the city; his territory.

The film was only a fantasy, but he was real; and now he was always there for her. Her work brought her into contact with the ogres of the city, and when danger threatened, he came to deal out just punishment and thwart them with retribution, in her name. Yet, she always asked herself, was she being fair to him?

Each encounter had notched up more deaths - running the risk of him being hunted down and destroyed. She remembered the film - the message conveyed, should one step out of one's own territory. And there were other lives at stake too. The people who lived with him in the tunnels and chambers Below. Father continued to remind her loyal servant that he sometimes broke strict rules, but his words were in vain, though born out of fear for them both.

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Catherine had sat up with only a small oil lamp. A full moon shone through her balcony window, its light falling softly onto her carpet. Suddenly, it was eclipsed by a dark shadow. A form.

"Vincent!" She hurried across to her balcony and flung back its doors. "At last!" She enfolded him in

her loving arms. "Oh, Vincent." His strong arms went about her. She felt whole.

"Catherine, I'm here, always," he assured her. She looked up into his face and she believed him.

"It's been so long, I thought you would never come."

There was a pause. "I've been away to think Below." Every spoken word came carefully.

Catherine swallowed. She asked, "Can you share those thoughts with me?"

Vincent looked up at the moon which made his skin the colour of milk and let out a deep sigh before meeting her gaze.

"Perhaps. When the time is right," was all he said.

Catherine frowned, fear filled her heart and she didn't know why. "Vincent, all the time I've known you, each time we meet, I feel it is going to be the last. If only I had your gift, knowing what you feel inside." She prodded his broad chest.

Vincent looked down at her, already feeling her pain. "Catherine, remember this, you and me are like the fingers on a glove, together, but separate - but we both share the same dream."

From under the folds of his dark cape he produced a slim edition of '*Shakespeare's Sonnets.*' All at once his voice lightened and so did Catherine.

"Catherine," he said, "I've never shown you how to read by the moon."

Catherine's mouth broke into a long smile. "Never," she answered, with a willingness to learn.

The moon looked down on them as they both sat on the concrete sill of the balcony.

As Vincent began reading, Catherine stared at him, this person she could only think well of, give praise to, and the beautiful soul that dwelled within him.

The thought of sleep had left her, it was well after midnight, but tomorrow was Saturday. No work.

She placed her hand upon his shoulder.

There was still enough hours left of moonlight before the first rays of dawn.

*'O' how thy worth with manners may I sing.  
When thou art all the better part of me?  
What can mine own praise to mine own self-being?  
And what is't but mine own when I praise thee?  
Even for this let us divide live,  
And our dear love lose name of single one,  
That be this separation I may give.  
That due to thee, which thou deserv'st alone.  
O Absence! What a torment wouldst thou' prove,  
Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave  
To entertain the time with thoughts of love,  
Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth deceive,  
And that thou teachest how to make one twain.  
By praising him here who doth hence remain*

- Shakespeare

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