

BEAUTY AMONG THE RUINS

by Allison

The wall of the basement appeared to have been broken through as if by a battering ram. Vincent led Catherine through this hole in the wall, into a passageway...and they disappeared...

Detective Hermann walked down the stairs and stood with several of his patrolmen, surveying the devastation in the townhouse entryway.

"So you got any ideas?" One of the patrolmen asked.

The detective shook his head. "No...Looks like they were mauled...by a lion."

As they searched the townhouse, Hermann and his men moved through the splintered basement door, down the stairs into the basement.

"Some pretty strange things going on in this city..." His voice trailed off as he discovered the hole in the basement wall and the passageway beyond. "...And, I hear, there are even stranger things going on underneath it..." He and the others examined the area in greater detail. "I don't know what happened here, but I'm going to find out."

Hermann leaned back and closed his eyes as he recalled the incident at the townhouse with Martin Belmont and his cronies. The three bodies sprawled throughout the entryway. Their bodies ripped to shreds. Gathering his thoughts, he looked at the small stack of files on the corner of his desk. Each file showing men killed in a similar fashion. When he went to speak to his captain about it, he was told...

"Look, Lou. We have real cases going on out there. When low-lifes kill low-lifes, take it as a favor and go look out for the people who actually obey the law, huh?"

So he put the word out to send him anything that sounded similar and that's where the 12 files on his desk came from. Each file, a man's biography and how he met his end. All the files were somewhat still active, just no one was taking any interest in them.

"I must be crazy," he commented as he brought his mind back to the present and the case file in front of him. "I'll take these home with me and go through them again. Maybe something will pop out this time." He recalled the conversation he had with one of the coroners over lunch recently.

"All the victims in each of these killings have the same particular slash pattern on the abdomen and upper torso and sometimes show other signs of being attacked with great force. Most died with a look of abject terror on their faces. I'm surprised no one ever figured out the slash pattern looked familiar in each of these cases."

"So am I, Doc. So am I. Maybe no one's as interested as I am"

"Why are you so interested in this, Detective?"

"I guess I don't like leaving a case unsolved, for any reason."

"I can understand that," the coroner said. "If any others happen to show up, I will call you."

"Thanks Mike. I appreciate it."

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"You're crazy! They'll never let you get away with it."

The man at the window turned, the afternoon sun glinted off the golden mask he always wore on the left side of his face.

"What better way to get Vincent out of the way permanently, Mr. Denton, then to do exactly what Father always feared? Expose Vincent for the entire world to see. Without Vincent to protect them, it'll be child's play to remove Jacob from his throne."

"What about Vincent's lady friend? I could probably take her out. It's the how I'm not so sure of."

"Never fear. I have plans for her as well. By the time I'm finished, her reputation will be ruined and she'll spend the rest of her life in prison. And...if she should happen to come to harm...well..."
Paracelsus gave an evil laugh.

"Prison? You really think you'll be able to pull that off?"

"Patience, dear boy. All in good time. All in good time."

Mitch wondered what the hell he got himself involved with. Helping Paracelsus, of all people. But if his plans took Vincent

down a few pegs and got rid of Chandler...so be it.

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Matt Smith was surprised when the old man contacted him. Said he had a specific job for him and boy what a job it turned out to be. Here he was, following and practically spying, on a beautiful woman. "What the...?" hbe silently exclaimed, as he saw movement near her as she stood outside the large drainage culvert. He focused his camcorder as the shadowy figure emerged and moved toward her. A shaft of moonlight hit the couple and the figure's face was clearly visible through his lens. "Holy Shit!" he whispered. He held the camera steady on the figure's face, taking in the leonine features and profile.

He set the video camera down and took out the 35mm that he used with his photography assignments. He took several shots of the figure and of the woman with him. He had become rather deft at following Catherine Chandler. She almost caught him a few times, but he managed to duck just in time. He even found an apartment across the park from hers with a perfect view of her balcony. He recalled getting some great shots there too. He made sure he got close-ups of both figures, as well as close-ups of the intimate embraces they shared.

"The old man said this guy was some sort of freak but he didn't elaborate. I can understand why. I wonder what the old man has in mind with this. He sure is paying me enough though."

He managed to get a few more shots before the couple moved back into the drainage tunnel. He waited a good 20 minutes to

see if Catherine would return, but when she didn't, he packed up his gear and headed back to his studio to develop the pictures and wait for the old man to contact him.

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A few weeks later Detective Hermann found himself in an abandoned warehouse littered with the remains of five more men killed in the same manner as before. He also found Mitch Denton cowering and balling like a baby, on top of a catwalk. Denton begged the detective to take him to jail. As his men escorted Denton out, Hermann asked him.

"Who or what did this, Denton?"

Mitch had the look of someone whose shit had thoroughly been chilled. "Get me the hell outta here and I'll tell you anything you want to know." Mitch thought back to his conversation with Paracelsus. *'The cop will never believe me but he looks like he's seen this type of killing before so maybe, just maybe, he will, and that'll get the cops looking for Vincent and maybe go after Chandler as well.'*

"Take him downtown. I don't want anyone talking to him but me. Understand?"

"Yes, sir." The officer answered as he started pulling Mitch toward the door to the warehouse.

The detective grilled Mitch for over six hours once he was arrested and processed. Denton waived his right to an attorney, due to the fact that he thought he'd be better off in prison instead

of running the docks where Paracelsus, or worse, Vincent, would find him. Whatever Paracelsus had planned, he and his men paid for it with their lives and lost. Now the rest was up to Paracelsus and the info Matt Smith was able to dig up on Chandler.

Once the detective was finished with Denton, he found himself itching to speak to Catherine. He didn't believe Mitch's story but it sounded too impossible not to believe. He checked with Lang General and they had no explanation of how Chandler ended up on the steps of their emergency room. He had a man stationed there now to wait on news of her surgery to remove the bullet she was shot with. He would check with ballistics to match it against the gun Mitch had dropped from the catwalk. She was lucky she was found when she was. Any longer, they said, and she might have bled to death. He knew it would be awhile before he could talk with Catherine. Warily, he made his way home where he found an old man waiting for him, holding a manila envelope.

"Who are you?"

"A friend."

"Friend, huh? What do you want, friend?"

"Same as you. To find the mystery killer in this city. I might be able to help you." Then the old man handed the envelope to Hermann.

"Everything you need to find Vincent is in there,"

"You...You know this Vincent? Denton's story is true?"

"Yes. I know him."

"Where can I find him?"

"The woman will lead you to him. I'll return after you've talked to her."

The old man turned and left before Hermann could open his mouth. Shaking his head, he entered his apartment, poured himself a round of Scotch, and dumped the contents on his coffee table. Numerous photographs of this Vincent with Catherine Chandler, and of the creature himself. There was also surveillance footage on a VHS tape of the recent killing at the warehouse. It showed Vincent snapping the necks of two of Denton's goons and the slashing of the others.

"Well, I'll be DAMNED!"

After Mitch was released on bail pending trial for shooting Catherine, Paracelsus reminded Mitch of the plan they worked out.

"Hey, thanks for bailing me out," Mitch told Paracelsus after they left the 33rd police precinct.

"For my plan to work, I need you on the street."

"You're still gonna try and go through with this crazy scheme?"

"Why not? Just because you got greedy doesn't matter to me. Everything you need has been provided for you. You'll know when the time is right."

"You're crazy, you know that. But taking down those two is worth it."

Paracelsus gave Mitch a large bag of gold coins as payment for

what happened to Catherine and told him where he should wait until he was needed. Mitch grabbed the bag and quickly left Paracelsus in the darkness of the alley and made his way to wherever destiny would eventually take him.

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Six weeks went by and Hermann kept a low profile, working on his other cases at the precinct and tracking details on the other files on his own time. He brought the 12 files home with him and laid them out on the table, along with the information the old man gave him. He heard through the grapevine that Catherine was back at work at the DA's office. *'Now's a good time as any to talk to her,'* he thought as he gathered his notes

Hermann made his way to the DA's office and as he walked through the door, he noticed Catherine sitting at her desk. He slowly made his way over to her.

"Miss Chandler, I'd like to talk to you about Vincent and the men he's killed."

Catherine looked up at him. Her features showed a look of suspicion and slight apprehension.

"Vincent? I don't know who you mean."

"Mitch Denton told me all about Vincent."

"Mitch Denton is a bitter liar," Catherine said. "He blames me for the consequences of his choices. Whatever Mitch told you about Vincent, it was a lie..."

"I thought you said you didn't know Vincent." Catherine realized her mistake too late, but didn't say anything else. "I don't believe you. I have all I need to go after this Vincent and bring him to justice." Then Hermann threw a photo of her and Vincent in an intimate embrace.

"Where did you get this? This isn't real." She glanced at the photo.

"Oh, it's real, all right. That's not all I have, Miss Chandler."

Catherine paled at the comment. "I have pictures and video of the two of you together."

"Where did you get these so-called pictures? I want to talk to your source."

"My source wishes to remain anonymous. I'll find this Vincent, Miss Chandler and when I do, he'll face justice for the men he's killed, including Detective Yates."

"Yates was a dirty cop who killed Perotta because he wanted to turn his partner and the others in for taking drug money."

"Yeah, he might have been dirty but he didn't deserve to die the way he did."

Catherine knew she wouldn't be able to convince him this way. "I will not allow you to hurt Vincent or those he cares for and protects. Be very sure of that. I can and will take matters into my own hands if you so much as breathe a word of this to anyone."

"Is that a threat, Miss Chandler?"

"Not a threat, Detective Hermann. I'll prove any information you

have is false. No matter what it takes." Catherine glared at Hermann as Joe came into view after hearing Catherine's raised voice.

"You okay, Radcliffe? What's going on?"

"I'm fine, Joe. Detective Hermann was just leaving."

"We'll talk again, Miss Chandler. You can bet on it."

"You're wasting your time, Detective."

"It's my time to waste. I'll get to the bottom of this, Miss Chandler. Even if I have to charge you with obstruction."

"Now, wait a minute," Joe started.

"Don't, Joe. It's personal. Nothing involving any cases I'm working on here."

"Good day, Miss Chandler. Mr. Maxwell." Hermann walked away with a smile on his face.

"Cathy, what the HELL was that all about?"

"Let it go, Joe. As I said, it's personal."

"Personal?! He's willing to charge you with obstruction!"

"He can try, Joe. But he won't get very far. I know what I'm doing. Believe me."

"If you're sure then," Joe shook his head.

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Catherine sent a message via Benny for Vincent to meet her at her

threshold. She knew he would be worried, having felt her anger and agitation after her conversation with Detective Hermann. She quickly left her office and made her way to her building. Once there, the trip to the storage area was short work and soon the doors to the world Below opened. She heard Vincent's quiet whisper just as she locked the door behind her.

"Vincent!" She said with a concerned voice, worried that Detective Hermann might have followed her but didn't see him.

"Catherine? What is it? What's wrong?"

She quietly explained her conversation with the detective and showed Vincent the picture Hermann left with her.

"We face a much more urgent problem than placing blame on how he found out," Vincent began. "What if he told my secret? Who would believe him?" Perhaps rather than concealing the truth from this man, we should tell him who I am. About the tunnels. He must be made aware of its importance."

"I think this man has a good heart and a conscience. If he understood that people's lives depended on him keeping this secret, I believe he can be trusted. I'd like the chance to try," Catherine commented.

"I'll have to tell him my very existence lies here, in these tunnels. It is my salvation. I couldn't exist elsewhere. Without the tunnels, there is nothing for me. That my secret will now be in his hands."

"I'll set up a meeting with him in my apartment. There's no need to actually show him the tunnels. Just telling him they exist should

be enough."

"Come Below this weekend?"

"I'll set it up for next week sometime. Tomorrow's Friday. I'll call him in the morning and come down right after work."

"Your chamber will be awaiting you upon your arrival, as will I."

Catherine called Hermann the next morning and informed him that Vincent was willing to meet with him. She set the appointment up for the following Wednesday evening.

"I have your word, Detective. You'll come alone."

"Yes, Miss Chandler. You have my word. I'll come alone."

"Thank you, Detective."

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Hermann didn't trust the old man, not really. But the old man seemed so innocent, so nonchalant. He's the one who gave him the information on this Vincent character, with pictures to prove his theory. Hermann realized he was able to rattle Miss Chandler. He heard from others that she was a tough nut to crack, but that photo really spooked her. He put the message from Miss Chandler into his jacket pocket and headed for home. He poured himself a splash of Jack Daniels and settled on the couch to watch the news. Suddenly there was a knock at his door.

"Who is it?"

"Detective Hermann..."

Hermann recognized the old man's voice as he went to answer the door.

"You! I wanna talk to you. How did you find out where I lived? Where did those pictures come from? Who are you and how do you know Miss Chandler? Who, or better yet, what is Vincent?"

The old man slowly filed into the apartment. He turned as Hermann closed the door behind him.

"Did you talk to the woman?"

"Yeah. It took a while but she finally admitted, somewhat reluctantly, that she knew this Vincent guy. Your photos will help me get this guy. I'm supposed to meet her and this guy next week. She promised to tell me everything."

"Of that I have no doubt."

Paracelsus clicked the hidden switch and the long blade slid out from his sleeve, hidden from Hermann's view. Then without even seeing the blade, Hermann felt an explosion of pain in his stomach. Time slowed to a crawl as he glanced down to see the silver blade carved its way inside him, digging deeper as a crimson blush spread across his shirt.

He gagged, tasting blood in his mouth as he hit the living room wall and slumped down to the carpet. Paracelsus followed him down, the knife still buried inside Hermann's abdomen. He tried kicking out wildly, trying to jar the man on top of him to drop the knife.

"It's better if you don't fight."

Hermann heard the old man whisper as Paracelsus pulled his arm back with the bloody blade attached and watched in horror as it plunged once more into his abdomen.

"Why?" he whispered.

Hermann never heard an answer. As a pool of blood started to form around the body, Paracelsus opened the front door with his gloved hand to admit Tamara. She pulled an identical blade with a handle out of a plastic bag. Her gloved hand held the blade so Paracelsus could see it close up.

"You're sure her prints are there, on the handle?" Paracelsus asked her.

"Positive. Your man did a beautiful job, transferring Catherine's prints from the glass she handled onto the blade's handle," Tamara said as she wiped the blade with Hermann's blood and placed it next to the detective's body.

"You took care of him, of course?" Paracelsus asked.

"Certainly. As well as the waitress who brought me the glass she handled after her lunch a few days ago. No one will ever know you and I were involved. What about them?" Tamara's eyes glanced down at the floor.

Paracelsus made sure the photos of Vincent and Catherine were scattered among the case files on the table as well as the videotape from the warehouse. He wanted to be sure the authorities found everything.

"Once Vincent is out of the way, then the next phase of my plan

can begin. Poor Jacob. Always counting on Vincent for protection. Soon he will have no one to help him stand in my way."

"What about the man who took the photos?"

"What do you think happened?" Tamara laughed at that remark.

"He served his purpose and then was disposed of, like all the others."

They took one more look around the apartment.

"Ahhh, one more piece needs to be added."

Tamara took a piece of paper with Catherine's name, home and work numbers and placed it next to his phone. She also found the note in the pocket of his jacket about meeting Catherine and left that there too. They then left the apartment, leaving Detective Hermann to his unfortunate fate.

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After a frustrating night interviewing Detective Hermann's neighbors, Greg sat down at his desk with a hot cup of coffee when his phone rang.

"Hello." He barked as his coffee sloshed over parts of his desk.

"Great, just great. This is starting to be one hell of a week."

"Detective Hughes? This is Sam from the crime lab."

"Hey Sam. You got something on one of my cases, I hope?"

"Yeah, Lou Hermann's. I ran the knife for prints on the knife your boys found."

"And?"

"You won't believe who's prints came back. I can't believe it myself."

"Slow down, Sam. Who's prints are you talking about?"

"Catherine Chandler's."

"What? You're crazy!"

"I ran the test myself. Twice. Both times, the same result."

"I don't believe it. Not her."

"Greg..."

"Hey Sam, do me a favor. Send them to O'Rourke over at the FBI office in Brooklyn. He owes me a favor. Tell him to put a rush on it. I'm sorry, Sam, but you must have made a mistake. Can't be Chandler. No way. Can't be. She's no killer."

"I'll contact him right away, Greg. I hope, for your sake, I'm wrong. I know she's a friend."

"Thanks, Sam. Hey, can you keep a lid on this for the time being?"

"Yeah. I'll pull the files on this one for now till your friend either proves me wrong, or verifies my findings. Greg, what are you going to do if I'm right?"

"I don't know, Sam. I don't know."

The following day O'Rourke called Greg.

"I double checked your crime lab's findings, Greg. They are a

positive match for the set they sent over matching Catherine Chandler."

"You're sure, Rick?"

"I'm sure, Greg. I'm sending you a copy of the report via messenger. You should have it by the end of the day. Your friend Sam said you wanted to keep this confidential."

"For now. Thanks, Rick."

"Don't be a stranger, Greg."

"I'll call you. Soon."

Greg hung up the phone and rubbed his hand over his eyes. He wondered at the reactions he's gonna get from the DA's office.

"SHIT! Maxwell's gonna have a canary when he finds out. I pray Cathy's got an alibi for this weekend. If she doesn't, I'll have no choice but to take her in."

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Greg reluctantly walked into the DA's office the following day. He asked one of the passing interns if they knew where Cathy Chandler was. He was informed she was with Mr. Maxwell in his office. Hesitantly, he knocked on Joe's door.

"Come on in," he heard Joe call out.

As Greg entered, he saw Catherine and Edie sitting on the couch with Joe perched on the corner of his desk.

"Cathy...Edie...Hey, Joe."

"Hey Greg. What's up?" Joe started to rise.

"Catherine, I've got to ask you something. Where were you Saturday night?"

"What's this about?" Joe asked.

"Why?" Catherine questioned.

"Just answer the question, Cathy?"

"I went away for the weekend."

"Can anyone verify that? Were you with someone?"

Catherine hesitated, then reluctantly answered Greg's question.

"No. I can't verify it."

"I was afraid of that."

Greg looked from Joe to Catherine.

"Cathy, I'm afraid you're gonna have to come down to the station with me."

"Now wait one damn minute!" Joe exploded.

"Joe, it's procedure. You know that. I've got to take her in on suspicion of murder."

"Murder? Cathy? You're crazy, Greg! Who's murder are we talking about."

Catherine and Edie looked at Greg in shock as this was going on.

"Lou Hermann's. We found his body late last night. His partner

went to his apartment and found his front door ajar. When he went in to investigate, he found Lou's body in his living room and a knife lying next to him. I'm sorry, Cathy, but the crime lab confirmed your prints were on the knife Jackson found."

"Joe..."

"Don't worry, Radcliffe. We'll get to the bottom of this. Is there anyone you'd like me to call?"

"Yes. Could you call Jenny, Elliot and Peter? Tell them what's happened. I'd rather they heard it from you than on the six o'clock news."

"Sure, Radcliffe. Right away. Hey Cathy, Burch and I will figure this out. Don't say anything till we get you a lawyer." Greg looked at Joe. "C'mon, Greg, she's gonna need someone, right?"

Greg reluctantly nodded and then escorted Catherine out of Joe's office.

Joe called Elliot's office.

"Elliot, it's Joe Maxwell. I need your help."

"Now, how can I help the mighty Joe Maxwell and the DA's office?" he said sarcastically.

"DAMMIT, Burch! Catherine's in trouble and I don't need any of your bullshit right now!"

"What happened?"

"Not over the phone."

"Come to my office and I'll have my investigator Cleon Manning meet us here."

"Be there in 10."

"I'll be waiting."

Afterwards, he called Jenny and Peter and explained what had happened. He told them as soon as he had more information he would let them know.

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Vincent felt a flash of fear and apprehension from Catherine. He knew she was at the DA's office, so there was no danger to speak of. He knew Catherine was worried about the detective questioning her and thought that was what he was feeling. He made his way to the nearest tunnel entrance by the DA's office to wait for Catherine to come to him. He waited for over an hour. He could still feel her apprehension and wondered what was going on.

There was a sudden tapping from the pipes, with a message from Pascal summoning him to Father's chamber. Vincent hesitated, torn between wanting to wait a little longer for Catherine and answering Father's call. Another round of tapping sounded. This time the message said it concerned Catherine and to return to Father's chamber immediately. He quickly made his way back and soon found himself staring at Peter as he entered.

"What's happened?"

"Catherine's been...detained."

Detained? Why?"

"Her boss said they took her down to the police station regarding the murder of a detective."

"Did he mention the detective's name?"

"Lou Hermann. Why?"

"That was the detective Catherine told me about. He's the one who was investigating her about...unsolved killings...in some of her cases."

"Oh," Father and Peter both said, in dawning comprehension.

"I was going to meet with him, talk to him. Try to explain..."

"Vincent, what were you thinking?" Father exclaimed.

"Trying to protect the woman I love," Vincent said in a whisper.

"Vincent, was Catherine with you this weekend? I hate to invade your privacy but...under the circumstances. You understand," Peter awkwardly asked.

"Yes, Catherine was Below and stayed in one of the guest chambers," Father stated.

"Are you sure?" Peter asked.

"She was...with me..." Vincent hesitated. "Catherine was never out of my sight the entire weekend," he finished quietly.

"You mean..." Father stammered.

"Yes Father, I've spent each minute with her since she came

Below Friday. Day and night, until she left this morning to return to work. We were never apart."

"Vincent..." Father couldn't believe what his son was saying.

"I'm happy to hear that, but that doesn't solve the immediate problem. We can't give Catherine an alibi without compromising the tunnels and exposing you," Peter said out loud.

"I can give her the alibi she needs. I can go to the authorities..."

"Vincent, you can't. Catherine wouldn't want you to do that. There has to be another way, another explanation," Peter told him.

"Peter's right, Vincent. We'll find another way to help Catherine. Exposing yourself would only cause more problems. Raise questions that you and she would refuse to answer."

"I know, but..."

"We love her too, Vincent." Peter put his hand on Vincent's shoulder. "Joe Maxwell said he was contacting Elliot Burch to help figure this mess out. And hopefully get to the bottom of this. If anyone can find out who framed Cathy, he can."

"Thank you, Peter, for everything."

"As soon as I know more, I will let you both know."

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Joe was shown into Elliot's office as soon as he arrived. As he walked in, Joe heard Elliot and another man talking in low voices. Both men turned as he came closer.

"Elliot, thank you for seeing me."

"Joe Maxwell, Cleon Manning." The men shook hands. "Cleon is one of the best investigators in the business."

"I hope so. Cathy's gonna need it."

"Okay, Joe, now that the niceties are over with, what in blue blazes did you get her involved in to warrant her being questioned by the police? What bullshit investigation was it this time?"

"Hey! Slow down, Burch! Cathy wasn't involved with anything major to cause this. A detective came to ask her some questions a couple days ago, about some unsolved killings during her investigations."

"Detective?" Cleon inquired.

"Yeah," Joe said hesitantly. "The one who was killed the other night."

"I read about it in the paper. Whoa! Wait! They think Cathy killed him?"

"Greg knows she didn't do it. But Elliot, she told him she doesn't have an alibi for this weekend. She won't reveal who she was with. And I know it wasn't you, so don't even start. Also Cathy's prints were found on the murder weapon. A knife, next to the detective's body."

"Do you know how Miss Chandler's prints got onto the knife?"

"How the HELL should I know? That's what I thought Burch brought you in for, hot shot! If you can't figure it out, stay out of

my way and I'll find the bastard who did this. Even if I have to tear this city apart to do so."

"Calm down, Maxwell. Cleon does have a valid point. This frame is very complete. There has to be a loophole somewhere. We just need to find it. Any ideas?"

"Yeah," Cleon began. "I know a guy who's an expert at pulling something like this. He'll tell me who hired him, even if I have to break every bone in his body to do it."

"Just make sure he's able to testify," Joe cautioned.

"Don't worry. He'll tell us whatever we need to know."

Cleon left quickly, leaving the two men staring at each other.

"Look, Burch...err...Elliot...I'm sorry for my outburst earlier."

"I understand perfectly, Joe. You love her too." Joe looked at Elliot. "Don't look so surprised. Like you, I'm caught in Catherine's spell myself. And struck out. Now I envy whoever the man is who captured Cathy's heart."

"I'm counting on you, Elliot."

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Greg and Catherine entered the 33rd Street precinct shortly after they left the DA's office. Greg gave her the courtesy of not handcuffing her, for which Catherine was extremely grateful. He led her to a conference room off to the side and offered her one of the chairs at the table.

"So, Cathy, you wanna tell me how the hell your prints got onto

the knife that killed Detective Hermann?"

"Greg, believe me. I had nothing to do with his death."

"I know you, Catherine. I don't think you are capable of this."

"Thanks, Greg. I appreciate it."

"So, where were you this weekend?"

Catherine stared at him silently.

"Cathy, give me something, for Pete's sake. No one else knows about your prints but me so far."

Catherine looked at him. "I told Sam at the Crime Lab to keep this between us. I told my friend at the FBI who verified it the same thing."

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"It's complicated."

"If you don't give me someone who can verify where you were this weekend, I'll have no choice but to charge you with Lou Hermann's murder. You know that."

"I know, Greg. I'm sorry, but I'm not saying anything else."

"JESUS, Cathy! Someone? Anyone?"

"I can't."

"GOD DAMMIT!"

Greg turned and walked out of the conference room. He called one of the officers over and asked him to keep an eye on her and not to allow her to leave. The officer nodded as Greg walked over to his desk. He knew he could hold her for 48 hours before he was forced to charge her.

Once Greg cooled down, he went back to talk to Catherine. She continued to refuse to reveal who she was with or where she was.

"I'm going to hold you here until you tell me, Cathy."

"I understand. You do what you have to, Greg."

"Then, Catherine, I am holding you till Joe can clear this up, if he can. If he can't, I have no choice but to formally charge you with Lou's murder."

"I didn't do it, Greg, but I understand."

"McKenzie, take Miss Chandler to a holding cell. Special privilages."

"Right, Greg. This way, Miss Chandler."

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"Damn, this guy is good. Getting rid of any cronies so they don't squeal if they're caught. Awww, Calvin," Cleon looked down at the dead body. "Your talents finally caught up with you."

Cleon proceeded to search Calvin's room for clues.

"Ho...Ho...What do we have here?"

He uncovered a few gold coins under some papers with the

names Tamara, John Pater and Paracelsus written in Calvin's scrawl.

"Holy Shit, Calvin. Where in the hell did you hook up with this maniac? Why would this nut job go after Catherine Chandler? How does she know who John Pater is?" Cleon wondered.

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After Joe left, Elliot called Jack Ryan and asked him to represent Catherine. Ryan told Elliot he'd go to the 33rd precinct as soon as he could and get the particulars on her case. Ryan also asked to have Manning bring him any information he finds out. Elliot then placed a call to his investigator.

"Cleon, it's Elliot. Any luck with your guy?"

"Yes and no."

"What'd you mean, yes and no?"

"Yes, I found him. No, he can't tell us anything. He's dead."

"SHIT! GOD DAMMIT! Now what do we do?"

"I found some info on who might have hired him. I'll let you know once I check it out. I've also contacted the police."

"Give any info to Jack Ryan. I just put him on Cathy's case. At least you found something."

'Great,' Cleon thought. 'Jack's heard the stories about Paracelsus like I have.'

"Will do, boss."

Cleon left Calvin's room and headed toward Central Park. He wanted to let Vincent and Father know about Paracelsus. After entering the culvert, he started banging on the pipes. Asking to be escorted Below. One of the children arrived and before long he was outside Father's chamber. As he approached, he heard voices and one of them was Jack's.

"...discreetly. Can you find out anything further about Catherine, Jack?" Cleon heard Father ask.

"Father?" Cleon called out.

"Cleon, what a surprise. We haven't seen you for awhile. Your detective agency is doing well, I hear," Father commented.

"Thank you, Father, but that's not why I came down here. Jack, I heard Elliot assigned you the Catherine Chandler case. I might have some information for you. Did I hear you correctly, Miss Chandler knows about the tunnels?"

"Yes, she is a...special friend of Vincent's and she's gotten herself into a little bit of trouble."

"Little? I don't see how you can call murdering someone little?"

"Catherine didn't do it, Mr. Manning." Vincent calmly looked at him.

"I knew that already, Vincent. I came down here because I found out something disturbing. Paracelsus is involved somehow along with his companion Tamara."

"Paracelsus?"

"Yeah, the guy who planted Miss Chandler's prints on the knife had a few gold coins in his apartment and some papers with John Pater, Paracelsus and Tamara's names written on them."

"Will this prove Catherine's innocence?" Vincent asked.

"No, but it can place doubt on some of the evidence they have. Her prints are going to be a problem though to disprove."

"We must let Catherine know that Paracelsus is involved."

"That's easy enough. Since Elliot's assigned me to her case, I just need to figure out how to let her know that Cleon and I know you guys." Jack commented.

Vincent quickly wrote a note and gave it to Jack.

"Give this to Catherine. This is the only way she will believe you and I know each other, and that you know about the tunnels. She won't discuss it with you if you don't, no matter what you tell her."

"She's that loyal, even if her life depended on it?" Jack seemed skeptical.

"Without a doubt," Father stated.

Vincent gazed at Father unable to believe that he would finally acknowledge it.

Jack nodded his agreement and slipped the note into his pocket.

"Was Catherine Below this weekend?"

"Yes, " Vincent replied.

"All weekend?"

"Yes."

"No wonder she hasn't got an alibi for when the detective was killed. I better hurry over to the 33rd and have a talk with my client."

"If there's anything we can do, Jack...Cleon..."

"I know. We take care of our own. I'll be in touch soon. Father...Vincent..." Jack turned to leave.

"Wait up, I'll walk with you. Hey kid, you within earshot?" Cleon called out.

Geoffrey appeared at the top of the stairs. "I'm here."

"Good lad. Guide us up. We've got work to do."

"Thank you, Cleon," Vincent said.

"As Jack said, we take care of our own, and Catherine is definitely one of our own." Cleon grinned and winked at Vincent as he climbed the stairs behind Jack.

=====

In the meantime, Greg went to see Sam at the Crime Lab. Sam had called Greg to go over a theory he had on how Catherine's prints got onto the knife used to kill Detective Hermann.

"Hey, Sam. I brought Joe along with me to hear this theory of yours."

"I should have noticed this before, Greg. The prints are

too"perfect", They're placed in a way that a woman would not normally use to hold a knife, especially if she wanted to kill someone."

"You can tell that just by examining the prints on the knife," Joe looked skeptical.

"The knife was utterly clean except for one set of perfect prints. No smudges. No nothing. She stabbed a man. There should be smears from her hand, moving on the handle."

"So what?" Joe questioned.

"The wound to Detective Hermann was horizontal and very low on his abdomen." Sam started to explain. "Miss Chandler is shorter than him. Since the detective was caught by surprise, it stands to reason whoever killed him was at least the same height."

Sam grabbed the knife lying on the exam table. He showed it to Greg and Joe. "A woman, especially a woman who's never been in a knife fight, is going to hold it, secretly and down. She'll hold it vertically and her hand would likely grip it the same way you or I would hold a kitchen knife."

"There were no marks on Cathy that I could see," Joe said.

"There were no signs of a struggle, either," Greg stated.

"Hermann's knuckles were unbruised. No defensive wounds. He didn't die fighting. He just died. So he knew his murderer, well enough to let them get close. Then the murderer planted the knife with Miss Chandler's prints." Greg and Joe looked at Sam. "I

can't prove it, yet, but I'm sure Catherine Chandler did not kill Detective Hermann."

"Keep digging, Sam. I can't rule Catherine out as a suspect based on this evidence alone. We are gonna need a lot more if we are going to clear her of this mess."

"Count on it, Mr. Maxwell."

"Thanks, Sam. I appreciate you telling us this." Greg shook his hand.

"Oh, an interesting side note. Jimmy Moreno had the same identical knife wound and we know Miss Chandler didn't kill him."

"Jimmy Moreno!" Joe exclaimed.

"You're sure about this, Sam? You know we never found any evidence on who Jimmy's killer might have been," Greg asked.

"I'm positive."

"Good work, Sam. Damn good work. It's a start, at least."

=====

In the meantime, Cleon got word from one of his C.I.'s that an old man was seen trading that new drug out on the streets for gold coins again. He met his informant in the usual place.

"Are you sure about this, Leo?"

"Yeah, man. The old dude was jonesing for some big payday. He's also been mumbling about some chick going up the river. He's real secretative, man. Said this chick was some sort of DA and he's

been sayin' he got rid of some guy and got the blame placed on her. Real crazy dude."

"Do you know where I can find him?"

"Nah, man. I'm tellin' ya just what I heard."

"Leo, would you be willing to swear to what this old man is saying and give us a description of him?"

"I don't wanna get involved, Cleon. I just wanna pass on the info as usual."

"Leo, you tell the DA exactly what you told me and that child support charge you've been running from, I'll make it go away."

"I have your word, Cleon. No jail?"

"I'll have my boss make the payment in full plus another \$10,000 for you."

Leo gave a low whistle. "Ten grand..."

"The info has to be legit, Leo. We have to find this guy. Otherwise, no dough."

"Okay."

"Thanks, man." Cleon shook Leo's hand then took him to see Joe downtown.

=====

Jack arrived at the 33rd precinct shortly after he left Father and Vincent. He was shown to a conference room and Catherine was brought in a few minutes later.

"Would you wait outside, please?"

The officer nodded and left the two of them alone.

"Miss Chandler, my name is Jack Ryan and Elliot Burch hired me to represent you. I'm going to try to get Mr. Maxwell to agree to release you on your own recognizance, pending the outcome of the investigation. Now, down to business. We can speak in total confidence."

Catherine looked at him silently.

"The DA believes you didn't do this, Miss Chandler. But the facts state otherwise. You told Detective Hughes you have no idea how your prints got onto the murder weapon?"

Catherine nodded.

"And you refuse to tell the authorities where you were or who you were with this past weekend. You have no alibi for Detective Hermann's murder. You know that. Excuse me a moment."

Jack exited the room and entered a small room off the hallway. Two men were watching Catherine and had a video camera recording every word said in the room.

"You can turn the cameras off and leave us alone," Jack told the two officers.

"But it's procedure..." one of the officers protested.

"Look, I've already cleared this with Detective Hughes and your watch commander."

The officers nodded reluctantly, turned off the video camera and

left the room. Jack returned to where Catherine was.

"Now we can talk privately."

Jack handed Catherine the note Vincent gave him. She recognized his handwriting immediately.

'My dearest Catherine:

Jack Ryan is a friend. Trust him as you would trust me. Know that I am with you during this, ALWAYS.

V.'

Tears glistened in Catherine's eyes as she looked up at Jack. She tried to speak but her throat felt constricted.

"Are you all right?"

Catherine nodded, unable to answer. She cleared her throat and answered a minute later.

"You know...?" she asked, protective of Vincent at all times.

"Yes. Is he why you won't reveal where you were this weekend?"

"How can I explain I was Below with Vincent all weekend? They'd lock me up in Bellevue and throw away the key."

"Does Elliot Burch know about Vincent?"

"No. He doesn't know anything about Vincent and the tunnels."

"Do you have any idea how your fingerprints got onto the knife?"

"None."

"I'm sure you've made enemies during your investigations.
Received threats..."

"Of course. Everyone has at some point working for the DA's
office."

Suddenly an officer entered the room, telling Jack there was a
phone call for him. It was Cleon, telling him about the old man his
C.I. told him about.

"Thanks, Cleon." Jack returned to talk to Catherine.

"Miss Chandler, are you investigating or have you heard about an
old man selling a new kind of drug on the street?"

Catherine shuddered. She knew instantly who the old man was.

"I can tell by your expression that you recognize this person."

"Paracelsus."

"I've heard stories about him from my parents. Is he capable of
something like this?"

"Paracelsus must be trying to expose Vincent, to leave the tunnels
unprotected. The detective had pictures of Vincent and me.
Paracelsus must have hired someone to take them to discredit
me. Get me out of the way so to speak."

"The pictures. We can explain that they were faked somehow.
Proving your prints were planted will be a little more difficult. Not
impossible though. Lets see if we can get you out of here."

As Jack tried to arrange for Catherine's release, Cleon took Leo to
see Joe and soon a sketch of Paracelsus was sent to every precinct

in the city. Moreno wanted proof the prints were planted before he would agree to release Catherine, even though he thought she was innocent. He told Joe as much. Cleon was also true to his word. Elliot agreed to pay Leo's child support payment and gave the \$10,000 Cleon promised Leo.

"When we catch this guy, I'll give your friend another \$10,000 for his help," Elliot told Cleon.

=====

Sam went back to Calvin's apartment to see if anything was missed on his initial visit. Sam was told Elliot Burch's investigator reported that this guy could have been the one who planted Miss Chandler's print on the knife. He wanted to try and prove his theory. After searching for a few minutes, he happened to find a wine glass under a stack of paper. *'This is probably what he used for her prints.'* Sam thought to himself. He carefully placed it into an evidence bag, then double wrapped it so it wouldn't be damaged during transport back to the lab.

When he arrived back at the crime lab, Sam set to work on the wine glass. First he dusted it with a fine white powder. It eventually revealed a set of fingerprints. Carefully he managed to lift the entire set and transferred them to the paper in front of him. He compared the prints on the paper to the ones taken off the knife. They were a perfect match.

"Well now, this shows how he got Miss Chandler's prints on the knife. Hey, wait a minute. I remember I saw something like this when I first started here. Old man Turner showed me three similar

cases. What was it he said? He thought he knew who was responsible. What was the guy's name he mentioned?"

Sam paced back and forth, trying to remember. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Calvin Fremont. I knew that name sounded familiar from somewhere. Old man Turner just couldn't find enough evidence to prove it was Fremont. It always fascinated him. Well, Fremont won't be doing that anymore."

Sam called Greg and told him he had the proof he was looking for that Catherine's prints were planted on the murder weapon.

"You're sure, Sam?"

"Absolutely. I found the wineglass Fremont used to lift her prints."

"Thanks, Sam. I'll let Maxwell know right away."

Greg called Joe a few minutes after Sam's phone call. "Joe, it's Greg. I'm releasing Catherine. She's no longer a suspect."

"Finally came to your senses, did ya?" Joe said sarcastically. "You knew she was innocent."

"Sam found proof that her prints were planted. She's not out of the woods yet. There's still those pictures we found in Lou's apartment."

"We'll get to the bottom of this. Guaranteed."

"I hope so, Joe. I hope so."

Greg went to the holding room and told Catherine he was releasing her. Greg felt she was no longer a suspect in the actual murder. He also told her they would be investigating the pictures

found and that she could still be charged with conspiracy to commit murder when the real killer was found.

Catherine and Jack left the precinct and made their way to the Central Park entrance, where they were met by Vincent shortly afterwards. He enveloped her into his protective embrace. Jack left them and made his way home.

=====

The next day Peter Alcott used the entrance near his office and made his way to Father's chamber.

"Jacob, where's Vincent?"

"Here, Peter," Vincent said as he descended the stairs from the upper level of the chamber, Catherine following close behind.

"Were you here, in the tunnels, last night?"

"Vincent was here last night, with me," Catherine stated.

"What's the matter? What's wrong?" Father asked.

"This is the matter. I gather none of you have seen the morning paper yet?"

"No. Lou hasn't sent it down yet."

Peter handed Jacob the newspaper he was carrying. Vincent and Catherine looked over Father's shoulder as they checked out the headline.

'LION MAN ATTACK IN CENTRAL PARK'

'A man, looking like a lion, attacked a 25 year old man last night

near the Carousel in Central Park. Jake Murphy was savagely assaulted and left bleeding on a park bench where he was found by passersby. Police are investigating. Murphy described his attacker as caucasian, 6'2, 210 pounds, wearing a black hooded cape and tall, tan leather boots, blonde hair, a face or mask like a lion and long claw-like fingers with which he inflicted the injuries. A spokesman for the police department has asked if anyone has any information or know who or where this lion man is, to contact police.

"My God. Who would do this?" Father was appalled at what he read.

"The same person responsible for framing Catherine with Detective Hermann's murder," Vincent offered.

"I think you might be onto something," Peter began. "Do you know anyone who might hate Vincent and Catherine that much?"

"You don't think...?" Father looked at Catherine who in turn looked at Vincent with a question in her eyes. Vincent nodded.

"Paracelsus," They all said at the same time.

"John? I thought he was dead. You never mention him after he was banished so I thought..." Peter shook his head in bewilderment.

"He tried drugging Vincent a few weeks ago and was responsible for that new drug that killed 50 people." Catherine explained.

"I heard about that new drug, but didn't know he was involved. The police never caught who was distributing it or so I've read."

"Vincent managed to stop him. He just vanished after that, until this new incident involving a new drug source," Catherine commented.

"First, Catherine gets accused of murder and now this!"

"Trust in the authorities to find the real killer. As for me..."

"Vincent! Don't even think about it. Paracelsus wins if you do. We'll prove the attack wasn't done by you somehow," Catherine pleaded.

"How?"

"I don't know yet."

=====

Greg and Joe were discussing the case.

"...That still doesn't explain the pictures Lou had of her and a lion man. And with the attack in Central Park, she's not out of the woods yet. This lion man could have gone on the attack in retaliation for us holding Catherine."

"Radcliffe? Involved with some freak from the sideshow? I don't care what those pictures look like, you're crazy, Greg. It's probably some nut job who digs lions."

"I don't know, Joe. I just don't know."

=====

"I've had it, man. I'm gotta here," Mitch told Paracelsus.

"What? Things get a little hot and you bail like a child?" Paracelsus

questioned.

"You said you'd help me. Get me a good lawyer to help beat the attempted murder rap on Chandler. I ain't seen no lawyer yet."

"All in good time, my boy. All in good time."

"That ain't good enough!"

"DO NOT try my patience. They will pay for their arrogance. Both of them. Father as well. Leave if you must. I grow weary of waiting."

Mitch made to grab the lion mask lying on the table when Paracelsus turned his back, the conversation obviously at an end. "I'll take my chances on my own terms."

Paracelsus turned back before he could complete his treason. Quickly he left the apartment. Mitch waited around the corner of the hallway. He knew the only way he could prove things was to get the lion mask away from Paracelsus.

"Well now, *et tu Brutus*," Paracelsus quoted as he picked up the mask from the floor and placed it back on the table. "It's time for the final stroke." With that, Paracelsus quickly left the room and made his way down to the street. "No more, Vincent. No more."

Mitch returned to the apartment and managed to get inside. He grabbed the mask and claws and quickly left.

Paracelsus had a plan to get Father and Catherine together. He managed to get a message, posing as Mitch, sent to Father, asking him to meet him at Catherine's apartment. The note said he

wanted to come clean to the both of them about everything. Paracelsus, the detective's murder, the lion man attack. Father was very skeptical about the note.

"Mitch Denton wants to see us," Father told Catherine as she and Vincent entered his chamber.

"Us?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, you and me. At your apartment. He says he wants to 'come clean'. Tell the police everything. He can clear you, Catherine."

"Father, should I trust him after everything he's done?"

"You must hear him out, Catherine. If he can indeed clear you..." Vincent began.

"You're right, Vincent. I know that. I just don't like the idea of meeting him in my home."

"Tell Joe Maxwell. He'll know what to do."

Catherine nodded her agreement and both she and Father prepared to go to Catherine's apartment to wait for him.

"I'll be near," Vincent said.

"No, Vincent. You mustn't. Joe will make sure the police are there. We'll be all right."

Vincent nodded his head and gathered Catherine close. He didn't like the idea, but knew it was the only way. Father was ready quickly and soon they were on their way to her apartment.

In the meantime, Mitch gathered up whatever courage he had

and with a deep exhale, walked into the 33rd police precinct carrying the lion mask and claws. The desk officer took one look at what Mitch carried and drew his gun.

"Freeze!" the officer yelled.

Mitch immediately raised his hands, dropping the lion mask and claws to the floor in front of him. Other officers grabbed his arms and pulled them behind his back.

"Whoa! Hold it! I have information for the detective in charge. I can give you the man who wore these."

"Mitch Denton," Greg said as he came into view. "What makes you think I'm gonna believe anything that comes out of your mouth. You shot a good friend of mine."

"I'm sorry about that. I was messed up. I didn't care about anyone or anything. It took an old friend to scare me straight. I tried talking him out of it but he's obsessed. I came here to warn you. He's gonna go after her."

"Who's he and who is he after?"

"The maniac responsible for killing that detective and the lion attack. He's gonna kill Catherine Chandler. He planned the frame on her. He found out she wasn't gonna get charged."

"How the hell did he find that out? I thought we had a tight lid on that information."

"I don't know, man. All I know is that he flew into a rage when he found out. He said something like 'it's time to finish this. The

Chandler woman's death will release the beast within."

"Put him into a cell. He's not going anywhere till we check on his story. I want two cars to go to 135 Central Park West, Apt 21-E code 3. They are not to engage till I get there."

"Right, sir," one officer responded.

=====

Father decided to go with Catherine to see what Mitch wanted. He also offered to stay with her there until she contacted her boss, to let him know about the note from Mitch. Vincent wanted her to come below after the meeting where he could protect her until Paracelsus was caught.

Shortly after arriving at Catherine's apartment, Paracelsus surprised them by walking out of Catherine's bedroom.

"So, you are finally here."

"John, what are you doing here?"

"Removing the one obstacle to unleashing the beast. Having you here, dear Jacob, is a bonus in itself."

"Forget this foolishness, John. Vincent will never be yours."

"Of course he will, with Tamara to teach him."

"Teach him?" Catherine questioned. "Teach him what?"

"That everything Father ever taught him was a lie," Tamara said in an exact copy of Catherine's voice. "That Paracelsus is his true father. That he created him."

"He will never believe you," Father stated.

"With love and the right amount of persuasion, anything is possible."

"Vincent will know that you are not me."

"I can make it so he will believe anything I want him to believe, and more."

"The police are on their way. They're supposed to meet me here."

"I will be long gone by the time..."

Paracelsus' statement was cut short as a loud bang went through the apartment as Greg kicked the door in. Two officers followed him inside. One went over to Tamara and the other stood near Paracelsus. Greg went to stand next to Catherine, who was standing in front of Father.

"Put your hands where I can see them," Officer Flarity ordered. as he stepped forward.

Paracelsus made a dash for the front door. Officer Flarity blocked his path and made a grab for Paracelsus' arm. Paracelsus twisted away and once again tried for the front door.

The other officer managed to handcuff Tamara before she could get away as well. Greg moved in front of Catherine and Father.

Paracelsus made to push the officer away from him and both toppled into the door frame and slid down to the carpeted floor. Officer Flarity managed to get a firm grip on Paracelsus after a brief struggle.

"Hold it right there, old man." Officer Flarity told him as he pulled Paracelsus to his feet.

"I'm an old man. I pose no threat to you."

"Turn around and put your hands behind your back," Greg ordered.

"An old injury prevents me from bending my arms fully as you ask."

"Cuff his hands in front of him then. Make sure you search him thoroughly."

After Officer Flarity cuffed Paracelsus, he proceeded to search him for any weapons. As the officer reached Paracelsus' right arm, Flarity suddenly heard a click and then felt a searing pain on the inside of his left arm.

"Mindless fool, you have no power over me," Paracelsus yelled as he struck at the young officer, the long steel blade showing signs where he hit the officer.

"Son of a Bitch!" Greg yelled as he came forward, starting to draw his gun.

"You think you can put me in a cage."

"I'll put you in the ground if you try anything like that again."

"John, please. You were a good man once. You don't want to die like this," Father tried to plead with him.

"You have everything. I have nothing. If I can't have him, no one shall." Paracelsus raised his arms and ran toward Father and

Catherine, looking to strike them down in his rage.

Catherine pushed Father out of the way. Greg fired two shots point blank as Paracelsus crashed into him. Greg flew backwards, avoiding the bloody blade, as Paracelsus toppled sideways and both landed with a thud on the carpeted floor. Greg extricated himself from Paracelsus' body and checked to see if he was still alive.

"Is he...?"

"He's gone."

"Such a waste, a brilliant mind twisted by greed, by gold, by power."

Tamara was too frightened to move. The officer with her finally got her to leave the apartment. Father walked over and stood over Paracelsus's body.

"You have been the sun of our lives. Our prayers will be the sun that lights your journey home. We will remember you every dawn and await the night to join you in the sky'."

"That's beautiful, Father."

"It's an old English prayer I learned as a child. I hope it brings him some peace."

"Do you have a place to stay?" Greg asked Catherine.

"Catherine can stay with me and my family for as long as she needs."

"I'll have an officer stay here until I can get the manager to

replace the door. I'll make sure the front desk gives you the keys when you come back."

"Thanks, Greg. For everything."

"You can thank Mitch Denton?"

"Mitch?"

"Yeah. He's the one who told us this guy was coming after you."

"Well now. That's a first," Father commented as he took hold of Catherine's arm. "Come, dear Catherine. Lets get you home."

Catherine and Father left the apartment, making their way to the waiting arms of Vincent and hopefully a new life of peace for them all.

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