I Can't

by Allison

"What can I say to you?'

The tenderness of her embrace was a feeling he'd never felt before, never even dreamed of. He held her close, and then suddenly heard voices from above. Catherine looked toward the blue light and then realized Vincent wasn't beside her. He was gone.

"Vincent...?"

Sadly, she raised the hood of her coat and went to the bottom of the ladder. As she placed her foot on the bottom rung, she froze.

'I can't do this. I can't! My face... what would they think? What would they say?'

She turned back toward the opening from whence she came. She looked into the tunnel, but saw no sign of Vincent. She wondered if she would be able to find her way back to that place of safety she had so recently left. She hesitantly started walking back in the direction she and Vincent had travelled.

"Vincent?" she whispered again, hoping he was within the sound of her voice.

"I'm here." He came out of the shadows.

"I can't face them," she confessed. "Let them think I'm dead. It's better that way."

"Catherine, you survived. And what you endured will make you stronger... and better."

"I can't."

She turned and ran back the way Vincent had led her. He easily caught up with her and took hold of her arm.

"You have the strength, Catherine. You do. I know you."

"No. I don't."

"Yes, you do. Believe in yourself." His low baritone sounded so unshakably certain.

"You sound… so sure," she allowed.

"I know you, Catherine. You have the spirit to overcome this."

She looked up at him, profoundly touched by his tenderness. He led her back to the opening and walked her to the ladder.

"This is where you go out."

Mutely, she nodded her head and slowly climbed up the ladder... disappearing... back into her life.