

Masques Emend

by Allison Duggins

"Don't leave!" Catherine begged. "Brigit told me that this is a special night, Saowen, when the walls ..."

Vincent turned back as Catherine spoke and finished her comment. "When the walls between the worlds grow thin ... and spirits of the underworld walk the earth."

Catherine smiles and nods. "Vincent, we can't waste it."

"No, we can't. Where shall we go?"

Vincent offers his arm. Catherine notices a cab nearby and hails it. When it arrives and as they enter, the cabbie gave a small gasp of surprise.

"Vincent, is that you?"

"Louis, what a pleasant surprise." Vincent commented.

"Where are you two off to?" Louis asked as they settled into the cab.

"We were going to take a tour of the city. I want to show Vincent as much of it as I can," Catherine calmly commented, after she realized the cabbie was a Helper.

"Then let me be your personal chauffeur for the rest of the evening." Louis offered.

"No, Louis, We can't take away your livelihood on a busy night like this?" Vincent protested. "Take us to the Park and we can manage from there."

"Nonsense. I want to do this. Please, Vincent. Let me treat you two." Louis wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Very well. Where shall we go first?" Catherine asked Vincent.

"HmMMMMM. Is the Metropolitan Museum of Art still open?" Vincent asked.

"You're in luck. The Met is open till midnight. They're having some sort of masque event." Louis replied as he put the cab in gear.

"I was invited to it, since my father was on the board of directors, but we decided to go to the party instead. I think I can still get us inside. Will you wait for us?" Catherine asked.

"No worries. I will be waiting when you come out."

Louis got them to the Met in record time. Vincent helped Catherine out and as they reached the entrance, Catherine spoke to the man stationed at the door and he radioed someone and then ushered them inside. They spent an hour admiring all the artwork that Vincent had only read about and heard Father and others

discussing. As they exited the Met, the cab was patiently waiting for them.

"Where to now?"

"I'm not sure," Catherine looked to Vincent. "What about St. Patrick's?"

"St. Patrick's it is." Louis put the cab into gear and soon they were outside the great cathedral. Again, they only spent a few minutes inside, admiring all the stained glass and the high-vaulted ceilings.

They entered the cab and then Louis took them on a guided tour of New York City. They cruised by Rockefeller Center, The Metropolitan Opera House, the Empire State Building. Vincent commented that he already has been to the top.

"How?" Catherine and Louis questioned.

"Riding atop the elevators, of course. Devin took me before he left with Charles. He said he knew one of the guards who worked there and managed to gain access."

"Will wonders never cease? Say, how about a carriage ride? I know one of the hansom cabbies."

"Oh, that would be wonderful," Catherine exclaimed.

Louis brought them to the park entrance near Catherine's building on Central Park West. He quickly located his friend and arranged for them to go through the park. "I'll be waiting when you come back."

An hour later, true to his word, Louis' friend dropped them back at his cab.

"Thank you, Louis. This has been a magical night. I'd like to walk with Catherine for awhile. It will be dawn soon." Vincent said to his friend and held Catherine close.

"My pleasure, Vincent. See you again sometime." Louis smiled and climbed into his cab and drove off into the predawn light.

Slowly, they went, walking closely together down at a littered but deserted street very late in the morning. There's an ease between them, an acceptance. On this night of masks and illusions, for a few short hours, they've been able to taste a life they'll never know.

The huge stone arches of the Brooklyn Bridge dominate the background, as they sit together on a bench near the river. The sky is a dark pre-dawn blue, just starting to lighten, a magic hour. The great span of the bridge, stretching away over the river, is still festooned with lights - but they have eyes only for each other.

"I've lived here all my life, Catherine... yet somehow it's as though I'd never seen the city until tonight"

"You've seen so much of the violence and hatred of my world ... I wanted you to know that there's beauty as well."

"I've known that since the night I found you, Catherine"

A balding, pudgy man in jogging clothes, doing his dawn run, heaves into view. Takes one look at the couple, shakes his head and then moves on.

As the warm dawn light shines on Catherine's face, Vincent leans in and gently kisses her. Afterwards he puts his arms around her and holds her close. As they hear the sounds of traffic slowly increase, Vincent realizes he has to leave.

"I must go...."

Cathy nods, wordless but accepting. She and Vincent exchange one last fond look before he turns and is gone.

She sits for a moment, pensive, wistful, replaying every precious memory in her head. Then she hugs herself, and smiles a slow, sweet smile.

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