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Heart's Home

by Angie

Where thou art, that is home.
- Emily Dickinson

"There will always be another Burch Tower, and another. We have no choice if we are to preserve what we are. We have to move. We have to leave New York."

The words, coming from Father, had a finality about them. Everyone looked down at their laps and knitted their brows in thought. No one disputed the statement. It had become obvious over the past two years that New York was not going to stop the upward trend of its skyscrapers – which meant that construction would delve deeper and deeper – and therefore closer to the tunnel world. It was just a matter of time before they became exposed to the world above.

Vincent had been silent during the discussion in Father's chamber. Catherine was snuggled in the crook of his arm. He could sense her sadness. He looked down at his hands – his long-haired, sharp-nailed hands. He spoke softly as he flexed them, hating them – and himself – more than ever before.

"I make this ... necessity ... more difficult," he said softly. "Were it not for me, you could live ... almost anywhere."

He looked up to find several pairs of eyes staring at him in disbelief. Characteristically, it was William who found his voice first.

"Not true, Vincent," the big man said gruffly. "Many of us were born in the tunnels, some now have children of their own." He looked over at Olivia and Kanin as he said this. Olivia was pregnant with their second child.

"You are not the only reason we must be careful. None of us wants to live above again. We have a life here ... a community ... that we built ourselves. No one wants to move, either - but we have to," he finished sadly.

Catherine straightened.

"I have an idea. Father, would you take notes, please?"

Father nodded and picked up a pen and readied it over a sheet of lined notepaper.

"We've reached a decision," she continued. "Now we have to decide what characteristics we must look for in a new home. I suggest we make a list and then I'll start researching possible locations."

"Excellent idea, Catherine," Father agreed. "Speak up when ready, folks."

"Have to have big park above," Mouse rushed out. "Lots of trees, flowers – lake too."

"Fresh water," Jamie added.

"Good solid bedrock," Kanin remarked. "No more mudslides and cave-ins."

"Hot springs," Lena remarked. She had become addicted to the bathing chamber – something she had never dreamed of enjoying in her old life.

"A good pipe system," Pascal said softly.

"Good ventilation for my kitchen," William intoned.

"Helpers," Mary declared. That gave everyone pause for a few moments. How could they find helpers in a new

place?

“Warmer – no more icy cold winters,” Olivia stated, into the silence. A year without Kanin had made her realize that the chill she felt was not just his absence from their bed.

“Places to scavenge what we need,” Cullen added.

“Mountains,” Charles said softly. He and Devin had arrived home from their sojourn in the Appalachians the previous night, after receiving an urgent summons from Father.

“A recreation hall,” Devin added.

“Waste disposal,” Father inserted, when nothing was said for a few moments.

“And a place where we can stay long term,” Catherine finished for them all. “I think this is enough to get me started. I’ll report back as quickly as I can.”

“Would you like some help, Chandler?” Devin asked.

Catherine looked at him. Devin was well-traveled. He might well have insights.

“Thank you, Devin. Yes.”

“Meeting adjourned,” Father declared.

Catherine rose and turned to Vincent.

“Don’t worry, Vincent. There IS such a place. I know it. There has to be.”

Vincent dropped his head and looked at his hands again. “There is nowhere for such as me, Catherine.”

Catherine gathered his hands into hers and shook them until he looked up at her.

“Wrong, Vincent. You belong with me – with all of us, wherever we are. And you will be.”

She leaned towards him and planted a kiss on his lips.

“And I will find that place.”

“We,” piped up Devin from behind her. Vincent sighed and looked over at his brother.

“I have no heart for it,” he said softly, as they turned to leave. There was nothing either could say to that.

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Catherine and Devin decided to go straight to the New York Public Library. It was early afternoon. Catherine had some ideas. She had not told the others what she feared most – that the move would be far away, and possibly difficult. She hoped it would not be both.

She and Devin quickly found a large atlas with a physical map and several flimsy overlays. They went to work. Catherine pulled out a notebook and pen from her purse and prepared to record what they found.

Devin looked at her.

“You realize we have to eliminate the entire south, Midwest and east coasts of this country, don’t you?” he asked her.

“Yes. That doesn’t leave much. Water and good rock – those are essential – plus a city we can melt into without raising comment.”

“This would be good,” Catherine remarked, pointing at a west coast city. “But it’s in an earthquake zone.”

At the end of three hours, both had come to the same realization. They looked at each other, nodded, and cast their eyes further up the map.

“There,” Catherine stated bluntly.

“Yes. I’ve been there. It’s a beautiful city. A gentler place, overall. It would be perfect – and enough like New

York that the transition wouldn't be too difficult."

"Except that we have to scope it out first – and then get there," Catherine remarked.

"I think we should report back and book a flight ASAP, Chandler." Devin declared.

"Yes. I agree."

She sighed. They would need a couple of days, at least, to do that. She hated to be away from Vincent.

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Vincent left Father musing over the list and decided he needed to see Narcissa. The old seer had insight which might help them – or at least himself – reconcile to this uprooting of their community.

He found her, much to his surprise, sitting in the cathedral crossroads, as if she was waiting for a Greyhound bus. She had a large wicker basket and a couple of shapeless bags beside her. She looked up at his approach and smiled.

"Vincent. I'm ready."

"Narcissa! Ready for what?"

"To go with the Father and all. Away. To the new place."

Vincent knelt in front of the old woman and took her hands in his. He spoke softly.

"Narcissa, how did you know? We have only just decided."

"I saw it in the waters, Vincent. Do you think I would not know what is necessary? I have known for a long time that we must leave."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"What good, Vincent? Until you were ready to see, my words would mean nothing – the ravings of an old woman. Now you are ready."

"What did you see, Narcissa? What you know could make the decision easier."

Narcissa looked up at the tall roof of the chamber. Her voice was low.

"Terrible things, Vincent. Things I cannot speak of. They have a name, the same name ... terror. Terror is coming. This city is in danger – we are in danger."

Vincent rose and gave his arm to Narcissa.

"I'll signal Pascal to send someone for your belongings. How did you get them up here?"

"The Mouse. He carried them up yesterday and promised to say nothing," she told him.

Vincent sighed. Why did everyone seem more ... eager ... than he?

"You can stay in the Great Hall, Narcissa. We will have to get word out to our helpers above."

"Yes, everyone who wants to must come, Vincent. Sometimes the soul knows what the mind cannot grasp."

Vincent said nothing to this, but led Narcissa back to the Great Hall, stopping only once to signal about her baggage and give his destination. He left Narcissa on the lower step to open the big doors. He helped her inside and she looked around and chose a spot in one of the alcoves. She pulled a chair from among many stacked nearby and sat in it.

"I will wait here," she told him.

Cullen arrived shortly afterwards with Mouse, carrying her basket and bags.

Mouse looked at Narcissa and smiled broadly.

"Coming too?" he asked. "Ok, good. No more secrets."

"I think there will be others," Vincent told the two men. "I'll tell William to prepare for guests."

"I'll tell him," Cullen offered. "Mouse and I will find the camp beds and sleeping mattresses and get them down here."

Vincent nodded and went back to Father's chamber.

"Narcissa has come up and will stay in the Great Hall," he reported.

"Goodness, I had no idea it had come to that!" Father exclaimed. "That puts a whole new complexion on it. I confess, I had not considered Narcissa – although I'm sure Mary did. We must talk to Elizabeth too. And all the helpers we can reach – when we know where we're going."

"Narcissa says there is great danger."

"I hope not too urgent a danger, Vincent. It will take some time to arrange a move, be it only to the next state."

"I do not know how urgent it is, Father, but I suspect we will have time to do what we must."

"Well then, we must do what we can until Catherine and Devin report. We must all pack our belongings in readiness. We must try to take as much furniture and necessities as we can, less trinkets, unless of sentimental value. Anything we cannot take must go above, or be disposed of out of sight and sealed in. We must leave no trace behind us. We will have to take down all the bridges and block the route to the catacombs."

"I know. I will tell Pascal to send the messages. I'll help Mary make a list of what needs to be done. I suspect there will be little time for regrets."

"Regrets are pointless, Vincent. We must do it. That's all there is to say."

Vincent sighed and went to talk to Pascal, then tramped sadly to his chamber. He looked around. There was, in reality, little that he had to take, beyond his books and journals. But obviously clothes, bedding and such would have to be packed. Catherine would be coming; he would have gladly given up everything, so long as she did so. Nothing else mattered.

He looked at the stained glass window, which had defined his life as much as anything he owned. He would like to take that too, but suspected it would be impractical. He sat down on the bed, suddenly weak with emotion.

How could it have come to this? While his differences set him apart from the rest of humanity and he didn't know his origins, he did know he had been born in New York.

What use would he be in a new place? Everything he knew was here.

He looked up and sensed resignation in Catherine. He knew what that signified. She and Devin had found a place, but she wasn't completely happy about it. He dropped his head into his hands. He had been half hoping there was no other place for them, that they would have to go deeper, as they had once considered.

He rolled over onto his bed and lay facing the window, his eyes burning with unshed tears. He must have dozed off because he suddenly felt a hand massaging his back. Catherine had returned. He turned over and pressed his head into her chest. He found his throat choked with emotion. His voice cracked.

"Catherine. I cannot. Tell me this is a nightmare!"

Catherine stroked his hair then turned his face up gently between her hands and kissed him lightly on his nose, cheeks and lips. She could feel his sadness and regretted the necessity of this move, more than anything in her life.

"It's real, Vincent. We're together in this. You are right about one thing, though. You'll lose the most. We have the option of living above. You do not. None of us is leaving our home behind, just rock walls and ... stuff. You will leave everything."

Vincent said nothing to this. The enormity of the work ahead made him numb.

"How can we move so much and so many?"

"Slowly and with all the help we can get," Catherine replied. "Come, it's dinner time. Devin and I have an announcement to make."

Vincent asked no more. He was afraid to know the answer.

Their entry into the dining hall was greeted with a sudden silence. Vincent went to sit beside Father, and stopped in amazement when he realized who was sitting on the other side. Narcissa! That drove home to him the importance of the coming announcement, as nothing else could have. He was sure he wouldn't like it.

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Catherine and Devin stood before the tunnel community and informed them of the location they had chosen. There was a stunned silence and several jaws dropped.

Then a soft, deep voice spoke into the hush.

"This is the right place. I have seen it," Narcissa stated.

Father turned to her, made a helpless gesture, then stood up.

"Catherine, Devin, are you sure? It's such a long way to go. And ... and ...," he found himself unable to say more.

Catherine looked at Devin and he nodded.

"We're sure, Father. In the end, there was nowhere else suitable. It has, we believe, everything we are looking for – and we're sure we'll find more reasons as time goes on. It *is* much like New York, in many ways – just smaller. Devin and I will fly out there in two days and investigate more closely. First, I have to contact an old friend. I think we will have all the help we need."

Suddenly, there was an explosion of talking, which William's booming voice broke into without difficulty.

"Enough, everyone. Let's eat and save the talk for afterwards."

He began to pass the platters of food around and the community ate their meal in uncharacteristic quiet. It gave everyone time to think, Vincent reflected.

Afterwards, Mary announced a long list of work that needed to be done. Crews could start on some of them the next day.

Everyone, Father declared, should go back to their chambers and carefully consider what they would take and what must stay. That would be enough work for the day. After a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, they would begin to formalize their plans.

Catherine and Vincent left the hall and returned to his chamber. She looked at the stained glass window and made a resolution. No matter what else had to stay, that would accompany them. Vincent deserved something more than books from the only home he had ever known. She knew he would never ask, had probably already decided it was impossible. But right now, she had another task to do.

"Vincent, I must go above and talk to Tony Ramos and his grandparents. I think they might be able to help us. The Roma have relatives everywhere – perhaps even where we are going."

In a day of shocks, Vincent felt another. Catherine's brain was working, he thought gratefully. His own seemed paralyzed.

"You are amazing, Catherine. I'll walk you to the nearest entry. There may be vehicles in their junkyard we can use."

"Yes, I think so too. I know we can count on their help, if they can give it."

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Three hours later, Catherine returned to Vincent's chamber triumphant. The Ramos' did indeed have relatives in their new city. She and Devin had been given a medallion, similar to that of Tony's, to present to a cousin with a warehouse on the docks. He was Zageb Ramos, a scrap metal dealer and a man of some wealth. The gypsy code ensured he could be trusted to help and say nothing. She had also mentioned transport, and Tony's grandfather had promised to find at least two school buses and some large moving vans, as well as some smaller cube vans and an RV. Most, he had told her, could be scavenged. Several Roma had moving companies. They liked to travel, and it was a good source of income. Their yards would have old trucks that could be fixed up or cannibalized. Once they got to their destination, Zageb would either use them himself, return them, or pass them to other Roma companies. Nothing would be lost. The Roma, he told her, never got rid of anything.

Catherine gave them the location of the warehouse with the freight elevator, and as the vehicles were found and repaired, they would be taken there.

The Ramos' probably knew of Vincent and the tunnel community, she guessed, but they said nothing. It was not their way. Tony had extracted a quietly-made promise from her to visit below before they left, though. Catherine had thought that a good bargain and readily agreed.

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The flight to their prospective destination was uneventful and Catherine's first glimpse was of a bright, modern city wreathed in cloud and mist. In late fall, this was to be expected. Nevertheless, Catherine felt the rightness of their choice as soon as they stepped from the plane, stiff legs and jetlag notwithstanding. It smelled clean and vibrant, despite the damp. She hoped Vincent could feel that too. Their bond had improved since they had become lovers, but she was never sure how much she could actually feel of Vincent's emotions and how much was instinct and observation. She missed his arms already. They had to get this foray done quickly so that the real work could begin.

Devin and Catherine wasted no time getting to Zageb's scrap yard. Its extent shocked Catherine and she foresaw many pleasant hours in store for Cullen and Mouse, scavengers extraordinaire.

Zageb greeted them warmly and immediately took them to his warehouse on the docks. He led the way into the depths of the old brick building and down a flight of stone steps. In a room without a door, he stopped and opened a trunk. It had an assortment of flashlights and lanterns, and a waterproof folder. He pulled out a map and set it on top of the trunk.

"This is maps of the tunnels and steam lines. It's a very old map, but no work has been done there for a long time."

He pointed at the map. "Hydro crews sometimes go down this manhole here, about four blocks away. It leads to their main conduit. We are here."

"Where is 'here'? Devin asked.

Zageb gave them a wolfish grin and walked to a wall, pressing two cinder blocks in the corner. A section of jagged wall opened noiselessly, revealing another set of stone steps. There was a large lever on the wall inside the tunnel, and a string of light bulbs led down into the darkness. Zageb flicked a switch inside the door and they lit up.

"I ... um ... used to have a need for this," he told them. "No longer. Container shipping has changed everything. This warehouse is yours to use - and anything you find down there too. I understand you may need a lot of pipes. You can take anything you need from my yard. It will be closed next winter to make way for a causeway extension. I will retire.

"Do not hurry. When you are ready to leave, call me from the telephone upstairs in the office. I have replaced all the dead lights, but they do not go far. Just to the old town. There is food and water in this bag."

"Well, what are we waiting for Chandler?" Devin asked.

Catherine sighed, thanked Zageb with a hug and followed Devin, who had grabbed the map and the bag of supplies and flashlights.

The next four hours passed swiftly, but it soon became apparent that this location would work. The tunnels were deep and one narrow one led straight beneath the harbour to the park. There, they found a honeycomb of small caves and decided that this would be their core living area. The park was largely wild and would never be developed, being protected by statute. There were pipes even here. Some, they guessed, were for the various water features above. The tunnels were thick with dust and had not been trodden in many years, even though some of the old pipes had sprung small leaks. Devin marked these places on the map.

Then, as they walked deeper, they rounded a corner and suddenly emerged into a huge open space, glittering with the reflected light from their flashlights. It was huge cavern with a lake in its centre, a wide border of soft sand, and a roof that seemed to be full of stars.

“Not another Mirror Pool?” Catherine whispered, stunned.

Devin cast his flashlight around.

“No, I think those glints are stalactites. Small ones.”

They returned by a different route and found a round-about but equally useful tunnel under the area marked as residential, near the park. The tunnels were all dry.

Devin made quick sorties into several narrow side tunnels, handing all but a flashlight to Catherine to hold and wait for him. On one such excursion, she heard his whoop. She rushed down it to find him grinning from ear to ear.

“Look, Chandler. This is it! I knew there had to be one – maybe more than one.”

“What is it?” Catherine couldn’t make sense of what she was seeing. A very large contraption blocked the tunnel.

“It’s a rock miner. Pneumatic. This will save a lot of back-breaking work. They always bring them down in pieces and assemble *in situ*. They leave them because they might be needed again – or it’s too much work to disassemble and take back up top.”

“Well, in a day of wonders, that’s good news. Are we finished here?”

“Yes, but we have to look for the other things we need. Water, heat, electricity. We cannot be lit wholly by candles anymore. This map shows services start near the warehouse ... here.” The area had a name which indicated a colourful past – and one heated and powered by steam from deep below ground.

They trudged back to the area below the warehouse and headed inland, then west. They soon found themselves in an area of hissing steam pipes and muggy warmth.

“Whew, we could have saunas here,” Devin commented.

“A good idea, if a bit remote to the home area,” was Catherine’s reply.

“Ah, I’m sure there are geothermal vents under the park too. I read that the lake there seldom freezes.”

They marked the map as they progressed. They soon found the steam pipes and realized they extended well into the park area as well.

“Well, I think we’ve satisfied all requirements, except perhaps ventilation,” Catherine said at last. “We can leave that to Kanin. He knows what’s necessary.”

“So what else is on the list,” Devin asked.

“I think we’ll discover more in time,” Catherine remarked. “We’ll have to send some people out here to begin work almost immediately. We haven’t much time and a great deal to do.”

“I’m not useful for much, so I’ll be the coordinator at this end,” Devin offered.

“Thanks, Dev. That would be wonderful, but we’ll need you back there too, once in a while. You’ll have to return before the big move. We’ll need a spare driver.”

“Right, Chandler, I get it. We have to get Charles and Vincent here overland.”

“Yes. The Ramos’ are looking for an RV for us. We will probably take a few others with us too, if there’s room.”

“Well, let’s get back to the warehouse and call Zageb. I need to eat.”

Over the next three weeks, the Great Hall filled with helpers making the move and the warehouse with trucks. The windy stairs were blocked with a temporary door to prevent everyone and everything from being blown away inside. Gradually, the trucks were filled and some of the Roma drove them west with as many tunnel men as was practical. Sentries were posted to watch the warehouse and given a special code to use if they needed help. Catherine couldn’t be sure, but she suspected the Ramos’ had mobilized some of the Roma, because there were no problems at all.

Unneeded furniture was sent above to helpers who had decided to stay.

Devin returned to their new home and helped organize the work crews. He took time to examine what was available in the scrap yard and sent letters back with information. On one, he said simply – “New laundry here.” That was greeted with whoops of delight. No one wanted to move the Rube Goldberg devices that were their manual washing machines. Mouse, however, cannibalized the machines and removed various gears, belts and all the mangle attachments.

“Might be useful,” he explained. “Don’t make these anymore.”

No one argued. Mouse’s gizmos had saved them in the past. Devin would just have to create a new storage room for the overflow.

Rolley’s concert grand piano proved the most difficult task. They couldn’t leave the instrument behind. For Rolley it had great sentimental value. It had, in a sense, brought him back to them – and a musical instrument was not something to be thrown down the Abyss or buried.

Mouse solved the problem in his usual fashion. He dismantled it again. Only the soundboard required special attention, and it was packed in blankets and tied with rope. Mouse swore to Rolley the piano would be assembled in a music room.

Cullen and Kanin flew out to join Devin and they sent regular reports via coded telex to Peter Alcott, who passed them onto Catherine. The physician was not happy with them leaving, but could not come up with a reasonable argument against it.

Less easy to convince were Catherine’s friends. She invited Jenny, Joe and Nancy to her apartment one Saturday and told them her plans. There was a stunned silence.

“You can’t be serious, Radcliffe,” Joe exploded.

“My plans are already well-advanced. I’ll be selling this apartment and buying us another there.”

“But why? What does that place have that New York doesn’t?” Jenny asked.

“I can’t explain – but there’s no choice for me – for us.”

“Would this have anything to do with that friend of yours who was so sick a couple of years ago?” Joe asked, with unusual insight.

Nancy, who perhaps knew more about Vincent than the others, without ever having met him, looked at Catherine and winked. A small smile quirked Catherine’s lips.

“Yes – and he’s more than a friend. He’s my life. This way, we can be together - forever.”

Catherine decided that was all anyone needed to know and quickly changed the subject.

Before her friends left, she promised them they would receive an invitation to visit – sometime after the

following summer. She privately hoped she would be able to keep that promise. She would keep in touch with Dr Peter Alcott, she told them, if they needed further proof that she wasn't crazy.

"Cathy, whatever else you may be – crazy is not one of them," Joe told her, giving her a parting hug and brotherly peck. "Take care, kiddo."

Catherine finished her packing, closed the apartment and put it up for sale. She sold it in short order and added that considerable sum to her father's inheritance.

Meanwhile, by common consent, Catherine became the home tunnel coordinator. She alone had contacts with the world above that were needed now. She made sure they had enough boxes and tape to pack their belongings and carts to get them to the warehouse. Most residents had several trunks, but everything had to be labeled as well. She issued handfuls of big cardboard tags with strings, markers and masking tape. She did not envy the folks sorting out at the other end.

Beyond that, her main job was to make sure every tunnel crew had a different job, from a growing number of lists provided by Vincent. The community was used to working together and needed little direction once they were pointed in the right direction.

Vincent was still too quiet for her liking, though. There was still one big job to do – Father's library, and Catherine asked him if he would take charge of that. He smiled and agreed, well aware that she was trying to distract him.

He took on the task with more interest than he had shown in anything lately, and the two men sorted and stripped the shelves in the cluttered chamber. Vincent ensured that the books were categorized as they were packed and duplicates were sent above to Mr Smythe's bookstore, where they were gratefully received. They found many treasures in the process and often wasted time discussing them. Catherine said nothing, realizing that both men would be leaving more than stone behind them. Father had created the world below and Vincent was its true child. They needed the comfort of the books and the memories that were wrapped up in them.

Gradually the tunnel chambers emptied and their contents shipped as moving vans became available and Vincent realized he had been lagging. It was time he got to work on his own chamber. Kristopher Gentian's portrait of himself and Catherine had been resting on the top of his trunk, next to a full length swinging mirror. They had often regarded themselves in that mirror and tried to imitate the pose in the portrait. It was an uncomfortable one for Vincent, but he never said anything. Now the painting had to be packed with the rest of his belongings.

Carefully, Vincent wrapped the still unframed portrait in one of the blankets they used for their musical evenings, then added the mirror to another. He tied them both up with rope and put one of the tags on it. He carefully wrote "Vincent – Fragile", reflecting that the statement applied to more than the two items in the bundle. He still was not happy about the move.

He sighed and packed the rest of his chamber goods quickly and sent the trunks to the warehouse, keeping only a bag with a few clothes, books and his most recent journal in the Great Hall. He swore never to enter his chamber again. That, he decided, would prevent some regrets. He and Catherine slept in the Great Hall with everyone else.

Catherine quietly had Mouse and Jamie extract the window, package it carefully and carry it to one of the trucks, addressing the package to Devin. He would know what it was and what to do with it. Pascal left with that shipment. He was needed to set up their new communication network.

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Catherine had ordered the contents of her apartment packed into a shipping container and sent it to the New York warehouse. She realized she had to do something more on her own account. She wired Zageb and asked him to look out for an apartment at their destination, stating only that it must have a private entrance and be accessible to the tunnels. She was amazed to have him wire her two days later with an urgent request to visit.

He had found the perfect place, he said.

Catherine booked herself on the next flight and was met by Devin at the airport. She pressed him for information but he declared ignorance.

“Zageb insisted I wait until you could see it too.”

He drove them to the high-rise residential area near the park and down a ramp. A creaky door opened and he drove into a dim parking garage. They were met by Zageb holding a large lantern.

“Trick I learned from those guys below us,” he commented, and led them to a set of stairs.

“My brother, Sigmund, told me about this. It’s slated for demolition. It’s old, but sound. Two stories, eight suites, plus a penthouse. Old lady owned it. She died three years ago and it was sold for back taxes. Too good to destroy. Fine woodwork. She even put in a sprinkler system. Had to.”

He led them up to the first floor.

“No power right now, but there is ancient elevator – a museum piece.”

The floors were covered in dusty rug and the place had obviously not been lived in for some time. The halls were wide, though, and oak banisters bespoke a much earlier era. The pipes for the sprinkler system were a jarring note along the ornate metal moldings of the ceilings. Perhaps they could be painted at least, Catherine thought.

Zageb continued his tour guide role.

“This was one of the apartment-hotels, used in the summer by rich tourists. All the suites have two big rooms, each with a Murphy bed. There’s a sliding door between. Nook kitchens, but lots of storage. The penthouse is on the top – that has two bedrooms and a patio. The elevator goes there too.”

“Can I see it?” Catherine asked, suddenly excited.

“Surely. Up here.”

Zageb led them up a staircase beside the elevator on the second floor and into a roomy suite whose windows looked over the park. Catherine walked out onto the terrace and looked around. The penthouse, as was usual in these old buildings, took up only about one-third of the roof area and sat right in the middle of that expanse. On either side of the block were the blank walls of much newer towers, broken only by the frosted glass of what were probably tiny bathroom windows. They had a section which opened at the top – and no way to look down, she was glad to see.

The terrace was set back from the edge of the roof and paved with flagstones. A few huge ceramic pots with small trees and dead vegetation were spaced around its edges. The view over the park and its lake was spectacular. Catherine caught her breath and looked at Devin. He nodded. He knew she was thinking of Vincent.

“Perfect,” she breathed. “How much does your brother want for this?”

Zageb quoted a figure so low that Catherine stared at him.

“Not possible,” she declared bluntly.

“He wants only what he paid for it, which wasn’t much. You will pay for renovations and clean-up, yes? He will arrange that. Fair prices – the best.”

“What are those?” Catherine asked, pointing at some dusty panels on either side of the penthouse suite.

Devin snorted and smirked. “You’ve led a sheltered life, Chandler. Those are solar panels.”

Zageb nodded and made a whirling gesture next to his ear. “The old lady was a little gaga, but not stupid. Paranoid. I have more to show you. Come back downstairs.”

He led them down the three floors and through a battered wooden door into the basement, which was just below ground level. He opened a metal utility door and led the way. Devin’s jaw dropped.

“A power plant! And a boiler!”

“Yes. This place is almost self-sufficient. There is also a diesel generator and an incinerator. The solar panels feed the battery packs in here.” He showed them a heavy metal cabinet.

Devin looked at Catherine.

“Chandler, that electricity problem I hinted at the start. Not a problem now! We can use the power from this to supplement our own below. We can add to the solar panel array and store a lot more electricity – if we get enough sun.”

Zageb laughed. “And if not, you have the diesel generator too. The old lady was sly. She put a water filtrations system in too – but used it only for the laundry. Crazy, like I said.”

They left the room and walked back to the stairs. Catherine noticed a sign on a door and pushed it open. Zageb shone in the lantern. There were two washers and two dryers.

“Next door are storage lockers.”

“We won’t need those, but we do need more washing machines. We’ll need to join this to the storage room and put in more. Take out the lockers and the coin boxes. These will be free.”

She opened up a large wooden door and found herself looking through a huge cupboard of wooden slats and rails – at the back of the boiler.

“Airing cupboard,” Zageb told her. “Very old technology – but practical.”

“Wonderful,” breathed Catherine.

“Sounds like you’ve made a decision, Chandler,” Devin commented.

“I’m sold,” Catherine declared to Zageb. “Let’s talk to your brother and arrange to get the place cleaned up and ready for occupancy. Vincent and I will have the penthouse, the rest will be used to board our students attending university - or visitors.”

Maybe she would be able to keep that promise to her friends after all.

“Devin, see what can be done about linking the parking garage to the tunnels below. Maybe with another freight elevator. We’ll need an alternative to the dock warehouse.”

“You got it, Chandler. I’ll get Kanin over here right away.”

Zageb gave Devin a set of keys. “My brother also has a set. There will be no others. He will use only Roma to work here and no one will work unless he is present. It will be ready in two months. He will give the keys to you when the work is done.”

Catherine returned home a little poorer in bank account, but ecstatic. Their new home seemed to already be welcoming them, she reflected. It was almost too easy!

...

Some days later, Tony sent a message to Catherine, asking that she come to the junkyard. She did so and found herself greeted by Tony and his grandfather. The latter looked apologetic.

“We found an RV, you understand, but it’s not what we would have chosen. We thought you should look at it before we fix it. Come.”

Against the fence, Catherine saw something that looked like a battered double-decker Greyhound bus, in plain grey metal. It had “HM 4:20” emblazoned on the side in jagged purple letters.

“Where on earth did you find this?”

Tony answered.

“Long, bent story – like a Roma nose, as we say. What do you think?”

“I think it’s perfect. Can I see inside? How many can it sleep?”

“It will sleep 10 upstairs and four more down,” the senior Ramos told her.

“Wonderful! I can think of several who could join Vincent and me. We’ll need a special hidden compartment for he and another, where they can hide if need be.”

“I know,” Tony declared. “Grandpa will see to it.”

“Yes, only Roma will work on this one. We can change the name.”

“How about *Home Away*?”

Mr Ramos laughed. “Yes, that is good.”

She walked up the metal stairs to the top and saw that it had been stripped to the bed frames. There were two double beds at one end and several sets of bunks along the walls.

“We will bring the bedding, Mr Ramos. Give us as much storage as you can. And a kitchen on the lower level.”

“There are the underneath compartments, like in a Greyhound bus,” Tony told her.

“I’d forgotten about those. Thank goodness. Thank-you for all your help. We would not be able to do this without you. Tony, would you like to come for that visit now?”

“Oh yes!” Tony fairly jumped for joy.

“You mind your manners, Grandson,” the old man admonished. “The bus should be ready in a month,” he told Catherine.

“We hope to be on the road in early May,” Catherine remarked. “We have to choose our route with care and not all take the same one.”

“Roma know many roads. I will send down a map of our ways, and a list of people who can help you.”

“I don’t know how to thank you,” Catherine declared gratefully.

“No thanks are needed. You gave us back our grandson. That is a gift which can never be repaid.”

He walked away and shouted at a man in a coverall, gesturing at the bus.

She led Tony to the nearest entry and was not surprised to see Vincent waiting.

Tony got the royal tour and joined them for lunch. He declared the soup the best he had had – except for his grandmother’s. William huffed, but conceded that he didn’t know much about gypsy cooking. Afterwards, Tony thanked them both for the visit and said he should get back to the yard.

“Grandfather taught me to read, and now he’s teaching me bookkeeping. Even Roma need to know how to count,” he said wryly.

Catherine laughed. “And even a lawyer can learn a thing or two,” she remarked. “Who would have thought we’d end up with a rock band bus?”

...

In early spring, Catherine called a meeting to order in Father’s chamber. There were not many people left now and they had cleaned out the Great Hall and moved into the dining room. Not much work remained to be done. Mary had taken Rebecca and Brooke and flown out to take charge of the everyday essentials in the new tunnels. Two bus loads, mostly families with kids, would make the trip in easy stages, leaving the next day. They would use the Roma network of helpers, since they would not be able to cook or sleep aboard. They had packed tents, though, and could camp where necessity and weather allowed.

“I wanted you all to know that the RV has a lot of room, so we need to decide who should travel by road with Vincent and me. Devin has promised to return to share the driving with me, so Charles will also come. The Ramos have made a special hidden room over top of the driver.

“I think Father, Narcissa and Elizabeth should also come with us. Anyone have other suggestions?”

“Me!” bellowed William. “You’ll need someone to cook. I’ve been making a lot of preserves and pies. There’s a

diesel-powered freezer in the RV.”

“That makes eight,” Catherine remarked. “Anyone else?”

“Me,” spoke up Olivia. “Kanin is out there already. I can bring Luke and little Annie. Besides, you need another younger woman on board. I can help out, while you drive.”

“That’s nine adults and two kids. I think that will work. Thank you, Olivia.”

...

Now that most of the work was done, Vincent was quiet again. He had revisited his old haunts, even made a visit to mine the crystal cave with Devin on one of his return visits. They had decided the crystals might be useful to exchange for money and Devin had seen to that, so they had some ready cash to travel with – a necessity for gas and ongoing expenses. They did not want to draw on Catherine’s reserve any more than necessary. The apartment block would need regular infusions of cash.

That same trip, Devin and Vincent did one last important task, quietly. When Elizabeth was packing her paints and brushes, they worked with lanterns and a good camera to take photographs of her painted walls. When they left, the entries would be blocked with rubble. No one had the heart to destroy the paintings, but they had to be hidden well. Devin had a plan for the photos, but declared he wanted a surprise or two. That made Vincent laugh. Everything would be a surprise to him and the others traveling in the RV. What would one more matter?

...

Catherine had quietly decided to retire and devote more time to Vincent. Since leaving the DA’s office after Vincent’s illness, she had been working with Peter to ensure people who needed assistance found the right agencies. A few had joined the tunnel community. Once they reached their new home, she decided she would try something new. She wanted to be part of their new world in a way she could not have in the old one. Everyone was starting fresh – so would she. She was sure something would make itself known once she was there.

...

Devin had returned for the last time and the RV was packed and ready to go. Olivia and Catherine made one last tour of the tunnels, to make sure nothing had been forgotten, or remained to raise questions.

Using the remainder of the plastic explosive that Mouse had been forbidden to take with him, and some knowledge he had picked up on his travels, Devin set a series of small controlled explosions and collapsed any bridges and walkways leading deeper into the tunnels. The home tunnel entry would be closed similarly, when they were all out.

Mouse’s *gizmos* had given them no little trouble. He had packed them himself, but so haphazardly, that no one knew what was in the odd assortment of trunks and crates he had left behind. One had leaked a noxious fluid and had to be dumped, unopened, into the Abyss. Another had started to smoke. It too was disposed of. After that, each trunk was opened and examined. Most seemed to be full of wire and gears. Vincent had sighed and rolled his eyes, but was well aware that Mouse was the best scavenger of them all. As long as it wasn’t dangerous, it would go to their new home.

Arthur the raccoon had been shipped with Mouse on a flight to Oakland and then the pair had taken a bus north. He had held his pet in a covered cage the whole way, but no comments had ensued. Devin reported that the raccoon had discovered some friends in the park one night and had driven Mouse frantic until he returned. Devin had created a “pet door” inside a hollow trunk for the animal to leave and return to the tunnels. Mouse

had finally been convinced that Arthur could not be completely tamed and needed to socialize with his own kind.

...

They decided to leave on the night of May 1, so as to get of the city before rush hour. The RV was waiting in the warehouse, warmed and ready. Vincent and Charles had examined their secret hidey hole and declared it more than suitable. There were two folded foam chairs, which could be stretched out into beds, at each end and a small table in the middle. A one way glass gave a view of the outside through the disguised bus marquee. The room could be accessed through a hidden panel between the two “bedrooms” – one for Vincent and Catherine and the other for Devin and Charles. The layout of the top floor made the room impossible to detect by a casual observer. They did not expect to have any of those, but it was best to be safe.

It was decided that both men would probably spend the daylight hours in the secret room, which had been made very cozy. Catherine had packed a small bookcase with favourite books and added a CD boom box and some classical music. A ventilation panel under the table allowed the men to talk to the drivers below them.

Each of the older travelers picked a lower bunk and the children took the upper ones near Olivia. William had organized his kitchen and declared himself too fat to lumber up the spiral metal stairs. He bunked downstairs at the back, near the kitchen. There were plenty of tables and seating on the lower deck. There was sink and toilet there, a supplement to a small toilet and cubicle shower upstairs. There were many cupboards stuffed with household necessities, a large portion of which were non-perishable foods. Most of their personal luggage was stowed in the compartment underneath. They each had only a single carry-on bag with a change of clothes.

Vincent had prepared a small net-bound play area for the children, and promised to read them stories at night.

Catherine was to take the first shift at the wheel, since she knew New York and its environs well. She waited impatiently, and finally sighed in relief when Devin and Vincent ran to board the bus. They had collapsed the home tunnel entries. Both were wearing coveralls. They shed them, bagged them and stuffed the bag in the luggage compartment.

“Almost did a *Mouse*,” Devin laughed. He had been told about the plastic explosive and the near disaster when Vincent and Father had been trapped in the Maze.

Vincent rolled his eyes and went upstairs.

“Buckle up, everyone,” Catherine ordered and waited until she was sure that had been done, then put the bus into gear. She heard Vincent and Charles shuffling above her head. Neither man had wanted shoulder straps – in Charles case they would have been very uncomfortable. The Ramos’ had rigged up a kind of webbing that could be fixed across the chairs and prevent them from sliding out on curves. The chairs rotated to allow them easy egress, there being almost no leg room to spare.

Catherine had taken a few lessons from Devin in driving a multi-shift diesel, but found it less difficult than she expected. The RV had been well-serviced and she was satisfied they would be safe in it.

Devin sat in the passenger seat and talked to Vincent and Charles in their secret room. Whoever sat in that seat would be navigator. Olivia and Father would take their turns when Devin or Catherine slept. They planned to move slowly, with stops every three hours or so to stretch, then again to eat, and end their driving day in mid-afternoon. There would be no walking about while the bus was moving. No one was used to long travel and they had plenty of time.

At this time of the year, Catherine rationalized, they could use truck stops and not raise any comment. There would be no tourists if they used the more northern routes. It was still cold, but there was no danger of snow now – or so they hoped.

Leaving New York was simpler than Catherine had expected. They met few red lights and breezed onto the Interstate with hardly a pause. When she commented on that, with a sigh of relief, Narcissa spoke up.

“Do not worry. This was meant to be.”

Catherine hoped she could look back later and thank the fates for the fact that all of their truckloads and people arrived without incident. They had many miles to go and she often chewed her lip in worry. She calculated they had over 2,400 miles in a direct line, but many hundred more, taking the routes they planned. She figured if they could manage 600 miles a day, they would be doing well. The bus was too old to risk at highway speeds. They had decided to keep to the slow lanes and not stress it.

She and Devin took turns, changing after the rest stops. The first day they put New York behind them as far as they could. They pulled into truck stops and slept a few gloriously quiet hours, the bus' metal settling around them. Catherine was glad to sleep in Vincent's arms until breakfast and her next shift.

By the end of the first week, they had fine-tuned their routine and both drivers took opportunities to sit with and watch the scenery pass with the others on the lower deck. Devin had not spent much time in the country of his birth, preferring exotic locations he had once described as '*south of oz and north of Shangri-La*'.

...

Charles and Vincent enjoyed their view of the road ahead so much, they did not leave their secret room except for meals and necessary leg stretches, for which they tramped up and down the upper floor at stops. Neither felt inclined to go outside, just in case. For Vincent, who had never seen the world in daylight, each part of the journey was a source of wonderment. He learned that Charles had traveled more miles than any of them, but seen very little. While with the carnival, his brother Eddy had insisted he remain hidden, so as not to spoil the con. Vincent had been appalled at this revelation, but Charles never dwelled on the past. He stated it matter-of-factly, without malice.

The two men could often be heard exclaiming about what they saw. Catherine reflected that this trip had given Vincent something she had only dreamed for him – a trip in daylight. She could feel his happiness and felt for the first time that everything would work out.

One night, Vincent gathered Catherine in his arms and whispered a thank-you in her ear.

“For what?” she whispered back.

“For ignoring my funk. I never dreamed of such marvels, such beauty, Catherine. It's worth everything -even leaving the only home I've known.”

Catherine found herself wishing she had thought of that aspect of their journey sooner. It was obvious, but she had been distracted with the logistics of moving. And how do you describe a field of bright spring growth to someone who had never seen the sun? She sighed.

“You'll have many more surprises awaiting you, I think,” she said at last and kissed him deeply. They made quiet love and slept the night away in each other's arms.

...

One afternoon, while traveling across the Great Plains, the temperature dropped and it began to snow. Catherine pulled into the next rest stop and called for attention. Devin, dozing in the seat next to her, awoke with a start and looked around. There had been no need for a navigator for the last two days. The roads were straight as arrows and well-marked. Catherine's tone was serious.

“I don't like the looks of this. Spring storms can be violent, but usually the snow melts quickly. I declare a holiday.”

They made a meal and everyone took turns leaving and stretching as soon as the light began to fade. The wind blew around the bus all night, sometimes rocking it alarmingly. but they all slept soundly and warm.

The next day dawned bright and sunny, but the snow was deep in the fields and there was heavy slush on the road. They discussed the situation and decided to stay another day.

Olivia suggested they air out the bus – which everyone heartily agreed to. Seven days in close quarters, even in a bus the size of theirs, was trying at times. They rigged up lines and hung out all the bedding in the warm sun, then cleaned the bus from top to bottom, even luring Charles and Vincent from their “club car” perch so it could be swept of cookie crumbs. The two men helped to remake the beds and everyone settled down for one of William’s fine meat pies at dusk. Afterwards, they trooped in ones and twos to the rest stop’s shower – a luxury they could not indulge in often aboard the bus. All water had to be carried, and cooking and drinking took priority.

Olivia took the opportunity to do some laundry too. They had a small washer and dryer onboard, but she hung all but the heaviest items across the lower back of the bus to dry. The airflow had already proven a boon for this purpose.

They sang songs and played cards until the children’s eyes drooped. Vincent’s services were not required and everyone turned in early.

The next day, the roads were clear and drying. The plows had been through during the night. William filled up the water tank and they bid a fond goodbye to an anonymous rest stop and continued their journey, revitalized. The rest and work, Catherine decided, had done everyone good after so much sitting. She and Devin agreed that another long rest stop should be made before they crossed the Rockies. Once on the other side, they would have to skirt large cities and their northbound route would be more complicated and better traveled. Then they would face the last challenge before they reached their destination. Others had reported no problems, however, so they did not expect difficulties.

The Rockies crossing was as uneventful as had been the rest of their journey to date. Narcissa, Catherine noticed, seemed positively cheerful. She smiled and kept the children amused with stories and cat’s cradles. Elizabeth and Father played chess almost every day. It seemed Father had finally found an opponent worthy of him. They were well-matched and neither could win more than a game or two in succession.

Vincent wrote in his journals in the club car room and Charles began one of his own. His writing was clear, but he had difficulty expressing himself. Vincent had Devin buy some books of word puzzles at one of their gas station stops and Charles worked at them avidly. He had not had much education, but he was a keen observer and a quick learner. His brain, Vincent told Catherine later, was unimpaired. He had just needed the right stimulation.

...

One morning, after going upward for hours, the bus crested a foothill and the horizon opened up. There were gasps from everyone in the bus, all of whom had been glued to their windows, waiting for this moment. The sky was clear and where it met the horizon, the sun gleamed on a wide expanse of bright, rippled blue.

The Pacific Ocean! Charles and Vincent’s explosion of happiness infected Catherine, made Father, who was in the passenger seat, smile and woke up Devin, who grunted, but opened the door into the club compartment to see for himself, then tumbled back into bed, complaining. He liked to sleep in, preferring the later driving shift. He claimed Charles snored, but being in such close quarters, Catherine knew that wasn’t so. She suspected he was thinking too much – and looking forward to the end of their journey.

At the first rest stop, Catherine turned in to let them all stand up and take a good look without upsetting the bus.

They followed the coastal highway north, skirting all the major cities they could and stopping only to quickly re-provision. They camped in scenic rest stops redolent with the tang of salt air and heather in bloom.

Eager now to reach their destination, they wasted little time.

Two days later, they were heading down the highway and the first sight of their new home was gleaming like a jewel against the dark mountains and a sky thick with thunderstorms. It had been smooth, but not without one of Devin’s jokes. He had obviously been waiting for his chance.

“You did that on purpose,” Catherine accused Devin, later, when she had cooled down a little. The bus had been rocking with laughter for some miles. She didn’t mind that she had been the trigger for it – they needed the humour - but Devin’s smirk could not pass without comment.

“Chandler, I knew you wouldn’t have had time to look at a map of the environs. Why would you? I couldn’t resist.”

“If it hadn’t been you, one of us could have just as easily set off that joke,” Father chuckled from behind them.

“Well, I’m sure I haven’t heard the last of this,” Catherine commented ruefully. “I owe you one, Devin.”

“Oh, don’t be a sourpuss, Chandler,” Devin admonished her. “It’ll make a great story to tell the folks when we get home.”

Home! That thought brought home to Catherine the enormity of this undertaking, more than all the work that had gone before. It seemed strange to be going home to a place none of them had ever lived before. She sighed. Her stomach was fluttering in anticipation, and she sensed that Vincent too was somewhat apprehensive to see what awaited them.

Two hours later, near dusk, they were pulling into the warehouse, waved in by Jamie, who shut the door behind them.

Lights came on and they slowly disembarked, unable to believe they had arrived at last.

“Can’t say I’m sorry to be out of that thing, but I will miss it,” William rumbled.

“I think we’ll keep it handy,” Devin told them. “Zageb can get a local registration for this. We could take the children for short trips to local sights.”

“I like that idea,” Catherine agreed. There were many new places to explore. She hoped she could take Vincent to some of them, somehow.

Waiting along one wall were two mini-buses with tinted windows.

“We’re taking the taxi service to the apartment,” Jamie told them, as she walked up. “It’s all arranged. Then you’ll go below from there. It’s early, but we thought you’d like to stay overnight in the building and go down in the morning. You’ll want to clean up. Just bring your essentials. The rest will be taken down overnight.”

Despite their burning desire to see their new home, everyone had to agree that the plan made sense.

“A real shower,” Catherine breathed. “Yes, that first. Then a real bed.”

“We’ll be bringing up some food,” Jamie told them. “There’s a kind of social room in the building, which we’ve made into a communal dining room. In about two hours. I’ve already signaled. You can explore the building, pick a bunk and relax for a while. Get back your land legs.”

She led them to the buses and took charge of one. Devin took the driver’s seat of the other and they all piled in, carrying a bag each.

The drive to Catherine’s apartment building was brief, but their arrival a relief, just the same. They took the freight elevator upstairs and were shown into a well-appointed dining room, bright with flowers and shaded with one-way glass. The view of the setting sun in the park lake stunned them all into silence.

Jamie gave them a brief description of the building and left them to return below. The travelers wandered around the building. Catherine was amazed at the transformation, noting that the decorating was modern, but tasteful – and yes, the pipes for the sprinkler system had been painted to match the ceiling.

They all retreated into a suite. Olivia and the children took one, Narcissa and Elizabeth another, Father and William a third and Devin and Charles another, all on the same floor. Vincent and Catherine went to the penthouse and stood amazed for long moments. Catherine’s furniture had all been placed in much the same arrangement as in her old apartment. Devin again, she thought. He must have pumped Jenny for details.

Two hours later, they obediently trooped into the dining room, to be met by Zageb, Sigmund and their wives. Cullen had appeared, dressed in tails and obviously playing master of ceremonies.

“Sit!” Cullen ordered and they did so. William stood uncertain, unused to taking orders in a dining room.

“You too, William!” Cullen ordered.

What followed was a feast even William found satisfactory. Zageb’s wife had prepared some traditional Roma food and seconds were smilingly provided for everyone. After more than two weeks on the road, the rich soup, goulash and grainy bread were heaven. Dessert appeared in the form of a multi-layer cake with a pair of mountain peaks and a blue lake done in icing. It was chocolate – but nothing but crumbs to identify it after second helpings.

They sat for some time in the dining room, chatting and exchanging news with Cullen. Then eyes started to droop and their host declared the festivities over for the day.

“Everyone be down here for 7:00 am,” he ordered. “We’ll eat below.”

Everyone groaned automatically, but left for their rooms. The suspense was tangible.

...

Catherine found it hard to get to sleep. She had become so used to the vibration of the bus, that she felt ... strange. She found herself musing.

Despite the fact that she and Vincent had been lovers for almost three years, they had not conceived a child. She thought about that. Once, when she had almost lost him to his illness, a child had been among her dreams. Somehow, without realizing it, she had put that aside. The love they shared was so total, so complete, she guessed, that there was no room for another.

However, she was willing to bet that a few months down the road, the tunnel community would be experiencing a baby boom. She loved children and suddenly knew exactly what she wanted to do in her new life. They would need all the help they could get. She smiled to herself.

Vincent sensed that Catherine had come to a decision and was glad. He gathered her to him and finally she dozed off. Whatever it was, he would support her. Then he let himself drift into a deep sleep.

The next day, the travelers arrived in twos in the dining room to find hot tea and coffee to get them started. They all sat down gratefully and tucked in and gazed out at the lake, today reflecting a watery sun.

“Heaven,” was William’s comment.

“Yes,” Catherine agreed. “We have been lucky.”

“Not lucky,” Narcissa said softly. “It was meant to be.”

When everyone had awoken sufficiently, Devin led the way to the elevator.

“We extended the shaft down to the top sub-level. It’s hydraulic. Very safe – and not registered. We don’t want any elevator repairmen in here. We had it officially de-commissioned and then put it back.”

“You thought of everything,” Catherine remarked admiringly.

“We’ve had lots of practice,” was Devin’s comment.

Their arrival in the tunnels was almost anti-climactic. The rock walls looked much like those of their old home, except that they were better lit and the rock was more yellow than red.

“How deep are we?” Catherine asked.

“About 60 feet – almost the same as the old tunnels. It’s far enough that no work crews will come close and no noise indicate our presence below them.”

Vincent found Catherine’s hand and clasped it. She sensed he was nervous. She remembered times when her family had moved. It had always been traumatic. She squeezed his hand and smiled up at him.

They followed Devin to the New Hall. The first surprise were the doors. Catherine looked at Devin, speechless. Vincent was grinning.

“How did you get these out here? I never noticed them missing!”

“Vincent and I had to take them apart to ship them - and we waited until you and the rest moved up to the dining room. Putting them back together was fun, fitting even more so, but we did it.”

As they entered, a huge chandelier revealed the entire tunnel community waiting and a huge cheer exploded. Olivia ran to Kanin and there were many hugs and tears as everyone was re-united, after almost a year of upheaval and work.

Olivia, Catherine reflected, was a strong woman. This was the second time she had been separated from Kanin for several months. She had seldom been apart from Vincent for more than a few days – at most two or three weeks – not since that first encounter when he had saved her life, and she had returned above to change her life.

She looked across the new hall and smiled. What looked like two massive paintings stared at her from an opposite wall, their colour vibrant in the light of the electric chandelier. She was about to question Devin about them, when she recognized them and gasped. Vincent followed her eyes and she felt his recognition.

Devin smirked.

“Thirty years of dust and candle smoke had not been kind to those. Brooke and Samantha took them on as a personal project. They worked for weeks to get them cleaned and dried.”

“Amazing,” was Father’s comment. “I don’t remember them ever being that beautiful.”

A gong sounded and everyone looked to the breakfast buffet. The tables groaned under platters of muffins, tiny quiche, bacon and eggs, toast and hash browns. William was obviously puzzled.

“Who’s been cooking for you,” he demanded loudly, eyes narrowing.

“Me,” Rebecca piped up. “I wasn’t needed to make candles anymore, so I decided to try and remember my cooking skills. No one’s complained.”

“She’s almost as good as you, William,” Cullen quipped. “And he never made quiche!”

“She makes great perogies too,” Kanin added, laughing.

Their first meal together was merry, with everyone talking at once. But the bus travelers were soon pressed for details of their trip, and Cullen bellowed for silence.

“Not much to report,” Devin declared, finishing a mouthful of coffee and taking on the role of spokesman for the bus travelers.

“Except for a funny little incident. Later,” he promised, seeing Catherine’s brows knit together. “At dinner.”

Charles and Vincent had recorded everything and their remembrances caused tears of both joy and sadness – to say nothing of whoops from the children. Over more coffee and some fine hot chocolate, the tunnel community seemed to have never been apart. They were what they had always been, one big family.

Since Devin was the only bus traveler who was familiar with their new world, he took on the role of tour guide, with not a little pride. There were many gasps at the Jeweled Cavern and its warm water. Narcissa immediately asked for a chamber nearby and was shown one that suited her. Devin signaled Pascal to send her luggage to it.

“I’ll stay here,” she told them. “Walking is for younger legs than mine.”

Catherine could hardly believe the tunnels were the same she and Devin had visited so many months previously. They were well-formed, well-lit and a flattened place at every intersection corner, they were told,

awaited some artwork from Elizabeth and would point to community areas and personal chambers.

The elderly lady immediately asked for a map and her paints. A chamber was ready for her, complete with a small workroom. When she walked in, she stopped dead. All around the walls were laminated pictures of her tunnel paintings. She clapped her hands and hugged Devin. The rest of the party smiled at her obvious happiness.

“Oh, it was hard to leave those. I will do these corners – my last work,” she said. “I’m an old woman now.”

“The personal chambers are pretty small,” Devin explained, as they passed several openings. “There are a lot more of us now, so we decided that the common areas needed larger spaces.”

They left her to her plans and the tour progressed to William’s new kitchen. He had wanted to bring his huge old iron oven, but Devin had found an industrial-sized unit in the scrap yard. He declared himself satisfied and declared he needed to familiarize himself.

“Besides, I’m not much for hikes,” he remarked to general laughter. “I can see I’ll have to learn my way around all over again.”

Devin told him that the vent for the kitchen rose under the park restaurant. Catherine shook her head in disbelief. They seemed to have thought of everything!

“Where does the food come from?” Vincent asked. Without an extensive helper network above, he wondered how so many could be fed. They now had almost 100 people living below – far more than at any other time in their history.

“Ah, that’s something I have to show you,” Devin remarked. He led them down a side passage that opened into a huge, fairly low-roofed chamber. It seemed to be filled with bathtubs of every description. Lights overhead cast a mellow, sun-like glow. Then Catherine realized there were plants growing in the tubs.

“Hydroponics,” Devin explained. “Zageb gave us every old tub in his yard, and we found more in other places. This is right under the rose garden, so we get plenty of natural rain run-off. It’s not far from the apartment, so we can use the solar-powered generator for the lights. We’re growing mostly leafy stuff here, some vine vegetables. Out on Cambie Street, near the scrap yard, we’ve got several plots in a community garden on an old railway right-of-way. There we’re going to grow squash and root vegetables. We won’t starve,” he finished.

“What about meat, dairy and eggs?” Catherine asked.

“Zageb again. He bought a small hobby farm outside the city and is supplying us with all the goat cheese, milk and eggs we want. In exchange, we grow him some special stuff.”

He pointed at some black sheets and low banked wooden forms at one side of the cavern.

“Fancy mushrooms, truffles and ginseng. Very high value items out here.”

Vincent shook his head in disbelief. His brother, he decided, was a genius – and invaluable. Travels had certainly broadened his mind!

“Well, shall we continue? Father’s chamber is next.”

Father’s library was so much like the old one, that everyone gaped. However, closer examination revealed that although the railings had made the move, the disorder had not. The bookshelves were neat and the books arranged in order. There were several tables for readers now and the light was good. An annex had been added for Father’s sleeping quarters, an arrangement he seemed to prefer.

By the time they reached his chamber, Father declared himself ready for a rest and left Catherine, Vincent, Devin and Charles to continue alone.

They passed a large chamber with two rooms meeting at an angle.

“That’s for Charles and I,” Devin declared. “Close, but not too – you understand.”

Catherine laughed.

By now, Vincent was getting impatient, but was trying not to show it. Devin looked at him and winked. Charles broke into a grin. He had no idea what was coming, but he was sure it would be good.

“Now, little brother, it’s your turn – yours and Catherine’s. Follow me.”

He led them onward and upward a while, then suddenly made a left-hand turn into a broad chamber. He stood back to let Vincent enter first. Vincent did so and stopped dead. There, in front of him, was the stained glass window he had thought never to see again. It shone with a light from beyond, as before, but with glints he didn’t remember. It had obviously been cleaned as well. The yellows shone like the sun. His ... their ... huge bed had been placed along the wall as before, but in an alcove made for it, not in front of the window. His table sat before the window, with several big chairs and flanked by two large bookcases. The portrait, now framed, was mounted in an alcove obviously made for it. It was the final touch and he felt his heart relax at last. They were home – wherever home was.

“Where are we?” he asked, as the others came in behind him. “Where does the light come from?”

“From the Jeweled Cavern. We’re about half-way up here. There’s a vent we decided to use to bring in reflected light. It exits in a rock outcrop in the centre of the park. This is right under the park lake.”

“Amazing,” Catherine breathed. She hugged Vincent from the back and felt his happiness like a balm. It had all been worth it. This was the final test.

“There’s more,” Devin declared and led the way through a small door and down a set of stone steps. Before them a small bathing pool shone with the light from the cavern and the backside of the stained glass window shed a mellow glow.

“How is this possible?” Vincent asked.

“This place is a honeycomb of hot pools and old whirlpool caves. This one drains into a vent near the Cavern, but is fed by a thermal vent. We made Father has his own sauna from another and there are smaller communal pools too. We made a large shower and bathroom chamber, because we didn’t want to risk waste disposal from too many places. We found an old steam vent that goes far below ground and tested it. A kind of Abyss,” he remarked.

“And over there is your dressing room. I never realized my brother had so many clothes,” Devin chuckled, indicating a row of wardrobes and chests.

“It’s beautiful,” Catherine declared. “I suspect we will be hard pressed to choose between this and our penthouse.”

“Ah, I don’t think so,” Devin said. “There’s no real sunshine here, however well we light it. But we have found a way outside that we can use to access the park secretly. Do you want to see it?”

“Yes,” Vincent spoke for them all.

Devin led them along another series of tunnels and then upwards. Catherine now understood why Elizabeth’s talents were needed to mark the ways. Without a guide, she would have been hopelessly lost.

They emerged in a small chamber with a metal ladder at one end. Devin walked to it and clambered up, opening a trap door above his head. They followed him and emerged cautiously into a deep dell, where a park bench had been placed. All around them were tall evergreens and old maples. It seemed magical.

“How did you find this?” Catherine asked.

“Arthur found it,” Devin laughed. “It was too good to waste on a raccoon. We have a periscope in a nearby dead tree that can be used to check out the area before you come up. The area is very overgrown, so that’s unlikely. We found no signs of anyone having been here, but it’s best to be safe. There are homeless people sometimes sleeping in the park. This dell is well hidden though.”

“Oh, look,” Charles breathed and pointed tentatively. Gazing at them from a raised bank was a brown rabbit. It had kept still, so would have been easily missed. Charles had sharp eyes – and had proven it often on their trip. The rabbit abruptly twitched its nose and skittered off, making soft rustling noises as it left.

“Seen enough?” Devin asked. “I believe it’s lunch time!”

The dining hall was bursting with song and talk as they arrived and it seemed that someone’s birthday was

being celebrated. It took the group a while to realize it was Father's. They had forgotten, Vincent realized. It was wonderful to be back to their routine, among friends and family. He had missed the faces, voices – even the scents of a community.

There was a call for the story Devin had promised to tell everyone. Ignoring Catherine's snort, he recounted the tale with his usual aplomb, as if he had been an observer rather than a participant.

...

The day came on their travels they had dreaded. Catherine had worried most about this particular transition. The bus took its place in the large vehicle line-up and inched forward with the rest.

"Let me do the talking, Chandler," Devin demanded as they neared the booth. He was driving now, and would take them to the warehouse first, now less than two hours away, he assured them.

When their turn came, Devin smiled at the official and waited.

"All Americans?"

"Yes, Sir."

"How many of you are there?"

"Seven adults and two children, Sir."

"Any firearms?"

"No, Sir."

"Destination?"

"Golden Ears Park – family reunion, Sir."

Catherine sensed a mild shock and frisson of humour from Vincent, above her head and schooled herself to not look up. She fought to keep her mouth firm.

"How long do you plan to stay?"

"Until the family tires of us. Maybe a month," Devin revised quickly as he caught the merest wrinkle above the forehead of the border guard.

"Enjoy yourselves. Welcome to Canada."

The bored guard waved them on and moved to the next in line.

"See? Easy," Devin crowed when they were out of earshot.

"That wasn't even funny, Devin. Golden Ears, indeed!"

"It wasn't a joke, Chandler. Have you even looked at a map? There is such a park. We'll be passing near it. Moreover, if you look at that same map, you'll see a couple of peaks called The Lions and a bridge called Lion's Gate. We won't be taking it, but it IS real! There's even a Lion's Bay just up the coast."

Catherine was silent and heard muffled laughter from above her head, soon echoed by others in the bus. Everyone had apparently been listening closely to their exchange. William was soon roaring with laughter, drowning out everyone else. Catherine joined in and Devin drove on, a huge smile on his face.

Narcissa spoke when the merriment had died down.

"That is why this IS the place for us. Where else has such names?"

...

Later that day, as dusk began to fall, Vincent and Catherine tried out the bench in the dell. Sitting in the midst of the lush greenery, they had difficulty believing they were in a modern city. Except, Catherine thought, for something that seemed to vibrate through the ground, just below the range of hearing. Hers at least. She turned to Vincent.

“Can you hear that?”

“The cars over the bridge? Yes.”

“Of course – that’s what it is. It seems so out of place, like an earthquake far out at sea.”

“It’s a reminder that we are no longer in New York. It is the only sound we now hear below, that we do not make ourselves.”

“No more trains,” she sighed.

“Yes. I wondered if I would be able to sleep on the road, without them or the tapping of the pipes. But there was so much to see, my dreams were full. I didn’t recall the trains until now.”

“And the pipes we have still.”

“Yes. They have worked wonders here, Catherine. I would not have believed it possible to do so much in so short a time. I feel like a dilettante. Once again, I had no part in the building of our world. The first time it was because I was a baby. Now I arrive when all the hard work is done.”

“No, Vincent. The work will never be done. We have the structure again, true, but now we must open our hearts and fill it with joy. Without that, it’s just stone walls. Your heart, Vincent, is what makes this world special. You are our shining light.”

“Catherine, you embarrass me. I am no saint. I do what has to be done.”

“True, Vincent – but you do it willingly and well. That’s what makes the difference. You are our model.”

Vincent said nothing to this, merely pulled her to him and held her close, his lips caressing the top of her head. His heart was full, he decided. He had better let some of that out or he would explode with happiness.

...

Over the next months, Catherine took on her own task, amusing the tunnel children in various innovative ways. She delighted in her work and spared no regrets for giving up the paperwork and angst of a community lawyer. The Jeweled Cavern became a recreation area second to none, but she also took them on trips in a school bus and encouraged their artistic abilities. She had no desire to teach. Children, she thought, should be children. She was happier than she had ever been in her life.

“You have so much love to give,” Vincent told her one evening.

“You’ve said that before, Vincent. I learned that from you.”

“No. It comes from the heart. It is there, or it isn’t. You are blooming in our new home.”

“Yes, I think I’ve found my niche at last. I feel ... free at last.”

Their first Winterfest was an occasion for much joy. As Catherine had predicted, several new babies were born that year and the New Hall rang with more high voices than at any time in the past. There had been many weddings as well. William had married Rebecca, who had wanted to stay on as assistant cook and help William in his kitchen. Remarkably, he had not objected and they now had a small son who was a miniature version of his father. She still made the Winterfest candles, though.

Mouse and Jamie had tied the knot too, as had Lena and Cullen. Rolley was still completely wrapped up in his music, but their orchestra had expanded and the new music chamber was well-used. The school room adjoining it never lacked for children, or teachers.

Catherine spared a brief regret for the lack of a place to listen to park concerts with Vincent. Then one day, Devin beckoned to her.

“I wanted to do something special for Vincent’s birthday. That’s some months away, but I’m showing you now, so you can use it while the weather permits. They don’t do those kinds of things in a Vancouver winter.”

He led Catherine upwards through a new side tunnel and into a small chamber with a perforated roof. She looked at him in puzzlement.

“Where are we?”

“Right under one of the bandstands. It has concrete footings that will last for a million years.”

“Oh, Devin. Vincent will be so pleased.”

“And you too, Chandler. I heard about your concert nights.”

Catherine laughed.

“Yes, they were magical. Thank you, again, Devin.”

Vincent now felt that every one of his wishes had been granted. He and Catherine spent many nights in the little chamber, drifting on ethereal classical strains from the world above.

Over the years to follow, the tunnel community heard occasional news from New York, mainly from Tony, now owner of the auto yard. He told them a city crew had found an entrance to the tunnels and discovered the spiral metal staircase, now so rusted it was declared dangerous. They had also found many rock falls. After a brief sortie, they had sealed off the entrance again – permanently.

A huge windstorm blew down hundreds of trees in the park over their heads one fall and gave them some bad moments as work crews and heavy equipment moved in to repair the damage. The tunnel community quietly removed any signs that might give them away and then even more quietly began to replant the trees. The city project to do so was massive and done by many groups. They knew a few more bodies would not raise comment and it made the community feel good to help in this small way.

Years later still, Vincent and Catherine awakened one morning to a sense of terrible foreboding. Vincent, who always sensed more clearly, gave it a name - Narcissa!

They dressed quickly and made their way down below to the dining hall. The mood was sombre and a long wrapped bundle on a table told the tale they had feared.

Father hobbled up to them as they entered. His hair was now white, but he was as energetic as ever, having had a hip replacement a few years previously. Catherine knew he indulged in the sauna shamelessly, and was glad of it.

“Narcissa passed away in the night. Rebecca was with her. She had a few last words for us. Maybe you can make sense of them. Rebecca?”

Rebecca recited carefully.

“The day has come, the night will follow. All things end. You cannot now go home again. Trust to your hearts and in each other.”

There was a sudden burst of pipe tapping, which broke off suddenly, as she said this. Everyone automatically looked up and then turned to the door as Pascal suddenly rushed in, a piece of paper in his hands, his face white with shock.

“News, everyone. New York has been attacked! The World Trade Centre towers have collapsed. Thousands are dead.”

Everyone sat down in the nearest chair. There was complete silence for many long minutes.

“So this is what she meant,” Vincent whispered. “How could she know – and so far ahead?”

Father spoke into the silence.

“Be thankful that she did and that she was with us. We will not escape the effects of this, but we are safe here. She was right. There will be no going back for us now.”

“We must go forward with hope,” Catherine whispered.

“I think we need food in us,” William spoke up, less brusquely than usual. “Everything seems easier on a full belly. We must eat and then look after Narcissa.”

They had carved catacomb-like repositories, as they needed them, in the far side of the Jeweled Cavern. It was an area spot everyone loved. Laughter and sorrow were two sides of the same coin – the coin of life, Narcissa had told them. Children’s voices would keep the spirits appeased.

They lit a fire, as they had done often beside their old Mirror Pool, and burned their personal letters to the old seer. Given the events of the day, they added special tributes to the folks left behind and hoped fervently that the world that would know some of their own peace.

The burnt paper rose into the jeweled roof and out a vent that led into an old steam conduit below the lighthouse.

When they trudged back to the home chambers, they were all quiet. No one, until now, had realized how divorced they had become from their old home – and their homeland. Fortunately, there was always work to do, and with that consolation they continued their daily routine.

That night, Vincent and Catherine sat on the patio and looked at the night sky, clear for a change, and dotted with stars.

“Penny for your thoughts, Vincent,” Catherine said softly.

He took her hand in his, as he often did, stroking it, musingly, tenderly. He spoke softly.

“Catherine, we left a place I thought I couldn’t, traveled as I never imagined. Our world below seems fantastic, even to me. And the world has reminded us that it exists, again.”

“We never really forget, Vincent, but we have the luxury of our own reality now, which means so much more. It’s a promise, a hope, a future.

“Yes.”

“And nothing can destroy it, because we carried it here in our hearts.”

“And its name is Love.”

“Yes.”

There was no more need for words. The tranquility of the sky seem to seep into them.

They both sighed.

END