

April 12th in an alternate universe ...

Predestination

by Angie

*“No voice; but oh! the silence sang
Like music on my heart”*

– Samuel Taylor Coleridge

She jogged through ground mist on an early spring day that promised to be sunny and warm. She was not usually out so early, but had slept well for two nights in a row and had awakened energized. The air was pristine in the park. She could smell the earth and fancied she could hear the grass growing after its long winter sleep.

She approached the drainage ditch and, on impulse, decided to run down one side of its concrete border and up the other. She had reached the end and was about to jump over a patch of dampness when something large and dark caught her eye. It lay against the deep shadow far inside the concrete culvert and seemed to project pain and vulnerability.

She approached cautiously, realizing that the person was almost completely enveloped in a black cloak, so deeply black that it was part of the shadow. A heavy leather boot extended from one end. She approached the other end and felt for an arm. She grasped it, hoping furiously that she was not touching a corpse. The arm was firm, well-muscled, clothed in a thick wool sweater – and warm. Definitely alive, then - and no drunk either, for there was no scent of booze or poor hygiene.

The figure stirred and a hood emerged from the ground, pulled abruptly across the face by a hand hidden in the cloak. A pair of brilliant blue, deepset eyes regarded her, fear growing in them as he looked beyond her into the daylight. There was a grunt of pain as he moved and she put her arm around him to help him sit up. He groaned.

“Thank-you,” came a deep silken voice, like a purr, from inside the hood. Her heart fluttered.

“What happened?” she asked. “Do you want me to call an ambulance?”

“No.” The voice was emphatic. “Dogs. I’m just tired. I must get home.”

“I’ll help you then. Here, hold onto my shoulder.” She bent to get under his arm and with her help he slid up the curved wall. He finally got his feet under him, still holding his hood closed, but resting his other forearm on her shoulder. She could feel his large, warm hand pressed on her upper back.

“What is your name?” he asked, panting slightly.

“Catherine,” she replied. “Come, you can make it.” She began to turn towards the park, but immediately met resistance.

“My name is Vincent. Not that way. Into the tunnel,” he rasped, wincing.

They stumbled into the darkness until they reached a dim chamber facing an iron gate with a rusty padlock. Behind it was a solid-looking piece of riveted boilerplate. He led her to one side and sagged against the brick wall, bent almost double, legs braced apart. His arm left her shoulder to hold himself up. His head was bowed.

She moved in front of him and looked down. As her eyes adjusted she realized his pant legs were torn and bloody.

“Your legs are bleeding, Vincent. If you sit down, I’ll take a look.”

“No,” he said again, then with mild humour in his voice, “They bit my behind as well. Walking is painful - but sitting even more so.”

His voice was cultured, mellow – and seemed to stroke her soul. She looked up at him, now able to see more clearly as her eyes adjusted in the dimmer light. The hood had fallen open and a mass of long golden hair caught the daylight from the culvert. It surrounded a face that made her heart jump.

She saw a different kind of hurt in his eyes then, as he focused on her. She could feel his tension, like a hard barrier. He expected her to cringe, she realized, was waiting for it. She had never felt less like doing so. His was a unique, leonine face, but she saw nothing frightening there. It was noble, beautiful even.

Captivated, Catherine moved a little closer, placed a palm gently against his chest, as if calming a restive horse. Then she lifted the other to stroke his cheek. Vincent closed his eyes. What looked like several days growth of beard was actually as soft as a baby’s hair brush, almost fur-like. She would have loved to feel his nose, which was broad and hairy, or his fascinating cleft upper lip, but she found herself suddenly embarrassed by her curiosity. What must he think of her?

He was breathing quickly now, his chest heaving. She felt joy wash over her, like a warm summer rain. He seemed to relax a little and his face smoothed, but he kept his eyes closed. She closed the gap between them until she felt the feather touch of his clothing. She felt an inner pull as she looked up at his face, and unable and unwilling to resist, angled her head and planted a light kiss on his unique mouth. The sensation was electric and she felt him quiver down his length

in reaction. When she moved away, he opened his eyes to look at her. They were deep azure pools that swallowed her whole. Words became superfluous.

In a fluid motion, he swung his cloak around them both and held her gently close to him. She dropped her cheek onto his chest and closed her eyes. He felt wonderful, a firm place in a world suddenly turned to quicksand. Time hung suspended.

Abruptly, a noise from beyond the culvert broke their reverie. Vincent dropped his arm from her and used it to hike himself up the wall until he could stand straight. He reached behind him and yanked something she couldn't see. A sound made Catherine turn and she saw the metal boilerplate door grind aside, revealing a well-lit tunnel with a sandy floor.

Vincent pushed himself away from the wall and she moved beside him, so he could lean on her as they shambled quickly to the doorway. When they reached it, he looked down at her. He must have seen her determination, because he sighed.

"Catherine," he whispered. She saw the sharp points of canines as he spoke her name, felt a thrill up her spine.

"Yes, Vincent," she confirmed.

He opened the metal gate, propelled her through, pulled it closed behind them. Then he reached to one side and pulled a lever. She saw a hand covered in long amber hair with pointed, ivory nails. She found herself hoping he had inflicted some irreparable damage on the dogs.

The heavy door scraped across, closed with a deep clunk on the world she thought she knew. She would never, now, look at it in quite the same way.

She tightened her arm around him, felt him lean a little more on her shoulder as they walked slowly down the tunnel. She had no idea where he was going, but she knew she had to go with him, beyond reason, beyond doubt.

END