

Sweet Love Remembered

by Angie

(This story was inspired by the Black Cover story "Beauty and the Beast" by M. Louis (1990), and is a sequel to it.)

For thy sweet love remember'd, such wealth brings ...

- William Shakespeare

"I remember!" Catherine felt as if a door had suddenly opened into sunlight. She hugged herself with happiness, almost dancing around her apartment. It seemed that all her secret dreams were revealed to have already happened! She couldn't quite believe it - but clear memories were now flooding back of the erotic nights of love and the wonderful lover she had welcomed into her arms and her heart.

She also remembered how and why. In those days, the summer after her first year of college, she was working as an escort, making good money from out-of-town businessmen, until ... what was his name? Merlin! Yes, Merlin asked her to do a favour for him, to entertain a special friend, gratis. He was very mysterious about this man, intriguing her just enough that she had agreed.

That night her visitor arrived on her balcony, instead of the door as she expected, cloaked and hooded, and insisting on minimal candlelight. He spoke to her with a velvet rasp and called her Belle - and himself la Bête. They spoke no other names those long ago evenings - but she soon refused to address him by his.

He didn't take off his clothes, would not even let her touch him that first time. Then on the second visit, she persisted and pleased him, giving him relief and sensations she could tell were new to him. After that, he visited more often. Then one night she managed to kiss him, at last. That changed everything. Her mysterious lover soon dominated her thoughts day, and night, and she eagerly awaited his visits. Catherine smiled as she recalled their liaisons. There could be no doubts now. Her mysterious lover had been Vincent!

But why didn't he say anything - and why hadn't she recognized him before this? The two questions dampened her happiness somewhat as she began to consider them seriously.

He must have recognized her the first night he visited her on her balcony, months after she returned above, her face repaired by a plastic surgeon. Was that why he seemed so shy and uncertain of himself?

She certainly did not remember him, not even his voice - all she could know of him while her face was bandaged and she healed below. He had been patient and understanding, and she longed for him when his duties kept him away. Her thoughts when she was alone were not comforting.

But she had screamed and thrown that reflector at him when she first saw his face behind her, after taking off the bandages. He left quickly. Even now, she flushed at the memory.

When he returned with her clothing, he told her he had never been ashamed of what he was, until then. No wonder he had not wanted to reveal their past connection!

She owed him so much. He had done more than save her life - he had given her the courage to remake herself, to leave her father's law firm and join the DA's office.

How could she have forgotten him? That long ago summer, after just two visits, she had fallen in love with her mystery man.

Then once, in the heat of their passion, she caught a glimpse of his face and hands, and then his canines, catapulting her desire to new heights.

She wanted him as she had never wanted anyone, forever. Nothing else mattered but their love - and she knew he felt the same way. It was as if they were one, never complete unless they were together.

Oh, she remembered waiting eagerly for him every night, aching to see him again, to hear his voice, feel his lips and hands upon her, his clothed, heated body pressing against hers, to know the exquisite joy of their coupling.

The last time she saw him was the most wonderful night of all. They were comfortable by then and he had brought a bottle of wine.

He had undressed completely, for the first time, letting her see his beautiful, muscled, lightly-furred body. He was magnificent - as she knew he would be, and she was enthralled. They made passionate love, touching, licking, hugging, coupling over and over.

It seemed, in retrospect, that he was saying goodbye. But why?

She reflected on her state of mind at the time, and began to get an inkling of the answer. Before that night, she was on the brink of giving up her education. It didn't excite her any more, and the thought of going away to college and not seeing her lover was unbearable. She lived for the evenings when he came to her.

Suddenly, she recalled the morning after that last night. She had awakened remembering nothing of her lover. She returned to college in the fall, obtained her law degree, and went to work in her father's law office. She didn't return to the escort business, nor did she hear from Merlin again.

"Odd," Catherine murmured. Merlin sent Vincent to her. Had he played a role in his sudden exit from her life too?

Merlin knew a great deal about her. He wasn't upset when she told him she was giving up the trade, that she was saving herself for her lover. He had smiled and told her she wasn't cut out for it.

Thinking back, she wondered if she would have returned to college if Vincent had still been visiting her. Her daytime life seemed empty, hopeless and passionless, her prospects dull.

But why had she forgotten him for so many years?

Catherine thought back over that evening and remembered the bottle of wine. He usually brought small gifts - flowers, once a beautifully-written sonnet on parchment. The wine was unusual.

She did drink a glass of it, but she was sure he did not. Had it been drugged? What drug could make her forget weeks of her life? The thought was more than a little disturbing.

"What should I do now?" Catherine asked herself. Vincent might have felt her jubilation, but would he know the reason?

Her recent affair with Elliot Burch must have made him very unhappy. Thank goodness it had come to a quick end and would not be repeated.

Sometime recently, Vincent had secretly left the book of sonnets and a rose on her balcony. He had inscribed "*Shakespeare knew everything*" inside it - and the handwriting had looked familiar. That parchment from long ago had triggered her memories. Which meant that he wanted her to remember him now!

Would Vincent agree to resume their love affair? How would it affect her job and the long hours she put in at the DA's office? She was older now. She had experienced life - and not always the pleasant side of it. She was sure she could accommodate a lover. He would give her something to look forward to, a way to relax and recharge - if he agreed.

Catherine walked onto her balcony and looked over the city and, as she always did, down at the Park. What was he doing now, she wondered. Would he come to her?

Vincent sat in his chair, his eyes closed. He felt Catherine's sudden happiness and knew the cause. She had remembered! How often had he regretted the night he used Narcissa's potion to drug the wine, to make her forget - even though he knew, in conscience, there was no other way.

Yet, they had met again, against all odds, and in very different circumstances.

He had recognized her, even with the knife cuts on her face, but knew she did not know him. He could not reveal himself then. Neither had he told Father about their love affair, even at the time, much less about his friendship with Merlin, or his other passionless matches.

Father was convinced he was too different to enjoy what other men took for granted. Vincent knew he wasn't - had known it ever since that wonderful summer with his Belle, Catherine.

Now he felt her happiness dampen and guessed she was thinking through that time, especially that final bittersweet evening, when he revealed himself completely to her and they made love over and over. He had left her sleeping, knowing she would remember nothing of him when she awakened.

But he could not forget. That night was a comforting memory during the bleak intervening years, even though it also reminded him of all that he had lost.

Perhaps he had he felt her danger and been drawn to the Park that night he found her. He had not tried to sense her after that last night. Her memory of him was gone and he bore the secret of their love alone.

Suddenly, Vincent knew he could not stay below. He had to go to her. Quickly, he gathered his cloak and ran the long route to the tunnel entrance below her building, the one created for her. He hauled himself quietly on top of the elevator and waited impatiently for someone to use it and carry him up. Finally!

He reached the roof and carefully climbed down the fire escape, then dropped silently to Catherine's balcony. She was still inside, but as he moved towards the door, she came out and leaned against the balcony railing, staring down at the Park. He hesitated a moment, then called to her.

"Catherine."

She turned to him immediately, and met him as he moved out of the shadows. She was in his arms and hugging him closely before he could take another breath. They didn't move for long minutes, savouring their banked passion, the renewed depth of their love, and their bond.

Then she shifted away slightly and looked up at him. She was smiling, happy - and she loved him. He could feel it, and guessed that she could feel some of his emotions as well.

"I'm glad you came," she whispered at last. "Understatement of the year," she remarked wryly.

He smiled down at her. "I could not stay away, my Belle."

Catherine sighed deeply, and snuggled into his chest again. She spoke quietly, her voice partly muffled by his vest.

"That summer I wanted no one, nothing but you. I still want you desperately, Vincent. I will always want you."

"You have so much to offer your world, Catherine. I do not wish to distract you now."

"That applies to you too, Vincent."

"Yes. We must both try to strike a balance. It will not be easy."

"I know. But we're older now. I think I can manage it, but only if you will come to me when you can. I need you to anchor me, to give me your love - and love me as no one else ever has."

Vincent was silent for long moments and she wondered if he was reluctant to tie himself to her like that again. She felt tears burn in her eyes at the thought.

He suddenly hugged her closer, tightly, pressing her against the hard bulge in his pants. Then he moved his hands down her back, to cup her bottom and began massaging her lightly there.

The sensation was so delightful that her legs began to feel weak.

“Vincent,” she whispered huskily into his chest, realizing he had answered her in his own way. “We must continue where we left off, tonight, now.”

“Yes,” he agreed. He picked her up and carried her through the French doors and into her bedroom. He placed her on the bed and immediately began to strip off his clothes, placing them neatly on a chair. Catherine shed her night attire in one swift movement and threw it over the vanity chair. She stood quivering next to the bed, waiting for him to finish.

She gazed at him in wonder, as he straightened and stood facing her, just as he had that last wonderful night, fully revealed by the lights of the city and a full moon. He had an erection that hardened even more as she watched him, drank in the sight of him.

They moved slowly closer until they touched, then held each other tightly. Both were almost panting, their bodies quivering in reaction.

Then Catherine took his hand and led him to her bed. They lay down, facing each other. Vincent pulled himself as close as he could, draped a leg over hers, wanting to feel her on as much of his body as possible.

Catherine rubbed herself against his erection between them, stroked it gently with one hand. She felt him shudder and sighed. This felt so right!

She lifted her head to kiss him. She pulled his head down to her and when their lips touched, she put her tongue into his mouth. She shivered with delight as it found his canines.

He groaned and slid his hand down into the soft hair between her legs and stroked her, as he had so many times before during that summer of love. She groaned in turn and gasped, feeling the heat rise from her core like a volcano, flushing her skin.

There was no more to say, no more need to wait. She grasped his hardened member and stroked it, then helped him position it as he moved atop her, carefully, taking most of his weight on his elbows and knees.

The glorious feeling, the intimacy of that moment when he plunged slowly into her, made her tighten around him and he gave a low, seductive growl. Both their bodies were now quivering with arousal and need.

They lay savouring their joining for long moments. Neither wanted to move. Catherine knew her body remembered Vincent, knew this to be the perfection she had dreamed of.

Then she wrapped her legs around him, as she used to do, and he began to move in her, slowly, sensuously, carefully.

She stroked his hair, his back, and pulled his face down to hers. She saw the dark ardour in his sapphire eyes and looked at him with deep passion.

It was so long since she'd had a man, that she felt herself building up to an orgasm almost immediately, and knew that Vincent was just as affected.

This was what she remembered about their lovemaking. They needed to say nothing - they knew each other so well, as if they could read each other's mind. She realized that their bond had been active even then. Now it was even stronger and richer.

There was no more time for thought as a wave of glorious orgasm engulfed them, carrying them away on its crest for long moments, an eternity, until its warm flush gradually dissipated. They relaxed,

unaware until that moment that they had been a double arch.

Catherine could feel Vincent pulsing inside her, his seed filling her with warmth. She sighed and snuggled close to him, feeling the dampness of his chest hair. On impulse, she licked around one nipple and felt him quiver.

Then she felt a vibration begin in his core and spread through his chest, and she remembered that too, something unique to him.

She closed her eyes, and held him close, as he relaxed and softened inside her.

“Ma belle Catherine,” he whispered, his voice hoarse and low.

“Vincent - never again la Bête.”

He looked down at her and captured her mouth. There was nothing more to say. Vincent slid down beside her, still holding her tightly, and they fell asleep, their hearts again captive, their souls one.

They awakened, spooned together, a couple of hours later. Catherine turned over to look at her restored lover. She sensed he wanted to talk.

He looked at her, his eyes full of his love, and she smiled and kissed his furry nose.

“What?”

Vincent sighed. There could be no secrets between them now.

“Catherine, do you remember that final night?”

“Yes. All of it. There was something in the wine, wasn't there?”

“Yes. I used a potion given to me by a ... friend ... someone not one of us, who lives below, apart. But that is not what I have to tell you.”

He sighed again, deeply this time, and held her close. His voice was a seductive, silky rasp, almost a whisper. It made her heart sing but she made herself listen, knowing it was important.

“Catherine, no one knows of our affair - and they must not know, perhaps never.”

Catherine shifted to gaze into his eyes, somewhat puzzled.

“I would never betray your trust, Vincent. You know that. Besides, who would I tell?”

“In your world, you cannot, but my world is different, and I the most different person in it. They give me a home, keep me safe - and I protect them. They don't know about us, no one does. The man I call Father, who raised me and taught me all I know, believes I ... cannot. Merlin died two years ago. He said nothing.”

“You mean I must pretend we're just friends?”

“Yes. I will visit you as often as I can, but I will not always be able to stay long, Catherine. And some nights you will be tired and need your sleep.”

Catherine sighed deeply this time, and kissed him lightly on his unique mouth.

“I understand,” she whispered. “We each have commitments now. They're important and should not be compromised by our love, what our bodies demand.”

“Yes. Soon I must leave, Catherine. My body cries out for you - and this time, we can answer it.”

Catherine reached between them, where his penis was straining against her belly, bent almost double. She winced at the sight and, and moved it so that it was held vertically against them. Vincent immediately groaned with relief.

“Thank you.”

“Vincent, you are so beautiful, every part of you, and I love you so. How can I hide what I feel for you?”

“You will not have to, Catherine. Father knows we are connected through our bond. He will see only what he expects.”

"Then there is no more to be said. Except this, Vincent. I want you now."

"And I you."

Their lovemaking was slow and delightful, a tribute to a time long before, now to be superseded by many more. Their love had endured so much that they both believed nothing could come between them.

Two years after that wonderful reunion and the re-affirmation of their love, Catherine sighed.

The Fates, she decided, had not been ready to let them be, to let them enjoy a calm, eventless love. Just when it seemed that things were settling down and the worlds above and below were in a tense balance, something would happen to remind them of the tightrope they walked.

The first incident had involved her investigation of a subway vigilante. It was her first moment of doubt. She had wondered if Vincent could be the man they sought. After all, she reasoned, she didn't know what he had been doing in the years before they found each other again. She knew very little about his world and how they survived.

Later Vincent told her that Father had found him brooding, and told him that she was only responding to the fear that dominated her world. He could not tell Father why her doubts affected him so.

She knew she had hurt him. She could see it. What was she to think? She even had a nightmare about him! But that nightmare forced her to think.

Vincent was right. She had to listen to her heart - and once she did that, she knew without a doubt that Vincent was not the one she sought.

Facing Jason again, knowing he was the perpetrator, had been difficult and dangerous. Jason had captured her - but had also discovered Vincent's existence. His curiosity and hubris had led to him jumping to his death.

Months later, she had been offered a job promotion in Rhode Island. Vincent had insisted that she could not refuse such an opportunity and left her abruptly, left her standing in the dim culvert, stunned. She felt unmoored, as if in a dream. She wanted him to tell her to stay, but he had refused.

Then, when he had been captured by the two scientists, it was the thread of his love that had drawn her, made her connect the dots and find him, rescue him from certain death.

Their love, whether they admitted it or not, even to each other, was not impervious. They both realized that now. It had to be to be nurtured and strengthened - and it could not be ignored. Every challenge they survived made it stronger.

Safely back in his chamber in his world, she had read *To Althea* to him. Indeed, they had a similar freedom in their love, but stone walls and cages would always seek to hem them in. They could only truly soar together.

Through all the month of challenges - almost madness, she reflected - their love helped them cope. When he had been drugged by Paracelsus, she had gone to him and brought him back to reality. He had saved when she was captured by then Stephen Bass, then Paracelsus. Through it all, their love was constant, an internal bulwark that gave her the strength to continue her work.

When Vincent and Father had been trapped in the Maze, she had been frantic with worry and went to Elliot for the supplies Mouse needed. She realized then that she would do anything to protect Vincent, to keep him safe. She proved that again when Elliot's massive building threatened the world below.

How could she have survived as Elliot's wife? It would have been worse than not remembering her summer of love with Vincent. She would have been a zombie, just making the motions. In her heart she could never have forgotten the man she truly loved. And Vincent would have become a ghost, without hope, denied her love forever. So many secrets, and not just of their love.

She found that secrecy almost unbearable at times. How could they even consider a life together when

no one knew they were lovers? She'd had to discourage Joe several times, and she liked him well enough not to want to hurt him. She had to protect Vincent's world, keep it secret.

Then, during her first Winterfest, Paracelsus had resurfaced. She had helped to unmask him, but he had escaped. She worried about the future. She knew he would not give up.

Then her father had died and she had gone to Vincent, begged him to let her stay below. He had agreed. She knew having her so close was a challenge. Their love, by then, was literally difficult for him to hide. He wore long tunics to hide the most obvious sign.

Those nights below, as she grieved, she knew she could not ask him to make love to her, much as she wanted to. Later, she had asked him if that would ever be possible below. He had replied in typical Vincent fashion, that it could happen only when they knew all the risks.

The stress of keeping their secret took a toll on Vincent too. It troubled him to keep it, especially from Father. Then came the violence which marked those terrible days after he had rescued her from drowning, and she had returned from her eventful trip to California.

To see his world challenged by a violent gang, one he would eventually have to destroy single-handedly, made Vincent doubt his humanity. There was little time for lovemaking during those months. She had been busy with trials, a promotion she desperately wanted to work, because it put her in less danger - and therefore Vincent as well.

To be fair, there were wonderful moments too. The unwrapping of the beautiful portrait given to them by Kristopher Gentian, the naming ceremony for Lena's child ... but much more was dark and violent. Winslow had died, so had Ellie.

She and Elliot had almost been killed on the waterfront. Vincent had saved them - but not without cost. The violence was disturbing him more now. Then his peace was disturbed when he witnessed two men killing a young prostitute. Her own involvement in that case led to his having to rescue her - again. Both those times, he had been injured.

Her world had seemed intent on separating them. Then his world was turned inside out. Paracelsus' plot almost destroyed Vincent, threatening him with exposure in her world, a life as a refugee from those he loved.

Still, there was hope. Even in her apartment, when she found him collapsed on the floor amid the ruins of her curio cabinet, their love had won out. Their lovemaking then had eased his pain for a while. But the darkness that Paracelsus had tapped had been released and could not be so easily bottled again. To fight it his own way, he had left her, and then the tunnel community as well. He feared for their safety, what he might do in his madness, so he had retreated far below, to fight his demons in the dark, alone.

Catherine had gone to him, where he was roaring his despair and hatred of what he had become. She reached through his pain, using the power of their love and their bond. They had made love, affirming his humanity and her love for him again. Only this time it was different. Something had happened, beyond all expectations.

She was on her way to him now. He was in his chamber, still somewhat weak from the events of recent weeks, when he had not eaten or slept well. They had not made love since returning from that dark cavern. He was not able to come to her balcony, and she felt it more important he get his strength back. She found him on his bed, his eyes open. He sat up as she entered and she ran to him.

"Don't get up, Vincent."

She moved onto the bed and he made room for her. She turned and put her arms around him, and he held her tightly. Her face on his chest, she felt him sigh.

"Catherine, what is it? You're quivering with news. I can feel your happiness. Tell me."

Catherine took a deep breath and moved apart so she could look in his eyes..

"Vincent, there's been a miracle. All our love, our love-making, and now this. I'm pregnant, Vincent."

He pulled away from her slightly and put his hand on her stomach and closed his eyes.

“Yes, I can feel it now. I wondered at the change in our bond. I never guessed ... I didn’t think it was possible ... Father said I must be sterile ...”

Catherine snorted. “Father has been wrong about many things where you are concerned. But now, he’ll know we’ve made love. He need not know how often.”

Vincent chuckled. “Yes, that would be best. I wonder why it took madness and that dark place ...?”

“I think you had to come to terms with your nether side, Vincent, in order to be whole. You conquered it, and now there need be no more doubts about what you are.”

Vincent sighed, holding her close. He nuzzled her hair and spoke softly.

“Catherine, I will always be different and forced to live a restricted life. But you, my love, are the answer to that. You have made me what I am. Your love has changed me, made me whole.”

“It has changed us both, Vincent, and soon we will have a child to love as well,”

Vincent stiffened and shifted away a little.

“But what kind of a child, Catherine?”

“A child of ours, one that we will love without reservation. One that will grow up in the most wonderful community on this planet - cared for, respected and whole.”

Vincent looked in her eyes and saw that she had no doubts, only love for him. He hugged her close again, then lay down with her in his arms.

They slept together then, for the first time, in his bed. When they awakened, it was to the knowledge that the deception was over. Their love could now bloom in complete freedom.

END