

# The Song Never Ends

- by Angie

*Sans wine, sans song, sans singer, and – sans End*

- Edward Fitzgerald  
(Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam)

An old friend and a special guest ask for a unique favour  
... and deliver a message for Vincent and Catherine

Mouse rushed into Vincent's chamber, out of breath.

"Vincent. Got to come. Spooks in the Great Hall!"

Vincent looked at the wild hair and excited face of the tunnel's most irrepressible inhabitant and sighed inwardly. It would be no use asking what Mouse had been doing in the Great Hall – or why. The explanation was bound to be as frustrating as the fact. Obviously he had used the lesser entrance, one used by people doing very occasional clean-ups or maintenance in the Hall. The big doors were only opened at Winterfest.

Vincent decided to ask a more direct question.

"What do you mean by spooks, Mouse?"

Mouse rolled his eyes, the way he always did when people failed to "get it".

"Ghosts. You know – loud noises, whispers. Cold too – by the big doors."

Now Vincent was intrigued. The only other ghost he knew was Kristopher Gentian – and the last time he'd seen him was in that warehouse where they had found his paintings. The portrait of himself and Catherine was proof that the supernatural was not something to be shrugged off. It stared at him now from the other side of his chamber.

"Very well, Mouse, I will look at this ghost of yours."

Mouse made a dismissive noise that was part disgust.

"Won't see it! Invisible. But can hear it. Feel it."

Vincent grabbed his cloak and a lantern and followed Mouse down the long route to the Great Hall, then they turned down a side tunnel to emerge at one end, the opposite end from the main doors. It was very dark and quiet. Vincent lit the lantern and the shadows retreated around them to waver on the distant walls like crouching beasts. He walked into the centre of the huge chamber with Mouse slouching behind him, holding onto the back of his cloak as if he feared getting lost. The pull was annoying and his voice was a little sharp.

"Mouse, please let go of my cloak - and wait outside, if you wish. I want to walk around."

Mouse did let go and scuttled back the way they had come, with a brief "Wait outside."

Vincent strode around the silent hall. Suddenly there was a souging above him. He held the lantern up but could see nothing. The chamber was very high. Perhaps the wind had found a tiny crack. He was about to turn back when there was the discordant clatter of breaking glass nearby.

"Mouse?"

But it couldn't be Mouse. He had left.

Vincent whirled and moved quickly to the source, but again found nothing – certainly no broken glass. Just then a series of deep metallic rattles rang through the chamber. It sounded as if the links of an enormous chain were being dropped on the floor, one by one. It seemed to come from near the great doors. Vincent ran that way, the lantern sending the shadows scooting ahead of him. When he reached the doors, there was nothing to see – and no chain, but the air was icy. Vincent took a few steps away and felt the temperature rise. He moved back into the cold spot and looked up. The ceiling wasn't high just here, having been angled to accommodate the big doors. There was no hole where cold air might have entered and the doors themselves sealed the entrance very tightly. There wasn't even a draught under them, despite the constant wind on the other side.

A ticking noise sounded behind him and Vincent turned. He decided something had to be done. He called on the only ghost he knew.

"All right – enough! Kristopher, are you here?"

There was a sigh nearby and Kristopher Gentian walked out of a shadow in front of Vincent and into

the circle cast by the lantern. He looked exactly as he always did, including the ever-present baseball cap. Vincent relaxed a little.

“Kristopher! What is the meaning of this? Why are you frightening people?”

The untidy artist looked a little hurt. Then he grinned.

“Vincent, I’m not making any noises in here. I’m a painter, not a poltergeist.”

“Nothing material actually being thrown, Kristopher, so it is not a poltergeist.”

“Semantics, Vincent. However, I can help, since you ask so nicely. You are being haunted, you might say, by someone with a motive.”

Vincent said nothing to the dig at his manners. Why would a ghost need an apology - especially one only he and Catherine could see? He was suddenly glad Mouse had left. He kept his voice low, just the same.

“All right, Kristopher. I admit to curiosity. Please explain.”

“A man by the name of Farrokh is restless. He was extremely talented, but died young. He wants to sing – it’s all he really cared about in life. If you’ll allow him, he’ll sing here, in the Great Hall. I brought him here. He likes the acoustics. He’s been testing the sound in his own inimitable fashion,” Kristopher chuckled.

Vincent was speechless. A dead singer wanted to sing in the Great Hall? How could he sing? And what did he want to sing?

Kristopher seemed to read his mind and answered.

“He can sing the same way I can talk. Never mind the technicalities. He wants to sing something special, Vincent, something he wrote and sang, a song without words - and one or two other pieces. His voice was extraordinary. It will be an event to remember, I promise you.”

Vincent could think of only one question now. “When?”

“Thought you’d never ask,” Kristopher grinned again. “November 24 – the anniversary of his death.”

“That is only two weeks away,” Vincent commented, his voice low.

“Yes, but this isn’t to be a Met evening performance with tails and gowns. The folks in the world Above would never understand. Just for the music lovers in your community, Vincent.”

Vincent sighed. “Very well, Kristopher. Does he need anything special to ‘appear’? How will we know when he is ready?”

“He’ll sing at sunrise, Vincent – for whoever is here. Just be sure there is a good piano here – and someone who can accompany him. Here’s the list of songs he will sing.”

Kristopher handed over a tattered piece of parchment paper. Vincent looked at it and saw just three titles listed in black ink. He had never heard of any of them. A short performance, obviously.

Kristopher Gentian grinned at Vincent as he opened his mouth to say something, turned away and abruptly disappeared.

Well, Vincent told himself, at least he had seen him disappear this time. That was almost as disquieting as his usual method. The hall seemed to warm after Kristopher was gone – presumably with his ghostly friend.

Vincent sighed and left. He almost tripped over Mouse who had moved just around the curve in the tunnel and was sitting on the ground. He could not have heard anything but tried to pump Vincent for information, without luck. Vincent knew better than to tell Mouse anything like this.

“Mouse, you will know in due course – as will everyone else. Thank you for telling me about the ghost. See you at dinner.”

Mouse shrugged, realized he wouldn’t get any more from his friend, and headed towards his chamber. Arthur needed feeding.

Vincent was so distracted that he didn't realize Catherine was sitting in his chamber until he entered. She waited until he took off his cloak and then moved into his embrace.

"What is it, Vincent? You seem disturbed."

Vincent looked down at Catherine and then over at their portrait.

"I met Kristopher in the Great Hall a few minutes ago, Catherine."

Catherine started and moved away to look up at Vincent's face. It took her a moment to get her voice.

"Kristopher? Gentian? What on earth did he want?"

"Actually, Catherine, it is not of this earth. He wants us to arrange and attend a special singing performance by a man named Farrokh, in the Great Hall, sunrise on November 24."

"Farrokh? Vincent, I only know one singer of that name, and he changed it. Oh, this will be a treat – even if I don't understand how it's possible. He died at the age of 45. He had an extraordinary voice."

"Ah, an opera singer. Father won't mind that."

Catherine laughed.

"No, Vincent. This man was the lead singer in a British heavy rock band. Very innovative. Father might even like them. I can't believe this! Why did he choose us to sing to, I wonder?"

"Kristopher says he likes the acoustics in the Great Hall. Mouse heard a lot of funny noises there and when I investigated and called for Kristopher, he gave me this paper. I saw no one else."

Catherine looked at the piece of paper. "Oh, will he be singing these?"

"Kristopher said one was a song without words, but that there will be two others as well. He wants us to have a piano accompaniment. I wonder if Rolley would consent to play?"

Catherine got a dreamy expression on her face.

"Oh, I know that piece. It'll be a treat. And I understand, now, why he would like the Great Hall to sing it in."

"Why?"

She looked at Vincent and smiled. "I won't spoil the surprise. But we'd better find Rolley and tell him the story."

They found their piano prodigy in the music room, as usual tickling the ivories of their old upright piano. He was playing Grieg's Piano Concerto. Catherine and Vincent waited for him to finish. Neither could bear to interrupt him. When he ended and sat back, they both sighed. Rolley heard and turned to look at this audience.

"Sorry. I didn't see you."

Vincent approached and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Rolley, you play so beautifully there is no hardship in waiting for you to finish. But I have an unusual story to tell you, and a request."

Vincent told the story of Kristopher Gentian, then the most recent visitation, then the request for a pianist to play a piece of music for a singer in a special performance in the Great Hall.

"Are you familiar with these songs, Rolley?"

Rolley shook his head. "No, but if I can hear them, I can play them – you know that, Vincent."

Vincent smiled. "Yes, Rolley. Just this once, I think Miss Kendricks might forgive you for using your gift that way. Catherine?"

"I'll bring down my cassette player tomorrow. I have those albums."

"Good. Now, Rolley, there is something else. The singer is dead – but somehow we will hear him sing."

Rolley's eyes widened. "Dead, Vincent?" Then he had a thought. "Do you think Miss Kendricks might be listening too?" He had such a hopeful expression on his face that Vincent wished he had an answer.

"I do not know. I have a difficult time believing a ghost can sing, but if that is possible, it is also possible Miss Kendricks might be listening."

"Vincent, I'll do it. I'm not scared of ghosts. Would have been one – except for you."

Vincent sighed. "That is behind you now, but I thank you for doing this. We will prepare and tune the grand piano in the Great Hall. Please, keep the details a secret for now."

Rolley nodded, so Vincent turned to Catherine. "How will I explain this to Father?"

Catherine giggled. "Well, perhaps it's best not to. Just say we are organizing a surprise performance. Oh, Vincent, I can hardly wait."

That night, after Catherine had left and the rest of the community was asleep, Vincent went back to the Great Hall. It was as silent as the grave – not an apt description, he thought on reconsideration. Was anywhere really silent – or anyone quiet, alive or dead?

He shook his head to clear the cobwebs and moved into the centre of the hall. He had not brought a lantern, but it wasn't completely dark, so he could see well enough. He spoke softly into the chamber.

"Kristopher, I wish to speak with you."

There was no sense of anyone being there, but Vincent felt the temperature drop several degrees. Now why did that happen in the presence of a ghost? He decided there was no point asking the only ghost he knew. That ghost seemed unaware of conventions – on either side of the veil.

A shape stood in front of him and Vincent caught the slight gleam of the logo on the front of Gentian's cap. He sighed.

"Kristopher, thank you for ... um ... appearing. I have a favour to ask of you, in return for the one we are doing for your friend."

There was a chuckle from the darkness and Kristopher spoke with his customary cheek. Strangely, the hall did not ring with his voice.

"That's only fair, I suppose. I do owe your Catherine a debt that can't ever be repaid. What's your pleasure?"

Kristopher was a great painter and their portrait Vincent's most cherished possession, apart from the rose Catherine had given him, but for some reason the painter's off-handedness raised Vincent's hackles. He tried to speak calmly.

"Kristopher, the pianist who will be accompanying your unquiet singer is a man we love, but he carries a burden from the past. His music teacher, one we valued highly here below, was killed by thugs when he was a boy – and as he watched. He was not blameless and has felt the guilt for many years. He almost committed suicide because of it. Her name was Miss Kendricks and he would like her to be present for this performance. He feels this might help make amends."

There was a silence for some minutes, but the figure in front of him remained, so Vincent waited.

"Vincent, this Miss Kendricks is present now. She has watched over Rolley since he left you. She forgave him moments after her death, she says. She cannot materialize like myself or Farrokh, and no one can talk to her, but she will be listening to the performance. You may tell Rolley so."

"Thank you, Kristopher. I am grateful." Vincent paused.

"Kristopher, your portrait of myself and Catherine was a gift beyond price. Aside from Elizabeth's painted walls, there is no image of me anywhere in the world – and none of Catherine and myself together – except yours. For that, I can never thank you enough."

Kristopher chuckled.

"Vincent, no thanks are necessary. Your Elizabeth is a remarkable artist. She doesn't hold to conventions either. I wish I had known of her earlier."

“But I have a serious message for you. If you don’t protect Catherine carefully, and let her into your life – all of your life – you will live to regret it. Nothing to do with me, but this is a warning. Heed it. I’ll have to do some penance for my loose, ectoplasmic lips, but you’re both special friends. I didn’t have many in life - and even fewer now. Don’t end up alone in the dark - and stone cold - as I did.”

With that he faded into the shadows.

Vincent sighed and went back to his chamber. He must tell the good news to Rolley tomorrow.

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The next day, Catherine brought her portable cassette player to the tunnels with a set of ear plugs. She found Rolley in the piano room and told him which tracks he should listen to. He seemed happier than she had seen him since his return. He thanked her and immediately put in the earphones, then turned to her.

“Vincent’s in the Great Hall,” he said, as she was about to wonder who to ask. He hadn’t visited her balcony the night before. She assumed he had been working on the preparations for the recital.

It was peculiar being in the huge chamber without a crowd. She wondered why it was not used more often. Perhaps the special concert would encourage more events. She looked across and in the flickering light of several lanterns, Vincent was manhandling a baby grand piano with Cullen and Kanin. The piano had wheels, but it seemed to have a mind of its own. The rough floor of the chamber was making moving difficult. Catherine had never really paid much attention to the floor, but now she saw that it looked like it was made of sandstone, although it was very flat. The men had just managed to get it into the special nook reserved for it when there was an enormous clang from the other side of the hall. Catherine spun around, expecting to see a chandelier on the floor, at the very least, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. The three men were leaning on the piano, exhausted, and all wore long-suffering expressions.

Catherine ran over to Vincent and touched his arm.

“Did you hear that, Vincent? What on earth made that noise?”

The three men exchanged glances and rolled their eyes. Vincent sighed.

“Nothing normal, Catherine. I believe it is our ghostly guest-to-be. He has been testing the acoustics again – or so I assume. I do not know how these noises can determine anything. Surely a voice ...”

He stopped as a banshee shriek echoed in the hall. All four put their hands over their ears. Vincent took Catherine’s arm and signaled to the others.

“I think we should leave him to his testing,” Vincent declared. “I hope you will not inflict noises like that on us during your performance,” he shouted into the air.

The reply was a vocal crescendo that started at the bass level and rose to a high soprano. They all stood stunned.

“I guess that is my answer,” Vincent commented. “Don not tell anyone, any of you. Please?”

Everyone nodded, but Catherine had a fit of the giggles and was hiccoughing by the time they reached the hub. Vincent escorted her into his chamber and made her sit down, poured her a glass of water and put it into her hand. He waited until she took a sip, although it did not seem to help.

“What on earth is so funny, Catherine?”

“Vincent, our ethereal singer was showing off. He had a five octave range, you know. He did some amazing things with that voice. The full extent of his talent was seldom evident - but he was quite a showman.”

Vincent grunted. “The concert is next week. We must keep everyone out of the Great Hall until then. We can set up the chairs the night before. Why have a concert at sunrise? It might not be very well

attended. Even at this time of the year, that is early.”

Catherine shook her head, still trying to get her hiccoughs under control. She had just managed to do so when Father walked into the chamber and hobbled over to Vincent, who was sitting on the side of his bed.

“Vincent, you know I don’t like to question your reasons for anything, but why are we having this concert at sunrise? Should I ask William to prepare a late breakfast? And who is going to perform at this ungodly hour?”

Catherine covered her mouth, her shoulders shaking with suppressed humour. Vincent tried not to look at her, but the bond told him everything and he had to drop his head to avoid laughing himself. He got himself under control with an effort and looked up at the older man.

“Father, sunrise was requested by our guest singer. I do not know why. The singer also requested the Great Hall and a pianist. It will not be a long concert. Just three pieces. We need not to delay breakfast, but we could eat it in the Great Hall afterwards. What do you think? Then more people will be tempted to attend. I think a large audience is important to the singer.”

Father huffed.

“Well, of course the artist would want an audience. All right, Vincent, I’ll tell William to set up the breakfast buffet down there. Who is going to direct the singer to the Great Hall? We’ll use the small entrance, of course. No point opening the big doors for a few minutes.”

Catherine spoke then.

“Um, I’ll be the official usher, Father. I know the singer, by reputation at least. I may be the only one here Below who does.”

Father turned on Catherine, realizing belatedly that she seemed to know more than she’d said.

“And who is this singer, Catherine? And what will he or she sing? And why are we inviting them into our midst – right into the Great Hall? You know we don’t encourage strangers to visit us. Why all the secrecy?”

Vincent caught her eye and winked. She kept her voice firm with an effort.

“I’m sorry, Father. We don’t want to cause any worries. It’s just that this singer is ... unusual. There is absolutely no danger to anyone, I promise. Actually, our guest is a friend of Kristopher Gentian’s and I can assure you will take our secret to the grave.” She paused and coughed, to stop the laugh that was trying to escape.

“We, um, didn’t want anyone to have preconceived notions. The pieces are quite beautiful, Father, but you won’t know any of them. They’re not classical, or even opera. They defy labels – just like the singer. We want to surprise everyone.”

Father sighed and looked back and forth between Catherine and his son. He was sure there was something he was not being told. Kristopher Gentian! He glanced at the portrait. How on earth could a painter know their guest singer? Well, if it wasn’t risky, there was no more to be said.

“Very well, keep your secrets. I’ll find out soon enough, I suppose.”

“You will indeed, Father,” Vincent said seriously when he saw the look on Father’s face.

Over the next few days, everything was readied in the Great Hall. Father had asked everyone in the community to attend, if at all possible, but some would have sentry duty and two people were in the hospital chamber and couldn’t be moved. Everyone seemed intrigued at least, Vincent noticed.

Catherine came Below the day before, right after work, and helped move the chairs into position. She stayed for dinner and Vincent announced that preparations were completed and that everyone should be in the Great Hall by seven o’clock, and to use the small entrance. William broke into the silence after this and asked for several volunteers to help load the dumbwaiter in the kitchen, then unload it in the

Great Hall and set the buffet tables. Several hands were thrown up and William thanked them.

“Six o’clock in the kitchen,” he bellowed to everyone as he turned to oversee his dishwashing detail. A few mild groans followed him, but everyone seemed eager now.

Catherine and Vincent returned to his chamber and parted after a brief hug and kiss. It was getting late and they all had to be up early. Catherine went to the guest chamber as they had decided she should sleep Below, for convenience’s sake. She had decided that, since it was a Friday, she could be late into the office if necessary, but was going to see this event through, no matter what. Joe would just have to practice his darts. There was nothing more urgent than usual on her desk.

Vincent couldn’t sleep. He was now in the position of every organizer the night before an event. Everything that could be done had been done. There was nothing more to do before the event itself. The worst that could happen, he reflected, was that their ghostly singer didn’t appear. In which case, they would listen to Rolley and have breakfast.

But Kristopher’s last words haunted him. Why had he said that? Wasn’t Catherine already a part of his life? Well, granted, he wished there could be more between them, but they had a loving relationship now, if not one of lovers, strictly speaking. They hugged, kissed and shared their thoughts. More than that would require a commitment he was not sure Catherine wanted. Or did she want it, but was waiting for him to make the first overture? They had discussed something of the sort when she stayed Below after her father died, but he had not pursued the matter since. And what had Gentian meant by saying that he’d regret it if he didn’t? It seemed that Kristopher knew something. Obviously, he existed outside normal timelines, or how had the painting been possible? That must have been painted long before Catherine met him in the bookstore. The warning was plain enough. He had to do something – but he didn’t dare tell Catherine about the ghostly warning. After the recital, he would invite Catherine to the waterfall again. Yes, that was the most romantic place he knew and he knew she loved it there too.

Vincent closed his eyes and fell into an uneasy sleep.

A message on the pipes, beginning with his name, woke Vincent up. It was time to go to the Great Hall. He gave himself a quick wash and pulled on his black pants, red boots and a bright blue sweater. He topped it all with a patched sheepskin vest. It could be cool in the Great Hall and he had no idea if the cold spot would expand to fill it in the presence of no less than three ghosts.

He left the chamber and looked in on Catherine. She was just pulling on her boots and looked up at him with a smile.

“Vincent. You look as good in the morning as you do at night. I, on the other hand, am a mess. My hair looks like it’s been slept on – which it has – and there’s nothing I can do about it without a hairdryer.”

Vincent walked to her and took her hands in his.

“Catherine, you are the sun in my morning and I see no flaws. Do you want a cloak? It can be chilly in the Great Hall.”

“I’ll be fine, Vincent. I expect to be running about a bit, as usher, so that will keep me warm.”

Vincent chuckled. “I do not know what you will be doing, Catherine. Everyone here can find their seats and our guests are unlikely to appear until they’re good and ready.”

Catherine shrugged. “Well then, I’ll help Father to a seat, and sit next to him. I want to see the expression on his face during this recital. I guess we’d better get down there.”

Vincent led the way to the Great Hall and into the cavernous space. Mouse and Jamie were already there, lighting every lantern they could. Behind him, people were shuffling in, yawning but keen. William was near the dumbwaiter overseeing the transport of breakfast to a couple of large tables. A pile of cloth napkins, plates and cups were already neatly placed. The smells were enticing. Muffins – and spicy ones at that!



He looked around. How would he introduce their ghostly singer? Would he materialize as Kristopher did? Rolley moved past him as he pondered the question and walked over to the piano. Vincent followed.

“Good morning, Rolley. Are you ready for this?”

Rolley looked up at him and smiled. “I’m ready, Vincent. But how will I know when to start?”

Vincent had no answer to that, and said so. Then he had an idea. He moved into one of the shadowed alcoves that usually held the Winterfest beer kegs.

“Kristopher?” he whispered.

“Yes, Vincent?” came the voice behind him.

Vincent whirled but there was no one there. He sighed.

“How will we know when to start, Kristopher?”

“Don’t worry, Vincent,” came the cheeky voice. “There will be an unmistakable signal.”

“Fine,” Vincent whispered to himself and left to tell Rolley.

Everyone was seated quickly and Catherine was next to Father, Vincent noticed. He sat himself against the wall, near Rolley. He wanted to see the reactions. There was a lot of shuffling and a few murmured questions, then suddenly there was a loud percussion blast, followed by a silence that seemed to muffle noise.

“Thank you for coming this morning,” came a mellow voice which seemed to originate in no particular place, but somehow didn’t echo in the vast hall.

“My name is Farrokh, but the world knew me as Freddie Mercury. I will sing three pieces for you today. ‘Lily of the Valley’, if you please, my friend.”

Rolley looked up and then down at the keyboard and began to play. Father, Vincent noticed, had an expression of shock on his face, as he realized this was no “normal” recital.

A beautiful, clear voice filled the Hall. Vincent, who had never heard of anything like it from male vocal chords, was stunned and felt his mouth drop open. He watched smiles and grins spread around the audience he could see. Father’s eyebrows shot up and stayed there.

“I am for ever searching high and low  
But why does everybody tell me no?  
Neptune of the seas  
An answer for me please  
The lily of the valley doesn’t know

I lie and wait with open eyes  
I carry on through stormy skies  
I wait for her and show  
My kingdom for a rose  
But each time I grow wild  
Serpent of the Nile  
Relieve me for a while  
And cast me from your spell, let me go

Messenger from seven seas has flown  
To tell the King of Rhye he’s lost his throne

Wars will never cease  
Is there time enough for peace  
For the lily of the valley doesn't know"

Vincent looked at Catherine and saw her smile. He sensed she was pleasantly surprised, but not by the voice. Well, he'd have to ask her later. The audience refrained from clapping, Vincent was glad to see. The mellow tones of the singer spoke again.

"My next song is a piece of indulgence. I called it 'Exercises in Free Love.'

The piano began to play and as the incredible voice rang around the Hall, a slight echo seemed to make it even more beautiful. Vincent found his neck hairs standing on end as the voice ranged up the scales and hit notes he would have thought impossible for any normal man. The man must be a contra-tenor, he thought, then heard some of the bass notes again and realized Catherine was right. His voice defied all usual definitions. What must the rest of this rock group's music have been like? He promised himself to listen to more of it.

Everyone in the hall was wide awake now and some were bent forward, as if to listen better. Father had closed his eyes and seemed rapt as the song concluded. Catherine was happy.

Everyone seemed stunned into silence, and in that space, the singer announced,

"My final piece will be 'Who Wants to Live Forever'."

The piano was muted as Rolley played.

"There's no time for us,  
There's no place for us,  
What is this thing that builds our dreams, yet slips away from us.

Who wants to live forever,  
Who wants to live forever ... ?  
There's no chance for us,  
It's all decided for us,  
This world has only one sweet moment set aside for us.

Who wants to live forever,  
Who dares to love forever,  
When love must die.

But touch my tears with your lips,  
Touch my world with your fingertips,  
And we can have forever,  
And we can love forever,  
Forever is our today,

Who wants to live forever,  
Who wants to live forever,  
Forever is our today,

Who waits forever anyway?"

Vincent felt as if the words of the song were directed specifically at himself and was stunned once more. How was this possible? Was he just being over-sensitive? But Kristopher had given him a warning. Was this another?

Rolley continued to play the tune for a few more bars, then stopped. In the silence that followed, the just three words were spoken.

"Thank you all," said the rich tenor. The chamber became suddenly silent and felt empty. Then wild applause erupted from the community, who looked at each other, then made mild sounds of disappointment when they realized there were no more songs forthcoming. Gradually, everyone rose and went to the breakfast buffet. There was a merry chatter and clatter as people picked up a couple of muffins, an apple and a cup of tea or coffee. They returned to their seats and turned them around so they could talk.

Vincent rose to talk to Rolley, who looked up at him with a smile that could have lit up the Hall.

"I think I felt Miss Kendricks' hand on my back, Vincent, the way she used to, to make me sit up straight on the stool. Thank you."

"There is no thanks due me, Rolley. You played very well. Our singer seemed happy. I think both he and you will rest easier now."

There was a step behind Vincent and Father hobbled into view. He also thanked Rolley and then spoke to Vincent

"Who was that man, Vincent? The name means nothing to me."

Vincent was about to say he didn't know, when Rolley spoke up.

"He was the lead singer in a group called Queen."

"Ah, I see. A rock group, I assume. What a curious name. Hmmm ... do you think I might hear more of their music?"

"Certainly, Father," Catherine said, as she joined the group and put her arm through Vincent's. "I loaned Rolley my cassette tape player with several tapes. You're welcome to borrow them. They're a very innovative, quite unique group – very talented. However, losing Freddie has been a blow to them."

"I can imagine it would be. What a voice. Extraordinary," Father declared. "I have trouble understanding how a dead man can sing, but I can't deny it was a pleasantly unique recital. Thank you for arranging it."

"I did nothing, Father," Vincent murmured. "I merely put one ghost to rest – at the request of another."

"Yes, you must tell me about that sometime. But right now, I want breakfast."

The four of them headed to the breakfast table. Vincent carried the plates of muffins and fruit, while Catherine carried the tea. They used a fifth chair for a table and ate in a companionable silence.

"I think we should use this Hall for recitals more often," Father remarked, after he had demolished a muffin and cup of tea. "I had not realized how good the acoustics are."

"Yes, apparently that is what our singer liked about it too," Vincent remarked, with a grin at Catherine, who almost choked on her tea.

Father looked at the two of them, and then at Rolley. All wore expressions of extreme innocence, which didn't fool him at all.

"I can see there is a lot more to this story. I think it might make a good one for the children one day. You know how they love ghost stories."

"But this one is not scary, Father," Vincent declared.

"Oh, well, that won't matter," Father laughed. "I'm sure you can spin it into something interesting."

After breakfast, Vincent and Catherine returned to his chamber. Catherine hugged him and was about

to say goodbye when she sensed Vincent had something to say and waited.

“Catherine, I felt your surprise at the first song. I thought you knew this group.”

“Oh, I do, Vincent, and it was a wonderful performance. The best ever. But our singer must have known something ... about us. Two lines were changed.”

Vincent looked at her and waited. She seemed suddenly shy. Finally, he could wait no longer.

“What lines, Catherine. Please tell me.”

She looked up at him and sang the tune softly.

“I am for ever searching high and low

But why does everybody tell me no?

Neptune of the seas

An answer for me please

The lily of the valley doesn't know

“I lie and wait with open eyes

I carry on through stormy skies

I wait for her and show

My kingdom for a rose”

“The two lines ending with ‘show’ and ‘rose’, Vincent. Those were not the original words.”

Vincent didn't know what to say. The first lines could have described himself. Now it seemed that both songs echoed ominously what Kristopher had told him. The rose could only refer to Catherine - and hadn't he lain awake the night before thinking of her?

“Catherine...,” he stopped. There wasn't time for a discussion of the kind he wanted. She had to go to work. He remembered his pledge to himself the night before.

“Would you care to come to the waterfall with me tomorrow, Catherine? I'd like to talk about this – and about ... other things.”

Catherine looked up at him, her emotions along their bond so complex, he couldn't sort them out. But they weren't negative – that much he could be sure of. He held his breath and waited for her answer.

“I'd love to, Vincent. I don't plan to work this weekend.”

She hugged him for a long moment before saying goodbye, then gave him a smile that went straight to his heart and warmed him.

But some things are not to be. Catherine sent a message to Vincent later, apologizing for not being able to make their rendezvous the next day. Joe had asked her to talk to a witness and she didn't know how long it would take. Then she would have to spend Sunday preparing the brief. Another time – very soon – her message promised.

Before they could arrange another assignation, Fate intervened and all thoughts of Farrokh and Kristopher were chased from Vincent's mind for a time. A letter arrived for him - from Lisa - and for a few days, events kept him and Catherine at arm's length, until he rescued her from the men who were trying to kill her to get Lisa. At that moment, and later when she told him his hands were beautiful, he knew Catherine was all that mattered and he wanted her to know she was everything to him, that she was his life - and to move closer to love.

He met her on the balcony not long after that emotional night, but a phone call turned their world topsy-turvy again.

As Vincent watched the car sink into the lake, with Catherine trapped in the trunk, he had despaired. Kristopher's words had seemed the knell of doom. The dispatch of her tormentor had galvanized him and given him the strength to rescue her from near death. When he held her in his arms on the shore, he had been rendered almost wordless. Later, on her balcony, they had kissed. Suddenly, there was no more need for words between them. Their souls now seemed enmeshed.

Kristopher's warning had been timely, after all. Now they could move their love forward with confidence.

END