

# Vignettes – Webs

by Angie

## 13. China Moon

Vincent trudged tiredly back to the home tunnels, pausing at the entrance to Father's chamber. He dreaded human company. What he had left behind him did not encourage pleasant thoughts. He had protected his family and rid the tunnels of a threat, but he had left something of himself behind with that old man, the one who had seen his heart.

He strode in silently and stood still, looking at the anxious faces of Father, Catherine, Lin and Henry. No one seemed inclined to speak first. He looked down at himself, realizing he probably looked as bad as he felt.

"I must wash," he said abruptly, and turned and left them all. If only he could wash away the memory of violence.

He took his time and when he returned to Father's chamber, Dr Wong had joined them and they were all sitting around the table, drinking tea. A plate of cookies sat untouched in the middle.

He sat down in a chair and Father poured him a tea without comment.

Vincent took a sip and sighed deeply. His meddling had brought them to this point. He knew they would not see it that way.

"Tangled webs," he said quietly, looking down at his teacup.

"Because we care, life is complicated," Catherine remarked, just as quietly.

Father cleared his throat and spoke in his matter-of-fact voice.

"Lin and Henry have invited us to their wedding, and they want to be married here, among us."

Dr Wong nodded. "I know a traditional priest. It will be a simple ceremony."

Vincent looked around. They were all trying to make him feel less ... uncomfortable.

"I am glad," he said at last, and meant it. That something good would come of this night's killing was indeed miraculous. He had forgotten. The knot in his heart eased a little.

"I will supply the refreshments," Henry remarked with a smile.

Catherine watched Vincent as he sat at the table, knowing quite well what he was thinking. His face was expressive when his emotions were deep. His use of violence upset him, she knew that, had known it from the first time he saved her. Something in him refused to believe there was no other way, she mused. He wanted the ties that bound him to her, and to his extended family, to exist without danger requiring his particular skills.

They couldn't. Because she cared, because he did, their lives were complicated. They couldn't just ignore the pain of people they came in contact with. They had to try and help. Yet that decision, in this instance, had threatened the entire tunnel world, and herself.

She was grateful when Father changed the topic to Lin and Henry's wedding. But so much was still unsaid.

Henry's face became sombre.

"Chinatown will be a much more peaceful place now," he remarked quietly. "Good people will be able to breathe easier."

"And my shop may see less business," Dr Wong intoned with an ironic twist to his mouth.

"Alas, old age cannot be cured," Father chuckled. "I think you will never lack for business."

"True. This doctor cannot even heal himself of everything."

"Uncle, you best not say that," Lin smiled at him.

"Here we are all friends. We can tell the brutal truth," the old apothecary stated with a nod.

Vincent looked down at his teacup. Brutal indeed was the truth he had heard from the old man, at the last. That statement had shocked him, as it was intended to.

"Their leader, the old man, he said I was an honourable man." Vincent said quietly.

"And so you are," Father said. "You did not seek violence, as he did, but you saved us from him just the same."

"Yet, he caught us all in his web. Only his death could free us."

Lin looked at Vincent and caught his eye.

"Sometimes good can come from bad things," she remarked.

"Like the evil-smelling medicines we boil from Dr Wong's herbs," Father remarked.

There was a laughter around the table and Catherine saw Vincent relax. When he looked at her, she nodded and sent her love along their bond. She guessed he felt it because his eyes closed briefly.

Their connection, that thread, was eternal. Like Lin and Henry's lives, which could now stretch together into the future, unhindered. The spider at the centre of their troubles was dead. That web would shred and blow away. Something stronger than hatred had defeated him. Love.

END