

TO SLEEP - PERCHANCE TO DREAM

by Anne McClelland

(prequel to *To Dream Anew*)

(from *DREAMS IN AMETHYST*)

Catherine trailed wearily through the tunnels, her head hanging and her shoulders rounded, as if she was carrying a huge burden on them.

Coming Below to be with Vincent had once been her greatest joy, but these past few months were beginning to take their toll on her - physically and mentally. Her eyes were becoming more and more sunken, with dark circles underlining them. Her hair had lost its bounce and hung limp, half covering her face. She had lost weight and looked even more fragile than usual. She so missed Vincent coming to meet her.

Catherine plodded down the short staircase into Father's chamber. She was amazed to see the children preparing their musical instruments for a concert.

"Father! What on earth are they doing? I can't believe you're allowing the children to give a concert at a time like this! How dare you! He's lying through there in that condition and you're allowing the children to perform music as if nothing's happened!" She stormed on. "Don't you care anymore? Is that it?"

Father turned to look at her. She immediately bit her lip, expecting Father's backlash, but instead he lowered his eyes, blinking away a tear. Catherine was not expecting that. His gaze met Catherine's.

"I'm sorry, Catherine," he sighed. "I know how you feel - really I do." Father hesitated before continuing, afraid of hurting Catherine's feelings. "I know how hard you have tried to reach him, but it occurred to me that perhaps the children's music would succeed where words and other things have failed. So we, prepared a camp bed for him - here and we will carry him through shortly."

Father waited to see how Catherine would react, but she simply nodded her head in agreement with his plan.

He knew that she had spent hours every evening reading to him, talking to him, pleading with him and even shouting at him, in an effort to rouse Vincent from his coma. She had tried all possible means of communicating with him. She had held various substances against his very sensitive nose - everything from roses, to lemons, to onions, but she had not seen any reaction. Likewise with his sense of touch - rose thorns against his fingers, feathers tickling his nose - even her kisses had brought no reaction. She had brought his favourite ice-cream and placed tiny drops on his tongue with her finger, stroking the roughness she had found there, but again, there was only disappointment.

On several occasions, when she had been totally exhausted, and could not face the long walk back Above, she had lain down with Vincent, hoping that her very presence, so close to him, would

perhaps reach him through their bond. At these times, she had gently massaged his shoulders, back and chest and her toes caressed his feet and legs. Lying so close to him had been a comfort in itself and she usually dozed off, whispering, "Please come back to me, my Vincent."

Once Vincent was settled on the make-shift bed, the children began their concert. They were all too aware of the importance of his concert and the reason for it. They played many of Vincent's favourite pieces, from Schubert to Mozart to Beethoven.

When the concert seemed to be reaching an end, Catherine, who sat holding Vincent's hand and stroking his hair all evening, requested that the children play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, knowing how much it meant to Vincent, because of Rolley.

As the gentle note of the Sonata washed over them, Catherine gazed at the beautiful face she loved with every fiber of her being. He looked much thinner than usual, and so fragile, especially with the various tubes and equipment attached to him. They were essential, she knew, but she longed to see him once more striding through the tunnels, his hair and cloak flowing behind him; and to see him with a smile on his face, eating heartily again with the other tunnel dwellers.

As she watched, she thought she saw just a hint of movement in one of his eyelids. She thought it was only her imagination, until it happened again. It was only a slight twitch, but it was the first sign of movement in all these empty months.

Catherine sat there, stunned, unable to speak. A lonely little tear rolled down her cheek. As if to reciprocate, Vincent's eyes allowed a little moisture to escape.

Catherine, at last finding her voice, whispered, "He moved." Receiving, no response, she shouted. **"He moved!"**

Father and some of the others rushed to Vincent's side. However, there was to be no more movement - not tonight.

Several months before this night, Vincent had been overcome by his dark side, after a terrible struggle against it. Illness had followed and, fearing for those he loved, and to protect them from himself, he had traveled miles below the tunnel dwellings to a dark cave.

By the time Catherine had arrived with Father, Mouse and Pascal, he had turned completely wild. She had entered the dark cave alone. Only her bond with Vincent had saved her, when he had raised his hand to attack. The realization of what had happened was too much for his heart to cope with and he had collapsed. Catherine did manage to revive him again and she lay with him, cradled in her arms, until Father had appeared.

They took Vincent's home, but he fell into a coma and had remained that way until tonight.

Although it seemed to the outside world that Vincent was completely unconscious - deep within his own mind, Vincent's life continued.

So far, he had dreamt about his own loss of memory, the severing of his and Catherine's bond and the darkest time of his life.

Catherine had been kidnapped and due to the severing of their bond, he had been unable to find her. She had died tragically in his arms, her last words telling him that they had loved and of their beautiful son.

His quest to find his son had been heartbreaking and sometimes terrifying, but determination and his love for Catherine had kept him going.

He had seen so much death, especially on the night when he had slaughtered so many of his enemies and watched the hated drugs burn in the fire - the drugs which had almost destroyed Rolley's life.

The following evening he had met Diana, who was investigating Catherine's murder and who wanted to help him find his son.

"Vincent, don't!" said Diana, praying that he would listen to her.

"How did you know?"

"I know - it's what I do. Joe Maxwell came by to see me this morning. He knows what happened last night. He's looking for you."

"He won't find me."

"I found you."

"There are no safe places for anyone."

"The place you destroyed belonged to Gabriel."

Vincent spun around at the mention of his name - the one who had murdered his Catherine.

Diana continued. "It was his. I can't prove it, but I know it's true."

"Gabriel," Vincent repeated.

"Vincent, why? If you didn't know, why did you do it?"

"I had a friend - his name was Rolley. I did it for him."

"Is he better now, Vincent? I've been there too and this is not the way."

"There where is the way? What would you have me do? He has my son and I have nothing but these," he said, holding up his hands.

"Those can't help you find your son."

"They can make Gabriel bleed - night after night until...."

"Until you kill him, or until he kills you. By then it won't matter who wins, Vincent. What kind of father do you want your son to have? You continue alone in this and you're going to lose everything."

"Then, where's the hope, Diana? Where is the hope?" Vincent wandered through the tunnels once more - only the thought of his son kept him away from the Abyss.

Miles below the city there was a chamber with a concert grand piano, waiting for someone to play it.

Vincent had almost arrived at this chamber, when the gentle sounds of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* drifted through the tunnels to meet him. He walked steadily onwards until he could see who was playing, although deep in his heart, he already knew.

Rolley's fingers caressed the ebony and ivory keys lovingly; reverently.

Vincent stared, his gaze coming to rest on Rolley's face. As he watched, he felt his eye twitch once - then again, as tears welled up into his eyes.

Over the next few weeks, Catherine continued her bedside vigil. Vincent had become more and more restless, giving her a sense of hope. It had given her the push she needed to begin taking care of her own health. Slowly, she became more like her old self and once again. She took

pleasure in coming to see Vincent each night.

It was on one of these occasions that Vincent began growling and then roaring, throwing himself around in his bed. He pulled out his feeding and intravenous tubes, tossing them aside. Catherine called to Father and together they tried to hold him. All they could do though was to try and prevent him from falling or banging himself on the wall.

After about twenty minutes of this thrashing around, his eyes flew open. He stood up and marched, albeit unsteadily, out of his chamber to the nearest set of pipes. He grabbed them and roaring loudly, wrenched the pipes apart with his bare hands.

Catherine and Father stood numbly watching this scene taking place before them. He was completely beyond their control and totally unaware of their presence. They followed him as he wandered off through the tunnels. He hurried up the small flight of stairs to the nursery and Father and Catherine stared in amazement, as he lifted his huge clawed hand and sliced it down through the huge teddy bear, which had been a gift to the children many years ago from a Helper. The blow sent it spinning across the room, stuffing spilling out across the floor. Vincent took one more step towards the bear, as if he intended attacking again, but then suddenly stopped. He turned and moved towards the crib containing a new baby, who had been brought Below by a Helper, who had found him lying abandoned near her home.

Stooping low, Vincent gently picked up the baby and held him close. After one more disdainful look at the poor dishevelled bear, he turned again and headed along the passage. He hesitated suddenly - just for a moment - and then returned to his chamber, still clutching the baby to him.

Father and Catherine allowed Vincent to continue, feeling that all this must lead somewhere - hopefully to a full recovery.

For Catherine, it was nothing less than a miracle. Once she knew that Vincent was settled again - with the little one lying next to him - completely unaware of what had happened, the whole episode caught up with her and she turned to Father, sobbing into his shoulder, shaking with fear for Vincent, but at the same time, sighing with relief that he was at least moving once more.

"Come now, Catherine - rest," said Father gently.

Catherine settled down in her sleeping bag on the little camp bed she had set up next to Vincent's. Tiredness overcame her and, knowing that Father was keeping watch for a while, she allowed herself the luxury of some sleep.

Vincent was still trapped in his life-like nightmare, having been captured by the evil Gabriel and then tortured mentally and physically. He had been rewarded by being given his son to hold and punished by having his son taken from him once again. Eventually, sensing that his son was suddenly in great danger, he had used his massive strength to force apart the electrified bars, which had held him a prisoner.

He had raced upstairs and slashed Gabriel, who had been about to smother his son, the force of the blow sending him spinning across the room to land in a crumpled heap on the floor. Just as Vincent moved closer to end the life of his tormentor, Diana arrived and saved him from the task. As Vincent carried his son from the room, he heard a shot and stopped - only for a second - knowing that it was over.

When Catherine woke up, Father and the baby were both gone and Vincent was sleeping peacefully. Rising, she washed and changed her clothes and then began what had become a regular ritual during the last few months - giving Vincent a bed-bath and massage.

She began, as always, with his face, gently wiping it with a soft sponge. Next came his neck and chest. As she sponged him, the water droplets on his soft golden fur shimmered in the candlelight. His arms were each tenderly cared for and it was here that Catherine allowed herself a moment's passion. She would kiss each of his fingers, then the palm of his hand and leave a trail of kisses right up his arm, finishing in the hollow of his neck.

She did not know why she tortured herself in this way. It always ended with tears in her eyes for Vincent - and for herself.

Still, she continued, working her way down his beautiful body, sponging and then drying with a soft fluffy towel as she went. She rolled him gently over to reach his back, bottom and the backs of his legs. That done, she rolled him back to finish his legs. This was usually the most difficult part for her, as she visualized his muscle-bound legs, clad in their usual soft denim, striding out through the tunnels, or leaping to her rescue, or touching her own as they clung to each other in their rare moments of passion.

Sighing to herself, she finished the last toe and then took the bottle of oil. Rubbing her hands in a small amount of the oil, she began his massage. It was due to her excellent care that he had suffered no real ill effects, during his time of immobility. To finish, she gently dressed him in a fresh nightshirt and brushed out his golden mane of hair. Then, she allowed herself a brief smile. There was one more task to complete - one which always brought a little smile to her face, no matter how tired she was - she collected his toothbrush and toothpaste and carefully cleaned his teeth, paying extra attention to those gleaming white fangs he normally kept so expertly hidden.

Ten minutes later, she was on her way to her apartment and to work.

One day, a few weeks later, Catherine dressed herself in a deep blue coloured dress and styled her hair carefully. She headed for the tunnels and Father's chamber. Today was the new little baby's Naming Day and Father had asked the Council if they would allow Catherine to name the baby and act as his mother for the Naming Ceremony.

They had agreed instantly, and so it was that Catherine was going to be his mother for the day. The very thought put a spring in her step and she even chuckled once or twice to herself at the idea of being a mum! She was completely unaware that she had caused a few bouts of silent mirth among the sentries. They were delighted to see her so happy, but they had stifled their own chuckles in case she would hear them!

An hour later she stood in Father's chamber, proudly holding the baby. Vincent had been brought through once more to share the experience. Everyone hoped that this event would perhaps be the final trigger he required to rouse him completely from his state of unconsciousness.

In his dream-like state, Vincent had gone to Diana, asking her to come Below. He shared all the beauties of his world with her and it was not long until they stood in a circle in Father's chamber for the Naming Ceremony of Vincent and Catherine's baby son.

Father began his speech.

"It has been said that the child is the meaning of life. The truth of that has never been more apparent to me, than it is on this day, when we celebrate the child, that has been brought into our world. We welcome the child with love, that he may be able to love. We welcome the child with gifts, that he may learn generosity. And, finally, we welcome the child with a name....."

Father turned to hear the baby's name.

"I've named this child, Jacob," said Catherine.

"I've named my son, Jacob," said Vincent.

Then, like a total eclipse of the sun, it was as if two shadows had merged to become one. A joining of two souls from different worlds. Everyone seemed to feel that suddenly the world was right again.

Vincent looked up and saw Catherine's face smiling at him. She was holding out her arms, reaching for their child.

Catherine, delighted, but overwhelmed all at once, at seeing Vincent focusing on her, gazing at her, smiled at him.

Immediately she reached out to him, still holding baby Jacob in her arms.

As they passed the baby to each other, Vincent took the final step out of his coma. It was a truly magical moment for everyone, but especially for Vincent and Catherine.

Once all the rumpus had died down, Vincent and Catherine spent the rest of the evening exchanging their stories. They held each other tightly the whole time, but Catherine still had a difficult time persuading Vincent that he was now back in the real world, and that he could begin to put the past behind him. It was when she asked him to tell her more about Diana, the mysterious police detective who had helped Vincent, that he suddenly sat bolt upright, gasping for breath.

"Vincent, what's wrong?" asked Catherine, panic-stricken. She had only just got him back and she did not want to lose him again.

Several minutes passed before Vincent quietened down, but even then he clung to Catherine for all he was worth, needing her reassurance and her love and then, gently, he slipped out of her arms.

"Catherine," he began. "What date is it?"

Catherine stared at him. "The date?" she asked.

"Yes, please - it's important. When is our anniversary?"

"Next week, Vincent. It will be our third."

"That is good, Catherine. I would like you to ask Joe to allow you to take a vacation next week. Is that possible?"

"I'll try, Vincent. If it is so important to you."

"You must, Catherine," he hissed. "I cannot stress how important it is - for my sake - and for us."

"All right then," said Catherine quickly, not wanting to alarm him any more. "I'll make sure that Joe give me the time off, but can't you tell me why?"

"Catherine," Vincent sighed her name, as if caressing her very soul. "This is very difficult for me. A few months ago, I said some words to you in your apartment. Every word came from my heart and I repeat them now and ask you to trust me... one more time. Whatever happens... whatever

comes.... know that I love you."

"You know that I trust you, Vincent. I love you, too."

Vincent sighed. "Catherine, there are secrets I have had to keep from you. Feeling us growing closer and closer, and yet not being able to share everything with you... has been so difficult for me over these past three years. Next week, I will reveal those secrets to you. I do not know how you will be affected by what I have to tell you... it could even mean... the end of... us... I can only hope for your forgiveness."

"Vincent, what is it? Why can't you tell me now? Nothing will ever part us... you know that I couldn't live without you."

"Catherine, know that something beautiful and wonderful awaits us- something beyond your wildest dreams. When you come to me next week, I will at last be able to share it all with you, and the reason for my silence until not."

This long and loving speech from her Vincent brought tears to her eyes and a lump to her throat, making it almost impossible to reply. "Vincent, I love you... I always have and I always will."

Catherine stayed Below that night, lying with her love in his huge comfortable bed, tangled in his arms and legs. They could feel each other's desire, for their bond had returned, firm, true and even stronger, but for tonight, at least, they put their desires aside and enjoyed the simple pleasures of touch, caress and peace.

As the last bastions of consciousness left her, Catherine pondered on this huge, magnificent, but terrifying secret Vincent had kept from her. What effect would it have on her- on their relationship- on their life in the future? Who was Diana? Where did she fit into all this?

A thousand other questions were there- somewhere - for the asking, but not tonight. Tonight, she was with her beloved once more and he was with her. At the moment, if he had been an anemone on a rock, and she the tiny shrimp within his grasp, she would gladly have surrendered all-to be a part of him.

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