

# THE TOUCH OF LOVE

by Avril Bowles

*(from The Candlelight Collection)*

Catherine put the finishing touches to an arrangement of early Spring flowers, humming softly to herself as she moved around the living room of the apartment. She glanced at her watch again; 9:15. Vincent had said he would come at 9:30. Catherine smiled towards the balcony. Not long to wait now.

She hadn't seen him the previous evening. Joe had particularly asked if she would be his companion, in her capacity as his Assistant D.A. at a special function attended by the Mayor of New York. The invitation had stated 'formal dress' and although Catherine had little time for that type of affair these days, she found it hard to refuse Joe, especially when he used his most engaging 'little boy' smile.

For years there had been nothing she enjoyed more than to go on a shopping spree with her father's credit card, arriving home laden with bags and boxes from the most famous and expensive stores in the city. But meeting Vincent had changed all that. Shopping, gala dinners, making a fast buck on Wall Street - all that stuff seemed so trivial now, since she had become a part of Vincent and his world below the streets. All she yearned for now was to be with him, for as long and as often as possible, either in his own environment or here in her apartment.

About six months ago she had finally managed to persuade him to come inside. For a long time he had resisted, partly due to a lifetime of Father's (understandable) brainwashing that any time spent Above was filled with danger for him, and partly she knew, because he felt while he remained outside on the balcony he was in less danger of losing control. In the last six months, though, since the incident when he had been spotted on the balcony by a lunatic with a telescope, Catherine had managed to convince him that he was actually safer inside than out - if not from her, from danger - but he flatly refused to stay all night. He had learned to enjoy watching television, videos and use her compact disc player, which probably gave him the most pleasure of all. Tonight she planned to get him to play Trivial Pursuit.

While she was selecting some of their favourite music she heard his familiar tap on the doors. Always, she experienced a fluttery feeling in her stomach, like a host of butterflies waking up and stretching their wings. The feeling lasted long after she opened the doors and stepped into his arms.

He held her fast, and his murmured; "Catherine", told her he had missed her as much as she had him.

She moulded to his body perfectly, almost disappearing in the sheer size and strength of him.

"Mmmm," she purred. "It feels wonderful to hold you again." She stepped back and looked at him. "You smell pretty good too. But you look tired."

"I am a little," he replied. "Your perfume too, is... intoxicating. Let me see... Opium .. . am I correct?" She nodded happily.

"I never thought there would come a time when you would be able to differentiate between French perfumes Vincent. Some men spend years with the same woman without ever knowing the names of the fragrances she loves."

"They do not have my acute sense of smell though, do they?" he said.

Catherine was uncertain whether this was a genuine appreciation of his sensitivity or if it was a reference to his leonine features. She decided to treat it as the former.

"Unfortunately for them, no," she replied with a smile and stood on tiptoe to kiss his nose.

"Come on in Vincent. I have great plans for you this evening." He raised his eyebrows and closed the doors behind them.

Catherine went through to the kitchen to fix drinks.

"Wine okay for you Vincent?" she called.

"Not tonight Catherine; I would prefer an orange juice if you have it."

"Yes. Sure." She opened the refrigerator and poured a long-stemmed wineglass of Lambrusco Bianco for herself and a tall glass of iced fresh orange for Vincent.

When she returned to the living room Vincent was leaning on the fireplace, one hand held to his brow.

"Here we are. Vincent... are you okay? What is it? Do you have a headache?" He dropped his hand and turned to face her.

"Thank you Catherine, I am quite well."

She set the drinks down on the table and walked towards him.

"You are not. Vincent, for Heaven's sake, don't be so tough. If you have a headache, say so!"

He held out his hands, palms upwards in a resigned manner. "I have a headache."

"Bad? Don't lie to me Vincent," she added, suspecting he would make light of it even if he felt like death.

"Since you insist, Catherine. If feeling as if my head is about to split in two, counts as bad, then yes, it is bad."

Catherine reached up a finger to place a featherlight caress beneath his fringe, her voice sympathetic.

"Poor Vincent. Don't worry, I'm going to fix it for you."

Taking his hand she led him over to the couch. She made him remove his suede overshirt and told him to sit on the floor while she went into the bedroom. When she returned she had changed into a tracksuit and carried a small bottle in her hand. She tucked a large cushion behind his back, and sat down behind him on the couch, pulling him back between her legs.

"What are you proposing to do to me, Catherine?" he inquired. "I could Just take an aspirin."

"You could, but it wouldn't be anywhere near as much fun. Okay, now Just put your arms loosely around my legs and relax. "

He closed his eyes and did as he was told, sitting with one leg stretched out flat, the other knee bent with his foot flat on the floor. Gently she tilted his head back, and after applying a drop of oil to her fingertips, slowly massaged his temples, moving in small circles and drawing an imaginary line over his forehead and back again.

"How does that feel?" she asked.

"Good. It reminds me of when I was a child. I had a fever once and Father rubbed my head then."

Catherine, bending over him, was about to protest when Vincent opened one eye. "Although, there is something very different about the way it feels when you do it Catherine." She grinned.

"I should hope so! I've never known you to have a headache before Vincent; I wonder what caused it."

"I think I know," he replied with a sigh. "When I returned Below the night before last, Pascal had a problem with one of the pipes. We had to work on it all night and the whole of the next day. I was working in a restricted area with the banging of pipes beside me the whole time. We thought we had repaired it satisfactorily and then this morning the same thing happened to another one, so the whole operation began again. I fear the system is so old we will continue to have one problem after another."

Catherine tipped his head forward and poured a little more oil into her hands. "Then I'd better make sure I always have plenty of this. It sounds like you may need it."

"I did not know you were an advocate of aromatherapy, Catherine." She laughed.

"Heavens yes! I'm famous for my neck massages... In fact I'm thinking of taking out an ad in the personal column of the New York Times," she teased.

Lifting his hair she began to knead his neck, commenting on the solid knot of tension she found. There was no fur on his neck; the skin was golden and almost as smooth as her own. At her request, he undid two of the brown suede laces which fastened his shirt, loosening it from his neck in order to avoid getting massage oil on the material. She ran her fingers up and down his neck and around the front to his collar bone, before extending the area to include his shoulders. He remained very still, making no comment as her probing fingers tightened and relaxed forming a rhythmic pressure on his skin, her thumbs finding sensitive spots, soothing and relieving the tension.

She continued the motion for a long time, or perhaps it just seemed that way, because a completely different kind of tension began to build between them. Catherine knew Vincent was trying to ignore it, but his reaction to her continuous massage technique was betrayed by a marked increase in his breathing.

"That feels so good," he murmured at last.

"I know," she whispered, grateful that finally, he seemed to be in danger of losing the control they had both battled against for over two years.

Suddenly, she leaned over him and kissed him full on the mouth, unable to prevent her hands from sliding forward over his shoulders and exploring the deep chest muscles. The way they rose and fell so much faster than usual, told her all she needed to know, until without warning, he pulled her down onto him and all the resolve he had maintained for so long, evaporated as he made her his for all eternity.

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Afterwards, they lay staring into each other's eyes, almost in disbelief at what had happened. They had wanted it for so long, almost from the beginning, but Vincent had never before allowed himself to be in such intimate contact with her, fearing his Dark side might take over when roused.

Later, as she looked at him while he slept, he looked more peaceful than Catherine had ever seen him and she had never felt so much love for him. For the moment, none of their problems existed. They were just a man and a woman like any other, and their lovemaking had been everything she knew it would be.

Eventually she shifted position and his eyes flew open. He looked around anxiously for a few seconds before staring at her, his expression one of amazement.

"Catherine? I thought I was dreaming."

"No Vincent," she smiled. "You're really here, we really made love and. . ."

"Yes?"

"It was beautiful Vincent. Just beautiful. If you'll excuse the oldest cliché of all time... how was it for you?" For just an instant, his blue eyes misted.

"There are no words Catherine. Thank you."

"For curing your headache?"

"Yes. For curing my headache."

**The end.**