

*This story was inspired by the following screen cap challenge that was posted on the **Beauty and the Beast 1987 Community** Facebook page a while back: “B&B FANFIC IN ONE PHOTO! With this one screen cap (thank you, CABB!) you can create your very own Continued Classic story! [Yes, we know it's really baby Luke, but work with us here!] Two smiling lovers gazing at a child...the perfect picture of a family unit...the story kind of writes itself, doesn't it?!”*



## **No Ordinary Love, No Ordinary Child**

By Barbara Handshy Anderson

*“To love is good, too: love being difficult. For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation...Love is a high inducement to the individual to ripen, to become something in himself, to become world for himself for another's sake, it is a great exacting claim upon him, something that chooses him out and calls him to vast things.”*

— *Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet*

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Vincent reclined on the bed as he watched the two most precious treasures of his heart. After two years, he could still hardly believe that she was his wife, and that this beautiful child was his son. No, *their* son.

He wondered if there would ever come a day when he didn't look upon this sight and marvel at the miraculous gifts that life had given him.

"Catherine," he said softly.

"Hmmm?" Catherine replied, only halfway paying attention to him as she rocked back and forth, with Jacob in her arms.

"Do you know what day is coming up?"

She smiled wistfully. "I do," she whispered, carrying a slumbering Jacob to his crib and then joining Vincent on the bed.

Snuggling into his waiting arms, she asked, "What are we going to do about it?"

He tightened his embrace of his beautiful wife and kissed her on the forehead. "I've been thinking."

She smiled mischievously and said, "Mmm, a dangerous past time."

He chuckled and raised his eyebrows. "I know... but someone's got to do it."

They both began to laugh and she silenced his laughter with a kiss.

"Mmmmm, Catherine." His voice had become husky. He grabbed both of her shoulders and moved her a little bit away from him and shook his head, as if to clear away cobwebs.

She looked puzzled. "What is it?" she asked.

He smiled and said, "You have a terrible effect on me. I can't think straight when you are this close to me, and yet, I can hardly bear it when you're not."

She tried to look serious, "Mmm. Yes, I see. That is a problem. There's only one solution."

"And what is that, pray tell?" He was now curious.



He could see the twinkle in her eyes as she said, “I’ll just have to stay here ... in your arms ... for the rest of our lives.”

He couldn’t help laughing. “Yes, I suppose that would be one solution ... but not very practical.”

She nodded reluctantly and sighed in agreement. “Regrettably.”

“Catherine, *please*, be serious for just a few minutes. I want to talk to you about our anniversary,” he pleaded.

“Fine ...” she said, kissing him again. “But under protest.”

“Duly noted,” he teased, trying to clear his head.

She grudgingly moved from the bed to the rocking chair Cullen had refinished for her, and gave him her full attention.

Sitting on the edge of the bed and facing her, he said, “It’s been five years, Catherine, five years since that terrible ... wonderful, miraculous night.”

“Yes ... I know,” she whispered reverently. “Five amazing years.”

“I want to do something special with you... *for* you. Take you somewhere special,” he suggested.

“That sounds promising.” She smiled lovingly in anticipation. “What have you got in mind?”

“I want to take you to see a part of the tunnels that you have never seen. I want to take you to the Crystal Cavern.”

“But I *have* seen it, Vincent. You’ve taken me there many times ... with your words,” Catherine replied. “And I carry a piece of it with me always,” she said, lifting the crystal that hung about her neck.

“But, Catherine, I want you to *see it*, experience it for yourself, with your own eyes,” he pleaded. He had asked her to go with him a few times since they were married, but she had always found a reasonable excuse as to why she couldn’t go.

*Vincent asks so little of me, she thought. I know he’s trying to give me a precious gift, something that he cherishes, but... She just didn’t see how they could do it.*

Catherine was silent.

“What are you thinking?” Vincent asked.

“Vincent,” Catherine, began hesitantly. “The Crystal Cavern is *very* deep. It will take a couple of days to go there and back. I don’t see how we can. Jacob is too little to go that far. And think of all the supplies we would need to carry for him.”

Vincent shook his head. “No, Catherine. I want to take *you* ... for our anniversary. Jacob would stay here.”

She was silent again. He thought he could see her eyes as they widened at his suggestion. He could feel the tension rising within her.

“What is the problem?”

“It’s just that I ... I’ve never been away from him for that long. Not since ... not since you rescued us from ...” She looked at him with ... what was it? Fear?

Vincent sighed. He understood that it was something deeper than being separated from Jacob for two days, but he persisted. Reaching for her hands, he said, “That is true, but you are away from him every day, when you go to work.”

“But never overnight.” She paused.

Vincent could see that she was grappling with something as she chewed her bottom lip.

“I want to ... *really*, I do. I would love to see the cavern. But what if he needs us in the night? What if he wakes up and we aren’t here and he’s afraid?”

Vincent was thoughtful for a moment. He could see that he needed to proceed carefully. If he pushed her, she might dig in her heels.

After a time, he gently asked, “What is it that you are really afraid of, Catherine? Are you worried he won’t be safe here with Father, and Mary, and the others?”

“I know he’s safe here. I have no doubt about that. I guess ... I don’t know.” She spoke slowly and introspectively. “But the moment you suggested it, I was gripped by a fear that I can’t quite define.”



Vincent nodded, “Yes, I know. I felt it. I could see it. It was ... unexpected?”

“Yes ... unexpected ... *and* ... illogical.” She thought for a moment. “All right, I’ll go. We will have to choose someone dependable who is willing to babysit him for two days. It’s a big job. It would be too much to ask of Mary or Father. It needs to be someone who has the energy to keep up with him.”

“Catherine ... are you certain you want to do this?”

Catherine looked into his eyes. She knew there was no point in trying to hide the truth. She shook her head. “No, I’m not certain, not certain at all. But I know that you’re trying to share something with me, something that is very dear to you. Part of me is screaming, ‘Don’t do it, don’t let Jacob out of your sight,’ and the other part is saying that I’m being completely irrational. You have always encouraged me to face my fears. Maybe by facing it I can give it a name and it will no longer frighten me.”

Vincent could feel the conflict within her. He could feel her fear rising like a tide, and he could also feel her battling to keep it at bay. He leaned closer until their foreheads were touching and he whispered, “You are the most remarkable woman I have ever known. I love you.”

She smiled and breathed deeply as if to inhale the loveliness of those words as they lingered in the air. “Yes, I know you do. It’s a good thing too, because you’re stuck with me now.” They both laughed softly. “May I come back to bed now and show you just how *much* I love you?” she asked.

He smiled knowingly and pulled her to him. There was no better feeling in the world than having this courageous, beautiful woman in his arms.

And there was no other place in all the world that she would rather be.

He could feel that, too.

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Over the next several days, Catherine observed how their fellow tunnel family interacted with Jacob. Jacob was never lacking for love and attention.

She became increasingly aware of how much Mouse loved to play with Jacob and how much Jacob loved Mouse. When Mouse was with him, Jacob talked nonstop, and Mouse actually talked back.

Jacob's speech had not developed as quickly as his physical abilities and it sometimes concerned Catherine that other children his age seemed more advanced. He seemed to understand what people were saying to him, and he did talk, but very few of his words were understandable.

Peter assured her that he was perfectly fine and that each child develops at their own rate. He gently reminded her that even Albert Einstein was four years old before he began to speak.

Still, like a typical concerned mother, she worried that Jacob's vocabulary was not developing as quickly as it should.

Mouse seemed to be the only one who could understand him, and Jacob seemed keenly aware of it.

Watching one such exchange, Catherine asked, "Mouse, how is it that you can understand what Jacob is saying when nobody else can?"

Mouse looked at her in surprise. "Nobody else can? Mouse didn't know. Not even Catherine?"

Catherine smiled and shook her head. "No, Mouse, not really. Sometimes I think I understand what he needs by the sound of his cry or the look in his eyes. But I'm just guessing."

Mouse shook his head. "No, Catherine. Not guessing. Catherine *knows*." He pointed to his head and said, "Not here." Then he pointed to his heart and said, "Here."

He could tell she still didn't understand what he was trying to explain. Letting out an exasperated sigh, he attempted to elucidate. "When Mouse is small," he began, "Vincent finds Mouse. Mouse can't talk. Nobody understands Mouse. *Nobody listens*. Vincent listens. Vincent understands." He put his hand over his heart, again. "Vincent listens here."

Catherine was beginning to understand. She nodded in amazed agreement. "Yes, Mouse, you're right. That *is* where Vincent listens."



Mouse continued, “Vincent listens to Mouse. Vincent understands Mouse. Vincent teaches Mouse to listen. Vincent teaches Mouse to talk. Now Mouse teaches Jacob.”

Catherine nodded. She was astounded, and touched, by the revelation. “You know, Mouse, sometimes I think that you’re the smartest person I know.”

Mouse was a little embarrassed by the compliment. He smiled and said, “Not smart. Just Mouse.”

Catherine laughed and nodded. “Well, Mouse, I think ‘just Mouse’ is just fine. Better than fine.”

And they both laughed.

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“So, have you thought about who you would like to care for Jacob while we’re away?” Vincent asked.

Looking up from the files she had brought home from work, she smiled at the beautiful man that she loved. “I have. But I think it’s a decision we should make together.”

He nodded in agreement. “So? Who do you think we should ask?”

“I don’t want to influence your decision, Vincent.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” he replied.

She smiled and said, “Why don’t we both say it at the same time then?”

Vincent nodded, willingly indulging her wish.

They both began to count together. “One, two, three ...”

Simultaneously, they both said, “MOUSE”

Looking at each other in surprise, they both spoke in tandem again, “Really?”

At this, they began to laugh.

“Catherine, I must say, I’m surprised. I was hesitant to suggest him. I didn’t think you would approve. What made you choose him?”

Catherine told him of her observations over the last several days, and of the conversation she'd had with Mouse. And the amazing discovery she had made.

Vincent listened intently.

“Vincent, do you realize the legacy that all of you have created here?”

Not sure that he understood what she was asking, he shook his head. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

She smiled to herself, remembering Mouse’s attempt to make her understand. “Father and others who took you in. They took you into their hearts. They loved you without question, in spite of fear, in spite of not understanding what you were, or what you might become.

“And then you did that for Mouse. You opened your heart and you understood him, when no one else could. You taught him to speak, Vincent. Until Mouse explained it to me I thought that was all you’d done. But the most important thing you did was to teach him how to listen and understand ...”

She placed her hand over his heart and said, “You taught Mouse how to listen and to speak with his heart. And now ... *you and Mouse are teaching our son.*” She looked at him lovingly and said, “It’s a wonderful legacy of love.”

Taking her in his arms he said, “Yes, now I understand. I believe we are all teaching him. You are part of that legacy too, Catherine.”

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Mouse’s eyes were as big as saucers at Vincent’s request. “Me? Vincent trusts Mouse? ... to watch Jacob?”

Vincent laughed. “Yes, Mouse. I don’t know why you are so surprised. You seem very comfortable with Jacob. And the others would help you. But you would be in charge.”

Still unconvinced, Mouse said, “Catherine ... *trusts* ... Mouse too?”

“Yes, Mouse. She chose you very carefully. We both ... chose you together. Will you do it?” Vincent asked again.

Mouse seemed to ponder for a moment and then nodded emphatically. “Okay Good! Okay Fine! Yes, Mouse will do it.” Grabbing Vincent’s hand he



shook it vigorously, up and down. "Meet you Saturday morning. Your chamber. Okay, good. Okay, fine?"

"Okay, good, Mouse," Vincent said, trying not to laugh. "... and thank you."

As Vincent left the chamber. Mouse looked at Arthur, his eyes wide in shock that such a responsibility would fall to him. Picking Arthur up from his comfortable slumber, he asked, "Did you hear that, Arthur? Catherine wants Mouse to watch Jacob."

A look of fear again crossed his face. "Big job. Can't let Vincent down. Can't lose Jacob. That would be bad." He gasped. "Worse than bad." He gasped again. "Worse than worst!"

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On the eve of their trek, Catherine seemed distracted, as they prepared their backpacks for the trip to the lower tunnels. Whether she was Above or Below, Vincent's worries had grown throughout the week, as her stress levels had slowly increased as the day drew near. Until one afternoon Vincent felt an intense wave of panic wash over her, before she quickly tamped it down. He could almost feel her breathing deeply, in an effort to calm herself.

He later asked her about it, but she insisted she was fine. Since then, he had felt the waves of panic return, periodically, only to be replaced soon after by a feeling of contentment and anticipation. He hoped that meant she was beginning to look forward to their trip together. But he also noted the return of the nightmares that had plagued her in the early days after he had rescued her and brought her to live Below.

What she dreamed, he didn't know, but he was often awakened by the nightmares as she cried out. It had been over a year since she had struggled with them so intensely. Each morning though, she seemed fine, as if she was unaware of her restless sleep.

Vincent was beginning to wonder if he was asking too much. Even now, as he watched her packing, he could feel the emotions churning within her.

Finally, he took her hands in his and drew her away from the task at hand.

Catherine knew her inner turmoil was something he could feel. It was difficult for her to hide it from him. She took the solace he offered her and buried herself in the softness of the vest that covered his chest, and the safe circle of his arms. Stroking her back and lightly brushing his lips across the top of her head “We don’t have to do this, Catherine,” he whispered. “Perhaps another time would be better.”

Even as he said it, he could feel her stubborn determination taking over.

She laughed, and shook her head, as if amused by a secret joke, that made his words sound ridiculous to her. “No, Vincent, the time is *now*. Perhaps *we* don’t have to do this ... but *I do*. Whether I want to or not, the time is now and *I am* going to do this.”

Something in the way she spoke made him wonder. “We are speaking of the trip to the Crystal Cavern, aren’t we?” he asked.

She hesitated slightly before answering him. “Yes, of course that’s what we’re talking about. What else could it be?” With that, she turned and resumed her task.

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When Saturday morning finally arrived, Mouse followed Vincent and Catherine back to their chamber after breakfast, so they could give him last minute instructions.

Vincent could feel Catherine’s anxiety ... and he could clearly see Mouse’s.

With little Jacob protectively in her arms she gave Mouse a tour of the room as if he had never been there before.

“All of Jacob’s clothes are here in this dresser. His diapers are here, and if you aren’t near our chamber, then there are diapers in the nursery chamber. Mary can show you where. He likes to play with Luke and Katie, but sometimes Luke forgets that he’s bigger and stronger than they are. You must keep a close eye on them. He needs to take a nap at one o’clock, or he will be cranky for the rest of the day. He’ll go to sleep if you read him a story. His books are over here on his book shelf. You might want to take a nap when he does, or he’ll wear you out. Oh, and he likes to sleep with this teddy bear ... He won’t sleep through the night without it. And make sure he has a bath before bedtime. It will help him to settle down....”



She looked over at Vincent who was patiently waiting for her to run out of things to say.

“... and Mouse?”

“Yes, Catherine?”

“Thank you!” she said, as she kissed Mouse on the cheek.

Mouse’s eyes widened in surprise, at the unexpected gesture. He smiled and said, “Okay, good! Okay, fine! Give Mouse Jacob now,” as he held out his arms to receive her precious package.

After handing him off, she gave Jacob one last kiss. “I love you, Jake. Be good for Mouse, okay?”

Vincent came forward and tousled Jacob’s hair and kissed his son. “Be good for Mouse. We will see you tomorrow night. I love you.”

With one last kiss bestowed on the top of Jacob’s head, Vincent turned, took Catherine’s hand, and they walked out together.

Even though Jacob was not making a fuss, Vincent could feel his wife’s inner turmoil, but he said nothing, for fear she would change her mind.

They walked hand in hand in silence until they reached the steps that led to the Great Hall. Catherine suddenly stopped, and leaned against the wall with her eyes closed.

“Catherine?” Vincent asked. “Are you all right?”

She shook her head, but didn’t speak.

With some trepidation, he asked, “Do you want to go back?”

She opened her eyes and looked at him beseechingly... and then she shook her head. “No,” she said firmly.

Vincent sighed. “Catherine ... your words say ‘no’, but everything else about you says ‘yes’. I will understand if you do ... want to go back. I’ve been feeling your fear increasing with each passing day.”

She shook her head more emphatically, “NO! I won’t go back, Vincent. I won’t give in to it! I have learned that the only way to conquer my fears is to face them, and this is no time to stop.”

She reached out to him and grabbed his vest, pulling him close. “Hold me, Vincent ... Please.”

He obediently enveloped her in the safety of his arms. He could feel her fears and anxiety melting away, in the warmth of his love.

As her heartbeat slowed and her breathing became more even, she loosened her grip on him and they continued their journey.

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As Mouse and Jacob watched Vincent and Catherine leave, Mouse turned to Jacob and spoke to him as he would any other person in the tunnels. “Okay good. Okay fine. What does Jacob want to do?”

“Cookie.”

“Cookie?” Mouse looked at Jacob with surprise and shook his head. “Just ate breakfast. Can’t go back yet. William won’t like.”

“Cookie, Mouse, Cookie, Mouse,” Jacob insisted as he pointed in the direction of the book shelf.

Mouse carried him over to the book shelf, and Jacob began to clap his hands. “Cookie book. Cookie book.”

When Mouse reached the bookshelf, sure enough there were several books laying on their backs as if they had recently been read and not properly put away.

“Ohhhhh, Cookie book? Jacob wants a book?”

Lifting up the first book, Mouse slowly read the title, “Milk and Cookies. Then looking at the next one, he read, “Cookie Monster and the Cookie Tree ... OH, and The Gingerbread Man.” Mouse laughed when he picked up the last one. “If You Give a Mouse a Cookie.”

Jacob began to clap his hands, again. “Mouse cookie book, Mouse cookie book.” He jumped up and down in Mouse’s arms.

Mouse laughed. “Okay good. Okay fine, Jacob. Mouse will read.”

He settled on Vincent and Catherine’s large bed with Jacob safely in the middle, and opened the one of the books.



“ ‘*If you give a mouse a cookie, he’s going to ask for a glass of milk,*’ ”  
Mouse read.

Mouse paused and nodded, as he looked at Jacob. “Mouse likes milk with cookies too!”

“Cookie, Mouse, cookie” Jacob said, as he jumped up and down excitedly. He slapped his hand on the book and pointed to the next page.

“Okay good. Okay fine ... ‘*When you give him the milk ...*’”

“Did I hear someone say ‘cookies?’” came a voice from the chamber entrance.

Mouse’s eyes grew wide, as he recognized the voice of his friend, Jamie. “Did Jacob hear that?” he whispered. “Mouse thinks we have visitor.”

Jacob began laughing and capping his hands as Jamie appeared in the entrance.

“What are you doing, Mouse? Are you and Jacob all right? I thought you might be lonely.”

“Not lonely,” Mouse replied. “Reading.”

“Cookie book!” Jacob said, and slapped the book again.

Jamie took a seat near the bed, and Mouse continued reading. One by one, the Tunnel children wandered into the room to check on Jacob and Mouse. Before the book was finished the chamber was filled with tunnel children, all wanting to make sure that Jacob didn’t notice his parents were gone.

Jacob laughed and clapped, as his tunnel friends crowded onto the large bed, and laughed and played with him. It wasn’t long before pillows were flying, and children were jumping up and down on the bouncy mattress.

Passing Vincent and Catherine’s chamber, Father was surprised to hear screaming, fits of giggling, and the loud squeaks from distressed mattress springs.

“WHAT IN HEAVEN’S NAME IS GOING ON IN HERE?!?” came Father’s loud and indignant voice over the din.

Immediately, all the laughter stopped, and everyone looked wide-eyed and frightened at Father’s stern figure.

Suddenly there was a loud cracking sound and everyone began screaming, as one side of the bed collapsed. Children of all sizes rolled off onto the floor and landed at Father's feet.

Mouse thought quickly as the rest of the bed frame gave way, and grabbed little Jacob, holding him safely, high in the air.

For a moment there was confusion and mayhem as children ran wildly past Father and off to safer regions of the Tunnels. All except Mouse, Jamie, and of course, Jacob.

Little Jacob was the first to speak. "Cookie, Pampaw!" he said clapping his hands and holding them out to his grandfather.

Father's heart melted, and he reached to receive his grandson. "It looks like you will have your hands full, Mouse. Mary sent me to tell you that we will help, if you need us."

Mouse smiled broadly. "Thanks. Mouse can do it. Vincent and Catherine said so." He puffed his chest up a little bit. "Trust Mouse!" he exclaimed proudly.

As he looked at the broken bed, a confused look crossed his face. "Don't know why..."

Father chuckled. He didn't tell Mouse that he had wondered the same thing. But he trusted Vincent and Catherine's judgment. *They know what's best for their own child*, he'd concluded. Nevertheless, he was determined to keep an eye on them both.

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Vincent and Catherine took their time as they journeyed to the deeper tunnels. Though Vincent was familiar with the terrain, Catherine had never been this far down, and he wanted to show her some of the things that had always drawn him there.

Just as Catherine was beginning to feel fatigued, Vincent stopped and turned to face her.

"We are nearly there, Catherine."

"To the Crystal Cavern?"



He shook his head, “No, that is a little farther. We will go there tomorrow morning. We’re almost to where we will camp for the night. Before we get there, though, there is something I want to show you.”

Catherine reached for his hand, “You lead, Vincent. I’ll follow you anywhere,” she said, with a sparkle in her eye.

“That I know, Catherine,” he said, returning her look of love. “You have already convinced me of that ... many times,”

He spoke softly as they proceeded forward. “When I was a boy ... there came a time when the home tunnels began to close in on me. When Devin and my friends became old enough, they began to venture out of the tunnels to explore the world Above on their own.” He sighed deeply as he remembered that difficult time.

“They began going places that I could not go, and doing things that I could not do. They left me behind.”

Catherine squeezed his hand. “That must have been a painful time for you.”

“Yes,” he whispered. He was quiet for a moment, as he recalled the memory. “They tried to include me by telling me every detail of their adventures ... As much as I enjoy that now ... back then ... it only made it all the more painful. I understood what they were trying to do. They didn’t mean to hurt me. More and more, I found myself ... left behind ... and left alone. Or worse, I was left to play in the nursery with the little children. I hated my predicament.”

He laughed and said, “You might say I ‘troubled deaf heaven with my bootless cries and looked upon myself and cursed my fate’...”<sup>1</sup>

She ached for the lonely child he had been.

“Did you ‘all alone bewep your outcast state?’” she asked.

He could hear the compassion and understanding in her voice.

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<sup>1</sup> From Shakespeare’s Sonnet XXIX.

“I am ashamed now to say that, yes, I did indeed indulge in such behavior ... and on more than one occasion. I wasn’t very pleasant for anyone to be around. There were many times when I wasn’t fit company for man nor ...”

Catherine gasped. *Is he really going to say it?* she wondered.

He stopped himself when he saw the look on her face. He took her in his arms. *How is it that this angel has chosen to love me?* he wondered. He never ceased to be amazed by the depth of her concern for him.

“After a while,” he continued, “I began to wander these lower tunnels on my own. Father had forbidden me to venture Above, but he had never specifically forbidden me from venturing Below.

“Most of the time the other children didn’t go any deeper than the Great Hall ... and even that was only on occasion. Below the Great Hall were the catacombs, and that was even a place most of the adults would only go as required.

“I decided that if I couldn’t have an adventure Above, then I would find a way to compensate and have my own adventures, here Below.”

“Didn’t it make you feel even more isolated to wander in the dark all alone?” she wondered.

“On the contrary, it actually helped to ease my pain. At first I kept it to myself. I didn’t even tell Devin. I felt like Marco Polo, and Aladdin, and Christopher Columbus, all rolled into one.”

“Or Tom Sawyer in McDougal’s Cave?” she mused.

“Exactly.” He laughed and squeezed her hand, thankful that she understood. “One day in my wanderings, I stumbled upon something that I thought was truly amazing. Over the years, I came back again and again, to be sure that it was real and not something I had imagined.”

“What was it? Is that what you want to show me now?”

He guided her around a bend in the path that revealed a large niche in the cave wall. The floor of the niche appeared to be white and smooth in some places, from centuries of mineral deposits caused by dripping water. Hanging from the top of it were several stalactites. The largest, nearly in the middle, looked to be about 5



½ feet long and 3 or 4 feet wide. It was hollow, shaped very much like a human heart, and seemed to glow red from the inside.



“It’s amazing, Vincent ... and a little creepy. What makes it glow like that?”

Vincent laughed. “It took me a while to figure that out. I am fairly certain it’s the sun. There must be an opening up above that lets in some light. It glows red like that at sunset. At sunrise, it is a softer shade of pink. When the sun is at its

height, it doesn’t have much color at all. It’s just a soft white light. On rainy days, the heart is darkened and water drips from it, as if it’s weeping.”

She stood, staring at it. “So he *was* right. It’s true,” she whispered.

“Who was right? What’s true, Catherine?”

She smiled and said, “Art Garfunkel ... He sang that ‘there’s a heart that lives in New York.’” Still smiling, she looked at him with eyes filled with wonder and said, “*And here it is*.”<sup>2</sup>

He smiled, and nodded as he whispered, “Yes.”

She put her hand up to his cheek and looking into his amazing azure eyes, she whispered, “Perhaps ‘deaf heaven’ wasn’t as deaf as you thought it was.”

“No.” He laughed softly. “I’ve learned that heaven isn’t deaf at all. I just needed to learn to be patient and believe that there were things that heaven had in store ... even for me.”

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<sup>2</sup> This particular stalactite is actually known as ‘The Heart of Timpanogos’ and resides inside of Timpanogos Cave National Monument in American Fork, Utah. <http://www.nps.gov/tica/learn/historyculture/the-legend-of-timpanogos.htm>

Catherine smiled knowingly and stroked his cheek. “Things that heaven had in store for us both.”

“ ‘...believe in a love that is being stored up for you like an inheritance,’ ” he quoted. “ ‘...and have faith that in this love there is a strength and a blessing so large that you can travel as far as you wish without having to step outside it.’ ”

“Rilke?” she asked.

“Yes,” he whispered, nodding. “I’ve often wondered if the young poet he was writing took his words to heart. I certainly did. There were so many times I felt as if he’d written those letters specifically to me. Other than Father, I’m not sure any one man has influenced my life more.”

“Not even Shakespeare?”

Vincent laughed and pulled her back into his arms. “Well, Shakespeare has certainly had his moments, hasn’t he?”

She laughed softly as his lips caressed hers. “Mmmm, hmmm.”

“How much farther is it to the Crystal Cavern?” Catherine asked at length.

“Not far. But we won’t go there tonight.” He took her hand and led her through a narrow opening in the tunnel wall. “Close your eyes for a moment, Catherine, and take my hand. I have a surprise.”

She laughed as he led her down a short side tunnel.

“Keep them closed for a moment until I tell you to open them.”

“They’re closed,” she assured him.

Even with her eyes shut, she could detect the sweet scent of roses. Her stomach rumbled at the smell of freshly baked bread and something Italian.

Pulling her close to his side, he said, “All right, Catherine, you can open your eyes.”

As she opened her eyes, she was unprepared for what she saw. It was a spacious chamber. Candles flickered in the many niches that had been painstakingly carved into the walls. On one side stood a crocheted lace-covered table set for two, and against the far wall was a beautiful antique four poster bed, covered with a beautiful rose-appliqued quilt. Rose petals were strewn over the



bedspread that graced the large bed. More rose petals lay, scattered on the floor. Soft candlelight gave the room the appearance that she was standing in a beautiful dream.

“Vincent,” she whispered in disbelief. “Oh, Vincent. I must say, I like your idea of camping. It’s straight out of a fantasy. How in the world ... did you do all this?”

Vincent looked satisfied. It gave him great pleasure to be able to please her. “I can’t take all the credit,” he admitted. “It’s a gift to us, from Kanin and Olivia, and the others. He’s been working on this chamber for us for a long time. It’s all ours, Catherine. For whenever we want to get away for a little while.”

Catherine recalled the night they had prepared a similar chamber for Kanin and Olivia. She remembered how deeply she’d ached to have such a place for herself and Vincent to share. At the time, it had seemed like such an impossible dream. She also recalled how she’d envied what Kanin and Olivia shared together, and then later how guilty she’d felt for having fleetingly begrudged them such happiness.

Vincent recalled that evening as well. How much it had hurt him to feel her longing and know he could never give her such a gift, that they could never share the kind of life that Kanin and Olivia had. Back then, he couldn’t imagine how their mutual dream could ever become a reality. It was Catherine’s faith that eventually taught him that with love, all things were, *indeed*, possible.

Catherine was speechless, as she reached to touch the exquisitely beautiful quilt that covered the bed.

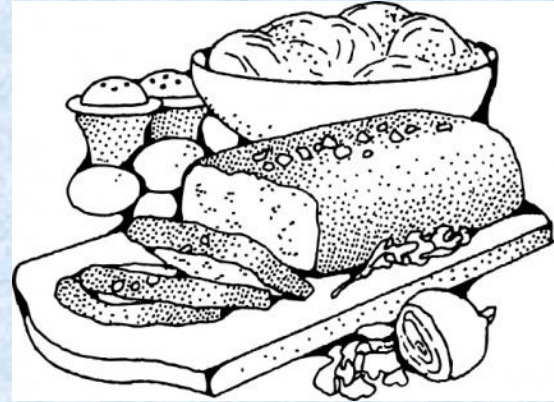
“Mary and Olivia and several of the other women made the quilt,” Vincent explained. “For both of us.”

Overwhelmed by the generosity of her Tunnel family, Catherine looked up at him with tears in her eyes. “It’s perfect,” was all she said.

“Cullen helped me refurbish the bed,” he continued. “Elizabeth painted the roses on the headboard. Rebecca made the candles. Lena crocheted the tablecloth. And William is responsible for the meal.”

She walked across the room into his waiting arms. “Then we better not let William’s gift go to waste.”

They talked and laughed easily with each other, as they enjoyed the meal of lasagna and fresh bread William had prepared for them. As they finished their dessert of Dutch apple pie, Catherine looked around her in wonder.



“How in the world did you pull this off without me knowing? How did you manage a hot meal and the newly lit candles? Everything is like it was set up just before we arrived ... but I didn’t see anyone on the trail.”

Vincent smiled at how smoothly everything had worked out. “I showed Brooke and Michael how to get here. They are the ones who lit the candles and put the food over the brazier to warm it up. They left the main tunnels this morning about an hour ahead of us. Then they hid in a side tunnel along the trail, until we passed by.”

Catherine rose to retrieve something from the top of her backpack. Returning, she placed a small box on the table in front of him. “I have a little something for you too. Happy Anniversary, Vincent.”



Looking at the gift she had placed before him, he felt a shadow pass over his heart. It was perfect, with its bright, uncrinkled, shiny wrapping paper, and crisp bright bow. But somehow, it looked out of place in the earthen, home-spun room. To Vincent, it seemed like a subtle reminder of her life Above, and all that he was unable to give her. “It looks expensive,” was all he said.

“You can’t possibly tell that by the box,” she said with a smile.

“It looks like it’s been professionally wrapped. Like it’s something from a department store.”

“Jenny helped me,” she admitted. “I wanted it to look special. She’s always had a knack for that sort of thing. I’m not very good at wrapping.”

When Vincent made no move to open the box, she could see that he looked upset.



“What’s wrong? She asked, her smile slowly fading. She was confused by the sudden change in his mood.

“I’m sorry, Catherine. It’s just that...” his voice trailed off.

“What?” She shook her head slightly, trying to understand. “Why does it matter how it’s wrapped? Would you feel better if I’d put it in a brown paper sack?” She was stung by his reaction to her offering. When he still made no move to open the gift, she asked. “You can give me all of this and yet you can’t accept a small gift box?”

“You can go into any store,” Vincent replied. “And buy something and have it wrapped like this ... All I have to give you is ... other people’s cast offs,” he explained dejectedly.

“That’s not true,” she protested.

“*It is true!* Look at this ...” he swept his arm around indicating the room. Everything seemed to have lost its sheen. He looked around and saw only shabby old furniture and repurposed garbage in a hole in the ground fit more for hibernating bears, than for humans. “I’ve dug a hole in the ground and offered it to you, like it was ... like it was something you would want.”

“*It is...* something I want,” she insisted. “I love it!”

“No ... you settle for what I have to offer, but Catherine, you deserve so much more.”

Catherine looked at him in disbelief. “Why do you *still* believe that? **How** can you *still* ... believe that? After all this time.”

He didn’t answer. His doubts about himself and the value of his gifts touched and hurt her deeply.

“Why can’t you believe that you have so much to offer, so much that I am so grateful for? Vincent, I don’t know how to refinish furniture, or carve stone, or paint roses ... I don’t even know how to quilt ... I’m learning, but *that* quilt...” she said, looking toward the bed. “I’m not sure I’ll *ever* be able to do anything *like that*. What’s in this box ... it’s the best I have to offer you ... and you’re rejecting it before you even know what it is. Are these doubts really going to surface every anniversary ... every birthday ... every Christmas for the rest of our lives?”

She could feel she was on the verge of tears. She fought to keep them back, but she felt the salt stinging her eyes.

*This day has been so perfect. How could it go so wrong?* she wondered.

He could feel that his self-doubts had hurt her. He also knew how she hated it when he hid his true feelings from her. He sighed. “Catherine, I know how you were raised. You had ... everything. Sometimes ... I still can’t believe that you chose me, when I had so little to offer you... when I *still* have so little to offer.”

Catherine was frustrated that he sometimes still measured his value by the standards of a world he wasn’t even a part of, had *never* been a part of. *How can I make him understand*, she asked herself. *How can I make him see?*

“Vincent... don’t you understand? It’s *you*, not me, who has everything to offer ... everything that matters, anyway. It’s you, who has given me *everything* that you are ... *everything* that you have. Yes, I had *things*. I had money. *I still do*, if we need it. But my life before you was so ... empty. I was starving for something I couldn’t find, something no amount of money could ever satisfy. *I should know*, I tried to fill that emptiness with the things money *could* buy. I even believed that I *was* wealthy ... that is ... until I met you ... and I realized how poor I really was ...”

She paused and gazed at the incredible man that she loved and silently willed him to understand.

He looked up from his despair, wondering why she had stopped speaking. The love he saw in her eyes was undeniable. The acceptance and compassion, the passion and frustration he felt in her was overwhelming. He waited for her to continue.

“Until I met you, I had no idea what *true* wealth even was, or how much of it I lacked. I can never repay the abundance you and others here have so freely given me. *Please*, believe that.”

He was humbled by her words and filled with regret for the pain he had caused her.

“I’m sorry, Catherine. I know you’re right. I shouldn’t let myself think like that. But from time to time ... I just wish I could walk into a store and buy something for you, a ring or a locket or some piece of jewelry, something as



beautiful as you deserve. Something that has never been owned by anyone else, or retrieved from a dumpster, or found in a charity bin.”

She looked at him sympathetically and smiled softly. “ ‘Rings and jewels are not gifts’, Vincent, ‘only apologies for gifts. The only *true* gift is a portion of thyself.’<sup>3</sup> ... and you give me that, so generously, *every ... single ... day.*”

Her words were like a soothing balm to his aching heart.

“Not just a portion, Vincent. You give of yourself fully and completely.”

He bowed his head, too ashamed to look at the pain in her eyes. “I’m sorry... Catherine.” he said, unable to look her in the eye. “Sometimes I forget that.”

She knelt in front of him, leaning against his knees so that she could look up into his face. “I won’t let you forget.” She pressed one hand against his heart. “You don’t need to apologize, Vincent ... you only need to believe me.”

He looked up enough to gaze at the incredible woman that Heaven had blessed him with. “When you’re by my side, I think I can believe just about anything,” he whispered, reaching to gently stroke the side of her face.

She reached for the gift box. “*Believe me,*” she said, holding it up for him to see. “I promise you, this is no apology for a gift, it’s only a... uhm ...”

“ ‘A portion of thyself?’ ” he suggested.

“Open it and find out,” she suggested, suddenly afraid that he might not want it. “Please?”



He reached to accept her gift as well as her forgiveness. After removing the ribbon and lifting the lid, he reached in to carefully remove the folded tissue paper. He looked confused as he lifted out what appeared to be a small toy.

“Isn’t this a Jacob’s old rattle?”

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased quote attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

She smiled tentatively. “There’s more.”

He reached back into the box and pulled out a very scuffed pair of baby shoes. “These are Jacob’s first pair of shoes. I don’t understand.”

Suddenly feeling her stomach doing summersaults, she began. “I ... uhm ... I’ve been feeling pretty tired and run down lately. I popped in to see Peter the other day, to see if he could give me some vitamins or iron tablets ... something to give me a boost of energy. He ran a few tests ... and ... well ... it turns out ...that I ... uhm ... He says I’m ... pregnant.”

Vincent was unsure that he had heard her correctly. “Pregnant?” he echoed her last word carefully. “But I thought you were ... How?”

Silently praying that he would be happy about it, she nodded. “I didn’t do it on purpose, Vincent, *I promise.*” She bit her lower lip and closed her eyes before continuing. “I ... uhm ... I forgot to take my pills for about a week, during the McMillan trial. I guess I just got so involved in the case that I ...” She paused and took a deep breath. “Anyway, I ... I didn’t think it was a big deal. Peter said it takes several weeks for the hormones to work their way out of the system, so I started taking them again as soon as I realized ... but I guess he was wrong.”

Vincent only stared at her blankly in stunned silence.

So far, his reaction was doing little to calm her anxiety. “Sooo ... what do you think?” she asked, praying that he wouldn’t be upset.

“You’re ... *pregnant?*” he asked again. “Are you *sure?*”

She nodded. “Yes. One hundred percent sure.”

“And you’re okay? And the baby’s okay?”

She nodded again, “As far as Peter can tell, everything’s fine.”

He dropped his head so Catherine couldn’t quite see his face.

Still kneeling in front of him, she began to rub her hand along his thigh, trying to see the expression on his face. *Please...* she silently prayed. *Please be happy about this.*

“Vincent?” she asked tentatively. “Are you ... all right? Is *this* ... all right?”



He looked up and she could see a slow smile begin to spread across his face. He began to laugh and took her hands in his. Standing up, he brought her with him and pulled her into his arms.

“Am I all right?” He laughed again. Taking her face gently in his hands, he spoke softly. “Oh, Catherine ... I am so much more than ‘all right.’” He kissed her and then continued. “I never dared to believe that we would have more ... I just thought ...”

As his voice trailed off, Catherine spoke. “I know we should have discussed it first ... and I meant to ... but I wasn’t sure if you would--”

“But we did ... discuss it,” he corrected. “At least ... I told you ... I felt a longing in you. I thought that might be what it was, but I waited for you to bring it up. I didn’t think I had a right to ask you to--”

“Of course, you have the right,” she interrupted. “Vincent, this is a choice that we should have made together ... I’m sorry ... I didn’t mean for it to happen like this ... like it was an ... accident.”

Vincent tightened his embrace and assured her. “Don’t be sorry. Please ... *Please* don’t be sorry. I know we should have discussed it ... but since neither of us did ... it seems that fate has made the decision for us... again ...” He laughed again, and kissed the beautiful woman that had chosen to love him.

Looking into her eyes, he searched for the tiniest shred of doubt or fear, but could detect none. “So, we are *really* going to have another child?” he asked, still not quite believing it could be true.

She laughed and nodded. “Yes, Vincent, we really are.”

“Thank you, Catherine, for the best gift I could ever imagine.”

“Are you sure?” she teased, with a mischievous look in her eyes. “Because I could still go to a department store and get you something else...”

Their laughter seemed to echo through the lower tunnels, as they celebrated their love for one another late into the night.

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Mouse seemed very uncomfortable in the bathing chamber. He held out his naked little charge and said, “Here, Mary, you give bath. Mouse can watch.”

Mary stepped back and immediately declined the offer. “Oh no, Mouse. Vincent and Catherine left you in charge. This is your job. I’m only here to help.”

“But Mouse doesn’t know how,” he declared, his eyes wide as he began to panic. “Might hurt Jacob. Might drown Jacob. That would be bad.” He gasped. “Worse than bad. Here. Take. Please?” he begged.

“For heaven sake, Mouse. You won’t drown Jacob. He learned how to swim before he could walk. Besides, the water in the children’s pool isn’t that deep. Now pick up the soap and do your job. I’ll be right over here with the towel when you’re finished. I’ll even help you get him ready for bed. But this ...” she said indicating the bathing pool, “... is all for you.”

Mouse began to lather up the washcloth and bathe the squirming, giggling two year old. “Oh ... Oh ... sit still, Jacob,” Mouse pleaded in vain.

“Splash, Mouse! Play, Mouse!” Jacob squealed with delight. “Duckie!” he yelled, as his favorite bath time toy floated out of his reach. He began to pull away and whine.

Mouse held onto the child with one slippery hand and reached to retrieve the rubber duck. “Here, Jacob. Now hold on to Duckie this time... ‘kay?’”

“Kay!” Jacob replied, as he grabbed the toy and made a huge splash with it in the water. “Duckie!” He squealed with delight. Then, seeing the suds and water running down Mouse’s face made him laugh again. “Mouse wet? Mouse bath time?”

Mary couldn’t help but laugh, as she watched the scene with delight. What a sight it was to see Mouse in this predicament. She’d lost count of the times she’d emerged from bathing the children looking like she’d gone several rounds with a sea monster.

*It’s about time for Mouse to learn this, she thought. Perhaps one day, it will be his own child he is bathing here. She smiled at the thought of a little Mouse, running around the Tunnels. Now wouldn’t that be something?*

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Vincent and Catherine had finally gone to sleep, basking in the warmth of their love for one another, and the joy their gifts had brought.



The contentment was short lived, however.

Shortly before dawn, Vincent was awakened by her dreams. She was crying out in her sleep. He'd almost grown used to it. Her old nightmares had returned in the days leading up to their trek. So much so that he had considered calling it off. *Perhaps I am asking too much from her*, he'd wondered. But last night had banished all of his misgivings. Now, as he watched her struggling with the demons in her sleep, his doubts returned. He didn't awaken her ... he reached to take her in his arms, knowing that his embrace usually calmed her.

She awoke suddenly, screaming out for Vincent ... her heart was racing ... the panic she felt ... the terror was so close and so real. Only half awake, her eyes were wild with fear as she clutched onto him as if she were drowning.



by Renate Haller

Vincent reached out to her the instant she woke and pulled her close, in an effort to comfort her. He knew instinctively that words at this moment were not what she needed. It was his nearness, his strong arms around her, the calm beating of his heart, his breath in her hair that helped her to gain control of her emotions, as she clung to him.

As her racing heart slowed and her breathing became more even, she began to tremble, and then she began to cry.

Each sob felt as if his heart was being ripped from his chest. Vincent was confused. He could feel her inner turmoil. He could feel her intense emotion, but he didn't understand what it meant.

She had been so filled with joy only a few short hours before, she had literally glowed with her love for him ... and now ... now she was filled with ... what? ... Raw, abject terror?

It felt as if her fear was sucking every bit of oxygen from the room. But fear of what? Fear for Jacob? Was he in danger? No, he would feel that too, if that were the case. Or was it fear for this child she now carried? Fear of having this child ... his child? Fear that it might not be ... normal? Fear that it might be like ... him?

Vincent's mind raced with possibilities, but he was afraid to break the silence ... afraid to ask her ... afraid to hear the answer ... afraid of what it might be ...

She suddenly stopped crying and pulled herself away from him. Without speaking she fled from the chamber.

Vincent followed, not far behind. He found her leaning against the wall of the outer tunnel, staring silently at the heart rock formation.

"The sun must be rising," he said softly. "It's beginning to glow."

She only nodded.

"I've stood there too ... over the years, watching the heart like that, drawing strength from it. Would it help to talk about it?" he softly asked.

"I don't want to burden you, Vincent. I don't want to ruin our anniversary. Can we go on to the Crystal Cavern and forget about what just happened?"



“No,” he said. “The Crystal Cavern is a wondrous place, Catherine, that I wish to share with you. If you carry a heavy burden there, you won’t be able to enjoy its beauty.”

She silently contemplated his words as she breathed deeply.

“Catherine, if you are worried about Jacob, I will take you back right now. We can do this another time. I’ll understand.”

She closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and reached for his hand.

“Pregnant women can be very ... unpredictable and irrational and emotional, Vincent. You didn’t have the privilege of witnessing that when I was pregnant before.”

“I understand,” he said. “But that is not what this is ... not fully ... *is it?*”

She shook her head sadly and said, “No. Yes ... I don’t know... No. Not completely, anyway.”

“This is something deeper?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Something more frightening? ... more painful?”

She nodded again.

“Catherine ... if you are afraid ... to have this child ... I won’t force you ... I ... I would understand if you ... if you’re frightened to ...”

She rushed into his arms and put her hand to his lips before he could say another word.

Looking into his eyes, she said, “DON’T ... don’t even say it, Vincent. *Don’t ever ... think that.* I love you more than my own life. This child is a manifestation of that love. I would *never* be frightened to have your children.”

Vincent was not convinced. “I can feel your fear, Catherine. I feel your pain.”

“I know you do, but you don’t always understand it.”

“Then help me,” he pleaded. “*Help me* to understand it ... Share it with me so that I may help you.”

“All right,” she finally said. She took his hand and led him back to their bed.

Vincent silently followed. As he sat with his back against the headboard, she curled up close to him, and he enveloped her in the safety of his arms.

They sat there in silence for a long time. He could feel that she was drawing strength from him. Finally, she pulled back from him just enough so that she could look into his eyes.

“When you rescued Jacob and me from ... Gabriel ...” She spoke the name with reluctance.

Vincent only nodded. It was the first time he could remember her actually saying his name since he had brought her home over two years ago. In all that time she had never spoken of him, or what he had done to them.

She continued, “You never asked me ... to talk about it. Even after all this time you’ve never broached the subject. Why?”

Vincent was a little confused by her question. He answered, “When you were missing ... when Jacob was missing ... when I thought you were ... dead. I’ve never known such pain. I couldn’t imagine ... I *still* can’t imagine ... what it must have been like ... for you.”

He was silent for a moment. “When I brought you both home ... and you didn’t speak of it, I decided to give you time to heal. I thought that when you were ready to talk ... that you would. Then as time went by and you didn’t ... *ever* ... I thought perhaps you had dealt with it ... in your own way... but you didn’t. Did you?”

She shook her head. “No ... no, I didn’t. I buried it. I threw myself into activities ... into my new life with you ... with Jacob ... with my job ... with work in the Tunnels. I needed to push it out of my mind, out of my memory. It worked too ... as long as I could keep myself busy ... fill my days ... every minute of every day with ... working or taking care of Jacob ...*something* ... anything ... and fill my nights with ... loving you...” she said shyly.

“I have no complaints about that, Catherine,” Vincent whispered as he gently brushed her hair out of her eyes and swept it behind her ear, and gently kissing her forehead.



She couldn't help, but smile and blush a little at his candor.

Vincent smiled too.

"I buried it so well that I even convinced myself that I *had* dealt with it."

"But you hadn't?" he asked.

She shook her head. "No ... when you first asked me to come with you to the Crystal Cavern, I was overwhelmed by a fear that I couldn't name. It seemed irrational and unreasonable. I didn't understand what it was."

"And now? Now you do ... understand?"

She nodded, "I'm beginning to... I think that I was frightened by the prospect of not having my usual distractions... of having too much time to think. I dreamed ..."

"Yes, I know. Whenever you dream, I can feel your fear. It awakens me. I can't do anything for you unless you wake up. So I wait and watch over you and keep you safe."

She looked at him as if she was just realizing something. He could see a question in her eyes.

"What, Catherine?"

"Has it happened ... before? Have my dreams awakened you, before?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"How often?"

"I don't know... In the beginning it was nearly every night. Now it isn't as often... not every night ... but a week never goes by ... without it happening once or twice. The last few days it's been worse. All this time, all I could do is stay close ... in case you needed me. But when you awaken in the morning you seem fine... you don't seem to remember the dreams ... so I've never said anything."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I didn't know ... I didn't remember the dreams ... not until today." She stroked his face ... his gentle, loving face. "I'm sorry, Vincent ... that I have put you through that. You should have told me."

Brushing a tear from her cheek, Vincent shook his head. "No, Catherine. You needed time to heal. What happened to you, to us, was beyond ... beyond

anything imaginable ... I believed you needed to heal in your own way ... in your own time.”

“And now?” she asked.

“Now? ... I still feel the same. Perhaps this trip is something you needed. To get away from all the distractions you’ve created for yourself. Maybe now enough time has passed and it’s safe for you to look at it. Do you want to tell me what was so frightening in this dream?”

She drew close to him again and he wrapped his arms around her as tightly as he could. Within the safety of his arms Catherine began.

“I dreamed about him ... Gabriel. It happened again ... He found out that I was expecting another child ... your child ... and he was trying to kidnap me again. He was determined that this time the child would be his. I had Jacob in my arms and I was clearly *very* pregnant. I was trying to run. I was frantic ... and I couldn’t find you ... I thought he had you ... I thought I’d lost you. Everywhere I turned to escape, he was there ... laughing and ...”

She buried her face in Vincent’s chest. He could feel her trembling at the recollection and instinctively tightened his embrace. Stroking her hair and kissing the top of her head, he whispered, “It’s all right, Catherine. It was only a dream. I’m here and Gabriel is dead.”

She was content to stay there, quietly, in his arms.

“That isn’t everything, though ... is it?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Then tell me. You can tell me anything, Catherine,” he assured her.

She moved enough so that she could look him in the eye. “I don’t want you to misunderstand, Vincent. I don’t want you to think that I don’t want this child, because I do ... *I want this child ... with all my heart.*”

He reached up to put his hand on her face. He stroked her cheek with his thumb. “I know that, Catherine. I can feel that ... so strongly ... *Please ... tell me.*”

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Then, looking into his loving blue eyes again, she said, “Every day ... at work ... I see the worst of my world.



Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by how ugly and cruel and depraved the world ... no ... *people* can be."

"Yes," he said. "There are times that I can feel how it weighs on you."

"I know you do. I try to leave it up there. When I come home to you and Jacob ... I don't want to bring even the shadow of that evil into the tunnels with me."

He continued to stroke her face and her arm, so that she could feel his love.

"Since I found out that I was pregnant ... I ... I've been feeling these waves of panic that I can't always control and I wonder ..."

He waited.

"I wonder ... Am I being irresponsible? Am I being selfish? Do I have a right to bring a child into such a cruel and depraved world? Is it fair for me to inflict this world on an innocent child? ... And yet ... I can already imagine what he or she might look like, what it will feel like to hold this child, *our child*, in my arms. I'm already dreaming dreams that include *this* child."

He waited again ... he could feel that she was still trying to put her thoughts, her fears into words.

"When I found out I was pregnant with Jacob..." She smiled at the memory. "... I was amazed and shocked and filled with love, and wonder. But I didn't know then that ... I couldn't even imagine that I ... that I ..."

"What, Catherine? That you what?"

"That I couldn't protect him ... from ..."

"From Gabriel?"

"I couldn't protect him from ... *anything*." Her eyes filled again with tears as she spoke. "He was so tiny ... and so helpless ... and I ... I couldn't do *anything* ... except watch them take him away."

He held her close until she was able to gain control of herself. "Oh, Catherine," was all he said.

"How do people do it, Vincent? How do people kiss their children goodbye every morning and send them off to school? ... Not knowing if something will

happen to them ... if someone will grab them off the street or drive by shooting a gun? Or sell them drugs or ...”

“You do it,” he whispered. “Catherine. You kiss Jacob goodbye and go to work every day.”

“Yes, but I know he’s safe here. He’s surrounded by people who love him. Not everyone has that. And even then ... I know that my love can’t protect him from everything. *I can’t protect the people I love from anything.*”

He smiled and nodded. How well he knew that feeling. “Yes, I know, Catherine. I have those same fears when I kiss you goodbye every day. Not knowing what could happen to you ... up there. Knowing that *I cannot protect you from everything.*”

He could see ... he could feel her beginning to understand.

She nodded.

“Each day we live, Catherine ... is an act of faith. We cannot allow fear to govern our lives or it will destroy our happiness.”

She could feel his love and his understanding as he spoke. With each word, she could feel her fears beginning to subside.

“Yes, we must use caution and care ... but fear can deprive us of so much joy, and so many of life’s gifts. I learned that from you, Catherine.”

“I see so much ugliness in the world every day, Vincent. How can I not be afraid?”

He thought for a moment. “It *is* true, that you see so much of the ugliness of the world in your job. But don’t forget, there is much good in that world too, so much beauty, so many good people. You taught me that too. Do you remember the first time we walked the City together so you could show me its beauty?”

“It was Halloween.” She smiled at the thought of that night.

He held her a little tighter. “Yes, it was.”

Then he continued. “Can you imagine what would happen to that world if all of the good people decided not to bring children into it? *All the good would eventually die.* We bring children into this world because they are the hope that one



day good *will* prevail. You spoke to me of the legacy of love we are giving to Jacob. One day he will carry that legacy up there ... into that world. And perhaps the world will be a better place for it, for him.”

“How do you know that, Vincent?”



by Renate Haller



“Because I know that the world ... Above *and* Below ... are better, Catherine ... because *you* are in it. *My world* is a brighter place ... because *you* are in it. You are the gift your parents gave to this world ... the gift they gave to me and to so many others. One way we can perpetuate that gift is by having children and doing our best to teach them to be a light, in the darkness of this world. Whether they choose to live here Below or Above.”

She looked at him in wonder. “There was once a time when I could never have imagined you would ever say such things.”

Vincent nodded. “Yes, there was a time when I believed having children of my own wasn’t even a choice that would ever be possible for me. But we do have the choice, Catherine ... we can choose to live in fear or we can embrace this life we’ve created with faith and hope and love. Yes, we know that bad things can happen ... we have experienced that firsthand. But we can’t let it stop us ... or the darkness will win. *I learned that from you, too.*”

“Earlier, you said that our child is a manifestation of our love. It’s more than that, Catherine. This child is a manifestation of your faith in me. It’s a manifestation of your courage. It’s a manifestation of our hope in life, and in the future, despite what we have been through. Despite what I am. It’s a manifestation of our faith in each other and that this child could make a difference in the world.

“Our love is no ordinary love, Catherine. *It is extraordinary.* It’s something that has never been. What we have ... took the ultimate courage and faith... from both of us. *That* is an amazing legacy to give to our children.

“*Our children*, no matter how many we have, will not be ordinary children. They will be our gift to the world. And they will be *extraordinary* gifts, of that I have no doubt, my Love.”

She pulled herself deeper into his powerful arms and whispered, “I love you, Vincent. You are the most amazing and wonderful man I have ever known.” She kissed him gently and said, “I think I’m ready to go to the Crystal Cavern now.”

He smiled and shook his head. “Maybe not just yet,” he managed to say as he returned her kisses.

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Jacob awoke bright and early.



Although his Tunnel home was too far beneath the city to hear the early birds, singing in the park, somehow he still instinctively knew when it was morning. Jacob was an early riser, just like his father, even at this young age.

Attempting to climb out of his crib was one of his favorite new activities. One that had challenged him for some time. Very satisfied with himself for having finally conquered that obstacle, he went looking for his parents, only to find his friend Mouse, sound asleep on their bed. Now that the bed had collapsed on the floor, it was much easier for Jacob to climb onto. He liked it this way.

“Mouse?” he chimed, as he patted his friend’s stomach.

When there was no response, he moved to Mouse’s face. Mouse’s mouth was open slightly, and a rhythmic snorting sound seemed to be coming from inside. Jacob peered inside the small, dark cavern. Patting Mouse on the cheeks, he called to him again. “Mouse? My Mouse?”

Without opening his eyes, Mouse swatted at his face as if he were being bothered by a fly, and rolled over with another snort.

Wondering where his mother and father could be, Jacob climbed off of the mattress and wandered from the chamber.

To the two year old, it seemed only logical to begin looking for them in the place where they had all spent many happy hours with his Grandfather.

Jacob wandered into Father’s study. “Daddah? ... Pampaw?” he called into the unoccupied room.

No one answered, but it didn’t really matter, and he was quickly distracted. He spent several happy minutes, climbing up and down the steps. Finally tiring of that, he moved further into the room.

Even with no playmates, there were many things to entertain and intrigue a small child. “Pampaw chair,” he said, as he clapped his hand on the chair behind his grandfather’s desk.

Curious, he climbed onto the chair and surveyed the top of the desk. “Pampaw book” he said, as he patted an old volume that Father had placed there, meaning to repair.

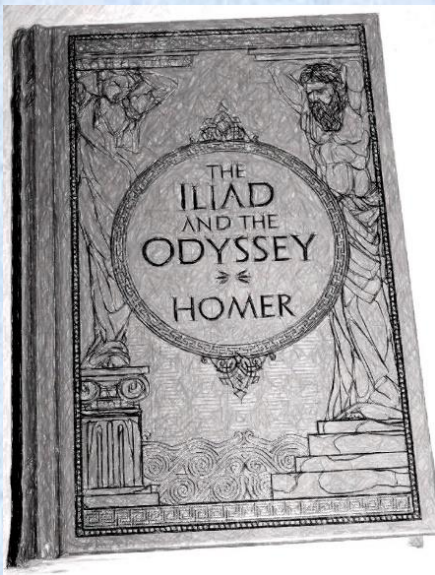
Quickly deciding he needed a better look, Jacob scrambled to the top of the desk and found a spot between Father's stacks. Sitting directly in front of the old volume, he opened it and soon discovered, unlike the books his grandfather usually read to him, there were no pictures.

Concluding that the pages without pictures had little value, he began ripping them out of the old volume one by one and tossing them over the side of the desk.

Father entered his study slowly. He had a cane in one hand and a book in the other. He was so engrossed in the volume he was carrying, that he didn't even notice he had a visitor until he was seated in his chair. He might not have noticed little Jacob even then, except for the faint sound of paper fluttering to the ground, followed by the child's laughter. As he looked up, he heard, the distinct sound of the pages being torn from the ancient tome.

"What in the world?" he asked, as he recognized his grandson, as well as what remained of the book he had left on the desk. A look of horror crossed his face as he saw the smiling child waving a fistful of Homer's Iliad in the air above his head.

"OH, NO!" Father exclaimed as he dropped his own book in an effort to save the other. Quickly gathering up the loose pages that littered the top of the desk, he muttered "No....nononononono..." and then finally realizing his efforts were futile, he tossed the remaining pages into the air and onto the floor, and collapsed, defeated, back in his chair.



Young Jacob only laughed to see his grandfather joining in the fun.

Father picked the child up and sat down with him on his lap.

"Jacob!" he scolded. "You are a very naughty boy!"

The child looked up at his grandfather, concerned by the scowl that now furrowed his brow. Pulling on Father's whiskers, he drew himself closer to his face. "Pampaw ... sad?" he asked.



Father found it nearly impossible to be angry with the lad, with his piercing blue eyes, and a look of innocent ignorance, so reminiscent of another little boy he'd once held on his knee.

Picking up the book, he sighed, shaking his head in despair. "It's beyond repair now, I'm afraid." Then wagging a finger at the child, said, "In the future, young man, you *must* show more respect for Homer! Although I must say ... I seem to recall, your father had much the same opinion of the Iliad as a youngster, as well." Sighing again, he concluded, "Oh, well, I suppose we do have several more copies. Well, at least it *wasn't* a first edition<sup>4</sup>..." he declared in all seriousness. "Now that would have *truly* been a tragedy!"

With impeccable timing, little Jacob patted Father's cheeks and laughed. "Pampaw ... funny!"

Jacob Sr. looked at his grandson in surprise. "I must say, young man, *I am impressed*. Many men older and more educated than yourself would not have caught the humor in that statement."

Their conversation was abruptly interrupted by a commotion at the chamber entrance. Father looked up to see a very disheveled and frantic Mouse come barreling into the room.

"FATHER, FATHER ... Mouse needs HELP! Lost ..." He stopped short when he spotted little Jacob sitting on his grandfather's knee. Clapping his hand over his chest, Mouse breathed a sigh of relief and slumped down on the steps.

"Are you all right, Mouse? Are you ill?" Father asked with concern.

"No, Mouse is fine. Woke up, Jacob's gone. Scared Mouse! You took from crib?"

"No, Mouse, I didn't take him." Then realizing what must have happened, he turned to young Jacob. "Well, well, you have been a busy boy this morning haven't you?"

Jacob proudly declared, "Busy, busy!" and clapped his hands.

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<sup>4</sup> The text is Homer's "Iliad," is believed to have been written in the year 762 B.C., give or take 50 years.

Then addressing Mouse again, Father explained, “It would seem, your young charge here has finally worked out how to climb out of his crib. Ahhh, they do grow up quickly, don’t they?”

Dejected and discouraged, Mouse explained. “Mouse no good for babies, no good for Jacob.”

“Now why would you say that? I happen to think you have done a marvelous job.”

“Nope ... Catherine trusted Mouse. Vincent trusted Mouse. Mouse lost Jacob. Not good. Not good.”

“Now listen here, Mouse. What just happened, could have happened to anyone. Now that we know Jacob can get out of the crib, we will just have to make accommodations. Jacob will need a different bed, and the crib will undoubtedly be passed along to another baby.”

Shaking his head, Mouse was inconsolable. “Nope. Nope. Could have gotten lost. Could have gotten hurt.” Then, he gasped. “Could have fallen in Abyss! Mouse is bad. Worse than bad. Worse than worst ... *worse than worst than worst*. Never trust Mouse again ... Nope ... never trust Mouse.”

“Mouse!” Father yelled to get Mouse’s attention. “Now you listen to me! You did *nothing* wrong! Believe me I know first-hand how challenging small children can be. Young Jacob couldn’t have gotten very far. Vincent and Catherine’s chamber is well within the hub, and someone would have stopped the child before he could get into any danger. Now stop fretting about something that didn’t happen. Most likely, if Jacob hadn’t come here, he would have followed his nose straight to the dining hall, looking for cookies.”

Mouse smiled a little, and nodded. “Jacob likes cookies.” Sitting up at the thought of food, said, “Mouse likes cookies too.”

Looking at the state of both Mouse and Jacob, Father concluded, “I take it that neither of you have had your breakfast?”

Mouse shook his head.



“Just as I thought. Now, take Jacob back to his room to change his diaper, freshen yourselves up, and then go get breakfast, before there isn’t any left.” He handed the child off to Mouse.

“Father trusts Mouse?”

“Of course, I trust you. If it makes you feel better, I’ll ask Jamie to help you until Vincent and Catherine get back tonight.”

Mouse nodded enthusiastically. “Yes... Jamie help Mouse... yesyesyes.”

“Mind you, you will still be in charge. Jacob is still *your* responsibility for the rest of the day. Jamie is only going to help. Do you understand?”

Continuing to nod, Mouse agreed. “Yes, yes. Mouse in charge. Jamie helps. Mouse will do a good job! Better than good! *Better* than best!”

Father laughed to himself as Mouse exited his study with renewed enthusiasm. Turning back to his desk, he sighed as he looked around him, and the destruction one small two year old had wrought. “So like your father, little Jacob,” he muttered. “So like your father.”

Despite the mess, Father was quietly grateful for the miracle that Vincent and Catherine’s love had created.

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Entering the Crystal Cavern, Vincent placed his torch in a sconce on the wall and reached for Catherine’s hand, to guide her in.

She gasped as she entered and then stood in silent awe taking in the sight of the Crystal Cavern. Multi-colored crystals sparkled in the flame’s dancing light. Everywhere she turned, she saw something that took her breath away.

“Well?” he asked, “What do you think? Was it worth the trip?”

“OH, VINCENT!” she finally exclaimed. “It’s beyond words! It’s exquisite!” Looking into his eyes, she said, “Isn’t it the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen?”

Vincent was pleased at her reaction. “It’s the second most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen,” he replied.

Catherine turned back and looked at him, wondering aloud, “The second? *Really?* What’s the first? I can’t even imagine ...”

He smiled down at her glowing face. “It’s you, Catherine. *You* are the most beautiful thing ... *I* have *ever* seen.”

As she threw herself into his arms, he basked in the waves of love coming from her. Looking around, the light seemed to be bouncing all over the room as it never had before. He felt as if he too was looking at the cavern for the first time. In the light of Catherine’s love, it seemed even more beautiful than it had ever been before.

“When I see something as amazing as this ... Vincent...” she whispered. “It reminds me that ... there *must* truly be a God.”

Reaching out to tenderly touch her face, he said, “Oh, Catherine, I don’t need this cavern to remind me of *that* ... I only need to look at you and our son to remember I have been blessed. Wherever God is ... I am *so very* thankful.”

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It was shortly after midnight, when Vincent and Catherine finally neared home. The tunnels were resting in quiet slumber. Even the pipes were quiet. As they reached the entrance to their chamber they saw Jacob come scampering out into the hallway.

“Mama ... Daddah!” he said, as he threw himself into his mother’s surprised and waiting arms.

Holding him close, she asked, “What in the world are you doing up at this hour, young man?”

“Mama... Daddah!” was his only reply. Smiling, Vincent leaned over and kissed his son.

“Jacob? Jacob? Where are ... you?” Jamie came running out of the chamber, and stopped short when she saw that he was safe in his parent’s arms.

“Jamie?” Catherine asked. “What are you doing here? Is everything all right?”

“I’m on sentry duty... for Mouse,” Jamie explained.



“Sentry duty?” Vincent wondered aloud.

“Yeah ... Mouse needed some sleep. *He’s exhausted.*” She laughed a little. “Jacob has been quite a challenge. Anyway... he keeps climbing out of his crib and making a run for it. We think he’s looking for you guys. So, we’re taking turns sleeping. I must have dozed off ... and this little guy snuck right passed me ... sorry.” Jamie was a little embarrassed that someone so small had given her the slip.

Vincent and Catherine only laughed. “Don’t worry about it, Jamie. He’s a very active little boy. We knew he would be a challenge. Thank you for helping.”

Vincent bent down to speak to his son. “So, have you had fun with Mouse and Jamie?”

“Yay!” was his response, as he clapped his hands.

Vincent nodded. “I see. And you’ve learned how to climb out of your crib, I hear?”

Jacob laughed and clapped his hands again. “Yay!”

Catherine and Vincent couldn’t help but be amused at Jacob’s enthusiasm, especially at such a late hour.

“I guess he couldn’t stay a baby forever,” Catherine observed sadly, as they entered the room.

Jamie shook Mouse’s shoulder to rouse him from his slumber. “Come on, Mouse. We can go now. Catherine and Vincent are back.”

Mouse jumped up from the chair in a panic. “Where’s Jacob? Jacob okay?”

“Jacob’s fine. Catherine and Vincent are home now, we can leave,” Jamie explained.

Mouse breathed a sigh of relief when he saw Vincent.

“Thank you, Mouse, for taking such good care of Jacob for us,” Vincent said, placing his hand on Mouse’s shoulder.

Mouse let out an exasperated sigh. “Mouse never knew ... being a dad ... hard work!”

Everyone laughed.

“Yes, it is,” Vincent agreed. “But it looks like you’ve done a fine job.”

“Needed help. Couldn’t do it alone,” Mouse admitted sheepishly.

“No one can do it alone, Mouse. We all help each other,” Catherine assured him.

Bouncing from one foot to the other, Mouse made one more confession. “Sorry about bed... broke it... too many people ... too much fun ... then ...BAM ...broken. Sorry.”

Vincent laughed again. “It’s all right, Mouse. I’m sure it can be repaired. You and Jamie go get some sleep.”

“Okay good. Okay fine,” Mouse nodded, and they turned to leave.

“Come on, Mouse,” Jamie said turning for the exit. “Let’s get out of here. We both need to get some sleep.”

Vincent and Catherine could hear their voices fading as they disappeared down the tunnel.

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Catherine hummed softly as she rocked their beautiful son to sleep.

Reclining on their collapsed bed, Vincent watched the two most precious treasures of his heart, *It’s actually three*, he reminded himself. *Although the third is yet unseen.*

As he watched them, he wondered anew if there would ever come a day when he didn’t look upon them and marvel at the miraculous gifts that life had given him.

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