



# Traditions

by Barbara Anderson

№ 12. - CHORUS  
"FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN"

Isaiah ix: 6  
Andante allegro (♩ = 76)

**A** SOPRANO  
For un-to us a Child is born, un-to us a Son is giv-en, un-to

us a Son is giv-en, for un-to

ALTO

TENOR  
For un-to us a Child is born,

BASS

Handel's Messiah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6UzKurPSfo>

Vincent sat alone on the bridge, listening to the closing strains of Handel's Messiah. He'd been fortunate, tonight. The air currents in the Chamber of the Winds had been kind, and he had been able to listen to the nearly three-hour performance with only a few momentary gaps, from time to time, as the winds shifted.

How he wished he could share it with Catherine. He knew she would love it as much as he did. But she had been Below for Winterfest only a few nights before, and he was still basking in the magic of it all.

He knew they wouldn't see each other again until the following weekend. She was spending the evening with her father. Vincent knew how important that was to her, and how difficult, as well.

Catherine's secret life had created a wedge between her and the elder Chandler. They had spent less and less time together over the last year, and had grown apart, as a result. Vincent knew it weighed on her, and he felt responsible for it, no matter how she protested.

Nevertheless, Vincent had felt her emotions all evening, like a tide, rising in waves of exhilaration, and then breaking, as sadness and happiness ebbed and flowed within her. He noted that sometimes her emotions seemed to mirror his own as he sat listening to the music.

If he closed his eyes, he could almost imagine that she was sitting there next to him, safe and warm in his embrace... *almost*. He hated to think that someone might be causing her such anxiety. He hoped it wasn't because of him and wondered if she was all right.

As the concert came to an end, Vincent found himself heading for her rooftop. Despite the fact that they had no plans to meet this evening, he felt a need to see her, just to be sure.

Passing through the hub on his way to the Central Park entrance, he heard a familiar voice calling after him.

"Vincent, Vincent, wait."

He turned to see Samantha running toward him with something in her hand.

He bent toward her and spoke firmly, yet gently. "Samantha, it's late, you should be in bed. You certainly shouldn't be running around these drafty tunnels in your nightgown." He looked down with a frown as he noted that she was also barefoot. "Samantha ..." he began to scold.

“I know. *I know*. I’ll catch my death ...” she said in a mocking tone. “You’re beginning to sound like Father.”

“Well, in this instance young lady, Father would be correct. What is so important that you would risk illness to catch up to me?”

Seeming to ignore his question, she asked, “Are you going above to see Catherine?”

“As a matter of fact, I am.”

She held out a brown paper package tied with a piece of red and white string. “Could you give this to her, please? Mary helped me make it. It’s important.”

“Wouldn’t you rather give it to her yourself? Catherine will be here on Christmas evening.”

“No.” Samantha shook her head emphatically. “Christmas will be *too late*. She needs it *now*. *Make sure* she opens it tonight, Vincent,” she said forcefully. “*Tonight*,” she repeated.

Vincent could hear the urgency in the child’s voice and nodded appropriately. “Very well, Samantha, I’ll see that she gets it.” He held out one large hand for the package, accepting the charge.

The young girl smiled broadly as she reached up to hug him. “Thank you, Vincent!” she kissed his cheek and ran off in the direction of the girl’s dormitory.

He smiled, as he tucked the gift into his vest and continued his journey.

Reaching the park drainage tunnel, Vincent blended easily into the night shadows, as he moved quickly through the frozen, deserted park, making his way to Catherine’s apartment building.

Carefully lowering himself onto her balcony, his well-worn, hand crafted boots landed silently, more muffled than usual by a pile of snow that the wind had blown into his heavily shadowed corner. His rabbit skin boots were waterproof and lined with fur, perfect for a cold December evening.

She wouldn’t be expecting him.

As he waited, he peered into her apartment. The rooms were dark, except for the lights that twinkled on her Christmas tree. They shone like tiny beacons through her sheer curtains, inviting him to come in out of the cold to wait for her. He resisted the silent invitation and admired them from the balcony.



The balcony was their space. He felt safe there. He had only rarely crossed the threshold that separated him from her world.

Finally, he saw a sliver of light brighten the opposite side the room, as he stood outside, looking into the dimly lit apartment. *She's home*, he thought, just as he saw her silhouette illuminated by the light from the hall, as she slowly opened her door. She closed the door and smiled at the light of Christmas tree as it cast enchanting shadows on the wall and carpet.

The sight of her through the sheer curtains took his breath away. She sparkled and shimmered in the dancing light, like an image he was sure he had seen in his dreams. Her hair was pulled back and swept up in the back, held with beaded combs that sparkled as the light caught them. Her dangling earrings

made her look like a princess he had seen in an illustrated story book, and her silvery evening gown seemed to flow like water, as it shimmered in the dim light.

There were times, like this one, that he was sure he had been dreaming of her all of his life.

She moved slowly toward the tree and stood, staring wistfully at its branches, as she removed her beaded, angora wrap, and laid it across the back of the nearest couch.

Reaching for a well-worn cardboard box on the coffee table, she removed the lid and looked lovingly at what was inside. Vincent could clearly see that whatever it was, she cherished it. On several occasions, he had seen her look at him in the same way. *How is it possible that this waking dream, this vision I see before me, would ever cherish me?* he often wondered. But he knew she did. The bond that flowed between them left no room for doubt on that point.

She slipped off her shoes and set them aside. Then, pulling one of her dinette chairs over to the tree, she climbed up to stand on it, holding the object from the box in one hand. She teetered precariously on the chair, as she reached up to pull the very top of the tree toward her, and slipped an old-fashioned, blown glass tree topper onto it. Satisfied, she let go of the tree, catching her foot on the hem of her gown. She stumbled awkwardly, and the chair began to tip backward, at the sudden shift of her weight.

As Vincent watched, he saw her begin to fall and quickly opened the French doors. Rushing up behind her, he caught her in his arms before she could hit the floor. "*Catherine!*" he called, saving her before any harm could come to her.

Realizing she was falling, Catherine had closed her eyes to brace herself for a hard landing just as she felt strong arms catch her before she even had a chance to call out.

Shocked and disoriented, Catherine gasped and opened her eyes to see what had intervened to save her from certain catastrophe.

"Vincent!" she exclaimed, trying to catch her breath. She instinctively threw her arms around his neck. "Oh, Vincent! Thank you," she breathed. And then she realized what he had done. Looking into his eyes, she asked a silent question.

"What is it, Catherine?"

She shook her head in confusion. "How did you...? I mean ... How could you have possibly known that I would ...? I wasn't expecting you to be here. How long were you out there?"

Vincent slowly, yet reluctantly, put her on her feet. He felt his old inadequacies and timid awkwardness returning. He knew that this was her world, a world where he did not belong.

"Only a few moments," he answered. "How was your evening with your father? Is he well? I have felt your emotions all evening. I was concerned. I only arrived a moment before you did. I was on the balcony admiring your Christmas tree lights, when you came in. You looked so ...so ..."

She blushed, knowing that the way she was dressed pleased him. He couldn't say it, but she knew, she could see it in his eyes, she could feel it flowing between them. She could almost touch it, *his love for her*. She had seen it only a few nights before, felt it, as they had danced together to the music in the wind.

He had never actually said the words, and she was wise enough not to ask it of him. Catherine didn't need him to say it. She knew he admired her, cherished her, even *loved her*. However, she also recognized that there was something about her, or rather about their relationship, that he feared, much like a child who has been burned fears coming too close to a hot stove.

*Who was it that burned you, Vincent?* she sometimes wondered.

Something inside of her sensed that he had certainly been hurt, and deeply. Even though she perceived it, she had yet to find a way reach it, let alone heal it. He never spoke of it, nor did anyone else, so as far as she knew she was the first woman he had ever cared for.

"I'm sorry I worried you," she said, searching for some way to keep him close and talking.

"I wasn't worried. I knew you were safe... but I felt your sadness and your happiness by turns. It made me wonder ... I needed to be sure you were all right."

She smiled ruefully, regretting that her mixed emotions sometimes plagued and confused him

"Now that I see you are fine, ... I should be ... going..."

As he turned toward the French doors that were still standing open, she reached out to touch his arm. "Vincent... *Please...*"

He looked at her, clearly uncomfortable in her domain.

*"Please stay."*

He looked at her but didn't speak. *How I wish I could stay here forever, Catherine*, he wanted to stay. But he knew he couldn't. He knew he shouldn't. He knew he shouldn't be inside of her apartment at all. Something in him warned that it was dangerous, for them both.

"Vincent," she reasoned. "You shared your Winterfest traditions with me. *Please ... won't you allow me to share some of my holiday traditions with you?*"

There was such pleading in her voice ... in her eyes. *She asks so little of me*, he thought. *How can I refuse such a sincere and simple request? Can I not give her this one simple gift?*

Unable to deny her, he nodded. "Very well, Catherine. I'll stay for a little while. What tradition is it that you wish to share?"

She smiled at her small triumph and seized the opportunity. “Do you like hot chocolate?” she asked eagerly, “or apple cider?”

“Either one would be fine,” he answered, feeling slightly off balance now himself. Catherine turned on her stocking-clad heel and disappeared into what Vincent could only assume was a kitchen.

As he waited for her to return, he closed the French door against the freezing winter air, and then picked up the offensive dinette chair, returning it to its rightful place, where it could pose no further danger.

From the kitchen she called out, “Take off your cloak and make yourself comfortable. I’ll just be a minute.”

He laughed inwardly, looking at her incredibly small couches. They were a stark reminder of how out of place he was in her world. “Make myself comfortable...” he repeated softly. *I’m not sure that’s possible, my love*, he thought. Then realizing how he had mentally addressed her, he chided himself. *Watch yourself. You must never allow that endearment to slip out. She can never know how deep my feelings are for her.*

As he lay his cloak across the back of one of the couches, he remembered the package Samantha had given him. He removed it, hoping that whatever it was, it was not breakable. Shaking it next to his ear, he was reassured that whatever it was, it was still intact. He lay the gift on the coffee table.

Unsure of where to sit, he decided to spend the time looking a little closer at the ornaments on her tree. The tree was covered with expensive looking crystal icicles and cut-glass snowflakes, that sparkled cheerfully under the twinkling tree lights. A sterling silver ornament caught his eye. He touched it, carefully turning it to see an engraving on the back.

### *Cathy’s First Christmas*

1956

He smiled as he tried to imagine her parents hanging the ornament, as they held their newborn daughter, and celebrated their first Christmas as a family. *What did you look like as a child?* he wondered. It was then that he caught sight of another silver ornament hanging on a higher branch. It held a small black and white photo of a toddler sitting on Santa’s lap. She wore white high-top shoes, and a smart looking coat with a matching, wide brimmed bonnet. Vincent

imagined it was blue velvet. Her tiny hands were hidden in a white fur muff. She was looking up at Santa with a look of wonder and awe.

*Just as I thought.* Vincent smiled wistfully. *You were beautiful even then, my Catherine.*

“I see you found me,” Catherine said, smiling as she put a silver tray on the coffee table. It held several brightly frosted cookies and two steaming cups. “I hope you don’t mind, but I didn’t have any whipped cream for the chocolate.”

Vincent was speechless, as he watched her put down the tray. *She moves with such grace,* he thought, as her dress shimmered in the dim, twinkling light. She looked like an angel. He had the distinct feeling that he must be dreaming. But the steaming cups of chocolate were very real.

“Hot cocoa and frosted sugar cookies were always part of the tree trimming at our house,” she said, trying to fill the awkward silence.

Vincent turned toward the tree. “It looks as if you have already trimmed the tree.”

“Not completely,” she laughed, and then noticed the plainly wrapped package.

“What’s this?” she inquired, picking it up.

“It’s from Samantha. She asked me to personally deliver it to you.”

“How thoughtful.” Catherine smiled. “Can you tell her I said, ‘Thank you?’” she asked, as she turned to place it under the tree.

Realizing her intent, Vincent was quick to add, “She insisted that you open it right away, Catherine. She said you needed it *now*, and that Christmas would be *too late*. She insisted that I make sure you open it tonight.”

“Really?” she asked, with a furrowed brow. “What is it?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. All she told me was that Mary helped her with it.”

“Well then ...” Her eyes twinkled excitedly. “I guess I should open it.” She untied the string, and carefully unfolded the paper wrapping. “Oh, Vincent! It’s gorgeous!” she exclaimed, holding up an extraordinarily long garland made from



popcorn and cranberries. Vincent couldn't imagine she could be more excited if it were made of pearls and diamonds.

Vincent appreciated Catherine's gracious response to the homespun gift.

"Catherine," he whispered, smiling indulgently, "It's only popcorn and cranberries. I'm afraid it will look ... out of place against the ornaments on your tree."

"No, Vincent. *It's perfect!*" She laughed, and nearly burst with excitement. "Will you help me put it around the tree?" she asked, handing him one end of the garland.

He was delighted by her childlike response to the simple gift. "Certainly."

"When I was a child," she said, chatting as they worked. "We would sit by the fireplace and string popcorn and cranberries for our Christmas tree." She laughed, as she recalled sweet, long-forgotten memories. "Daddy would always have to make more popcorn, because we ate more than we put on the string."

She carefully adjusted the swag of the garland on the branches. "He had this ancient looking contraption," she continued, "...with a long handle on it that he used to pop the popcorn right in the fireplace. Sometimes he would let me help shake it to keep the kernels from burning. Daddy always said, 'We eat so much, I should invest in a popcorn company.'" She giggled again, with delight, as she imitated her father's voice.

Vincent laughed too. He could almost envision the child she had once been.

"I haven't thought about that in years." She slipped beneath his arm as they stepped back and admired their work. Catherine sighed happily. "It's perfect!" she declared.

"Perfect?" he questioned, wondering again if she was just being generous in regard to the humble offering. But the delight he felt from her told him she was genuinely thrilled with Samantha's gift. It puzzled him that something so simple could bring her such joy.

"Yes, absolutely perfect," she said. "Earlier this evening, I kept looking at the tree and thinking something was missing, I just couldn't put my finger on it. Now I know it was missing the garland."

Vincent just smiled down at her. "So, you have finished trimming the tree?"

She reached out and cradled one of the icicles lovingly in her hand. Her eye sparkled with love, as she was clearly reliving another fond memory. "No, not

quite finished yet. Would you like to help me?" She smiled up at him. "It's always more fun to do it with someone you ..." *Careful*, she inwardly warned, *you don't want to frighten him*. "...when you do it with someone special."

He nodded, still confused at how surreal he felt, standing inside this small part of her world.

She turned to retrieve a box of ornaments from beside the couch.

"They look fragile, Catherine. Are you sure you want me to help?" He held up his large hands, silently expressing concern about the damage they might do.

"I suppose they are fragile," she agreed. "Each one is a treasure. We used to collect new ones every Christmas. Mother said they helped capture the memories... and yes." She nodded, smiling at him reassuringly. "*I'm sure* I want you to help."

He carefully removed one from the box, noticing that each had a date on it. 1958, 1959, 1960. "Tell me about them," he said.

She seemed to glow with happiness, as she shared her treasured Christmas memories, each ornament bringing back visions of her happy childhood.

Holding up the last one, he read aloud. "1966" As he hung it on the tree, he asked, "Are there more?"

"No... that's all of them," she said quietly. "That's the last one."

He felt a stabbing sensation in his heart, as her smile faded. Then he realized.

"Because that was ..."

"That was...our last Christmas ... as a family." She paused, then added, "...before she died."

He inwardly berated himself, as he recalled the deep pain she had experienced the previous spring, at the anniversary of her mother's death. He felt responsible for opening an old wound. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-"

She reached out and gently squeezed his hand, her eyes glistening with unshed tears "Don't be sorry, Vincent. It's all right."

"I don't want to cause you pain, Catherine. I didn't mean to ..."

"You didn't... *really*, Vincent," she insisted. "My Christmas memories of my mother are all wonderful. No child could ever ask for happier memories. But I've discovered that the joy and the sadness of life tend to ... get all jumbled up together, sometimes."

“Will you tell me about these memories?” he asked, hoping they would give him greater insight into what had made her the amazing woman that stood before him.

She quickly wiped away a tear and laughed, her emotions swinging back to joy. He was beginning to understand what he had been feeling from her all evening.

“In my memories, she was always smiling,” Catherine explained. “But at Christmastime she was *even more* full of joy. She made everything magical. We would go ice skating in Central Park, and drink hot cocoa. One of my earliest Christmas memories is going to the ballet with my parents to see *The Nutcracker*. We went every year. It was wonderful. I never tired of it.

“And then, a week or two before Christmas, we would pack up the car and go to the house in Connecticut. There was caroling, and sleigh rides, and a Santa’s village with *live* reindeer. Sometimes my grandparents would come too. We decorated the tree with these ornaments and baked cookies.”

She thought for a moment and went on. “I think now, that my mother must have known for a long time that our time together would be ... short. And she did everything she could to make every minute we spent together special.”

“And after?” he ventured to ask. “After she...?”

“After?” She repeated his question, her eyes dimming a bit. “It was different. I think it was all too painful for Daddy to... face without her.” Her voice faded momentarily, and then she brightened a little, and took a deep breath. “So, we made new traditions. Just the two of us. Still good ... but different.”

He could feel her joy was now tinged with a bittersweet sadness. *How remarkable you are, my Catherine*, he thought. *Even as a child you had great strength.*

“How was it different?” he asked, sensing that she wanted to share it with him.

“We stopped going to Connecticut. Daddy would hire a professional designer to decorate a tree in our house, here in New York... *You know* ... one of those sterile, department store trees ... with big red bulbs and awful fake flowers, all perfectly spaced.” She laughed a little.

“I always hated it...” she admitted. “But I never told him. We would eat Christmas dinner at The Four Seasons ... Sometimes he would have it catered. Then, the day after Christmas, he would take me skiing in Vermont, or Aspen, or Switzerland, or some other amazing place. I think it was his way of trying to keep the holidays

special for me, and still get through a difficult patch for himself. I knew Daddy was doing the best he could, so I never told him how much I missed ... how everything used to be.”

“It’s remarkable that you were able to understand your father’s pain at such a young age,” Vincent whispered. “You must have been in great pain yourself.”

“Not really so remarkable,” she replied. “My parents loved each other so deeply. Even as a child, I knew it was something special... something rare... something *magical*. And they made me a part of that magic. We were ‘the Three Musketeers.’” She smiled at the memory. “We both missed her terribly.”

Her smile had faded as quickly as it had appeared. “Near the end, Mother said, that if love could keep her alive, as long as she had us, she would live forever.” She looked at the tree and took a deep breath.

Reaching again to cradle one of the icicles in her hand, she said, “To me... these were more than just ornaments. They represented our family, and all those happy times... *before*.” She fell silent, as she recalled the bitter and the sweet.

Vincent sensed that she needed to savour them all, and stood silently, waiting for her to continue.

“This set of crystal icicles was a Christmas gift from my grandparents, the first year after my parents got married. They came all the way from England.”

Catherine laughed through the tears. “Mother loved them because they made the lights dance all over the room. After my grandparents were... gone... it was almost as if... a part of them was still with us at Christmas time, dancing in the light.

“Last year, after Dr. Sanderle... fixed my face, Daddy sent me to the house in Connecticut for a couple of months to recover. He wanted me as far away from the reporters as possible. While I was there, I discovered the box with our old Christmas decorations in it.” She looked up at him, her eyes sparkling. “You know? I’d nearly forgotten all about them. But as I looked at each of these ornaments, all those wonderful memories came rushing back. It was almost as if my mother was there with me, somehow. I know it sounds crazy, but I found it... comforting. When I returned to the city, I brought them back with me. I figured Daddy would never miss them.”

Vincent had known few details of Catherine’s life in those months she after her attack. *How incredible you are*, he thought, *to find healing in a box of old memories*.

“Do you and your father still go to the ballet to see *The Nutcracker*?”

“No...” she said, shaking her head and taking another deep breath. “We never went again after she was gone. Daddy said that I had outgrown *The Nutcracker*. Perhaps *that* was too painful to him as well. I’m not sure, but I will always have a special place in my heart for Tchaikovsky.

“That’s the year, he began taking me to Handel’s *Messiah* instead. That’s where we were tonight.”

“That’s where you were with him, *tonight*?”

“Yes ... Handel’s *Messiah*. At the Lincoln Center. It was magnificent, as always. Have you ever heard it?”

“Yes.” He nodded. “Many times. Tonight, in fact.”

“You did?” she asked. “But where? Surely, you couldn’t have been in our Music Chamber?”

“I was in the Chamber of the Winds. The currents were kind, this evening. I was able to hear nearly the entire performance. But as I was listening to it, I... I could feel your emotions, so clearly. Exhilaration, then joy and then sorrow and then joy again. I thought perhaps your evening with your father wasn’t going well. I was concerned. Any other night, I would have come right away, but I knew you were not home. After the concert, I wanted to see you, to be sure you were ... all right.”

“I’m fine.” She rested her hand gently on his chest. “I’m sorry I worried you, Vincent. It’s just that this time of year tends to bring old memories to the surface... and I also tend to get swept up in the passion of the performance.”

“Yes, you’re not alone in that. It’s a much-beloved work of genius. It’s been performed countless times for more than three hundred and fifty years.”

She grinned, and said, “It’s been running longer than any Broadway play I’ve ever heard of. Do you think *Phantom of the Opera* will enjoy that kind of success?”

They both laughed at the thought. “Did you know that Handel wrote the entire thing in only three or four weeks?” she asked.

“Yes.” Vincent nodded. “It’s truly... inspired,” he whispered.

*Inspired?* Catherine tilted her head as she turned the word over in her mind. And then she wondered aloud, “Vincent? ... Do you believe in God?”

“Yes, I suppose I do,” he replied thoughtfully. “Or at least I have come to believe that there is something of a divine nature... something we don’t fully

comprehend, that moves in the universe. Although, I must admit, I have often wondered what God was thinking when He created me. But it's difficult not to believe, when I listen to something like Handel's *Messiah*, or read the poetry of Wordsworth, or Rilke. It's undeniable that Handel certainly believed in God."

Catherine nodded. "Yes. The joy, the sorrow, the triumph, and the reverence of it all comes through so strongly, in the music. I'm in awe that a person could create something so breathtaking and beautiful. Every time I hear it, I half expect to look up at the rafters and see angels singing along with the choir."

He could no longer withhold the impressions of her he had experienced all evening. "You are breathtakingly beautiful, Catherine. When I look at you ... I can't help but believe in angels."

"I feel the same way about you ..." she whispered.

"No." He slowly shook his head. "I'm no angel." His voice was tinged with sadness, as he looked out the window at the night sky. "I don't think there is a place in Heaven for someone like me." There was a catch in his voice as he expressed the truth that he had accepted long ago.

It broke her heart that he could believe such a thing. She reached up and gently turned his face toward hers, so that his eyes met hers. "You say that with such conviction, Vincent," she whispered adoringly. "But I will *never* believe that." She slipped both arms around his waist.

He tilted his head, as he looked wonderingly at the vision in his arms. Looking into her eyes, he felt a small spark of hope.

"Shortly before she died..." Catherine whispered, "...my mother told me, 'There might be times in your life when you think that God has forgotten you. But you must *always* remember that sooner or later, Heaven smiles on us all.'"

Vincent was speechless. It sounded familiar to him somehow. *Was it Rilke?* he wondered.

"I believe that's what happened the night you found me," she continued. "Heaven smiled on me, Vincent, and sent you to save me. You've been *my* angel ever since. How many times have you saved me? You even saved me tonight. How could you be anything *but* an angel?"

"Oh, Catherine," he whispered, pulling her close and cradling her head near his heart. "That night ..." He sighed deeply, as a tear rolled down his cheek. "Heaven smiled on us both. *You* are the most precious gift I have ever received."

They tightened their embrace as the words burned into both of their souls. For a moment Vincent had been able to catch a glimpse of the beauty Catherine saw in him.

But just as quickly, an inner voice mocked. *You fool*, it said. *Would she still believe you're an angel if she knew what you did to Lisa? Would she still think you're beautiful if you told her **everything** you have done?*

He stiffened as his mind returned to his cold reality. "I must go, Catherine. It's late." He gripped both of her shoulders and put her at arm's length. Striding across the small space, he retrieved his cloak.

As he turned toward the balcony doors, she sensed she only had a moment before he disappeared into the night. "Vincent, wait." she pleaded.

He stopped and waited.



Looking at the tray on the table, she snatched up the brown paper wrapping and used it to quickly wrap the untouched cookies. Tying it up with Samantha's discarded string, she presented it to him. "These are for you. I wanted to share them with you."

Then, quickly removing one of the icicles from the tree, she placed it in the palm of his hand and gently asked, "Would you please give this to Samantha, and tell her *how much* I loved her gift?"

He looked wonderingly at the small prism of faceted glass. "Catherine ... this is too much." he protested. "This is one of your treasures."

She gently closed his fingers around the tiny gift and smiled lovingly. "The memories are the treasure, Vincent. That is what this represents. That is what Samantha gave to me. She restored a precious memory. One I didn't even realize I'd forgotten. *That* is so much more valuable than this ornament could ever be."

He looked doubtful, still unsure if he should accept it.

"*Please*," she pleaded.

She wisely resisted the urge to kiss away the tear that remained on his cheek and instead reached up to gently wipe it away, wondering if she would ever be able to reach the pain that lay so deeply within him.

He sighed, temporarily soothed by her loving caress. “Very well, Catherine. If that is what you wish.”

Realizing she couldn’t stall his departure any longer, she whispered. “Goodnight, Vincent... and thank you again... for saving me.”

Without another word, Vincent disappeared into the night.

She followed him onto the balcony and looked out into the starlit night, hoping that he could feel her love for him, as he made his way home. Eventually, the cold drove her back inside.

Pulling a blanket off the end of her bed, she curled up on the couch to watch the lights dance around the room.

She fell asleep, dreaming she was attending a concert at Lincoln Center with the man she loved by her side....



*Merry Christmas to all ... Barbara*

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\*\*\*A huge, Thank you, to Sobi, whose gorgeous challenge page (<http://www.batbland.com/challenges/challenges.htm>) inspired this story and many others. We keep the “Dream” alive for each other.