

Star Crossed

By Cindy Rae



Author's note: In science, there is an understanding that matter and energy are never lost. That they simply change form. Burning wood is usually offered as an example of this idea. The wood, matter, changes to energy, heat. It also changes to ash, and mingles with the earth, while the energy is released into the atmosphere, its smoke ascending. The "wood" is still there. But it is different, now.

This idea has created certain laws for physicists, and a chance for us to play.

"Matter is never created or destroyed. It just changes form."

- The Law of Mass Conservation, Antoine Lavoisier, physicist

"We are all star stuff." - Carl Sagan, astrophysicist, astronomer, and cosmologist

The Astral Couple shimmered closer to New York, riding the wings of a celestial night.

"They can't be here," he told her.

"I swear to you they are. Can't you feel them, my love?" she answered her leonine husband. They drew closer to the New York skyline, from above.



"There is a legion in there." He indicated the metropolis of one of the largest cities on Earth. "That would be insanity for me." A nova's shadow shifted across his broad muzzle.

She gave him a full smile. "Ah, love. You've been insane, before." She purred the words as they hovered near a particular balcony. A particular couple paced its stones.

"See? I told you they were here," Astral Catherine told her eternal mate.

"And as always, you are right, my glorious love." He stayed near her. Always near her. It was his fate, and his constant blessing.

"I like the country, more," he said. "You can see the children, better." He looked above to where the stars glittered in the heavens, but not too brightly here.

"My children. My children! My children shine, everywhere!" She shouted it, and spun in a joyous circle, starlight casting from her fingertips. It was a gorgeous March night, for the equinox of this place.

"You look beautiful," he told her, indicating both the ethereal vision before him and the mortal one, on the stones. Her mortal arms were crossed.

"And you look worried," his wife said, looking on with him. His mortal self did just that, as it stood a bit to one side.

"I always look worried. We are early, here," he replied, noting the body language of his corporeal self.

"Mmm. Early and not yet joined. Do you think they're fighting? I always liked making up with you."

He smiled indulgently. "That might explain some of our fights," he responded, humoring her a bit.

"Am I still Catherine, here?" she asked, hovering.

"Of course," Astral Vincent replied, enjoying his wife's pleasure as much as he enjoyed her curiosity. They should go, now...

"I was Katya in Russia. Do you remember that?" She drew closer to the balcony.

"Like it was yesterday."

"It was yesterday."

"Give or take a few hundred years."

"Like I said. Yesterday." She danced away from him a little, and moved closer still to the tense couple.

"Oh, love. They're sad! We should help them!" the shimmering woman said.

"Catrine..." It was one of many names he called her, and his voice held a warning. "You know we shouldn't."

She went down to the balcony anyway, and set her incandescent feet upon the stones. He knew she would.

"We said we would not do this again," he reminded her, knowing it was no use, as he swung star spun legs over the side of the wall. Even after eons, the motion felt familiar. Still.

"I do not recall any such ill-advised promise," she smiled, "and I think you should kiss me. I clearly feel bad." She looked at her mortal self. There was concern in every line of her small, human frame. There was an answering tension in his.

"See? This is just what I'm talking about," her bond mate chided. She'd said she only wanted a peek. Now, it was more. His love was ... herself. As always.

"It is just a kiss, Vincent." She brushed one across his celestial cheek, which he returned.

"Kissing before it is time is not allowed," he stated.

His tone of voice was so imperious, she giggled at him.

"Says who?" she asked.

"Chione, we nearly started a war in Macedonia, that way."

Her spiritual voice tinkled with laughter at the memory. "Only a little one. You were such a great big brute. And I was a princess." She glistened with the recollection of an ancient time.

"You still are, from the looks of it," he told her. Not everything was always a "constant" between them, but some things seemed to happen with more regularity than others. Often, she had wealth. Sometimes, a conspicuous amount.

She looked in at the tastefully appointed apartment.

"It looks comfortable enough," she told him.

"Your palace in Greece never looked more so," he said, eyeing the deeply tufted furniture.

"Remember that little couch I had, in Egypt?" she asked him, looking at the "dinky" sofas in Catherine's apartment. This, too, was an odd constant between them.

He smiled at her, wolfishly. Which was to say that if it was possible for a lion-faced being to smile wolfishly, he was doing it.

"The purple one with the gold carvings of cats on the legs?" His gaze grew fond, with very specific memories of lovemaking. "I have no recollection of it whatsoever," he teased.

She laughed again, and the few stars above her glimmered just a little brighter. His love was in a merry mood, tonight. He stepped closer to her.

"I do not remember a thing about it." He brushed up against her, nuzzling. "Not the way you sat on it, or the way I did. Not the way your back bent over the arm, or..."

"Shhh. I think he's hurting." She put him off, as she stepped away.
"We should go to them. We should fix it, Vicente."

He looked at the clearly unhappy couple before him.

"Catherine. You know we can't. If we possess them, they won't remember it," her starry husband told her.

"We could talk to them."

"They won't hear us. They can't hear us, now."

"We're not *touching* them *now*. Oh, please, Vincenzo. Can't you see how unhappy they are?" she asked him. The eyes he knew he could deny nothing to took on a pleading aspect.

"We struggle sometimes, love," he soothed her, watching their earthly selves. "We always do. They will get through it. Sometimes, we never find each other at all." He hated to remind her of the lonely lives they had both led, when that happened. But it was necessary.

"I think you're shy, this time," she told his Astral self, while stepping closer to his mortal one. "I always loved it, when you were shy."

"And I always loved you, no matter what," he sighed, indulging her closeness to his mortal form. It tickled. Mortal Vincent felt a small breeze stir past his arm. She stepped around him, then over to her human self.

"She has a scar!" Astral Catherine told him, indicating the marred cheek.

That too, had happened more than once. The Constant Mate shrugged negligibly. "It does not detract from your beauty. Nothing could do that," he told her, stepping near to wrap her in his arms a moment.

They both looked at the couple before them. They were at some sort of impasse.

Astral Vincent recognized this particular patch of ground. He moved nearer to his mortal self, and indulged his wife. Touching his mortal self on the shoulder, Astral Vincent whispered, "That is the most beautiful woman in the world, across from you. Her scar only makes her more so."

Vincent would not "hear" it in his ear. But he would feel it in his mind, as if it was his own thought. Which in a way, it was.

Ah, he had gone first! How she loved him. Now she could try. Starlit Catherine touched the elbow of her mortal self. "Stand here. Look up. Let him see the scar on your face," Astral Catherine whispered to herself.

Earthly Catherine leaned back her head. The New York night was its typical blaze of light, but there was no moon. A few faint stars pushed their light through.

The Star Swept Husband gave his Glittering Wife a smile, and stopped touching the solid shoulder of his counterpart.

The couple who had celebrated anniversaries past counting, stepped away, and watched themselves from a corner of the balcony.

Everlasting Vincent confided to his wife, "He's in love with her. So much, so deeply, it's bludgeoning him. But they haven't... done anything about that yet," he told her.

Incandescent Catherine nodded. "I see. A man did that to her." She indicated her scar. The touch that provided communication often also provided memories.

"Not one who still lives, I assume." Celestial Vincent knew that patch of ground, as well.

Moonlight's Eternal Bride felt sorry for her terran counterpart. "We aren't lovers yet," she confirmed. "How can we have more children, if we aren't lovers?"

She shook her head, stepped forward, and touched Catherine's elbow again. She whispered, "He loves you more than his life. More than all his lives." She looked at her husband. "But he is frightened. Stay still. It is like tempting a deer. You have to stay still. Let him come to you."

The Ever Husband stepped next to Vincent. "Go to her," Vincent's Astral self whispered in his earthly ear as he set his star-shot hand on his mortal shoulder. "Your woman is standing, with sorrow, looking up at the stars. You should be holding her. Letting her feel your strength."

Vincent moved to stand behind Catherine, sure he hadn't meant to do that a moment ago, but glad he had. The warmth of her brushed against his long frame.

"This is not long after the night you told me about Lisette," the Ever Wife told her husband. Both Catherines scowled, as she was still holding Catherine's elbow, though her husband had let go of Vincent when he moved.

The Always Husband nodded. "Lisa. He calls her Lisa, here."

The ephemeral hand lifted. "Oh? So he doesn't call her a ---"

"Ah, ah," he cut her off, knowing full well how his Catherine felt about his boyhood crush, in this life or any other. Lisa was another fairly regular touch-point between them. In Persia, the two women had actually brawled. The dancer had sported the rake of Catherine's nails across her face, a thousand years ago.

"Language, my beauty. She was of no consequence. Only you are." His words warmed her. She focused again on her mortal self.

Light-formed fingertips brushed a satin clad shoulder. "See the stars?" Astral Catherine whispered in the shell of an ear. "Those are our children. And our children's children. We make universes, when we are good."



Catherine tilted her head to the left. "Star light, star bright."

"That's it. Make a wish," Eternal Catherine told herself.

"What will you wish for, Catherine?" Her mortal consort wrapped his arms around her shoulders. His Astral self approved.

It was about being with him, as a true mate. The women both knew it. "She doesn't want to tell you," Astral Catherine responded just before the human one spoke.

"Oh, I don't know," Catherine hedged. But she did know. "Saying it is just habit. Like 'When you wish upon a star,'" she quoted the children's song lyric.

"Like Peter Pan. 'Second star to the right, and straight on, 'til morning,'" Vincent told the woman he loved more than his life. She nodded.

"Mary used to recite a poem about starlight to us, but I can't remember what it was," he added.

"She doesn't want poetry, you idiot. She wants a kiss," Always Vincent told himself shortly, moving the incandescent hand to his bicep.

Always Catherine laughed at his impatience, and her mirth caused mortal Catherine to smile, a little, even though she was somber.

"I guess we all want to go to Never Never Land, sometimes," the earthbound woman said, and they lapsed back into silence.

Always Catherine let go of her charge, stepping toward the corner of the balcony again. She took a moment to admire the glittering view of the city. Ceaseless Vincent removed his hand from mortal Vincent's arm, but did not step far back.

"Alexandria never looked this stunning," the Everwife said. "Why do you think we come to this plane, so often?" she asked.

He had no idea, and he was not about to be put off.

"I am going to give myself a kick in the pants," he told her.

"What happened to that famous vow of non-interference?" she asked him coyly.

"It thinks JM Barrie is worthwhile bedroom conversation," he sneered. "Catriona, have mercy. At this rate, it will take them years."

"You're the one who said we might start a war."

He glanced around her tiny terrace. "I see no armies present."

She chuckled at his impatience. "These are later times. Like you once told me, it's always easier, when we're ancients."

"When we're ancients, they think I'm a demi-god. Of course it's easier."

"They made you a king, in Sparta. Remember the helmet?" Her smile was radiant with memory.

"And they used your image for a constellation, my beautiful, beautiful wife."

He was still trying to be charming. Of course, not every time between them had been so easy.

"They tried to burn you, in Europe, once," she recalled.

"It was the Reign of Terror. They were burning everybody."

"But not us. You saved us." Her voice was one of loving approval.

He crossed to where she stood near the terrace wall. "I will always save you, my beautiful love. And you will always save me." He inclined his head in a gesture so familiar, it would have looked identical to the one his current self regularly used.

The Never-ending Bride knew when she was being schmoozed. She didn't budge. Yet.

"Show compassion, Beauty. He's miserable." Ageless Vincent wheedled his matchless mate.

"Vicente, we can't have them make love. They won't remember. And they haven't even done that for *themselves* yet. They won't understand being pushed that way, even for their own sakes."

"Not making love. Just a kiss. Like you said." He brushed her temple in the familiar way that always gave her Auroral Self shivers.

"You say that like it's a small thing," she chided. "Fates have been sealed, with less." She was serious, for a moment.

"I already know my fate." His deep voice rumbled like a birthing galaxy. "My dear and blessed fate. It is to be with you. To make sons. And sons. And daughters, and beautiful, beautiful grandchildren who spread our love, forever."

She smiled at him. She loved it when he was in a flattering mood.

"Look at him," her husband, who could ask for anything and usually get it, prompted. "He's in beggar's rags, and she's damn near a queen. He's awestruck by you, Katerina. I always am. Pity a fool. You know he loves you."

"I know he does," she said, cupping her Vincent's cheek.

She gave him a look, then prepared herself to help nudge things along.

"If we collapse the Empire, I'm not taking responsibility this time," she warned playfully.

"Your father was over-protective." He dismissed the charge as negligible.

"And yours was an interfering old biddy," she replied indulgently. They agreed with each other on all counts.

The Astral creatures each crossed to their respective counterparts. Catherine's vision-self held her corporeal one gently, by the wrist. Vincent touched himself on the bicep.

"He wants to kiss you," Astral Catherine whispered to herself.

Since Vincent was also touching Catherine as he embraced her, the cosmos' Feminine Self could feel him, as well. Great conflict. Great love. He would die for her. The bond shimmered, and sharpened, within him.

"He wants the feel of your sweet lips under his," she continued. "He wants to be your servant, be your slave, and yet be your master. Are you brave enough to allow such a love?" she asked herself, never taking her eyes off her Celestial Husband, whose head inclined.

"You should kiss that scar," he urged his mortal form. "Kiss it like the precious sign of victory that it is. She endured much, to reach you. She will endure more, bringing your children forth. You should be on your knees. Or you should hold her closer to the stars, in thanks, that she may see her children better. You should... kiss her."

The mortal couple began to speak.

"Catherine..."

"Vincent..."

They said it together, turning. Their "partners" stepped away, again.

"I've been wrong... No... You haven't been." Again, practically together, just a few syllables apart.

They smiled a little, letting the tension of the disagreement fade between them.

"I am sometimes stubborn," Vincent admitted. "But it is not because I am certain I am right. It is because I am certain I am... lost," he told her. Lost to her. Lost to the clearest path of safety. Just... lost.

"You can never be lost, when I'm here," she told him, needing him to believe it.

Vincent's shining, celestial head nodded at mortal Catherine's mortal wisdom.

"He needs you," the Moonlit Husband told both his brides. His hand lifted. "Katya, tell her how much he needs her."

Her astral form set her hands on her hips for a moment, "And how should I know how much that is?" the Ephemeral Being demanded.

Her husband tilted his head again, chiding. She knew.

"Oh, all right. But it makes me sound like I'm bragging," Catherine's star-drenched form chuckled. Taking a moment to compose her thoughts, she lifted her hands a moment, breathed in the cosmos, and gathered her shimmering memories, before she settled those hands on Catherine's arm.

"He loves you," she crooned. "You are the last thing he thinks of when he goes to sleep, and the first thing on rising. He loves you. He's afraid of how much. Afraid you will shatter him. He loves you." The words were a soft purr of feminine sound in Catherine's ear. "He's afraid another man will want you more, will offer you better. He doesn't know how much you belong to him yet. He's not sure he can sort out the difference between what he's afraid to want, and what is there for him to have. You have to help him to it. You have to help him see."

Her husband approved of the message, nodding.

The Celestial Woman continued to whisper in Catherine's ear, the one near the scar. "He'll be lonely, if you can't help him to it, help him to you. So terribly lonely. The despair of it will break his heart, the aloneness so terrible to bear. You have to help him see the other path, the one full of starlight, and children. You have to make him see it *all* so he can see you. And not see his fear."

The Woman of All nodded to her Timeless Mate. It was his turn, now.

"She loves you," Vincent's Eternal Self whispered to his other Eternal Self. "Loves you in her fierceness and in her languor. Loves you more than she has ever loved, or ever will. You surround all she thinks, and all she feels. And no, you don't deserve it. No man does. No man can. It's all right. We are all humble, before our Goddesses." Ever Catherine smiled at that. She was being wooed. Again. Still.

"He'll bring you joy." Her sparkling self had eyes only for her love.

"She'll bring you immortality," her love returned.

On the terrace, mortal Vincent shifted his stance, and moved away, a little. If he sensed anything, it was lost in the sensation of his own inner turmoil.

"I don't deserve you. I can't deserve you," Vincent told his Catherine.

"That has never been true. I've never understood why you thought it," Catherine replied, stepping closer to him again. "But it doesn't mean I don't understand that you feel it."

He nodded, accepting her words. Turning back to the beautiful view, he stood behind her again, enjoying the sensation of her sweet curves as they melded against his muscular length. He settled his arms around her, lightly.

She took in the panorama with him, feeling the breeze of the March night. The cityscape glistened in front of them, like brightly set diamonds in an impossible, mad setting.

"I'm not sure any man deserves his love." Vincent regarded the glitter before him, aware that behind each light, a story was happening. One like theirs, perhaps. Perhaps. His arms tightened around her, enfolding. He wanted badly to kiss her scar, very lightly.

"Perhaps none of us deserve the love we get," Catherine returned. "Or perhaps we all do. Or perhaps we're just fated."

"Fate? Isn't that an unusual thing for an attorney to believe in?" Vincent asked, loving her.

"You are a law giver, here. Again," Vincent's Nova-born Self said to his love, as he stepped away from his mortal frame.

"And you are a patchwork prince. Again," his wife returned, also stepping aside.

"Last time it was like this, you were an Oracle, and I was a teacher. Or was it the other way around?" He smiled at her.

She laughed at his reminiscence. They had been many things to each other, over the eons. Many wonderfully constant yet unique things.

"It's never been like this. It's never exactly the same way twice." She smiled. No, it wasn't. But there were certain consistencies, almost always.

"I'm not sure I ever did believe in fate ... before I met you." Catherine put her arms over Vincent's and squeezed. "Do you know what the date is, Vincent?"

"March...20th. The equinox?" he asked.

"Yes. The equinox. Equal day. Equal night. The world, just at the place where it isn't tipped more either one way or the other. Balanced. Even."

She relaxed against his long frame some more, willing him to feel the words, as he stood. Equal. Balanced. Neither owing more than the other, or owning more. Having all, just in that they had each other.

"I am not your equal, Catherine." It was a thing he had been struggling with, for a while.

"No. You're my better. I'm just trying to convince myself that you could love me anyway." She gave him the words of her heart.

He turned her, gently. She was not teasing him. But she was nudging him, a little.

"I can do nothing else," he told her, sealing the vow with a kiss.

Searching, seeking, and warm, Vincent's singular mouth tested hers. Tasted. Felt her open.

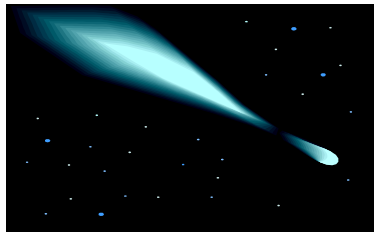
"Oh! I love this part! Do you think it's our first one?" the Boundless Woman asked.

"That one, or near it." Her husband moved close to her. "Do you want to?"

"Oh, you know I do. Should we?" Constant Catherine asked him.

"Of course we shouldn't. But we're going to." He held her hand and stepped into his lion's frame, as she stepped into her feminine one. Just for a moment.

Suns flared and comets raced, and the stars overhead glittered.



Mommy and Daddy were kissing. All was right, with the universe. As it always was, and always had been.

And always would be.

"I love you, my Catherine," a deep voice very much like Vincent's own said, simply.

"And I love you, my Vincent," a softly sweet voice replied. She reached up a hand to touch his cheek, and he closed his eyes in contentment.

I am going to make children with this woman. One day. And my sons will be among the finest of men, and my daughters will be the glory that is their mother, all over again. It all goes on. Forever. We are all

star stuff. And nothing is ever lost. He placed a soft kiss in her palm, and then released her.

And then released them.

"You were giving him ideas." Catherine's limitless form stepped away as she took her husband's arm. It was time for them to go. Other universes to visit. Their children, everywhere, needing tending. Well, not "needing" it. Not exactly. But the Eternal Couple enjoying it, just the same.

"He already has ideas. I always do. I didn't think it more than he did. I just knew it was there." He kissed her hand.

"So soon? They've barely just kissed," she asked him, teasing. She did not quite believe him.

"I don't tell you everything, my Catherine," he chuckled.

She threw back her head and laughed at that, the sound like a ringing bell, in the cosmos. Stars sparkled. Mother was laughing, with Father. Of course she was.

"Shall we go then?" The Immortal Groom asked his Immortal Bride.

"We should... but I'd like to stay near." She just decided it.

"Catherine..."

"We can visit with friends! Surely Narcissa and Kristopher are around here, somewhere," she reasoned prettily.

He smiled an indulgent smile, his nod a slight movement of surrender to her wants. She knew she was being celestially humored. Just as he knew they would not wander too far, for a bit. She loved to be in the room the moment her children were born. Loved to help herself through it, when she could.

"Don't fuss," she said. "We won't stay long. Just long enough for the christening." A year or two. Or five. A tick of the clock, in Eternal time.

The shimmering beings watched their mortal selves embrace again.
Kiss. Deeply.

"As you will, Beloved." He glanced over at the still kissing couple.

"It does not look like we will have very long to wait."

Gratefully inspired by:

Any Soul that Drank the Nectar

Any soul that drank the nectar of your passion was lifted.

From that water of life he is in a state of elation.

Death came, smelled me, and sensed your fragrance instead.

From then on, Death lost all hope of me.

~~

Mewlana Jalaluddin Rumi

No matter where you are in your own fairy tale, I wish you love. ~Cindy



The constellations Leo and Libra, the lion and the scales of justice.

Vincent and Catherine

We are all star stuff.