

# REFLECTIONS

by Debbie Ristick

The dusty stacks of books lay before him, welcoming his presence among them like some long lost friend. Only he knew their sequence, and a weary sigh left his lips as he placed the copy of *'Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island'*, that Kipper had no doubt thrown on top of the nearest pile to the door, back under his copy of *'Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.'* His filing system made no sense to anyone, except himself.

Jacob Wells hobbled slowly across his chamber and his soft grey eyes searched the room fondly, painstakingly recording every nook and cranny, every corner and crevice. This room had been his home (*or hiding place, some might say*) for close to forty years, but never had it meant so much to him before. Never had the entire tunnel society meant as much to him.

In the years since he had isolated himself from the world Above, Jacob had cast aside his pain, shunned the anger that had been the catalyst of his departure. Instead, he had become a part of something, participating in a *'culture'*, a way of life below Manhattan's streets.

He was called *'Father'* and treated with the respect due a patriarch. He had known the love of a woman and the grief of her loss. He had been given the responsibility of a son, a boy he had not the courage to acknowledge as his own, until recently. And he had been entrusted with the upbringing of a child - a child more special than anything. He had been given Vincent, a gentle soul whose only crime against humanity had been to be born different. With a face that somewhat resembled a lion, and covered with downy golden hair, he had been cast away - left to die in the howling blizzard of a New York January night. The infant had been lucky, for Anna Pater assured that he would be safe with Jacob.

Making his way to his desk, Father found a smile forcing its way onto his face.

"To see the world in a grain of sand....," he quoted a line from *'Blake.'*

Vincent had learned anything - no everything, that he had endeavored to teach him, and had been an exceptional pupil. His knowledge of the classics, his love of the poets were amazing things in today's world Above. But it was his infatuation with *'Shakespeare'* that was the most astonishing.

Casting a brief glance at the maps Mouse had left on his desk, Father absently rubbed a half-gloved hand over his eyes. The last year and a half had been hard on this entire society, but especially for Vincent. He had fought the demons of his bestial side, nearly succumbing to death. He had battled long and hard to regain his strength, his memory, his identity. But the most tragic loss had been Catherine; whose smile could fill a room, whose charm was captivating, and whose beauty was more than breathtaking.

It was Catherine Chandler to whom Father was indebted - not only for his life several times over, but for the life and sanity of Vincent. Her love had opened the world to him and had led him from an existence of obscurity to one of brilliant possibilities. Her love had helped him through more than one conflict, and the mystical bond connecting them had been the reason.

Father sniffed loudly, lifting his chin defiantly. Even to think of the past several months brought fresh spasms of pain to his chest - for Catherine had been lost to them; taken, imprisoned, shut away from all who loved her. Worse yet, after six months in ruthless captivity, she had been

murdered. He would never forget Vincent's haunted features the morning after her death, for it had been his son who had carried her home, forced to leave her alone in her bedroom as the sun rose on the new day. It had been his son who had gently informed him that Catherine had delivered a child - their son, shortly before her death, and that 'he' must find that child.

A smile crossed Father's lips. Vincent had found the child - his son, and had suffered more than a lifetime's worth of pain to do it. The boy was strong, beautiful, reminding all who looked at him of Catherine, and at his Naming ceremony, had been called Jacob.

The smile turned to a frown as Father found himself recalling those first days, the days after little Jacob had come home. He had stood in the doorway of Vincent's chamber watching; gladdened with the happiness of knowing the boy was finally safe, and burdened anew with the pain of the loss of the child's mother.

Father moved stiffly, leaning heavily on his walking stick as he made his way to his favorite chair. He had seen a miracle after Catherine had come Below, he had seen love in a form he could never have imagined. What he was sure must remain unquestionably platonic, had, to a point. The child was the proof that it had evolved, and he was saddened to think that it couldn't have lasted longer. If anyone had deserved the magic of complete and utter love, it had been them; for they mirrored each other in every way, and the many sacrifices each would be called upon to make, would have been nothing in the face of that love.

The grin returned to Father's face, as he settled his aging frame in the old upholstered chair. The agony of loss had at one time been insurmountable. Vincent had been withdrawn, quiet, able to function in only the smallest capacities - until the baby had been found. Now, after a few short months, there was a solid argument for felicity; against all odds Catherine Chandler had returned.

The joy had returned to this separate world, bringing the residents together in the spirit usually reserved for Winterfest. The happiness of his son was absolute, and the bond connecting this family had enveloped them, bringing them together in a mystical joining of the souls.

Catherine's smile brightened any room, especially when she was with Vincent, but the look on her face when she held her child for the first time had been something that Father would never forget - it had taken his breath away. To have survived imprisonment, torture, childbirth and what had turned out to be attempted murder, was indeed a miracle, for she had lost none of what she was.

He was determined now that he would no longer try and sway his son's mind, particularly where Catherine was concerned. He was certain there would be a wedding soon, and all the community and some special Helpers, like Peter and Diana would be invited. There would be work to do - Vincent's chamber would need to be expanded, but there was time for that later. For now it was enough just to be thankful for the reunited trio.

Pulling himself to his feet, Father slowly walked the short corridor that lead to Vincent's chamber. Upon the great bed Catherine slept, her son by her side, her arm about him in a protective manner. Vincent sat in his favorite chair, watching in silence - drinking in the sight of this woman who meant more than life to him - unaware of the patriarch in the doorway.

With a smile on his face, Father turned back to his room. The weight of grief's anguish had been lifted this day, the darkness had been pushed back by the light of love's truth. Never again would limits be placed on his son, for the greatest lesson that could be learned from all the months of waiting, and the reality of grief and loss, was that with love, all things 'were' possible - and nothing could make him happier.

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