

SURRENDER

by Debbie Ristick

She found him on the balcony, lost in thought as he stared out at the night. Frozen at the threshold to her apartment, she watched him, wondering how long he'd been there and why he'd come Above tonight. She smile to herself as she gazed at him, lost in the spell of his gentle but masculine beauty. His kind and generous heart warmed her inside and gave her hope in this somewhat reckless world. And his love... well, his love was her life - was the reason she lived. She longed so much for the things he said they could never have - longed to hold him close and tell him he was wrong - longed to experience the miracle of his touch and to tenderly teach him the magic of passion... to lose herself in him....

"Catherine....," he spoke softly, but the low vibration of her name from his lips sent shivers down her back. Turning her attention to him and away from her continuing fantasies, she closed the distance between them, falling into the arms he held open for her.

Her breathing was slow and even as she laid her head upon his chest. He trembled helplessly as feelings of warmth and happiness shot through him, melting the resolve that had settled around his heart like a block of ice. He felt suddenly weak in the knees, almost dizzy, as the wonder of his situation penetrated through the layers of doubt still festering in his mind, after all this time. He frowned - he should be able to put it away - to forget about it. But he couldn't.

And yet, he thought as he held her in his arms, she could have anyone she desired but she'd chosen him above all others - loved and accepted him in spite of - no because of who he was. Though this one fact humbled him with its value, it was another irrefutable truth that astonished him with its unbelievable and wondrous beauty; she wanted him with a soul-deep passion he was finding harder and harder to deny. And, he thought ironically, he wanted so very much to give into her yearnings, to love her....

Lifting her head from his chest, Catherine gazed into his eyes. Her smile of satisfaction caused his heart to lurch, to skip a beat, as the impulse to gather her closer to him was met and fought away. He must not allow himself to forget who and what he was, to lose hold of his tightly-fought-for control.

"You're shaking," she stated simply, never taking her eyes from his. "Is something wrong, Vincent? I didn't know you were coming, but I'm so glad you're here..."

Shaking his head, he closed his eyes. "No," he whispered, "there is nothing wrong." Taking a deep breath, he weighed the words he'd come to say carefully, measuring them for their validity and truthfulness. "There are things I wish to tell you," he began hesitantly, "to finally say to you. Now," he sighed despondently, "I don't know if I can..."

Tilting her head in question, Catherine grinned. "You know you can tell me anything, Vincent... anything at all. You know you can trust me with your problems..."

Feeling her warmth press against him, Vincent tensed, his control weakening. "We share a dream, Catherine, a dream that is in many ways beautiful, but in many more hopeless. I feel in you much love for me, such passion. I don't know how to help you. I don't know how to help myself. I want so much ... but it is only a dream."

The hope his words gave her heart brought her head up, and meeting his eyes, she shook her head. "I want it too..."

"It is unimaginable ... it can never be..., " he admitted sadly.

Resolute, Catherine took his chin in her hand. "But, Vincent, how can it be unimaginable? It's a dream we share together. It's right to want more; your feelings are real ... and they're shared ..."

Pulling away from her, Vincent turned, resuming his study of the city below them. Aside from the somewhat mystical lights decorating the buildings, it was now shrouded fully in darkness.

"Yes," he finally whispered, "It is real, Catherine. But we must be responsible, we must see beyond the reality. We must see the truth."

Taking a step toward him, she extended her hand. "The truth has always been love, Vincent. We both know it ... accept it ... believe it. I could never live without you in my life ... without the love"

"Love yes ... no," he said tensely, moving away from her. "The truth is that I'm a monster, quite capable of horrendous evil. I could hurt you with a single touch ..." He turned to face her, his soul bared and vulnerable. "I could never risk that. What I want is impossible ..."

"No," she uttered the single syllable sternly. "We both know that isn't so. What we've endured during our time together has convinced me, and it should have convinced you as well. I have never asked you for anything impossible, and I want our dream, Vincent." She ran her hand along his arm, feeling the muscles within quiver. "Tell me what it is you need want you want ..."

Hearing the confidence in her voice, the conviction and certainty in her words, Vincent knew he wanted to tell her everything. Though now, after rehearsing what he would say and climbing seventeen stories to do it, the words escaped him.

More than anything, he longed to be a man - to love her as a man. He wanted desperately to go to her and hold her close to his fragile heart forever. The desire he had always tried to hide overwhelmed him, suddenly strengthened him; he needed her touch, needed to lose himself in just a kiss. Turning to her, he looked down, unsure of what to do.

A soft breeze lifted long strands of honey-colored hair from her shoulder and Catherine closed her eyes at the sensation. Vincent was at a crossroads in his life, in great turmoil, longing for love yet afraid to take it - afraid even to ask for it. As she watched him standing before her, she wondered what more she could say to him - how she could ease his mind.

"It is difficult to forget the fear," he began softly, startling her from her reverie. Averting his eyes from her gaze, he shook his head. "But within me, there is a tremendous need - a need I don't really understand. It eats at me constantly I can't concentrate ..."

"I know," she whispered, hugging him gently. "I feel it in you, Vincent. I understand it because I feel it too. I have for a very long time. You must believe that."

"I know you do," he replied, helpless as she squeezed him. "The beauty of your love staggers me, Catherine. There is so much I want to give you ... so much I want to tell you..."

Lifting her head to meet his startled blue eyes, she smiled. "So tell me, Vincent. Tell me now"

The invitation was plain and he tensed slightly before throwing the doubt away. The miracle of her love filled him with courage, with fortitude, and he shivered with a willing anticipation, as he reached for her. Slowly, deliberately, he lowered his face toward her, allowing himself the privilege of her kiss, the right to gather her softness closer to him.

His mouth moved on hers intimately, and Catherine could hardly control the thrill she felt at the contact. Burying herself deeper into him, she slid her arms around his neck, urging him to deepen the kiss, to take what it was he longed for.

It seemed as though time stood still, but as they slowly parted a moment later, Vincent couldn't believe the excitement building within him, the freedom he suddenly felt. Without hesitation, he lowered his mouth again and found hers waiting, eager for him to continue, hopeful that he could.

The heat was rising in her like a tide and Catherine was finding it difficult to remain passive. But, she sighed, she knew she must for his sake. This was his discovery, his surrender to fate. She could not hinder him now, would not interfere in this, his victory.

Vincent closed his eyes tightly, allowing the triumph he felt to overtake him. He grew bold, moving his mouth slowly along her cheek to her jawbone and up the side of her face to her ear. All the while he could sense her emotions, could sense the desire building within her and knew it was an echo of his own. It was overwhelming that something as simple as this touch should affect him so, but it did and with a heartfelt groan, he was lost.

"Catherine," he growled low in his chest, moving his mouth toward the hollow of her throat. *"Oh... Catherine..."*

Her head dropped back as she gave him access to her skin, and with a growing sense of joy, Catherine knew Vincent's resolve was abandoning him. Pressing herself into him confidently, she found his ear close to her mouth and kissed him, chuckling softly as he shivered.

Lifting his mouth from her throat, Vincent stared into the excited green eyes of his beloved, knowing that now, tonight, the time for his denial of their love was over, forever. He would struggle against the truth of this love no more - it was time to surrender to it - surrender and be reborn.

"Yes," he whispered with a ragged breath. "It is right for us, Catherine. It is real. I want you ... yes, that is what I wanted to tell you tonight. I want you, now..."

"Yes, now." She smiled, reaching for his face with her hands. "It is finally our time..."

Confidence carried him across the threshold to her bedroom, and as he closed the doors behind him, Vincent knew he'd been captured - caught in some kind of exquisite spell. He wanted to cry out in frustration as the emotions he'd always kept locked away before were now experienced, drowning him with their purity and passion. He watched her, bewitched as she resumed undoing the laces of his shirt, his breath held as she exposed his bared chest to her eyes. Their eyes locked, and in his, was his soul.

What she was about to say was lost as Catherine first looked at him, and smiling, she couldn't help herself as she pressed a soft kiss against his skin.

"So beautiful," she murmured seductively, determined now to take full advantage of this moment and the drop of his guard. "Do you know how much you excite me, Vincent?" she whispered just seconds later, totally engrossed in her slow exploration.

Feeling her building desire, he nodded, overcome by the promise in her eyes and the urgency of her touch.

"I do," he stammered, pushing the fabric of her sweater aside to expose an alabaster shoulder. "I do."

A soft chuckle escaped from her lips, and Catherine pulled him close to her, reveling in the accomplishment of their bond. They were drawn together irrevocably - had always been - and would never be parted again. As he spread hesitant but chilling kisses over her shoulders and neck, all she could think of was the wasted time - time that both of them would one day soon want back.

Vincent's knees trembled as he scooped his beloved into his arms, and though nervous beyond all reason, he carried her the few steps to the waiting bed. He saw in her face a look he'd only imagined before - a look of sheer and total joy - acceptance and happiness. He was lost....