

Tender is the Night

Dream Gyres

by Frances Lambeth

Catherine, Father and Elliot stroll into Vincent's chamber. Mother Marie sits beside his bed. Vincent wears a long-sleeved hospital gown. Several of the remote cardiac discs can be seen above the neckline. The monitor silently blinks and the screen traces the slow rhythmical beat. An IV hangs from the top of the stained glass window.

"How is he?" Father asks.

"No change," Mother Marie smiles. "Restarted an IV. Soon, the feeding is due. William, I think he said, went to get it."

"Good," Father nods as he ambles over and checks Vincent's pulse, more out of habit than necessity.

"Getting late," Mother Marie reminds him.

"Yes. Must inform everyone," Father sighs. "It's only right they know what to expect. Vincent's a very vital part of us."

"You plan to tell them all?" Mother Marie gazes at him.

"I don't know," Father shakes his head.

"What do you mean?" Mary asks. Fear furrows her face. "Vincent's going to be all right, isn't he?"

"I don't know." Father twists to face her. "I honestly don't know." His own fears and concerns wrinkle his face.

"Everyone's waiting," Mary nods. She turns and plods out of the chamber.

Father takes a deep troubled breath. "What do I tell them?"

"You're too close," Mother Marie stands. She knows now why she was allowed to find him. "You know, but your hope clouds your eyes. We must plan, together. He'll need help to relearn, instructors used to dealing with adult frustration. He may remember he used to be able to do things, or he may remember nothing. You'll care for him and support the efforts. Do you have access, or do you want me to?"

Father breathes sadly. "We have Helpers who are teachers for those with special problems."

"He'll need a speech therapist," Mother Marie prods. "If he can't make the sounds, then someone to teach him sign."

"Eleanor can do both," Father nods. He does not like thinking about this aspect of Vincent's injuries.

"Good," Mother Marie nods. "I'll take care of the physical. He'll have to learn to read, math, the rest."

"Mark," Father thinks deeply, "does so for the handicapped children, dyslexic, learning disabilities."

"Good," Mother Marie nods. "Now, we'll talk to them."

Father sits in a chair at the table. Mother Marie sits beside him. Elliot stands near the entrance. Catherine stayed with Vincent. Sadness weighs the atmosphere as sniffs whisper around with the nervous fidgeting.

"Your duty," Mother Marie offers. "Is to love him. He'll need that more than anything. We can't guarantee he'll ever wake. You must support without doing it for him. He has to fall to learn to walk. He's a plain piece of paper. Everything must be retaught, relearned, rethought." She looks at everyone, some with tears freely running.

"Some things he'll never do again," Mother Marie warns. She studies the sea of faces sitting, standing, perching everywhere around her.

"We must be careful what we write," Mother Marie cautions. "It'll last for his lifetime. Then, he may die in his sleep."

Gasps hiss around, up and down the stairs. The sniffs increase in number and loudness. Weeping is openly displayed by men, women and children. The emotions move her. Vincent is truly loved.

"We must hope and pray," Father wipes his own tears away. He cannot deny what she said. "What he has endured, has been great."

"He's a survivor," Devin says loudly as he steps into the library. "Always been. This, just the ultimate test."

"He'll make it," Diana smiles as she steps beside Elliot.

Everyone stares at this red-headed intruder. She is offering them an answer, but many wonder if she is to be believed. So much has happened, turning their world upside down and now it brings these three. Devin turns to glance at Diana.

"Wish I was so sure," Father sighs, wiping his chin.

"Be sure," Devin smiles. "I am." He pats Father's shoulder. "All of you. It's late. Go on to bed. We've all got a lot to think about. Sleep's the best preparer. You, too, Father. Come on, let's go to your chamber."

"I'd rather stay with Vincent," Father waves Devin off.

The community members babble-whisper their concerns as they leave for their chambers. Mary, Pascal, Mouse and Jamie linger with Elliot and Diana. Rolley stops briefly to study Father who is being consoled in the arms of Devin. Rolley feels the pain, but Vincent is not here to hold him. Rolley turns and plods past Mouse.

Minutes later, Rolley sits at the piano, studying the keys as tears stream down his face. "You tried so hard, saw me shot, saved me. Because of you, I'm alive. You cared even when I didn't." He sniffs his emotions. "For you, Vincent." He begins to play the haunting melody Vincent loved so much; *THE MOONLIGHT SONATA*.

Catherine sits by Vincent's head, caressing his hair. Father rests at Vincent's feet, Devin perches beside him, Mother Marie by Catherine, Elliot and Diana congregate with Mouse and Jamie, and Pascal and Mary collect at the writing table. The haunting melody wafts into the chamber as if whispered, then gradually swells, until everyone is aware of its presence. Then, a miracle. Vincent's head moves slightly, the fingers of his hand stretch as if to reach out. The music echoes through the quiet tunnels to fill the chamber with muted vibrant tones.

"He moved," Catherine whispers, almost afraid she is wrong.

Vincent's head flexes as a deep breath is taken. No one can deny what they see. Vincent's head weakly rolls, as if to hear the music more clearly. He takes another deep breath, fingers jerk. The music stops and Vincent's body drifts into silence. His head rolls back to where it was. Mother Marie shakes her head sadly. It was a brief moment of hope, but now it is gone. Father's shoulders drop. But, Elliot studied what he saw very carefully. Diana shrugs at his unspoken question. The music begins again, broken and labored. Elliot studies Vincent carefully. Diana cannot feel anything but sleep. Vincent takes a deep breath and fingers tense.

"The music!" Elliot points out enthusiastically. "It's the music!" He turns to Mouse. "Can you get me to a phone? Some place I can get things brought to me safely?"

Mouse nods delightedly. "Okay, good. Okay, fine. Get there quick!"

"Good," Elliot grins. "I think I've got the answer."

"Need to get back, myself," Diana waves after them. "I'll go with you." She and Jamie hustle to catch up.

Later, Mouse bounds into the chamber with a bulging plastic bag clacking against his leg. Jamie spills the batteries onto the table. She neatly stacks the packages as Mouse stacks the audio discs.

"Music," Mouse motions at Father and Catherine. "All best. Plenty."

Elliot jogs in almost breathless. "You two're fast." He sets the portable disc player on the table. "Let's get one of those playing." He punches several buttons. Mouse clicks through several, then hands Elliot one. Elliot slips it into position. He pushes it in.

"This ejects it, pushes it out," Elliot instructs. "This make it play. Should be enough batteries for a week. You have my card. Call." The strains of the *BLUE DANUBE* begin oozing from the speakers. Elliot adjusts the volume, until the music fills the chamber with gentle, clear tones. It sounds as if it were live.

"Top of the line," Elliot explains. "Can't do a lot for him, but I can bring him music. There's a disc of every classical recording I could find, from *Brahms* to *Wagner*. A lot of *Mozart*. Mouse said Vincent likes him the most."

"True," Father nods, overwhelmed by the gesture. "You shouldn't have gone to such an expense." He notices the \$20 price on many of the boxes.

"Jacob," Elliot justifies. "My choice, my way of helping."

"Thank you," Father nods. "It is greatly appreciated."

"Good," Elliot nods satisfied. "Well, I've got to go. Several meetings tomorrow. I'll check with you later in the week." Elliot turns and nods at Mouse.

"Thanks," Catherine smiles.

"Any time," Elliot smiles as he leaves. He stops briefly to watch Vincent take a deep breath.

Two days later, Father enters Vincent's chamber. Catherine is napping beside Vincent. Mother Marie perches on the chair. The disc player stops and ejects the disc. Father glances at it, then ambles to the table to drop in another disc. The music begins with *Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto*. He chuckles as he remembers the significance to Vincent and Catherine.

Father ambles to Mother Marie. "How is he?"

"Moving more fluidly, not jerky like yesterday. The motions're exercising him more than mine. I'm quite pleased."

"Good," Father smiles. He notices Catherine is waking. She raises her head to glance at the disc player.

"*Grieg's Piano Concerto*," Catherine says, rolling onto her back and stretching like a cat. She sits up and rubs her eyes.

"Seems appropriate," Father answers. He flashes a grin.

Suddenly, Vincent jerks violently, seems to be fighting some dream. Catherine tries to wrap him up. Mother Marie does the same. His physical struggle escalates to head shaking, moaning and body tossing beyond their control. It is as violent as a convulsion. Elliot enters the chamber. Father anxiously draws a syringe of sedative.

"It's the music," Catherine offers, as she vainly tries to keep Vincent still. "Ours, the most emotional." Elliot realizes Vincent must be feeling core emotions. "Don't give him that. You'll take it away from him." Elliot rushes to stop Father.

"He's going to hurt himself," Father reasons.

"No!" Elliot pulls Father away so violently that Father is dumped into the chair. He jerks Mother Marie out of his way. "Sorry, but he must know the feelings!"

"What are you talking about?" Catherine growls. Elliot forces Vincent's body up and slides underneath to hold him from behind.

"Must feel your song, your love," Elliot insists. "Can't you see that! Don't you understand! He's fighting for his life, your lives." Elliot cradles Vincent closer to him. He begins to gently rock Vincent as the music plays.

No one turns the music off. Vincent flails the air with desperate howling, a wordless pleading cry. Elliot comforts him silently, rocking him back and forth. Vincent becomes more violent, his terrified cries rock the chamber. Elliot holds him tighter, rocking him faster.

"Feel it, Vincent," Elliot weeps. "Know it. She's here, close to you. You're not alone. You're not alone!"

Vincent pants. He runs, searches everywhere. But, no one is here. Everyone is gone. He stops to cry mournfully for all the missing people, for his aloneness.

"No!" Vincent cries. "Please! Not alone! Not alone!" Panicked by the emptiness, his heart pounds with fear. He searches every corner, every chamber, but there are only bare stone walls, nothing of what he knew. Fear racks his body with its panic, dropping him to his knees to clutch his chest to stop the pain.

"Is it all lost to me?" Vincent wails. "Why?" Where did they go? Why did no one send him a message? He studies the emptiness of what was the library.

Suddenly and faintly, a distant voice whispers, "You're not alone. I'm holding you."

Vincent whirls to find the voice. He closes his eyes to the dizzy whirling that staggers him. He feels the arms, the gentle rocking, but he cannot see them.

"Mother?" Vincent's mind searches. "Why did you leave?" He has been exiled. What could he have possibly done to deserve this?

"All, left! Why?" Vincent sobs, dropping to his knees. There is nothing left for him now, no reason to live.

"What did I do?" Vincent cannot understand what he did to deserve this isolation. That dark, evil other must have done something and he must pay the penalty. "Exiled forever?"

"No," the soft, distorted voice echoes. "You must live. Remember love."

Vincent weeps. His aloneness is more than he can bare. No hell can ever be worse than this. "Lost." Death is all that is left to him, the only way out of this nightmare.

"No," the voice answers. Vincent rubs his arms where he is being rocked back and forth. "Not lost, found. Not abandoned, loved. Knew the love, feel it," Elliot states.

Vincent's body jerks with his tormented weeping, his aloneness. He clings to Elliot's arms. Everyone realizes what Elliot is doing, forcing Vincent's dreams into reality. Father approves of this rage reduction. It is having a positive effect. Catherine brushes the tears from her face. She wishes this could have been done without Vincent suffering. The syringe is in Father's hand, capped but ready to be used.

Elliot continues to rock Vincent as a mother would a sick child. Vincent begins to calm as the music,

the *Concerto*, ends. The music moves onto vibrate the tones of *Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet*. Vincent's eyes flutter. Catherine gasps. His eyes open slowly, but will not focus. Vincent has no idea where he is. He tenderly shakes his head. He does not know who or what is holding him. He fearfully tries to pull away. Two strong sets of arms grip him. He pulls harder, tries to shake them loose.

"Vincent," Catherine tries to reach beyond the unfocused eyes and terrified struggling. Vincent has all but thrown Elliot onto the floor.

"Please," Vincent gasps. In these blurred and dark surroundings, the voices are distorted. "Do not hurt. I will go. Please." He wishes he could see.

Elliot helps Catherine force Vincent onto the pillow. "Take it easy," she comforts. "You're safe."

"Please, do not hurt me," Vincent desperately pleads his terror. He cannot hear anything but a strange moaning as blurred forms force him down. "Please!" Is he going to be killed, tortured? Catherine desperately glances at Elliot for an answer. Vincent either cannot hear them, or words do not have any meaning.

"Kiss him," Elliot shrugs with a sheepish grin. "Somebody who's going to hurt him, wouldn't kiss him."

Catherine nods. Vincent tries to push her away, moving his head to defend his face. Elliot holds his arm down, forces his head over. Catherine plants her kiss on his lips gently at first, then increases the pressure. Vincent draws his head back in the pillow, then slowly stops struggling. Elliot lets go and Vincent's hand finds her shoulder. Vincent realizes he is being kissed. Only one person in the world would kiss him like this. Only one. Catherine! His mind clears, his eyes focus as if freed from some sedative. Catherine pulls away. Vincent takes a deep breath and smiles.

"Good morning," Catherine smiles, caressing a strand of his hair aside. She is glad Elliot's suggestion worked.

"Afternoon," Vincent grins broadly. She has never seen him grin like that. He takes an exhilarated breath that makes him light-headed for a moment. "Kissed!" he beams.

"Not bad for the first," Catherine chuckles. She can see he enjoyed it, but then so did she.

"You're alive," Vincent stretches tight muscles. He realizes what she said. "If the first, perhaps others?"

"You bet!" Catherine says, glancing at Elliot and Father. "Really asleep. Known I'm here. First time in over three weeks." She wipes away the tears of joy. "Thanks, Elliot, for giving him back."

"Did it," Elliot explains. "Once....." He shrugs nervously. "While I was on the docks, I knew this guy, a friend. His wife was killed in a accident. Tore him apart. Didn't know what to do for him. His family put him away. For his own good, they said. Mourning too deeply. They sedated him, so he couldn't feel. Three months later, still sedated, he gave up, died. Promised I'd never let anybody be sedated like that."

"You are right," Father nods, dropping the syringe into his bag. He regrets what he was about to do, though his intentions were only to help Vincent. "We must feel our pain, to heal." What would have happened if Elliot had not stopped him?

"Yes," Elliot agrees. "The music was theirs. He thought she was dead. Music brought the memory back. That's what I saw."

"We discovered a great deal," Mother Marie smiles.

"Jacob," Mother Marie says, bobbing. She pats her fingertips together as she often does with a Novice. "Seems, we've much less to worry about. He communicates, can see, recognize people." She winks at Catherine, who snickers. "He remembers and is very mobile. Any weakness is easily dealt with."

"Thank God," Father nods happily. "His inactivity has compromised his physical condition."

Mother Marie nods. "To take care of that, Mary, you and I need to plan with the children." She leaves the chamber. Mary shrugs and quickly follows.

Twenty-four hours pass. At midday, Father enters Vincent's chamber to find Michael sitting on Vincent's right ankle as if playing *'horsey'*. With difficulty, Vincent swings Michael off the floor several more times to Michael's count of "nine, ten."

"Finally," Vincent sighs tiredly, letting his head droop slightly.

"You did good," Michael beams his four year old smile. He dashes out of the chamber. Father grins as Michael brushes past him.

"I see your exercises are going well," Father smiles. He is glad that Mother Marie insisted the children participate with Vincent's recovery. It has been good for the entire community.

"Yes," Vincent chuckles. "Tiring." He pushes himself out of the chair. His steps are shaky as he crosses to plop onto the left side of the bed.

"Still, clumsy," Vincent excuses. He wishes his movements were not so strained.

Father smiles as he sits in the chair against the wall. "With these exercises, your strength will soon return."

"The children enjoy their part," Vincent chuckles. "Hanging on my wrists, sitting on my ankles."

Father grins. "At least, you can get up when you like. As remarkable as your recovery."

"I am glad," Vincent gives a breathy smile.

"We are all glad," Father smiles. "Brooke, Steven, Sam, Elliot, our Helpers, all safe because of your gift."

"I only remember," Vincent recalls the incident in the library, "words that were not yours. A darkness rose with them and I struck out." Vincent shakes his head. "If I were wrong?"

"Your mind knew the difference," Father counsels. "Reacted in our defense. I am grateful."

"How did I know," Vincent asked, gesturing the depth of the question. He studies his mind, glancing at Father who shrugs. "Mysterious miracle?"

"Yes," Father nods with a chuckle. "I am amazed every day. Marveled by the impossible becoming reality. And you, my son, are the greatest marvel of them all. Though, I must admit Mouse sometimes...." They both chuckle.

Catherine enters, grinning broadly. "Glad you're up."

"Weak," Vincent nods as he rises. His overworked leg wobbles and he plops.

"Pretty good for a man I just buried," Catherine chuckles. "Cremated first, of course." She takes a deep pleased breath. "Everyone seemed satisfied. And, Rosenthal...."

"Rosenthal?" Vincent bolts up. He reels as if to escape the name. His eyes are wide with fear as a dark evil cloud whirls around him. **"No!"** He is nearly hysterical.

"Vincent!" Father shoves Vincent onto the bed. "It's all right. I know what he did to you, what you went through. He cannot hurt you."

Vincent sits wide-eye, as these dark violet hours claw at him unmercifully. He thought he had destroyed those memories. "Know?"

"Yes," Catherine takes Vincent's arm, wrapping his hand up in hers. "He told us everything. He's never going to hurt anyone again. We're asking for the death penalty."

"Will it work?" Father asks. "He'll have proof he is insane. Plenty of money."

Catherine growls pleased. "Government seized all assets, drug related. Used that plea before,

completely cured after 60 days. Don't think he's going to fool anyone this time. He's too hot. Can't seem to get a lawyer. Going to be court-appointed. Three countries want him for murder. Not this time. He's too infamous."

"He will not hurt anyone?" Vincent asks, his mind reeling.

Her words have slowed the holocaust, but did not stop it. "No," Catherine smiles. "You're safe. Everything is silent forever. All ruled self-defense."

Vincent sighs, deeply distraught. "There will be others."

"Not that I know of," Catherine grins. Vincent gives her a questioning stare.

"I do not understand," Vincent gazes at her. He can hear she will not be investigating any more. There are other thoughts twinkling through her mind, lighting a path into his thoughts.

Catherine grins. "Stay in the office or in court, now. Assistant DA."

Vincent chuckles. "There, you are exceptional."

"Yes, I am," Catherine chuckles. "It's a lot easier on the body, too."

"The children are planning something," Vincent smiles. "Will you stay?"

"Wouldn't miss it," Catherine beams. "You look tired. Maybe, you should rest."

"Perhaps," Vincent smiles, with a glance at Father.

"Guess to make sure everything's okay," Catherine giggles, understanding.

"Yes," Vincent smiles. "You explored my life?"

"Well," Catherine is embarrassed. She wonders how much Father has explained. "What've they told you?"

"Since Spirko?" Vincent asks. "Paracelsus? Little. But, your mind contains all."

"I see," Catherine answers anxiously.

"I have no fear," Vincent comforts. He smiles, taking her hand in his.

"Still," Catherine shrugs, nervously glancing at Father. "We hadn't discussed, decided..."

"Catherine," Vincent comforts. "I know. That cannot change. Knew with the kiss."

Catherine blushes with the memory of that night. "Well." Her embarrassment grows. After all, it was not even her idea.

"I am grateful to Elliot," Vincent smiles.

"I'm glad," Catherine nods. "Glad to have you back."

Vincent smiles. They hug for the first time since Spirko separated them. They cling with all the pent-up emotions. Father leaves the chamber so they can become reacquainted.

"All that happened," Vincent studies her face. "A dream?"

"For the most part," Catherine smiles.

"My parents?" Vincent asks.

"Real," Catherine answers sadly.

"Diana and Elliot?" Vincent asks, realizing they saw him.

"Friends," Catherine grins. "The miracles your dreams allowed to be."

"Your love," Vincent smiles with his heart. "Is the miracle."

Diana gets a call. "Diana," Joe sighs. "Got a sticky situation on this Gabriel thing." He is worried. The

FBI called. "Seems the granddaughter of Edward Davidson, of Malloy and Davidson, has been kidnapped. Want some key belonging to Anon International. Only got one call, according to Edward."

"Ransom note?" Diana asks.

"None, as yet," Joe pops the desk with his pencil. "Called this afternoon. Snatched her from dance school. Got two days to turn the key over, or she's dead."

"What key?" Diana asks. She saw nearly all the evidence and personal effects of everyone. She runs through the clutter of information to extract all the keys she saw. "Bank box or something?"

"Can't be," Joe shakes head. "Opened them all. Each made the news."

Diana sits back. "They'd know those're empty." She thinks about the items found at the estate. But, why snatch the girl for something there? She re-examines Malloy's office. She extracts all the things she saw on his desk.

"A key," Diana remembers. "In Malloy's desk. Remember, it didn't make the news. The mausoleum key with the number 125R on it."

"Yeah, I remember," Joe nods. "Gave it to the Feds."

Diana sighs. "Obviously, that's it. I was there when they opened it. Found a set of books, pictures, and gold coin collections. They don't know the Feds have it."

"Then," Joe reasons. "The girl's as good as dead."

"Not necessarily," Diana answers, but not totally convinced he is wrong. "If he plays the part of trying to get stuff released to him. Then, he takes them all the keys he gets."

"Yeah," Joe bounces forward. "That'll give us time."

"I'll talk to Davidson," Diana answers. "See if I can get anything."

"Need this one, Bennett," Joe warns. "Need her alive and the kidnapers."

"Do what I can, Joe," Diana nods. "You know that."

"Yeah," Joe smiles. "Go get 'em."

"Always!" Diana chuckles and hangs up. She grabs her coat and leaves the apartment.

Forty hours later, Diana finds her way Below and calls out to the sentries. "Need to see Vincent."

Steven steps from the shadows. "Follow me," Diana nods.

Soon, Diana is in the library. Vincent is reading, his back to her. He closes the book and places it on the table. "Come. Sit," Vincent offers. "Problems?"

Diana perches. "In a way," she smiles with a shrug. "Need your help."

Vincent nods. "From your haste, it is important."

"Yes," Diana sighs. "Girl's been kidnapped. Being held on the wharf. At least, we think so. The boat sounds and such."

"Know where?" Vincent asks.

"Narrowed it to two or three," Diana shrugs. "Running out of time. Need a way of checking without being seen."

"I know a way," Vincent nods. He steps to Father's desk and pulls down the maps.

"Heard you were Below," Father smiles as he enters. "Maps? What is this about?"

"Diana needs an unseen way to the wharf," Vincent explains. "There are three entrances, at the beginning, at the end, and inside this warehouse. These are manholes, this a slab."

Diana studies the maps and Vincent's directions. "Boat whistles in the background and said she could see the sun reflecting off the roof below."

Vincent points to the map. "Glass upper level, here and here."

Father shrugs. "Do you think you are strong enough to show her the way?"

"Yes," Vincent nods. "She will need help with the covers."

"Okay, good. Okay, fine," Mouse beams as he joins the group. "Mouse good at moving things."

"Yes," Father grins with a chuckle. He is very aware of how adaptive Mouse is. "In fact, I prefer you did."

"Father," Vincent protests. "I am able...."

"I don't doubt you are, Vincent," Father explains. "But, I prefer someone go with you, in case you need something."

Vincent sighs. "As you wish. Mouse, you and Diana will ride to this point. Meet me here."

"How long to get there?" Diana asks. She knows the deadline is coming fast. "Only have until five, then they kill her."

"Twenty minutes after we get here," Vincent sighs. "The slab may pose a problem, the noise moving it."

"You wait, I get. Hear nothing," Mouse promises. "Mouse take care of." With that, he swirls and darts from the library.

"Well," Father chuckled. "He does not lack for energy."

"No," Vincent chuckles. Mouse has always rushed about. "Do you need anything?"

"No," Diana shakes her head. She made sure she had everything in her bag before she left.

Vincent nods as he rolls the maps up. "We will leave, when Mouse returns."

"I'll take those," Father offers. Vincent nods.

"Mouse ready," Mouse announces as he bounds in, only slightly winded. He proudly displays his pouch. "Got plenty noise."

"Yes," Father chuckles. He turns to Vincent. "Take care, Vincent. Call, so we'll know where you are, what you need."

"I will be all right, Father," Vincent smiles. "I will return in three hours or so."

"I will sound an all-quiet," Father nods, still worried about Vincent. "At least, until you return to the main tunnels."

Vincent nods. "I will be safe, Father."

"Not worrying," Father chuckles. "That is next to impossible. On your way and do be careful, all of you. Especially you, Mouse."

"We will," Mouse beams. He swirls and bounces to the entrance. Diana chuckles and follows. Vincent gives Father a hug and leaves, grabbing his cape off the table.

Later, Mouse and Diana board the subway car. Soon, the doors snap shut and the train rushes on its way. Diana waits for Vincent to join them. After several moments and no Vincent, she becomes worried. She can feel him near, but they are the only passengers.

"Where is he?" Diana wonders. She hopes he is all right.

"Vincent ride," Mouse beams. "Up there. Do all time."

"But," Diana shrugs. She closes her eyes. "It's been awhile since he's done it." She feels his confidence and the wind on his face. She sighs, relieved.

"Vincent, Vincent," Mouse shrugs. "Always." He never doubted Vincent would recover and be himself again.

Vincent watches the tunnels rush by as the train bullets on its way. Within minutes, they will be at their destination on the lower east side, near the wharf. The train darts into the station. As the doors open, Vincent jumps to the beam above the car. He quickly beam-walks to the far side and drops to the floor. The train pulls out in less than two minutes. Vincent will wait at the shadowed entrance, until Mouse and Diana join him.

Vincent picks his way through the debris clogging the tunnel. He stops to study the distant tunnel carefully. Diana steps forward to shine her flashlight beam ahead to see what he is studying.

"No," Vincent quickly lowers it. "It will disturb the nest. It will be easier to pass, if they are not upset."

"Nest of what?" Diana asks. She is not sure she really wants to know.

"Rats," Mouse rasps quietly. "Hear them. Quiet. Sneak. They just watch."

"Mice?" Diana shrugs. She is not frightened by small rodents.

"Rats," Vincent corrects. He can feel her dread. "They are more frightened of you, than you of them."

"Tell them!" Diana rasps. She would rather be somewhere else, now that she knows these are small dog-sized creatures.

"They already know," Vincent smiles.

Diana chuckles. They cautiously pick their way past the nest of baby rats chewing on the remains of a sandwich. Diana shudders with the closeness. They do not go far before Vincent stops at pipe rungs embedded into the wall.

Vincent nods upward. "This is between the first two warehouses."

"I go," Mouse begins climbing. "Get noise ready. Then, bang." He pushes the manhole cover aside and scrambles out.

"That's what he's got planned?" Diana wonders. They continue down the spiderweb strung, water puddle laden tunnel.

"He did not say," Vincent answers. "It will be loud."

"Thanks for the warning," Diana nods as she brushes the webs away from her face.

"Here," Vincent stops.

Vincent climbs to the top. Diana follows. Vincent listens for several moments. Suddenly, there is an unmistakable explosion. The ground rumbles and sound rocket about like Fourth of July.

"Loud!" Diana chuckles.

Vincent chuckles. He leans into the slab overhead, but it barely moves. He takes a deep breath and reaches inside to tap the hidden primal strength. He forces all against the slab and it slowly grinds aside enough to get through. Mouse scrambles up behind Diana.

Diana finds Vincent crouched and scanning beyond the darkness. He motions her to the shadows behind him. Mouse quietly joins them. They peer out into the active warehouse.

"One in front," Vincent whispers. "One behind us. One in the next corridor. One above us. Hear several outside. All have weapons."

"Full house," Diana whispers. "Obviously, this is the place."

"I hear her," Vincent gazes at Diana. "Crying, above and behind us."

"Need a diversion," Diana thinks. "Need to get the guy down here." Diana wonders how they are going to get to the girl.

"I will confront the guards," Vincent offers. "Perhaps the noise will be sufficient."

"Look," Diana answers. "For the time being, close your hands." Vincent questions her remark. She picks his hand up and pushes the fingers against his palm.

"Close them," Diana smiles. "Keep your nails in. Don't want Joe knowing you were here." Vincent shakes his head, not sure now.

"With your knuckles," Diana whispers. "Like this." She punches his arm gently with her fist. She takes his closed hand and does the same. "With all you've got. It'll work the same. Trust me."

Vincent smiles and slips toward the back wall. Diana eases her gun from her bag. She searches upward to see the steps. The guard leans on the railing, watching the front. Mouse sneaks up and pulls her gun down. She gazes at him to see that sly grin. Mouse sneaks out. Diana sees him reappear under the steps.

Mouse is aware of the need for secrecy. Everyone is concentrating on the front. Voices ripple back and forth from outside. Vincent sneaks towards the guard on the far side, propped against a tall crate. Mouse slips his fishing line from the pouch. In a gap between the balcony and the railing edge, he sees the man's boots have a metal ring. Perfect for what he needs.

Mouse slips the fishing line through the ring and, using an old fashioned button hook, pulls the line down. He glances around and does it again, doubling the strength of the cord. He quickly ties the four strands of line to a metal support bar underneath the flooring. This should throw the guard, if he moves.

"Done good," Mouse whispers, as he sneaks back inside. "Move, fall down."

"We hope," Diana nods. She takes a deep breath. "Just wish we could get closer to the girl."

"Come," Mouse nods with glee. "Found way." He sneaks out.

Diana follows Mouse to a narrow walkway and rigged some steps of wooden crates. Mouse crawls onto the crate ledge. The ledge is almost against the floor above. Diana follows, worming her way to keep up. At the end of the crawl space, Mouse rolls over, reaches over his head, and pulls himself through a hole. Diana does the same. She finds herself near the railing, but behind a wall of boxes and crates. She inches away from the railing to follow Mouse.

Mouse crowds himself into the corner and waves Diana around him. She squeezes past Mouse and inches forward to sneak a quick peek beyond the last crate. She can see the guard. The room door is only five feet from her.

Diana hears voices clustered near the front. The guard comes to attention. One of the returning men must be in charge. She has little time left to get to the girl. The guard's attention is totally on the conversation below. With her gun trained on the guard, she sneaks to the door. Mouse is beside her; before she can motion him to stay put. She eases open the door and Mouse brushes behind her. She backs into the room and eases the door almost closed.

Diana turns to find the girl beside her so close that they bump. Mouse nods with a finger to his lips. Diana hisses a chuckle and eases the door open. The guard is still at attention and focused on the arguing below. She shields the doorway. Mouse and the girl quietly sneak past her to the crates. She cautiously follows. Mouse slips through the hole head first, waving the girl to wait. Diana feels closed-in and blind. She listens carefully to all sounds as she approaches the girl.

Vincent sees Mouse perched in the crawl space. Mouse gives the okay sign. Vincent is glad the child is with Mouse and Diana. Now, he must make sure they get Below. He eases closer near the front. He nods to Mouse. Mouse nods back. Mouse lets Diana know everything is ready.

"Follow," Mouse nods. "Hear, see nothing, but Mouse."

"Do as he says," Diana nods. "We're here to rescue you."

"Name's Sam," Samantha smiles. "Stick like a second skin."

Mouse ducks into the hole. Samantha takes a breath, then follows. Diana glances around, then worms her way down into the crawl space. She keeps her eyes on the front, her gun ready. Suddenly, one of the group notices them.

The girl! the mustached man yells, raising his attack rifle.

Vincent sees the man rising. He closes his hands the way Diana showed him. He lunges forward with a roar, leaping into the group. Vincent swings with the violence of an enraged lion. The man nearest falls to the blow. The others turn their guns. Vincent hears shots and two men drop. A gun butt finds Vincent's head, dropping him to his knees with flashing lights and whining rattles. Vincent grabs the descending gun butt and arm, throwing them as far away as he can. Six men clutter the floor.

Suddenly Diana is there. She karate kicks the gun from the hand and rips a muffled cry from the last man with a blow to his throat. There is a momentary silence. Vincent's head hurts as he drops to his knees to catch his breath and clear his ringing ears.

"Are you all right?" Diana asks, stooping. She sees the pain.

"Yes," Vincent sighs. "We must go. Others are coming."

"Probably FBI," Diana nods as they dash to the bunker's protection. Vincent tugs his hood up before entering. The man on the balcony is face down.

"Go on," Diana motions to Vincent. "You and Mouse. We'll wait. Don't worry, we're safe." Mouse climbs into the opening. Vincent nods, but stumbles slightly. He shakes his head, as he catches his balance.

"Mouse," Diana calls down. "Vincent was hit. Watch him." She wants to make sure Mouse is aware Vincent was injured.

"Okay, good. Okay, fine," Mouse calls up. "Take care."

"I am well," Vincent protests, as he tries to slide the slab back into place.

"Good," Diana smiles. "Then, it won't matter. Sam, help me push." Diana and Samantha push on the opposite side of the slab.

Below, Vincent is tired. The long period of not doing anything has reduced his stamina. He reaches the bottom step and takes a deep breath. He feels he should rest for awhile, but not here.

"To the subway," Vincent motions Mouse ahead of him. He takes a tired breath.

"You first," Mouse answers. "Mouse follow."

Vincent nods and picks his way through the tunnel. Mouse follows closely, studying Vincent's every move. Vincent stops several times to rest briefly. When they reach the subway's connecting tunnel, Vincent braces against the wall before continuing. Mouse grabs his arm.

"No," Mouse pleads. "Rest. Safe, here. Rest."

Vincent braces his back against the wall. "Yes. Perhaps you are right." He slowly squats, then sits to stretch out his legs and rests his head against the wall.

"Rest," Mouse nods, scooting down the wall to sit. He watches Vincent carefully, as Vincent closes his eyes. Vincent seems exhausted. Then, he notices the blood on Vincent's palms. Mouse pulls a piece of cloth from his pouch and tears it.

Realizing Mouse tore something, Vincent gazes at him. Mouse takes Vincent's right hand. There in the palm are the marks of Vincent's nails, drawing blood where they dug into the flesh. Mouse wraps

it carefully and ties it as Vincent studies his other palm. It has the same puncture marks.

"Held then too tightly," Vincent smiles. "Not used to closing them."

"Next time," Mouse chuckles. "Half-close, then not do this."

Vincent chuckles as Mouse wraps his other hand. He drops his head back to rest. Mouse sits against the opposite wall and watches him closely. The bruise on the left side of Vincent's forehead is visible, including a slight swelling. He will stay close to Vincent. After several minutes, Vincent sits forward with a deep sigh.

"We will take the tunnels back," Vincent says. "Too exhausted for the train."

Mouse nods. "Rest lots. Take longer, but get there." He grins to show Vincent he does not mind taking the long way home.

"Yes," Vincent answers with a smile. Vincent lumbers up. Mouse steps forward and under Vincent's arm to support him and make the trip easier.

Later, Catherine makes her way Below, with Diana close behind. "Hope he's okay," Diana sighs as they turn the corner. The tunnels are silent, no signals anywhere.

"Me, too," Catherine nods. She realizes the pipes are silent. She sees Father at his desk with Pascal, staring at a map.

"He's here," Pascal points to the map. "He'll be in the main system here in ten minutes." He has been monitoring the reports from Mouse and the sentries.

"Good," Father nods. "I'm glad he's resting along the way."

"How is he?" Catherine asks as she joins them.

"Tired," Father nods with a smile. "The injuries are minor. Mouse is with him."

"The guy hit him pretty hard," Diana nods. "Worried a lot. Kept shaking his head, like he couldn't keep it clear."

"His head?" Father is stunned. He turns to Pascal. "Did Mouse say anything about that?"

"No," Pascal shrugs with a head shake. "Only mentioned that Vincent had cuts on his palms."

"What?" Catherine is startled. How could something like that have happened?

"Made him close his hands," Diana shrugs as she stuffs her hands in her jean pockets. "Didn't want Joe to know he was there."

"Obviously," Father chuckles. "He did. This blow was to Vincent's head."

"Yeah," Diana sighs. "Left temple. Raised a welt."

"I see," Father sighs. "Pascal, find out from Mouse exactly how Vincent is."

"I am well," Vincent answers as he enters. "Catherine, Diana."

"Come, sit," Father motions to him. "I want to check." He smiles as Vincent shrugs and sits. Father can clearly see the bruise.

"Pascal," Father glances up. "My...., thank you." Mouse sets the black bag on the desk.

Vincent smiles. "There is no concussion, just a bruise."

"I need to check," Father smiles. He quickly checks Vincent's eye reactions. "Good."

"Yes," Vincent grins. Catherine is staring at the wrapped hands. "Closed my hands." He gives an embarrassed shrug. Father studies the marks and paints them.

"Sorry about that," Diana apologizes. "Didn't think about your nails."

"Nor did I," Vincent side glances at her, embarrassed he closed them so tightly.

"Need learn," Mouse offers. "Then, not do." He beams with his brilliant suggestion.

Vincent chuckles. "That is not practical."

"Could be," Catherine answers. She remembers Isaac has seen Vincent and kept the secret. "If you want." Vincent looks at Father, as if for permission to even think about learning.

Father nods. "Very well. But, only to keep him from slapping like a woman." He had never really thought about how Vincent fought, until Diana's description.

"Isaac's seen Vincent, knows him," Catherine smiles, remembering the night when Vincent was injured by the Silks. "Should be able to teach you."

"Unless," Diana grins slyly. "You want Martial Arts."

"No!" Father instantly reacts. "Learning to close his hands is sufficient." He shakes his head.

"Just offered," Diana shrugs. She did not mean to upset anyone. Both Father and Pascal are glaring at her.

Vincent consoles her. "You were only trying to help. After all, you are my sister."

Diana becomes anxious. "Look, Elliot promised..."

"He said nothing," Vincent smiles. "Have known, since my dream."

"I...", Diana stammers, unsure whether to run or hug him. She wanted him to know. Now, she does not know what to do. Emotional relief and tears well up.

"You did not want to intrude," Vincent smiles lovingly. "You are always welcomed." He pulls her closer with a gentle hug. Diana lets go the years of frustration and grips him tightly. Finally, she has a family.

Diana takes a deep breath. "Yeah, well. Take care of yourself."

"I will," Vincent smiles. "Here is a haven, hidden eyes, friends."

Diana smiles. "Greatest undercover network in the city. Nothing can escape, especially when they don't know who's watching."

Catherine smiles as she wraps her arm around Vincent's waist.

"And, it works." Vincent chuckles.

"So," Diana grins slyly. "When're you two getting married?"

Vincent glances at Catherine, who looks up with a smile. "When it is right."

"I see," Diana grins broadly. "Meant to give you this." She hands him a piece of paper from her bag. "Your deed, to your estate on Staten." She shrugs and winks at Catherine. "Underground way there and furnished. Well, gotta go." She winks and strolls from the library. Mouse grins and bounds to catch up.

"Well," Father sighs. "A very interesting month. Quite frankly, I would rather not re-live it."

"I don't know," Catherine sighs. "There're parts I'd like to redo, often."

Vincent chuckles, hearing her thoughts clearly. "Yes!"

"An estate?" Father wonders, shrugging at Pascal. There will be many obligations associated with it that cannot be done by Vincent.

"Sell it?" Pascal shrugs. "No, that wouldn't work. It's in Vincent's name, so he'd have to sign."

"Think I could figure out what to do with a walled in, forested estate," Catherine grins. Her mind's filled with possibilities for just the two of them. "Gardens, pools and rooms. Oh, yes!"

"Yes," Vincent smiles. He gazes at the folded paper in his hand. It is a deed to a life he has never known, never thought would exist. He pulls away from Catherine and opens it. The paper is not a deed, but a letter.

Dear Vincent,

Staff members on the estate now. You already know them. Come, stay, and leave when you want. Have moved in. What's mine's yours. Remember the entrance Below.

Love, Diana.

P.S. Henry Pei says he makes an exquisite picnic lunch.

Vincent smiles and dares to dream. He imagines walking hand in hand through the gardens, laughing as they romp through the trees, chasing each other in the sunlight. He imagines them enjoying a picnic. He will hear the birds, feel the warmth of the sun on his face, and the brilliant butterflies exploring the vivid flowers, and smell the world of daylight. It is a dream he dares to dream. His eyes close to dream of new, greater possibilities. There is so much he wants to do, to feel, to experience. Now, he will have a chance, a place that is safe for him.

Portions of Keats 'Ode to a Nightingale' run through Vincent's mind, summing up all that has recently happened to him.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

by John Keats

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.*

*O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:*

*Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
ere, where men sit and hear each other groan;*

*Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.*

*Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.*

*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.*

*Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.*

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.*

*Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?*

END