

A Gentle Rain

by Gloria Handley

A Gentle rain had been falling steadily for the last two hours. It made a muted, whispering sound as it splattered wetly onto Catherine's terrace. Early evening had been warm, inviting her to leave the French doors open to catch the slight breeze accompanying the rain shower and to savor the soft, tranquil rhythm of the rain.

It had been dark, almost since the rainfall had begun. But, for some reason, she felt no inclination to turn on the lights in her apartment. Electing, instead, to let the softness of the outside night sounds filter through the darkened rooms. The traffic played its own muted song far below, adding a counterpoint rhythm to the almost dream-like quality of the night just beyond her terrace doors.

This had been a rare day off for her. No work to accompany her home from the office and keep her occupied all weekend. No phone calls or social appointments calling for her attention. She had placed a stack of classical records on her stereo and spent the day padding barefoot around her apartment doing some much delayed house-cleaning. In between bursts of scrubbing and polishing, she had found a book of poetry that Vincent had left and she stopped occasionally during lunch and rest breaks to read the romantic words of Sara Teasdale. She mused upon the poet's words and felt as if they had been written only for her and Vincent.

Her cleaning finished, she had taken a leisurely shower and, donning a comfortable robe and towel-drying her hair, she walked to the terrace door leading from her bedroom. Draping the towel around her shoulders, she stood looking out over the rain-washed city. Leaning against the door frame, her thoughts returned to Vincent.

She wondered what the park below sounded like with the trees catching the falling droplets. What music would it be playing? Would Vincent be there, somewhere, listening to the gentle melody? He had often told her how beautiful he thought the park was at night when it rained. Would he be able to find an uninhabited corner there tonight and enjoy the rain in the unconfined freedom of the world Above? Were they, at this same moment, sharing slightly different versions of the evening's rain-symphony? She felt his presence as if he were standing close beside her. She rested her head against the door frame and, closing her eyes, imagined the two of them sharing the gentle music of the rain.

*You are the rarest soul I ever knew,
Lover of beauty, knightliest and best;
My thoughts seek you as waves that seek the shore,
And when I think of you, I am at rest.*

Vincent dropped lightly onto Catherine's terrace. He was as another shadow outside her terrace doors, loving and benign. He held to the deeper amethyst shadows, a massive, dark-cloaked figure, silently watching her. She rested easy and relaxed against the doorjamb, her head tilted back, eyes closed, a faint smile curving her lips. Opening himself up to them, he felt her emotions, and his heart swelled knowing he was part of them. He found it a constant miracle that thoughts of him could be, in some small way, responsible for the smile on her lips and the feeling of contentment he sensed about her. There was a subtle change in her that flowed along their bond to touch him. She had become aware of his presence and, without changing her position, she had reached out to him with her heart.

He was drawn to her with an invisible thread. He moved easily out of the shadows, crossed the rain-washed terrace to stand motionless and unspeaking beside her.

As he moved toward her, Catherine heard the whisper of fabric of his wool cloak and the sound his metal and leather belt made as the parts rubbed lightly against each other. He stood silently near her and she smelled the comforting, distinctive aroma of his clothing: all candle smoke and musky odor of deep earth. She inhaled the dampness that clung to his mane and his own body scent that stimulated her senses. She felt the heat of his body as he moved closer and she waited expectantly.

"What brings such a look of serenity?" His voice came soft and honey-warm above the gentle sound of the rain.

"You," she answered quietly. "I was thinking of the rain, and the park... and you. wondering if you were walking through the darkness, enjoying the sights and the sounds it made." She opened her eyes and gazed straight into the calm, warm blue of his, "and wishing we were together."

"We are always together, Catherine, even though an entire world should separate us."

She recalled when four days had stretched interminably ahead of them, marking their first painful time apart. It also reaffirmed the miracle of the bond that joined them; and the strength of their love was proven during that separation. There had been thousands of miles between them, yet he had saved her life.

*I heard a cry in the night
A thousand miles it came
Sharp as a flash of light
My name, my name! It was your voice I heard
You waked and loved me so--
I send you back this word
I know, I know!*

The joy of their reunion was a wonder to both. Upon her return to New York from California, she had been forced to stop at her office to deliver a very important witness. But her heart had raced ahead of her and he had been here on her terrace waiting with hungry arms open, crushing her tightly against him; heart beating against heart in joyful celebration of their reunion.

"And I was remembering," she continued softly, "one spring evening when we were walking late at night through the park, a thunderstorm caught us and we took shelter in the darkened doorway of some building. The storm crashed all about us. You held me shielded by your body, wrapped me in the warmth of your cloak, and held me close. Though the storm raged wide, I felt safe and warm within your arms."

That had been during their first year together, when being in each others arms was new and tentative and unexplored. "I remember looking up at you, and your eyes said more to me that night than your lips had found the courage to say."

Vincent recalled that night. It had been one of the first times he had held Catherine in his arms. The wonder of feeling her that close, soft and warm, within the intimate circle of his arms, had overwhelmed him and left him momentarily unable to speak. But she had seen in his eyes what he had been incapable of saying, and was afraid to tell her.

"You entered the dark and lonely corners of my soul and filled it with light."

The soft, husky pitch of his voice reached across the narrow space between them on this rainy evening to enfold her, caress her.

"I didn't know what to do for fear that light would go out and I would be left in darkness once again."

*You took my empty dreams
And filled them every one
With tenderness and nobleness,
April and the sun.*

*The old empty dreams
Where my thoughts would throng
Are far too full of happiness
to even hold a song.*

*Oh, the empty dreams are dim
And the empty dreams were wide,
They were sweet and shadowy houses
Where my thoughts could hide.*

*But you took my dreams away
And you made them all come true--
My thoughts have no place now to play
And nothing now to do."*

He turned and looked out over the rain-washed city. The glowing windows from distant buildings were softened by the falling rain and appeared as a mosaic of unblinking stars. The Park below was cloaked in a misty shroud. Vincent's dark hood and the shoulders of his cloak glistened from the moisture that had collected there. His golden mane held diamonds of water. Like exploring fingers, the breeze gently lifted strands of his tawny hair, where it rested upon his chest. There were no lights on Catherine's terrace and his features were a dark, exotic silhouette against the faint illumination of the city beyond.

"With Lisa, I had no understanding of my youthful emotions. But, how do you ignore the restless yearning for an unknown something?" he questioned softly.

He was silent for several long moments. He turned back to her, reaching out to touch her cheek with his clawed hand, comfortable, at last, with the appearance of it against the softness of her skin.

"I found it in you. I remember, always, that in your love, I found acceptance for not only what I am, but who I am."

*Before you kissed me only winds of heaven
Had kissed me, and the tenderness of rain--
Now you have come, how can I care for kisses
Like theirs again?*

"And your lips..." His gaze sought their curve. "Before you, I could only imagine the pressure of another mouth on mine."

He bent his head to her, touching her lips lightly with his. Tasting the love that she returned to him, giving back to her his unconditional love, undemanding that she return anything to him accept the promise of what she was to him. The woman he loved.

Before the kiss ended, the gentle rain turned to a downpour and a chill wind searched the corners of the terrace. Catherine's feet suddenly felt the cold and her body, naked under the thin robe, shivered. Vincent moved between her and the open doorway, his massive body blocking most of the coldness.

"You had best go in, Catherine," he urged gently, "you are not dressed for this kind of weather."

Catherine grasped his wrist and, stepping backward, pulled him into the apartment with her. There was a moment of hesitation on his part, and then he followed her in, stepping to one side of the small landing as she reached outward and pulled the French doors inward, securing them against the now gusting wind. There was an awkward moment when it seemed Vincent might go back out those fragile doors. The wind had caught and pulled her robe just before they backed into her bedroom, pulling it aside to reveal her bare thigh. In that instant, she knew that he had become very conscious of her unclothed state beneath her robe. She saw the almost imperceptible movement of his body that indicated his sudden leaving was a possibility. To prevent such, she made a small step between him and the doorway. She did not want him so uncomfortable that he would leave.

"Why don't you go into the other room and start a fire, and I will put on something more appropriate for the evening." Continuing her conversational patter, she held her hands out toward him, "Your cloak is wet from the rain, let me hang it up to dry."

He hesitated and then, reaching up, pulled the hood off of his head and slid the weighty garment from his shoulders, folding it across her outstretched arms.

"I'll join you in a moment." She smiled up at him and, nodding toward the living room, walked toward her closet and pulled out a strong wooden hanger, placed the cloak on in and hung it in the closet doorway. She relaxed when Vincent moved into the other room. She searched her wardrobe and found a silky, peasant-style lounge dress with full sleeves. Removing her robe, she slipped the loose-fitting dress over her head, letting the soft fabric skim across her naked body.

When she entered the living room, she found Vincent had moved the glass coffee table back. He was seated on the floor in front of the fireplace, leaning sideways against one of the small couches. One of his arms rested casually atop one upraised knee. He was staring into the slowly-building fire, a quiet, pensive look shaping his features. The only illumination in the room came from the fireplace and it played its game of light and shadow upon his beautifully unique features.

God, how she loved him! She wanted to melt into him, become a part of him; to be his heart. There were no words that could express what it was about him that had stolen into her soul and woven him so inextricably within her very being. She had known him far more intimately than any others. But, it went beyond, and was more than the physical sharing of their bodies. It was the joining of everything that made them what they were, separately, and fused in into one living wholeness. He was what made her life truly beautiful.

It is enough of honor for one lifetime
To have known you better than the rest have known,
The shadows and the colors of your voice
Your will, immutable and still as stone.

The shy heart, so lonely and so gay,
The sad laughter and the pride of pride,
The tenderness, the depth of tenderness
Rich as the earth, and wide as heaven is wide.

He looked up as she approached him and his pensive look disappeared. He held out his wonderfully large hand to her. She went to him, knelt before him, and he pulled her to him so she reached partly across one powerful thigh and enfolded closely within the circle of his arms. She rested her head on his shoulder, her forehead against his neck. She turned and pressed her lips against the place where his collar opened and the golden fur of his body was revealed. She inhaled the warm scent of his skin and, closing her eyes, she nestled closer.

The classical music had faded quietly to its conclusion, and the room was bathed in momentary silence. They could hear the faint, steady murmur of rain falling rhythmically on the terrace. It sounded as if it would last all night. The lovers sat, uncaring of the passage of time, content only to be within each other's arms. Catherine's hand moved slowly upward over Vincent's chest to touch the strength there. Pressing lightly against him, she could feel the steady rhythm of his heart beneath her palm. She was pleasantly aware of the heat and hardness of his thighs where they contacted her hips through the thin silk garment she wore.

The roaming pressure of his hand followed the supple line of her spine, sliding sensuously over the silky material which clung so closely to her body. The fabric whispered beneath his fingers. The erotic feel of cool silk against warm flesh was a sensory stimulation that Vincent had come to enjoy. He sensed Catherine knew this and it was why, to give him this rare pleasure, she had worn such a seductive garment tonight.

"Are you warm enough?" his lips brushed against her hair, his voice soft and comforting in the flame lit darkness enclosing them.

"Yes," she whispered, savoring the circle of his arms.

Somewhere, within the span of a heartbeat, the moment of wanting simply to be close, changed to one of need.

A fluttering warmth started in her center and began to spread, communicating itself to Vincent. The folds of the silk garment she wore outlined every intimate curve of her body and he felt his own hunger rising slowly within him. The touch of a woman's soft hand had not been his in youth. Now, Catherine touched him freely, willingly, but not often enough for either of them. In these moments of intimacy, he wanted her caress, needed it. But he did not want it to seem that the only reason he had come to her tonight was for the soft release her body offered him. He pulled her tightly against his body for a brief moment, then rose quickly to his feet to pace a short distance away. Staring, unseeing out the terrace doors. She had arisen to follow behind him, puzzled by his sudden actions. She stood near him, her hand reaching out to the broad expanse of his back.

"Vincent?" Her voice was tender and concerned, "What is it?"

He did not turn to look at her, but continued intently staring at the French doors in the dining area. It was as if he expected, or hoped, they would open and given him an escape route. He turned to face her, dropping his head before speaking.

"I'm sorry, Catherine. It's best I go."

"Why, Vincent?" She tried to see his face, but his mane partially screened his features. "What's wrong?"

He struggled with his inner desire to stay with her, to hold her within his arms, share this evening with her, and was fighting with his sudden passionate physical need for her. That need was becoming more evident in his changing body. He spun around, once more, his back to her, trying desperately to control his emotions and hide them from her.

But Catherine had seen, and now understood. She moved closer, pressing against his back, her arms moving around the wide expansion of his chest. Hugging him close, she placed her cheek against the broad plane of his back. Not entirely releasing him, she moved around to stand in front of him. She studied his face for a moment, then dropped her head, trying to decide the right path to follow.

Looking at the floor through the narrow space left by their bodies, she noted that he had removed his shoes. Odd, she had not noticed it when they sat by the fire. She smiled inwardly, and a warm place grew near her heart, he had not planned to leave early! It was to have been a quiet evening enjoying each other's company. On impulse, she reached out with her bare toes and stroked one, very large, white-stockinged foot.

Looking up, she studied his face, his expression was unreadable. But he hadn't moved away from her. She stroked his foot again. This time a questioning look changed the color of his eyes. And, the embarrassment lessened.

"It seemed the only safe place to touch you." She meant the words half-teasing, half serious.

A pained expression crossed his face. His physical need for her was still quite evident. "It is not why I come to you, Catherine."

"I know that, Vincent." Her voice was soft and she reached out to him with all the love and understanding she could muster. "But, it is no reason to leave me either. When it happens -- when you desire me -- I don't want you trying to ignore something that is a natural consequence of our being together, touching each other, loving one another."

Her hand moved forward, the slender fingers curled, hooking over his leather belt, sliding between it and his body. She felt his stomach quiver slightly at her touch.

"I don't ever want you to not come to me. I don't ever want you to feel I don't want your touch, your lovemaking, you."

Her hand increased its hold on the leather of his belt, her voice dropped lower and she felt her throat tighten not only with unshed tears, but with the fear that he might leave.

"When someone is frightened, they seek shelter and safety. When hungry, one seeks food and sustenance. When there are hungers of a more intimate, physical kind, I want always to be there to satisfy that hunger in you, Vincent. Please, don't turn away from me." Desire for him made her voice come with difficulty. "Tonight, Vincent, I want you -- if you would have me."

She would have said more, but his arms reached out for her, surrounded her, pulling her close, holding her tightly against the hard outline of his body, and his mouth closed over hers, turning her last words into a sigh.

He raised his head slightly, and she felt his warm breath as he whispered against her lips, passion threading his voice, "There is never a time when I do not hunger for you, Catherine."

The room tilted and swirled as he gathered her up into his arms, and then it tilted again as he gently lowered her legs. They stood, once more, close together before the fireplace. She felt his claws gently skim over her flesh taking the silk garment with the upward movement of his hands. The wisp of fabric floated to the floor and disappeared somewhere in the fire-shadows surrounding them, accompanied moments later by garments more roughly-woven.

There were no clothes to mask their closeness, and his body was warm against hers. His claws slid through the golden silk of her hair, cupping her head in his hands. His tawny head bent slowly toward her mouth and he captured her lips in a kiss of exquisite tenderness. She let herself flow with him into a sensual world of his creation. A world filled with his undemanding love. A world born of each touch of his lips, each caress of his hands upon her body. She was lost in two separate sensual realities. She experienced the arousing touch of his clawed hands upon her flesh and the soft, warm pressure of his mouth.

His hands tenderly defined the soft curves of her body, moving across her shoulders, hovering above her breasts, brushing lightly across them, and then coming to rest on the smooth silky skin of her stomach. He knelt before her, his fingers circling her waist, holding her between his large, clawed hands. His lips touched the softness of her breasts, the curve of her hips. His whiskered muzzle skimmed feather-like across the sensitive skin of her stomach, his lips warm and moist and unbelievably erotic wherever he touched her. His mouth tasted the creaminess of her thighs, then moved inward toward the core of her rising passion. Her muscles contracted and he felt her shudder, and he held her tighter still against his mouth.

The warmth of her body, the taste of her skin, the scent of her desire filled his nostrils and intensified

his own desire. He pulled her down to him and laid her backwards on the rug, his mouth hungry for hers. Catherine was only able to whisper his name. He answered her with his body, with an urgency that matched her own. He was unaware of everything except his need for her and the deep yearning to give himself to her. Catherine received him into her body, giving back to him her need, the fire of her passion and returning to him her unconditional love. They gave, and gave to each other again and again, riding the crest of their passion, clinging, melding two bodies into one, erupting in intense fiery unison.

Vincent's arms pulled her tightly against his hard, warm body. She felt the quivering aftermath slowly subside as he relaxed atop her. His face buried in the curve of her neck. Finally, shuddering and spent, they lay with their arms wrapped around each other.

"I remember the first time," he whispered in her ear, "I held you afterward, not wanting to let your body go."

He raised his head to gaze warmly down at her. Evidence of his fading passion still visible deep within the smokey-blue of his eyes. His mouth found the corner of her lips, "I thought you were a dream, that you did not exist. But each time you let me come to you, each time you take me into your body, that dream is renewed...you do exist. You are not a dream."

Their bodies were still joined and he moved, a quiet pulse beat deep within her. "It is that way each time I am with you, Catherine. I never want to leave you."

He kissed her gently on the mouth, then rose to his feet, pulling her up with him. He widened his stance and held her tightly against him, feeling the rounded curves of her body along the planes and angles and hard muscles that defined him. Lifting her into his arms, he carried her into the bedroom, and placed her upon the soft blankets. Stretching out beside her, he drew a silken comforter up to cover them, then gathered her into his arms cradling her against the warmth of his body, where they slept until the dawn awakened him. Easing himself away from the warmth and softness of her body, Vincent dressed and prepared to leave. This woman he loved held his heart so firmly woven with her own, he knew that their hearts and souls would never be separated -- could never be separated. They would be together always.

Leaving her, he walked silently to the door, pausing to look back at her sleeping form, vowing his love for her. "Always, Catherine. Always."

*It is enough for me by day to walk the same bright earth with him
Enough that over us by night The same great roof of stars is dim.*

*I have no care to bind the wind or set a fetter on the sea--
It is enough to feel his love blow by like music over me.*

THE END