

BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

by Gwen Lord

"Radcliffe, are you sure you're okay?" Joe's concern was very evident.

"Yeay, I'll be fine ... Don't worry," Cathy tried to reassure Joe.

"You're a good liar, I'll give you that kiddo," he grinned.

"It's nothing, really, just a bad time of the month ... you know."

"Hmmm."

"Let me get my teeth into this lot, I'll be okay, really," her eyes smiled up at him.

"Have it your way," he shrugged and, picking up his papers he turned and returned to his office, shutting the door behind him, not convinced.

Cathy put her head in her hands, as her elbows rested on the desk. Her mind was in turmoil; no way could she concentrate on depositions, or anything else to do with work. One thought was in charge in her brain, it loomed imposing over everything else; even the dramatic happenings in the work load was as nothing, compared to her problem!

She felt sick; this feeling inside, churning and burning. God, she felt awful ... how late was she? Six weeks! Normally, she was as regular as clockwork. The awful truth hammered at her brain; her heart. It was all too clear. She was pregnant! PREGNANT! PREGNANT!

"Ah, there you are, Vincent; finished already?" Father had been reading, killing time really, until Vincent returned from working on the lower tunnels. He needed to speak to his son, but the subject in hand was delicate and needed careful handling; kid gloves in fact.

"Yes Father, finished. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must wash and change. Catherine expects me soon. I don't want to be late." He picked up his robe and made to leave his chamber.

"Vincent, I need to speak with you, on an urgent matter."

"Not now, Father, please."

"I'm afraid this won't wait, Vincent. It's of the utmost importance. I must insist you hear me." He leaned heavily on his stick. Vincent recognised this tone.

"Do sit down, Father." He advanced to his side and putting his hand on the old man's shoulder said, "Tell me, what weights so heavy with you?"

"This is very difficult for me, Vincent ..."

Sitting down close to the older man, Vincent put his hand over Father's and gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Please," he urged.

A silent moment passed.

"I love you, Vincent and I love Catherine. I love you both." His voice was ragged and urgent.

"I know that; we both know that," he agreed.

"Your relationship with Catherine has deepened over the last six or eight weeks; I know, I've been in love too. I know how it feels to have the woman of your dreams adore you and need you, I'm not too old to remember," he smiled, knowingly.

"Margaret?"

"Hmmm."

"And Grace, Devin's mother. You had the love of two good women. You must count yourself lucky, Father."

"I do, I do, Vincent. But I am worried."

"Worried?"

"About Catherine."

Vincent's head shot up. "Why are you worried? Is she ill? Tell me!" he pleaded.

"No, she's not ill, but one day she may be, unless the two of you are careful." He edged nearer to the issue.

"Careful? How do you mean?"

"If Catherine was to get ... pregnant. Dear God, Vincent. Think of the consequences. This is no light matter, it needs both of you to be very careful." There, he'd said it. All day this moment had loomed large in his mind. Now he had unleashed his burden and he felt the weight leave his shoulders.

A smile crossed Vincent's face; a gentle, understanding smile. Then, tilting his head to one side, he looked Father straight in the eye.

"Catherine's taken care of all that, Father. She explained it to me, so please, don't worry, all is well. We are very happy, truly we are one."

"I'm glad we've had this talk, Vincent. We used to talk for hours once. It's been like old times, but this time the subject was a little different." They both smiled.

Vincent stood and planted a kiss on the top of Father's head. "Now I must truly go and wash away the day's work, so if you will excuse me ..." He sighed.

"Of course. I'll leave you now. I must see Mary about some cough medicine for one of the children. Vincent, you both have my blessing."

"Thank you, Father." Picking up his robe once more, he hurriedly left the chamber to wash and change.

The hot steaming water washed over his aching body. The work Below had been particularly hard, he had pushed himself far too hard, doing the work of two men, to help Mouse and Winslow get the job done. He needed to see Catherine. He felt she was worried. Something was wrong - he felt her sadness and her joy; these two going hand in hand had him perplexed.

The water felt relaxing. He'd soaped his body all over and now lay submerged in its healing warmth; only his face visible. His thoughts - as always - were of Catherine. From the first moment he'd set eyes on her, he'd fallen in love, but never in his wildest dreams had he ever believed they would share a life together; really together.

Over the last two months, a milestone had been reached. It was inevitable it should happen one day, but he had been scared to face it; afraid of the outcome. A life-time of can't be and shouldn't be, was the hardest of all barriers to overcome, but it was Catherine who had succeeded in the end, showing him how - with love - all things were possible. At last he had dared to dream; he had allowed himself to believe - even for

him - that maybe there was a chance for them. Catherine guided and helped him through this testing time, her love was like a torch, lighting the way. He was drawn to it with a hunger for truth, to search for who he was and what he was.

With her love, the dark places deep inside were filled with light. Where anger and foreboding lay waiting, love entered, driving away all the uncertainties, filling his very soul with love and desire for the woman who made him - of all people like a man; a king among men. No longer did he desire another man's art or scope, he was at peace within himself for the first time in his life. His fears for her safety were unfounded. He was a willing pupil and learned quickly, how to please and fulfil her needs which matched his own perfectly.

Their happiness soared to new heights with each new day. To him it was a miracle that he should have the love, the total love, of this wonderful woman.

The lights from inside the apartment cast shadows in ribbons across the balcony. The air was filled with the scent of the blossom on the trees below, in Central Park; the fragrance drifted high into the air on this beautiful moonlit night, so still and peaceful.

Vincent tapped on the door. immediately it flew open and their arms were around each other.

"Oh Catherine, I've missed you today," he sighed.

"I know, I know. I've wanted to feel your arms around me so much. Hold me close, please."

"I love you, Catherine," his velvet voice whispered.

"Hold me tighter," she pleaded.

Their lips met in a warm and tender kiss which said everything. Catherine was the first to pull away a little. As she looked into the face of the man she loved, Vincent saw dancing lights in her eyes.

"Vincent come, let's go inside. I thought tonight we'd just curl up together in the candlelight. I've got Beethoven and Liszt ready to play on the CD, wine cooling, everything ready. All I need now is to feel your arms holding me; to listen to your heartbeat."

"Come. If music be the food of love, play on," and together they went inside. Vincent closed the doors behind them.

The music, combined with the candles and the wine, set the scene for an evening to remember. Both were at complete peace with each other. No greater gift had any man.

"Are you staying tonight, Vincent?" Cathy asked in his ear as she lay curled up across his body.

"If you'll have me," he teased.

"Oh Vincent, you know I want you to."

"I know. I want to stay. Father has given up on me sleeping Below again, I fear." They laughed.

"How is Father? Is he well? It's a week or more since I last saw him."

"He is well, Catherine. In fact, he was in true war colours earlier this evening." He smiled as he recalled the memory.

"How do you mean."

"He was attempting to give me a ... facts of life chat. He was very concerned about you."

"Me? Why?" Her face was full of concern.

"Father was hoping we had taken precautions against you being ... with child."

Catherine nearly choked on her wine at that last statement.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. It went down the wrong way, that's all."

Taking her courage in both hands Catherine decided to broach the subject on her mind, making sure through their bond, that Vincent wouldn't pick up her anxiety or worry.

"What would happen if I ever did get pregnant?" She kept her eyes down, not daring to look at him.

"Catherine, you must never let those words pass your lips! This is something that must never be, NEVER!" His voice was no longer velvet.

"I'm sorry, Vincent, I had to ask. How else do I know your feelings?"

"I'm sorry, but this I do draw the line at. There must never be another 'me'. I wouldn't want a child of mine to have to suffer what I suffered and still do; perhaps always will, to my dying day."

"Don't, Vincent. Don't punish yourself."

"Catherine, when I am with you, you make me feel like a man and as a man. Of course I would love nothing better than to have our child. I know how you long to have a family, but I also have to remember I am not wholly a man. You love me as a man, but others see me as a ... beast, an animal, even." He sighed.

"Stop it, stop it!" Cathy jumped up and held his face between her hands. "I love you, my darling, I love you!" she cried, tears flowing freely.

"I know, but a child, Catherine. This can never be a part of our dream. This is one of the sacrifices we have to make. I'm sorry, truly I am. There is nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, except this," he sighed.

Catherine lay back across him, her body shaking with sobs. What was she to do?"

"Don't cry, please," he pleaded.

"I can't help it, Vincent. I cry for the child which will never be; for the son you'll never know or love. It is so sad, it breaks my heart."

"Oh Catherine, don't. My heart is breaking also. To think the pain you feel now, is all my doing."

"No, we are in this together; it's our problem, we will work it out, but we will need each other to release ourselves from this sadness which inhabits us."

"Yes. You are truly wonderful. Come, let us put the music and wine away and find peace in each other as we sleep."

Catherine tapped on the glass panel of Joe's office door before opening it.

"Hi Radcliffe, come on in."

"Hi, Joe. Have you got time to talk?"

"Sure. What's up."

"I ...er ...well ..."

"You're making me nervous, what is it?" Joe got up from his chair and walked round to Catherine. "Sit down, Cathy ... Sit!"

She did as she was told. Joe sat on the corner of his desk and started to play with a rubber band, twisting and turning it; a nervous habit he had in times of stress.

"So ...?" he prompted.

"Joe ..."

"Yeah?"

"I ... I ..."

"Damn it, Radcliffe!"

"I'm quitting ... not really quitting ..."

"Can we start again?" he urged and managed a half smile.

"I need to get away for a while, to sort myself out, get my act together. I can't do it here. Oh Joe, I'm going to miss you and all this, but I have to go," she sobbed.

"Here, use this." Joe handed her his handkerchief. "Is it something I've said? Maybe I worked you too hard. I know you were trying to prove to me - to everyone. Gee, Radcliffe ... I don't want to lose you!"

"I know, Joe. Please, don't make this harder than it already is ... please!" The room suddenly seemed so hot; Joe seemed so far away, she felt she needed some fresh air so, handing him back his handkerchief, she made to stand up. Suddenly, nothing seemed straight, the world felt upside down.

"Hey, good job I was here to catch you! What is wrong with you? I know, you're ill and don't want to worry me ..."

"I'm not ill."

"Well you could have fooled me. First you're all pale and sickly, then you're ratty and no one dares talk to you. Next you're weepy and moody ... You want to throw in your job; almost passed out just now ... Radcliffe, if I didn't know better, I'd say you were pregnant," he laughed.

"Oh Joe!" she started to cry again.

"Here, you'd better have this back. Keep it," he handed her the handkerchief again. Then, it suddenly struck him. "No ... you couldn't be ... could you?"

"Yes, Joe. I am pregnant," she sobbed.

"So, what's the big deal here, Cathy? Won't the bastard marry you? Who is he? Do I know him? Let me sort him out! Where does he live, or has he gone to ground?" Joe fumed.

"It's not like that."

"Have you told him?" he asked.

"No."

"Don't you think he has a right to know? I'd want to know if you were having my kid." He coloured, as a secret desire surfaced for the first time.

"He doesn't want a child, Joe. There are reasons - they are good reasons, truly."

"Not want your child? He must be a monster, Cathy. How could you love such a guy?" His anger was now clearly evident.

"He's my life, Joe. I love him, but I don't want him to know, so I will go away, have the child, then return, if you'll have me." She looked longingly at him.

"Where will you go? Come on, this is crazy!"

"I will go to the West Coast. I'll need a transfer to our office there, for a while. Please, Joe, I need your help."

"You have it, kiddo." Then Joe held out his arms to comfort her.

* * *

"Catherine, you look delightful, doesn't she, Vincent?" Father smiled, as he signalled her to join them at the table.

"Yes, delightful," he replied sadly.

"How are the arrangements coming, my dear? We are all going to miss you, so much. I dread to think what Vincent is going to be like. At last it isn't for ever; six months I think Vincent said."

"Yes. It's one of the hazards of working in the DA's office, they can move you when you least expect it."

"Please Catherine, do we have to speak of this, your last night here?" Vincent's voice was emotional.

"I'm sorry, Vincent."

"Come, open your presents from Father and myself." His eyes twinkled with anticipation.

"It feels like my birthday." Catherine picked up the square parcel first and read the card attached. '*To my dear Catherine, love Father. God speed you back home.*' "Oh Father, thank you." The wrapping was soon removed to reveal a journal. "It's beautiful."

"Each day you're away, enter your thoughts, then you'll always be able to look back on them, when the memory fades."

Catherine started to cry and rushed into Father's arms.

"There, there. No tears tonight." He planted a kiss on both cheeks. "God bless you, we love you."

"I love you, I love my home here, I miss you already," she sobbed.

"Catherine, my gift is small compared to what you've given me." Vincent placed the box in her hand. She read the card. '*To Catherine, my life, my love, my all. Vincent*'

She bit her bottom lip to stop it from shaking, then quickly she undid the present. The little box was carved in wood, which when opened, revealed two crystal pendant earrings, to match the necklace he'd given her two years ago on their first anniversary.

"Oh Vincent, they're beautiful, thank you." Leaning across, she kissed him on the lips.

Father coughed and spluttered at his embarrassment, but Vincent and Catherine had eyes only for each other.

The DA's office in Los Angeles was smaller than the one in New York and wasn't unfamiliar to her either, as she had worked there before but, as she recalled, didn't like it. Still, she had to make the most of it. It wasn't for ever, thank goodness, so she decided to live a day at a time.

Joe had made sure an apartment would be available for her, so she didn't have to hunt for somewhere to love and she was glad. The flight had drained her, having spent most of it being decidedly sick.

Days came and went with slow regularity. A new routine was found. Catherine rose at eight, got to work for nine, lunched twelve to one and left at four-thirty and was home (dare she call it home) by five. Next would follow a quick meal and she'd sit down and compose a letter to Vincent. Their bond would be open as she wrote; his presence would surround her. How she longed to hold him.

Next came the journal entries of the day, followed by a little TV and then, to bed.

As Catherine got larger, the problem of where their child would live became of paramount importance, until

panic seized her. She mustn't leave it too long, plans had to be made, just in case she didn't go full term.

The idea came to her as she lay one Sunday morning in bed. Her Dad's sister lived here in LA; the black sheep of the family who was head strong and self-willed, had left the family home thirty years ago. No one ever spoke of Aunt Sonya, who was Charles' half sister.

Cathy went to the local library to look through records and employed an investigator to help her in her search. Where was her Aunt? She had certainly covered her tracks well, seeking no contact from the family at all. But money talked and her Dad's money that finally found her.

Cathy took the train to see her aunt. The journey seemed endless, the cities and towns fell away until only odd, isolated houses lay dotted in the scenery before her. The train pulled into the station and only Cathy got off. The door clanged shut, the wheels started to turn and it slowly pulled out of the station.

A battered old cab was parked near the ticket office, so Cathy asked the driver if he could take her to the address on the slip of paper she held in her hand for him to read.

"Take a while to get there. I thought no one lived out that far any more."

"Will you take me, please?" she pleaded.

"Sure, lady. Hop in, I need the dollars."

"Their meeting was a success from the start. They seemed to share the same appreciation of things: music, poetry, even art. Yes, Cathy felt she had found a real 'Helper' out here at last.

The office life was behind her for now. Cathy moved in with Aunt Sonya who accepted the fact that Cathy had secrets she intended to keep hidden. Then, one night, while they sat, watching the sun go down, Cathy explained all about Vincent and the child she carried.

It was January eleventh when the pain hit her like a bolt out of the blue. "Oh,oh, oh!" she moaned, the beads of perspiration forming on her face, as wave after wave of pain invaded her body.

Hearing her cries, Aunt Sonya appeared. "So, it's time, child."

"Yeah, oh God, it hurts!" she stammered.

"Don't push, whatever you do. Not yet. I'll tell you when." Aunt Sonya was a qualified midwife, so the delivery didn't have to be in a hospital, with prying, inquisitive eyes, which was fortunate.

The labour was, Aunt Sonya decided, the worst she had ever seen. Poor child, she was worn out and still no baby. It was into the second day when finally Catherine's son was born, but it was four hours before she saw him for the first time, as sleep, from sheer exhaustion, had claimed her, directly the birth was over.

"You have a son, my dear. A lovely little boy."

"Is he ... is he ...?"

"Like his father? Yes my dear, he is." Then she handed Catherine the white bundle.

The sleeping baby was gorgeous; masses of golden hair, a flat furry kitten-like nose, furry hands and feet, with translucent claws on fingers and toes.

"Oh Auntie Sonya, he's beautiful! Just like his father! Oh Vincent, I wish you could see him." Tears ran down her cheeks as she kissed him and held him close, ready to feed him for the first time.

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Two days before the baby was born, Vincent was sitting reading with Father, in his study. All was peaceful, only the tapping on the pipes broke the silence.

Suddenly, Vincent threw down the book, growled and held his stomach. He paced the chamber, then more pain claimed his body. Father was lost for words. He tried everything to ease his son's discomfort, with no success. Then, after two days, it left him as quickly as it had arrived.

* * *

When baby Jacob was four weeks old, Cathy decided to have him christened. How she wished it could have been a Naming Ceremony in the tunnels Below, with Father and all their friends. As it was, it was just Catherine, Auntie Sonya and a priest who was paid so highly by Catherine to keep quiet, he could now live a life of luxury, thanks to five minutes work.

The child was named Jacob Vincent Wells.

* * *

"She's coming back, Father! She's coming back!" Vincent's slow pace of late had the sprightly step of old.

"Dear God, at last," Father sighed. "Now maybe we will be able to talk to you again," he chided his son.

"It's not been that bad, has it?" he quizzed, smiling.

"Worse," Father admitted.

"We must prepare, we must plan," Vincent mumbled, as he dashed from Father's study.

"Vincent, you've been preparing and planning since she left! Everything couldn't be more ready, my boy! Calm down!"

"Oh Father, I've missed her so much!"

"I know. When do you expect her?" he asked.

"Tomorrow, at sunset."

* * *

"Catherine! Oh Catherine, you're home!" He gathered her in his arms with such love that he took her breath away.

"I'm back, I'm back. Oh how I've missed you, Vincent!"

"And I you. Come, Father waits."

"I want so much to see everyone. Are they all well? Tell me the news, while we walk."

His arm encased her shoulders, holding her close. "I am too happy for words."

"I too am lost for words, my love."

"Have you been well? You look well."

"Yes, I have, but being here is all I ever wanted."

"When do you have to return to work, with Joe?"

"I've given in my notice. I am no longer a working woman, I am unemployed and in love."

"Catherine!" Vincent stopped dead in his tracks. "What does this mean?"

"It means my love, I am moving in Below with you and my family. I'm home, Vincent, really home."

"Oh Catherine, at last."

* * *

The years came and went. Life for Catherine was filled with much love and happiness, for Vincent adored

her. Each month, Catherine went away for a week. She told Vincent she went to stay with her Auntie Sonya, who was old. This much was true, but she omitted to tell him it was to be with their son who was now growing into a fine young man.

The time she spent with Jacob was special. She supervised his education and took tapes and books for Auntie Sonya to tutor him with, as school was out of the question. But, like his father, he was quick to learn and was a brilliant scholar.

Catherine noticed over the last few weeks that Vincent had been moody and irritable and couldn't understand why. They were like young lovers; that part was fine, so why was he as he was? Even Father, now a frail old man, but a wise old soul, couldn't interpret this change in his son.

Standing it no longer, Catherine decided to ask Vincent to explain it when next they were alone.

Their walk through the park, arm in arm, in the moonlight, was a favourite thing they both enjoyed and as they stopped by the old bridge, Vincent put his arm around Catherine's shoulder. She felt the moment had come, through their bond.

"Hmmm," he sighed.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"Vincent, we never keep secrets from each other, so tell me, please," she pleaded.

A long silence followed, but Cathy waited.

"Many years ago, we talked of having children, do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"I told you we must never have any and how sorry I was that it had to be that way."

"Yes ..."

"Well, over the years and more so of late, I have had cause to question my judgment on this matter."

"What are you saying, Vincent?"

"I am saying ... I wish with all my heart I could turn back the clock, go back in time. Catherine, we will now never know what might have been."

"Oh Vincent, don't torture yourself over possibilities."

"I wish we had a child, the proof of our love. I thought then it would be so wrong. Now, I'm not so sure I made the right decision for both of us, and I feel I have ruined your life with my selfish act. Forgive me, please."

"Oh Vincent." tears streamed down her face.

"Why are you crying, when it should be I who weeps."

"I'm crying with happiness, Vincent."

"How can this be?"

"Trust me, please," she begged and together, arm in arm returned Below.

Three days later it was Jacob Vincent's twelfth birthday and it was also his father's birthday too. Catherine had decided, since their chat in the park, to give Vincent the best birthday gift of his entire life; one that all the money in the world couldn't buy.

Plans were hastily made, which fortunately, went like clockwork.

Catherine supervised all the birthday arrangements personally. The Great Hall never looked better. All the tunnel community were preparing to enjoy themselves; it had been a treat to look forward to, Vincent, aged fifty-five years.

During the early afternoon, Catherine told Vincent she was going Above to have her hair done and collect a new dress. She explained she'd be back in time for the six o'clock start. He walked with her to the tunnel entrance then quickly dashed below again to the safety of the tunnels.

The Great Hall was full now, the chatter of excited voices filled the air. Vincent looked splendid in his dark green tunic and ruffled shirt, black trousers and knee boots. His hair was still a halo of gold, but Cathy knew better than anyone that there was now silver strands amongst the gold.

At exactly six o'clock, Cathy entered the great Hall.

"Catherine," Vincent said aloud.

"Happy Birthday, Vincent," she hugged him. Everyone clapped. "Now for your present, my love."

"Where is it?" He looked deep into her lovely eyes.

"I'm here, Father." The velvet tones met his ears. Vincent spun around. Before him stood a tall youth, with long golden hair cascading down to his shoulders. His face was a mirrored reflection of his own, years back. Vincent's eyes travelled downwards. He wore a denim shirt, cord trousers and high boots. He held out his clawed hands.

"Happy Birthday, Father."

"Catherine, how can this be?"

"Vincent, this is your son."

"My son?"

"Yes, our child. He is Jacob Vincent Wells."

"My son!" he repeated, wonder on his face. Then, without another word, he opened his arms and hugged him passionately. "Oh, I can't believe this," Vincent whispered in his ear.

"We share birthdays; January twelfth. I'm twelve today. This is the best present I could ever have."

"Your birthday too?" he stammered. "Happy Birthday, son," he sobbed.

Catherine put an arm around both the men in her life; the circle was complete.

"Jacob, we have so much time to catch up on. I want to show you my world - our world. One day all this, our kingdom will be yours," he sighed.

"Mom says the Whispering Gallery is your favourite. I want so much to see that, Father."

The word, Father, brought a tear to his eye. Yes, now he too was a parent. He was going to be the best of fathers for Jacob.

"Where's Grandfather, Mom?"

"Over in the far corner; the man with the stick. He's talking to Mouse and Jamie, can you see him?"

"Can we go meet him, please?" The way he put his head to one side as he said 'please' always made Catherine's heart skip a beat. He was so ... Vincent ... when he did this.

"Come, let us go and meet with your Grandfather."

Vincent put one arm around Jacob's shoulders and the other around Catherine's waist. Together they crossed the floor to the group at the table who had their backs to everyone, busy talking and laughing, so didn't see their arrival.

"Father."

"Yes Vincent, what is it?"

"There is someone here I want you to meet."

Leaning on his stick, the old patriarch of the tunnels rose and turned. The smile quickly left his face. "Dear God, Vincent!" Clearly the old man was shaken. Vincent supported him with his strong arms.

"Father, this is my son, Jacob." His voice broke with the enormity of the emotion he felt.

"Your son?" Catherine, tell me?" He sat down. He didn't believe his legs would support him much longer.

"Your Grandson was born on Vincent's birthday twelve years ago. Today, he came home." Catherine was clearly proud and choked with this meeting.

"Thank you for bringing him home, my dear."

Jacob opened his arms to his Grandson, who knelt before him and hugged him. Father ran his fingers through the golden hair; the feel was the same, the boy was strong and full of life. How well he remembered Vincent at this age. The face that looked up into his had the same eyes and leonine features. Yes, he was his father's son, down to the last detail.

"We have much to catch up on, Jacob," the old man said, clearly proud of his Grandson. "Can you play chess?"

"Yes. I enjoy chess, Grandfather. I play with Mom all the time, she taught me to play."

"Really! Well, shall we go and see how good you are?"

"Catherine, I think it's time for the first waltz."

"Yes, I'd like that."

As Vincent led her over to the area set aside for the dancing, he stopped and pulled her to him. "What can I say?" he whispered.

"Look Vincent, they're getting on so well. I've waited a long time to see this." Her voice was so excited, almost like a child's.

"Come, let's join the others for this dance." He held her hand and led the way. His arms encircled her as they moved to the music of the Skater's Waltz.

"Tell me, Catherine. Why now?"

"It wasn't right before," she explained.

"I've missed his babyhood, through my own stupidity. You should have told me," he urged.

"No Vincent, then you would have loved him because he was here. Now, this is right. You wanted to turn back the clock, to put things right. You wanted it. Really, really wanted it. That made it right, don't you see?"

"Yes," he sighed. "We have the rest of our lives. We mustn't waste it."

"He has all your poetry and readings on tape. He listens to them for hours and hours."

"How was this possible?" he asked questioningly.

"You remember I said I needed to tape you reading, so when one of us couldn't read to the class, we'd have

it on tape? Well, all those were for your son," she smiled. "He's grown up for twelve years surrounded by your voice, your guidance, your influence. He adores you. Even his room at Aunt Sonya's I had done out like a copy of our chamber, so it feels like his home already."

"How can I ever show you how special you are to me? You held out that torch to me so long ago to lighten my darkest corners. The rays of that light continue to burn. We are truly blessed, Catherine."

"I have the most wonderful family and now we are complete."

"Yes," he sighed. "We are at last a family."

The waltz ended and as Catherine and Vincent left the floor, Father was seen heading out of the Great Hall, his arm around his Grandson.

"I'm going to enjoy playing chess with you, my boy."

Vincent smiled. "Father's got a new pupil!"

"Yes, so I see, but Father is in for a shock, I fear."

"Why?"

"Our son is a very good chess player already." They both laughed.

"Oh Catherine, you are truly a wonder; the light of my life."

"I love you, so very much, Vincent."

"Come, let us go and watch our son beat his Grandfather at chess."

"Oh Vincent, our family is complete at last."

Together they walked the short distance to Father's study.

The End.