

ELLIOT'S DOWNFALL

by Gwen Lord

Catherine's mind wasn't on the child abuse papers in front of her, which Joe had given her more than two hours ago. Her mind was in turmoil, as she tried to figure out what *really* made Elliot Burch tick. True, she was attracted to him - what woman wouldn't be ever since she first saw him at the elegant cocktail party to celebrate a gift of artwork to the City of New York. She'd been talking to her friend, when she looked up directly into the eyes of the benefactor. Elegantly-dressed, extremely handsome and the chemistry was unmistakable. Warning bells started to ring inside her head, but who listens to these when the heart has found a dream come true?

All her life, Catherine had been schooled in what was expected of her, both in her private and public life. Since her mother's death when she was ten, Marilyn had been a 'stand-in' mother, whilst her father had been touring the world to lose himself in his work in order to hide, even from himself, the deep sorrow his wife's death had inflicted on him.

Then after Catherine had graduated, she went to work for her father, Charles Chandler, in the law firm, where she got good groundwork, but being totally spoiled, played on the fact she was 'Daddy's little girl', who could and did, twist poor Charles Chandler around her little finger.

Marilyn was not only Charles' secretary, but also Catherine's great aunt, so as Catherine learned the business, so Charles and Marilyn tried to guide her to a full and fruitful life.

Charles wanted his little girl married to a man who could give her the standard of life he demanded for his 'little girl.' He paraded a string of likely suitors to Catherine, who went along with it all; 'the richer the better'.

Marilyn, on the other hand, wanted her to have a good life, but she wanted love to finally help the match - whoever he was. Charles wanted money and position for her and to this end, sought relentlessly for a suitor.

Elliot Burch was a major developer, with many irons in many fires, so when Catherine told her daddy she'd met this man and liked him, Charles was delighted. He immediately had a man put on the case to find out everything there was to know about Mr. Elliot Burch; his background, his plans and any dirt there might be, if they dug deep enough. Charles Chandler had to have all the facts in order to know the score of this highly successful man.

It had been about a year now, since Catherine had been attacked and dumped in the park. Vincent, who had found her and tended to her needs, had never experienced feelings like those he had when he was with her, before. He'd been told from early in his childhood that whereas others could find love and happiness in this world, heartbreaking as it was, he must never look or accept love because of who and what he was. Yet Catherine crept into his very soul until he was at one with her. The bond he knew, allowed him the miracle of knowing her every move and thought. Vincent had fallen in love.

Catherine felt there was something very special connected to her through Vincent, but she never allowed the word 'love' to become a part of it, as her upbringing and tutoring for a suitor never included someone like Vincent, with no money and no home. She was used to a society lifestyle, so Catherine continued to be a social butterfly, but more and more, that kind of life seemed to hold less and less interest for her, as thoughts of Vincent invaded more and more of her time, with every passing day.

After Catherine's first meeting with Elliot at the cocktail party, it was only a couple of days later that he rang her at the office, asking her to have lunch with him. When she said she'd love to, but couldn't, because she was up to her eyes in work, Elliot brought lunch to her, embarrassing her in front of all her friends, but being a gentleman, he bowed out gracefully, though not before Catherine ran after him, apologizing when they kissed and made up.

Now as she sat back in her office chair, she contemplated all the different and manipulative ways he'd worked, to get his own way. He was a lot like her father, as he also felt money could buy anything and everyone, just as Elliot did. Once she would have gone along with this, but now, this bothered her deeply.

A date had been agreed after the kiss-and-make-up at the office, and the following evening both had enjoyed the elegant and lovely meal, followed by a walk in the park. As they stood by the fountain in the moonlight, Elliot kissed her and she returned his kisses as their arms locked tighter around each other. Was this love? she wondered.

Vincent's bond with Catherine had been getting stronger daily and when Elliot and Catherine kissed in the park, it was as if a knife had been plunged into his heart, when he realized what had just taken place.

A week had passed since the incident in the park between Catherine and Elliot, before Vincent met Catherine at the entrance to his world, within the tunnel. For the first time ever he felt awkward and uncomfortable, knowing she had been in another man's arms, when he longed so much for those arms to be his.

SONNET XXIX

When in disgrace with fortune and man's eyes,
I all alone bewep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And I look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
For in these thoughts myself almost despising
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From the sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

"Have you been well?" he asked.

"Yes... I've missed you." Catherine felt the strain in their conversation.

"Do you love this man?" Vincent had asked, a question he'd dreaded the answer to.

"I don't know," Catherine had said, but was quick to tell Vincent that if she did, it would make no difference to their friendship.

Unable to stand the feelings he had, Vincent turned away suddenly and left her stunned, as he closed the cast iron gate to the safety of his home. Here he could weep in private, as he now realized he loved her deeply as a man, but his love could never be. Hadn't Father told him this at every possible opportunity?

The pain he felt hurt deeper than any wound he'd ever had. It wasn't until a cave-in Below where Vincent and Father were in grave danger, that Vincent's bond to Catherine came full circle, as Vincent feared he'd

never see her again and the pain that fear brought, was a pain so strong that Catherine, for the very first time, felt his pain and she knew, deep in her heart, Vincent needed her. Nothing and no one mattered, except Vincent, as she ran from the office to be by his side in his time of need.

Abandoning work, leaving Joe open-mouthed, Catherine got a cab and made straight for her apartment and the threshold Below. Once down there, she tried to tap out one word. She only knew one word, and that was 'Vincent,' but even this one word received no answer. Desperation made Catherine wander off into the tunnels, trying to find her own way to the home chambers. It was only after many hours did she finally stumble across Mouse's chamber, where Catherine learned of the rockfall and the urgent need for equipment. So Catherine went back Above to get help, as fast as she possibly could and made straight for Elliot Burch.

Elliot was glad to give her the items listed on the scrap of paper. He found it strange and even laughed at Catherine's need of him, so nothing she wanted was denied her. But Elliot always had a price tag on anything he did for anyone, including the lovely and desirable Catherine Chandler, as time would reveal.

When Vincent and Father were at last found, the relief Catherine felt was beyond words. Then, as Vincent walked Catherine back to the threshold, he thanked her and she told him, it was love she felt for him. Vincent couldn't believe her words, as his heart sang with so much love for her.

Elliot Burch was the head of many companies and he was also a director on many boards. His workforce was now huge which made it difficult to rule the empire he'd created, hence the people he employed to carry out his wishes had to be ruthless. This is what he paid them for; they had to be without hearts to get results. But one day these business tactics affected some old people who were close to Catherine's heart. So when Catherine found out by accident - that these men were employed by Elliot Burch, the flame for him in her heart finally died.

But their paths kept crossing as the months unfolded, and every time they did, Catherine saw what a black sheep he really was. But still the chemistry was there and Vincent felt this in her and it troubled him deeply.

Months passed by, then one day Elliot and his guards met Catherine in the parking lot. As Elliot emerged from the shadows, he asked for Catherine's help to get his father from hospital. As Catherine told Vincent about the meeting, Vincent felt duty bound to help him because Elliot had saved his and Father's lives months before when they had the rockfall. But even then, with his father rescued from hospital, his associates were wicked and the result was his father was killed as his helicopter exploded. It was Elliot's insistence of her being on the dock to say goodbye to him that she was the innocent victim caught in the exchange of gunfire following the explosion, when Vincent felt she had need of him.

As Catherine got Elliot to safety via the drainage tunnel, so Vincent was badly cut and injured in an alley, losing much blood from his hand which, when Father saw it, filled him with horror.

Why had she allowed this man, Elliot Burch, to capture her heart at the start? How Vincent had suffered and was unable to tell her of his heartbreak.

Catherine could now feel the bond, just like Vincent, because she loved him as much as he loved her. Vincent wondered where it would all end. Every time she was in trouble he cared so deeply and found himself dashing to her rescue. But if she fell in love with Elliot, if she should... marry him, she would be lost to him forever.

One day while Catherine and Vincent were walking the tunnels to visit Elizabeth, the very fabric of the tunnels shattered, then the shaking stopped.

"What was that?" Catherine had asked Vincent.

He had told of the huge building going up above, on the ground directly above them. The foundations had to be so deep to take the enormous weight of such a building. As Catherine heard Vincent's sad account of how it could ruin all they had built over the years, Catherine knew she had to go something and promised Vincent and Father she would 'look into it,'

Investigation revealed it was Elliot Burch's new building that was causing the trouble and Catherine was at a loss as to what to do to stop it.

Elliot had a high level meeting in his office the next morning and Catherine burst in and interrupted it all. Ignoring those there, she threw abuse at him and left, leaving Elliot at a loss for words. Later that evening, as Catherine sat on her cozy little couch, wondering what she could do to halt the building, a knock at the door made her jump.

Opening it, she saw Elliot Burch standing there. He looked sad and lost, so Catherine asked him in and offered him coffee. With coffee mugs in hand, she joined him on her balcony as he surveyed the New York skyline. He told her that seeing her today in his office made him realize how much he needed her and he wanted her to marry him. Reeling from this turn of events, she told him she'd think it over and promised him an answer.

Alone with her thoughts, Catherine saw fate had dealt her this card to save Vincent and all the wonderful people she loved deeply below Central Park. If she agreed to marry him, she would tell Elliot it was on condition he stopped the building. With this in mind, Catherine went Below to tell Vincent her plan. She cried in his arms as she unfolded her story and Vincent's tears fell into her hair as he held her close and begged her not to do it.

After a sleepless night, Catherine made straight for Elliot's office to tell him her terms for a marriage between them. But Elliot Burch wanted his building more than he wanted Catherine, he was single-minded in his obsession to have this; no one and nothing would stop him in his quest for power.

But fate did hold the trump card. The building was stopped and Elliot Burch was ruined. So his greed for power, for now, was crushed and Catherine went Below into the waiting arms of Vincent, whom she would never leave again.

OZMANDIAS

I met a traveller from a distant land who said:

Two vast and trunkless legs of stone stand in the desert.

Near them, on the sand---half sunk---a shattered visage lies.

Whose frown and wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command,
tell that its sculpture well those passions reach which yet survive.

Stamped on those lifeless things---the hand that mocked them and the hand that fed.

And on the pedestal, these words appear:

My name is Ozmandias, king of kings,
Look upon my works, ye mighty, and despair,
Nothing beside remains.

Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare the lone and level sand stretch...far away.

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