

## WHEN FATE PLAYS ITS HAND

by Gwen Lord

"Radcliffe, I can't believe you are asking me this," Joe Maxwell declared, as Catherine Chandler stood before him in the DA's office. It was early one Monday morning in late July.

"Joe... please, I'm asking you as my friend. Okay, I'm begging you, please let me do this assignment, which I know came into the office late Friday. I've had the whole weekend to toss this idea around, and I really want to do this," Catherine pleaded.

"Hey, time out here, I see why you are so damn good in court," he teased her.

"Excuse me?" she questioned her boss, eye to eye, her green eyes flashing, housing a hit of mischief as always.

"This urgency scares me, normally when one of these special assignments comes up from Moreno and I need you, Radcliffe, to win it for us, I get a string of excuses why you 'cannot', 'will not,' do them. Now, all of a sudden you're 'begging' to do one, come on, the lawyer in me cries out 'why?' He stood waiting.

"So, suddenly it's a crime to change my mind and say 'yes,'" she flung up her arms in an act of despair.

"Not exactly, but I can't help feeling this isn't really anything to do with work, and more to do with... what's his name... Vinnie?"

Joe sat down at his desk and Catherine took a few steps nearer to him.

"His name as you **damn** well know, Joe Maxwell, is Vincent, and I will be honest with you. Yes, it has everything to do with Vincent."

A pause and then she continued. "I need to get away... to be alone with my thoughts, and to evaluate my future." There, she had said it, and strangely... it felt good.

"Hey, big time emotion stuff this," his lips curled into a teasing smile. "Sure, I can go with that, Cathy, but WHY, after so many excuses not to go? Something tells me I'm not getting the full picture here, yet I'm expected to make it possible. I need answers that satisfy me enough to give you green for go."

Stretching out his hand, Joe picked up a rubber band from the four or five in a small heap on his desk, near to the desk calendar. Then he forced the rubber band between his fingers in a complicated finger movement. Joe did this when he was worried, and he genuinely was now; he played around with the band unaware of doing it.

A lapse of silence hung in the air, which felt charged with expectancy, giving them both time to collect their thoughts and decide on their next move, as one does in a 'chess' like situation.

Catherine was all too aware of how careful she now had to be in her explanation, so as not to arouse in Joe too much interest. While, at the same time she had to keep a tight lid on her emotions, in case Vincent picked up on her feelings, and came to her rescue because of their 'Bond'.

Joe's voice was the first to break the silence.

"Cathy, this is me, Joe... Tell me, kiddo." He smiled a reassuring look directly at Catherine.

Her heart missed a beat, he must never know how close he was to being 'Mr. Right' for her. Had Vincent not stolen her heart first, she could so easily have fallen in love with him. He was such a lovely guy, who would have been the perfect partner, lover, husband and father. But she needed him as a friend, the brother she never had.

Of all the eligible men in New York, Catherine Chandler had fallen in love with a man who refused to accept that they could have a life together, or a future. Week after week and month after month their feelings took root and grew. But Vincent made the rules, and beyond that certain point was forbidden territory. This was why Catherine needed to get away. Maybe they both needed space... a time to see if absence made the heart grow fonder, or if it was impossible. All these feelings were eating away at the very fibre of what, and who she was... Catherine Chandler.

"Trust me, Joe," she repeated.

"Well, when you come back, I want... I need answers," he said encouragingly.

"You've got it, Joe. When do I leave?" Catherine continued to force this issue.

"Tomorrow, kiddo. I'll do the paperwork today, so feel free to do this assignment. No, better still, we owe you time, right? You take two weeks starting tomorrow."

"I owe you one."

"You better believe it!" Joe said teasingly.

After Catherine left his office, Joe was already pulling together a plan of action which had to begin in Central Park. He knew the connection was in the park, now he had to find the key as to why!

Turning to his computer, he started to feed into it certain facts which hopefully would shed some light on solving this situation. He gazed at the screen for a while, then started to add data to it.

1. Name---Vinnie (then smiling impishly he changed it to Vincent)
2. Never seen by anyone---why?
3. Radcliffe over-protective----why?
4. So, subject needs protecting----why?
5. Turned down marriage to wealthy Elliot Burch----why?
6. Never leaves the city----why?
7. If I visit her, I feel I'm being watched----why?
8. Her balcony is totally out of bounds----why?
9. Does this person live with her? Maybe he hides on the balcony when I visit?
10. Could be deformed----nah!
11. Ugly?----nah!
12. Married?-----nah!

Joe now sat back and surveyed the list on the screen, tapping his pencil on the surface of the desk. He read and re-read the list before him, looking for the merest clue. When none came, Joe decided to visit the park as darkness fell.

So when work was over and the moon rose in the sky, Joe entered the park with a confident air. As he walked a little way into the park, the eerie mist combined with shadows and the moon, gave Joe shivers down his spine. Yet he reasoned to himself that Cathy roamed this park at night and no harm ever came to her.

Why? This factor alone was spooky he felt. Here he was, a grown man with beads of perspiration now lining his brow, as drug pushers, gangs of youths and weirdos took over from the daylight park visitors of joggers, children playing, dog walkers, picnickers and families enjoying the green of the park, against the contrast surrounding them, of skyscrapers in concrete and glass.

"I'll try another day," he told himself, deciding to quickly abandon this line of enquiry, when suddenly he felt very aware that someone was very close to him, watching him.

"Man, this is creepy," he mouthed, as he sped up his exit from the park, hailing the first passing cab in order to make his escape. He felt like a thief in the night returning to normality, whatever normal was in New York City, the city that never sleeps.

\*\*\*\*\*

The following morning, Catherine came into the office to clear her desk, and to say her good-byes to everyone.

"Hi Joe!" she raised her voice so he'd hear her above the phones.

"Radcliffe!" he strode over to her, glad to see her. "You all set now? Any ideas where you are going yet... if you need company?" he teased.

Smiling, she replied, "Naughty, Naughty. Yes, I'm going to stay with my friend Nancy Tucker in Westport."

"Didn't I meet her once, when she came and visited you a few months back?" He moved nearer to Catherine as he spoke.

"Same one, fancy you remembering that Joe, I'm impressed."

Grinning, he continued, "I'm like an elephant... I NEVER forget." His face wrinkled with an enormous smile and suddenly any tension between them eased away. "If I can ever help... I'm..."

"I know, Joe, you are the best. But all I need right now is to get away before I go nuts. I must unwind, then, and only then, I can look my life head-on and find a way to..."

"Running away won't help, you do know that. Problems need facing, Cathy."

"I know, Joe. I tell everyone to do just that, yet here I am unable to take what I dish out to others." Catherine looked suddenly sad and thoughtful.

"Has this guy, this....."

"Vincent, Joe, his name is **VINCENT**."

"Sure, okay, keep your hair on. This guy, Vincent.....has he hurt you in some way?"

"No Joe, it's nothing like that."

Undetermined, he continued. "Is he blackmailing you?"

**"NO, JOE,"** she stressed.

"Do you.....love this guy?" The words were hard to say. Silence had never sounded so loud.

"Yes.....I do love him," Catherine confessed.

"So what the hell is the problem here? Am I missing something?"

"No, of course not, it's just not that simple a problem and would take forever to tell."

"I'm listening here, what is this not so simple problem?" His expression was that of keen eagerness and interest.

"Sit down, Joe." Catherine's tone altered to one of gentleness. Then taking his hand in hers she

looked down at their entwined hands, as her thumbs moved across the backs of his hands. Almost whispering, she started to tell him.

"All his life, his father has told him that it is impossible for him to have a normal relationship with anyone."

"Some father, eh?" he quipped.

"Well.....these facts may not sound as bizarre once you know all the issues, because to some extent, there is logic there."

"This is totally beyond me," he confessed.

"Vincent is flawed Joe, but to me he is not at all flawed, but beautiful."

"Flawed as in crippled?"

"No, not as in crippled," she screwed up her lips in an effort to express it better.

"So?" he urged, keen to learn the answer.

"He's very tall and very.....immensely strong, yet with features that are.....a mistake."

Sighing with relief, Joe responded fondly. "You should see my Aunt Maria. Man, she is the ugliest woman you have..... EVER seen, yet my Uncle Pablo adores her.....we all do. She is the anchor of our family."

"Really Joe? That is so sweet, but Vincent isn't.....he's....." and at that, Catherine's emotions were too painful as tears over spilled and ran down her flushed cheeks. Then, quickly she pulled herself together and Joe was amazed at the speed she changed back into being in control again.

"Man, how do you do that?"

"Do what, Joe?" she looked up through the tears.

"Turn off the sadness."

"I have to, because... Vincent and I share a Bond, we're connected. He knows when I'm happy or sad... or in danger," she confessed.

"I'm starting to build a picture here.... that is, who helps you get out of mega danger, when on assignments and you winning each time. It's Vincent, tall and strong, who is keeping you safe?" he challenged her.

"Yes."

"Man, this is awesome," his face turned serious. "When can I meet him, Cathy?"

"He lives in a secret place Joe, where no one can find him. Because if they did, he and his Father, and the whole family would all be in great danger of people finding out about them."

"Why is it a secret? You can tell me... come on, give me some slack here," he pleaded.

"Joe, I've already told you more than I ever should, but I'm trusting you, to tell no one... nobody... right?"

"Right, you got it," he assured her. "Maybe one day you'll let me meet... Vinnie."

"Maybe."

"Hey! What's wrong with now? My desk is almost empty, Rita can finish what's here. You are already on your way for your 'find yourself' vacation... So?"

"I'd have to ask Father," Catherine confided.

"Father? What's Charles Chandler to do with all this? Man, this plot thickens every moment."

"Not my Father, but Vincent's Father, Jacob Wells. He won't allow anyone 'Below' unless he vets them personally."

"This is like the Mafia, and I'm scared Cathy, scared you're into something you are already over your head in."

"No Joe, truly this is not what it must seem to you... if only there was a way to show you," she confessed.

"Did you sat Below just now?"

"Did I say that?" Catherine now felt flustered.

"You sure did... and I know..."

"What do you know, Joe?"

"I know all this problematic thing centres around Central Park." Her face became deadly serious.

"What do you know, Joe? Tell me!"

"Hey, time out.... I know you walk regularly through the park at night and nothing happens to you. I know you're also scared of being alone, and spiders and all that good stuff. Yet you walk in the goddamn park at midnight, looking as lovely as ever, yet nothing happens. It's as if it was a warm sunny day and the park was empty. Come on, I don't have to be Einstein to work out things aren't what they seem here."

"Have you been **following** me?" she spat at him.

"Don't be mad... just the once, and man, when you vanished I felt scared and totally unsafe. I couldn't see you anywhere, so I beat the hell out of that place I tell you."

Tapping her hand nervously on her folded arms, she spoke again gently. "Well, maybe it IS time for you to meet Vincent."

"Yes!" he clenched his fist and hit the air in triumph.

"Okay, okay Joe, but you will have to promise that you will **NEVER**, ever, repeat to a living soul where you have been or what you saw."

"You got it, hand on heart." Joe placed his hand quickly on his chest.

"Then come back with me, Joe, to my apartment, and we'll take it from there."

"Hey, I'm liking it already," he once more smiled boyishly. Catherine said a few goodbyes, then picking up her jacket and purse, joined Joe and together they left the office, this was to more than one raised eyebrow.

"Did you see those looks we got, Cathy?" he teased.

"Men!" she flashed him, as they entered the elevator which took them down to the entrance of their office block. Hailing a yellow cab, they made their getaway.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Catherine, I felt your turmoil today, I felt your need of me, here Below... tell me, what troubles you so?"

"My heart Vincent, it needs to distance itself from all this... I need to get away for a little while."

"Away, Catherine... from... me?"

"Away from... partly you, but really it's myself I need to find out about... I need time alone."

"I see." He looked as if his world had fallen apart.

"I've asked Joe for time off, it seems there was time owing me and I took it. But like you, Joe sensed in me an unrest. He knows more than I ever imagined about me, and my walking the park. Even about why I come out of dangerous assignments unscathed. I feel, Vincent, in my deepest heart, we should allow Joe to know more, he's on our side, he's my friend. Also, he knows how to keep silent... I want Joe to meet you, Vincent," she ended out of breath.

"No! Catherine, how can you ask?"

"Yes, Vincent. How can you say no when you say you trust me?" she asked and continued. "Father let Lisa go Below and others. Please Vincent, will you go Below now and ask him? I have Joe in my apartment, tell Father Joe would never betray us."

"Very well, I'll go and find him. Then I'll tap the reply on the pipes."

"Thank you Vincent," she turned and returned to Joe.

\*\*\*\*\*

Opening her door with the key, she looked up to see Joe on her balcony, looking out at the city by daylight, the same view she and Vincent shared by night - while the world slept. Seeing him standing there made her stop in her tracks and really look at him. He truly was all she could ever have wanted at one time, had Vincent not entered her life. She was very drawn to him, maybe... she mulled, he could always be in her life, their life, hers and Vincent's.

"Hi Joe," she breezed, as she walked through the balcony doors.

"Hi yourself. That was quick. Can I see this 'new world' now?"

"Very soon Joe, Vincent has gone to ask his Father and he'll get back to me soon, so lets have a coffee."

"Fine, okay, good. Can I use your bathroom?"

"Sure, first door on the left."

Meanwhile, Catherine went into the kitchen to make the coffee. She completely overlooked the fact the message would be quick in arriving, and didn't tell Joe to expect a message in tapping to arrive loud and clear... in her bathroom!

No sooner had Joe closed the bathroom door, when a loud Morse code message ran loud and clear in the tiny lemon and powder blue bathroom, scaring him to death. Suddenly, all Catherine could hear was ...-

"Jesus! what the hell WAS that?!" as he joined her in the equally small kitchen and vaulted onto a surface to sit near her.

"You need a fix-it bloke for your pipes, they are clanging and banging!" Laughter filled the apartment as Catherine saw the funny side of the situation.

"Excuse me, did I miss something?" he asked.

"That was Vincent."

"If that was Vincent, man, you sure do have a problem, Radcliffe."

"No, that was a coded message to say Father has agreed to this meeting."

"No kidding!"

"We'll go straight after this coffee.... Sugar Joe, is next to you," she added handing him his beaker of hot black coffee.

\*\*\*\*\*

They took the lift to the basement, then Catherine held his hand, leading him through a broken wall of bricks. As Joe followed her, they descended a ladder to Below.

"Are you sure, Cathy?" he said very apprehensively.

"I do it all the time."

"You do? Man this is weird!" With that he also descended the steps.

Vincent's hand helped her down the last few rungs of the ladder. Then together they watched Joe Maxwell enter their world. Vincent once again offered help off from the last few rungs to safety, placing his hand on Joe's arm.

Joe felt relieved to feel the comfort of this hand, until he looked down at the hand. All covered in fur and with deadly looking claws. The sight was such a shock to him he missed his footing. Going down the last two steps in one go, he landed hard on the dusty ground.

Details that Catherine had given him flashed through his mind at the speed of sound, and suddenly he felt trapped and scared. Then from behind him came a velvet voice speaking to him.

"Welcome Joe to my world, welcome as a friend of Catherine's."

Feeling less worried, Joe turned to finally meet this man who stole away his Cathy. Joe only came up to Vincent's chest, so his eyes continued upwards, taking in the unusual clothes and unique smell of candlewax that Vincent carried. However, he was not as prepared as he thought, when his eyes came to rest on Vincent's face, yet fear was not there. He saw beyond the lion-like features, the blue eyes so full of love and compassion, and it all began to slot into place like a jigsaw puzzle.

By this time, Vincent was aware via his keen sense that he need have no fear of Joe. So he stood, allowing Joe to take in all he saw. Catherine slipped her arm through Vincent's, as together they watched Joe, and after what seemed like forever, but was only moments Catherine spoke.

"Joe, I want you to meet Vincent. Vincent, this is Joe, my boss, my friend, my tormentor."

"Vincent, gee pal, I'm so sorry to stare, forgive me please," Joe stammered.

"Give me your hand, Joe." Vincent's voice was full of understanding.

"Sure." Then Vincent took hold of his hand and placed it against his face.

"Better you feel, touch and see. I am real, Joe, I am what I am, no more, no less."

"I'm honoured to meet you," Joe expressed sincerely.

"Welcome to my world, come, we must go now and meet Father, he awaits us."

\*\*\*\*\*

The three set off down the dark, dusty tunnels, where their feet kicked up fine dust, which lay where their feet walked. Reaching out for a burning torch from a bracket on the rock wall, Vincent then held it high, so all three could walk safely.

Turning to Catherine, Joe whispered, "How on earth did you find this place? Man, it's awesome .... does Spielberg know of this place or Disney?"

Catherine laughed out loud and soon all three laughed as they headed for Father's study.

Joe kept looking around him in total disbelief, then he occasionally looked behind at what he'd recently passed by. Then, a glow ahead which got larger, held his interest until it became the home chambers. It was a world that Catherine knew and loved, also a place where he felt drawn to.

Vincent released Catherine's hand as he entered Father's study. Catherine held back to let Joe follow, then she followed last.

The contrast was amazing to Joe. Here really was a different world, a world apart from his. The old books, hundreds of them, keepsakes, trinkets, scripts of readings, all married into old carpets, quilts, leather, and candles everywhere, they formed a safe haven, ever for him.

A huge leather topped desk stood before him with an old man sitting on a comfortable old leather chair behind it. The welcoming smile and greeting came from Father.

"I'm Father, you must be Joe."

"That's me, F.... Sir."

"Catherine asked me to allow you to share all this. Not a thing we undertake lightly, Joe. Our very world down here could end in hours, if those Above heard of us here Below. Please know, to be a part of us, you have to keep this place our secret. Do you give me your word?" He waited.

"Absolutely! I see the need for this Sir, and I will never let you down."

"Then consider yourself one of us, Joe." Then, as Mary entered on cue, Joe leaned over to Catherine, whispering in her ear.

"I feel I've graduated, I feel so good."

Mary advanced, carrying the tray, she looked at Jacob Wells smiling, then at Vincent and Catherine. Taking the tray over to Joe first, him being the guest, she held out the tray saying....

"Welcome Joe, please take tea with us, also do try William's biscuits."

Taking a cup of herb tea, Joe saw the quality China, yet all odd, not matching pieces. The tray was lovingly repaired, like he noticed the chair had a leather patch, the carpet lovingly repaired. Man, the hours saving all this was so bizarre, yet fascinating.

Looking finally at Mary, he said, "Thank you..... say, do I know you? You look like I should know you?"

"I think not," Mary said, very flustered at the attention this drew to her.

Joe let it drop as he chatted to Father, Vincent and Catherine, and Mary picked up her patching, threading the needle with spectacles on the end of her nose.

Then suddenly, Joe clicked his fingers, saying, "I've seen you in a photo someplace. I believe it was in the old family albums my Mama keeps. I remember, if you are this person, then as a child I saw photos of you. Then what I couldn't get, was suddenly you were not in any of them. I remember asking where you were, but all I was told was you hadn't died, but nobody knew where you were. Are you..... Mary Anna Rossini????"

Laying down her sewing, Mary put her hand in her apron pocket and pulled out a lace handkerchief, dabbing away unshed tears. Silence was golden and only the tick of the clock's pendulum disturbed it all.

"I am she..... but who are you to know all this?"

"I guess you must be my Aunt. My mother was Bernadette Marie Rossini, before she married. My papa is Gueseppe Maximilano Fiore DeMalva."

"You are my sister's boy, aren't you? My Bernadette had a child called Joseph. Oh Joe, it is so good to see you!" Then they hugged at this strange turn of events.. At last they spoke.

"So why did you disappear then..... why?"

"Oh Joe, it is a long story, a long sad story, only Jacob here knows of it. You don't want to hear all this after so long."

"I've all day and I want very much to hear it."



All waited the answer as Father blew his nose on a large red spotted handkerchief, which he took from his cloak pocket.

"I'm not sure this is right, Jacob, to bare all this again after so long." She looked at her friend for guidance.

"Mary my dear, this is the time, trust me."

"Very well then, Jacob took me in twenty years ago, when my life fell apart."

"Why? How did this happen?" Joe asked.

Taking a deep breath, then looking up at everyone she began a story which she needed to share, after 20 years of carrying it around, like a heavy mantle about her shoulders.

"As a child brought up in a very strict religious family. I felt the need to be a part of the church. I joined the choir with Bernadette and taught the little ones in Sunday School, right up until I was 15. By this time all my brothers and sisters were married, yet I felt a need to take my belief further, so I entered a convent with every intention of becoming a nun, and God willing, a Mother Superior.

She took a sip of tea and continued.

"First I became a novice, which thrilled me, then because I loved children, Father Michael, the parish priest, asked me if I would help them out for one year, to teach the small ones, giving them basic knowledge to love their belief. I was flattered, also at the end of the year, I would take my vows, so I agreed to do it.

"Father Michael found a person to help me, a local young man who was also thinking of the priesthood for his vocation in life, his name was Eddie. We were instantly attracted to each other and I was very shy, so for many weeks we spoke only of the job in hand. Then one night, when I was asleep, Eddie came into my room. He sat on the bed, which woke me. I clutched my bedding to me in horror.

*'Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you - I can't get you out of my mind, I need you, Mary.'*

*'I can't do this - I'm going to be a nun.'*

*'And I, a priest one day.'*

*'Don't you wonder sometimes what it would be like?'* He smiled at her lovingly

*'No.....yes.....maybe.....'*

Then he kissed me and for a short while we lived a once in a lifetime experience. Suddenly, reality arrived and I felt so ashamed, what had I done? In the heat of the moment, our passion had enveloped us and taken us over.

"It was many weeks before I had enough courage to go to confession, to have my sins absolved. By then I had more shame to bear - I was pregnant.

"Meetings were held and Eddie was confronted by Father Michael, but Eddie swore it wasn't his and how he'd seen me talking to another boy, so it could be his.

"I managed to escape my duties to find Eddie and personally confront him, but he had gone, like a ship in the night. I was forgiven my sin and told the child would be taken from me at birth, and given to a childless couple. But at eight months I miscarried. I fell scrubbing one of the floors which was my penance, it was to encourage the miscarriage. Not only was the child stillborn, but deformed.

"I then knew my vocation was not to be, and this was God's anger at me personally. So I left my hospital bed and crept away into the night. I had nowhere to go, I felt so alone and so empty inside. Jacob found me huddled in a cardboard box down an alley close by. I believe I was crying,

wasn't I, Jacob? That is how you knew where I was."

"Yes, you were cold, thin, ill and heartbroken. I brought you Below to heal, like Vincent brought Catherine after her attack in the park."

"Of course!" Joe said to himself, he was remembering the fuss in the press over the missing heiress, Catherine Chandler.

"And," continued Mary, "I've been here ever since. This is my home, these are my family now, and I still look after the children. They are all my children." Her face was wet with tears.

Her tears were matched by Catherine's, who once Mary had finished, let go of Vincent's hand and rushed over to Mary, to hug her as if squeezing the life out of her.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you," Catherine whispered in her ear.

"It's in the past child, but sometimes U-turns in our life redirect us into unexplored places. Here with Jacob, he and I have found our Shangri-La. My vocation is no longer to be a nun, it is to be here with all this."

Father cleared his throat to speak. "So Joe, this was all meant to be, with you joining us Below."

"Sure was, now more than ever. I will never give away to anyone the secrets of this place, I swear!"

Mary looked at Joe. "You look so much like your Mama, Joe. Please come and see us when you can. We have so much to catch up on, after all, it is 20 years."

"Hey, you can bet on that one."

"That's settled then," Father announced with glee.

"I believe Catherine is leaving us for a while, is she not, Vincent?" Father ventured to say.

"Indeed she is, Father," his voice was depressed.

"No Vincent, I'm not leaving, I feel I have found all the answers here today. This IS where I belong and the vacation I am taking will be spent down here with my family," Catherine faced Vincent.

"Can I stay?"

"Need you ask? You know you can, Catherine."

"Then I'll leave now," said Joe, "If you'll show me out." So following endless good-byes, Joe left to return Above, very keen to return soon.

As he left Vincent and Catherine at the tunnel entrance, Joe put his hands on Catherine's shoulders then kissed her cheek, then whispered in her ear, for only her to hear.

"Now I understand, marry him Cathy, live Below and work Above for me. Think about it, kiddo."

"Goodnight Joe, and thank you." Catherine kissed Joe's cheek.

\*\*\*\*\*

As Vincent and Catherine walked back together Below, Vincent slipped his arm around her shoulders, holding her tight.

"I like Joe," Vincent said slowly.

"I'm glad, and what a turn up - he and Mary," Catherine smiled.

"Some things are meant to be."

"He's a good man," Catherine added.

"He will always be a part of us now," Vincent said knowingly.

"Yes."

"He also gave you good advice as he said good-bye?"

"You heard! You heard?" She was impressed.

Not only did I hear every word, I also agreed with him. You should live down here and work Above."

"Am I finally hearing this right, Vincent?"

"Maybe we should have a wedding first," he said. Suddenly all Catherine's dreams had come true.

"Please share this dark world with me. I cannot offer you riches, fame or fortune... just my love," Vincent whispered into her hair.

"That's all I ever wanted, Vincent. I wanted that from the first moment I saw you. There is no darkness when I'm with you, you are the light of my life."

"I couldn't face your rejection," he said.

"I accept. I will marry you." He held her close and their love now was destined to last through eternity and beyond.

"I think I'll ask Joe to be my best man." Vincent announced happily. and with that, they went to tell Father and Mary their news.

END