

VIGNETTES

Beginnings

- by Judith Nolan ©

*"In the end these things matter most:
How well did you love? How fully did you live?
How deeply did you let go?"*

Gautama Buddha

Charles Chandler...

"So this is where you were hiding when you were missing for those 10 days." Charles Chandler looked around him with interest. "No wonder they couldn't find you. Even now, after all that has happened, it doesn't seem possible. How could I have missed all this?"

"What doesn't seem possible is your having been in witness protection all these years," Catherine replied softly, coming to stand beside him and putting her hand on his forearm. "And my not sensing that you still lived. We were all convinced you'd died in that hospital and we buried you. I came here to be with Vincent and to mourn for you. I almost stayed with him. I was so sure there was nothing left for me up there with you gone. It all felt so empty and pointless."

"I know and that I will always regret until the day I die," Charles sighed. "But the FBI persuaded me there could be no other way to keep you safe. Gabriel's influence was so dangerous and pervasive. He'd already tried twice to have me killed. I couldn't risk it. I had to keep you safe, so I was forced to disappear, no matter how much it hurt." Charles clasped her hand tightly. "But if I had known this place existed... I have missed so much in my ignorance."

He gazed out over the mysterious beauty of the Whispering Gallery.

Music drifted softly on the breeze, snatches of conversation and echoes of old sounds. The yawning pit below the bridge beckoned with its swirling mist and hidden realms.

Charles shook his head in wonder. "I have lived in this city all my life and yet I feel now I never knew it at all."

"I have lived beneath this city all my life," Vincent remarked quietly, standing beside Catherine. "But, until the night I saved Catherine - so long ago - I had never truly seen it. It was only an unsafe place, to be avoided at all costs. I walked its streets at my own peril, listening for every sound, watching every shadow, looking for each new danger. Not beauty or love, those were things I never thought to possess. But then Catherine showed me the grace and the magic that great city up there possesses. She opened my eyes to a whole universe of possibilities I never could have imagined, despite all the books and poetry I have read. Nothing prepared me for the strength of her beauty and her love."

"And now you're married and you've given me grandchildren." Charles cupped his daughter's cheek, ignoring the tears running down his cheeks. "I don't know where to begin. I wish..." He sighed. "I wish it could all have been so different. That you could have trusted me with this incredible secret of yours."

But I do understand. I know now how wrong I was to doubt you and how your life was turning out. But I was so afraid—”

“Don’t, Dad, please, it’s all right. Everything is all right now. We will start again from here. It’s what I want more than anything. We can do this together.”

“If it is what you want, then I will do my best to make it so.” Charles drew her into his arms and hugged her close. “I don’t know when I’ve been happier or more proud of you than I am in this moment.”

He reached to clasp Vincent’s hand, nodding his thanks for all the other man had done for him, and his beloved daughter. If there were words to express what he was feeling, he didn’t know them. He drew a deep breath, releasing it in a long rushing sigh of gratitude.

“If we are together anything is possible...” Catherine drew back to smile up at him. “Vincent taught me that. And it is so true. We have come too far to ever turn back now. We will be all right, we will...”

END