

# VIGNETTES

## Beginnings

- by Judith Nolan ©

*“You must think that something is happening with you, that life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in the palm of its hand; it will not let you fall.”*

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Erik ...

“My crime was that I grew old. You see, in the world Above people don’t want to look at me, an old man; this unpleasant reminder of their future. I was to be cast away, hidden from the eyes of the young who want to believe they’ll live forever. In the world Above I’d lived too long. But here -Below- I’ve not lived long enough. So why am I here? To make memories; so that the last moments of my life may be as full of warmth and love, as were the very first moments of my life.”

Erik smiled as he bowed his head and stepped back into the shadows, allowing the next dweller from the world Below to take his place. Giving them each the chance to talk to Brian, the boy who’d followed Catherine into their underground home. Hoping to convince him their closely-guarded secret was worth preserving.

As Erik watched his friends come and go, he thought of his own childhood, when he’d once been as wide-eyed and full of life as the impulsive young man he’d just seen. His life too had held so much promise back then when he thought he owned the world and would live forever. How swiftly things had changed, distorted by time and circumstance.

He closed his eyes and drifted into the past, remembering Cecily, the love of his life, and the children they had brought up together. His throat tightened with unshed tears. Their married future had seemed so different then, when they were both young and filled with hope. He’d been a carpenter and a builder, a man who worked with his hands and gave everything to his creations. He had built the house they were to live in for over 50 years. But those years had passed, too swiftly to recall, and Erik had grown old.

Then his family - his own flesh and blood - had sold his beloved home right out from under him after his wife had died, and they’d tried to force him into a home for the elderly. A place where you waited to die and you had nothing to look forward to except the next meal. And even that was on the clock, like some damned prison camp. His family had wanted to put him somewhere he would be unseen and forgotten. It made it easier for them to get on with their own lives; thinking he was well-cared for.

But Erik had balked at the whole idea and he’d run away. His mouth quirked now as he considered the absurd notion. He’d actually run away from his own life! But he’d never gone back to that soulless

existence. And now, by some miracle, he had a new life, one full of purpose and meaning.

He watched Catherine lead Brian away to speak with Father. The boy needed to understand everything that was at stake, before he was guided out of the tunnels again.

“It will be all right.” Erik nodded, knowing Vincent would be the next to speak after Father, and he felt good about that.

They all worked so hard to protect Vincent, always. He’d been the one who’d found Erik one night five years ago, huddled cold and alone, in the scant shelter of a church doorway.

At first Erik thought he was seeing things, when his now good friend had loomed up out of the chill darkness, hooded and cloaked like a mysterious angel - coming just close enough to ask him if he was all right and did he need any help. The hand of a stranger. Erik shook his head on a ragged sigh.

Back then it had been Vincent’s voice that had first arrested Erik’s attention, making him pause in the act of flight to frown in wonder. It had been so full of concern and understanding, as if the voice’s unusual owner genuinely cared about what happened to a homeless old man and knew his pain.

Erik had swallowed his worried concerns about being approached by such an exotic stranger and answered he’d nowhere to go right then, that he had no idea what to do next. After they’d spoken together for some time, he’d trusted his new friend enough to go with him to a secret world he’d had spoken about. What did he have to lose anyway?

And it had been the beginning of something new and wonderful. He was working again with the tools he knew so well. Mending and creating whatever was asked of him.

It was all right now, he was wanted and needed.

Erik smiled. And there was still so much more living to be done before his long life finally drew to its natural close, and he would finally see Cecily once more.

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