

VIGNETTES

Beginnings

- by Judith Nolan ©

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.”

Helen Keller

Joe...

“And you’re really sure this thing is actually safe?” Joe peered into the echoing depths of the spiral staircase. He stepped hastily back, clutching Vincent’s intended birthday gift close against his chest.

“I mean, I can’t even see the bottom from here. It could have rusted out down there for all you know.”

“I guess it just takes a little faith, Joe.” Catherine smiled. “But it’s the quickest way down to the home tunnels and it is safe. I use it all the time. You do wish to go there now and help us celebrate Vincent’s birthday?”

“Hey, Radcliffe, you’ve spent years trying to keep me out of the place, when you didn’t know that I knew all the time. Ever since Vincent saved me from being gutted like a fish, that night in the park, I’ve owed him big-time. I ain’t about to pike now.” He peered over the railing again and grimaced. “I was just checking up on the safety rating. But if you’re sure...”

“Vincent says, what’s life for, if it doesn’t contain an amount of risk?” Cullen remarked drily, his hand settling encouragingly in the small of Joe’s back.

“Yeah, all right, I get it. Rag on the new guy.” Joe divided his glance of distrust between them. “So, this *is* the fastest way down? I feel like Alice going down the rabbit hole for the first time.” He laughed ruefully.

“It’s time to show you everything. You’ve earned it.” Catherine took his hand. “You promised to keep all our secrets and you’ve kept your word. Now this is the biggest one of all.”

“You know I would never do anything to endanger you or those you love,” Joe replied honestly. “Lord knows they did a better job of protecting you, when you needed it, than I ever could. I guess I must come a poor second to Burch and what he can do for you with his money and all, but you know you can

trust me never to spill the beans.”

“I know, Joe.” Catherine reached to kiss his cheek. “But now you have to have a little faith in us and take the first step. Everyone’s waiting for you down there. It’s going to be a wonderful celebration.”

“Yeah, I was afraid you were going to say that.” Joe sighed. He turned to Cullen. “How about you go first and I’ll follow after Catherine? Give me something soft to land on if anything gives way.”

“Topsiders...” Cullen sighed roughly, shaking his head in resignation as he stepped off the top step without hesitation and started down.

“Come on, you can do it. Race you to the bottom.” Catherine grinned at Joe before also moving easily down, their combined footsteps echoing hollowly into the distance.

“If my mother could only see me now...” Joe drew a steadying breath. He followed gingerly, testing each rung twice before venturing to step on it as he crept slowly down towards the glowing amber light that both illuminated the staircase and concealed the mysterious realm that lay far beneath. He was aware this was only the beginning of an exciting new chapter in his life. *Something truly magic and special was about to happen, and he couldn’t wait...*

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