

# VIGNETTES

## Beginnings

- by Judith Nolan ©

*“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls;  
the most massive characters are seared with scars.”*

- Kahlil Gibran

### **Vincent...**

“What do we have here, then?” Huddling deeper into his ragged clothing tied close to his thin body against the cold, Falcon bent to peer under the snow-covered piece of cardboard. He blew on his bare fingertips where they protruded from the ragged holes in the ends of his woollen gloves, trying to restore some circulation.

He grimaced as he thought, January 12th, the coldest damn day of the year...and he was out in it, mucking around with things that didn't concern him. He frowned, wondering if it was worth his while even bothering with whatever it was under the cardboard that had cried out when he'd been about to step over it, hurrying on his way home through the snow from the back entrance of St. Vincent's hospital. This was his third dash in two weeks for supplies of much-needed and precious medication. Being forced to wait for Dr. Alcott to appear had made him late in returning, and he couldn't linger.

He poked at the pile of snow-covered debris with his boot and shook his head. “Probably just some kittens or a puppy someone's dumped. I got places I gotta be.” He straightened, about to turn away, when the sound came again; a plaintive mew of sound that barely carried in the frigid winter's air. He turned back. “Well, that don't sound like any damn cat...” He blew a disconcerted breath, torn between duty and compassion.

He was on an important mission; he didn't need to be distracted from his purpose now. Father was relying on him to get the new batch of medicines from Peter Alcott delivered back to the home tunnels right quick. Lives were depending on his speed. And it was getting dark fast. He still had a long way to go...

As he stared, stomping from foot to foot to keep his feet from freezing, the cardboard moved slightly, rose and then fell back, the snow covering it also lifting and settling again. Almost like the last breath of a drowning child. “I'm gonna get skinned for this...” Falcon shifted his grip on the precious parcel clasped beneath his arm as he bent down again and lifted a corner of the cardboard, uncovering a tiny bundle of rags. The bundle moved again, the mewling cry muffled by a cloth bag tied over the creature's head.

“What on earth? Some people...” Putting his parcel aside, Falcon bent closer, drawing a knife from the side of his boot, using it to gently slit the strings holding the bag in place. Carefully removing it he lifted

it away to reveal... "Well, I'll be..." He swallowed convulsively, staring at what he'd uncovered.

It was a baby that much was obvious. A tiny infant swaddled in rags to its tight-shut eyes with a shock of dirty blond hair sticking out the top like an exclamation mark. It mewled again, a soft, pathetic cry for help, wriggling slightly within the confines of the rag bundle.

"Well, kid, I don't have the time to run you all the way back to the hospital. Peter's probably gone home by now anyway and I'm late as it is. Whoever chucked you away obviously ain't comin' back any time soon. So I guess you and I are stuck with each other. And there's only one place I know of where we can both get out of the cold and all this damn snow..."

Scooping the baby up into his arms, he was amazed how light and thin it felt. Boy or girl, Falcon couldn't determine, but he knew instinctively the little thing was very sick. It barely moved again as he unbuttoned his coat and slid the tiny bundle inside to nestle against the steady beat of his heart. Holding the baby close to him, and grabbing up his parcel in the other hand, he set off through the snow, muttering about Topsiders, and praying Father wouldn't yell too much about the delay.

Inside his coat he felt the tiny child settle, wriggling closer to the vital warmth of Falcon's body. He smiled ruefully. He did wonder what Father was going to say about receiving yet another mouth to feed, however tiny. But he had an odd sense it was going to be all right. Like somehow, this abandoned kid he'd found was the beginning of something; some new phase of the tunnel's badly chequered existence. Lord knows they surely needed any kind of miracle right now...

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