

# VIGNETTES

## Beginnings

- by Judith Nolan ©

*“If you hang out with chickens, you’re going to cluck and if you hang out with eagles, you’re going to fly.”*

**Steve Maraboli**

### **Winslow...**

Winslow brought his blacksmith’s hammer crashing down on a piece of metal that had once been the rear door of a Buick. It made him feel better to hit something. It eased the nagging pain deep in his chest, clutching at his heart. The clanging sound of metal being beaten into shape echoed around the chamber.

Soon the piece would be transformed into another patch for Father to use in his constant vigil against water leaks and burst pipes. Winslow lifted his hammer and brought it crashing down again. The resulting percussion rattled his teeth, making his arm ache and his head throb, but he persisted. It was better than being idle and brooding on the things he couldn’t change.

Vincent watched him closely, sitting cross-legged in the old, rump-sprung leather armchair Winslow sometimes slept in now, when he wasn’t working at the forge. These days the blacksmith hardly seemed to sleep at all. Every time Vincent looked in, the fire was always glowing luridly, and the sound of metal being beaten into submission echoed endlessly in the nearby tunnels.

“I never knew my real father.” Vincent sighed as he watched the rivulets of sweat running down his friend’s naked torso, soaking into his well-worn jeans, making his skin gleam like polished ebony in the dancing firelight of the forge.

“Then I guess you got saved a whole world of pain,” Winslow growled, looking up from his work. Instantly he regretted his harsh words as he saw the flicker of dismay in the boy’s watchful blue eyes. It didn’t help to take his deep sense of guilt out on the kid. “Sorry, Vincent. That was uncalled for.”

“It’s okay.” Vincent shrugged. “I understand.”

“Thanks.” Winslow sighed as he returned his gaze to the work at hand. “But my father should never have been down there in the first place, digging around in that tunnel looking for a leak no one else could find. He knew the risks of a cave-in were too great. I tried to tell him, but he wouldn’t listen.”

He glanced back at his visitor. The kid was incredible. Even at barely 10 years old Vincent had the

uncanny knack of putting his finger right on the cause of the pain; like he was seeking out the source of a toothache. The boy probed until he discovered the truth. And then he tried his best to fix it. But, like now, some things were beyond mending.

Winslow's pounding rhythm gathered momentum again. "That whole area down there was far too unstable to be messed with. Father should have closed it off years ago and left well-enough alone. Just like the Maze you kids are always playing in." His angry gaze snapped up to snare Vincent's guilty look. "That place is a death-trap too. Some day someone's going to get trapped down there and we'll be forced to move heaven and earth to dig them out again, before they end up just as dead as my old man." He brought the hammer crashing down again with extra force. "And I don't want that on my conscience as well. No sir."

"Your father heard your fears," Vincent replied quietly. "But he had to go. He had to because there was no one else skilled enough to do it. He knew that. Father knew it too. That leak would have flooded all the chambers below it. Your father saved people and their possessions. He fixed the leak."

"And got crushed by a ton of falling rock for his efforts!" Winslow snapped, looking up again. He sighed on a grimace of apology. The kid was only trying to help.

"It wasn't your fault, Winslow." Vincent shook his shaggy mane. "Your father knew what he was doing. The risks he was taking. You couldn't have stopped him. No one could have. It was what he did. He looked out for us all and tried to fix things as best he could."

"Yeah..." Winslow sighed roughly. *There he goes again*, he thought. *The kid sees too damned much for a boy of his age.* "But it don't change the facts."

"No, it doesn't." Again Vincent's shaggy mane danced with the force of his assertion. "But now it's your turn. You need to do what you can to honour his memory by doing his work. Making things for all of us. Making it right."

"I..." Winslow blinked, his hammer pausing, half-raised, as he stared at the boy. "But I don't have his skill. He was a real craftsman with metal and wrought iron. He could turn his hand to making anything. He was trying to teach me, when he..." He exhaled roughly. "I've always been too ham-fisted." He raised one large, clenched hand. "I'm good at bashing out pieces to fix things. Beyond that, I wouldn't know where to start."

"The beginning is a good place to start." Vincent released his long legs and stood. "We can ask Pascal. Maybe he can put the word out to our helpers Above. Find some answers for you. Father is bound to have books on the subject. He has books on everything else. You can do it. I know you can."

"Kid, you're surely somethin' else, do you know that?" Winslow shook his head as he slowly lowered the hammer for the first time in days.

Suddenly his arm felt too weak to continue. In fact his whole body ached. He put a hand to his throbbing head and his eyes began to burn with unshed tears. But the pain in his chest had eased slightly, allowing him to breathe freely for the first time in a long while.

Dropping the hammer he staggered to the chair Vincent had vacated only moments before and collapsed down into it. He rested his head back and closed his eyes. It felt good to rest now. Tomorrow would

come soon enough.

“See ya, kid,” he murmured. “Go on now, I’ll be fine. I think I’m just gonna take a nap. I didn’t know I was so darned tired.”

Vincent picked up a nearby blanket and placed over the blacksmith’s recumbent form. “See you tomorrow. Sleep well.” He smiled as he left the blacksmith’s chamber on silent feet. Winslow was going to be all right now, he could feel it...

**END**