

# **DON'T LEAVE!**

**By**

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*"You are my best friend as well as my lover, and I do not know which side of you I enjoy the most. I treasure each side, just as I have treasured our life together..."*

***Nicholas Sparks***

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Vincent sighed as he stared at the beautiful picture of Catherine in her elegant Halloween costume. His heart ached with a sense of impending loss. Their precious time spent together was always so short. More often measured in minutes, rather than hours. They were bound by circumstances constantly beyond their control.

Tonight - this singular night of the year - could have been so different. He had such hope. And still, evildoers had gotten in their way, once more. He wished they could have had more. So much more of everything. But, time, most of all.

He knew he would never forget this night and could revisit it often in his dreams. But now, he needed to return Below. He had stayed too long as it was, and Father would soon begin to worry. Discovery could be just around the corner by some stranger who got too close or saw too much. It was a risk he was not prepared to take.

"Good night..." He sighed again, more deeply, as he turned to leave.

Catherine had been watching him, seeing his inner struggle and her heart missed a beat.

"Don't leave!" she begged earnestly. "She told me that this is a special night. Samhain. When the walls -"

Vincent turned back to her, drawn inexorably to her beauty and spirit. "- When the walls between the worlds grow thin... and spirits of the underworld walk the earth."

He stepped closer with dawning wonder in his expression. Could it be possible, after all? He fought against the rational dictates of his mind. *'Go now, while there is still time...'*

Catherine smiled with earnest expectation as she shook her head. "Vincent, we can't waste it. We just can't!"

He gazed at her for a long moment before finally shaking his head in agreement. "No, we can't. There is still time before dawn. Not much..."

"Yes, there is." His love gave him a radiant smile as he turned to walk beside her.

Vincent inhaled deeply as Catherine tucked her hand into the crook of his arm. She had always put her trust in him to keep her safe. Now, it was her turn to guard his secret from prying or suspicious eyes.

Love swelled within him, making it difficult to breathe. "I will need to find a way to send a message down to Father," he said, as they walked arm-in-arm down the street. "He will wonder where I am and once the sun rises..."

"Of course..." Catherine replied quickly, knowing he always had pressing duties, no matter what time of night.

It was a simple matter of finding the right building with pipes that ran down into the ground. Vincent picked up a nearby rock and tapped out a message.

The answer was almost immediate, and he smiled. "Pascal says, 'Hello, Catherine.'"

She frowned. "How does he know you are with me?"

Vincent shrugged. "Because I told him. I made no secret of my determination about coming Above tonight to meet Bridget. Father knows I am now with you."

"I'm so glad you did," Catherine replied as they walked back onto the sidewalk. "And that we could help Bridget find her father again before it was too late for both of them."

"Yes..." Vincent lifted her small hand from his arm and kissed the backs of her fingers before he tucked her hand back into his possession. "Shall we go exploring?" he asked with his eyes shining with keen expectation.

"I would love that..." Catherine wondered about his sudden boldness but didn't question it as she put her other hand around his arm and hugged it close to her chest as they walked on.

Arm-in-arm, they saw the city together for the first time. From Broadway to Times Square, then the Rockefeller Center and the Guggenheim.

Vincent pointed out the ethereal beauties of St. Patrick's Cathedral with the moon riding high overhead. They walked on to the majesty of the Empire State Building before they stopped to study the glittering lights and illuminated signs of Time Square.

The city buzzed and flowed around them in an endless rush of people and cars. Even though it was now very late at night, many revellers seemed reluctant to go home and back to their everyday lives. This night was one of magic and balefires.

Seeing that his love was beginning to tire in the early morning cold, Vincent pulled off his cloak and enclosed her in its warm folds. He raised one hand to hail a

passing hansom cab and they settled into the comforts of the leather seat as their horse trotted through the crowded streets.

Finally, they passed the lights of the Metropolitan Museum and Vincent delighted his love with stories of seeing the museum from the underside when, as children, he and Devin often penetrated it from the basement level and saw wondrous things in the vast, cavernous spaces.

He chuckled softly. "We often 'borrowed' items which interested us. But we always returned them, eventually."

"I'm seeing an entirely new side of you tonight, Vincent," Catherine marvelled. She too began to laugh softly. "I wonder if there are any outstanding warrants for the two of you."

Pride filled her love's look of disbelief. "I doubt it. Our 'borrowing' was never discovered, as far as I am aware. Nobody ever came to the areas we inhabited. They were forgotten places full of shadows, mystery and treasures."

He raised his shoulders. "I'm sure I could still find my way inside. The entrance is well hidden behind some enormous mahogany Victorian display cabinets that do not appear to have been moved for years. We were always very careful about how we came and went. We never left any trace of our having been there."

Catherine hugged his arm to her. "I never knew you were so incorrigible and daring as a child."

"Of course." Vincent laughed. "Devin was always an excellent teacher. I refused to let him go anywhere without me. He showed me incredible things long forgotten or lost. All of them were secrets we kept between him and me."

"I wish I could have seen you, then..." Catherine confided as she leaned her head against his shoulder. "So young and so eager to learn..."

She shook her head. "But if Father had ever found out what you two were up to..."

"We would not have been able to sit down again for at least a month," Vincent completed her statement with a rueful look. "He always said that Devin took things too far. I tried to tell him it was my idea, but he never listened."

All too soon, the sun began to rise above the city and shine on the Statue of Liberty. They walked slowly into Queenborough Park, reluctant for their night to end. Catherine has returned Vincent's cloak. She paused ahead of him to allow him to catch up with her.

She linked her hand through the crook of his arm once more. "It has been truly magical. Beyond anything I have ever imagined. I know it's impossible, but I wish we could be together like this again. See everything once more."

She glanced up at her love wistfully. "Tomorrow is Sunday. I don't have any urgent files demanding my attention." She sighed, long and regretfully.

"If only we could," Vincent replied softly, laying his hand over hers where it rested so trustingly on his arm. "But we both know it is truly hopeless to wish for more than we have already had. This was a singular night."

"Yes, it was..." Catherine nodded as Vincent guided her to a park bench on the side of a path that paralleled the river. The Queensborough Bridge filled the immediate horizon as the sun rose beneath it and then shone through its elegant metal tracery.

Vincent stared at the scene. "You know, I've lived here all my life, and yet, it's as though I've never seen this city until tonight. I have now seen it through your eyes."

Catherine smiled sadly. "You've seen so much of the violence and hatred of my world. I wanted you to know there's beauty, as well."

Vincent turned to look at her as he replied softly, "Oh, I know that, ever since the night I found you, Catherine."

Their look of longing held, and time appeared to stand still. Catherine lifted one hand toward him as they leaned closer to one another, becoming lost in each other's eyes as they drew toward an inevitable conclusion and...

From their right, an early morning jogger appeared, sweating and out of breath. He jumped to a halt. "What the...! Geez! you gave me a real scare. Hey, man, Halloween was yesterday!" He laughed at his own humour as he danced from foot to foot before he ran on. But the jogger's unwelcome advent had broken the delicate spell.

"It is time..." Vincent grimaced as he rose slowly to his feet. "I must go..."

"Wait..." Catherine put out one hand to detain him as he drew the hood of his cloak about his head and settled it over his mane.

"I'm sorry..." She shook her head as she allowed her hand to drop, knowing it was not fair to try and detain him any longer. The daylight world was now awake, and it was too dangerous for him to linger.

"Yes..." She nodded with deep regret as her love turned to her.

"What more is there to say..." he whispered as he raised his hands in despair. He stared at her with intense longing in his eyes before he turned and walked slowly away.

Catherine turned to watch him leave. She smiled softly as she turned back to stare at the sunrise. The golden orb outlined the bridge and the city skyline beyond the river.

Then something Vincent had said began to tug at her mind and heart. *'The entrance is well hidden behind some enormous mahogany Victorian display cabinets that do not appear to have been moved for years. We were always very careful about how we came and went...'*

She swallowed tightly as she tried to remain seated, even as rising excitement began to fizz through her. *'Nobody ever came to the areas we inhabited. They were forgotten places full of shadows and mystery...'*

"Why not?" she whispered. "Where's the harm? It's not as if we're going to borrow anything. We would only be looking..."

She rose to her feet before her practical lawyer's mind could throw up rational arguments and objections to override her excitement and she abandoned the whole idea. She hitched up her full skirts and hurried after Vincent.

He was far ahead but walking slowly with his head down in a way that spoke of his disappointment over leaving her. Catherine began to run, her clothing billowing all around her.

"Vincent!" she called, dropping her skirts to wave at him and gain his attention.

"Catherine?" He stopped and turned, his face filling with wonder and concern. "What is it?" he asked looking all about for any signs of impending danger. "Did you see something?"

"No, it's all right..." Catherine reached his side and took his arm between her hands as she caught her breath. "The museum..." she said, gripping his arm tightly. "You said you were sure you could still find the tunnel entrance into the basement level."

"I did..." Vincent scanned her face with worried eyes. "But what are you asking of me? I have not been there in years."

"I want you to take me there," Catherine begged. "I want to see all the things you saw as a child. Wondrous things, you said."

"You're tired," Vincent replied with compassion. "You're not talking sense."

"I'm not tired," Catherine replied quickly.

"Catherine..." her love said warningly.

"All right, maybe I am a little tired," she confessed. "But if you take me home right now, I can have a shower and sleep for a few hours. Then, I'll get up at noon, have something to eat and then get dressed in sensible clothes. I'll meet you below at my basement entrance at two o'clock."

She looked up into his dubious expression. "Please, Vincent. I want to play truant for once. I don't want to go back to being good. Not just yet. It has been such a magical night. I don't want it to end. Not yet."

She leaned into him. "The museum closes at 5.30 every evening. You said no one goes to the places you found. We can spend hours just looking around. We will certainly not be *borrowing* anything this time." She shook his arm between her hands, trying to force his agreement when she saw his scepticism.

"I should not have told you..." he murmured, as he turned and encouraged her to walk with him. "I will take you home. The tunnel entrance is very near. We must get Below."

"And after you take me home?" Catherine insisted, still holding his arm as they walked. "What then? Will you do as I ask?"

Vincent sighed as he held open the rickety door to a dilapidated and abandoned warehouse for her to pass through before him. "If it means that much to you..." He shook his leonine head as he guided her into the building. "But we cannot linger...."

"I won't," Catherine promised him with a beaming smile. "I'll be as quiet as the proverbial mouse. You'll see. No one will ever know we were there."

"That's exactly what I'm afraid of," Vincent commented drily as he showed her the way into the underworld that would lead her home. "More than you could ever know..."

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*"Every heart sings a song, incomplete until another heart whispers back. Those who wish to sing always find a song. At the touch of a lover, everyone becomes a poet..."*

**Plato**