

I See You...

Judith Nolan



“The power of love is that it sees all people.”

DaShanne Stokes



“Happy Valentine’s Day, Beloved.” Catherine knelt beside her reclining husband on the tartan blanket he’d spread beneath the stars in the roof-top rose garden of their home overlooking the East River.

She leaned down to kiss him. It was bliss to be alone, together once more.

Earlier in the day, Vincent’s thoughtful gift to her had been the idea of this night beneath the stars, away from all responsibilities and distractions. He knew his wife had been working too hard, with her father now retired from the family’s law firm. So much extra responsibility had fallen on Catherine’s slender shoulders.

The night was dark, and unseasonably warm for the time of year. Somewhere, a clock had declared the time, but they’d paid no attention, so entranced were they, one with the other. Their loving had been incredibly sweet and lingering, neither wishing their entwined closeness to end.

In years past, when they had been alone together like this, Catherine had often shed all her clothing when making love with Vincent. Afterwards they would walk naked in the moonlight.

The illicit freedom had been magical. Even the challenge of Vincent's full-throated shout of sheer joy had been lost in the sounds of the river and the city's far off nightscape of horns and endless clatter. This garden was the one place where they could truly be themselves.

But the inexorable years had advanced, the century had changed to the 21st, and a shyness had grown upon her that had not been there in the days of her more carefree youth.

Vincent had observed her newly-found reticence, but he had not commented. Their bond had shared the inner workings of her mind, as if she'd already spoken the words.

He lay beside her now, clad only in an old pair of unbuttoned blue jeans, watching the night wind lift and play with the silvered length of Catherine's hair. It ruffled the sheer silk of the nightgown she wore, and the material shone whitely in the light of the full moon, a glowing luminescence that flattered the increasing number of lines marking the passage of time on her face.

He saw those lines and understood. To his eyes she was as beautiful as the day he'd first visited her balcony, to see that she was well, and to tell her he could never see her again. *For her sake*. How long-ago and impossible that night now seemed.

Catherine looked up at the moon, then back at him. She raised a hand to smooth the tumbled fall of his thick mane with her free hand. "I love you so much."

"Not as much as I love you," Vincent rumbled, in contentment.

"I have a gift for you." Catherine held up a book she had brought with her into the garden. The intensity of their lovemaking had pushed it beneath the blanket. "I found this today in Mr Smythe's 777 bookshop, and as soon as I read it, I thought of you. It has some wonderful insights."

Vincent watched as his wife opened the book and began to read. "*I see you, beneath the surface. I see your untameable wild. I see your billowing heart. I see your unshed tears and your not yet dreams and your devotion to spirit. I see you howl at the moon and call the ocean home and ground to earth and grow taller than the trees. I see you. You are not alone. You are not invisible. You are seen. You are seen. You are seen. And my God, you are beautiful...*"

She looked up, her eyes gleaming with tears. “You are beautiful...” she whispered again.

“I see *you*, and *you* are beautiful...” Vincent sat up to kiss her cheek, smoothing away one of her tears with the gentle ball of his thumb, before looking over her shoulder. “That is lovely. Who is the author?”

Catherine sniffed as she closed the book to glance at the spine. “Jeanette LeBlanc.” She allowed her husband to take the book from her.

Vincent opened it at random and began to read. “*Why are you so determined to keep your wild silently inside you? Let it breathe. Give it a voice. Let it roll out of you on the wide open waves. Set it free...*”

He looked up, his sapphire eyes midnight dark beneath the shelter of his brows. “Why do you now keep your wild side silent within you, Catherine? There was a time when you couldn’t wait to set it free. With me. Every time was like the first time we made love among the roses...”

“That’s an unfair question.” Catherine sighed roughly. She looked away over the moonlit garden. “I’m older now.”

“We are alone,” Vincent persisted. “There is no one in the house, but us. Our children are grown and both our fathers are sleeping Below, tonight. There is no one to see us, but ourselves. There is no need to hide, here.”

“I know all that.” Catherine replied quickly, her eyes still on the black and white moonscape of the garden. “But, still...” She raised a helpless shoulder.

“I see you...” Vincent reached for her chin, turning her face back to his. “I see you in all your stages, and all your glory. Your beauty shines within you like a pure light. That is the essence of who you are. Nothing can diminish that.”

“That’s easy for you to say,” Catherine huffed. “I swear you have not changed one jot in the last thirty years. I have yet to find a single silver thread in *your* hair!”

“Do I detect a note of dissatisfaction?” Vincent smiled gently, even as his eyes narrowed. “It may be my genes, my fate to remain so, but it is not by my choice. I would grow old with you, knowing the best is yet to be.”

“A man would say that.” Catherine reached to play with the book where it now lay open, between them.

“Ah...” Vincent nodded, a world of understanding in that single syllable.

“Ah...what?” Catherine countered, eying him crossly.

“I do *see* you.” Vincent stood, reaching down one hand to draw her up beside him.

“I see everything you are trying to hide. I do understand. More than you know.”

“But there’s not a single thing you can do about any of it,” Catherine replied wistfully. “Unfortunately, not even you can turn back the clock.”

“Even if I could, I would not wish to do so. But there is something I can do about it. I can embrace it, and make it mine,” he countered, and proceeded to do so.

Held close against the strong beat of his heart, Catherine rubbed her cheek against him. She gloried in the feel of him, the firm and the soft, the masculine scent of his skin and crisp body hair. It all added up to her beloved, the only man she would ever love.

She gasped when she felt his questing fingers engage with the hem of her filmy nightgown, drawing it upwards. “Vincent...” she warned, throatily.

“Let me...” he begged, and she didn’t have the heart to resist him. “Call it another layer of my Valentine gift to you. There is freedom to be found in the darkness.”

“All right.” Catherine gave up the fight almost instantly. It was no use anyway, Vincent always knew how to turn her indecision to his point of view.

Her gown fell into a whispering heap at her feet, followed almost instantly by his blue jeans. They both stood naked in the moonlight, bare inches apart.

“I see you...” Vincent said again, his palm cupping the fullness of one rounded breast, the pad of his thumb teasing out the rose-coloured nipple to a hardening point. “And my God, you truly are beautiful...”

“I see you...” Catherine threaded her fingers through his, gripping tightly, as she moved to hide herself in the shelter of his strong shadow. “I love you, but you are not a very good liar.”

“No, Catherine, I speak the truth.” Vincent stepped aside, allowing the light of the moon to fall fully upon her. “Let me see you.”

“If you must...” She stood still, her chin raised defiantly, as his gaze swept the length of her, from bare toes to the top of her head.

He saw the lean lines of her legs and flanks beneath the softly rounded belly which had cradled his children. The full swell of her breasts below the defiant loft of her

chin, and the pulse that beat swiftly at the base of her throat. A sure sign of her inner turmoil. Their bond roiled with indecision and breathless desire.

His unblinking gaze held her fast, even as her every instinct demanded she bend down and gather her nightgown. She loved him that much.

“Walk with me...” Vincent tightened his grip on her hand, drawing her towards one of the many pebbled paths of the garden. Away from the temptation to cover herself.

Catherine went with him, unresisting now. The worst of her fears were behind her. Perhaps it wouldn't hurt to be naked in the moonlight, for one last time. To glory in the feeling of unfettered freedom.

“And we will do this again tomorrow night,” Vincent commented, sensing the trend of her thoughts. “Until you understand you will never have anything to hide. Not from me.”

“You have left me with little choice.” Catherine slid both hands around the swell of his bicep. “I am as naked as the day I was born.”

“Grow old, disgracefully, with me?” Vincent looked down at her, as they walked.

“Yes, please.” Catherine sighed.

A renewed sense of freedom fizzed like fine wine through her veins. Her shout of pure, unfettered joy blended with her husband's full-throated bellow. Both quickly became lost in the sounds of the river and the city's far off nightscape.

But their owners didn't care, for they had already turned as one, to blend into one perfect whole, outlined by the cool, white light of the full moon...



“Your love is my diamond that I want to wear near my heart. Your hug is my heaven where I want to belong always.”

Debasish Mridha

