



“Once Upon a Time...In the City of New York”

By Judith Nolan

“You have no control over how your story begins or ends. But by now, you should know that all things have an ending. Every spark returns to darkness. Every sound returns to silence. Every flower returns to sleep with the earth. The journey of the sun and moon is predictable. But yours, is your ultimate art...”

Suzy Kassem

Linda Hamilton was enjoying her new role. Over the last four days she'd been deep into the filming of the new pilot for a television show called Beauty and the Beast. The work gave her a necessary focus and a reason to wake up every morning, conquering her often wayward emotional state...for now.

Privately she'd had her doubts, the script was surreal and intriguing, too good to put down until she'd read it from cover to cover. This was not her normal fare, she was a movie actress, not given to doing television work, but it was a job and she needed that right now. But she gave it two years at the most, if it got off the ground at all.

She had no great expectation of the series being picked up by the network, or if they did, not much in the longevity of such a project. It was a sweeping and classical romance of the highest order, poetry and symbolism abounded, so she doubted any network exec would "get it." Maybe, just maybe, they'd all be looking for new work once they wrapped the pilot. She hoped not...

"What the heck...it's cool..." she murmured, shrugging her slim shoulders as she walked slowly towards her next position on the set, trying to look unconcerned at the excited chatter around her, and the many furtive glances being cast her way.

She tried hard to maintain her carefully composed air of disinterest. Fate had a way of dealing to her life as it wished, with or without her help. She'd learned that the hard way. She'd learned to roll with the punches as best she could. Today was just another day to get through, at least that's what she'd said to anyone who asked.

Inside, of course, she was secretly fizzing, sensing the atmosphere on the set becoming more electric with expectation as the moment

came ever closer to reality. They'd all had the word, today was *The Day*. The fabled beast had finally been summoned on the call-sheet. Up until now there had only been a lonely Beauty on the set...

During the last four days she and the crew might as well have been making a chick flick about an Upper East Side female lawyer figuring out how to live and work in the gritty heart of New York City, against all her rich, daddy's girl upbringing. The hours were long and complex, but it was good work and she had no complaints.

Except for one. For all she knew there simply was no beast, because she had yet to see him. Maybe they'd already pulled the plug and just forgot to tell anyone. They were all working for nothing. Things like that did happen in this business. The black humour of it made her lips curl slightly.

"Yeah, well..." Linda huffed a small laugh as she passed a frustrated hand over her face.

She took comfort from the fact her new friend, Ron Perlman, had been cast as the mythical beast creature to her beauty, but no-one on the set had seen him in his alter ego of Vincent. Or anyone that had was sworn to complete secrecy on pain of excommunication. *Could it be that bad...or truly that good?* Linda was dying to know.

Ron himself had been completely non-committal over the casual drinks and dinners they had shared in the *"getting to know you... hope to God there's some chemistry here..."* first moments of their professional relationship. They had not known each other before.

Linda found she enjoyed his company, his self-deprecating humour, old-fashioned charm and easy courtesy, which he said his mother had drummed into him from a very early age. Standing a full head

and shoulders taller than her slender five foot two inches, Ron made her feel safe and comfortable in his solid and powerful presence, almost as if they had known each other their whole lives. It was comforting to know he thought well of her and her abilities.

The horrifying demons that frequently haunted Linda's consciousness seemed to know and understand there was nothing and no-one to fear here...she had looked into the welcoming depths of his incredible blue eyes and knew she was okay. That things would be okay, and that fact had become very important to her. He would truly be there for her if she ever needed him.

Just as she heaved a tremulous sigh, a movement through the doors leading onto the set brought Linda's wandering attention back to the present. Someone had just arrived, sauntering slowly onto the scene as if unsure of their welcome, and it took her several seconds to grasp that the impossibly tall and gorgeous, blond-maned man in fantastic medieval dress who had just entered, was indeed her long looked-for co-star.

"You've got to be kidding me..." Linda breathed in equal measure of shock and fascination, staring at him open-mouthed. "Wow...I get to strut my stuff next to that...hold the phone...yeah, baby." Her heartbeat was set racing with anticipation.

Standing tall and proud, his thumbs hooked casually into the wide belt at his waist, Ron looked like Aslan from Narnia, and a whole lot of other fantastic, fantasy characters all rolled into one. *Damn*, he looked good enough to eat.

"Okay..." Linda's smile broadened with the commotion and the chatter around her increasing in volume as everyone rushed towards the newest member of the crew, leaving her momentarily alone. Not to be outdone she swiftly picked her way across the

hazards of the set floor and managed to be one of the first to reach her beast.

She looked up once more into those incredibly blue eyes that saw her for the person she truly was, those eyes that she knew would never let her down. They held a smile wider than the entire universe, and a seriously questioning look of wonder as if Ron was asking, *is this truly enough makeup to cover all my flaws?*

“Hey, there...” Linda grinned back, not hesitating to throw her arms around his waist, hugging him fiercely, before going onto tiptoe, reaching up to kiss the unfamiliar bristles covering his newly-angled cheek. He was even taller than she remembered and somehow broader beneath several shirts and a voluminous cloak. There surely was a whole lot of beast to hug. Pity this trip wasn’t going to last.

“Hi...” Ron murmured on a soft laugh, as they turned as one to cross the set to rehearse together for the first time.

Strolling along arm in arm, as the crew got over their initial wondering shock and hastily resumed their positions, Linda squeezed in real close, knowing what she had to say now might shock her co-star into immobility. She leaned in and whispered into the depths of that blond mane somewhere near his ear, “I don’t know about you, but for me, it’s two years and out.”

She felt her co-star’s step falter and she urged him on with her hand tugging his arm. “My, what a nice-looking crew!” Ron blurted out, and Linda frowned up at him, wondering what that odd remark was all about. She was trying to be being serious here about their prospects. And none of them had longevity.

They assumed their respective positions for rehearsal of the final scene of the pilot, and Linda decided she'd get through today and then they'd talk. Seriously talk about their shared future.

Smoothly assuming her role as Catherine, the beast's newly found love, she began the scene with, "I owe you everything...everything!" Somehow the words seemed to fit their professional relationship as well. She liked that.

Ron stared back at her, his incredible lion-man's face sad and reflective. Then he said, "You owe me nothing...I'm a part of you, Catherine. Just as you are a part of me. Wherever you go, wherever I am...I'm with you..."

*All right...*Linda's eyes rounded slightly at the incredibly soft warmth of his voice, so low and husky with its slight impediment of fanged teeth she wondered if anyone on the set had heard him speak.

There certainly seemed to be a flurry of disconcerted commotion behind her from the direction of the sound man. She felt for him. It was only that Ron's lips moved she knew he had said anything at all. Another first, who knew Vincent spoke like that! This day just kept getting better and better. Her toes curled inside her boots.

*Two years...*if they got that far she guessed she could live with seeing Ron every day in this outfit! She managed to maintain her role as his love, gazing lovingly at this beautiful, noble, beast-man as he continued softly, "Goodbye..."

She rushed to put her arms tight around him. "For now..." It felt so good to hold him close and be enfolded by his solidness.

She breathed deep, before drawing back reluctantly both as Linda and Catherine. It had been a surreal beginning for sure. She turned

from him and each headed away from the other. Suddenly they both turned back at the same moment, before continuing on their own way...each player focussed on their own thoughts.

THE END