

The Strongest of Bonds

Judith Nolan



*“Yours is the light by which my spirit's born: - you are my sun, my moon,
and all my stars...”*

E.E. Cummings

Many residents from the world Below gathered to watch Henry and Lin's wedding ceremony. They mingled with the guests who'd descended to the tunnels from Above. It had become a festive occasion for everyone to enjoy. The young couple were applauded for overcoming every adversity to finally be together and start a new life.

William and his helpers had gone to great lengths to assemble an extensive wedding feast to be held in the tunnel world's dining room, as soon as the ceremony concluded. Each attendee was dressed in their best clothing, and there were many eyes among the large crowd that were not quite dry as they watched the unfolding nuptials.

An elderly Buddhist monk robed in red and yellow turned to light a large red candle that stood in front of a statue of Buddha. The intoxicating perfume of flowers mingled with the scent of the myriad of candles lighting Father's chamber.

Lin and Henry were standing in front of the monk, facing each other. They lifted their hands and brought their palms together, smiling into each other's eyes. They had come so far and endured so much to be right here tonight. They had never looked happier.

The monk watched them with warm approval as he began to speak their vows.

“May you enter this marriage with love and respect for one another.

May your years together be blessed by children.

*Your love is the sum of your being and
must be cherished until the end of your days.*

For love is truly the strongest of bonds.

*Yet, for all its strengths, love is also delicate as a lotus flower,
and requires care.*

*Let your courage to love serve as an inspiration
to all who climb the highest mountains
and cross the great waters in love’s name...”*

Supporting his daughter, Dr Wong stood beside Lin with Catherine behind him. She was dressed in an ornate white Chinese gown with her hair drawn up elegantly and secured with a spray of flowers.

Father stood beside Henry, watching the ceremony with deep satisfaction. His world had been in great peril from dangerous men who would have killed all they found, if Vincent hadn’t stopped them. Now, the tunnel world was secure once more and Father could relax, even if it was only for a single night of welcome celebration. Soon enough, tomorrow would arrive, bringing its own new trials...

Above the wedding ceremony, Vincent stood with many others on the upper floor of Father’s crowded library. He stood close to the railing, at the head of the spiral library stairs. Looking down into the heavily crowded room, he only had eyes for Catherine.

“How very beautiful you are tonight...,” he whispered, taking in the picture she made dressed in white silk. “How I wish...,” he sighed, unable to continue the vow.

A waking dream formed inside his mind. His beloved Catherine, a vision in white, as she walked slowly down the aisle to his side. He would turn to her and look, filled with awed wonder that this beautiful woman had consented to marry him. That she wanted to share the rest of her life, with him. His accelerated breathing hitched with yearning.

Sensing his concentrated gaze, Catherine turned her head to look up at him longingly. She saw he was dressed in a ruffle-fronted white shirt beneath a finely

made leather waistcoat. He looked breath-takingly handsome and it was all she could do to prevent herself from running up the stairs to embrace him.

I truly wish this could be our wedding, Vincent... her heart whispered to his, through their shared bond. *I wish for so many things that may never come to be... and yet...*

And yet... Vincent lifted one shoulder. *Yes, Catherine, and yet... We must hold fast to the dream of our future, together... It is all we can do...*

Always... Catherine nodded, her eyes burning with unshed tears.

Becoming oblivious to everything around them, they exchanged a long, telling look, as the wedding ceremony continued toward its romantic conclusion...



The darkened view of the New York cityscape beyond the park sparkled with a myriad of lights and seemed to offer a whole universe of possibilities. It was a stark beauty that hid so many things left unseen and unremarked.

Vincent and Catherine stood together at the balcony rail. They both saw and understood the same things about the beautiful moonlit scene. A whole universe of possibilities...

Even though it was well after midnight, Catherine felt disinclined to sleep. The wedding had been wonderful, and she'd eaten far more of William's delicious food than she intended. Now all she wanted to do was be with Vincent, and allow the world to pass them by, even if it could only be for a single night.

Sensing the train of her thoughts, Vincent turned to her. "You looked... so beautiful. For a moment... I allowed myself to dream..."

"So did I..." Catherine sighed. She wanted to ask him to stay after the sun had risen, but the rash words stuck in her throat.

Vincent shook his head slowly. "They have a lifetime together. Our time together is always measured in minutes... seconds." He drew a deep sigh of discontent.

Catherine nodded. "Then we must learn to measure our lifetime in another way..."

"Yes..." Vincent breathed sadly. "Perhaps through dreams and the strongest of bonds we can do that."

He glanced back at the city lights. "Catherine, until I met you, I didn't understand what William Blake meant, about trying to hold infinity in the palms of our hands and eternity in an hour. We must try to make our own world, apart from all the others. We must dream a new dream if we are to be together."

“If that’s what we must do, then we will do that.” Catherine walked slowly towards him, moving close enough to push her arms around his waist, beneath his cloak, before dropping her head back to look up at him. “If we want to, we can choose to make time irrelevant. Make it work for us.”

“To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower...,” Vincent mused on the Blake poem, before leaning down to kiss her forehead. “I have found a heaven with you, Catherine. And it is very beautiful. I have never seen so many colours, as I have with you.”

“Oh, Vincent...,” Catherine shook her head slowly. “We have found that place together. You have given me so much. And I am sure there are many others still to be discovered.”

She laid her cheek against the strong beat of his heart. “If we have the courage to look for them.”

“We have the courage, Catherine. We do.” Vincent buried his face against her hair.

“We could make a start right now by going inside,” Catherine whispered, drawing back fractionally from his embrace. “I... it’s cold out here, and inside I have the fire going. And I can open a bottle of wine.”

She smiled. “Besides, I’m too wide awake to sleep. Tomorrow is Sunday, and I have no urgent work files waiting for my attention.” She tilted her head at him. “For once, we could play hooky from the world. We could sit and listen to music. Then, in the morning, I could make us some breakfast.”

“You can cook?” Vincent’s eyebrows rose teasingly. “I didn’t know.”

“Well, I can make coffee and burn toast,” Catherine declared stoutly.

“Perhaps it would be better if I make our eggs,” Vincent said, with an amused tone in his voice. “William made very sure all the boys learned how to cook.”

“Then I’ll order us a pizza for lunch. With all the toppings you like,” Catherine offered, understanding he was tacitly agreeing to her impulsive plans, without actually saying the words. It was good enough for her.

She drew back from him and caught his hand, holding on as she walked slowly towards the closed balcony doors. She reached to depress the door handle, pushing the doors open with her forearm. The warmth of the apartment wafted out through the billowing sheer curtains to engulf them. Soft music swirled on the draft of air.

She passed through and stepped down into the living room, still holding fast to Vincent’s hand. He walked behind her in silence, passing through the sheers cautiously, as if he were stepping down into a different world, which indeed he was.

The curtains billowed around his wide shoulders before sliding off over his cloak, falling back together behind him, once he was in the room. The warmth of the apartment enveloped him. Without thinking, he turned to close the doors behind him, locking them both into a new world, a completely different universe to the one on the balcony beyond the room.

“To see a new world...,” Vincent quoted softly, as he followed Catherine’s lead towards a pair of small chintz couches that didn’t appear to be able to support his broad frame.

He smiled, as he shed his cloak, well aware he was about to find out...



“Trust your heart if the seas catch fire, live by love though the stars walk backward...”

E.E. Cummings