

## **When Anything Is Possible...**

***A Beauty and the Beast (1987) / The Ghost and Mrs Muir  
Cross-Over Story***

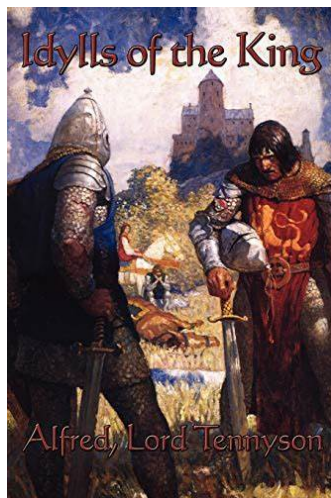
**By Judith Nolan**

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*This fanfic links the Beauty and The Beast (1987) episode 'When The Blue Bird Sings' and The Ghost and Mrs Muir episode 'Vanessa.'*

*All the characters have simply been borrowed for a time, and are always returned to their own universes, completely unharmed...*

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*"You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore..."*

***William Faulkner***

### **GULL COTTAGE, MAINE - 1869**

Captain Daniel Gregg reclined on the couch in his parlour, a glass of his best Madeira near to hand, as he savoured the cosy warmth of the fire burning brightly in the grate. He moved his stockinged feet closer to the flames.

He had nowhere to be, this evening, and no-one to talk to, but himself. It was enough, he was content.

Outside Gull Cottage, the night was drawing in, with a fine sea fog blanketing all around. The November chill was starting to bite deep, and the scuttlebutt down in the harbour-side taverns was that the winter of eighteen-sixty-nine was going to be long, hard and deep.

Daniel detested that such winters kept him from the ocean, his one true love. But even the most eager sea-captain knew he had to be sensible and wait now until the spring thaw began to loosen the grip of the ice steadily filling up the bay.

"At least I have brought enough books ashore to hopefully see me through until spring." He reached into the large, leather-strapped satchel at his side and extracted a book.

That summer, Daniel had allowed himself some free time in London while his last cargo of the year had been unloaded. On an impulse, he'd ventured down a side street and found a dingy, second-hand book store, operated by an unsavoury-looking man who'd watched his every move with ill-concealed avarice. Daniel had been about to leave the shop, after finding nothing to his discerning taste, when the man had accosted him.

"My name is Smythe, sir. Jonas Smythe, at your service. I am the proprietor of this most excellent establishment," the man had wheedled obsequiously, blocking Daniel's path. "Take a look at this one, if you please, sir. You look like a very discerning gentleman of good taste."

He'd held out a book for Daniel to take. He'd bowed so low his large nose had almost touched his knee. "You have my word it is a first edition in the most excellent condition."

"I do not set much stock by your word, sir. There is little in your shop that pleases my eye." Daniel had glared around at the dust-grimed shelves and cobwebbed corners.

He'd been about to refuse when the book's legend had caught his attention. "*Idylls of the King*," he'd mused, stroking his beard with a thoughtful hand.

He'd always admired Lord Tennyson's works. He had even seen the celebrated poet once when he'd attended The Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, nearly twenty years before.

The opportunity to own a first edition had been too good to pass up. "How much?" He'd eyed the bookseller suspiciously, trying not to allow his keen interest to show.

"Whatever the gentleman feels would be a fair price for such a prize..." The man had advanced the book closer, bobbing his head.

Daniel had frowned at him. He'd prevented himself from reaching for the book, or appearing too eager. He'd named the price he'd been prepared to pay.

"But I have six children, good sir. Have a heart and take pity on a poor, struggling father with so many mouths to feed. There is never enough gruel left over for me."

"I doubt you have ever starved a day in your life." Daniel had looked the man's ample body up and down.

They'd settled in to haggle, and Daniel had finally paid more than he'd intended to spend. But the book seemed to have had an unexpected hold on him, and it appeared to have had every intention of leaving with him.

"I trust you are worth what I paid for you..." Daniel settled himself deeper into his couch in Gull Cottage and opened the book.

He inhaled the dry, refined scent wafting from the pages. Turning to the bookplate, he read again the *ex libris* he'd attached there the previous evening before he'd left his ship.

In the finest black Indian ink, it declared the book to be the sole property of Captain Daniel Gregg. He had also inscribed the month and the year – November - 1869.

He felt renewed satisfaction with his purchase. He took a long sip of his Madeira, before looking through the book until he came to a familiar passage. He began to read aloud.

*But in her web, she still delights  
To weave the mirrors magic sights,  
For often, thro' the silent nights  
A funeral, with plumes and lights  
And music, went to Camelot...*

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#### **NEARLY ONE HUNDRED YEARS LATER:**

"Good evening, Mrs Muir." Captain Gregg materialised beside Carolyn, as she leaned back against the stone wall surrounding Gull Cottage. The sea fog of

early winter swirled all around, blanketing everything in shrouds of translucent white.

"You shouldn't be abroad at a late hour. You could catch a chill."

"Good evening, Captain." Carolyn smiled at him. "I just couldn't sleep. I do love it out here at this time of night, watching the fog roll in. Don't you?"

"It is fair enough," Daniel replied shortly. "But I am here on a far more important mission. For some days now, I have been searching in vain for a missing book, Madam. A particular tome that appears to have been purloined from my collection, without my permission. Do you confess to being the pilferer?"

"I beg your pardon?" Carolyn stared straight at him. "Are you trying to imply that I have been up in your blessed wheelhouse, again? Against your most explicit orders."

"It is not beyond the realms of possibility," Daniel grumped. "It is the nature of your sex that you cannot leave anything alone, nor any stone unturned. You must dig into every corner of a man's life, leaving him with no secrets and very little privacy to call his own."

"You are in a mood, tonight." Carolyn raised her right hand. "Very, well, I can swear on my honour I have only been up there once more, since that first time. And you know what I was doing, then."

"Please do not think I don't appreciate your efforts in creating that picture book about my walk." Daniel conceded grudgingly. "It was a wonderful gesture."

"Well, you have a fine way of showing it." Carolyn shook her head. "Exactly what book are you looking for?" she questioned, as the captain leaned back against the wall beside her. "Maybe I have seen it around the house. I have found that sometimes things have an odd way of turning up when you cease to look for them."

"It is a first edition of Lord Tennyson's work, *Idylls of the King*." Daniel folded his arms, pushing one boot through the swirling fog. "I purchased it in a dingy little bookshop when I was last in London, in 1869. The bookseller was an obsequious, conniving rogue and charged me too much, but it was worth it. I have always treasured that book."

"1869...," Carolyn echoed with a frown. Then her brow cleared. "Oh, that was the year that you... I mean... that was—" She floundered into silence.

"The year I kicked the blasted gas heater on with my blasted foot and I died. Yes, the very year." Daniel shrugged. "I had retired for the night, to my room. I carried the book up with me, intending to read further. But the lateness of the hour was my undoing. I composed myself upon my couch and fell asleep."

"Then, I am truly sorry that you have lost track of your book," Carolyn sympathised. "A first edition of Tennyson's works would be worth a fair sum these days. If the person who took it knew what they'd found."

She glanced sideways at him. "But I can assure you, it was not by my hand."

"Very well, Mrs Muir." Captain Gregg nodded. "I will apologise for suspecting you. If I did not know better, I would accuse Claymore of the theft. That man would sell his grandmother's false teeth, if he thought they would bring him a dime or two. But even he knows better than to venture into my wheelhouse."

He sighed. "Any other suspects would appear to be few and far between."

Carolyn stood, pushing her gloved hands into the pockets of her winter coat as she turned to walk along the roadway.

"There is one I would suspect of such an underhanded theft, above all others," she ventured, trying not to reopen old wounds. "Someone who now carries an enduring grudge against you."

"You have my attention." Daniel straightened to walk beside her.

"Vanessa Peekskill." Carolyn detested even saying the woman's name, after the chaos and confusion her impetuous arrival at Gull Cottage had caused to everyone. "You allowed her to have free run of the attic. I know she kept her bags locked at all times. Martha told me. Vanessa was very secretive about everything she did. But she began to see Gull Cottage and its contents as hers, to do with as she willed."

She stared out over the darkened bay. "I would hazard a guess she would have felt justified in taking whatever she could find of value, to punish you for breaking off your engagement to her ancestor."

"I will admit there are a few trifles of silver and a small, ebony box of jewellery not to be found. Jonathan and I have searched in vain. My gold is well enough hidden that no-one would find it..." Daniel stopped, frowning. "Could that woman have been churlish enough to remove a book?"

"If she thought it had been of value to you, then yes, she would." Carolyn nodded. "She would wish to take something cherished from you, as you destroyed the glorious vision she had of your romance with her great-great-grandmother."

"The vindictive vixen!" Daniel clenched his fists at his sides. "*Blast!* I do believe you have the right of it, Madam!"

Carolyn stopped walking to stare up at him. "If she had any indication that you treasured the book, she would have used it in her revenge. Did you?"

Daniel stroked his beard with one hand. "I do believe I did hear her remark upon the book when she first saw it. I had been reading it, and had left it

beside my usual chair in the wheelhouse, when she first appeared there. She did rifle through many things and went about making copious notes before I directed her attention to the sea-chest containing her great-grandmother's trousseau."

He grimaced. "I will admit, revisiting the days of my youth had enormous appeal. Until I saw the error of my ways, and how much I would have lost if I'd allowed Vanessa to buy Gull Cottage, and you would have been evicted. That I could not allow."

"Then that is probably your answer. Poor Claymore did say that Miss Peekskill had ordered him to forward her luggage to her at an address in New York, at his own expense. She said she was intending to visit an aunt there when she left Schooner Bay."

"She would have gone there to sell my treasures to the highest bidder, no doubt!"

"I am sorry, Captain. That was a low trick to play. But there are dangers in crossing a woman who feels she has been scorned. Even if it was by a man who has been dead for one hundred years."

Daniel shook his head. "It was my own fault, Madam. I allowed my past to cloud my judgment. It will not happen again."

He stepped back. "I will bid you good night. Enjoy your walk." He looked up at the moon. "I will admit it is a handsome evening."

"Walk with me..." Carolyn extended one hand without thinking. "For a little while..."

Daniel stared longingly at her fingers. "If you wish..."

He clasped his hands into the small of his back, before stepping close enough to touch, but always with the knowledge of the vast gap that lay between them that could never be breached, while one of them remained alive...

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## **NEW YORK CITY - 1988**

The cool of the New York spring evening didn't encourage many passers-by to linger past midnight. The Greenwich Village streets were emptying, and most shopkeepers were starting to close for the night.

Nestled amid the larger, more modern buildings, the exterior of the old 777 bookshop spoke of a by-gone time. Deep shadows huddled beneath its faded awning, as the wan moonlight slanted in.

But, if anyone took the time to step closer and look through the streaked windows, the musty, crammed interior invited inspection. It was a booklover's paradise. Cramped, chaotic, but with treasures amidst the junk. Some of the shelves were bowed by the weight of their contents, while others were straight and true.

The aisles between the floor-to-ceiling bookshelves were narrow, with old hardcovers jammed into every possible inch of shelf space. It was a place that invited browsing. It was a space that begged to be explored, especially for bibliophiles.

The shop's owner and proprietor, Jonathan Smythe, was a direct descendant of the obsequious book-store owner Daniel had first purchased the Tennyson from, so many years ago.

But this modern Smythe was unmarried and lived alone in the small apartment over the shop. The books in his charge were his life and his friends. His small world was peaceful and uneventful, apart from the occasional disturbance caused by a tiresome young man, who seemed incapable of accepting his fate.

Smythe sighed brusquely, as he pushed into the shelves, the last of the books he'd bought back from Kristopher Gentian's dreadful landlord. It had been a traumatic experience, haggling over the pathetic remains of a young man's life, taken far too soon. However careless that same young man had been with the basic necessities of life.

"You made sure you got back my Tennyson?" Kristopher asked anxiously, appearing silently to hover at Smythe's elbow. "I told you I wanted that one."

"Yes, I did. For all the good it will do you now." Smythe frowned at the rumpled young man in a Mets cap.

"You never know," the young artist declared brightly. "Books were made to travel, to go from one life to the next, spreading happiness and joy. I remember the first time I opened a book..."

"You were barely three years old when you first wandered into my shop. You were not even tall enough to reach the third shelf for the books you wanted," Smythe remembered, in a resigned tone. "I must have walked the aisles more times than I care to count, assisting you."

"I can't help it, I love books." Kristopher shrugged. "My mother always knew where to come looking for me, whenever I ran away from home."

"Every one of your poor mother's grey hairs can be attributed to your thoughtlessness, Kristopher," Smythe told him severely.

Smythe regretted his harsh words as soon as he saw his young companion's expression sadden. "I'm sorry. Look, it's late and I'm tired. Will you please go away now, and I will see you in the morning."

"My Tennyson, please..." Kristopher held out one hand. "I have a feeling I am going to need it soon. It's about to travel again."

"Very well..." Smythe didn't ask what the young man meant, as he found the first edition. He held it out. "Now, don't stay up all night, reading."

"I won't!" Kristopher took the book, flashing a cheeky grin. "But I do have so much reading I need to catch up on, now all my books are back."

"Tell me again, why do I put up with you?" Smythe took his glasses off to polish them on his handkerchief.

He settled them back on the bridge of his nose and looked around. He wasn't surprised to see that Kristopher had vanished as silently as he'd arrived. No matter how long he had known him, Smythe couldn't get used to how quiet the young man could be in his comings and goings.

"Sometimes, I think he actually *is* a ghost..." He shook his head at his own foolishness, as he walked away behind the counter of his bookstore and climbed the stairs to his small apartment above the shop.

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A week later, ADA Catherine Chandler was on her way to have lunch with her boss, Joe Maxwell, in Greenwich Village. The day was warm, and the Village thronged with people. The welcome spring sunshine made everyone smile.

As Catherine hurried along the pavement, trying to keep up with Joe's impatient strides, the dingy little bookshop caught her attention. She stopped in the shadows of the awning, putting up a hand to shade her eyes as she peered in through the dusty window, frowning at the disarray she could see.

She was in need of a gift, for a very special friend, and time was running out. She sighed, doubting anyone could find anything in this place in the limited time she had. Stacks of unsorted books covered the proprietor's desk and surrounded it on every side.

Joe had been walking with her, and he'd continued some way down the street before he noticed she was no longer beside him. He turned and glared at her, raising his arms in an impatient gesture.



"Aw, come on..." he groaned. His temper had been drastically shortened by ongoing continuances in the Ketter case, and he was in no mood for any more delays.

"Wait a minute, Joe. This is that bookshop Jenny told me about. She said the owner is cool and very knowledgeable." Catherine ignored his scowl of discontent, as she stood back to survey the shop frontage. Daylight streamed in through the closed front door, and the establishment's street address was silhouetted on the old tiled floor.

The numbers were 777. Catherine knew seven was a magic number, as was three. And with seven, three times? Something amazing was all but guaranteed to be inside. It just was.

The bell over the door jingled as she entered, with a very impatient Joe close on her heels. He looked anything but pleased, at her sudden decision to stop in.

"I said, no side trips!" He scowled at her. "How long is *this* going to take? We're running late already..." He sighed as he checked his wristwatch.

Catherine shook her head at him. "I just want to browse for a few moments. I *love* old books."

Joe grimaced, as he snatched up the top book off a nearby stack, blew the dust from the cover, before flipping it open. He held it out. "Here. This one's old."

Catherine glanced at the title page with affectionate disdain. "*The Collected Sermons of Cotton Mather...?* Not quite what I had in mind."

Unseen by the both of them, Jonathan Smythe, stepped out from an aisle behind them.

"Perhaps I can be of some help?" he offered smoothly.

Joe frowned at him, as he pointed to Catherine. "Yeah... um... she's looking for a book."

"Well..." Smythe arched one disapproving eyebrow, as he waved a hand at the shop's cluttered interior, stacked with volumes of every imaginable shape and size.

Catherine ignored her boss's bad humour. Her best friend, Jenny had been right about the bookstore owner. Behind his glasses, his eyes twinkled at her, as if they were sharing some great secret. He was quaint and unusual, and she liked him immediately.

She decided to chance it. "Something very special... maybe a first edition... poetry...?"

Joe rolled his eyes and groaned.

Smythe observed his derision but didn't comment. "English poetry is at the *end* of aisle three... toward the back. Feel free to browse for as long as you like."

Joe glanced at his wristwatch and sighed. "Radcliffe, we've only got, like, twenty-three minutes—"

Mr Smythe intervened smoothly. "Young man, there is a video store on the next block. I understand they have *Vampire Cheerleaders* in stock."

Joe flared defensively. "*Hey*, I read! I'm a lawyer..."

Jonathan Smythe regarded him cynically. His reply was calm. "We shan't hold that against you."

Catherine giggled. She couldn't help it.

Joe gave them both a put-upon look before glancing again at his watch. "I'll be back in twenty minutes. You're on your own for lunch, Radcliffe."

As he started out the door, Smythe called after him. "We shall miss you, young man!"

Catherine laughed and Smythe beamed at her. "This way, if you please." With a possessive air, he held out one hand to escort her to the poetry section.

The doorbell jangled loudly as Joe left the shop, muttering to himself. Warm air swept in, behind him, then was cut off, as the door closed. Dust rose from the shop's burdened shelves to hang in the air for a moment, before settling back into its proper place once more.

Catherine turned back to the shop's owner. He was smiling and looking very happy she'd decided to stay and browse.

"Here we are." Smythe indicated a long row of books, stacked almost to the ceiling. "Ignore your uncouth friend. Please take as much time as you need. I shall be at the front desk, should you have further need of my services."

Despite his portly frame, he bowed easily, with courtly grace. His eyes swept over her with a strange, knowing look as he smiled, before walking back down the aisle and disappearing around the corner.

Catherine frowned after him. He was certainly unusual. Turning to the stacks of books, she took several precious minutes to browse among the poetry on offer.

The volumes were old and dusty, and this far back from the front, the aisles were dark and narrow. After a few steps, she stopped to select a heavy volume and skimmed through it, unaware that a rumpled young man was

peering at her from the next aisle, through the gap she'd just made between the books.

She leafed through the tattered volume, before dismissing it and returning it to its place. She was forced to stand on tiptoe to reach for a different selection on the top shelf. As she strained to reach it, someone spoke, from behind her.

"Try this one...", a man's voice encouraged.

Catherine turned to see a boyish man of around thirty-five. He was attractive, in a sort of rumpled, unkempt way, and dressed in faded denim and sporting a Mets cap. He held out a book, offering it to her.

When she didn't move, he pressed it further toward her and Catherine took it, almost by instinct... but when she saw what she was holding, she reacted with delight, as she turned the pages.

*Look at you!* she thought happily.

It was a real antique, in excellent condition, with fine paper, gold-tipped pages, sewn signatures and colour plates. Engrossed in the pages, she didn't notice the *ex-libris* on the bookplate which declared the book to be, '*From the Library of Kristopher Gentian.*'

"*Tennyson!* A first edition... Oh, this is *perfect!*" Catherine had no doubt this was the one. She looked up, smiling, happy with the find. "It's wonderful! Thank —"

She stopped in mid-sentence, her smile turning to a look of puzzlement. She was alone in the aisle. She looked behind her, then peered around a corner, but there was no sign of the young man anywhere.

Catherine shrugged, as she took the book, and walked slowly toward the checkout at the front of the store. At the end of the aisle, she looked back, again, but it was still empty. The only dust that had been disturbed seemed to be from her own passing.

Mr Smythe was waiting for her, up near a ramshackle shelf. "I see you've found your book." He took it from her and approved her selection with a quick glance at the spine.

Catherine blinked. "My book?"

The bookseller smiled. "Well, it's Mr Tennyson's book, actually. It was waiting for you, young lady."

Catherine gave him a bemused look.

The proprietor expanded on the theme as he led her to the front desk. "All books wait. They sit patiently on their respective shelves, gathering only the

most refined dust, until the day their covers are opened and their pages turned by the proper person."

He sat behind the desk and checked the price inside the book's front cover. Catherine rummaged in her purse and pulled out a credit card, just as Joe returned.

"Okay, Radcliffe. Lunch is *over!*" He glared at his wristwatch. "We're due back in court in ten minutes."

The shop proprietor looked up and sighed. "Oh, joy! The tit-willow is back!"

Catherine laughed happily as the old man took the card from her hand. Smythe beamed at her with approval.

Joe looked from one to the other with an *'okay, you got me'* smirk on his face. He'd agree to anything if Catherine would just hurry up and buy the darned book!

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Several hours later, Catherine and Joe pushed through a revolving door to the D.A.'s office lobby, surrounded by a crush of people. They crossed toward the elevators, talking about their latest case.

Joe was deeply annoyed. "Six continuances! At this rate, I'm gonna be drawing Social Security before we get to trial on this thing—"

He looked up, just as the elevator doors started to close. "*Hey*, hold the elevator!" Without thought for Catherine, he jumped forward, and made it into the crowded car, just in time.

"*Wait!*" Catherine, a step behind, tried to catch the elevator door.

"See you up there!" Joe grinned, as the doors slid shut in Catherine's face.

She stepped back, exasperated. She reached to press the up button to call another elevator. As she waited, a large hand reached out and tapped her shoulder.

"Excuse me...," said a familiar voice.

Catherine started, turning to look behind her. "*You!*" she accused.

The rumpled young man in the Mets cap she'd last seen at the 777 Booksellers, smiled at her, disarmingly.

Catherine and her new companion stood staring at each other, neither knowing what to say next. Seconds ticked by, as the busy crowds of people

around them ebbed and flowed. The next elevator car came and went, but Catherine didn't notice.

Finally, the young man bobbed his head awkwardly. "Boy, this sort of thing is never very easy..."

"What sort of thing?" Catherine's tone was sharp. She had a very long and trying court battle, and she was in no mood for more games.

"Are you... ah... often approached by strangers?" the young man asked. His encouraging look seemed sincerely inquisitive.

"This is New York City. I'm approached by all sorts of —" She struggled for just the right word.

"Lunatics...?" the young man supplied helpfully. "Yeah, well, I'm not a lunatic. But, ah, I'm the next best thing..." He smiled sweetly.

Catherine relaxed and smiled, despite herself. Emboldened, the young man dug around in his pocket and finally offered her a business card. It was crumpled and creased, smudged, and much-used.

A little dubious, Catherine took the card and read it. "Kristopher Gentian..." She looked up at him. "Artist..."

The young man looked earnest. "Honest."

"Well, good for you..." Catherine looked at the card again. "Mr Gentian. But what is it you want?"

Kristopher hurried into speech, emboldened by her air of interest. "Just you. Ah... call me Kristopher."

Catherine stared at him. "Excuse me?"

"Kristopher. You can call me —"

Catherine huffed her impatience. "I caught that part."

Kristopher started. "Oh. Okay. I just... well... ah... I thought maybe you could... well... model for me."

Catherine was *really* dubious now. "Model for you...?" she asked suspiciously.

Kristopher gave a little half-smile. "Too eccentric?"

Catherine laughed. "Weird even. Is this some kind of come on?"

Kristopher looked deeply wounded. "Oh, no! I mean... it's not like that... really... you could... well, bring your boyfriend or something... you know to... well, make sure I didn't, ah..." His smile widened. "Try anything..."

The notion of Vincent chaperoning while she sat for Kristopher brought a smile to Catherine's face. "That would be... interesting..."

Kristopher seemed to think she was weakening. "I want to make you... well... immortal." He looked confident, in his claim.

Catherine regarded him with a dismissive smile. "Modest, aren't you?"

She heard the elevator chime as the next car arrived behind her. "Thanks, but... I don't think so." She shoved the card into her jacket pocket as she stepped into the elevator and turned to face the front.

Kristopher followed close behind. "*Wait...!*"

Catherine didn't pause. She wasn't interested in sitting for anyone, at any time.

Kristopher reached towards her. "My card..." He sounded abashed. "I only have the one..."

Catherine looked confused as she handed the card back to him, just as the elevator doors closed. But as the car moved upwards, she couldn't resist a grin, in appreciation at the audacity of the rumpled young man in the Mets cap, who had found her the best gift for Vincent...



Staring up at the night sky, Catherine leaned back against the concrete culvert wall in Central Park. The hour was growing very late, and she'd been waiting for quite some time, but there was still no sign of Vincent.

She held her gift of the Tennyson close to her chest, willing her love to appear. But the tunnel stayed stubbornly empty. She lowered her gaze and stared into the entrance.

"Vincent, be well...", she whispered.

She sighed, raising her shoulders in defeat. She had just started to walk away when Vincent suddenly appeared in the opening. He looked ill at ease and doubtful of his welcome. They stood apart, watching each other, without speaking.

Knowing someone had to make the first move, Catherine turned to him, her arms tightening across her gift of the book of poetry. "It's been so long. I was afraid..."

Vincent sighed. "That I might not come...?" He looked longingly at Catherine, then down, with a sad expression. "I was away. There's a place, miles beneath the city — a nameless river that runs through the darkness. Sometimes, I go there..."

Catherine walked slowly towards him, still hugging the book. When she was close enough, she held it out. "I wanted you to have this."

Vincent took the book and read the spine. "Tennyson... a first edition... it looks almost new..." He reverently leafed through the gold-tipped pages.

Catherine watched his delight in her gift. "I always loved *Idylls of the King*. I even knew some parts of it by heart. "Some nights I dreamt of Camelot...and Lancelot..."

Vincent kept his eyes on the book. "Lancelot was fatally flawed, destined never to find the grail."

Catherine wasn't deterred. "Still, he was the greatest knight of all..."

Vincent looked up at her then, everything he was thinking and feeling held in the vast depths of his frowning blue gaze. They stared into each other's eyes and suddenly the dam of their combined emotional turmoil burst asunder. They moved into a long embrace, their blended shadows embracing behind them, outlined on the culvert wall.

"I am so glad you like the book." Catherine sighed, after they'd finally pulled away from each other. She stood close by, watching him appreciate her gift, as only Vincent could. "They made books to last, then. The bookseller said this one was waiting."

"Waiting... yes..." Vincent smiled gently. "This book has been on quite a journey. I can sense it trying to tell me something..." He turned the pages slowly. "I wonder who first owned it, and how many hands has it passed through to finally reach ours..."

He shook his head as he began to read a random passage from the book. "*But in her web she still delights. To weave the mirror's magic sights. For often through the silent nights. A funeral, with plumes and lights and music, went to Camelot...*"

They both jumped as another male voice finished the poem. "'Or when the moon was overhead! Came two young lovers lately wed..."

Vincent instinctively drew back toward the shadows. Catherine whirled to face the voice, blocking Vincent from view, then turned back to him, shoving him toward the entrance of the tunnel. "Go! Go, before they see you!"

The voice was still reciting, still unseen. "*I am half sick of shadows' said the Lady of Shalott...*"

Then, there was a faint rustling of bushes, as someone approached closer. Vincent hesitated briefly... then whirled and vanished inside the tunnel, almost simultaneous with a rumpled young man in a Mets cap stepping out of the

bushes. Catherine moved between them, to make sure Kristopher couldn't see Vincent.

She shouted in exasperation, "*Kristopher!*"

Kristopher ignored her anger as he stared off after Vincent, his expression sorrowful. "You didn't have to send him away."

Catherine stood her ground. "Kristopher, what in hell do you think you're *doing* here?"

Kristopher didn't answer her. He continued to stare into the drainage tunnel. "God, he reads beautifully..."

Catherine's fury intensified. "I want you to stop following me! Do you understand that?"

Kristopher looked at her. "You think he'd sit for me?"

Catherine was fully over his weird behaviour. "*Who* are you talking about?"

He ignored her, continuing dreamily, "What century did he walk out of, Catherine? What storybook?" The young man moved closer, varying his gaze between Catherine and the area just past her shoulder.

"This is *outrageous!*" Catherine tried to force him to focus on her. "I don't what you think you saw, but —" She pushed past him, heading up the hill.

Kristopher closed his eyes in concentration and began to quote from memory, with heartfelt emotion. "'... *and over our heads floats the bluebird, singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and...*'"

Frustrated beyond endurance, Catherine turned back to seize him by the arm, dragging him away from the tunnel entrance and up the hill. "That's it! C'mon!"

He moved with her docilely enough, but still reciting, "'... *never happen, of things that are not, and that should be!*'" He opened one eye. "It's Oscar Wilde! Where are we going? Are you taking me to Vincent?"

Catherine continued to tow him after her. "I'm taking you home." Her tone was intractable.

"Oh. *Okay...*" The artist opened both eyes wide. "Does that mean you want to pose for me?"

Catherine made a sound as if she could gladly strangle him, and yanked at him harder. She feared this was going to be a long night of ongoing frustrations.

They walked off across the darkened park together, Kristopher stumbling along beside her.



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Vincent, restless and disturbed, paced his father's chamber, trying to make sense of a very confusing evening. He had told Jacob the disturbing news.

"Did he see you?" Jacob asked, deeply concerned.

Vincent lifted his shoulders as he looked down. "I don't know. Perhaps... a glimpse, but..."

"A glimpse... and if he *thinks* about what he saw... wonders... Vincent, the *risk!*"

Vincent turned back to face him. "I've lived with that risk all my life. Do you think I could ever forget it?"

Father huffed. "I think... sometimes... you grow careless... especially of late... you and Catherine... lose yourselves in the moment..."

Vincent chimed in sarcastically. "And the night, and the stars..."

"...and each other. *Yes!*" Jacob nodded. The effect love could have on a man was not unknown to him.

"No! That was *not* how it was," Vincent denied slowly. "I could hear all the stirrings of the city: the distant noise of traffic, the rustle of the wind through the foliage, someone skipping stones across the lagoon..."

"So how could this man possibly creep on you unawares?"

"I don't *know*..." Vincent's tone underscored his confusion. He *didn't* know. He truly didn't. Even now, it was a mystery he struggled with.

"There has to be some rational explanation." Father hunted his son's expression for any clues.

"*Fine!* Tell me what it is," Vincent demanded.

He looked sharply at Father, waiting for an explanation. But Jacob could only frown, as he tried to come up with a likely explanation. He looked away, his conspicuous silence saying he'd failed.

Vincent didn't give voice to the thought in his head: *It's like he wasn't even there, one moment. And then he was.*

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Catherine spent the rest of a very frustrating night, trying to keep up with the mercurial Kristopher, hoping to get to the bottom of his mysterious behaviour. and his alarming ability to appear and disappear at will. Almost as if he was some sort of ghost. Which she didn't believe for a second!

She'd been forced to pay for their meal at a Village coffee shop, but at the end of the night, she was no closer to an explanation. It left her deeply annoyed and determined to uncover the truth.

The next evening, after work, she threw open the 777 bookshop's door and barged in. The bell jangled loudly, alarmed at such rough treatment.

Mr Smythe was standing at his desk. He was totalling up the cash receipts for the day's takings, on an old-fashioned manual adding machine.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I'm afraid we're closed..." He looked up, and his mouth thinned. "Oh, you. You are the persistent one, aren't you?"

"Is that a compliment...?" Catherine asked pointedly, as she stepped up to the counter. "Mr Smythe?"

Smythe appeared to realise that the game was up when she called him by his name. He sighed deeply, seeming to understand it was no use pretending, now. "Oh dear...", he commented.

"You lied to me," Catherine accused, without preamble.

"Well, I fibbed..." Smythe made a face, as he tried to mitigate his involvement.

Catherine wasn't buying his contrition. "How long have you known Kristopher?"

"When he was a little boy, he used to come in and sit for *hours*, reading book after book... folklore, mythology, poetry... Even when he grew up, he would rather read than eat. I'd have to shoo him out at night, so I could close up."

"Then why did you pretend you'd never heard of him?" Catherine worried the point.

"It's just... such a *bother*. No one ever believes me anyway. You're not the first, you know..."

"Not the first *what*?"

"Why, to see Kristopher's *ghost*. He materializes for all the... more attractive... young ladies," Smythe replied, with an air of injured innocence.

"I can't believe this!" Catherine declared in exasperation.

"See...", Smythe pointed out reasonably.

"You're still claiming he's dead?"

Smythe stared at her. "My dear young lady. Of course, he's dead. I identified the body myself. Such a waste. He had so much talent..."

Smythe sounded utterly sincere, utterly convincing. Catherine just stared at him, and he stared right back, unwavering. Finally, she threw up her hands in helpless exaggeration.

"That's it! I give up!" She turned to leave, but halfway to the door, something occurred to her and she turned back. "His paintings..." She frowned. "There was no family, no will... none of the paintings had ever been sold... what happened to them?"

Mr Smythe looked pained. "His landlord took everything. A dreadful man."

"For the back rent..." Catherine walked back towards him.

The bookseller nodded. "His books too, but I bought those from him. It seemed only right... old friends coming home, again. Kristopher would have been pleased."

"The landlord must have tried to sell the paintings, too..." Catherine mused.

"Undoubtedly. The only portraits he valued were the ones on dollar bills. But I don't imagine he had much success. Kristopher's work is probably off in storage somewhere... presuming it still exists..."

Catherine looked at him directly, tired of the performance. "It still exists. Otherwise, what's the point of this charade?"

"My dear, young lady, so young and so cynical," Smythe sneered. "You should not be so certain. This world devours our certainties... and all our beauties, as well..."

Catherine stared at him, not at all sure of what, or who, he was referring to, anymore. But she was determined to get to the bottom of the ongoing mystery. She disliked being treated like a fool.

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Six weeks later, Catherine pushed the door of her apartment closed with her foot. The thick stack of legal files she clasped in her arms threatened to spill from her grasp. The welcome end of another long, frustrating week had finally arrived.

"Weekend homework..." she grimaced, crossing the living room to dump the pile on her dining table. "But not tonight," she decided firmly.

It could all wait for the morning. Tonight, she had made a promise to Vincent she fully intended to keep. She kicked off her shoes, before scooping them up and hurrying into her bedroom to shower and change.

By the time she pushed aside the balcony curtains Vincent had already arrived on the balcony. Catherine opened the door before hurrying up the small set of steps and into his arms, nestling against the solid wall of his chest, finally releasing the sigh she felt she'd been holding all week.

"I have missed you," she finally confessed, drawing back to look up at him. "I haven't seen you since the night I held that gallery opening and sold all of Kristopher Gentian's artworks."

She couldn't bring herself to mention the incredible secret oil portrait Kristopher had also painted of the pair of them. It was still too impossible and unbelievable to discuss tonight.

"I am here now," Vincent replied softly, pressing a kiss to her forehead. "Are you sure you wish me to stay? You're not too tired?" he asked solicitously.

Catherine shook her head. "Please stay. I have been so busy with work..."

She drew back further, sliding her hands down his arms to entwine her fingers through his. "It's cold out here. Come inside. We can sit by the fire, have a glass of wine and just talk."

"If that is what you wish." Vincent allowed her to draw him inside and down into the soft warmth of her living room. He turned to draw the French doors shut, closing them inside. He left the curtains open so he could still see the night sky. He shed his voluminous cloak, tossing it aside.

Catherine poured them both a glass of wine, before settling back into her love's embrace on one of her dinky couches.

"Tomorrow is Saturday. I can sleep in all day." She inclined her head towards the stack of files on her dining room table. "I've decided all that work can wait until Sunday."

She looked around the neat living room, studying all its feminine aspects. Whenever she was with Vincent in her apartment, everything appeared so much smaller against his size and commanding height. His discarded cloak cast a vast pool of dark shadow across the other couch. Catherine smiled, knowing she wouldn't have it any other way.

In the background, her player clicked over to another song. The electric fire flickered, casting its own shadows across the walls. Everything in her world was in harmony and at peace. She wished it could always be like this.

"I cannot believe it's been almost two years since I came to your balcony to tell you I could never see you again." Vincent drew her closer to his side.

"I was so happy to see you. I'd tried to find you, but I had no way of getting back to you." Catherine shook her head. She sighed, burrowing deeper into his solid warmth.

"Yes." Vincent kissed the fragrant softness of her hair.

"I know you'll have to leave soon. Read to me before you go..." Catherine leaned over to reach for an old, leather-bound book lying on the table behind the couch. "Please..." She proffered the book as she settled back into his embrace.

"If you are not too tired..." Vincent accepted it, turning it to read the spine.

"Ah, I see. This is the Tennyson you gave me that night we first saw Kristopher..." He smiled. "I noticed it was missing from my collection. I wondered who had borrowed it."

"I couldn't help it. I didn't think you would mind if I borrowed it, just for a little while. You know I've always loved *Idylls of the King*."

"Of course, I don't mind at all." Vincent smiled as he opened the book. "No matter how many times we read this book, you never seem to tire of it. Nor are we any closer to solving the mystery of Kristopher, a young man of many talents who may be alive, or dead. Or perhaps, trapped somewhere in between."

He ran his fingertip across the *ex libris* on the bookplate that declared the book had once belonged to the Library of Kristopher Gentian. The mysterious artist who always slipped through their fingers, every time they came closer to solving the tangled enigma of his convoluted existence.

"Mmm..." Catherine moved her cheek against the thick padding of his grey vest. "Thinking about Kristopher at this hour is too hard. Please, just read to me..."

Vincent obliged by turning to a random page. It had become a habit to select blindly.

*"Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of: Wherefore, let thy voice,  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day..."*

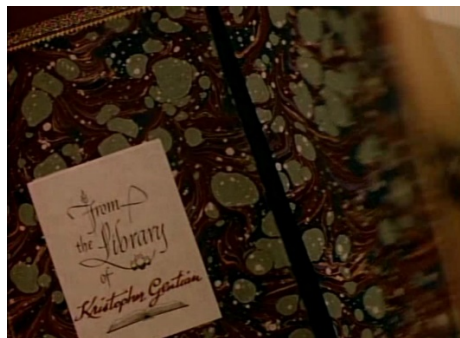
He paused in his reading, listening to Catherine's breathing. She'd fallen asleep against him, her head tucked comfortably into his shoulder.

He closed the book, then opened it to the bookplate once more. He studied the *ex-libris* again, pondering the mysterious Kristopher Gentian. An odd, sweet man, he was either a spirit trapped in this world or simply a clever

fraudster who understood that faking his own death made his artworks more valuable. It was hard to pin him down.

Vincent frowned at the label. For the first time, he noticed that it had lifted at one corner. Beneath it there was a thin piece of pasted brown paper. Under that, there appeared to be another, smaller label with writing on it.

Curious, he applied his long fingernail to the corner of the pasted brown layer, managing to prise it up just a little more. He held the book up to the lamp beside him, carefully peeling the label back further. It gave with a slight tearing sound, to expose a small part of the one beneath.



The first label appeared to be almost as old as the book itself. All Vincent could read was a name, scrawled in faded black ink. The writing looked equally as old.

He looked closer, his keen eyesight managing to work out the name. "*Captain Daniel Gregg...*" he said slowly, frowning in puzzlement.

Had the book been previously owned by this mysterious captain? And a captain of what? A military rank, or the commander of a long-forgotten ship?

"*November - 1869...*," Vincent mused, reading the barely legible date written beneath the signature.

Mystery piled in on confusion. How had Kristopher Gentian come to own the book, before Catherine had bought it at the 777 book-store in Greenwich Village?

Vincent closed the book and lowered it to his knee. He kept one hand on it, as he laid his cheek against Catherine's hair and closed his eyes, still puzzling over the mystery.

There would be time enough to return Below, before the sun rose. Time enough to savour the pleasure of keeping his love close in the long reaches of the night.

Hovering on the edge of sleep, something moving in the room disturbed his contentment. He felt unseen eyes on him, and a sudden, mysterious presence he could not pin down to any single point.

Vincent jerked his head up, a soft growl of warning hovering deep in his throat. But nothing moved beyond the shadows cast by the electric fire. However, the sensation of being observed would not be banished.

He turned to stare through the glass doors that led out to Catherine's balcony. Reflected in the darkened squares of glass was the image of another room, perhaps even another time.

Before his disbelieving eyes, Catherine's apartment began to shimmer and dissolve, merging into the vision Vincent could see in the windows...

Vincent frowned at the room he suddenly found himself in. Catherine was still nestled against him, fast asleep, but they were no longer in her apartment, seated on her dinky couch.

This room possessed all the splendour of a Victorian parlour. There was heavily carved, brocaded furniture and wide bay windows, closed against the spread of a thick sea-fog pressing in against the panes, giving a sense of complete isolation.

They were seated on a long couch beside the fireplace, where a cheery blaze created flickering shadows on the walls. There was no other illumination in the room.

Vincent sensed again the same unseen presence of someone else in the room. He didn't want to move and disturb Catherine, but a low growl of warning rumbled deep in his throat.

"Be at peace, Vincent. I mean you no harm." One of the many shadows in the room spoke, and a tall, strongly-built man in dark clothing detached himself from the deeper shadows beside the closed parlour doors.

"Where is this place?" Vincent demanded to know, as the other man crossed the room to seat himself in an armchair on the other side of the fireplace. "Why did you bring us here?"

"You possess my book." The man indicated the Tennyson still clasped beneath Vincent's hand. "You spoke my name, and the book called to me. I have been seeking its return for many years. I had almost given up hope."

"So, you are Captain Daniel Gregg?" Vincent frowned. "And this is only a dream?"

"A dream, a vision, call it what you will." Daniel shrugged. "When you spoke my name, I heard you. I knew my book had been found. I wished to reclaim it."

"This book was a gift." Vincent's hand tightened on the Tennyson. "From a very dear friend."

"Your lady gave it to you." Daniel nodded towards Catherine. "It was a very thoughtful gift. Unfortunately, the book was stolen from my collection in 1968 by a vindictive woman seeking revenge for imagined slights. I believe she sold it in New York."

Vincent shook his head. "Then it has been travelling for nearly twenty years. Through many hands, no doubt."

Captain Gregg's blue eyes studied Vincent closely. "I will say you are an unusual looking man." He shook his head. "In my voyages, I have seen many curious things and mysterious people. But you are a unique human being. That portrait Kristopher painted of the pair of you is a fair likeness."

Vincent looked startled. "You know about Kristopher?"

"I know *of* him," Daniel conceded. "I saw his name inscribed on the bookplate of my Tennyson when you held it up to the light of Catherine's apartment. Kristopher is a rogue spirit, trapped between two worlds, not knowing if he is alive or dead. He has become very comfortable moving in both realms and sees no need to change."

"And you..." Vincent considered him closely. "I once believed that ghosts walked abroad only in fairy stories. Do you also hover between the worlds?"

"No, I am a ghost." Daniel settled back into his chair. "I came to believe that I had lost my book forever. No-one looked beneath the sticker the Gentian lad had placed there, covering the one pasted in by the pilferer of my book. You are the first to notice the original plate I attached and speak my name."

Vincent considered him closely. "You were once a sea captain? I envy you such travels. The things you must have seen. The world you must have known..."

Daniel sighed. "There was nothing like it. I lived for the sensation of standing on a moving deck, the fathomless water roiling beneath you, waiting for you to make a mistake or a misstep. Then, in the dawn, watching the land taking shape before you. Knowing safe harbour was near, and yet another kind of adventure was in the offing. Do you... travel?"

"No..." Vincent shook his head. "Only in my thoughts and dreams. And in books like this one." He tapped the Tennyson. "So, you spirited us to this place, to this time, to regain possession of your property?"

"That was my intention," Daniel mused.

"Where, exactly, are we now?" Vincent glanced around the room.

"This is my house. Gull Cottage in Schooner Bay, Maine," Daniel replied easily.



"And you died here," Vincent guessed, watching the other man closely.

"I said you were perceptive," Daniel arched one eyebrow. "Yes, and because of that fact, I am forever tied to this house, and its current inhabitants..." He glanced up at the ceiling with a wistful smile. "I've come to realise I have no cause for complaint."

"You are so very lucky, my friend." Vincent looked down at Catherine. "I can never have a place in her world..."

Daniel shook his head. "I know that feeling only too well! The outside world is a blasted nuisance! I'm bound by this place, and out of time. I finally meet the woman I'd been searching for all my life, but one hundred years too late. Or perhaps I was too early. I can never decide which. And yet..."

"And yet you love her. With all your heart. That is what binds you to this place, now."

Daniel raised one knowing eyebrow. "It takes one to know one, eh, Vincent?"

"I do understand and sympathise with your predicament."

Daniel sighed. "I have the feeling you see beneath the surface of many things, Vincent."

"What do you intend for us, now?" Vincent returned to his original question.

"I can see that the two of you have found joy in my book. Mayhap it is time it moved on. Now that it is my choice to let go of that which was stolen from me..."

"I will cherish it, always..." Vincent promised.

"I know." Daniel sighed, waving his hand. "I have many other books." He smiled. "In fact, an attic full of them. They help me pass the time, until..."

He shrugged as he left the rest of the sentence unfinished. He settled back in his chair.

"Before I send you both back..." he mused, "I must tell you about the time I saw Tennyson himself, when he attended the Great Exhibition of London, in 1851..."

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The dawning light teased at Catherine's closed eyelids. She groaned and stretched, before realising the hour. She sat up quickly, turning to shake Vincent's arm.

He came awake instantly. "Catherine...?" For a moment he appeared puzzled and confused.

"We've overslept," she urged, tugging on his arm. "You must go, it's almost dawn."

She stood, drawing Vincent up with her. "It'll have to wait until later. But you won't believe the strangest dream I've just had. It was all about Kristopher, lost books, and long-dead sea captains..."

She shook her head in puzzlement. "It must have been the wine."

"Or maybe something else entirely..." Vincent glanced down at the Tennyson he still held fast in his free hand.

He bent down to place it gently on the coffee table. He gathered his cloak and drew it on, tossing the hood up to cover his head and face. "I must go..."

"Go, quickly..." Catherine urged him, hurrying to open the balcony doors. "I'll meet you Below at the threshold."

"I'll be waiting..." Vincent bent to press a swift kiss against her cheek, before vanishing through the billowing drapes and into the dawning light. "I have something I need to tell you about your dream, and I have a large favour I wish to ask of you..."

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### **GULL COTTAGE, MAINE - 1988**

"This came for you, today..." Carolyn held out a brown-paper wrapped parcel for Daniel to take. "It was concealed inside a parcel addressed to me. You never get mail. It's all rather mysterious."

She watched Daniel handle the package. "I hesitate to ask just exactly who would be sending you gifts," she said, with ill-concealed curiosity. "And someone using a Manhattan postmark. Who do you know there, that I don't?"

"I told you about how I finally discovered the whereabouts of my Tennyson that Vanessa stole. About the visitation, I arranged one night while you were asleep."

"Yes, but that was almost six months ago." She frowned. "What was his name? Vincent... that was it. How did he know the right address to send this to?"

"Simple enough. I told him." Daniel turned the parcel over in his hands, before reaching for the letter opener lying on the desk that he and Carolyn used to write their best-selling line of adventure/romance novels.

It had become a profitable partnership over the last twenty years, and Carolyn was now a wealthy woman. Years ago, she had bought Gull Cottage from Claymore. Both her children had grown and moved on with their own lives, while Martha still stoutly refused to give in to advancing age and slow down.

Carolyn would not have had her life turn out any other way. She had no intention of ever leaving the cottage, or the ghost of the man she loved with all her heart.

The brown paper fell open to reveal a copy of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. It was a first edition in even better condition than the one he'd allowed Vincent to keep.

Daniel opened it to the flyleaf. "This isn't the same book that Vanessa stole. This copy has been signed by Tennyson himself..."

"Amazing..." Carolyn looked over his arm. "This is a valuable book. You must have made a very good impression that night."

"I told Vincent all about the time I was in London and I saw Tennyson..." Daniel replied slowly.

He turned to the bookplate and stared at the elegant *ex libris* that had been pasted there. "*From the library of Captain Daniel Gregg...*" he read slowly. "*November - 1988...*"

He smiled at the addition written beneath the date in an elegant hand.

"*May all our books always find their way home.*"

*"We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk,  
and see the jewel in the toad's head.  
Champing his gilded oats, the hippogriff will stand  
in our stalls, and over our heads will float the blue bird  
singing of beautiful and impossible things,  
of things that are lovely and that never happen,  
of things that are not and that should be..."*

**Oscar Wilde**

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