

# None But the Heart Alone

by Katrina Relf

*(Based on the episodes 'Ceremony of Innocence', and 'The Rest is Silence')*

## Chapter the First

### *The Nightmare Begins*

Looking back, away from a future that held little but perturbation, Vincent tried to remember when it had begun - this downward spiral of death and self-doubt that was eating into his mind and body like a cancer. The killings, the rages that bore him away, were partly born out of his need to protect Catherine - he knew that - but he knew that they also emanated from those darkneses that he shared with that other self. Darkneses, more frequent of late, that could only be sated by the blood-letting, and which had made this parting with Catherine an unavoidable certainty. Somebody had only to think of what they saw, of what they heard. If it hadn't been the reporter it would have been someone else.

In all probability, the beginning of their dream had also been its inevitable conclusion. Ever since that night when he had found Catherine, he had known that he must protect her at all costs. Lately, that protection had become almost obsessive, the act of killing almost pleasurable and the transition back to shame and self-loathing stronger each time; until the blood, the madness, tortured him beyond belief. It was he, and he alone, who destroyed their dream, who made their love impossible. Now it was no longer safe for him to share Catherine's world, nor her life, and forever he would pay the price. He was trapped Below, a prisoner of his own nature, bereft of Catherine - and the blame could be apportioned to no-one but himself and those deadly animal rages that were awakened so easily - so irretrievably. And yet, even now, he knew - after all that had gone before - that if he felt Catherine's fear, he would go to her - oblivious of the dangers - there was no other way.

He suddenly felt stifled, claustrophobic, needing to feel Catherine's arms around him. Snatching up his cloak, he left his chamber and headed for the Mirror Pool. Kneeling beside its still waters he could see the reflection of the night sky, but, framed in the picture, he could see another reflection - his own. He stared down into the dark water and within its depths arose the images of a dream - Catherine was dreaming - a nightmare of their togetherness being discovered, being condemned by her colleagues, her friends - by Joe: Vincent is a monster - he is an animal - what does that make you? What does that make you?" Her anguish penetrated his awareness and tore into his heart, for dreams do not lie. As much as she fought against it, Catherine still feared rejection and abandonment by her world. As much as she loved him, Catherine was still a woman of the world above.

The dream ended and Vincent once again focussed his gaze, staring at himself as though seeing his face for the first time; as though, only now, recognizing his

differentness, and he knew - as in truth he had always known - that it wasn't the reporters words or pictures that precluded him from the world above, it wasn't just his darkneses that kept him from Catherine's side; it was his own inhuman strangeness. There was no place for him anywhere but here. This was his home - his tomb.

In the early morning Father came to him, trying to offer words of comfort - but no words helped to ease his desperate sadness. Vincent knew that he would never share another dawn with Catherine. Now every dawn for him would be nothing more than a reflection, and every day he lived without her, nothing more than a shadow.

He returned to his chamber, but could find nothing there but memories - reminders of his pain. Nothing held any meaning for him anymore - no books, no poetry, no friends. He was alone and his aloneness was deeper, more soul-consuming, than ever before. There was no peace to be found here - just a nagging uneasiness as images from Catherine's dream returned again and again - to torment him - to punish him for being who he was - what he was.

He left once more - to wander the tunnels - going nowhere, avoiding everyone. But in his solitude, unbidden memories crowded in upon him. Reflections of those days - the days of wine and roses - the days before the part of him that was the Other began inexorably destroying his life, his sanity, and Catherine's peace of mind.

If only he could have shared his confusion, his fear, with someone long ago - before it was too late. For now it was far, far too late - every hope, every dream gone beyond recall. Why did no-one ever let him explain how he felt? Why would nobody listen, why would nobody ask? Were they all too ashamed of what he was? Or were they all too afraid of what lay hidden deep within him? Perhaps if he had spoken to Father .... but how could that be? Father always seemed unable to admit to Vincent's otherness - the part of him that was neither gentle nor chaste. It was almost as if Father had convinced himself that he had tamed the beast, silenced the hunger forever. Perhaps he should have shared more of himself with Catherine - told her of his longings, his needs. But how could he bring himself to be so open with her? She had always been afraid to ask and he had always been afraid to offer.

There was no-one - no-one who wouldn't be repulsed by what he truly was, by what he truly felt. How could he expect others to understand his tortured mind, to condone the evil that was part of his soul, when it was a secret that he kept from everyone .... for even to himself he dissembled - and tried to wear the mantle of a man.

With nightfall he returned to his chamber, but still its candle glow, the invitation of his bed to limbs grown weary with hours of walking, could offer no consolation. The stars were once more floating upon the Mirror Pool and he needed the night sky, needed the one thing that he could still share with Catherine, albeit only by reflection. But before he could leave for that - his only place of refuge - he became aware of a sudden pull, a drawing towards Father's study, an inexplicable sense of Catherine....

.... Minutes later he was there, to find Catherine waiting with Father. Her presence was incomprehensible, beyond thought, so soon after their heartbreaking goodbye, and the sight of her, overwhelming in her loveliness, caused wounds to bleed anew. Her closeness brought all his need for her flooding back.

It took him a moment to compose himself, and, in that time, he failed to hear Father's words, as a golden locket was opened and handed to him. Vincent stared down at the picture lying in his palm - a woman's face - a stranger's face.

Father appeared disconcerted, wishing that he had dropped it into the Abyss, but

Vincent was unable to grasp the importance of the picture - its relevance to Father's agitation, and to be truthful it meant nothing to him - Catherine's presence was filling his mind. He needed to talk to her, to be alone with her. Nevertheless he tried to focus on Father's dilemma.

"Why would you even consider such a thing?" he asked. "To protect you."

Vincent still couldn't understand. "Who was she, Father?"

"Her name was Anna."

As Father was about to recount the events of his discovery as a babe, Vincent interrupted "Anna was the one who found me."

"No." Father was nervous, choosing his words. "That was a story. You were never found - Anna was your mother."

Now Vincent understood why Catherine was here. She was here to help him cope, to help him bear the shock of Father's words. To help him comprehend the existence of a mother - a mother who gave birth to HIM. "My "The word would not be spoken. It was beyond belief - beyond comprehension. He looked down again at the photograph resting in his hand, aware only of the blood pounding in his ears. Somehow he was able to ask, "What happened to her?"

"She died. It was an accident. So long ago. We buried her down in the catacombs"

Vincent studied her face, uncertain as to why he felt no closeness, no affinity with her. Surely with ... his... mother? But at this moment he felt nothing - there was only emptiness. Father reached out to take the locket, but Vincent snatched it, almost vehemently, away from his hand. And then he left, striding purposefully up the stairs, knowing now that he must go to her grave - try to discover a truth that no-one else could tell him.... The truth of his birth, of why he was what he was. Had this secret always lain with Anna? Is that why all his life they had lied to him - and all his life he had believed their lies?

Catherine followed him, stayed with him, and yet, somehow this woman - his mother - had put a distance between them. He had to find out who he was before he could share himself with anyone. And so he left Catherine, left the knowledge of her love, left the security of her presence - he had to face the truth alone, in case the truth was too terrible to share.

Through the Chamber of the Winds, down distant, dark passages - a timeless journey to a forgotten place. Eventually he reached the catacombs - Narcissa's domain - and she was waiting, a silent figure in the shadow of his torch; her blind eyes seeing more than he would ever know, for this was her world - a world of spirit.

"What is it you seek?" she asked him.

"Anna."

She turned away, as though unwilling, or unable, to share a knowledge deep enough, dark enough, to have been kept from him since birth.

"You know these catacombs." Even he could hear the hint of desperation in his voice as he asked, "Show me the way, Narcissa."

"Her bones have no answers. Go back, Vincent."

It was almost a warning - as though she knew the reason for his being here. But for Vincent it was too late. He had to know where she lay. It would be their only

meeting .... their only contact ....

Narcissa led him to the lower levels, deeper into the earth than he had ever been. Dampness and death hung in the air like an oppressive cloud as they reached her tomb. He moved close enough to read the inscription - "ANNA."

"There is nothing here but cold stone - death." Still there was an uneasiness about her. "Her spirit is gone, child."

"Once you told me you could summon spirits."

"Some who walk in death are fearful - cold, bitter as the wind that rolls up from the Abyss. Evil."

"But Anna was a good woman."

"In life - but death can twist a heart - poison it - and Anna's death was terrible."

Vincent turned once more to the tomb, a cold sliver of fear stirring within. "How did she die, Narcissa?"

He felt her touch upon his arm and turned to face her, fearful of her answer, suddenly afraid of the truth. Perhaps she sensed his fear of knowing, perhaps she was merely reluctant to speak of past sadness, but her only words - a presentiment in themselves - were "Ask .... the Father."

In a way Vincent was grateful for this delay to the inevitable finality of all that he had believed in. Turning back to the grave, he knelt before it, wiping away the moss which all but obliterated the stone. As the soft covering was pushed aside, words were revealed - words that were cursed for all time -

"ANNA PATER - BELOVED WIFE OF JOHN"

"John Pater" - he spoke out loud ... then, as the full force of the horror struck him he backed away - was pushed away - terrified by what he had seen - repulsed by its implications .... "Paracelsus."

Suddenly he found it difficult to breathe, the foul air sucked in and panted out labouriously. His head began spinning, or was it instead the world around him spinning, with himself as its axis.

Words, voices, began to fill the emptiness, merely a distant hum at first, growing louder and louder, joining in the rush of air that was spinning as he spun ....

Father's voice: reciting the story of the finding, "And then he was brought to me and he was wrapped in rags ...."

Paracelsus nearby: interrupting, tormenting "Are you content to accept Father's story... Father's story... Don't you see, Vincent, he wouldn't let me take you. He made me leave you behind."

Vincent was drowning deep in the sea of voices. He covered his ears, trying to escape, but they surrounded him, absorbing him into their midst, feeding on his breath....

Father's voice: "Nobody wanted him"

Paracelsus contradiction: "I loved you. You were mine..."

Words repeated over and over until reality was no more than the pounding in his ears. "Are you content to accept Father's story?"

And Father himself declaring: "Vincent, no-one ever wanted to lie to you," when in truth Father knew - Vincent knew - that his entire life had been a lie.

"Have you really believed that all these years... all these years?" asked Paracelsus.

It was the final torment - there could be no more. Vincent's whole world exploded into a roar - into a torrent of rage. Screaming, growling, he threw himself at the tomb, trying to wrench it apart, trying to find within its opened depths an answer, an escape from this hell that had suddenly been born before him. But, as the madness foundered into fatigue and despair, Vincent turned from the stone, collapsing against its solidity - a solidity that neither pounded nor spun - thankful that, for the moment at least, silence had eclipsed the voices, and the only sound that haunted him in this place of ghosts, was the pounding of his own heart.

He returned to Father's study, hoping that time and the long journey had allowed a deceptively calm facade to hide his desperate agitation. Catherine was there, in deep conversation with Father, but, for once, her presence brought him no joy, no feeling whatsoever. His own overpowering need to discover the truth eclipsed all else, and, calmly, coldly, he asked her to leave them. Without waiting for her departure he spoke the hated words - now almost unable to believe them himself.

"Anna was John Pater's wife."

Father's only reaction was to turn away. Vincent pulled off his cloak and walked over to him.

"Is it true then? Was Paracelsus... my Father?" He almost spat out the words. "Father, what have you done?"

He was aware of the uneasiness - the pain - that his questions would cause them both, but now there was no turning back. Father had, for some reason, after all the years, decided to unburden himself, and now there must be only the truth between them.

Looking down at the old man he spoke almost gently "Tell me."

Father looked up at him, visibly willing himself to be strong. "The beginning was John. He and Anna had tried for so long to have a child, but it was impossible. The fault was in John. He was unable to father a child."

"Yet - Anna became pregnant?"

"To Anna it was a miracle, but John just smiled as if he knew what was going to..."

"Go on."

"Vincent, please."

Father's sudden change of heart - his obvious disinclination to tell Vincent what he had to know - what he had the right to know - angered him.

"Go on," he shouted, pulling back the chair when Father tried to turn away. Bending down closely to him, he asked, "Why didn't you tell the others?"

Father's nervousness was tangible and out of character, as was his reluctance to face Vincent. He had risen now and was moving away. Vincent followed him.

"Someone must have known Anna was pregnant?"

"No." Now they were face to face. "No-one knew. You see... Anna was... Vincent, Anna was only in her third month when she went into labour."

"Third month...?" Vincent looked at Father incredulously. Now it was his turn to be afraid.

"As soon as it began I knew that something was wrong, but I could never have imagined... "

"Paracelsus?" It wasn't really a question, for already Vincent knew that this man - so evil, so hated - was the meaning, the reason for everything in his life. Why hadn't he gone on believing in the fantasy? Now it was too late.

Father nodded in reply. "John was a genius in his own way - but unorthodox."

He had moved until he was behind Vincent. Vincent stood immobile, waiting for the inevitable, terrible end to this story, for that is must be - why else would Father have waited 35 years for the telling?

Father continued. "Even so, no-one dreamt that he would perform medical experiments on his own wife."

"Did - Anna know what he was doing?"

"Right at the end, when she was too weak to scream anymore. She looked up at John and I saw the knowledge in her eyes."

Now it was Vincent' s turn to move away. He began pacing - fearful as to what he might hear - fearful, despite his inherent belief that Father would never intentionally hurt him, would never speak words that might destroy him. Yet, with a heart that heard and couldn't deny the direction that Father' s words were taking, he asked "So... Anna died in childbirth - like Devin's mother."

"No."

His pacing ceased and he turned to Father, saw his nervousness and already knew the answer.

"No - not like Devin's mother... no."

"Well then - how?" Fear was turning into anger and Father was unwilling to answer, averting his eyes again. if he was trying to spare Vincent now, it was too late.

Vincent flew at him, hands roughly grabbing his shoulders. "How?"

"Vincent, you were - you were not born - like other children."

The words, so obviously painful for Father, made Vincent long to flee from them, to hide somewhere far away. But they were already being spoken - words so terrible that they tore open his mind, his heart, and left him to die - for only the beast could hear such words... and live.

"You ripped your way out of your mother's body."

Very slowly Vincent pulled himself upright - away from Father - away from the obscenities that he had spoken. His eyes were unseeing, his mind filled with the ugly, evil images of all that he was, of the way he was born. All around him he could hear cries, an animal's tortured cries of pain, and remotely he wondered if the cries were coming from himself.

Catherine was waiting in his chamber. It almost surprised him. After all that had gone before, how could she bear to be near him. He asked her - told her - to leave, but she refused.

"What did Father tell you?"

Didn't she know? - Hadn't Father told her the terrible truth of all that he was? Would he be forced to speak those unspeakable words... himself?

"Go back to your world. Go back to the life you once led." He was keeping as far away from her - as far away from her love - as possible, afraid that her nearness would break him completely. "Throw your memory of me behind you."

"Tell me what he said." She came to him, taking his hands in hers - those hands that had .....

"I love you, Vincent. Whatever it is we can face it together."

"What you love is only part of me." He pulled away - moved from her - the hurt, the shame, spreading through him like a fever.

"No, Vincent. I love all of you."

"How can you know that? There are darkneses inside of me that you cannot even imagine." He turned to face her, not knowing what to do - not knowing what to say - but she continued -

"Whatever Father said - it doesn't matter. You haven't changed you're still kind and gentle and strong."

"Stop," he shouted. He didn't know where to turn, how to make her see what she was refusing to see - the monster that he truly was. He moved from her, began pacing, trying to think. Words were not enough...

"Look at me, Catherine. Look at ME." He bent down to her level, hands resting on the table. "What do you see?"

"I see the man that I love."

Words were truly hopeless - but she had to know, and then she had to leave - leave him to think - to decide. He straightened up again - his nerves almost at breaking point.

"There are no mirrors in this chamber, but there are mirrors in the soul ... and I cannot live with what I see there."

Catherine had moved closer and was now directly behind him. He could feel the nearness of her hand - and he couldn't bear it.

"Don't touch me," he spat - almost snarled - through clenched teeth. He felt her brief shock of fear and wondered how he could treat her this way. He had to explain - he had to make her see, so that she would go... and never return.

"It is not safe to love me, Catherine. I killed Anna."

He lifted his hands, looking at them - now more monstrous than ever before - and the pain was all he felt, all he knew.

"These hands ripped apart my mother's flesh, tore me from her womb. I was born in blood."

"No. I don't believe it."

"Believe whatever you like." The coldness in his voice belied the inner turmoil waiting to erupt. Again he moved away from her. "Only leave me."

Again she came to him. This time he rounded on her abruptly; snarling, fangs bared. She cried out and he saw true fear of him in her eyes, making him turn away.

"Don't look back", he warned her. For she may see his pain, she may just see him breaking.

At last she did as he had asked, but there was no relief. She had to go, but now that she was going every part of him was crying out for her to stay, to be held in her arms, to be soothed by her touch, to be loved unconditionally by her, in spite of everything. As she left the chamber, he half-turned to watch her, and this time he knew there would be no returning. Nothing mattered now - not even Father's darkest secrets...

Vincent returned to Father's study. He stood atop the stairs, looking down at this man who was now a stranger, a travesty of all that he had held dear. How could a Father have spoken such words to a son? How could he have loved him, held him and protected him all his life, if those words were true? He called him by name "Jacob" - for there was no longer any affinity between them. Father looked up at him warily.

"Why did you let me live?"

"You don't know what you're saying." Father closed his book and turned round in his chair towards Vincent. "Vincent, I remember the first moment I held you in my arms. You were so tiny, drenched in blood, but I could feel the life in you."

Vincent felt a new power about Father, almost as though he gloried in the words that he was speaking. He replied, "Death has its own power. Perhaps that is what you felt."

"You opened your eyes and you looked at me - you knew me - and I knew that something new had come into the world, that you were destined for unimaginable things." Father was smiling now, a strange, terrible smile.

Vincent descended the stairs. "And it was up to you to see that nothing stood in the way of that destiny."

"Yes, oh yes."

"No matter who you hurt, no matter how many lives were warped and destroyed by your lies?"

"But it didn't matter. Don't you understand that? I mean - they were ordinary, unimportant..."

Vincent couldn't believe what he was hearing. This was Father, and yet so unlike Father - speaking words that Father's lips would never have uttered. Within him there was a growing need to silence those unspeakable words.

"But you ...."

He was becoming afraid - afraid of Father - afraid of the words that were burning into his mind, taking him somewhere distant, somewhere that he didn't want to travel. He tried to run, to escape from this place.

"No, no, you have to listen, you have to understand," Father had followed him immediately, grasping his arm, drawing him close. He was awakening darknesses within and Vincent wanted to strike out at his tormentor, but this was Father - a Father who was feeding him on Paracelsus' words, looking at him with Paracelsus' eyes.

He turned, snarling, but Father didn't move, didn't flinch.



"Do you think it's been easy for me? You don't know the price I've paid for you. For years afterwards I could see her face, hear her screaming. Sometimes, as I pass through the Chamber of the Winds I hear it still - the screaming and the sound you made as you tore your way into the world."

Father seemed to be smothering him. He raised his hands to his head, trying to blot out the words.

"Stop it." It was almost a sob. His thoughts were becoming as liquid fire, pouring from his mind as lava from a volcano, a molten rage destroying all that lay in its path. "Stop it." He pulled away from Father - back into the study.

"No - you must hear this."

"No more," he pleaded, knowing how little control was left.

"Why do you resist your own nature?"

"No", he shouted, striking his hand violently on the desk, as he once again tried to escape from this nightmare.

"Where are you going, Vincent? You can't run away, you know that."

Vincent stopped at the foot of the staircase, grasping the rails for support. Behind him he could hear Father's laugh. "Oh, yes, they tried to smother it with their piety, chain it with their little moralities." He came over to Vincent's side - so close again - unbearably close. "But you can still hear the singing in your blood - can't you? Huh? Can't you?"

Vincent turned to him. Now the darkness was filling him - a smouldering darkness that took away his breath, that was taking away his humanity.

"Don't fight it, Vincent. It's you, it's who you are, it's what you've always been since the moment you were born. Good and evil - these are human concepts..."

The battle within was sapping Vincent's strength. He slumped down on to the steps, panting.

"Let go of them, Vincent."

Vincent closed his eyes and rested his head in his hand. Something within him, some remaining semblance of sanity, refused to acknowledge the inherent change in Father, told him that whatever was the hideous truth of his birth, such secrets would never be spoken - they would go to the grave with him. For Father's Vincent was gentle and would never suffer at his hands. There was only one who would draw him into the darkness, into the domain of the beast. Only one....

He remained as he was - eyes closed - but he could sense that Father was before him.

"Let the power fill you, make you its own. All your victims knew the truth."

Those words were the final obscenity. They opened up the floodgates to a blood-red river. He stared up at his tormentor with eyes filled with desperation. Why didn't he stop? Didn't he know what was happening?

"Couldn't you see that in their faces? Couldn't you remember their eyes - as they beheld you for the last time?"

Vincent growled, the burning need of his aroused body - and its only completion - were suffocating him.

"The smell of their blood on your hands. Oh, Vincent, imagine the taste of it."

Vincent's body was shaking, his growls no longer merely menacing, now a verbal rage. And deep within himself the burning tremors begotten of the words, were becoming images coloured by the vivid glow of warm blood; their clawed fingers tearing at his soul.

Father seemed to be moving towards him. "Like copper and fire on your tongue."

Still he could hear that hated voice, but the words meant nothing. Father was smiling at him again - that terrible smile - and the need to kill was becoming overpowering, sending violent paroxysms through his body, sending him crashing towards the throes of madness. Growling, he threw Father back on to the desk and ripped his claws through the length of his body ....

The carnage before him, the unbelievable truth of what he had done, devastated, almost destroyed Vincent's sanity. He looked down in horror at his hand - the fingers, the claws, wet with blood - Father's blood. No - not Father - he couldn't... not Father. His mind could bear no more - he refused to believe what lay before him.

The dying man was lifting his head to look at him. "It's all right. Don't be afraid."

The voice still held the same solicitous tone, with no condemnation whatsoever. He had lifted his hands to his face and, with great difficulty, began to pull at the skin, struggling until Father's face was gradually peeled away, leaving instead the scarred countenance of Paracelsus. As Vincent watched, his tormented, tortured mind unable to grasp completely that which was happening before him, Paracelsus spoke, through bloodied lips, his final words

"At last you ARE my son."

His victory was complete. His head fell back and his eyes stared unseeingly.

Part of Vincent felt a distant kind of relief, but the part of him that could still understand knew that this time Paracelsus had succeeded. Now he truly was his son. The darkness had obliterated everything, awakened by - driven by - the words. He had KILLED because of words. Now he was all that Paracelsus had wanted him to be - for he had found it within himself to kill Father...

He turned away from the eviscerated corpse - the sight, the stench of blood making him feel physically ill. Always it was the same. In the throes of the rages, in the act of killing, the smell, the taste of blood could bring his other self almost to orgasm, but, once it was done, once the hunger was assuaged, the blood, the death, and he - its perpetrator - sickened him, made him despair, and terrified him beyond measure - because he was capable of such inhumanity. And tonight he had killed solely because of words... What if the blood he had shed had been Father's? The possibility made him dizzy and he swayed slightly.

Suddenly he realized that he was not alone. He forced his eyes to focus on the top of the stairway, to focus on Catherine, Father and Jamie, who were standing there, watching him - watching as he killed... that other Father. Now they would never be able to deny the blood-lust, the uncontrollable danger that existed within him. But how could he be certain that this wasn't just another Father whose face could be torn away, revealing yet another Paracelsus? Nothing was certain anymore. Nothing was as it seemed. He couldn't face their scrutiny, nor the pity that he could see written on their faces, and the fear of him that must certainly be in their hearts. All his reality had gone. He stood, as once again his world began spinning; staring with unseeing eyes,

listening with unhearing ears. He had to find a place - a safe, silent, unpeopled place - a place that bore no memories...

His next awareness was of Catherine's voice "I will stay as long as he needs me."

He was slowly leaving behind the peace, the safety of his withdrawal, and the nightmare was seeping back. Catherine and Father seemed near him, he recognised his chamber, and, in that moment, Catherine's presence brought him a comfort he needed badly. He remembered turning her away, knowing that she would never return. He was so grateful that she had, but so ashamed of what she had seen - the unforgivable, unprovoked murder of... Father? His heart told him that he knew it was Paracelsus, but his mind questioned - would it have mattered if not? He killed - because the darkness was upon him, and he thanked God that it had been Paracelsus who was there.

"Vincent." Now she was standing in front of him, close to him, as he sat, staring ahead, seeing nothing. "It's finished." Her voice was gentle, soothing, but a sudden gnawing ache in the pit of his stomach contradicted her.

She went on, "You did what had to be done, and we're free. The nightmare is over."

No. Her words filled him with an unreasonable sense of panic. He pulled himself free of the impassive void and looked straight up into her eyes.

"No, it's not over."

What he meant exactly he didn't know; but he knew beyond any doubt, that for him, perhaps for them, the worst was yet to come.

Father's voice was definite, convincing, and just what Vincent needed to hear - the fairy tale was intact. So why didn't he believe him? Could Paracelsus have made him believe if it wasn't the truth? Would he have been willing to die for anything less?

Catherine explained patiently, gently, that all of Paracelsus' words had been lies. The truth was as it had always been. But still he knew nothing of the truth - the truth of his birth. No one would ever know. The seeds of doubt were planted and he would never be free of them.

However, for the present, the imminent danger was passed - he had to believe that - he had to have something to hold on to. Something real, something solid - to stop his world from spinning each time that he remembered Paracelsus' words, each time that he remembered their ultimate tragic consequence, each time that he remembered Father laying, torn and bloodied, on that desk... each time he wondered if he really did know...

Catherine would stay with him - she would stay as long as he needed her - and he needed her so badly. He was humbled by her love, by her trust - after all that she had seen, after all that he had told her. Without Catherine he would truly be lost. He could hardly bear a parting from her, yet he was so tired, so completely empty, that he had to sleep. She wanted to stay with him whilst he slept - to hold him in case there were dreams, to protect him from any nightmares. But that was something he couldn't allow - for in sleep there was no control, and sometimes dreams could be too real. He made her leave, remembering how he had made her leave before, and knowing that she remembered it too.

They promised to meet on Friday night beneath the bandshell for the Vivaldi concert, but Friday night seemed so far away, and every moment without her reminded him of

what might have been.

With her departure came a fear of being alone that he had never known before. He lay on his bed, his thoughts tangled, his emotions hurtling between light and dark, joy and pain, hope and despair. Soon he slipped into the depths of his fatigue, but with sleep came no peace. He was tossed from dream to dream, lost and alone in a terrifying world of nightmares, with nowhere to hide... for Catherine's arms were not around him.

## **Chapter the Second**

### *DENIAL*

His claws tore into her flesh just as surely as his penetration drove into her body. He couldn't breathe; his body was shaking, his senses on fire, burning with the hunger. Her scent, the sweetness of her blood, was all around him, her tightness enclosing him, driving him beyond endurance. He plunged deeper and deeper into her, further and further into the tormenting hunger, tearing her apart as he filled her with himself. But even with completion came no peace. The sight of Catherine, torn, bloodied, hurt and afraid beyond words, drove him almost to madness...

Vincent awoke, soaked with sweat, the sickening thud of his heart pounding in his ears. The dreams of last night had been fearful - haunting his restless sleep until he could bear no more. But the nightmare he had just left was more real, more terrifying than any he had known before. His body was still shaking from its intensity, his arousal still fed by the images before him. He lay panting, eyes closed tightly against the pictures in his mind, desperate to control the hunger that once again shamed him. He waited until his breathing quietened and his heartbeat steadied, then he tried to sense Catherine. There was nothing, only peace. She was sleeping. She knew nothing of the unspeakable horror of his dream. She must never know.

Her Vincent would always be gentle, always protect her, and hold her close whenever she needed his nearness. Nothing more. He would ignore the longing he sometimes saw in her eyes, heard in her voice, felt deep within her... He would deny his unending need of her, the physical pain of having her near - knowing it could never be.

Suddenly, he needed to see her, to know that all was well with her. To reassure himself that his dream had not invaded her sleep, had not frightened her as it had frightened him. He dressed quickly and ran swiftly, silently, through the tunnels until he reached the cool freshness of the night air in the park. Soon he was on Catherine's balcony, outside the french windows of her bedroom. The curtains were open, allowing him to gaze, almost timidly, at her sleeping form; feeling guilty at this invasion of her privacy, but unable to tear himself away. The softness, the beauty of her, caressed his heart, causing it to constrict. How could such beauty awaken a darkness such as he had experienced in his dream? He stood, watching her, his hand resting lightly on the window-jamb. He had no idea of how long he stayed there. Time was meaningless. He was lost in the magic that was Catherine. How could he not desire her? How could he not long to discover feelings he had never known before? To touch, to be touched. To lay his head against the softness of her breast. He knew that for him it must be wrong, but how could he stop his body from yearning?

It was so different from his wanting of Lisa. Lisa had tempted him, taunted him. He'd

had no control then. Catherine neither tempted nor taunted him. In fact, she silenced her love, her need, just as surely as he did. And this silence, this denial of anything more physical than an embrace, somehow transformed their love into something pure, almost spiritual. He made this purity of feeling suffice, but there were times when his body needed... no... craved, so much more. He would fight to control this need, to suppress the wanting, but on occasions - more frequent of late - the hunger overtook him and demanded satisfaction. It fired his body, his mind, with images he dare not dwell upon, with passion so raw, so demanding, he was lost to its power, lost to the insistent, throbbing urge. He killed. He killed for Catherine, for those he loved - to protect them. But, in truth, wasn't it also for himself - to ease the growing torment in his body? For the killing had become, in essence, the only way of discharging his need to possess Catherine fully, completely. The unleashed fury tore through his body, cleansing him, fulfilling him, bringing him the release he could find no other way.

Catherine stirred - the unexpected movement recalling him from his thoughts. Suddenly the sight of her, her vulnerability, made him long to be beside her, made him long to touch her, to feel her. The hunger awoke from its uneasy sleep, and coursed through him, its burning fingers arousing every part of his body. He must leave - before Catherine awoke... before she saw... before she knew.

Quickly he withdrew from the balcony, careful not to awaken her, lest she should call his name...

He retreated back to his world, back to the comparative safety of his chamber. Lying fully clothed upon his bed, he tried to contain his thoughts, to understand what was happening to him - for something was happening, of that he was sure...

Why should he dream of hurting Catherine? Did some part of who he was really want to hurt her? Paracelsus had told him that he had been born in blood, that he had torn himself free of his mother's body. Father denied it, of course, but how did Father know? Perhaps Paracelsus knew the truth. After all, Anna had taken the child directly to him, not to Father. Perhaps the child was, as Paracelsus had claimed, drenched in his mother's blood. If that were so, if blood was his birthright, his heritage, did it demand more than the killings, more than just Catherine's spiritual love ....?

His vision blurred into a blood-red mist. He could almost smell it, taste it - *'like copper and fire on your tongue'* - Paracelsus knew. He knew him better than anyone. Perhaps, after all, he was his son...

His body was burning, his face damp with sweat. He needed fresh air. He needed to go Above again. But not to Catherine - it wasn't safe - not now. Perhaps the cool darkness of the park would awaken him from this nightmare, would calm the fever that was burning its way through him. He hurried from his chamber, through tunnels that seemed endless.

Once in the park he began to run - away from his fears - or towards them - he wasn't sure. There were others in the park that night - shadows that he quickly passed. He felt no need to hide, no fear of them. After all, he was the one to be feared.

He could sense a new kind of freedom, an escape from the rigid boundaries that he had himself imposed upon his behaviour, upon his thoughts. Perhaps if he were indeed part of Paracelsus, in a way that he could never be part of Father, perhaps then he need not fear this other self, need feel no shame at its desires, its imaginings; which, after all, were merely extensions of his own thoughts and feelings, always hidden, vehemently denied.

For, in truth, what was the Other, if not part of himself? They shared the same body, they shared the same needs - the only difference being that the Other gloried in what he was, in his strength, his darkness. He lost himself totally to the orgasmic fury of his killing, as his body convulsed with the hunger, with its insatiability. He wantonly desired Catherine's body, the unrestrained craving to take her, possess her, always present. Vincent could only remember these moments with horror, denying the truth of what he was and seeking out only gentleness.

But, of late, this was becoming increasingly difficult. Paracelsus' words were too deeply ingrained in his mind. There was no peace - just a continual battle to be as others wished him to be, when, in truth, he knew that only in that darker being was he truly himself.

He was tired, tired of fighting, tired of all the pretence... Perhaps, after all, the nightmare that had so terrified him only hours earlier, was merely an indication of what was to be, of what should be. There was a growing affinity between Catherine and his other self. He had sensed it of late - at the killings. Perhaps she too was tired of the gentleness, the purity of their love.

Suddenly, in the distance, he could see Catherine standing, waiting .... But in the space between them he could see only danger. Mounted, armed police, aiming at him, firing at him. They were protecting Catherine, of course, protecting her from him; from what he was becoming, from what his thoughts were making him. He could understand that, but what he couldn't understand, what finally broke his heart and wrenched it from his body, was her utter disregard, her complete indifference, as the bullets tore into him, as he sank to the ground, dying. Their love, their dream, was nothing more than emptiness, nothing more than a hopeless illusion built on lies. He tried to call, but his voice was silent. He tried to see, but there was only the night.

Through all the pain that has gone before,  
Through all the pain that is yet to come  
I know that I am loved  
And love must protect its own  
From that which will pass through me, changing me.  
I will lose myself in the shadows of the past,  
In that which I might have been -  
I will become that which I fear and detest the most.  
Deadlier than any enemy,  
For now the enemy is within  
And all the love in the world cannot save me

### **Chapter-the Third.**

#### *ONLY THE LOST*

The heat of the sun on his back awakened Vincent, recalling him from the depths of a black, bottomless void. He turned over, blinking into the strong light, bewildered by his surroundings. Always he had dreamed of waking in the sunshine, of gazing up into a

sky of blue, but now that it was finally happening, instinct screamed at him that it was wrong.

As memory returned, a wave of nausea swept through him - remembering Catherine's betrayal, remembering the bullets. They had shot him - he had felt himself sinking into the deep stillness of death. Yet he wasn't hurting, he wasn't bleeding. With a strange, sudden pull of fear, he realized that it had been a dream - another dream that he couldn't quite distinguish from reality. How could he be sure that he wasn't dreaming now? The colours around him were vivid, the scent of the grass unmistakable, the warmth of the sun on his face unimaginable. He almost wished this were a dream, so that he could close his eyes and forget the nightmares, but a nagging doubt whispered of reality. He was in the park, it was daylight, and he was in danger.

Almost by reflex, he was on his feet, hiding himself behind the nearest tree, trying to translate the images of a daytime park into the shadows of moon and shadow that he knew so well. Once he had his bearings, he covered himself with his hood and fled towards home, running as near to the general direction of the drainage tunnel, as his frequent need to hide would allow. Gone was the bravado of the night before. Now he concealed himself from strangers, a stranger himself in an alien world. There was no inner darkness, no loss of himself, to give him courage. For last night he had been lost, of that he was sure. These lapses of self were increasing, and he knew how it would end. He had felt this way before, but he had been younger then, more easily controlled. This time it would be different - for him - for them. This time he must find a way to protect them.

Finally, gratefully, reaching the safety of the tunnels, Vincent made his way directly to Father. He needed his wisdom, his counsel, his explanation as to what was happening. Father had witnessed it before, had been with him, tended him. Perhaps he could elucidate the dreams, could calm his fears, quell the fire that was burning its way through him. But if Father did have the answers, if he did know the truth, he was afraid to admit it, perhaps lest he heard the words himself, and Vincent found no reassurance in him - just an old man, afraid and uncertain of his dangerous son. There was no point in frightening him more, and so he gathered this man - his beloved Father - into his arms and tried to impart the comfort, the protection to him, that he himself so badly needed.

Eventually, he returned to his own chamber, hopefully leaving Father with some vestige of normality. Vincent needed rest, he needed peace, but, in truth, the only companions that he found were memories of all that he wished to forget. Last night's dreams were persistent in their torment, and the darkness within - which at the merest thought of Catherine, became the hunger - was even now stirring in the pit of his stomach, waiting to be awakened - perhaps by a shadow, or the flicker of a flame.

Night would soon fall - the night that protected him on that most precious of journeys; and he tried to persuade himself that it would be safe to go to Catherine, to be alone with her. Yet he doubted, for already there was an irrational impatience, an anger smouldering just below the surface, as if the Other had awoken already and was waiting

Shaking hands, clumsy fingers, tore a lace on his shirt as he tried to fasten it, as he tried to tidy himself for Catherine, and the rage ignited, its ugly flames threatening to consume him. He sat on his bed, staring down, examining his hands. How could such hands ever touch Catherine? He had no right. He had no right to go to her now - it would be dangerous. Perhaps if he just watched her from the balcony, if he didn't call

her to him. He just needed to see her, to be near her. There may never be another time, another chance. The fever from last night had returned, burning through his entire body. The chill of the night air beckoned, and, pulling his cloak around him, he began his journey to Catherine.

Nearing their secret place below the bandshell, he heard music and saw her standing, listening. She was so beautiful - her dress, he imagined, the colour of a summer sea beneath a midnight sky. Why was she here? Had they planned it? It frightened him not to remember. But, perhaps, no matter, for it was safer here - for her - for him. She reached out, taking his hand, and he sat down beside her, trying to appear normal. But something was happening, something was changing - her words were becoming merely sounds, her face a blur that swam before him, and the music a discordant cacophony of sound. All around him so much brightness, so much noise - arousing something within him - frightening him.

"Are you all right?" she was asking, her voice echoing as though from a great distance.

"Yes," he lied. He had no words to tell her otherwise. Deep within himself he was lost, with no recollection of the path home, and no-one to guide him - for no-one should tread this path but him.

She spoke again, lost words, her face distorted by the intensity of the colours. She was moving her arms, sweeping movements, back and forth, over and over - disturbing him, angering him. He had to leave before he tried to stop her, before he tried to hurt her. Already he could sense her growing fear of him, he could hear its inflection in her voice.

"Talk to me, Vincent."

He was on his feet in a moment, pacing back and forth, trying to rid himself of the tumult raging all around. But the eye of the storm was now within, within his soul, within his mind - within him. He threw back his head and roared his rage, his frustration, but still they clung to him, still they buried him within their depths.

Too ashamed to look back, he escaped into the tunnels, returning to the sanctuary of his chamber. Still pacing within its rocky confines, he told himself that he must be strong, that he mustn't let them see what was happening to him. Above all, he mustn't frighten them. And he must prepare, carefully prepare, for whatever may happen.

Suddenly, he was aware of being watched, and, looking up, he saw Catherine standing in the entrance, listening. She had come to him, afraid for him, but he could offer her no words of comfort, for he, too, was afraid. She held him close, her nearness offering him much more than comfort, but all too soon she was gone, and, with her leaving, his fear took on a new perspective.

He knew the fever, the darkness, would soon control him. Soon he would be lost to himself, to everyone. He had to tell Catherine, before it was too late, that he would love her beyond death, beyond madness. There was a line, a poem, he had read it somewhere, long ago. He must find it now, take it to her. Feverishly, he tore through his books, shelf after shelf, bookcase after bookcase, knowing by touch that every book was the wrong book. He was burning up, even becoming uncertain as to why this poem was so important, but he couldn't stop - he must find it, find it. The lid of his trunk was cleared with a single sweep of his arm, and books feverishly tossed aside. He stopped for a moment, clearing his mind, catching his breath.... must find it.



He looked down at a small book, suddenly visible, suddenly familiar. Almost fearfully he flicked through its pages until he found the verse, the lines, that he needed so desperately '*Though lovers be lost, love shall not, and death shall have no dominion.*' Reciting the words over and over, he pressed the book against his burning forehead. The words seared through the cold leather into his brain. He would go to her now. She must hear this - she must hear it.

Pulling on his cloak he left the tunnels and ran through the park, last night's disregard of caution with him once more. His need to show Catherine the words were of ultimate import - nothing else mattered - he would have killed the innocent had they stood in his way.

Swiftly climbing the balcony, he tapped on her bedroom door. Everywhere was in darkness - was she already asleep? He couldn't see her, he had no sense of her, nothing at all. He began pacing, waiting, watching for her to appear, reciting the words over and over, in a frenzied effort to calm his pounding heart; only interrupting himself to call her name. With still no sound, no movement in the apartment, his patience, his control, finally snapped.

"Catherine, you must hear this," he shouted, moving to the french windows. His eyes searched the blackness within, but found only his own reflection. If she were hiding from him he would find her. She must hear it. Something akin to panic arose within him as he smashed his way into the apartment.

A dimly lit lamp stood on a table before him. He swept it to the floor, then retreated back to where the broken doors stood open to the night air. He was uncertain of what to do, uncertain of Catherine's whereabouts, and the dark hostility of the apartment worried him - he could find no familiarity, no comfort here. He was suddenly aware of a movement, a presence beside him, and, turning towards the wall, he found himself staring into the depths of a mirror. Baring his fangs, he growled a warning, for the creature that he faced within was dark, menacing, something that Catherine must never see. He struck out at the glass, shattering his image, tearing his hand. Unable to comprehend what was happening, he stared blindly at his bloodied flesh, knowing that he must leave before Catherine saw him, lest, in reality, his countenance was as obscenely inhuman as his reflection. The book, no longer needed, was thrown through the open doors into the night, but, before he could follow its path, the room began spinning around him. He closed his eyes and the mists were upon him. As he stumbled forward he reached out for support. Instead he heard the crashing of glass falling with him.

The sound of Catherine's voice, the realization of her touch, and his own subconscious awareness of her being there, pulled Vincent back through the softly veiled clouds of obscurity, to brief moments of consciousness, only to return again and again to the fever-filled nightmares that awaited him. But, as he became more aware of this journey between dark and light, he also became aware of the demons that sometimes travelled with him. The dark visage of the Other had, more than once, violated the transitory moments of togetherness that he was able to share with Catherine. It had watched her, lusted for her, provoking him into violence - but its visitations were brief, and, for that, Vincent was grateful. Yet still he feared for Catherine when she was alone. He must stay near her, protect her, lest the darkness return, and for this reason he made no effort to resist when he felt himself being gently persuaded into Catherine's bed, and no effort to move when he felt her lying down close beside him.

Gently cocooned in a warm softness, and drifting somewhere between sleep and waking, Vincent could hear Catherine quietly reciting the words that he knew so well. Fleetingly he wondered how she knew them too - had he read them to her after all? But, before he could barely form the words, he had returned to that world of half-lights where nothing really mattered.

Catherine seemed close, very close, so close her breath was warm upon his face. Her hands were touching him, so beautifully, in a way she had never touched him before - awakening his body with their tenderness. He felt that he should stop her, but he had neither the strength, nor the will. He had always feared the hunger for it was one with his darkness, with the desperate, unspeakable dreams that haunted him; but now it had become a beautiful anticipation to be cherished, to be savoured, to be shared with Catherine. Strangely, he had no fear of hurting her... no fear at all... His arms were encompassing her and she was closer than she had ever been. Taking him, surrounding him, until he knew nothing, could feel nothing, but the throbbing, overpowering sensation of being lost somewhere deep within her, deep within the moist, warm power of her giving. His world was exploding into trails of wonderment and tears, and he clung to Catherine, suddenly afraid, suddenly terrified of losing her. But she was there, holding him, kissing away the wetness from his lashes. And she would always be there, for, without her, his world would end.

He awakened in a room warm in the soft glow of sunset. It was Catherine's room and he was in her bed. Somehow the thought didn't shock him, nor even surprise him.

There were fleeting memories, fragments as of a dream, that he couldn't quite grasp, but couldn't forget. He was lucid, and, for the moment, the fever seemed to have abated. He left her bed and walked slowly to the window, captured by the colours that he saw there. He stood, staring out at the city, wondering how he would find the strength to return Below. For that he must do. He knew instinctively that this respite in the delirium was only temporary, and when it returned, it would be even stronger. He mustn't be here - not then.

He heard Catherine enter the room, felt her come to his side. They shared the beauty of the sunset, the beauty of this brief moment of peace.

When she spoke he could hear the gentle optimism in her voice, "Maybe the worst is over."

"If it's not it's best that I'm Below. I should go back."

She stared only at the sunset, but the disappointment in her voice was almost tangible.

"It'll be dark soon."

She asked him to share whatever may come with her, yet he knew that whatever was happening to him now could be shared with no-one - not even Catherine. He promised her his love - there was no more he could give.

He had no idea of how he reached the tunnels, his exhaustion was so great, his weakness fed by the fever which, even now, was returning to eat its way through his mind and body, turning his world once more into a place of lost souls.

At last he reached his chamber, all strength, all determination spent. To be alone - to sleep - that was his only wish...

But the Other granted no wishes...

In an instant Vincent felt the fire burning through his veins, demanding life from a body that had no life left to give. Its fangs were bared, soft growls echoing through the chamber - strong in the face of Vincent's weakness. Unable to fight any more, Vincent stared back into the dark face of his own death - and accepted.

The fatigue was replaced instantly by a feral energy, secret yearnings and urges taken in hand and embraced. He rose to his feet, pacing restlessly the confines of his chamber. He needed Catherine. Brief memories of those lost hours, days, in her apartment, in her bed, fired his body with a lust that only she could dispel. He would take her to the dark places within herself, the places they visited together when he was lost in the killings. His body was growing hard with his need to possess her. Pulling on his cloak, he ran from the chamber, colliding with tunnel walls as he raced towards the park entrance, only to find someone there, preventing him leaving. With a sweep of his arm, the intruder was on the ground. Vincent could almost smell the fear in him. With something akin to pleasure, he knew that very soon they would all be afraid

He threw the lock on the gate, but the iron barrier remained firm. He tried once more, gripping the bars and shaking violently until the very foundation moved, but still he was trapped. He threw himself against the bars again and again, rage deadening the pain.

Deafening roars, savage as the hunger for Catherine that was growing into the throbbing hardness of his erection - vivid pictures of his bloodied penetration of her body, filling her with his burning flesh. He would tear the gate apart to get to her. He would destroy whatever stood in his way. With every thrust of his body against the bars, he was thrusting into Catherine, until his body shook with a craving beyond control, with a need that would kill to be released, with a madness that was destroying him.

Time after torturous time his broken body was thrown mercilessly against what had become a deadly enemy, its bars shuddering with every impact. He had to get out - he had to go Above.

"Vincent."

The voice rose above the clanging of the metal. He turned to face it, growling viciously, his tortured mind demanding revenge, his aroused body demanding orgasm. He would claw his way through their bodies, tearing their flesh, tasting their blood... He growled again, raising his arm for the kill - but there was nothing, no-one - just a mist moving toward him, slowly evaporating, revealing a face - a face he knew from somewhere before the dying of the light.

"Vincent, come with me - we'll go home." Father's voice was kind, gentle, and somehow, with those words, a little of his gentleness seemed to wend its way into Vincent's soul, until the rage, the hunger, began slipping from him; leaving him, instead, weak, hurting and unbearably afraid and ashamed of that which he had been.

Why could he remember every thought of that depraved mind, every intention of that evil soul? Why couldn't he just forget? He slumped down into Father's arms, that same Father who, only minutes before, his other self would have murdered, just as he had murdered Paracelsus. He must leave them - he knew that now beyond doubt. If he stayed he would destroy them.

"Bring Catherine," he begged, needing to see her one last time - but then afraid, for

now that the horror of what he truly was, was upon him, could he ever let her see him again?

He had no more strength, nothing left to give but his tears, his sorrow - and he wept - for all the pain that he had brought to Father - for all the pain yet to come. He clung to him, sobbing like a child, and Father rocked him, comforted him, as though he were that child again.

Soon he was dimly aware of being led back to Father's chamber, of being watched over by many people. It made him afraid - there were so many to be hurt, so many who could suffer at his hands. He tried to make them understand, but he was struggling for words. He felt so terribly sick, burning up, drifting in and out of that world of half-lights, where even thinking was becoming difficult. He had to leave - before it was too late, whilst he could still protect them from himself. With a great effort he rose from his chair, taking a final heartbreaking look at his family - those who had loved him as a brother, a son, and knowing that very soon their faces would mean nothing to him...

He had no idea of where he was going, he only knew that it must be distant - somewhere beyond the catacombs. Every step was an effort, every breath a heart-beat nearer to the greatest aloneness he would ever know. He stopped in some strange, remote tunnel, far enough apart from all that he knew, from all that he loved, for them never to find him.

That was how it must be. They must never know what he had become. He was gripped by a sadness, a despair beyond anything that he had ever known, and he cried out his pain for all that was, and his fear of all that would be. It was the last human sound that he would utter, for, even now, as his cry still hung upon the air, he could feel the mists rising within him, their cruel fingers blood-red around his heart. As the sound died, so his humanity slipped away and he knew that he must find that place, his refuge, before the man was lost forever.

He finally reached the yawning blackness of his hell, his tomb, and dragged himself into its obscurity. He felt the weight of his cloak being ripped from his shoulders by the jagged rocks, and he let it fall where it would. He had no need of it now. His eyes quickly adjusted to the darkness and he moved painfully across the sandy floor to the farthest wall. There he sank to the ground, no longer able to fight his exhaustion.

He awoke suddenly, the complete strangeness of his surroundings confusing him, frightening him. Using what little strength he had left, he pushed himself to his feet, pressing his back against the wall. Before him there were mists rising from the ground, seeping through the walls, trailing fingers towards him - trying to touch him. He curled his lip, snarling a warning, yet still they were there, ghostly shadows hiding in the mists, watching him... waiting. He moved towards them, claws ready to strike, but they taunted him, floating nearer, then disappearing into the darkness. He struck out, immediately recoiling, growling in pain, in anger, as the deadly rocks clawed back, tearing his nails, ripping his hands. He staggered, falling against the wall. Its jaggedness tore through his clothing, slashing, bruising his body. His pain became a swirling vortex of rage. He had no defence against the demons in this place. He retreated back to the distant wall, his cries of pain and rage echoing back at him until it seemed as though the shadows themselves were screaming. Deepening mists were chilling him, their grey coldness damp against his burning flesh. He had no memory beyond this time, this place, nor any knowledge of what he was, save that he existed. He crouched down close to the rocks, hidden by the darkness... waiting... waiting...

his desperate cries the only release for that tortured mind.

As though in response to those cries, instinct suddenly told him that he was not alone - a sound, a movement in the distance - near the mouth of the cave. It was more than a shadow - a substance - flesh and blood - and flesh and blood was dangerous - must be killed. He struggled to his feet, arm raised, and with a strength born out of the need to kill, out of his need for blood, he moved swiftly towards the intruder.

Within reach of its body he was stopped abruptly by a scream - one word - "**Vincent.**"

It meant nothing to him.... it meant everything. It was a word, a voice, that penetrated the depths of his being, a voice that awakened a memory - and in that memory he knew - as he had always known - that he would rather die than hurt her.

## **Chapter - the Fourth.**

### *IMAGES BEYOND THE DARKNESS*

Vincent awoke, dragged back to consciousness by pure sensation, by touch. Hands were cool against his burning flesh - and lips, warm and demanding, were pressing upon his mouth. He tried to open his eyes, but his lids were leaden weights. He was awake and yet he was sleeping, he was here and yet he was adrift in some far-off place, lost between heaven and hell.

Dreams were infinite here, images beyond the darkness. But was this imagining? Could there be any imagining of hands so soft - touching as he had never been touched? Warm lips, warm breath - giving him breath, giving him life. Too soon leaving, leaving his mouth bereft - moving to his neck and chest, bringing new sensations. Skin against skin, skin against fur. He wondered fleetingly at the degree of his nakedness - how this could be.

But thoughts were lost to feelings as hands moved to his thighs, his belly, bringing fire to his growing arousal. His eyes flew open, the lids suddenly weightless. All around him only the darkness, the mists of semi-consciousness. He focused on a face, drifting above him, somehow familiar, somehow strange. The face became lost again in the mists, but the symphony of hands and lips continued. His body hardened, swelled, straining painfully against the tightness of his jeans. The ever-present darkness within demanded satisfaction, demanded release.

His arms reached out towards the enigmatic figure kneeling beside him - his tormentor - a ghost belonging to this place of ghosts. He grasped her shoulders tightly, and turning, abruptly pulled her down beneath him. She made no effort to resist, and in her face he saw no fear of him, just something deep within her eyes that he couldn't understand. She spoke. Her words were soft and gentle, but words meant nothing to him. They were merely sounds, lost in the pounding of his heart.

He feared this path that they were taking, he feared where it may lead. He didn't want to hurt her, he couldn't bear to hurt her - she was too gentle for pain. Yet already she had taken him too far on this journey - there was no turning back. Even now the feeling of her body beneath his was like a tide rising within him. Her warm softness enticed him, enveloped him. His hips began to move against her, his arousal pushing hard against her body. He lowered his head and pressed his mouth awkwardly to hers. This first joining with her, the taste of her, made him ache with his need of her,

made his body tremble with anticipation. But he pulled away, pushing himself further down her body. The sudden feeling, the sudden awareness of her naked breasts beneath him made him groan with wanting, as the hunger rose in his belly and the fire burned in his groin.

Her scent was all around him, pushing him further and further into the whirlpool, into the bottomless abyss of his desire, where instinct and lust alone were guiding him. He fastened his mouth over her breast, suckling hard as from a mother he had never known. He heard her gasp, but no longer had the power to stop. He had no strength to fight whatever was happening to him. The flames burning within him had turned a thoughts, all gentleness, into ashes. He ground his body against her - urgent, demanding - his hardness burning into her. Pushing himself between her legs, he tried to enter her, snarling his rage and frustration at his failure.

Blood-red mist was blinding him, drawing him ever deeper into its all-consuming vortex. Thrusting wildly against her, he growled menacingly, fangs bared. His body was screaming for release, crying out to take her, but he was a victim of his own innocence. For him there could be only one completion - one way to end this blinding agony of mind and body - this torture that she had brought him. His hands, his claws, still bloodied from the rocks, were dangerously near her body...

Through his frenzied haze of desire and fury he was aware of hands, reaching down, freeing him, taking hold of his engorged erection and guiding him into her. His body was shaking, soaked with sweat, as he plunged desperately into her, all control gone, his entire being submerged by the pounding torrents of his orgasm. During that moment of possession, his soul, his being were hers, and he was lost within her. The rage, the pain, were dissolving into nothingness, and bringing to his broken body, his broken mind, a gentle peace, a healing peace. A terrible weariness drifted over him, seeping into every part of his body, soothing jagged nerves, robbing him of awareness. He slipped silently away from all that had gone before - and he slept.

## **Chapter the Fifth**

### *INTO THE LIGHT*

He lay, too weak to move, remnants of unreal dreams, dreams he should forget, wrapped around him. So many things he didn't understand, so many things that he couldn't remember, but they seemed unimportant now.

She was with him, holding him, this woman who wove in and out of his dreams. She was smiling down on him, whispering soothing words, and they were somewhere safe, somewhere quiet, in a place where the demons had disappeared.

In this silent world nothing else was real, nothing else mattered, just as long as she would always be there – this woman that he loved.

I know nothing of that which has gone before,  
Nor any memory of who I am,  
I know that I love her -  
This woman who is my anchor in a sea of turbulence,  
My saviour in the throes of madness.

Her name is lost to me,  
But her touch is more familiar than my own breath.  
We are one -  
Our minds, our bodies joined by a love, a need, beyond all knowing,  
And forever we will be together -  
There will be no parting ...

**THE END**