

# OF FIRE AND TEARS

by Katrina Relf

Vincent was alone in that darkest of dark places. Alone with the madness, alone with the rage of the beast. Although memory was gone, fear remained – fear of what was to come – of dying alone in this hell. Although he knew not why, he knew this had to be – he had to be alone.

His cries reverberated from the rocks – cries of pain, of fear, of rage. Rage against everything, but most of all – against himself. His body was racked by fever and the weakness enveloped him. His clothes were rags, his flesh torn and bruised. Hands that were no longer his clawed at spectres that were visible only to him. Clawed at the clothes on his body, unsure of why he needed them.

Suddenly, he was aware of another in this place – in his domain – an intruder. He forced his eyes to focus through the blood-red mist until he could see the shadow of someone else – a stranger, an enemy – moving slowly toward him. The tortured animal cries gave a warning, but still the shadow moved closer. With every ounce of his remaining strength he pushed himself forward, arm outstretched to strike. And then ... the voice ... frightening him – yet somehow familiar – crying out a name he knew from somewhere beyond the dying of the light – from somewhere beyond the darkness that was now engulfing him.

Catherine fell with Vincent. She wasn't sure whether he was holding her, or whether it was merely the force of his fall. He lay there, so still, so quiet. She laid her head on his chest, listening for his heartbeat – but there was nothing. Panic rose in her – blind, ice-cold panic. She had to do something – anything. She pressed her mouth to his, forcing it open and breathing her life into him.

For what seemed an eternity she lay there, holding him, willing her spirit to join his and bring him back to her. Then, at last, she heard him gasp, felt his heart flutter beneath her hand. She waited, her arms around him. She had no idea how long – time was meaningless in this place. But still his eyes remained closed. He made no movement. The only sound was the steady, slow beat of his heart.

She felt so alone. Without Vincent she WAS alone. As she had told Father, *“Without him there is nothing”*.

She took his hand in hers, rubbing it, trying to rid it of the chill that seemed to permeate this place. She touched his face, stroking back the hair that hung in damp strands around him. She kissed him – his forehead, his cheeks, his mouth.

“Vincent, come back to me”.

Suddenly his eyes flew open, his breathing quickened. He stared at her, eyes black with emotion. Anger? Fear? Desire? She wasn't sure in this darkness. His hands came up to grasp her shoulders and, in an instant, he had turned, coming to rest above her. He pulled back on to his haunches and stared. This time there was no doubt of the message in those eyes. She also knew, with every fibre of her being, that it was not Vincent who she had brought back.

He looked at her. He knew who she was and he knew what she was doing. She had touched him, kissed him, awakened feelings within him long since dead – killed by the gentleness. He had seen it in her eyes so many times – but he had denied it, denied himself, denied her. But now he had neither the strength, nor the will, to deny himself any longer. He almost fell upon her, his mouth joining with hers, his fangs tearing her lip. The taste of blood fired his blood still more.

She tried to speak and began pushing at his chest, trying to push him back.

“Vincent, let me help you”.

He looked at her through eyes reflecting the darkness within him. Her heart broke – there was no love in those eyes – barely recognition. He felt her fumbling with his jeans – undoing them. Then she was pushing her own clothes away. Was this her acceptance of him – or merely of her fate? He knew not and he cared not. He had seen the message in her eyes so many times ....

Again Catherine's body was trapped beneath him. This time his face was buried against her shoulder, the mantle of his hair across her face. Its usual clean softness was replaced by a dusty dampness. Everything about him was alien.

He knew nothing now but the fire consuming his body. With a violent urgency he was lost in the taking of her, lost to everything and everyone. As the sensations slowly subsided, Vincent was aware of Catherine beneath him, of the smallness of her. As he raised his head to look at her he saw the tears in

her eyes and the bruised, bloodied lip, and his heart broke. The nightmare had been reality. He tried to speak, to ask for her forgiveness, but he had no words.

Catherine looked at him, saw the pain in his eyes, and knew that the nightmare was over. She was no longer alone, she had found Vincent. He pulled himself away from her, sobs racking his body, afraid, ashamed, to look at her, to touch her, knowing how he had abused her softness, her beauty. But she came to him and held him until the crying stopped, whispering words of love and comfort – soothing his troubled mind.

Catherine had dressed him and dressed herself. He lay with his head in her lap, wondering at her generous heart, that could let her forgive him. Still he had no words. Would there ever be words again? Weariness was stealing over his body, over his mind. The gentle warmth of Catherine's love, of her arms, was lulling him to sleep. He prayed never to wake up.

Nearby, Catherine's crystal lay hidden in the sand.