

Beyond Love

by Katrina Relf

A Classic B&B Story of Passion and Romance

They had walked for miles, the tunnels stretching before them, away - far away from the paths that even Mouse would travel.

For so long they had been talking - lost in each other, in each other's dreams - until suddenly, without warning, the thought of their isolation, their very aloneness, made Vincent apprehensive. They had decided that they wanted to share this quiet time together, alone, but only now were the ramifications of their shared solitude becoming apparent to him. Being so alone with Catherine could be dangerous, if he allowed himself to dwell upon his feelings, if he allowed himself a more intimate nearness to her, than the holding of her hand.

Catherine knew his misgivings, his uneasiness, not because she knew his mind, but because she knew Vincent. She felt that they needed these few hours of togetherness, of undisturbed peace. She had to talk with him, to talk him through his doubts, his fear of love. For love was now a need, a longing, that had become increasingly difficult to ignore. To touch, to be touched. How could a love so strong, as all-consuming as theirs, not express itself in words of desire, in caresses, although sensual, still pure because of their depth? He would listen to her, she would make him listen, because his need, his frustration, was becoming alarmingly evident to her in the growing savagery of his killings, in the lengthening time he was lost to the darkness.

Eventually, they reached a small cave, so far beyond the catacombs that even Vincent had been unaware of its existence. Its walls were rough, jagged, but its floor was sandy and safe. Vincent had earlier plucked a burning torch from the tunnel wall, and now he placed it in one of the cave's many crevices. That torch, together with the two oil lamps that they carried, provided enough light and a little warmth for their sojourn in the cave. Vincent removed his cloak, laying it over the sandy floor. Catherine immediately sat down, grateful for the chance to rest.

"Come sit with me Vincent." She held up her hand, and, taking it, he sat down beside her. As always, she laid her head on his shoulder, but she could feel his tenseness.

Almost reluctantly, he put his arm around her. She snuggled up to him and, trying to put him at ease, she said, "You should read to me."

"Unfortunately I brought no books."

"Then let us talk."

"What would you have me say?"

Catherine could see that this was going to be long and difficult task. "Let's talk about us."

Vincent looked at Catherine, slightly inclining his head, but, for a fleeting moment, Catherine saw the uncertainty in his eyes.

"Vincent do you love me?"

"With all that I am and with all that I can ever become."

"Do you desire me?"

"Do my eyes disclose no secrets?"

"I need to hear the words, Vincent."

"Then hear them Catherine. Yes, to my shame, I do."

"Why to your shame? There is nothing shameful in desire."

"For me there is. I desired Lisa and I hurt her."

"You were young then, Vincent. She taunted you."

"For me, Catherine, desire becomes a hunger that feeds upon my need for you, and I would be lost to it - just as I am lost to the darkness, for that hunger is always there when I kill and only the killing can satiate it. How then would it use you?"

"It is different Vincent. You love me."

"In this heart, Catherine, love and desire can never be one."

"But they can Vincent. I believe they can."

"That then, Catherine, is one of our differences. The darkness will never touch you. My body will never defile your beauty."

"Vincent, I wanted our time together to bring us closer, to bring us more understanding of each other. Instead it seems to be pushing us farther apart."

"I am only trying to make you see the truth Catherine."

"Whose truth, Vincent? Yours? It's certainly not mine. All I can ever want is to hold you, to love you, to be one with you. I had hoped that you might feel the same."

"If I was not as I am, Catherine, I could want nothing more."

"To me, Vincent, you are everything. You are the man that I love."

"Look at me, Catherine. Look at me."

As if to emphasise his point Vincent stood, towering above Catherine.

"I am not wholly a man, nor am I wholly other than a man, and, because I will never be complete in either part, I am less than both."

"Vincent." She stood to face him. "You are more than a man, not less. What man would risk his life a hundred times for those he loved? What man would always put other's needs before his own?"

"Why do you see only what you want to see?"

"I see that you are the most human being I have ever known. And that is the truth - my truth."

"Our truths seem to differ."

"I don't know about truths, Vincent. I only know that I love you, and I want to show you how much."

"Catherine, you already show me in so many ways."

"You know what I mean, Vincent." She reached up, her hands gripping his shoulders. Even through the layers of clothing her touch was like fire. He pulled away from her, turning his back, trying to hide his emotions, so raw, and too near the surface.

"We should go."

"I won't run away anymore."

"I fear for you Catherine, if we stay." He half-turned his head towards her, "How can I protect you from me?"

Again Catherine reached for his shoulders, this time turning him around to face her. The pain, the fear, she saw in his eyes, tore at her heart. But they had come too far - she couldn't stop now. They might never have another chance.

"I am not afraid, Vincent. You could never hurt me."

As if not hearing her words, he continued, "Before there was always the safety of others, but now there is no one."

Again Catherine reiterated, "I could never fear you."

"But I fear the darkness within me, Catherine. I fear the depth of my hunger. The immensity of it. It tears my soul, and I am lost to it. I know nothing, I feel nothing, but my need. Catherine, you must never bear witness to that."

For a brief moment apprehension gripped Catherine, but she dismissed it instantly,

before Vincent could sense it within her.

"Vincent to receive your love, I would risk anything."

She reached up and kissed him gently on the mouth. The softness, the moistness, the very differentness of her sent shivers and fire coursing through his body. Not just her kiss, but her actual willingness to kiss him, brought tears to his eyes and an intensity to his body that frightened him.

As if reading his thoughts, Catherine again said, "I am not afraid."

"You should be afraid." He moved to a nearby wall, and leaning against it, he let his body sink down to his haunches. He knew that if he stayed, if Catherine touched him again, he would be lost, they would both be lost. And yet, in truth, he knew that it was already too late, it had been too late from the moment she had kissed him. Need of her was filling his mind, his body, like an impenetrable mist. He could no longer think of anything but Catherine, he could no longer see anything but Catherine. His body hungered for her touch, tortured him with its longing.

"Send me away Catherine. I can no longer go of my own volition. I am lost to my feelings."

"Then do as your feelings bid, Vincent."

"I can't."

If he travelled down that path, followed his instincts, he would have crushed her to him, matching her desire with his own. And that must never be.

"I do not fear your desire," she whispered.

"I do."

He rose to his feet and began to pace from wall to wall. He feared the overpowering, crushing waves that were leaving him breathless, that were pushing him beyond endurance. His throbbing hardness was paining him, straining against the tightness of his jeans. If not for his shame, his need to hide that shame from Catherine, he would have ripped them apart. But Catherine must never know, never see how the hunger tormented his body.

But she already knew.

His eyes, in the light of the torch, were wild - growing dark with his need. Catherine was wary - knowing that she must take infinite care of his feelings. She had never seen Vincent lost to the hunger and now she knew why he feared it so much. It was claiming him just as surely, just as fully, as the rages possessed him, and once possessed, didn't release him until the killing was done. She could see it, feel it circumvent his desire. She could almost feel its power within him, and she feared its strength, because she knew it

could destroy him.

He stopped pacing and was watching her now. She could see his eyes - but she could no longer read them. A low, warning rumble began in his throat. His hands were clenched into fists. She had awakened the demons within him and there was no turning back for either of them, except by denying him the very thing that she had offered him, and she knew full well the irretrievable damage that would do him. Besides whatever lay behind those eyes was probably beyond denial, beyond rational thought. There was only one answer – love.

She stepped towards him, about to take him in her arms, but he moved away.

"Do not touch me," he hissed.

He could not let her feel his trembling body, his hardness against her, his desperate longing to be within her. He couldn't stay and he couldn't leave. He could only watch her, hunger for her, and feel shame at his body that swelled with every thought of her.

His words had been soft, but Catherine knew they were still a warning. She was unsure of what to do next, of what to say. Clearly her touch disturbed him, but on what level she wasn't sure. Perhaps if she sat down? She would offer less of a threat then. She sank to the ground. His eyes followed her every movement.

"Why don't you sit with me, Vincent?"

For a long moment he stood, looking down at her, resisting the pull of her eyes, her body, until the unimaginable weight of a thousand hands pushed him toward her. He sat perfectly still, not daring to move, hardly daring to breathe. He knew he should send her away, make her leave, perhaps frighten her into leaving. But the hunger wanted her near - wanted its retribution...

Suddenly her arms were about him, and, as if with a hunger of her own, she was whispering, "Vincent, love me. Please love me."

Her words opened the floodgates and he felt he was drowning in the tidal wave that followed. His craving for her tore through him, swept over him like the ocean in a storm. With a swift, silent movement he was above her, resting on his hands and knees, astride her body. His hair was hanging down, shadowing his face like a curtain. For what seemed an eternity he neither spoke nor moved. The only sound was of his ragged breathing.

Catherine was afraid to speak to him, to touch him, afraid of his reaction. She wished she could see his eyes, but they were just deep, dark pools within the shadow of his face.

Suddenly, there was a soft growl, a glint of fangs, and he brought his head down to rest his mouth, gently, upon hers. He remained still for a few moments, as if unsure of what

to do, or perhaps just afraid of hurting her. Then, as he increased the pressure upon her mouth, his fang caught her lip. The taste of her blood inside his mouth awakened other, darker longings within him - and other fears.

He abruptly ended the kiss and lowered himself upon Catherine, pressing his lower body against hers. Instinctively his hips began to move, pushing the hardness of his arousal into her. His face was against her neck and her creamy softness made his jagged breath catch in his throat. Her scent was surrounding him and causing his heart to beat as though it would burst.

She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him closer. His movements were becoming more and more insistent, demanding, his body pressing closer to hers.

The throbbing fire in his groin was paining him, the layers of clothing between them tormenting him, so that he would tear them away. But suddenly, in that instant, he knew - he must always have known - that he couldn't let his body touch her. She must never see the shameful truth. She was so beautiful, so perfect, he could never defile her. And yet he needed her, needed, more than he had ever needed in his life, to be within her, part of her, surrounded by her. His hunger was an all-consuming fire - a fire that was burning into rage - at the loss of everything, of every dream he had ever dreamed, and yet, for a brief moment within his desire, it had seemed possible. He pulled away from Catherine's arms. No more - nothing more.

"Vincent, what is it?" She sat up, once again taking him into her arms. She could hear the quiet sound of his weeping, feel his body shaking. "Vincent, tell me."

He buried his face against her shoulder as if ashamed to look at her, ashamed for her to look upon him.

"Help me, Catherine. Please help me."

He was offering her his trust - his fear - himself - and Catherine loved him more in that moment than ever before. Tenderly, she lifted his tear-stained face.

"Vincent, with love anything is possible."

She softly kissed his cheek, brushing his hair from his face, and held him tightly until the crying stopped. Then gently, she laid him to the ground, taking off her coat and folding it as a pillow beneath his head.

Vincent lay - his body still throbbing with desire, his heart still aching with regret. His tears had dissipated the anger, but still the fire burned. Her closeness had always aroused him, but never as today. She was kneeling beside him, and now he felt the whispering of her fingers as she opened the laces of his tunic.

"Catherine." His hand touched hers.

"It's all right, Vincent. It's all right."

His body began to tremble at the anticipation of her touch. It was far more than he had ever dared to imagine. Her fingers were soft and gentle as they moved across his chest, pushing back the fabric of his shirt. She bent closer and her lips - so soft, so warm - brushed his skin again and again, slowly moving upwards until they came to rest upon his cheek, his hair, his mouth. She was touching him - her hands, her lips were touching him as he had never been touched before, and the taste of her, the feel of her, the sensation of her warm breath upon his skin was making the hunger within him grow stronger and stronger.

He had to hold her in his arms, press his body to her, feel her close against him. The hunger demanded it - his body craved it. He reached out, but she slipped away, her hand moving lower down his body.

With a sharp intake of breath he begged her, "Please Catherine. No." Although in truth, every part of him was pleading, was begging for her touch.

"I am betrayed by my body, Catherine. It shames me." His voice was breathless - a whisper.

"There is no shame in you, Vincent."

He was filled with a fear as deep as the abyss, and yet the longing, the yearning, the need, were inconceivable, were uncontrollable now. It was a need beyond all needs. He had to possess her - she had to possess him. He had no power to stop her. The coolness of her hand upon his burning flesh was too exquisite even for thought. He closed his eyes and was lost to the feeling. He had no idea of time or place. He was somewhere distant, beautiful. Touched by Catherine, loved by Catherine, surrounded by Catherine. It was warm and soft and safe. He was lost within her - deep within her - forever...

The hunger was diffused in an explosion of a thousand stars.

He was loved. She had seen him and all that he was - and she loved him.

"Catherine."

He could hardly speak, tears began be-dimming his eyes, threatening to overflow. She moved into his arms and he held her to him, never wanting to let her go. Gone was the terrible yearning - now her closeness brought him only peace.

"Catherine, have I been dreaming?"

"No, Vincent. It is all real."

"It was so beautiful, Catherine. Beautiful beyond beauty. I have no words to tell you how I love you - to tell you how I feel."

"I think you have already told me, Vincent. Perhaps even shown me."

"That you could see me as I am and yet be close to me, touch me. I find that incomprehensible."

"Vincent, I love you. To me you are beautiful. You must believe that."

"At this moment, Catherine, I could believe in miracles. Anything is possible."

"Now we are truly one, Vincent. Now there must be no more fear. What we have found is beyond everything - even beyond love."

They lay there - in the afterglow of their love - in the warm glow of the burning torch. At last they had found peace. At last, they had found each other.

END