

Diana:

"In the Forests of the Night"

by Lyn Roewade

Personal Journal

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Vincent. Why the hell does everything have to come back to Vincent?

"The only thing missing from her life was the perfect man. You know about attack victims. They have to find a new way to look at things or else they can't go on."

God, Bennett, sound familiar?

Attack victims. Yeah, I know about attack victims. Cathy Chandler knew about attack victims. Was it in the same way? Is that why I've felt so drawn to this case, tied to it, from the first moment Joe Maxwell asked for my help? I knew about Chandler. I'd read those papers, three years ago, when it first happened. And then I'd closed myself off again and gone back to work on the Domingues case. I solved that one, cracked it wide open and everybody lived happily ever after.

Do I even believe in happily ever after anymore?

"The only thing missing from her life was the perfect man."

Is that why I'm drawn to him? Is that why I keep wanting to help him, protect him?

Vincent. It does all come back to him. Every thought, every word, every dream . . . every piece of evidence. Dammit, how am I supposed to protect him? How am I supposed to protect *me*? Why do I want to let him in, when I don't even really know him? Is that why? Because I don't really know him? Except I do. But I never let Mark in. Or David. Or Jesse. Or even my family. Not after . . .

"They have to find a new way to look at things or else they can't go on."

That's what I told Joe this morning, when he came to see me, to tell me about the attack on that damned drug lab. My first thought was to protect Vincent. I'm sitting here writing this, and I don't know whether to laugh or cry or scream or just tear my apartment to pieces like I did all those years ago. I was sitting there, saying those words, and wondering who I was really talking about -- Cathy Chandler, or me.

I wonder if *she* knows. Do you, Cathy? Do you know what's driving me? Is it Vincent? Is it you? Is it the memories? Is it a dozen other things I can't even name because the very thought of them makes me want to curl up and hide in a deep dark place where nothing can touch me, nothing can hurt me, no one can make me do anything I don't want to do.

Except it's too late for that. I didn't want to feel, but he's made me feel. I didn't want to get deeper, but I find myself doing just that. Why? Why do I keep doing this to myself? Why do I think I can help Vincent find his son, battle his demons, battle a demon like Gabriel, when I can't even face my own?

Fear. That's what it comes down to. Face the fear. Confront it, win over it, and it won't control you. Dammit,

I thought I had done that!!

Help me, Cathy. Help me find what I've hidden away. Help me find that light that used to be in me, the one I've replaced with other people's lights, with every case.

Except this one. Is that what scares me? Is that what scared you? He's incredible. Unbelievable. A dream, a fantasy, a nightmare, all rolled into one. Beautiful and dangerous, and gentle and terrifying. God, terrifying. That first night, first couple of nights . . . Did you ever see him like that, Cathy? Did it scare you and draw you at the same time, like it does to me? Crouching in a corner, not daring to move, almost not daring to breathe, gun clutched in my hand, seeing what those claws could do . . . And yet the thought of killing him, hurting him, giving away his secret, never even occurred to me. Was it you, Cathy? Were you protecting him? Were you protecting me? Not from him, but from myself?

Crouched in a corner, shaking, not daring to move or even breathe . . . god, I remember that. I remember. And not from that night. From before. Long before. I remember the smells, the sounds, the taste of fear and bile and that dirty rag shoved in my mouth, and the bright light of the flashlights when he ran and they found me, and the hospital smells and

God, will I ever forget? *Can* I ever forget? Can I ever move on? Let it go, let go of the hate and the dreams, and the haunting, fleeting little thoughts and worries. Is that why Vincent is in my life now? Is that why I've felt such a strong connection to him all these weeks, even before I met him? Knowing him, understanding, seeing . . . It's never been so clear before. Not 'til now. Not 'til him. Like a bright flame in my mind, replacing the creeping darkness, but warmer, clearer than any other case before. Like he said: there was no imagining him.

Him. Vincent. Almost afraid to say his name aloud, that it will break the spell or wake me up. Say it out loud, Bennett. Vincent.

I still halfway believe I was dreaming the whole thing: finding him, nursing him, talking to him. Even with Joe sitting on my couch telling me about the attacks and this little voice telling me of course it was him, of course he had a reason, urging him on and at the same time terrified for him. Like in the tunnel, when he saved my life. Did you feel that way, Cathy? Did you feel anything like this confusion of emotions and needs and wants? Am I getting this from you, or is it me? Is it some deep part of me, the part that hasn't moved on, that wants to and sees a mirror, a savior, a possibility in Vincent?

What do I want from him?

What does he want?

MEMORY: Night-time and being scared, terrified, listening as he gets ready to hit again, and again, and I know what's coming next and I can't stop it . . .

Shit. No. Not now. I can't do this now. I won't. Cathy needs me. Vincent needs me. Their baby needs me.

Will I ever have a baby? Will I ever know that kind of love, Cathy; the kind you and Vincent had? Is that what I want, what draws me, or is it something else?

"The only thing missing from her life was the perfect man."

Perfect. That's what he is, isn't he, Cathy? Except not in the way any little girl was raised to believe. Protector, guardian, lover, confidante . . . perfect. Perfect and out of reach. Always? Do I want him in touch, or is this another shield for me? Is this why I turned Mark away? Because I saw in Vincent, even before I met him, when I was just piecing him together from your inscriptions and rosebush and impressions of memories, what Mark could never be?

I know the answer to that. It's "No." That's not why, not really. Vincent was . . . the clincher, the last tumbler

in the lock. I knew from day one with Mark that it would end that way. We were . . . we were good. But good isn't good enough. He could never quite understand when I worked, why I got so intense, why it mattered so deeply and I couldn't let it go, even for one night. Different worlds. Shit, ain't that the truth? But you had different worlds too . . .

No. No, that's not true either. Your worlds were different only in the physical. Vincent knew you. He understood, didn't he, Cathy? He knew and he cared, and he saw. Mark could never see. I keep searching for someone who can. Vincent can, can't he, Cathy? Of everyone I've ever met, he can see the connection I feel towards those victims. He just doesn't know why. Joe doesn't know why. I don't want him to. I don't want to see that pity. From either of them. Did you see it, Cathy? Did you close yourself off because of it, or did Vincent save you from that? Could he have saved me from that?

I'm cold, Cathy. That's what I'm afraid of. I'm so cold, and hard, and far away. I don't want to be, not anymore. Figures I'd find the one person I can relate to, and I can relate because he's just lost what made him able to relate, and that's why nothing could ever happen anyway. Do I want it to? Do I want something more? The dreams don't tell me. The dreams are frustration, anger, a need to help. I dreamt of her too when I was working her case. Can't even say her name now. Little girl. Poor little girl. That's what everyone calls her. What I call her. Did you ever fail someone, Cathy? Did you ever fail a little girl whose parents thought you were her only hope but you knew, all along you knew, how the story would end. But I tried anyway. Dammit, I *tried*! And then I pushed her away and closed it off and I pretend it doesn't tear my soul into pieces, that I didn't collapse and scream and break things when I got the call, that going to your autopsy wasn't the only way to keep myself sane.

Anger. Rage. Frustration. Fear. Terror. Guilt.

Oh, yes, Vincent, I do know. And you know too, don't you, Cathy? Watching them take your baby, knowing you were dying even as you found Vincent on that roof. Am I failing you, Cathy? Is that why I apologized, seeing your tears in that rosebush? Was I sorry for trying to defame your memory with Joe, or because he didn't buy it and that meant I'd failed Vincent? Will I fail Vincent? Will I fail the baby I've never seen, the baby you had just a moment or two to see? Will I fail myself?

Justin. It all comes back to him, to that sonofabitch, now. Justin and Gabriel. Two of a kind, except that would actually be insulting Justin. I don't even know Gabriel, but I feel such animosity towards him. More than towards all the others, the ones I saw Justin's face on when I was hunting them.

Expunging my guilt. That's what I'm doing, isn't it, Cathy? Survivor's guilt. Victim's guilt. I know it wasn't my fault, I know what he did, I've seen it so many times since then. Did you ever really believe it, Cathy? That it wasn't you? That you couldn't have stopped it? I can't. I tell myself and they tell me and everyone tells me, but I can't. I still keep thinking if I had just done something differently, told him no in a different way, made it clearer, run faster, hit him harder, carried my goddamn fucking gun like I was supposed to . . .

"Have to find a new way to look at things or else they can't go on."

Have I found that new way? Or have I been replaying that same nightmare all these years? Chasing the bad guys, catching them and putting them away, but I still feel empty. Cold and empty. And alone. So alone. And I know it's my own fault there, I don't let anyone in. But finding someone who would understand, who wouldn't treat me like glass . . . I never told them. Any of them. Not even Mark, for all the "little glimpses" I let him have. I couldn't. I was scared.

I'm not scared with Vincent. Because he knows. I can see it in his eyes. He knows and he would understand. And he's alone, just like me. Maybe that's why I need to help him. Maybe by helping him I feel I'll be helping myself. Maybe I *will* be helping myself. Maybe when this is done I won't be so cold inside. Why not? I've tried everything else. I've tried making up for that guilt, for surviving, by getting the other bad

guys, helping the other victims.

How long has it been, Bennett? How long since I even thought about going to a meeting? Do I even have the number, or know where to look?

Is that what you keep trying to show me, Cathy? Is that why you sent me to that graveyard to find Vincent? I know it was you, it felt like you, and nothing else makes sense. I'm supposed to help him. Is he supposed to help me, too? Are you protecting strangers even now, Cathy? Is that why all your roses are blooming?

12:30. If I'm going to help anyone, I have to get my ass to that hospital. A survivor. Point one to Vincent's conscience, but if I'm right and these SOBs are tied somehow to Gabriel . . . He had the power to blow up Elliot Burch, he almost killed Vincent at least once that I know of. If he finds out about this, guesses the source like Joe did . . . won't even think about what he'll do if he ever finds out about me.

Cathy, I hope your powers as a Guardian Angel are a hell of a lot stronger than Gabriel's personal helping demon. We're going to need all the help we can get.

End Journal Entry.