

THE VOICE OF THE CHARMER

by Lyn Roewade

Vincent tapped on the glass, and Catherine opened the door.

"Come in," she said happily, "and warm yourself by the fire. I'm in the middle of concocting our dinner, so get warm and make yourself comfortable."

He draped his cloak over the back of the couch, and rubbed his hands together as he approached the fire. "What are you making?" he asked, as she headed for the kitchen.

"Oh, it's a surprise - you'll see."

A surprise; that meant he should remain where he was. If she needed help in the kitchen, she'd ask for it. He allowed his imagination to delve among the possibilities, so that even his thoughts were delicious.

The phone rang. Catherine appeared at the kitchen door. "My hands are sticky. Would you mind answering it? There's a message pad and pencil on the table."

Tentatively, he lifted the receiver and uttered a preliminary "Hullo?"

A man's voice said, "Who's this?"

"My name is Vincent. Catherine is busy, may I take a message?" He was impressed by his own boldness.

"Oh wh... Yes. I'm Joe Maxwell, could you ask Cathy to remember she has a deposition? She has to be there by 9:45 tomorrow morning. I just wanted to remind her."

"Yes, of course. I shall pass your message to her. Thank you, Mr. Maxwell, and good evening."

"Er---- yes, good evening."

He made a note on the pad, after replacing the receiver. Phone calls were not commonplace in his life, but they invariably amused him, especially when the person at the other end had never seen him.

"What did Joe want? I heard you say '*Mr. Maxwell*'."

"He wished to remind you to be present at 9:45 tomorrow morning, Catherine, for a deposition."

"Oh, he's just fussing -- he '*knows*' I'll be there. Thanks anyway, Vincent."

"You are welcome."

He sat on the couch, his long legs stretched out in front, and leafed through a book he had taken from the bookcase. Since his recovery from his breakdown, he savoured each small pleasure more than ever.

Various sounds could be heard from the kitchen. A twinkle lit his blue eyes; he found Catherine's enthusiasm in culinary matters to be quite delightful.

The phone rang again. He listened, but she didn't seem to hear it. Well, it could do no harm, as he could not be seen by any stranger; he picked up the phone.

"Hello."

"Hello ... Wwho is that?" It was a woman's voice, and she sounded startled.

"My name is Vincent. Catherine is unable to answer the phone at present. May I ask who this is?"

"Oh, It's Jenny Aronson, Cathy's friend."

"Ah yes, she has talked to me about you. I assure you, it has all been favourable."

"She hasn't mentioned you, Vincent. How long have you known her?"

He smiled to himself. "For more than two years now."

"Please go on talking, Vincent."

He was startled. "Why, Jenny? Is everything all right?"

"Yes, very much so - you have a lovely voice. I could listen to it for hours. I'll bet you and Catherine talk a lot."

Gratifying as this was, he was taken aback. "We do indeed, for hours. And frequently, I read to her."

"What'd you read?"

"Poetry of various kinds; classical literature; some of my favourite novels. Do you like these too?"

"Yes, I do; but Cathy had only a passing interest in them before. With a voice like that though - you'd make the telephone book sound sexy. No wonder she hasn't discussed you with me - she's been keeping you to herself! I wonder if the rest of you is as gorgeous as your voice?"

Vincent was both startled and a little embarrassed. He had no experience in this charming art of flirtation, and was somewhat breathless. Cautiously, he offered a few non-committal remarks.

Catherine wiped her hands and came out of the kitchen. If Vincent could blush, he was very near doing so - but he wasn't unhappy, only surprised.

"Who is it?" she whispered.

He put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Your friend, Jenny Aronson." He spoke into the phone again. "Excuse me, Jenny. I am enjoying our conversation, but Catherine is here now; would you like to speak to her?"

Catherine was trying to grab the phone from him, but he was using his height to prevent this.

"Oh, I'll speak to her in a moment. Can't you and I chat some more? I'm falling in love with that voice!"

This time Vincent took the phone away from his ear and stared at it; she was able to snatch the receiver and say, "Hello, Jen----what's going on?"

"Hi, Cath. What's going on is, you've been hiding this guy from me, and now I know why."

"You do?"

"Oh, yes - that is *'the sexiest'* voice either of us has ever heard. Admit it now!"

"Okay, okay - but did you tell him that? He's a bit embarrassed."

"Just asked if he's as stunning to look at as he sounds. And I said I was falling in love with that voice. Surely he gets compliments like that all the time?"

"Only from me." Catherine could hardly stifle her giggles. "And he *'is'* beautiful, and I'm already in love. With that voice," she added hastily.

Vincent, by way of changing the subject, was sliding his arms around her from behind, holding her against his powerful chest. He lowered his face to kiss her hair. This was a very sweet, if indirect revenge, and he was relishing it. Her friend flirted with him and now they were discussing him. Very well; he would distract her as much as possible.

"Jen, what was it (*just a moment*) wait, Vincent, hold on now!"

"I '*am*' holding on, Catherine," he said blandly.

Jenny's delighted laughter floated into the room.

"I'll call you around lunchtime tomorrow, okay? Now, I must stop infringing on Vincent's time. And '*if*' I '*ever*' meet him, I'll take him into a corner and have him all to myself."

"Okay!"

"Ask him if he's got a brother, for me."

"Yes, but Vincent is unique!" and Catherine hung up the phone, turning to face her love.

"She flirted with you! And when she does see you one day, she'll flirt more."

"What difference can that make, Catherine?" And Vincent stopped her mouth with his own.

END