

A SAFE HAVEN

by Lynn Murphy

(from Crystal Cavern 11)

Catherine was subdued and quiet again, and Vincent was slowly going out of his mind trying to get through to her, because she had closed off her mind to him.

"Catherine," he pleaded, his eyes fixed on her lovely face, which today seemed as remote and withdrawn as an ice maiden.

"Is it that you no longer love me?" Even making himself say those words cut deep as a knife, but he had to know. Turning her head away, she said woodenly.

"Leave me alone, Vincent. You're right, I don't love you any more."

His face was as transparent as a child's in his hurt. "May I ask what I did to make you stop loving me?" he asked in barely more than a whisper.

Completely refusing to look at him, she said with a shrug. "It just happened. I have a headache. I'm going home now, Vincent. I think it would be better if we didn't see each other again. Goodbye."

Without looking at him at all, she turned and walked away and his sensitive hearing traced her footsteps as she walked homeward along the stone walkways for quite some distance. Father came in quietly.

"What is wrong with Catherine, Vincent? Did you have an argument?" he asked.

Vincent turned to look at him and his eyes were streaming with tears. "She no longer loves me," he whispered.

Father crossed to his adopted son and put his arms around him. "Did you quarrel?" he repeated.

Vincent shook his head wearily.

There was a frown on Father's face.

"What is it, Father?" asked Vincent.

"Did Catherine finish with you?" Father asked.

Vincent nodded, his eyes filling again.

"Then that doesn't explain why she was crying as she left," said Father.

"She no longer loves me," said Vincent in a breaking voice.

"Well, I don't believe her," said Father firmly. "Give her a day or two, Vincent, and then try contacting her."

Vincent lay miserably on his bed staring at the ceiling. Even the mercy of oblivion in sleep was denied him, and now his eyes were sore and his mind ached. He had thought and thought about what could have happened to change the spontaneous love Catherine had been giving him only days previously.

Tentatively he felt for Catherine through their Bond but he seemed to hit a brick wall. She was blocking him very solidly. He sighed, he would have given anything to know what she was thinking.

During the next few days Vincent was like a zombie. He was there in body but definitely not in mind. Oh, he did all the usual things all right, but none of the enthusiasm he normally showed.

Finally, when Father spoke very sharply to him about something, he snapped. He turned around without saying a word and left. He spent the rest of the daylight hours by the waterfall, holding his rose in his hands and trying desperately to wish himself back in time. All it brought him was tears, because he felt her physically but couldn't tell how she was feeling.

When it became dark, he climbed up to her balcony, but she wasn't home. But even being around her home made him feel closer to her. He put the book with the message he had written, down next to her rose bush and sat in the shadows to wait for her to return.

When he heard her front door open he made himself as unobtrusive as he could and waited. Sure enough she came out onto her balcony and gazed out over the city, and every fiber of his being urged him to go to her and take her in his arms. But using will power, he stayed very still as she noticed the book.

"Vincent," she whispered. She looked around quickly for him but he had gone.

She looked in the book and read the message and her eyes filled with tears. She sat down wearily and began to cry. Vincent came back very quickly on seeing her so upset and put his arms around her. With a little cry Catherine clung to him and cried harder.

"Vincent, I'm so very sorry," she sobbed. "What I did was so cruel and unnecessary and all it did was hurt us both very badly. I should enjoy to the full the time we have and not begrudge someone else your love and our son." Vincent was completely flummoxed.

"Catherine, I don't understand what you are talking about," he said. "Please say that you haven't stopped loving me, because I can tell you now that I would rather be dead than live without your love." Catherine put her arms tightly around Vincent's neck and kissed his mouth.

"Come inside, darling," she said. "I need to talk to you and I'll explain what I've been doing to us both."

Seated on her couch she had fast to both of his hands.

"Vincent, I'm scared," she said. "I've had the same dream three times now. In it I'm abducted by the man Gabriel and he drugs me and tries to get me to tell him what I know about his organization, but I won't tell him anything. Soon though the doctor working for him discovers I'm pregnant."

Here Vincent's eyes went wide and she kissed him.

"I'm not," she assured him. "Anyway, to carry on. At first this Gabriel wants to keep on with the drugs and the questioning but then you almost rescue me, he gets a look at you and that changes the whole game. Then he wants to keep the baby. I suppose he thinks that it might have your strength or something. So I'm kept healthy, as an incubator for the baby and it's born and that my usefulness gone and I'm disposed of."

Vincent's face was full of horror and he cuddled Catherine tighter to his body.

"Gabriel takes the baby away in a helicopter and I die in your arms. After that there is an inquiry and a woman called Diana is the detective put on the case. You get the baby back in the end, Vincent, but this Diana falls in love with you, and because she is in danger Above, she comes to live in the Tunnels."

Catherine's eyes were streaming with tears.

"I was being selfish," she said brokenly. "I thought that if we were not together any longer, there would be no need for you to come to rescue me and no baby. Then, even though I would die, this Diana wouldn't get to you. I hate her, Vincent. I've never met her, but I hate her. I don't want her to have you and our son. If I'm to die I wanted to leave you as I discovered you. Separate from my world. Then in the future if you found love again, I wouldn't know anything about it and you could start with a clean slate and have your children

with her." She was sobbing now and clinging to Vincent.

"Catherine, how can you talk about dying so casually," he asked in horror. "Forget this woman, if I can't have you then I don't want anyone else. The last few days have proved that to me. And if you don't have my babies, no one else ever will. I'm yours, Catherine - I thought you must know that. If this is all to happen because of your work then the answer is very simple. You give up your job."

He got a handkerchief out of his pocket and carefully dried her tears with it.

"Darling, do you love me enough to give up your world for me? We could be married and you could live down in my world and I could keep you safe. Please! I couldn't bear to lose you for anything. The last few days have been hell and I have just about sent everyone mad."

"Of course I love you enough to come and live in our world, Vincent," said Catherine. "But I'd feel bad leaving Joe in the lurch."

"Catherine, in order to enjoy the luxury of feeling anything you have to be alive," Vincent reminded her gently. He looked at her.

"I want this sorting out now," he said firmly. "I cannot take the chance that tomorrow you will change your mind. There is far too much at stake, Catherine. Please ring Joe now, at his home and tell him that I have had the chance of a transfer to another city, that I have asked you to marry me and that we leave in two days' time."

Catherine's eyes shone and she reached for the phone. With Vincent watching her, she rang Joe and gave the information that Vincent had told her to. To her surprise, Vincent took the phone and talked to Joe as casually as if he did it all the time. When he passed the phone back to Catherine and she told Joe she would be in the following day for her things, Vincent was on a high. Catherine was going to be his wife and give up her world to live in his.

"Tomorrow I will be shadowing you," he said. "I cannot take the chance of this Gabriel getting near you. You are mine, Catherine, and I will keep you safe for the rest of my life."

Solemnly, he seated her on the end of her couch and dropping onto one knee asked her very romantically to become his wife. Catherine accepted with the same Olde Worlde flair as Vincent had made the proposal.

Afterwards, she kissed him and caressed his face, trying to make up for the most miserable three days of their lives.

The following day as she went into the District Attorney's Office to collect her things and make her farewells, she could feel Vincent was close. Joe and her friends were very sorry to see her go, especially at such short notice.

"So, we even get to miss your wedding, Radcliffe," said Joe.

"Afraid so," said Catherine. "Vincent had this chance of a great career move so we took it."

"Your Vincent sound like a really nice guy, Radcliffe," said Joe. "I hope you'll be very happy. You kept him dark, didn't you?" Catherine smiled.

"Yeah, we've been together now since just before I started here, Joe. So while you were telling me that I needed to get a down-to-earth guy instead of all those artsy types you seemed to think I went for, I was smiling to myself, because I already had Vincent. He's the best of both worlds, because we enjoy poetry and concerts, but he's all the man I could ever want or need."

"What's he like?" asked Rita.

"He's got blond hair and very blue eyes, a fantastic physique, and he's about six feet six inches tall," said

Catherine proudly. "He's also very warm, kind and gentle and protective of me, and he makes me feel happy and safe and I love him to bits."

Joe smiled. "That we have guessed," he said gently. "He has a fantastic voice, Radcliffe." He cuddled her and gave her a kiss. "Keep in touch," he said. "We'd love to know how you were doing. You've been great to work with, and I know I am going to miss you, if you ever need a reference then I'm your man."

Catherine smiled at him gratefully. "Thanks, Joe, but I think that Vincent and I might go for a family soon," she said. "We're both in our thirties now so I figure its about time to start thinking booties."

Rita hugged her. "Well, good luck and be happy," she said. "I'm going to miss you too, Cathy. Let us know where to send the booties too when the time comes, won't you?"

John Moreno came through. "Did I hear that you're leaving us?" he asked.

For some reason Catherine felt a chill go through her. "Yes," she said. "I'm getting married and moving to another city."

"Well, good luck," he said. "We'll miss you, Catherine Chandler."

Catherine murmured something and left, wishing she knew why she had felt nervous around him suddenly. She decided to go via the Tunnels because she suddenly couldn't wait to get back to Vincent again, so she went into the next building that Vincent had said had a basement leading Below. As she went into the building two men followed her inside. She hurried along silently, her mind screaming out to Vincent.

Just as one of the men tried to detain her, the wall burst outwards and suddenly Vincent was there. He quickly dispatched both men, swatting them just as if they were flies. Then he gathered Catherine close.

"Are you all right, Catherine?" he asked gently. "Come, we can go home now."

Down in his chamber he cuddled her reassuringly. "I think that tonight we will go up to your apartment and collect your things," he said. "I no longer feel safe having you in the world Above."

Catherine shivered. "No, that attack this morning was too much of a coincidence. I think those men will think they have me for a while. So if I go up via my basement and get my things together now, if they come looking for me later, when the first men don't appear with me, they will think that I left like I told Joe I was going and they won't know where to look for me, will they? So if you would wait in the basement for me to help carry my stuff, I will go and get it now."

Vincent nodded slowly. "Yes, you are right, Catherine. So bring anything you want to have besides your clothing, and I can carry it here for you." He kissed her mouth. "Are you regretting this now, Catherine?" he asked.

"No," she said firmly. "I'm looking forward to living with you in your world, darling."

Up in her apartment, she packed all her clothes into her suitcases and the gifts he'd given her too. She also took one or two of the things she most loved. When the apartment looked devoid of her personality, she locked the door and feeling a little sad, she headed for the elevator.

Vincent took all the heavy things from her after she struggled with them into the basement.

"I'm sorry that I couldn't come up and carry this for you," he said apologetically.

"That's okay, darling," she said reassuringly. "I managed okay."

Seated on Vincent's bed at last, she gave a sigh of relief.

"Now I feel safe, darling," she said happily, looking around at his chamber which was to be her chamber too now. Father came into the chamber.

"Ah, hello, Catherine," he said, smiling at her. "I told him that I felt that you hadn't stopped loving him." Catherine smiled back.

"No, I don't think that I ever could stop loving him, Father. But I was afraid of what I kept dreaming. I should have told him straight away because he found me the solution."

"Which is?" asked Father.

"Well, I dreamed very clearly, that I would die," she said, "but it was through my work, an investigation that someone didn't want me to succeed in. So Vincent came up with the solution. We rang my boss and told him that my boyfriend had been offered a better job in another city, he had asked me to marry him, and we leave tomorrow. I've just been up in my apartment collecting my personal effects and Vincent helped me bring them here. So now, unless you object, I plan to make my home down here."

"Did he ask you to marry him?" asked Father, looking from Catherine to Vincent.

"I did, Father," said Vincent, "and Catherine said yes. So now it remains for us to ask if you will perform the ceremony for us?"

"Isn't this all a little sudden?" asked Father. "Are you sure you shouldn't think about it a little longer first, before jumping into lifelong commitment?"

"What is there to consider?" asked Vincent in puzzlement. "We are very much in love, and the last three days drove that home to us. I want nothing more than to marry Catherine and share my life with her, and hopefully, later share children with her."

Catherine put Vincent's hand to her cheek and rubbed her face lovingly against it.

"Father, I'm just not marrying Vincent to escape," she said. "I was thrilled when he asked me to marry him. The reason I tried to break up with him was because I thought I was going to die - and I couldn't take the other part of my dream which suggested that he would become some other woman's focus during the murder inquiry following my death. I was very, very jealous. Vincent is **MY** love. **MINE**. And although I should be happy that if I died he could someone else, I wasn't."

Vincent gathered her into his arms. "And since I definitely don't want anyone else, I did what was the only thing possible, Father. I asked her to give up her career for me."

He kissed her soft hair. "Bless her, she did. On the way home two men tried to abduct her, so I think we moved none too soon. Since I wanted to do this properly, I asked Catherine to become my wife. Now I will protect her with my life."

He looked at Father. "I hoped that you would be happy for me that Catherine is to be my wife. You must have realized that we wanted to spend our lives together."

Father answered him quietly. "I know that you two were in love and somehow that seemed all right. I somehow felt that it could be kept on a mental, not physical, level which was short-sighted of me. Vincent, are you sure that you and Catherine...?"

Vincent laughed. "Yes, Father, Catherine and I are physically compatible. Making love with Catherine takes me higher than I ever dreamed possible because of our connection. When we are married, I want us to try for a baby straight away, because I would dearly love a child that was mine and Catherine's."

He looked at Father. "Catherine and I are in our thirties now, Father, two grown up people who know their own minds. I know that now, having known how it should feel, there can never be another woman. I love Catherine to the total exclusion of any other and I desire her in the same way too. So her fears of me learning to love this other woman from her dreams is completely without foundation."

He gazed solemnly into Catherine's eyes. "If I had lost you, My Dearest Love, I would track down whoever

killed you until I found them, I would tear them apart and then I would kill myself."

Catherine cuddled him to her. "Let's forget I ever dreamed it," she said. "Let's forget the word Above now too and concentrate on our future together."

She turned to speak to Father. "Father, would you marry us please? We do know what is involved in marriage and we do feel that we love each other for all eternity, don't we, darling?"

Vincent nodded emphatically.

Catherine was offered the guest chamber until their marriage, but she wanted Vincent, uncaring if it raised eyebrows. As she slipped into the safe haven of his arms, she knew she was home at last.

END