

MISSING YOU

by Lynn Murphy

(from Crystal Cavern 12)

Jenny and Nancy Tucker had persuaded Catherine to take the children and go and spend a girl's get together weekend at Westport. Catherine went reluctantly, because she rarely left her home and Vincent nowadays, and she sensed that although he urged her to go, his heart wasn't really in it.

"Vincent and Dev can have a nice quiet weekend, no us and no kids," Jenny said cheerfully.

So they'd piled into Devin's car, since it was bigger than Jenny's, and headed off to Westport.

"It's going to be a bit of a squeeze," laughed Nancy. "I've borrowed lots of camp beds for all the children. Rebecca has three, Jenny's got three, Julie has four and I've got two. But you hit the jackpot Cathy, five of your own and our work mate's twins."

"Yeah well, always liked to go one better, didn't you, Cathy," said Rebecca cheerfully, ducking as Catherine threw a cushion at her.

"You might see Buddy this weekend," said Rebecca.

"Oh yeah? How is he?" asked Catherine. "How is he liking married life?"

"He's divorced again now," said Rebecca. "Shame you're happily married, Cathy. He still talks about you." Catherine smiled at her friend.

"I'm very happily married, Rebecca."

"You have lovely kids," said Rebecca. "Where do they get those wonderfully blue eyes? Your husband?"

"Yeah," Catherine said proudly.

"And the glorious blonde hair? I'm definitely into blondes, narcissism perhaps?"

"No," said Jenny. "Vincent is gloriously blonde. My Devin on the other hand is dark. So I have a preference for dark-haired guys."

Over the afternoon the five women chatted and played with the children. Catherine sat cuddling Elli who was missing Vincent a lot.

"I know, darling. I miss Daddy too." Catherine said softly against her youngest daughter's ear. "Never mind, we go home tomorrow. Don't you like playing with all the others?"

Elli considered. "I like the swings," she said. "Charles pushed me until I went high in the sky. But I wish Daddy was here."

"So do I, darling," said Catherine wistfully. "Tell you what, you think of Daddy really hard and I bet he can feel it." Elli closed her eyes tight and thought of Vincent, and then she looked at Catherine and she was smiling.

"I can feel Daddy thinking of me," she said, looking much brighter now. Catherine hugged her.

When at last they put the children to bed, Elli and Jake had elected to sleep with Catherine and Jenny. They did the rounds of all their cherubs, kissing them goodnight and tucking them in. Charles had Dimitri sleeping in his bed with him. Dimitri thought he was really big sleeping with his big brother. Levi and Nathan were already half-asleep. They weren't used to so much fresh air and exercise, and had been running around like puppies chasing a ball all afternoon. Catherine kissed them, and Levi opened his eyes.

"Love you, Mommy," he said sleepily. "Wish Daddy was here."

"Yes, Levi, so do I," she said softly. "Never mind darling, we'll see him tomorrow, won't we. I bet he's missing us too."

He was missing them.

"Vincent," said Devin for the third time. Vincent was obviously far away. "Vincent! Earth to Vincent, come in please." Vincent suddenly realized that Devin was talking to him.

"Sorry Devin, what were you saying?"

"Oh, only that the moon was made of green cheese," said Devin with a grin. "But I knew you weren't listening."

"I'm sorry," said Vincent apologetically. "I am terrible company, aren't I? It is too quiet by far. I am missing Catherine badly and I am missing my children. Most weekends the eldest three are gone, but not Catherine and the four youngest ones. How did I ever manage before, Devin? How did I fill my time?"

"I've often wondered, Vincent, old son," said Devin. "What did you do with yourself in the evenings, all of our growing up years?"

"Played chess with Father," said Vincent. "Took long walks in the darkness, read endless books on every subject under the sun. There seemed plenty to do before I met Catherine. But since she moved down here to stay and we had our children, my evenings have been filled with domestic things. And Catherine, she is my focus really."

Devin reached out a hand and put it on his arm. "I love Jenny, very, very much, and I'm missing her too, but you are like a lost soul, aren't you? Don't you ever feel that you need to get a break from each other?"

Vincent looked at him as if he had gone mad. "No, not ever," he said. "Catherine is my life, my being. The only consolation is that she is not enjoying herself either. I know that should not make me feel good but it does. And also I have discovered that one of my children is able to link with me too."

"I bet I know which one," said Devin. "It's Elli, isn't it?"

Vincent nodded. "Today she was thinking of me and missing me, and I could feel it."

"Where was your mind when I spoke to you earlier? As if I really need to ask," said Devin smiling at him.

"With Catherine," Vincent admitted. "We were sending each other our love."

Nancy had made coffee for everyone, and all of them were reminiscing and swapping gossip and relaxing.

"Your kids are wonderfully well-behaved," said Nancy. "Your eldest two took care of all the little ones this afternoon, Cathy. How old did you say they were?"

"Eight," said Catherine.

"Eight going on twenty-five," said Jenny. "They're fantastic kids, Nancy."

"Who keeps them in line?" asked Rebecca.

"Vincent," said Catherine. "But he doesn't hit them. He talks to them instead. Elli's missing him very much and so is Levi. They usually stick close to him at home."

"Where are everyone's husbands tonight?" asked Jenny. Rebecca giggled.

"On a boys weekend," she said. "Well mine and Nancy's anyway."

"Mine has gone to visit his folks for the week," said Julie. "Where's yours tonight, Jenny?"

"Dev will be round at Vincent's and probably trying to cheer him up," said Jenny. "They are brothers."

"Why?" asked Nancy.

"Because Vincent and Cathy are as sloppy as newlyweds," said Jenny cheerfully. "And I bet he's missing her a lot."

"Well, I miss him a lot," admitted Catherine ruefully.

"You have got it bad, haven't you?" said Nancy sympathetically.

"Is he cute?" asked Rebecca curiously. "Have you met him, Nancy?"

"Oh, he's definitely cute," said Nancy. "Tall, blonde wavy hair and very blue eyes and a fantastic voice, low and husky."

"He sounds Swedish or something," said Julie.

"No, he's a native New Yorker," said Catherine.

"What does he do?" asked Rebecca.

"Teaches," said Jenny. "He makes a lot of educational tapes for young children, learning to read, telling the time, etc."

"I've got one of his tapes," said Rebecca as light dawned. "Steve left it in our kitchen, Nancy."

Nancy fetched the tape and put it in the player and soon Vincent's voice came into the room.

"Wow! I see what you mean," said Julie. "He sounds gorgeous, Cathy."

"He is gorgeous," said Catherine.

"Aside from whether the tapes work, I'd just enjoy listening to his voice," said Julie. Catherine giggled.

"I said that I thought he should make poetry tapes or something, but he looked horrified and said he hoped I was joking."

"Those tapes are very good," said Rebecca. "Steve is doing much better with his reading now. I hadn't realized that they were done by your husband until you said just now, Cathy. Only then I put together the three elements, Vincent, which is quite an unusual name, your surname Wells, and when you said he had a gorgeous voice, it clicked. One of the girls I know from Steve's school recommended the tape when I confided that Steve was struggling with his reading. So tell Vincent thanks from me, Cathy."

Catherine looked pleased. "Okay, I will, Rebecca."

The evening sped by as they discussed other girls they all knew from college and what they were doing with their lives, their children's achievements, their husbands and all the other fabric of their various worlds. Nancy showed some of her latest photograph skills and she crept into the bedrooms and took pictures of everyone's children.

Elli was a bit restless, so Catherine sat with her for a while to settle her off again. She was just leaving the

bedroom, as she walked out of the door she bumped into Buddy.

"Hello Cathy," he said in a low voice.

"Oh, hello Buddy," she said. "You scared me, I didn't see you there." He pulled her into his arms and tried to kiss her, while pushing her into a bedroom.

"Stop it!" she said firmly. "I very happily married, Buddy."

"I need you, Cathy," he said. "He'll never know." Catherine looked at him, furiously angry.

"I don't know what type of woman you think I am," she said. **"But I do not cheat on Vincent."** She looked at him coldly. **"I used to like you, Buddy. But I never loved you, whereas I adore Vincent. Go away now and we'll forget this every happened."**

Buddy had the grace to look ashamed of himself. "I'm sorry, Cathy," he said dejectedly.

Catherine watched as he ran lightly down the stairs and then she went into the toilet. When she went downstairs and rejoined the others, Buddy was there and they acted as if they were meeting for the first time in ages. Catherine made sure she was seated between Jenny and Nancy, and was friendly, but nothing that could be misinterpreted.

She was worried about what Vincent had received from the interchange. The last thing in the world she wanted was for him to become introspective about her and Buddy. So she filled her mind with loving thoughts of Vincent and how much she wished she was with him.

The following morning Buddy was there at breakfast, but she was able to busy herself with her children. As they were all preparing to leave, her eldest three went up to Nancy and thanked her very nicely for having them. Then they went and checked that the little ones were all strapped in properly, and hadn't left anything behind. Nancy hugged Catherine.

"Your kids are something else, Cathy," she said. "Tell Vincent they're a real credit to him." Catherine smiled at her.

"Thanks, Nancy. I will," she said. "He'll be really pleased."

All the girls hugged each other and promised to not let it be so long next time before they met up again.

"And maybe Lydia will be around next time too," said Nancy. "What a terrible deprivation having to make a trip overseas must be." They all laughed.

One by one the cars drove out of Nancy's drive and off in their different directions, and Catherine and Jenny climbed into Devin's car, waved, and went off too.

"Well, that wasn't too bad, was it?" asked Jenny cheerfully.

"No," said Catherine, rather doubtfully. "Oh Jenny, I'm becoming very boring, aren't I? I don't really enjoy being away from Vincent anymore." She lowered her voice. "Last night, when I was settling Elli, Buddy came upstairs and wanted me to go into Nancy's bedroom with him. I don't think he wanted to show me his stamp collection either."

"Ooooh, tricky," said Jenny. "What did you do?"

"I was angry," said Catherine. "I said I didn't know what type of woman he thought I was, but if he went I wouldn't tell anyone. He went," Jenny looked at her.

"But now you're worried in case Vincent knew, aren't you?" she asked. "Well, if he did, he should be proud of you, Cathy. You told Buddy where to get off, didn't you?" Catherine sighed.

"I just hope it doesn't make Vincent feel that I would be happier free though, Jenny. He hasn't a lot of belief in himself. Buddy said that if I'd had sex with him, Vincent need never know. Oh Jenny, if only he knew. If I had had sex with Buddy, Vincent might just as well have been there with us. Infidelity is bad enough for a normal marriage, think what it would do to mine. I adore Vincent, and I'm sure that my feelings for him are so positive, for the sole purpose of his sanity. If I was a player and went into an affair willingly, I'd been forcing him to feel everything with me, my feelings, my actions..."

Jenny's eyes were wide now. "You are really so closely connected?" she asked. Catherine nodded.

"If another guy kisses me, Vincent knows. And what's even worse for him is if I react even momentarily. After Elliot Burch kissed me once, it took a lot of time to make Vincent see that I wanted him, not Elliot Burch."

"We're home," announced Teresa. Jenny parked the car and the children unfastened their seat belts and climbed out of the car. Devin, who was watching for them, came down and was pounced on by his children.

"Hi," he said. "Did you have a good time?" Teresa nodded.

"There were some neat toys," she said. "And a big swing set, with a climbing frame and a slide."

"Can we come home now please?" Emily asked.

"Sure you can," said Devin. He picked up Elli. "You were thinking messages to your Daddy yesterday, weren't you?" he said, smiling at the toddler, who nodded earnestly.

"And he was thinking them back to me," she said happily. Devin kissed her.

"You're a clever girl, aren't you," he said. He looked at Catherine solemnly.

"Was some guy trying to come onto you last night?" he asked. Catherine nodded. She looked at Jenny.

"I told you he'd know," she said.

"What happened, Dev?" Jenny asked as they walked towards the park.

"Vincent was really missing Cathy and the kids," said Devin. "So I staying talking way into the night, but he was rather distracted. So I asked what he was thinking of. It came out that he had been okay, until he felt her reaction to what he could only presume was a come on from some man."

"Buddy," said Jenny. "Cathy said he propositioned her and she told him where to go. She was sure that Vincent would know and she was worried that he'd get upset. But if he was tuned into her, he should be proud of her," she declared firmly. "Because Buddy always had the hots for Cathy, and she always made it clear to him that he was a no-hoper."

By now, they were at the drainage tunnel, and the children went racing inside to be greeted enthusiastically by Vincent who had the grille open. While he hugged and greeted them, he resolutely didn't look at Catherine. Then, when the children went scampering off along the stone walkways, he turned to Catherine and held out his arms. Catherine ran to him, to be enfolded and hugged tightly to his body. She clung to him.

Devin and Jenny followed the children through the tunnels, leaving Vincent and Catherine alone.

"Catherine, I never knew I could miss anyone the way I missed you," he said, his beautiful warm husky voice filled with tenderness. Catherine drew his face to hers and kissed him hungrily.

"Vincent, I don't enjoy being away from you for more than a few hours. You must know that from my thoughts,"

He nodded solemnly. "Dearest, beloved Catherine," he said. "Last night when that man was coming onto you, as Devin puts it, I was very scared and very jealous."

"I know," Catherine said very softly.

"Then you must also know from the way you reacted filled me with enormous pride in you," he said. "I felt surprise and anger in you, and also distaste that he should approach you in that way. Afterwards, I was ashamed of myself for ever doubting you, even for a second. Our love will last for all eternity and I hoped that you hadn't caught my fleeting fear."

Catherine put her hands up to his face and cradled it as she gazed into his eyes, her green eyes steadfast as they met his vividly blue ones.

"Vincent, when you love someone as deeply as we love each other, there is often going to be a flicker of doubt somewhere in your mind, that you can hold your lover forever. But the very fact that you are so much in love, means that neither of you have room in your mind to notice anyone else, except in passing."

"I feel it too, you know. If I let myself I could become extremely possessive of you. To my mind you are the most gorgeous man I ever met, and on a bad day, when I feel at odds with the world, if I see you sharing a joke with Jamie, for a split second I hate her. Then I have to reason myself back to normal again."

"Oh Catherine," whispered Vincent. "Please know that I enjoy other people's company, but only on a superficial level. There has never been anything superficial about what I feel for you. From the moment I touched your unconscious hand, I knew you were my destiny and whatever befell us from that moment would be in some way co-joined. I knew I loved you, but I never dared to hope that one day you would love me too. That was beyond my wildest imagining. I suppose I saw myself as your protector really, to come to your aid in times of danger."

"You did," said Catherine softly. "You saved my life countless times, Vincent. But you were already in my head and the more I saw you the more I loved you. My problem was in pinning you down, you were so elusive and I was just about going crazy for you. I wanted you so badly." Vincent swung her up into his arms and she laid her head against his chest.

"I adore you, my precious Catherine," he said very tenderly. Catherine meshed her fingers in his hair and kissed him breathless. When they surfaced again it was to find Charles and Levi grinning up at them.

"Grandpa says to tell Daddy to put Mommy down and come and get dinner," said Levi importantly.

Catherine burst out laughing. "Grandpa knows us too well," she said, "lead on guys."

Vincent slid her gently to the ground and kissed her fragrant hair. Then, with his arm around her they followed the boys.

Over dinner, Catherine passed on the compliments from Rebecca as to the learning to read tape. Julie's comments on his voice (*which made him blush*) and Nancy's compliments on his parenting skills regarding his children's behaviour.

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