



“Four days! I’ve got four whole days!” Catherine exclaimed. “Joe finally took pity on me; I think he really thought I was in danger of a breakdown. At least, I did my best to make him think so!” She grinned at the memory of his worried face. “And when he told me to take the rest of the week off, the first thing I thought of was the crystal cavern. Vincent, you said that when I had time you’d take me exploring in the lower caverns; well, I’ve got four whole days off! I’m ready any time you are!”

Vincent looked up, surprised, and then quickly down again. His answer was slow in coming: “I did say that, Catherine, but...I’m afraid this is not the best time for me to leave; I have other obligations, things that I must do, people who are depending on me.” He still avoided her eyes, looking down at his teacup, turning it in its saucer.

“Oh! ...Well...---some other time then.” Catherine smiled at him, hiding a quick stab of disappointment,. “I thought...Father said just the other day how quiet things have been Below since the new chambers are finished, and I thought that this would be a good time.” She was smiling still, but Vincent read the disappointment in her eyes.

“But...if you can’t, you can’t. It’s OK. We’ll go some other time instead. I’ll spend the long weekend luxuriating in my leisure; maybe I’ll spend the whole weekend in bed with a large pile of books. Now that I think about it , that sounds like absolute Heaven! I haven’t finished a book in one sitting for two years.”

Vincent got up and began to move around the room, putting a book away, snuffing candles, gathering tea cups; busying himself with small tasks. Catherine watched him, conscious that he was uncomfortable. When it became apparent that there were no other small jobs, he came to her where she sat in his big chair, and held out his hands. “It’s time for me to take you back, Catherine. I know you’re tired,tired; you’ve been working very long hours. Come now, I’ll take you home; you need to rest.”

It was clear that he was not going to change his mind about the projected expedition. Catherine

also thought that it was clear that something more was bothering him; but until he was ready to tell her, there was nothing she could do. "I am tired...but it's early yet." She looked up hopefully, but his hands remained stretched out to help her up.

She had undressed and bathed, but it really was too early for her to feel sleepy, so she got a book, and curled up on the loveseat with a cup of tea steaming beside her, and began to read. She had trouble following the story, however; her evening with Vincent claimed her thoughts repeatedly. What had made him send her home in that hurried fashion? He wasn't angry with her; his leave-taking had all of his usual tenderness.

The first time she heard the tap she discounted it; 'Wishful thinking!' she smiled to herself. But he was there. When the second tap came she turned to look, and saw his silhouette against the city lights. She moved quickly to the door.

"Vincent? I didn't expect to see you again tonight! Is anything wrong?" She spoke with anxiety.

"No. No, nothing is wrong." He leaned against the balcony wall, looking down at the floor. "...--- Or rather, what's wrong is...that when I refused your request tonight, I wasn't frank with you. Catherine, I'm sorry."

He looked up to meet her eyes., "There is nothing that I have to do that can't wait a few days. The truth is that I feel...uncomfortable...at the thought of...of four days with you, alone. I'm not sure that I am able to...able to..." He turned away from her, looking out over the city.

"Oh. I see." She turned him back to her gently, her fingers reaching up to his chin to turn his head to her and said softly, looking steadily into his eyes, "Vincent, you must make up your own mind about that, but I have no doubt that you will do whatever you believe to be right. I want to go on this expedition, and I believe you do also. Are we going?"

He stared down at her, his eyes intense. "You know I want to go. I can't think of anything in the world I'd rather do than spend time alone with you." Then his face changed, and he turned away from her to look back over the city. "But I don't know that this is a good way to do that. We could spend the weekend Below, but in my chamber, reading and talking...."

She smiled. "When you say what you think you ought to say, you look at the skyline. When you say what you really want, you look at me."

He was disconcerted. "I do?"

"You do. ...You want to go, I know you do. Please, Vincent, indulge me. Do this for me."

It was too much; he capitulated. "We'll leave early tomorrow morning." He looked down into her eyes, "And Catherine, I...I do want to go. Very much. I'm happy that we're going."

They had been walking for four hours or more. Catherine stopped, put down the light pack she had insisted on carrying, and announced her intention of taking a rest, "For Pete's sake, Vincent, do we

have to get there in one forced march?”

He stopped and turned to her. “I’m sorry! I’ve been thoughtless; I walk these tunnels so often that I forget that others aren’t used to this means of travel.” There was laughter in his eyes. “Not quite the same as hailing a cab, is it? So much more tiring.”

“Are you laughing at me?” She was indignant. “I don’t believe this! I offer to come with you on this endless journey, and what do I get in return? Ridicule!”

“Not ridicule, never that. Perhaps a small smile.” His smile wasn’t so small, all four of his canines were showing. She loved it when he really smiled like that.

He reached out and took her hand in his. “About twenty minutes ahead there is a storage chamber with emergency supplies. There are chairs and a table. We can stop there, make some tea, and have something to eat. I was planning on it, so you see I wasn’t so thoughtless after all. Do you think you could take up your pack and endure another twenty minutes?”

As Catherine drank the last of her tea, Vincent busied himself with restoring order to the chamber. It was a rather pleasant room, quite large, with storage cupboards around two sides. There was a large amount of food stored; sometimes a crew of several men came down for repair or maintenance.

Along with the other furniture, there were two large double beds. Catherine eyed them with interest. “Do people come down here to stay sometimes? For a vacation, for instance?”

Vincent looked at her with a raised eyebrow. “A vacation? No, I don’t think so. It’s really only a facility for emergency use.”

They shouldered their packs and left the storage room, but they had gone only a few feet from the door when Vincent’s head suddenly went up in a listening pose. He stopped, turned to look behind them, listened...---and, grasping her arm, he set off down the tunnel ahead of them at a dead run, hauling her along with him, not gently.

As they fled she began to hear behind them a rumble which quickly grew to a roar. It lasted only a few seconds, then grumbled away to silence. Vincent slowed, and at last stopped, bringing her panting to a halt beside him.

“What...?” she gasped.

“Cave-in,” he explained. “In the tunnel behind us. We’ll stay here until we’re sure that there is no further activity, then we must go back to see if we’re cut off.” As he saw her reaction to that statement, he quickly added, “Don’t be afraid. There is another storage chamber ahead; we aren’t cut off from supplies. There are pipes ahead also; we can let them know that there’s a problem. And if need be, there is another way out. It would take many days, but we could get out that way if necessary. Don’t be afraid.”

He took off his cloak, doubled it, and spread it on the floor. “I’m afraid it’s hardly a cushion, but it will keep some of the chill of the stone out.” He gestured for her to sit down. “We’ll need to stay here for an hour or so to make sure all is quiet.”

She slid to the floor and leaned back against the stone wall, and he sat beside her. He made several attempts at conversation, but Catherine remained uncharacteristically quiet. After the third remark which failed to receive a satisfactory answer, he turned to look at her. "Tell me."

She looked a bit reluctant. "I have an idea that this cave-in is a judgment on me. I haven't been totally honest with you, Vincent. When I suggested this trip, I truly wanted to see the crystal cavern, but also I...I was hoping for...well, exactly what I think you were afraid of; that there would be some... progress, some...coming together...in our relationship."

"Huh." The small exclamation of surprise was not the reaction she had expected of him. "I thought about our isolation also. I wondered if...perhaps the gods wanted me to be caught here, alone with you, so that I would reassess my position on this same subject."

He remained absorbed in his thoughts, his eyes focused on his hands. "Or perhaps what the gods are saying is that it's time that we talked about it. I've been reluctant to do so. It's a painful subject, I think for both of us, although perhaps in different ways." He looked up at her, gazing into her eyes with misgiving in his, but as he looked at her his gaze softened, and his love and care for her shone out. His next words were spoken in his most tender voice.

"Catherine, I decided long ago, at almost the beginning of our...relationship...that I am not for you, that I am not what you need."

"Isn't that for me to decide?" she asked quietly.

"Yes...no...I don't know!" He shook his head a little, as if to clear it. "but I know that in the generosity of your heart, you would give everything to me, and be left without the life that you were born to." He raised his eyes to her face. "You must not be held to our dream to the exclusion of a normal life Above. You must not. I cannot give you what you deserve to have; this—this restricted life Below is not enough for you. I am so afraid that I will curb your freedom to be all that you can be." He paused; when he spoke again, his voice had deepened. "And that final commitment, the...intimacy that you suggest... could make me...not able to give you up. This must go no further, Catherine."

Catherine's hands came out to grasp his. "Vincent, the final commitment is already made!" she insisted. "Do you think that I could ever be intimate with anyone but you? I could no more do that than I can stop wanting you, every minute of my life." She stopped suddenly, having said rather more than she had intended.

Vincent's reaction to her words was immediate. He surged to his feet and started away down the tunnel; his first impulse to flee an idea too painful for him to entertain, as he had so many times before.

"Vincent! Don't leave me here alone!"

He halted without turning. As she watched his shoulders slumped. Slowly, he turned back; but to pace the tunnel floor, not to sit beside her.

Catherine's voice was husky with emotion, "I can't have a 'normal life Above' Vincent; it's too late for that! It was too late for that the day that I first looked on your face." Her voice dropped to a half-whisper as she said, "I love you, Vincent, only you, and that's never going to change. Please, let us reach for the happiness that is waiting for us!"

Vincent's eyes were on hers; as she watched his agony became apparent in them. "I can't... please, Catherine, stop! I can't..."

She couldn't do it to him. His pain slashed through her, as real as if it were her own. She got up quickly. "Come on, we'll check the tunnel. We'll talk another time."

They walked back along the tunnel silently, both with much to think about. As they neared the storage chamber, it became evident that the tunnel collapse had not damaged it; looking inside, they saw everything still in order.

They continued on down the tunnel, for Vincent needed to assess the damage to make a report to Pascal.

The damage was considerable. A hundred yards past the storage room the floor ended at a jumble made up of every size and shape of rock, from boulders to sand, which stretched from the floor to where the ceiling met the tangle of rubble. Catherine was horrified. "This can never be removed!"

"Yes, it can," he replied reassuringly. "But it will take many men anywhere from several days to many weeks, depending on how far the collapse extends. What has happened is that the floor of a tunnel above has collapsed. If it is a tunnel that crosses this one at right angles, the break will only extend for the width of the tunnel above, probably about eight feet. We must go back now to the nearest pipe, and let Pascal know what we have found here."

"The nearest pipe" she echoed, "And just how far is that?"

"Just past where we waited in the tunnel. Are you tired? ...Of course you are, I would guess you have walked farther today than ever before in your life. I will leave you in the storage chamber, and you can take a nap while I make the trip down the tunnel to the pipes. How will that be?"

She awoke slowly, and stretched luxuriously.

"Hello. You're awake. Get up, sleepyhead, the meal is nearly ready." Vincent was smiling his small smile as he leaned over her, but it faded as he took in her flushed, sleepy face, tousled hair, heavy lidded eyes. She saw the change in his face as sudden yearning overwhelmed him; his eyes looked down at her darkly, his head dropped slowly closer to hers; and for a moment she thought: "Oh God, he's going to kiss me!" But...

"Oh!" his head went up. "Something is burning!" He was off the bed and across the room as he spoke, lifting a pan off the fire. He looked down at it ruefully. "William's good soup! We'll have to make do with bread and cheese for supper."

She slid off the bed, followed him across the room in her stocking feet, and joined him in looking at the pan. "Maybe we can rescue some of it," she said hopefully, "It's only scorched on the bottom."

They worked together to move the thick soup to bowls, carefully, without disturbing the burnt bottom layer, and to set out the rest of the simple meal; then she sat down across from him and they ate. There wasn't much conversation; the afternoon's incidents were still very much present with both of them.

Catherine wondered exactly what the sleeping arrangements were going to be. As she looked around the room, she had a better appreciation of Vincent's initial reluctance to come on this trip. They were going to have to share sleeping quarters, there was no doubt of that. She felt a momentary rush of regret that she had suggested this expedition; she had had so little idea of what it entailed for him; and for her also.

She thought about how it would be, when she could hear his breathing in the dark, when his warmth and his strength and his splendid body were lying so close, and when she knew that he lay awake also, hearing her breathe, thinking however reluctantly, about her body so close to him.

Heat spiraled through her at the mind pictures her thoughts brought. His body naked, aroused, coming down over hers.... God! Her breathing quickened, and she felt her nipples raise as her face flushed pink with the ferment of that thought; this was not going to be easy! It had to be this way, though; there was no other room, no place else to go. And this was only the first of what could be several, or even many nights.

She got up quickly, desperate to think of something else before her face gave her away, and began to pick up the dishes. When Vincent moved to stop her she insisted. "Come on, you help. We'll do this together."

There was mutual reluctance to go to bed. Vincent moved around the room, doing unnecessary tasks, making Catherine more nervous by the moment.

Vincent!"

He looked at her, silent.

"This is ridiculous! We're both tired."

His glance was defensive; then as he continued to look at her his gaze softened, and he nodded. "You're right. I'll go and check the cave-in again. You'll need a few minutes."

She undressed quickly, put on her nightgown and climbed into the nearest bed. She had brought nightclothes from her apartment, rather than the sensible flannel gowns she usually wore in the tunnels. As she thought about it now, she realized that she had done it with seduction in mind, although she had not consciously thought about it when she put the satiny wisp of nightgown in her pack. She pulled the blankets up tight around her chin, guilt making her extra careful not to let him see what she had done.

He came back quietly, sat on the other bed and took off his boots. Then he got up and padded across the room to the heavy curtain covering the door and looped it back to let in a gentle glow from the tunnel lights. He extinguished the lantern which sat on the table; she heard his soft footsteps as he returned to his bed, and the murmur of the springs as they took his weight.

"Good night, Catherine."

"Good night." But she didn't think it was going to be a good night. How could she possibly sleep? She stretched and snuggled closer in the woolen quilt, feeling its warmth, and closed her eyes.

When she opened them next she knew she had been asleep for some time. A glance at her watch's luminous dial assured her that it was very early morning. Another glance told her something more disturbing; Vincent was not in his bed.

The strange surroundings and the very early hour combined to give her a moment's panic when she discovered he was gone. She flew out of bed, across the room and out into the tunnel without thinking of anything but to find him. She paused outside the door, and then turned without hesitation to the right, toward the cave-in.

She found him almost at once, just around the first curve. He had been sleeping on the tunnel floor, a blanket under him, but as she came up to him he was on his feet. She went directly into his arms, molding herself against him, wanting the comfort that his arms provided. His arms held her close, his cheek brushing the top of her head. "What is it, Catherine? I felt your fear!"

"I woke up, and you weren't there. I got scared." She held tightly to him, her heart still pounding, but as her heart settled and her breathing slowed, she looked up at him. "What are you doing out here, Vincent? It's too cold for you to be sleeping on this stone floor!"

He didn't answer. She felt his body stiffen as his hands moved over her back. Suddenly his arms dropped from around her, and taking her shoulders, he pushed her away from his body almost violently. For an instant he looked down at her nightgown, his eyes dark with dilated pupils. "Catherine!" He turned away from her to lean against the tunnel wall, his head buried in his upraised arms. He said nothing for a long moment, then: "Go back to the chamber, Catherine. Put on something warm. It's cold in the tunnels, too cold for what you're wearing." His voice was controlled, but she could see from where she stood that he was trembling all over. She turned without another word and went back to the storage room, and to her bed.

She was thoroughly chilled. Even under the warm wool quilts, she shook violently, and her teeth chattered; partly from the tunnel chill, and even more from the tumult engendered inside her by the encounter just over. She saw again the tremors passing over Vincent's body, tremors caused by his body's need for her; and the memory sent excitement rocketing through her body, accentuating the shivering. In a few moments she was in true chills, her body wracked with shaking that passed over it in waves.

She heard Vincent's voice before she saw him, She was knotted into a tight ball, attempting to control the shaking of her body. "Catherine! this must be stopped!" He scooped her off the bed quilt and all, and moved to sit in the only upholstered chair in the room. He gathered her into his lap, tucking her feet into the quilt, pulling it around her snugly, and began to rub her icy hands, his arms reaching around both sides of her small body.

His breath moved warmly across the side of her neck from where his head was bent over her shoulder, looking down at what he was doing. As he worked, he scolded her gently. "What were you thinking of, to wear such an unsuitable garment? You know that the tunnels are always cooler than you are acclimated to."

She felt his body heat begin to warm her through the quilt, and the chills quickly abated. Her eyelids began to grow heavy as comfort returned to her, and she relaxed against him, warmed and soothed by his proximity. Her head was resting on his shoulder, both of her hands in his, his face just

brushing against her hair as he bent over her. She moved a little, snuggling closer; and suddenly there was tension again in his body.

“What?” She looked around at his face beside her. He was staring intently, she thought at her hands, until she looked down also. In moving she had dislodged the quilt from where he had tucked it around her, and one breast was bared, covered only by the diaphanous material of the nightgown. She looked quickly back at his face. He hadn’t moved; his eyes still rested hungrily on that seductive sight. Inevitably, the nipple on her breast lifted beneath that intent gaze. Its hardening was perfectly visible beneath the transparent material, but he didn’t look away. In a moment one of his hands left hers, and slowly he reached to touch what was all of his present desire.

Before his hand reached her it stopped. He came back to himself slowly, wrenching his eyes away, dropping his hand back to hers. He sat still for a moment, seeming to need time to return to reality; then he stood up, bringing her up with him with no visible effort. He crossed the room to her bed, and laid her gently on it, spreading the quilt over her; then reached to the shelf over the bed for another one, which he spread over the first. “There, I think you will be warm enough now.” He smiled gently at her, and whispered good night; then he was gone again to his makeshift bed in the tunnel.

In the morning no word was said of the night’s encounter. Over their bread and cheese breakfast Vincent talked with some animation of the work involved in clearing the tunnel, his explanation interesting to her in spite of her preoccupation with their personal circumstances. She listened with attention while she drank the last of her tea.

“I need to go back to the pipes to hear what the work crew has found out about the cave-in. Do you want to come along?”

“Yes, of course! Let’s get these dishes picked up, and we’ll go.”

In a few minutes they were ready for the little expedition. Just before they left the chamber, Vincent picked up a thick woolen blanket and draped it over his shoulder.

“What’s that for?” Catherine was mystified.

“It’s going to take a while to get everything said over the pipes. This is for you to sit on, so you won’t get a chill.” Vincent made no sign that he was referring to the previous night.

“Thank you. That’s very thoughtful.” She smiled, and took his arm as they started down the tunnel.

Vincent arranged the blanket carefully, folding it thickly to give the greatest insulation. When it was done to his satisfaction, he stepped back and with a sketched imitation of a courtly bow he invited her silently to be seated. She smiled and curtsied in return, then folded herself gracefully to the floor.

“It’s quite early; it’s possible that Pascal will have no information yet, but he’ll be there. We’ll see what he’s found out for us this morning.” Vincent began to tap rapidly on the chest high pipe that ran

along the wall of a corridor crossing the one they had been walking in, while Catherine sat comfortably on the floor listening to the metallic music,

Vincent stopped and listened. Soon an answering tap could be heard, and his face grew rapt with concentration as his mind turned the answering code into words. Catherine smiled as she watched him. His head had that characteristic tilt that it wore when he was listening; she found it very endearing.

“Well, I’m afraid he’s found out nothing yet. We’ll have to wait half an hour or so for our information, until the work party returns to the nearest pipes.”

Catherine got to her knees, turned around and began to rearrange his cushion carefully made for her comfort. When she was through, she turned back to sit on one side of it, and patted the newly made second place. “Join me?”

He put his head on one side and looked down at her with a wry twist to his lips. “I made that cushion for you, Catherine.”

“And I remade it for us. Sit down, Vincent.”

He sat, and they conversed for a few minutes about the cave-in and the prospects for regaining their freedom.

“I’m not so sure I want to go back; I could get used to having you all to myself!” She smiled up at him, flirting a little.

Vincent understood very well what she was doing. “I suppose it must be enjoyable to have someone around whose every thought is for your comfort and happiness; but there are others, you know, who deserve my attention, and I may even say...wish for it.”

“Oh, really. And is there any...person...in particular who wishes for your attention?”

Vincent looked judicious, and answered slowly. “Father. And William; William is always appreciative of my attention. And Kipper, too. He likes to have me read to him, although he’s getting a little big for it.” His eyes turned to hers full of laughter.

“Vincent! You’re flirting! Another undiscovered talent!”

Vincent looked disconcerted. “Merely a gentle tease!”

“What do you think flirting is?” Catherine laughed delightedly, and put her hand out to touch his thigh lightly. “I love it that you’d flirt with me!”

As her hand touched his body, its ease disappeared. She felt his tension immediately. “What? What’s the matter?” She looked down at her hand, still on his thigh. “Oh.” She drew her hand back to her lap.

Vincent rose and went to the pipes, where he tapped for a short while. When he returned to sit beside her, his eyes avoided hers. “...Catherine, please...you mustn’t touch me; just not while we’re...trapped here.”

There was silence for a moment; then Catherine said. "Is it because of what happened last night?"

He didn't answer. She felt the tension in his body increase.

"Are you going to spend tonight, and heaven knows how many nights to come, on the stone floor of the tunnel? Maybe you'd like to move down the hall to the next storage room?" She spoke with asperity.

"Catherine...don't be angry with me. I...can't...please!" His head went back against the wall.

Her shoulders slumped. "All right. I'm not angry, I just don't understand what's happening, Vincent."

"It's because we are isolated, cut off. I...I feel that isolation, Catherine. I feel...your nearness. I must be...---careful."

She watched him in silence for a few minutes, then began in a conversational tone, "Careful. Yes. ...Have you ever thought about where we'll be in another five years? Have you thought about where this determination of yours to keep...things...from moving ahead will take us?"

His head turned to her, a question in his eyes. "Tell me."

She looked back at him, her eyes intense, holding his gaze locked to hers. "Vincent, you're a somewhat silent and introspective person. But now, in the last few months, I see a change. Every day you grow more silent. You're closing in on yourself in an effort to contain what you feel.

"In five years, will you be a solemn, silent, unhappy man, frozen in his determination to keep control? You can't suppress only your feelings for me, Vincent! All of your feelings are being suppressed, controlled, made...safe. That iron will of yours can do that, but it is a tragic thing for you, and for those around you who depend on your love, and your expression of it."

He looked down at his hands; his voice was soft when he spoke. "What you're saying is true. I feel it happening; I know it."

She asked, her voice softer, more reluctant. "And how do you think...I will be in five years?"

"Catherine, nothing could stop the flow of your generosity, your love and compassion. You will not change, I know that." He reached for her hands, taking them both in his; but she drew them away after a moment.

"I think you're wrong, Vincent. I will change. This is what I see; in five years, we will see each other perhaps two or three times a month, for a short while only. It will be painful to be together for too long, and we will have learned to avoid pain. We will build lives separate from each other, ...each alone, neither complete.

"Vincent, this determination of yours to keep us...separate...is destroying an important part of our love for each other. It won't kill that love, nothing on earth could do that; but it will destroy the sweetness, the...the urgency. It will make of our love a thing of...resignation at the very best; at the

worst, bitterness will destroy us.”

His voice was agonized when he replied. “Catherine, these things will not happen to us. We cannot let them!” He shook his head back and forth in negation of the future she projected.

“Do you see another ending? Tell me if you do.”

The silence stretched out while he sat mute. Into that silence, in a husky whispering voice, she began: *”Spend all you have for loveliness,/ Buy it and never count the cost;/ For one white singing hour of peace,/ Count many a year of strife well lost./ And for a breath of ecstasy,/ Give all you have been, or could be.”*

With a groan, he threw his head back against the wall, his eyes shut, the battle inside evident on his face.

“There is something else. Something that you won’t want to hear; but in fairness to me, you must listen. I am not inexperienced in sexual matters...”

“Don’t...don’t!” He turned away from her, his arms raised protectively around his head, as if she were striking him.

“Listen to me, Vincent! ...I am not inexperienced in sexual matters; sex has been and still is an important part of my life. But the course you have chosen denies me this natural expression of myself.

“I love you. I love you with my heart and my soul, and with my body, Vincent, with my body too! Am I to look forward to a lifetime of celibacy? Do I have to give it up...forever?” Her voice choked; she was near tears, but she swallowed hard, and went on. “I can live without sexual expression; I have been celibate for three years, since the day I met you. But not forever...oh, not forever!” With this cry tears did come and began to run down her face. When she spoke again, it was quietly, without passion.

“In the years to come, will I look around me to find someone? Not someone to love, that belongs only to you, but someone who is willing to fill this empty place in my life?”

The cry that was torn from him nearly broke her heart.

“No-o-o-o!”

It was a long, wild cry, his head thrown back, the cords in his neck standing out with the effort. As it ended, he sat for a few seconds without moving, his head still back, the long line of his throat making her want to touch it, even in the extremity of the moment.

Then, stunning her with the speed and decision of his action, he reached for her. With the nearest thing to violence she had ever felt from him he lifted her effortlessly; and from sitting beside him she was turned to come to rest across his chest, her mouth only a breath from his. His arms tightened around her. His eyes were full of the heat he felt, a scorching stare so untypical of her gentle Vincent that her heart began to throb as if to flee her body, shaking her with every beat.

His voice shook as he whispered, “God help us both!” Then his mouth came down on hers, open and hot, in a searching kiss that seared her to the soul. She felt his tongue slide across her lips, delve inside to caress the inside of her lips, then reach deeper into her mouth to find her tongue. As the kiss

lengthened and deepened, her arms went around him, her hands tangled in his hair, her body striving to mold itself closer, closer.

When he raised his head at last he looked dazed, stunned at the ecstasy to be found in the touch of her mouth. Catherine's eyes opened slowly, languidly, to gaze softly at him. His hand came up to touch her mouth, the long nail of his claw-tipped forefinger caressing her lower lip with the tenderest of touches. He murmured, "This mouth...I have wanted this mouth...on that first night on your balcony, and it has been the same every day and every night since then. Catherine, Catherine..."

His breathing was quick and shallow as he looked down at her mouth, and then further down the column of her throat to the soft hollow at its base. His head dropped down toward that hollow, and his lips touched it softly; then his mouth opened and she felt his tongue moving gently over her skin. She shivered with pleasure.

His mouth continued to move over her, kissing her everywhere that he could reach skin to touch. His right arm held her close to him; his left hand slid over her back and shoulders, caressing her body with loving tenderness. As he kissed and caressed her, his breathing quickened further, and she could feel his heart begin to shake his chest with its pounding. With delight she felt his hands begin to search for her skin, pulling her sweater up to slide over her bare back.

She whispered soft words of encouragement to him, loving the feel of his hands on her, longing for more intimate touches. But after a few blissful moments, with one more soft touch of his lips and a great groaning sigh he withdrew himself from their close embrace, putting her away from him. His hands were trembling when he put them up to his face, pushing his hair back. He was breathing in short shaky gasps, and he put his head back against the wall, his eyes closed.

She gave a small moan of disappointment, "Oh, don't stop..."

He shook his head. "Not here. Not on the floor of the tunnel in the cold."

"Vincent..." Her arms crept around him,

He rolled his head against the wall, "Not here. Not now."

"Hold me...kiss me...I'm afraid you'll change your mind if we stop..."

His eyes opened, and he looked down at her. When he spoke, his voice had lowered to its deepest register. "No. I won't change my mind. I have claimed you!"

He looked, and he was unable to withdraw from her. Reaching for her, he pulled her back to him, buried his face in her hair and inhaled deeply. His head turned slowly, drawing his mouth across her ear, her cheek, and finally bringing it to her mouth. This kiss was slow, soft, sensual. When her mouth opened under his he explored its interior without haste. Catherine lay completely relaxed in his arms without strength or will, lost in the bliss of his mouth on hers, his hands moving over her. Heat swirled through her body, following the track of his hands.

When he raised his head, listening, she became aware slowly, through the haze of her arousal, of the language of the pipes. "No...don't leave me!" He turned his head to look back at her, his eyes molten with desire; "...Catherine..." His arms tightened, his mouth dropped to hers; but only for a moment. With a long shaky breath he rose to attend to the pipes.

He listened to a lengthy message, tapped a shorter answer, and turned back to Catherine, who was still sitting on the floor. "We must go back to the cave in, then come back here. The work party can estimate more closely if they have some measurements and a more detailed description of this side of the cave-in. I was not as careful as I should have been the first time. Come, Catherine, let's go." He put his hands out to help her up.

As she came up from the floor, he pulled her against him in one smooth movement. "Catherine...---" His mouth came down on hers again. Now, standing, his body was pressed to hers for its full length. Catherine's arms came up to slide around him and she molded herself to him, moaning a little through the kiss as she felt the hard muscular reality of his body against her. And now for the first time, with a thrill almost of triumph, she felt the surging lift of his penis pressing against her also.

He felt it too. His arms faltered in their tight clasp of her, and he moved back from the kiss, and the embrace. He looked down, avoiding her eyes. "I...can't.... I'm sorry, Catherine."

"Sorry?" Her hand came up to lay against his cheek, holding his eyes to hers. "Vincent, I want you more than anything in the world. That part of you that was pressed against me is evidence that you want me too. Do you think it could be anything less than precious to me?"

Closing his eyes, he turned his head to press his mouth against the palm of the hand she had laid on his face. She pulled him back against her, and raised her mouth for his kiss. His arms came around her again and his mouth came to hers.

Something in him was freed by her words, and now his body came to her entirely, molding itself to hers, his hips moving against her to feel the contact of his penis with the warmth and softness of her.

But in a moment his head lifted, he broke contact with her mouth. "Catherine...Catherine, I must go, they're waiting for me. I must go now! I won't be able to stop in another minute!" He pulled himself away from her almost roughly, his hands dropping to his sides, his head turned away. He was panting hard, his voice husky with his desire. "We must go back to the cave-in. Please, we must go now!"

"Yes, we'll go. Of course." She moved away from him, putting her hands to her head, smoothing her hair away from her face. She was shaking all over, her body demanding that she go back into his arms, that the rapturous interlude just past be extended to its only possible conclusion.

Scooping up the blanket that he had brought, Vincent turned quickly to the way they had come. His breathing was loud in the tunnel stillness, ragged and uneven, and his hands holding the blanket shook visibly.

They walked fast, vigorous movement helping to quell the fires within.

By unspoken agreement they stayed apart, not touching each other, for the remainder of the time that there were other calls on Vincent's attention; and by the time all requirements of his tasks were satisfied, it was time for them to fix their supper.

"That should be the last of it, I've done everything that I can from this end," Vincent said as he began to forage in cupboards for food. "Now it's up to Cullen and the work party to free us; but that's

not going to happen for a few days. We'll know more definitively by tomorrow, when they've begun the work. Now, what are we going to eat?"

Food was found and fixed, and they sat across the table from each other and ate, neither very hungry; stealing glances at each other, not nearly as interested in the food as in the delicious feeling of anticipation that was filling them both.

They were quickly finished, but Vincent refused her help to clean up. "No! I will do it." She sat with cup in hand while he began to move around the table, gathering dishes and putting things away.

He worked quietly, not saying anything, but each time he passed behind her he touched her, stroking her hair, running his hand down the side of her face, bending to kiss the top of her head; and finally, as he completed his tasks, standing behind her bench with his body pressed against her. He reached slowly down along her sides, and in a moment he held her breasts in his hands.

His fingers kneaded softly, and her eyes closed, her head fell back against his chest. She felt all of her consciousness centered in the feel of those hands. Heat flooded her body, delicious shivers coursed through her, her breasts becoming more sensitized and responsive to his touch with each second that passed. As the sensations she felt became almost unbearably sweet, she whispered, "Take me to bed."

"Yes," His voice was shaking. "It's...time."

He swept her off the bench and into his arms. The journey across the room was a short one, but he had to stop midway to kiss her.

When they arrived at the bed at last, instead of laying her down, he set her on her feet, then stepped back a step. She looked a question at him and received a wordless answer when his hands came up to the hem of her sweater..

He lifted it quickly over her head, leaving her bare to the waist. For a moment he just looked, his eyes at their darkest; then his hands came up to her shoulders, slid down her arms, drifted across her ribs, and came to rest on her breasts. His thumbs touched the nipples softly. He looked up at her, his eyes asking permission; and she whispered, "Yes, oh please yes..." He held her breasts for a long minute, running the pads of his thumbs back and forth over their erect peaks, watching the pleasure written on her face, savoring the sensations in himself.

The rest of the undressing was accomplished quickly. When he had removed her last garment he stepped back to look; but he couldn't stay away from her, even to look. He had to touch her. His hands moved over her body urgently; his arousal was evident in the raggedness of his breathing, and in the erection visible through his clothes.

Catherine took a breath and reached quietly for his belt buckle. Vincent froze; then his hand came up to cover hers. "Let me, Vincent," she whispered. "I want so much to see you."

He took a deep shaky breath, from the bottom of his lungs, and exhaled it in a rush. "I will. But, Catherine, I'm so afraid that you will turn away from me; it...it would kill me, if you left me now."

"I will never leave you. Never. It would kill me too." She began to unfasten his belt, talking all the time. "I know how your body is shaped. I have watched it when you moved or stretched; believe me, I

have looked. You are so beautiful, Vincent, I wish I could make you believe how beautiful.” She leaned her bared body into him, making him catch his breath. “Put your hands on me again, Vincent? I love to feel your hands on me.”

She felt his hands warm on her at her waist as she pulled his shirt out of his pants. Her hands slid under his clothing to feel his skin, caressing his ribs and touching his muscular back. “I love the feel of you.” She lifted up his shirt and the heavy undershirt he wore beneath it, and he took them from her hands and pulled them over his head. The hair on his chest was thick and much softer than she had expected. She pressed her face against it and breathed in deeply. “God! You smell wonderful!” Looking down, she reached to unfasten his pants. “I want to touch all of you. You are so beautiful.”

The pants slid off his body, uncovering his rigid erection, and her hands came up to fold around it. She began to caress it softly, holding it between her hands, sliding them from its base to its pulsing head, then back again.

He looked down at what she was doing, unbelieving of what he was seeing, and what he was feeling. He gasped and shivered and moaned softly under her hands and stood still, letting excitement wash over him in hot waves.

“Vincent, I want this so much...please!”

She turned and laid back against the pillows. He quickly got rid of his boots and socks, and then instead of turning to her as she expected, he stood up. He stood before her nude and beautiful, his mane streaming down his chest to mingle with the curls there. His body was haired in much the same patterns as any man’s, but with much more abundant soft golden hair. His shoulders were immensely broad, his chest deep and muscular, and his body narrowed quickly to a slim waist, strong loins and long smoothly muscled legs. His penis was fully erect, large and powerful.

Studying her face, searching for any sign of rejection or revulsion, he said tightly, “I have to make sure. I have to know it’s all right.”

“Oh Vincent, it’s much more than all right.” Catherine spoke softly, her voice shaking a little. As she looked at his body her face told him what he needed to know, of her admiration and desire for him. “You take my breath away.”

She laid back on the bed, beckoning him to her silently. He came to her quickly, and fitted his maleness against her, his erection finding a home pressed against her thigh. With a long sigh he felt the touch of her skin along his length at last.

He began to kiss her; he kissed the top of her head, her ears, her eyes lingeringly, the end of her nose. His mouth came to hers and lingered there for many seconds, drinking in the passionate response of her; the response that was more than he had dreamed.

He continued to kiss his way down her neck; she felt his tongue on her skin, and with a shiver, his sharp canines just touching the skin of her throat. His mouth and tongue moved over her shoulders, and at last, to her breasts. He kissed first one and then the other with his lips, and then with eager mouth and tongue he began to suckle.

Catherine threw back her head and arched her body toward his hot mouth and moving tongue. The sensations quickly became overpowering, shutting out everything but the exquisite pleasure he

was giving her. She moaned and tossed her head, lost to all sense of time and place. For long time he continued to do what was giving them both such delight; and when he raised his head at last to look at her face, what he saw there increased his excitement. "I think you like that." He said softly, as she came slowly back to earth.

She laughed weakly. "Yes. I like it."

"Let me find what else you like." He began again to kiss her, moving down her body slowly, not neglecting any part. When he reached her waistline and drew his mouth slowly around and down her side, she took a quick breath and shuddered. When he gently tongued her navel, her body arched toward him involuntarily. When he buried his face in her pubic curls, she moaned and lifted her hips to him.

He stopped then and drew himself up until they were face to face. "I can't...I'm afraid I won't be able to control myself if I go any further." He was breathing short hard breaths, and trembling all over. "Your response to me is so exciting, Catherine. I...I'm helpless to stop...what is rising in me. I want you now...oh please, now!"

"Yes, now...come to me!" She reached between them to take his throbbing penis in her hand, and guide it to her center. He rested there for several seconds, reaching for some control of his wildly spiraling emotion. The touch of Catherine's body on his seemed to stabilize his feelings, and with a deeper breath, he slid easily inside.

In that instant, the wild spiral of pleasure began again. He moved in her body slowly, marveling at the ecstatic pleasure of this deep connection between them, watching her face to believe that her excitement equaled his, that her emotion was rising with the same inexorable speed that he felt.

And then as the tide of fierce joy rose within him, his movements became stronger, quicker, more certain. Now his consciousness shrank to the tiny envelope of life that was the two of them and this glorious connection between them.

As he exploded into climax, he felt her muscles clench around him as she shared his ecstatic bliss.

He stirred slightly, and she looked to see if he was awake. He slept; his face so young and vulnerable in sleep that tears came to her eyes. How she loved him! She thought about his early years, the hurts and disappointments that had been his lot, and she wondered how he had come to this place without the least stain of bitterness, or anger, or resentment. His capacity for love was undamaged by the remembrance of hurtful things in his past; he only became more loving, more full of compassion and sympathy, as the years went by. She closed her eyes on tears of love for him. God willing, she would try to make up to him for those lonely years. She would give him all that she had, all that she could be, every day of every year to come.

As she opened her eyes to look at him, she saw that he was awake. He raised his hand to touch her wet cheek. "Tears? Tell me."

"It's nothing. I was thinking how much I love you, and how very happy I am this morning."

“Is that nothing? I think it’s everything.” He raised himself on an elbow, and looked down at her. “Everything ...” his lips came down to hers, and he kissed her with aching tenderness.

When he had raised his head, he continued, “I thought never in my life to know this...I thought that it...wasn’t for me. But I wanted you so...I wanted you with such love...and such passion....”

His kiss this time was less gentle, longer, deeper. His body came to hers as if of its own volition; and Catherine’s responded in kind. Her arms went around his neck, sliding under his mane. As the kiss ended, she brought her hands to the sides of his head, and gently turned it. Brushing his tangled hair back she bared one ear. “They are there,” she laughed softly, “I knew they had to be, but I’ve never seen one before.”

She brought her mouth to his head, and began to kiss his ear. She kissed all around its rim and breathed her warm breath into it. Then, as her tongue came to its interior he shivered, and a soft moan came from his throat.

His body sought closer contact with hers as her attention to his ear caused his erection to harden, but she pushed at his shoulder to make him turn onto his back, and her body slid over his. Now her mouth moved from his ear down the side of his neck, and continued down his chest to find a small nipple almost lost in the soft curls there.

As her tongue moved around and over it, he began to tremble. His hands came up to cradle her head, cherishing her lovemaking, holding her there where she made such wonderful and unknown sensations course through him. “Catherine,” he murmured. “Oh Catherine, how you excite me. Don’t stop...I love you making love to me.”

“I haven’t even begun,” she answered, smiling up at him. “I have dreamed so often of touching your body like this, of showing you how much I want you, how I adore you, body and soul.” Her head went down again to continue her exploration. Her hands and her mouth touched him continually, traveling slowly, slowly down.

When she reached his waist she slipped her hand under his side and lifted, whispering, “Please, love, roll over? I want to see the rest of you.”

Vincent rolled over onto his stomach, his face hidden in his long hair, his hands down at his sides, palms up, fingers curled. It was a position so vulnerable and trusting, blindly laying himself open to whatever came to him, that Catherine was seized with a sudden storm of love for him. She laid her full length down on top of him, covering him with herself, with a sudden impulse to protect this loving and beloved man, to keep him safe from all that could harm him.

But his perception of her lying close on top of him was not one of protection. “You feel so good!” he said. “But you’re not close enough! Press yourself into me! Gods! ...I want you inside my skin!”

“I can’t do that, I can only take you inside of me.” she laughed a little; then she smoothed the hair from the nape of his neck, and began her exploration of him there. Her first kiss brought a shudder and a moan, and as she continued to kiss and caress her way down his back, he responded to every touch with shivers of excitement.

When her hands and mouth reached his waist, he began to tremble. She knelt between his knees, and with slow care she caressed his buttocks. Her hands slid down slowly to where the soft skin

of his thighs joined his body, and there she began to kiss him, her mouth close, so close to the core of his desire. Her mouth moved down his thighs, one and then the other, until she caressed the soft skin at the back of his knees.

She lifted her head and put her hands on his buttocks, then curved them under to reach far into the place between his legs. His testes were covered with soft fur, and she took them gently into her hands, stroking them softly. He cried out wordlessly, his back arched, his head thrown far back, and his hands gripping the bed covers.

Slowly she withdrew her hands from him. "Now, turn over again," she whispered. "I'm not through with you yet."

When he was turned, she began again.. She sat up, astride his thighs, her body straight, her breasts with hardened nipples. His erection stood up close between her spread thighs, dark hair and golden hair mingling. As he looked at the picture they made together, he groaned, "How long? Catherine, anticipation will destroy me!"

"There are thing I haven't done. This... " and she took his pulsing shaft between her hands, "... and this...", Slowly she began to stroke the length of it.

His body arched up against her thighs, yearning toward her hands. She smiled and stroked steadily, her thumbs rubbing over the head of his penis, milking drops of wetness, spreading it to that most sensitive of spots just behind the opening. As she stroked she watched his face, her body reacting to the excitement she saw there with excitement of its own.

He was writhing with pleasure gone almost to pain. "I want you so badly, please..." His breathing was harsh and ragged, "Watching you doing this to me is...more than I can endure!"

Catherine slid her body farther down his legs, making him gasp in protest, "No, don't leave me! ...Not now!"

But her intent was not to leave him. As she slid away, her face came down, and her mouth was there, lightly touching the throbbing head of his shaft. "M-m-m" A soft sound came from her throat as her mouth opened and took him inside.

Vincent had never dreamed of such a feeling; the sensation was beyond even his most secret, wildest imaginings. His head whipped back and forth on the pillows, his body arched toward that hot mouth. His hands came to her head, holding her to him. He groaned and whispered incoherent words of love.

Catherine almost let it go too far. His excitement was so wonderful to her, his pleasure so extreme, that when he began to thrust into her mouth her impulse was to let him; let him have this great pleasure to its end. But Vincent was susceptible to guilt, and she was afraid that he would think this an occasion for it if she let him finish this way, without her. Another time, she promised herself silently, when he understands that it's all right. She gently unclasped his hands from her head, and drew her mouth slowly away from him.

Immediately, his hands closed on her shoulders; he lifted and turned her body effortlessly until she was laid beside him. His body was over hers in an instant, his mouth open and hot covering hers, his tongue searching the deepest places of her mouth. He stopped only to speak against her mouth:

“You are mine! Mine!” His words were slurred, blurred with the intensity of his passion. He began to growl softly.

One hand went down to her knee, moving it out and up, spreading her to receive him. The crown of his penis nudged at her, sliding toward the opening that was the sum of all his desire. Her legs came up to clasp him tightly around his waist, and with a great growling sigh he slid his shaft deep inside her.

He rested there, breathing short and hard, savoring the moment, and the anticipation of the moments to come. But now her excitement wouldn't rest, and she began to move under him, making soft sounds of pleasure. Her pelvis thrust upward to bring him farther into her, her legs lifted even more to make the deepest penetration possible. Lost in sensation, she began a rhythmic, involuntary motion to feel him moving inside her.

Her movement fueled his explosive excitement. He began to thrust himself into her, turning her rhythm into his own. His movements became faster, harder, driven by the growing necessity of completion. All sensation was centered in the hot wet joining of bodies, that conjunction of flesh made for pleasure, created to bring ecstasy.

Tenderness forgotten in the growing inevitability of orgasm, they drove with one mind to complete their union. Sensation was all; each movement was bliss. Consciousness narrowed to the feel of sliding flesh, sensitivity heightened to unbearable intensity, rising to heights undreamed of.

As he drove into her with a growling cry he gained at last his moment of orgasm. And as he felt it explode in him with agonizing intensity, he felt also the convulsive contractions as she melted around him in delirious pleasure.

Breakfast was an interlude of kisses and touches, with food secondary to their new closeness. As they finished, Vincent reminded her reluctantly that there was a world outside of this chamber, a world which wondered and worried about them.

“I want this time with you to go on and on...” His hands reached for hers across the table. “And it seems that it will go on, at least for a few days. We must make a trip to the pipes this morning, to see what progress has been made toward our rescue. They will be waiting to hear from us.”

The news from Pascal was encouraging. The consensus among the crew already working to clear the tunnel was that four or five more days should see enough rubble moved to let Vincent and Catherine make their way over the remaining rock.

“That means I won't be at work on Monday, and perhaps not until Wednesday or Thursday. Vincent, Joe will worry. Please send Father a message to get in touch with Jenny. Have her call Joe and give him this message, ‘I'm all right, and I've decided to extend my vacation a few days.’ Nothing else. That should infuriate him very nicely.” She chuckled at the thought of Joe's indignation.

Messages sent, they walked slowly back to the storage chamber and sat down at the table. “There is nothing else we must do; the day is ours. How would you like to spend it?” he asked.

A grin spread over her face. “Need you ask?”

He shook with quiet amusement. "Catherine, have mercy! I'll have a heart attack!"

She was still grinning. "I don't think so, but I can't take a chance on that. So we'll have to spend the day talking, I guess. Unless you could find a book? Then we could read aloud."

He stretched from the bench where he was sitting to grasp his pack, lying on the floor almost out of reach. Her eyes followed him, watching his body in action, savoring the catlike grace of his movements. "You'd better be careful." She spoke seriously. "I think you may be in danger of risking that heart attack you just mentioned."

He looked nonplussed. "What makes you say that?"

"You can't stretch your body out in front of me like that and expect me not to notice! I may become uncontrollable!"

He blushed. His reaction to comment on his physical being was still extreme, but he was quickly learning to believe that she truly admired his body, as well as desiring him. Making a quick recovery, he said, looking up at her from under his brows, "Catherine...have some care for my health!"

Chuckling, he rummaged in his pack and found three books. "I thought we might need to have some way to pass the evenings." He looked up at her, his eyes dancing. "I didn't anticipate that they would be fully occupied with other activities..."

"Here we have 'A Treasury of Great Poetry', 'The World According to Garp', and 'Sense and Sensibility', he continued. "Which would you like?"

"What a great selection! The choice is difficult, though. Which would you like?"

"Sense and Sensibility"

"Go for it."

And they settled down happily to read.

The days passed too quickly. They read, and explored, and made love. Catherine was happier than ever before in her life; her love at last had become her lover. Vincent passed the time in a daze of love and passion. It was all so new to him, and so much more than he had thought.

On the second day they made a trip to a hot spring. "It's time for a bath!" Catherine had said that morning. She began to look around the room for a pan big enough to bathe out of, but Vincent caught her arm as she walked past.

"You're right about the bath, but a pan won't be necessary. There is a hot spring not far from here. It's one reason we excavated the storage chamber here."

The rocks walls around the spring were rough, and it didn't boast the steps and smooth pool edges of the bathing rooms in the inhabited parts, but it was very welcome. Catherine undressed quickly, eager to step into the hot water.

But Vincent stopped her. "Let me look at you. I haven't had enough time just to look." His eyes traveled over her leisurely. Drinking in the beauty of her, he began softly:

*'Whenas in silks my Catherine goes,
Then, then, methinks, how sweetly flows
The liquefaction of her clothes!*

*Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That brave vibration each way free,
--O how that glittering taketh me!*

His arms went around her, drawing her into close contact with his desirous body. "I can't get enough of you!" She felt his erection hard against her, exciting her to equal his passion.

She began to pull at his clothes. "I want to feel your skin; take these off!" He obeyed with celerity, and in moments was nude.

"There is no bed, where...?" she asked, looking around them.

Quickly he laid his clothes and hers on the rock floor, and laid himself down on top of them. Opening his arms, he said, "Here, on top of me. This time you will be the one who will control things... the one in the saddle, so to speak." and he grinned at her, actually grinned.

Bathing was delayed for more important matters.

On the third day they could hear sounds of activity from the other side of the rubble pile.

Catherine said, "I'm not sure I want to hear that. Can't this go on forever?" She stood within the circle of his arms, looking up at him.

"I wish it could; but only if we had some food sent in. I'm getting tired of bread and cheese."

She frowned at him, mock-serious. "Isn't the world well lost for love? "

"Yes, of course it is. I'll eat bread and cheese forever. Or we could live on love." He stood looking down at her, and as he looked the magic of her, here in his arms, shook his soul suddenly. His voice deepened to that lowest register that made shivers run through her. "I would do anything, face any hardship, just to be near you. I love you more now than ever before, and I didn't think that was possible. Kiss me...." And he bent his head to her upraised mouth.

The day came at last. When Vincent and Catherine approached the rubble pile, rays from the lights on the other side were clearly visible. In a few minutes, there was a hole big enough for Vincent to climb up and look through to the other side. Warning Catherine to stand back, he began to heave rocks aside, enlarging the hole from his side as the crew did the same on the other.

When the hole was large enough, he returned to help Catherine up the slope of loose rock and

rubble. They climbed through with ease, and they were back in the world, where they were welcomed with handshakes and hugs.

They passed through the workers with many thanks, and started on the long walk back to Vincent's chamber. As they walked, Vincent said, "When we get back I suppose that you and Father and Mary will want to have the first of a long series of meetings."

"What do you mean? What meetings?" Catherine looked up at him, confused.

He stopped and took her hands in his, and with a look of great tenderness, he made her happiness complete.

"Well, my Catherine, I thought now that the honeymoon is over, you might want to plan a wedding."

END