

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

by Margaret Mansfield

PART ONE

Vincent's head rang with so many bizarre images and voices that he wondered whether his tormented mind would ever be able to reclaim the delicate balance of rationality. As the thin strand of sanity momentarily returned, he clung to the hope that this journey would end soon, allowing him to return to all he held dear.

He ached to have Catherine near, to hear her voice, to see her beauty, to have her hold and comfort him until this passage was complete. Yet, another part of him sensed an overwhelming need to put great distance between himself and those he loved, especially her. If he ever harmed her, he would be lost forever in the darkness, which washed over him like waves from the sea.

Movement and a sudden awareness of Catherine's nearness propelled him into panicked flight. Much later, he stopped and pondered his present situation. He knew that whatever else, he could allow Catherine to follow him no further. Earlier, as he had reached the lowest tunnel level where pipes were still available for message sending, he had already been far ahead of her. He wished she would abandon her quest and turn back while she still could summon help.

Knowing Catherine, however, and sensing her determination, he tried to stop at each new tunnel branching to mark a trail. Once she knew what to look for, she would have no trouble making her way back to where Pascal could hear her messages asking for help.

He could give her nothing now but possible death. He had fed in the darkness too deeply of late and could not even offer her the strength of emotional stability. The beast, right now, seemed every bit as much in control as the man.

This was what Catherine must now accept. Presently, he wasn't the kind, gentle, strong man she had come to know and love. He was more, and in being more, felt himself to be ultimately less. Trapped in this world of unbalance, he was no longer sure he could control the dark side of his nature. He could only hope and pray that the '*man*' in him could conquer and control the beast.

Something terrible had been set loose within him that day Paracelsus had pushed him past endurance. The veneer of education and humanity shrouding the other side of his nature had snapped, as instinct and rage brought him face to face with a death from which he could not walk away. Not until after the death blow had been delivered had he found out it was really Paracelsus. In that instant, he believed that he had killed not one, but '*both*' his fathers.

Without conscious thought, his mind returned over and over again to that moment, now seared deep in his soul, when he had reached out in rage and hatred to take the life of the man he had called 'Father' all his life. He shuddered as shame and hopelessness once again engulfed him. Jacob and Catherine had repeated over and over in the ensuing time that it was over, but the words were empty.

Father and Catherine saw only what they wanted to see. How could they know that something deep within him had responded to the desire to kill in those seconds before striking out. Prior to this, he had killed only when the need to protect had been the motivating factor. But this had been different. This time, he had

killed out of a desire to destroy. It was contrary to all that the man in him believed and held sacred. It had set him adrift in a sea of mental turmoil.

As she crept forward cautiously, Catherine was filled with the certain knowledge that if she lost contact with him now, he would be lost to her forever. Even in this, the time of his greatest need, he was typically Vincent, putting the safety of his loved ones first. Her life had quickly turned into a nightmare. Paracelsus had set in motion the diabolical series of events which had driven Vincent into the darkness he most feared, where he was trapped - alone. Her heart ached for him.

She remembered as a child how she had feared the darkness, and how her mother had lovingly chased it away with a tiny candle. Childhood was such a time of trusting innocence. If only this situation could be that simple. Yet, she knew that she was now Vincent's candle. The only one he had as he wandered blindly in his darkness. She accepted the knowledge that she now 'truly' carried his light. This thought alone kept her going, as she followed after the indescribable sounds of madness, knowing that lost somewhere within that holocaust was all that she held dear.

The dark days immediately preceding the disastrous incident with Spirko had taught her forever and always that Vincent alone was what mattered most to her. Without him, she was incomplete - unable to function any longer as a whole person. The fact that Paracelsus was no longer able to pursue his evil course was little consolation. She thought of all the pain and misery his malignant schemes had caused. She thought of Father, Mouse and the others steeped in grief and apprehension. Their world had also been shattered and turned upside down. Vincent was their sunlight; he was her sunlight. For her there was no more Above or Below - there was only Vincent. He was now her world. There was no turning back. They must face this darkness together or both become engulfed by it.

She had followed behind Vincent for hours now, calling his name over and over with no response, except for the unearthly howls. She felt trapped here in the bowels of the earth and momentarily panicked at the thought. Twisting and turning through the eerie tunnel world, she knew that without his guidance and uncanny sense of direction to guide her back, she might be hopelessly lost in this subterranean lair of gloom and dampness.

Although tired and desperately in need of rest, her most immediate need was to locate Vincent. She wondered where it would all end. What would happen if he ever allowed her to catch up with him?

Sudden stillness momentarily shattered her thought, startling her. Catherine once again sensed his nearness. The sporadic opening and closing of the bond had allowed her to follow him this far, serving as an indication of his lucid moments. As she rounded a corner, she was suddenly face-to-face with him, and her heart began to beat wildly in her chest.

She had not sensed he was this near. She backed into a rocky crevice, not knowing what to expect but determined to deal with whatever happened; to be a part of it. Belief at seeing him safe, and calm for the moment vied for upper place in her emotions, along with the apprehension she felt over what might now happen.

In the end, neither emotion was strong enough to overcome the sense of longing and need to comfort him which washed over her anew as she sensed his aloneness even in her presence. Compassionately, she moved toward him, wanting nothing more than to be close to him. She longed to draw him to her, to put her arms around him, to touch him... love him. She could sense that he was aware of her feelings.

His softly whimpering plea, "Catherine, don't come any closer," stopped her.

Sensing that this might be the last time she could reach him, she held nothing back as she let her deepest thoughts and feelings flow. It was a blessed relief to finally express them without holding anything in check.

Like moths drawn to a flame, they fluttered, silently winging their way across the space that separated them.

As their eyes met and held, she saw the naked yearning and hunger reflected in the shadowed pools of blue. She knew that there was nothing left unsaid. She had poured out to him all the unspoken hopes, dreams, needs, and desires that lay in her heart like jewels. Never before sharing so intimately of her hopes and feelings, she intuitively knew that now was the moment that Vincent needed to know just how strong and deep the bond between them had grown. He had to know, regardless of what came, that she knew in the depths of her being, their love was strong enough to overcome the horror.

Vincent groaned softly as he drew back from the intensity of her feelings. He began to tremble as he tried unsuccessfully to close out the intimacy of her thoughts. Deeply disturbed, he paced back and forth in the small semi-dark cavern where they stood. The hopelessness of their whole relationship once again began to plunge him into the depths of despair.

She felt him begin to fade away from her through the bond, and her panicky outcry suddenly shattered the silence of the cavern.

"Vincent, don't leave me. Let me stay with you. You have always been there for me, Vincent, always. Let me be here for you now. You cannot remain here alone, believing that yours is the only soul plunged into darkness by this horror.

Our spirits are already joined in a way we have yet to fully explore. Our bond has gone past the fact of your uniqueness. *We* are now as unique as *you*. You can't go far enough away to leave that behind. I'll always be with you as you are with me. *What* you are will never change that. You can separate yourself from the others, but I'll never again let you separate yourself from me. No more walls, Vincent, no more walls. I'm not afraid."

Vincent was amazed that she still wanted to stay with him, when he didn't even want to stay with himself. He was overwhelmed. He tried to push back the physical need washing over him through the bond, but he couldn't. Something within him, which he couldn't control, was responding to her needs. He felt as if a part of him was being wrenched free and changing. In one of the last clear moments he would remember for some time, he felt his soul separate and fuse with hers. He experienced the quiet acceptance of her words and all that they meant. He knew with certainty, for the first time in his life, that he would never be alone again.

He was humbled to realize how much he needed this woman's steadfast love. He thanked God for her as he reached out for the safety of her arms, sought the safe shores of her love. He heard her mind call his name, felt the loving protection of the small body as it molded itself to him, becoming part of him. He felt his hungry lips seek and claim hers. His mind reeled as his body took all she had to offer. He reveled in the myriad of new sensations joining with her brought, and like a man dying of thirst drank deeply of the pleasures she joyfully offered. His body felt engulfed in flames which increased in intensity, almost consuming him as he experienced the fulfillment of their lovemaking. As he cried out in pleasure, he felt something between them burst into being, and as consciousness left and oblivion claimed him, he knew that the horror of the last month was finally over.

Catherine lay curled against Vincent, peacefully sleeping. Father, coming to relieve her, found her thus hours ago and had gently covered her up. He sat, watching both his children. These past weeks had taken its toll on all of them, and he was gratefully for the few hours of quiet.

Vincent also slept, unmoving, in the bed. He had been like this for weeks, and Father hoped it wouldn't be much longer before he awakened. It was a miracle that he was with them. If Catherine had not been with him when he passed into this dormant state, God knows what could have happened to him down there in the bowels of the earth. They had been gone for days before she finally stumbled into a tunnel section that allowed her access to the pipes which Pascal could hear. When the message came that she had been located, there had been great relief, becoming even greater when she led them back to Vincent. Father had monitored and cared for him closely, once they had brought him back to the complex.

Catherine stirred and slowly began to open her eyes. She had actually been awake for some minutes, snuggling against Vincent, trying to recapture more of the pieces of her fleeting dream which had already begun to fade, as consciousness claimed her attention. It had been a wonderful dream. Vincent was awake and well again, and they had been planning their honeymoon trip to her secluded mountain meadow. They were both excited as little children on their first excursion to the candy store.

Yawning, Catherine opened her eyes fully to find Father sitting in his favorite chair, observing her. They had grown much closer over the past weeks, a closeness born of their matched concern for Vincent's well-being. He had been wonderful these past weeks, allowing Catherine to help care for Vincent.

Father had been there for her in every way, guiding her through her fears and anxieties, assuring her that, for Vincent, the worst seemed to be over. He had shared with her the history of Vincent's similar episode while a teenager and assured her that the deep coma-like sleep, which held her love captive, was the very thing necessary to bring him the healing his psyche so desperately needed.

Throwing back the quilt, Catherine swung her legs to the floor and searched for her tunnel slippers. She had taken to dressing as they did, and her small frame presently looked lost in one of Vincent's old sweaters worn over a pair of her faded jeans. Looking at Father, she gestured toward the doorway and beckoned him to follow. Lovingly covering Vincent over, they both quietly left the chamber and made their way to the small kitchen which Father and Vincent shared.

Father sat in one of the worn chairs at the table watching Catherine make tea. A small tin of biscuits sat on the table between them. It would take the edge off hunger until William had dinner sent in to them. When the tea water was ready, Catherine joined him at the table, and they sat for awhile in silence, enjoying the hot herbal tea they both liked so much.

"So tell me, Catherine. Tomorrow begins a new work week. Have you decided what you are going to do? Vincent will be perfectly all right if you go Above to work. You know he will be well cared for while you are gone, and we could quickly get a message to you if there was any change in Vincent's condition."

"Don't worry about my job, Father. There's nothing that needs my attention. Maybe later today, I'll go visit Joe for just awhile. The last time I saw him, I looked pretty rough. It was right after we brought Vincent home. I told him that I needed some time off for personal reasons. That was weeks ago. He's probably frantic worrying about me. I should have gone up to see him days ago, but I've been so concerned about Vincent..."

Vincent slowly fought his way up through the blackness which held him in its grip. Each time he fought the blackness, he seemed to come closer to overcoming it. Moaning softly, he shifted his weight while trying to focus his eyes. Gradually, the hazy images surrounding him took shape, shocking him into total awareness. He was in his own chamber, in his own bed, and the scent of Catherine was heavy all around him.

Rising slowly, he quickly sunk back down on the bed as dizziness claimed him. His head felt fuzzy, and his legs rubbery, as if he hadn't used them in a long while. He sat there, waiting for the dizziness to pass, trying

to remember what had happened, and how he came to be in his own familiar room.

Try as he did, however, he remembered nothing past that moment deep in the bowels of the earth when he had reached for the safety of Catherine's arms. For the moment, he could remember nothing else. Obviously, somehow, she had led them up from the depths of the tunnels. He wondered how long he had lain unconscious. He felt as if he had been away for a long time, not unlike the experience he had as a young boy.

Memories suddenly came flooding into his mind. He remembered what he had felt through the bond in those last moments before unconsciousness had claimed him. His chaotic thoughts and emotions had seemed to crystallize and then shatter as the intensity of Catherine's thoughts and feelings had come crashing in upon him, sweeping away all the doubts and fears which had for so long held him captive.

He knew that her love had saved him, had brought him back from the edge of insanity. Something deep within him had finally responded to the total commitment she had made to him. He remembered the physicality of their joining. He remembered the split second of time, as he lay spent in her enfolding arms, when something within each of them had splintered off, joined and fused, bonding them to each other for eternity. He sat lost in the thought, in awe of what had happened, and the peace he felt within himself. Never again would he doubt her love or commitment.

Bringing his thoughts back to the present, he wondered if he had strength enough to go looking for Father. He was sure Father would want to know that he was once again among the land of the living. And Catherine... he wanted Catherine... wanted to be with her, to hold her, to love her...

"But Catherine, what about all your other cases?" queried Father. "Really, Vincent will be all right."

Catherine sat silently looking down into her cup of tea, debating with herself as to how much she wanted to tell him. It was really none of his business, but also knew that he was concerned for her.

She wished Vincent would wake. He should hear her news first. Besides, she was a little afraid of Father's initial reaction when he heard that she was pregnant. She smiled to herself as the warmth of the knowledge of it washed over her afresh. She hadn't believed it at first, thinking she had miscalculated, but Peter had finally confirmed her suspicion. She had sworn Peter to secrecy, which wasn't hard to do. He hadn't seemed overly anxious to be the one to break the news to Father, especially with Vincent still in a coma.

"Father, there are some things I guess I'd better tell you. I'm quitting my job, and I'm..."

She got no further before Father exploded. "You *'what'?*! Catherine, how *'can'* you? That job is important to you! It is a big part of your life. Listen to me. Vincent will never allow you to..."

Catherine, following Father's example, exploded herself. "No, you listen to *me*. This is *my* life, not Vincent's. I'll decide if I want to work or not. That job is not as important to me as Vincent. I've had a lot of time to think things out these past weeks, and I've come to some unavoidable conclusions which have greatly influenced the decisions I've made.

"My job has been the reason Vincent has so many times been put in jeopardy. Time and again, because of it, I have stupidly let myself be put in dangerous situations where Vincent has had to take great risks. I will *never* let that happen again. Vincent is my life. He's all that matters to me. Without him, I have nothing. My well-being now depends totally on him. I need him, Father. If anything happened to him, I couldn't handle it. I'm not a whole person without him anymore. Something happened to us in that cavern, Father. Something that I don't have words to explain. Something from each of us - maybe the essence of who we each are as individuals - fused. Whatever it was can never be undone. My life now lies with him. Neither of us can break the commitment.

"My work now needs to take second place. I will no longer expose Vincent to the dangers it brings. Not only Vincent, but the whole community, was in danger and jeopardy this last time. If Spirko had lived to write his story, there would have been a witch hunt. There is no way this community would have escaped without being exposed. I will not take that chance ever again.

"Besides," she added quickly before she could stop and think about it. "I'm pregnant."

Her words lingered in the air as Father just sat there, staring at her as if he refused to hear what she had said. She had expected an explosion of major proportions, not this silence.

Simultaneously, they heard the sharp intake of breath behind them and turned to see who was entering the room. Both were up out of their seats and running toward the swaying figure who filled the doorway. Vincent found himself enveloped by more arms than he could accommodate. Catherine buried her head in his chest, murmuring his name lovingly over and over, clinging to him, while Father just held on tightly to his shoulder, tears in his eyes.

"Thank God you're finally awake, Vincent" Father exclaimed. "Thank God. Come, sit. You look very pale. You should still be in bed."

Becoming all doctor, he led Vincent over to the table and made him sit.

"Catherine, why don't you make him a cup of tea and get him something to eat. We'll continue our talk later."

"No Father, we'll continue it now," said Vincent, looking at Catherine in wonder. "I had to walk very slowly, so it took me some time to get down the pathway, and I make no apologies for eavesdropping. My hearing, as you know, is very astute. I heard most of your conversation. Catherine..." his voice broke, and he couldn't get any words out. He looked up at her standing before him, lost in his sweater, looking like a beautiful waif. He saw the love shining out of her deep green eyes, saw not only love, but joy and happiness. He pulled her down on his lap and buried his face in her sweet-smelling hair and let the tears fall, murmuring over and over.

"I love you, Catherine, I love you."

"Vincent... Vincent. I've been so worried about you," she shuddered and sobbed. "Hold me... Hold me... and never let me go."

He gathered her closer, murmuring in her ear. "Never, my love, never."

Lost in each other, and the wonder of their love, neither heard Father quietly leave, a smile on his face.

PART TWO

Joe was tired, impatient, and worried. The play of emotions across his face left no doubt in anyone's mind as to the state of his feelings. The usually calm, easy going, and somewhat boyish charm was, for the moment, replaced by irritability and frustration. What has she gotten herself into this time, he wondered, as his men approached her apartment door, looking for all the world like a squad of stormtroopers. If she doesn't answer this time, he decided as he knocked, we're going in.

As he suspected it would, the knock went unanswered. He signaled the manager and waited impatiently for the harried man to unlock the door. The little man's exasperated look seemed to say, *Why me, why my building?* Joe had no sympathy left over to expend on him. He was really concerned about Cath this time. He had a bad feeling about this one as if things might not work out as well as they had in the past when she had bitten off more than she could chew.

Waiting for the last lock to click and allow them entrance, he let his mind wander to his last contact with his missing co-worker. He had thought it strange that night when she called so late, begging him to meet her at the coffee shop near Central Park. Loathe to leave the warmth of his bed, he had almost begged off until he heard the note of near-hysteria in her voice. He had also sensed her desire to say something which, at the last moment, she decided against. The voice tinged with panic and frustration had finally overridden his lethargy and desire to roll over and go back to sleep.

When he had reached the little shop and spied her through the window, he had been immediately concerned with her appearance. She had looked almost frantic sitting there waiting for him to show up. When she glanced up and saw him standing over her, several moments later, what he saw belied the excuse of flu she had used for her absence from work. She looked like she hadn't slept for several days. Even in the dim light, she had looked painfully haggard and exhausted. But it was the look of impending loss he had seen in her lustrous, green eyes that made him glad that he had come.

"What's up, Radcliffe? It had better be good to pull me out of my nice warm bed."

"Something personal has come up, Joe. Something that I'm not free to talk about. It has to take priority over everything else in my life right now. I won't be able to work until this thing is straightened out."

Joe's brow furrowed as he digested this news. This wasn't the first time that Cath had suddenly asked for a leave, but this time he sensed an almost frantic need in her to be elsewhere, even as she sat across from him, calmly trying to articulate her words. He had caught, in her voice, the plea for empathy and unquestioning acceptance. If he were going to help her, however, he felt he needed a little more information.

"What's this all about, Radcliffe? Are you working on something that I don't know about? It wouldn't be the first time," he said, suddenly suspicious.

"No, Joe, it has nothing to do with work. Not at this point, anyway," she added under her breath. "It's really personal, Joe. Believe me. Someone I'm real close to is sick and needs me. I'd be no good at work until he's better. Can you handle it for me? I won't be around to even call in tomorrow."

She had suddenly looked too exhausted and emotionally drained to argue with, and he had agreed to notify Moreno that she would be on emergency leave. He made one stipulation, however. He made her promise to maintain contact with him, which she agreed to do. That has been weeks ago.

Blinking in the light of the hallway, Joe suddenly heard the click of the last lock and brought his wandering attention back to the present as he pushed open the apartment door. Entering the familiar apartment, he wasn't ready for the scene which met his eyes. Something had definitely happened here. What and when he could not tell.

Several of the inner doors were broken. Glass and wood debris looked like it had been swept hastily into several corners. Bed linen, blankets, and pillows were heaped on the floor beside the couch. The bedroom had a hastily vacated look with clothes and bedding scattered here and there.

"All right boys, check everything out. I'll start in here."

When they were finished, Joe was still frustrated. The search had turned up little else except a note which read:

*'Catherine,
V much worse.
Come quickly.
F'*

Outside of the broken doors and scattered glass, there didn't appear to have been a major struggle. It didn't look like the apartment had been tossed. There were dishes piled up in the sink and what looked like the remains of a hastily-prepared meal for two, largely uneaten, sitting on a tray near the bedside. A man's vest, rather large, worn, and outdated-looking was haphazardly draped over a chair. What appeared to be several long, reddish blonde hairs were found on the bed pillows.

Not much to go on, Joe thought, as he fingered the small book he had found in one of the bedside tables. After scanning it quickly, he had hastily secreted it in the large inside pocket of his raincoat. He had a suspicion that many questions about Radcliffe would find answers between the covers of the little book. Until he checked out the contents himself, he was loathe to give over to public scrutiny something so obviously personal as her diary. He owed her that much privacy. Part of him felt guilty about taking the little book, but his need to find out what has happened to Cathy overrode the guilt. He had a hard time admitting to himself that she was special to him - but the truth was he cared very deeply about her.

As usual, the rest of the day stretched out interminably, and it was late before he got home. After a quick bite of warmed up pizza, he extracted the little book from his pocket and settled into his favorite chair. Feeling like a peeping tom, he silently pleaded with the absent Cathy to forgive his delving into her private world. He was aware of the fact that this intrusion, if discovered, could put a damper on their friendship. But the fact remained that she had now been gone for weeks, and he needed some answers.

He began at the beginning and was instantly engrossed, forgetting time and place-----forgetting everything but the unfolding tale which stretched back to shortly before he had met her.

DECEMBER 12TH

Scheduled for surgery tomorrow. It's been over a week since I returned above. How many times this week I've wished I could hear **that** voice telling me I had the courage to face whatever must be faced. How different everything seems now. It's as though I see through different eyes. He left me so suddenly, and there were so many things I still wanted to tell him. I wonder if I'll ever see him again? I hope so. I owe him so much. Much more than just my life. It's strange how you can know people all your life and not really know them, and others, whom you've just met, seem like life-long friends.

I feel connected to this strange being in some inexplicable way - drawn to him. I find myself thinking of him frequently. Hearing his soft, whispery voice reading to me. Is he well? What is he doing? Does he ever think about the woman he rescued? And that society he lives in. Who would have ever thought such a place could exist right here under the heart of the city. It's like something out of a medieval tale.

So many people are wondering where I was those lost days. I wish I could tell someone. My father especially, but that's out of the question. I cannot betray their trust. I cannot reveal their existence - especially his. He must remain forever hidden. Safe from the harm my society could inflict on someone like him.

I am concerned about the anesthetic tomorrow. I have heard that people sometimes talk more freely under the influence of such drugs. Hopefully, if I say something, it will be regarded as the ramblings of a woman who had undergone such stress lately.

DECEMBER 19TH

The bandages came off today, and I was amazed at how well my face looks. It was so good to see the old familiar me again. The puffiness in my face will soon go down, and they plan on releasing me in a few days. Am I ready to go back out into the world? I wonder what he would say if he could see me now? I wish he could. I still think about him and his secret world. The scar traces on my face can be covered with hair style. What about the inner scars which they can't operate on? Will they also heal? Every time I find myself

thinking of what happened, I seem to hear his voice telling me once again of the faith he has in my ability to face life. It's a comforting thought.

AUGUST 10TH

Poor Dad! He says he understands. I really hope in time he does. I worry about him because it meant so much to him that I was working for his firm, but I can't do it anymore. It's never been what I wanted. I just never seemed to have the courage to face the situation. Somehow it's different now, and I feel a purpose and direction I've never felt before. I want to do something that will make a difference - something that will help other people. Somehow try to save others from having to face the brutality and terror I've gone through. I have a feeling that this will help heal the inner scars I carry. Life seems so changed. I owe so much to Vincent. I wish I could tell him what is happening in my life. I hope he is well.

AUGUST 22ND

I'm so excited! I got the job. What a job! Hectic isn't the word for it - frantic would more aptly describe it. I don't have anywhere near the free time I used to have, which is just as well. Somehow I feel a sense of relief not having the time to socialize. I've been thinking much lately about friendships. Many of mine seem so shallow, but Nancy and Jen are still special to me.

SEPTEMBER 9TH

Joe is a great guy. He reminds me of someone's big brother. I've only been there a couple of weeks, and already I know he's special. He's so serious about his work. I've been having lunch, when we can find the time, with Edie. She's fun and easy going. It's strange that I already feel closer to these people than to friends who have been around all my life. They seem much more real. Life is more than the next cocktail party to them. Life is filled with ups and downs which really effect them deeply. At work they have a sense of team spirit that I really like.

SEPTEMBER 19TH

Was late to work today for the first time. He came last night! I almost missed him. It's been such a long time that I'd begun to wonder if he were real, or had he just been a vivid dream? I have no doubts now. We talked about all the things that have been happening in my life. At first, he kept staring at my face, as if he couldn't believe it was really me. When he said that he thought about me, and had come because he wanted to see if I was well, something inside me turned over.

I'm afraid I stared also. He is so different from anyone I've ever known. It's not just his looks. Inside I sense the difference in him. He's unspoiled - still filled with trust and faith and quiet dignity. His gentleness and compassion are traits sadly missing among most of my friends. His attentiveness is intense - the way he drinks in my every word. I could listen to his voice for hours. Its whispery tones are almost hypnotic. He was going to leave almost as soon as he arrived, but I persuaded him to stay. We sat and talked far into the night.

Before he left, I made him promise to stay in closer contact. That seemed to please him, yet I also sensed great reservation and sorrow. I don't know what to call the feelings I have for this strange person. All I do know is that I want him in my life - I need him in some inexplicable way.

SEPTEMBER 30TH

Once again I owe my life to Vincent. If he hadn't shown up when he did, I'd be dead. I still can't believe what my eyes saw. Such rage and savage power. What happened to him? It's as if he somehow changed into another being. I've known all along that he was different, but this was something to behold.

Three men are dead, but somehow I can't seem to grieve for them. I'm sorry they died as they did, but part of me feels as if justice was rendered. What they did to Carol, and wanted to do to me, shows what kind of men they were.

I'm still shaking as I think about it all. I have so many questions. How did Vincent know what was going on? How did he find me? This connection that he talks about must really, somehow, exist. There is no other logical explanation.

What should I do now? What can I do? I broke every rule in the book. I left the scene of a crime - helped the murderer. I cringe over that word, yet I am only too aware of the legal ramifications. Just his looks alone should probably convict him. Yet, **they** weren't there and didn't see what I saw. They didn't see the daze he was in after it happened. They didn't see him sitting there trying to figure it out. They didn't see the revulsion and shame in his eyes when he realized what he had done. Now he, too, carries scars. I had to get him out of there. I couldn't let him stay. In a court of law, a case for justifiable homicide could probably be made, but at what cost? How could he stand trial? They would never let him be free again. It's unbearably sad to think that my world has touched someone like him. My heart aches to comfort him.

OCTOBER

I met a man tonight. His name is Elliot. Something about him is very appealing. I sense an attraction for him I can't deny.

Vincent came tonight just as I was getting home. He was not his usual self - more reserved. It made me very uncomfortable - as if there were suddenly a wall between us. I know he says he can feel what I'm feeling, but can he be responsive enough to sense my attraction to Elliot? I don't want to hurt him.

OCTOBER

Elliot is a very dynamic man. I really like him. I tried to explain to Vincent that my possible feelings for another man would never change the way I feel about him. I tried to make him understand tonight, but I don't think that he did. He looked so resigned as he walked off. I don't want to hurt him, yet I must live my life to the best of my abilities.

OCTOBER

How like Vincent to find a sonnet to express his feelings. Things affect him deeply. I should have known, but I didn't realize how much I have come to mean to him. How it must have hurt to hear me say that even if another entered my life, I didn't want to lose him. What makes it worse is that I was so wrong about Elliot.

It's a big responsibility being someone else's dream. I don't know whether I'm ready for that much responsibility. I have a lot to think about.

OCTOBER

If we hadn't found him, I would never have forgiven myself. What's worse, it would have proved all Father's fears true. As it is, he will be healing quite awhile from the injuries he suffered when he was hit by the car. Father says his eyes will clear in a day or two, which is good news. I wonder if I dare visit him without upsetting his Father more than I already have?

NOVEMBER 1ST

Saowen! What a truly magical night it turned out to be. Meeting Brigit and then spending the rest of the evening Above with Vincent. He looked so handsome dressed in his ruffled shirt and new cord jeans. Watching him enjoy all that he saw was priceless. I shall treasure the memories always.

Not only did the walls between the worlds grow thin, but the walls between us dissolved. We were any other couple out sightseeing. He was so relaxed and easy going, with so many questions and opinions. In a city where I was born and raised, I saw things I've never seen last night, through his eyes. I wish the night could have gone on and on, but it wasn't meant to be. Saowen was over all too soon. He left me by the bridge, wondering what sharing a life with him would be like.

NOVEMBER

My mind is in turmoil. How can I leave him and go to Rhode Island? Yet, do I dare pass up this opportunity? Joe went out of his way to put in a good word for me. As he said, *This kind of opportunity is a long time in coming*. I might not get another chance like this for a long time. I know I could handle this job.

Vincent doesn't help matters either. It almost sounds like he's saying that I need to do everything there is to do; experience everything there is to experience, here in my world, before we can be together. He can be very frustrating at times. The wall is back between us. I sometimes feel he has an unfair advantage. He can sense my feelings so clearly - sometimes my very thoughts. I'm still not used to his having this ability.

NOVEMBER

Thank God he's home safe! He won't talk about it, probably never will. More scars. I'm not leaving him. I can't. He was almost dead when Professor Hughes took me to him. Just knowing that made me realize how far away Rhode Island is to someone like Vincent. I'd never be able to see him. I'm used to feeling connected. It's a good feeling to know there's someone special nearby who cares.

NOVEMBER

Once again I find myself alive because of Vincent. This bond between us grows stronger and stronger. Even when my thoughts and feelings were clouded by the drugs, he was able to feel my fear and search me out.

NOVEMBER

It was such a wonderful feeling seeing Eric and his sister reunited and in a safe place. They are with Vincent. I still shudder when I think of all the children still being used and abused. How can things like this happen? Vincent comprehends it even less than I. His life, until recently, has been so sheltered. Our society is riddled with sickness. Where will it all end? There is so much to do and so few who really care to get involved. It makes my job that much more important.

It was good seeing Vincent again. He gave no explanation for his recent lack of communication. It weighs deeply on him that our lives are so different. Our times together are so few and short. It seems like he just arrives, and it's time for him to leave. Almost as if he doesn't trust himself to be with me for any length of time, as if he were holding back, afraid of getting too involved in my life. I'm sure he knows how I feel. How can he not? I wish I had someone else to talk to about all this. Things get so confusing sometimes.

DECEMBER

I'd never considered danger to Vincent striking from Below. Always my fears have been focused here, Above. It was a shock when I suddenly sensed that something was wrong. It took me a minute or two to realize that somehow I was sensing that something was wrong with Vincent. Now I have a better grasp on how this bond works. It is incredible to be able to feel another person's thoughts and emotions.

Thank God I found Mouse and followed my instincts concerning Elliot. Father is in pretty rough shape, but at least we reached them in time. Vincent seems fine. More dirty and tired than anything else. My heart was in my mouth when Mouse used that explosive. I said a silent prayer. When I entered that hole, expecting the worst, and found him alive, my heart knew beyond any more doubt or confusion that I am truly in love with him.

There is a world of difference between loving someone and being in love. I haven't been able to stop thinking about him since I left him staring after me in the tunnel. I will always remember how he looked at me that moment. His face was full of wonder when I told him that it was love that had brought me to him. What will happen now? Where will we go from here? Where can we go from here? He is so unsure of himself - such an innocent. Locked up by his own doubts. I sense them so strongly sometimes. God help us!

DECEMBER 12TH

A whole year! Has it been that long? Hard to believe. It has been a memorable time. My life has changed so much. Vincent sent word - the first since the cave-in. A flower and a note left long after midnight, as I lay lost in sleep. How special it is to wake to such a gift. He is coming tonight. I wonder if he will remember that today is special. I wonder what he will think of the rose. It's really such a small thing, yet it means so much to me. I want him to have it. I've taken such care about tonight. I want it to be perfect - magical - special for Vincent.

He should be here soon! Today I have thought about him constantly. That soft, velvety voice calling, *Catherine*. In my mind's eye, I turn to see him standing there in the shadows, hair billowing out about that unusual face. Everytime he comes, I am momentarily taken aback by the sheer beauty and majesty of him. Is he real? Do I dare hope for more than a few stolen moments now and again? No matter, tonight he comes - and he is mine.

DECEMBER 13

He remembered. Turning and seeing him standing there all dressed up in his special clothes, I was suddenly shy. I was specially dressed, also. It was instantly obvious that we both held the date so special.

He is so beautiful! Everything about him seems to sing with a melody all its own. His appearance, the way he strides, the gestures of his hands - all are wonderful and mesmerizing. The tone of his voice touched a cord deep inside me, and his deep blue, piercing eyes sometimes seem to penetrate my very soul. Sometimes I think I could be content forever just watching him. His motions flow with a free grace all their own.

The bond grows steady, weaving itself between our lives. I know it is much stronger for him, but I've begun to be sensitive to his emotions, also, especially when he's close by, and when they are intense. Tonight, I sensed such longing and desire held in check. They reminded me of a smoldering fire ready to burst into flames. I sense the hesitations in his feelings, but not the reasons. His personality becomes more complex to me as time passes. He truly is unique.

The crystal is beautiful. I shall treasure it always. It sparkles and gleams in the firelight. I only wish he could see it in the sunlight. I would gladly trade it for a kiss.

JANUARY

I'm glad Devin didn't put up a fight when I told him I wanted him off the Arringer case. Vincent seemed very affected by his reappearance. Below, after all these years. Father, I hear, caused an uproar as well.

I wish he would come tonight, but I know that he needs to spend time with Devin. They were really close, raised as brothers, and Vincent is glad he is back. Still, I wish I could see him, even for just a few moments.

Even throwing myself into extra hours of work sometimes doesn't keep me from daydreaming about Vincent. I picture him gracefully walking toward me with that rhythmic gait, cloak swaying around his boots. His masculinity captivates and fascinates me. I see his mythical face and remember those penetrating blue eyes - so deep - like bottomless pools. His soft, whispery voice echoes its elegant speech patterns throughout my mind, and I visualize the burnished waves of copper as they escape his hood. In my daydreams, I can even smell the smoky candlewax, the old leather, and the musky scent of him that clings to his clothes.

When he comes from his world to mine, he brings these and so much more. His presence alone gives me a sense of peace and well-being that I find nowhere else. Lately, I seem to have little objectivity when he's near. I'm content to nestle into his embrace, relishing the safe haven of his warmth, happy when his maned head bends to nuzzle my hair. Everything else then seems non-existent. There's such a sense of

enchantment that Vincent weaves. Wherever we meet, here Above or there Below, time stands still, and we take joy in the moments.

FEBRUARY

Steven came back into my life and when he told me how sick he was, he somehow made me feel guilty. I remembered how I felt during those last bitter weeks with Steven, after I suddenly realized that if I married him I would only be trading my father for Steven. I rebelled against Steven's trype of personality, which needs to dominate and control. Steven began to see, not me, but me as an extension of himself. I didn't handle the breakup very well.

How could i have been so short-sighted? Something should have alerted me that Steven was not well when he re-entered my life. Thank God, Vincent trusted his instincts and came after me, but I shudder to think of how much danger he put himself in, by coming so far away from the safety of the tunnels. Anything could have happened. What if he had gotten caught?

MARCH

Paracelsus is a truly evil man. The thought of him still makes me shiver, but I couldn't let the fear overcome me. It's what he wanted - what he seemed to feed on. When fear rules us, we are truly lost and at the mercy of what we fear.

Paracelsus is still free to continue his diabolical plans to return to the tunnels and rule in Father's place. It really scares me to think how close he came to realizing his goals. Somehow, the tunnel community must deal with the fact that Paracelsus is obsessed with his goal. He is not the kind of man who will stop. His kind are rarely swayed from their obsessions.

After Vincent scared off Paracelsus, the journey home from his lair was one of closeness for us. Somehow, having once again come so close to losing one another had broken down the wall Vincent usually keeps between us. I didn't sense in him the reticence and hesitation I so often feel when I am in his world. When I close my eyes, I can still feel the leisurely contentment produced by the motion of the boat. Vincent maneuvered it nonchalantly between the rocky outcroppings which, here and there, encroached upon the river, as it snaked its way through the underground caverns. I'll always remember the sense of otherworldliness being that deep in the earth produced in me.

When we stopped that first night, Vincent made a fire, and we shared half the food we had salvaged from Paracelsus' camp. We washed it down with crystal clear water from one of the underground springs which apparently helps feed the river. We were so one in spirit, filled with tranquil serenity, full and drowsy, we sat close by the warm fire.

How his eyes danced in the firelight that softly illuminated the small cavern with flickering reddish-orange light. The highlights of his hair seemed to burn more golden in the soft light. He told me stories of how he and Devin used to explore the uncharted tunnel regions as children, and I had to chuckle with amusement at the thought of how they must have led Father a merry chase.

I don't rememeber dozing off, much less falling asleep, but woke refreshed hours later cuddled like a child in his arms. He was still asleep and I could study the planes of his face to my heart's content with no inhibitions. Not yet ready to lose the opportunity of indulging myself in this pleasurable pasttime, I lost myself in a further study of his leonine features, until I suddenly became conscious of one penetrating blue eye studying me with just as much intensity.

What does one do in such moments? I laughed, probably a nervous reaction. After a second, he joined in, and his laughter was deep and full, setting the tone of lighthearted banter which predominated our mood for the rest of the journey.

I'll never forget leaving the boat behind the next day and beginning the last leg of our journey home. We set out on foot through the eerie tunnels. Vincent became more and more engrossed in making sure we took the right turns, as he led us closer and closer to familiar territory. Gradually, I could almost feel his rebuilding the wall, which would once again confine me to the area of his heart he seemed most comfortable having me inhabit.

Eventually, we could hear the pipes banging in the distance. Even though it was reassuring to hear them, I knew that once Vincent was able to send a message as to our safety and whereabouts, we would soon be joined, and - as I suspected - several hours later we were met with supplies by quite a delegation of tunnel dwellers led by Father.

APRIL 27

Memories - painful memories of my mother claim me, holding me relentlessly in their grasp. After so many years, how can they still hurt so? What's happening to me? Vincent seems to think it's some need to have a normal relationship, which is buried inside of me, calling out for fulfillment.

I kept seeing her everywhere! I keep thinking about her all the time. I am getting more and more depressed. I feel not so much the loss of my mother, but **how** much that loss has effected my life. Until I met Vincent, I felt so alone - disconnected. As if part of me wouldn't allow relationships to go too deeply, because I didn't trust how and when they would end.

Vincent is right, but only partly so. It is a more complete relationship that I want. Not with just anyone but with him, Now that I have admitted to myself that I love him more than I have ever loved anyone before, I long for a life with him. Part of me realized the impossibility of that, and part of me wants it anyway.

Do we really dream an impossible dream? Will we ever truly be together? I want a home and family. How can Vincent be part of this dream? How can it be fulfilled without him? I'm so confused.

MAY 1

He's worth everything. He's all I really need. Without him all the rest would be meaningless. He was waiting for me at the park entrance to the tunnels when I got there. He sensed I was coming, as I sensed that he would be there. Where did the night go? I only clearly remember being there in his arms - seeing the smoldering eyes - the maned head finally bending - his lips gently seeking mine seeing the commitment. All else is hazy, melting into a montage of images and impressions.

Mostly I remember the feelings. Joy at being with him - knowing that I loved and as loved in return. Contentment and safety, as I nestled closer into the strong embrace, listening with rapt attention to the murmurings of the soft, husky voice. Peace as the bond opened fully, enfolding me in a sense of belonging and fulfillment I never before experienced. I remember also, the need to touch and be close to him.

MAY 2

Last night, he knew that I had come to this decision on my own. If our dream can exist only at the cost of all others - then so be it. It's worth the cost. To know he's there - dreaming my dream - it's enough for now. I've come to a decision, but have not told Vincent. I only think of it fleetingly, in fear that somehow he might happen upon it through the bond. If I don't marry Vincent, I'll marry no one. If I don't have his children, then I'll have none.

MAY

It seems to be a time in my life for decision-making, or maybe once the most basic decision is finally made, others flow naturally. However it occurs, I have decided to spend more time in his world. I feel the need to acclimate myself to the place. I need to get to know it and feel comfortable there Below, where he feels safe and secure.

I know now that any life we could possibly have must be lived there. One day, I know I will join him in his world, but I must move slowly. I must prepare without alarming him, because it seems to mean so much to him that I live the life he feels I was destined to live Above. He seems to find a fulfillment for himself in all I do here - in all I experience.

As I sit and think of all destiny has handed out so far, I see more clearly that a life Below, sometime in the future when he is able to accept it, is what I really desire. I have been places and accomplished things already in my life, that are far beyond the dreams of many people. I know that I'm not yet ready to leave Above, but there is an excitement in knowing beyond doubt anymore that I want to eventually be Below with him - to know how I want to live my life.

Destiny is a strange thing. To some it deals harshly, while to others, it brings into reality things that are beyond even dreams. Vincent is beyond dreams, and destiny has linked my life irrevocably with his. He is a unique gift destiny has given to me - something that has never been in our world. I know life with him whatever it brings, will truly be a journey worth taking. Worth all the other dreams. I no longer need to understand it. I only wish to live it. I am happy.

Joe glanced at the clock on the mantle and groaned. He needed to be at work on time today; there was no getting around it. With Cath out, there was no way he could skip. Besides, he couldn't read anymore just now. The words in the little book were beginning to blur, and his tired eyes were blinking furiously. He closed his eyes gingerly and attempted to focus on what he had thus far read. There was such a myriad group of conflicting thoughts running around in his brain, he was momentarily at a loss as to which one to latch onto first.

He stood, stretched, and let his body go limp for a moment. Before becoming engrossed in preparations for work, he took a moment to secrete the little book. He wasn't expecting anyone, nevertheless, it wasn't something he wanted to leave lying around.

Heading for the shower, one particular thought kept presenting itself, almost crying out for conscious expression. Credibility. The whole story struck him as being fantasy-oriented, so he had to start by dealing with the credibility of the writer. It was damn good, he reflected, letting the spray from the shower play over his body until his skin tingled.

He had known Radcliffe for over two years now, and he had faith in her honesty and level-headedness. Therefore, he couldn't dismiss her story as the rambling of a love-starved woman. This observation established his basic premise. He was faced with one conclusion. What he had read had to be dealt with as reality.

Feeling frustration building within himself, he reached out and wrenched off the shower. What the hell was he supposed to do now? If what she wrote was true then this Vincent was a murderer. Yet, having read Cathy's account of the story, that term didn't quite sit right with him. He had a personal phobia against bending the law, but this situation could conceivably be the one in a million which had extenuating circumstances. He just didn't know.

Leaving the bathroom, he tromped down the hall and headed for his bedroom. Mulling the situation over, it was obvious that he couldn't share what he had read with any of the others. This bothered him, because he knew how upset and worried both Jen and Nancy were about Cathy's disappearance.

"Amazing, Radcliffe, simply amazing. Leave it up to you. More bizarre than even I would have imagined. I should have known better than to pick up that book."

Suddenly realizing that he was talking to himself out loud, he laughed and continued to dress. Actually, he was very glad he had followed his instincts yesterday and pocketed the damn thing. He could see the headlines in his mind's eye. It was all very sobering.

Shortly after Cath had come to work at the office, he had realized that she was someone special. It hadn't taken very long to become totally infatuated with his slender, beautiful assistant. After being gently rejected, he had eventually settled for a friendship which had quickly developed sibling overtones. He really cared about the lady - would do anything for her. It presently looked like his attitudes would face a practical test.

Right now, he had to get a move on it. Even though he had no concrete evidence, he was pretty sure wherever Cathy was, the tunnels he presumed, she was probably safe. He had read enough to assume that Vincent was the sick friend. And Vincent, sick or not, sounded more than able to keep her safe.

Work was the usual zoo, but Joe had to admit that he loved it. You had to, to stick around, he thought. The long grueling hours and the stress that went with the territory, soon weeded out those who were only there for a paycheck. Moreno wasn't so old that he'd be leaving soon, but Joe had time. He wasn't in any all-fired hurry. He wasn't ready for Moreno's job just yet anyway. The old man was good at what he did. Joe respected him for his honesty and his good track record on getting the job done.

Delving into the day's particular workload, he realized how invaluable Cathy had become to this outfit. He hadn't realized, however, how much he had come to depend on her. He began to see how much he took her for granted.

"Cath, wherever you are," he murmured, "be safe."

Looking around for the Lombardo file, he suddenly remembered he had given it to Cath. Plunked it down that last day, with about ten like it, on her already cluttered desk. He smiled fleetingly, as he remembered the change in her expression, so quick and subtle that anyone else would have missed it.

Funny, the inconsequential details the mind retains, he mused, as he rambled over to her desk in search of his missing file. It took him awhile, but he finally located the thing and began the trek back to his office. Deciding at the last moment that he had better take the rest of the files while he was there, he spun around bumping into Escobar.

"Whoa! Big boy! Watch the flight pattern," she threw over her shoulder, as she kept going. Joe's eyebrow arched imperceptibly as he thought about his appearance. He didn't look old enough to be a lawyer, never mind a Deputy District Attorney. His looks stood him in good stead with the women though, but he sometimes worried that it worked against him here at work. Cath was always playing up his *boyish good looks* with that lighthearted teasing, for which she was already famous.

Reaching down to pick up the rest of the files from her desk, his eye was momentarily caught by the doodle work on the blotter by her phone. As his eye focused in, he stopped dead in his tracks, staring, as the figure hidden among the various geometric shapes took form and leapt out of him.

"Holy Shit!" he gasped as he sat down hard in the chair at her desk. **"Holy Shit!"** The little drawing wouldn't have held its own in an art contest, but it was descriptive enough to tell Joe that *this* was Vincent.

Joe blinked and looked around. Everyone around him seemed their normal harried selves. He nonchalantly plunked the files over the target area and managed to bring up with them the piece of blotter which held the tiny caricature.

"Not bad, Maxwell, not bad," he murmured to himself, as he left Cathy's desk and retreated to the privacy of his office. Closing the door, he dumped the files on his desk and sat down staring in disbelief at the piece of blotter he still held in his hand. Joe's mind was flooded with half remembered tales of dragons and Knights

of the Round Table. Uppermost in his mind, however, was his grandma's lilting Irish voice telling the old fairy tale, his favorite, *Beauty and the Beast*.

If Vincent looked anything near like described in this drawing, he was incredible. How could something like him exist? What was he? Where did he come from?"

Looking down at the features of the lion man, Joe remembered excerpts from Radcliffe's diary. He hadn't really gotten around to formulating a mental picture of his mysterious Vincent yet, but immediately realized that he would not have come up with anything as fantastic as what he was staring down at. This being was magnificent. Joe was captivated by the magical, mystical quality of the entity depicted in the little drawing.

The last two years suddenly made sense. No wonder Cath was so secretive about her private life. No wonder she never talked about the man in her life, or brought him anywhere with her. All the times Cath had been mysteriously saved were suddenly understandable. The bond Cath alluded to, somehow alerted Vincent whenever she was in danger, and he instinctively reacted to her fear, searching her out and animalistically protecting her. Vincent didn't look like anyone Joe would want to meet in a dark alley, unless he was on friendly terms with Cath.

The drawing distinctly showed Vincent as having the features of a lion softened with human-like qualities. It was almost as if the figure were a composite of man and beast. The features depicted, blended harmoniously, lending the softly sketched figure an ethereal quality.

"Well, Cath," he whispered softly to himself as he carefully tucked the drawing into his inside coat pocket, "you sure know how to complicate your life, kid." He wistfully wondered if Vincent knew how blessed he was indeed.

Joe threw himself into his work with a vengeance, consequently finishing what he had scheduled for himself much earlier than anticipated. It was just as well, he thought. I need some sleep before anything else, or I'll be no good for Cath, or myself for that matter. Ignoring the hunger clamoring away at his midsection, he headed for home, not quite remembering how he got there in one piece. Taking the phone off the hook, cranking up the air conditioning, he crawled into bed, and was asleep before his head hit the pillow.

Hours later, he awoke refreshed and ravenous. He looked at the clock to discover that it was way too late to order in. Almost time for breakfast actually, he realized, heading down the hallway for the kitchen. Thank God for weekends, he thought as he rummaged in the refrigerator. He didn't have to go to work today.

"And when he got there, the cupboard was bare - and so was the refrigerator," was all he could think to say, as he stared in dismay at the barrenness of the shelves.

Come to think of it, he couldn't remember that last time he had shopped. Not lately, that was for sure. His routine shopping was mainly for staples, as he usually ate on the run if he didn't have a date. The staples looked sadly depleted, and he finally settled for tuna fish and turkey noodle soup. A disgusting combination his stomach seemed to say, but it had no choice. It was that or moldy bread and cheese. He promised his stomach steak and eggs later on, and that seemed to do the trick. Maybe he'd go visit Mom tomorrow for some good old fashioned pasta.

Feeling somewhat better after these momentous decisions, he headed for his easy chair and Cathy's diary. He had really been putting it off, but knew that he had to read the rest of it now. Somehow, between last night and this morning, he had suddenly become concerned for this Vincent as well as Cathy. Their situation couldn't be good, for her to have broken her word to him; for her to be gone so long. Moreno was starting to make nasty sounds about her extended leave. Picking up the little diary, he quickly found the place where he had left off, and began to read.

PART THREE

OCTOBER

Vincent took me to a wonderful place where we listened to a concert. He was so at ease with himself - with me. Even the rain was an unexpected pleasure. Since that night, I have spent several more enjoyable evenings dreamily listening to the park concerts in his company. I'll never be able to sit Above again and listen to the music without remembering my concerts Below.

Not a week goes by now that doesn't present several small excuses for my visiting Below. The various pathways through the tunnels become more and more familiar. I no longer feel quite so lost, winding my way through the dimly lit corridors. Mouse has had a great time being my guide. Next to inventing, he seems to love exploring best and can find his way anywhere. He promised to map out the path to the Whispering Gallery, so I can find it on my own.

Pascal has been a great help also, teaching me the rudiments of pipe language. It's a rare treat for him to have a new student, and he has the patience of a saint. He has even worked out a Catherine code, of which he is quite proud.

The children Below are fast becoming special friends. It is a treat to join them in their activities. They are not above the usual children pranks and stages, but they seem to have an innocence about them that is hard to find Above. They seem to remain children much longer. Vincent is a favorite of theirs. He is the primary teacher and does the job extremely well. I've listened in on some of his literature sessions and have come away all fired up to re-read many of the old classics. When he and Father join forces in narrative - how they make the old tales live. I have noticed that I am not the only adult who often likes to creep in unawares, to listen to the old stories. Pascal, Mary, Jamie, and Mouse are regulars.

I especially love the walks home after these sessions. Usually, we are deep in discussion or heated argument by the time we arrive at my building's entrance and can't bear to leave off - each of us feeling his point has not yet been made. After leaving me there at the entrance, more often than not, I find him patiently waiting for me on the balcony to continue the debate, staying till only minutes before sunrise.

OCTOBER

Since I came back from Nancy's house last spring, Vincent and I rarely talk about our dream, but the awareness of it is always there now, just below the surface of all our interactions. It exists as a possibility, and for this I am grateful, because sometimes it's all I have to hold onto.

OCTOBER

I should have known that getting Vincent away from the tunnels, for more than his usual visits to my balcony would never become a reality. For a few hours there, it seemed as if this dream would be realized. I even rented a van. When I went down to tell him all was ready and we could leave, I found him in a state of depression. I sensed his frustration and disappointment keenly.

Father and the others are somewhat overprotective of Vincent. They fear what would happen if he were caught Above, or even injured far away from the safety of the tunnels. I can readily understand their fears, since I share them. Occasionally though, I sense an undercurrent of self-interest in their concern, which aggravates me. I have a hard time holding my peace.

Vincent had enough to deal with, however. Life has certainly dealt Vincent a troubled hand. I only wait for him to realize that love was meant for him, as surely as for any other. I wait for him to understand that he is a person with needs and desires, like everyone else. He, above all, should have the right to happiness. He is so gentle and courageous. He is always there for them Below, and me Above.

Father does not act like he believes that Vincent should have such feelings. I must wait till the need in Vincent becomes great enough, to cause him to see that Father's attitude is possibly an obstacle, which he may also have to rise above. Until this happens, I must remain silent.

Father is afraid for Vincent. He has always been vocal in his opinions concerning our relationship. It has taken him a long time to accept the fact that I care deeply for his son and truly wish to share his life. He sees only the probability that Vincent will eventually be hurt, and he has never been able to see beyond this to the possibilities.

NOVEMBER

Ellie is gone, along with several others. The whole underground community is hushed and quiet. Even the pipes have left off their banging. Everyone seems to have drawn inward, trying to reconcile themselves to what has happened.

Thank God Peter was able to get them the drugs and supplies they needed as quickly as he did. Things would have been much worse. Plague down in the tunnels could have been a devastating thing.

All these long months of wishing I had someone to talk to about Below, and Peter was there all the time. I'm glad they have someone like Peter as a Helper. They couldn't have a better friend. I'm glad that I know about him now. I don't feel so alone up here anymore. There's someone now who knows I'm connected to Below.

DECEMBER

As I watched Father lead Lena away, my heart was filled with mixed emotions. Happiness that Lena was safe now and that her baby will have a family. Wistfulness, that she was going to a place where I longed to be.

DECEMBER

Fate is a strange thing. Vincent is having a hard enough time dealing with one woman's love and along comes another. Poor Lena, I hope she finds someone who will give her the love she needs. The baby is a big comfort to her.

I saw the affect the baby has on Vincent, and I long to give him all the things his heart desires. Father doesn't help matters. Vincent might not be so unsure of himself, if Father were not always telling him that it is all an impossible dream. My love for Vincent is the most solid thing in my life. But I must continue to go with care. Vincent still needs time to realize that my love is solid enough to weather any storm.

JANUARY

Winterfest - candles, music, and ceremony - more memories. I'll never forget the journey down to the Great Hall - passing through the Chamber of the Winds - entering the darkness of the Great Hall. It's vastness echoed as we moved in, pushing back the shadows with the light of our candles.

The day was filled with possibilities - shattered by Paracelsus. I have never felt evil so strongly as I do in this man's presence. Because of him, good people have suffered, and some have lost their lives. He escaped again, vanishing into the misty murkiness of the tunnels. It is truly scary knowing that he was there among us, and even more chilling to know that he is still free to continue his diabolical schemes.

Narcissa will mend - so will William, but Lou is dead. More tragedy. Even Peter was subdued and ready to leave, but Vincent was not willing to let Paracelsus so totally overshadow this, one of their most special days. It was good to see them rally around and pledge their support, to stand against the darkness, whatever form it takes.

No recounting of Winterfest would be complete without mention of the evening's end. It was very late and very quiet. All had left except Vincent and me. We were just getting ready to go when we heard the music. Ever so softly it played, beckoning us out into the shadowy gallery - and I got my wish.

Vincent is a wonderful dancer. Full of beauty and grace. I could have stayed in his embrace the whole night long. He led me around as if I were a feather. I was lost in the love reflected in his eyes. I truly felt we had stepped across some invisible barrier and lost ourselves in the land of make-believe, where we would live happily ever after.

FEBRUARY

Vincent feels as if he has betrayed Michael. He sees his feelings of envy and jealousy as ugly as poisonous, which they are. What he doesn't see, though, is that these feelings are normal, and all people have them occasionally. I still have thoughts about Lena, of which I am not especially proud.

How long will it take for Vincent to understand that he deserves to be loved like anyone else? What will it take for him to see that he has a right to reach out and embrace love, without feeling guilty or unworthy?

Vincent seems to be under great stress. Father and I are pulling him in opposite directions, and somewhere it will have to stop. I fear that the day might come when Father and I lock horns over this issue. I can't stop loving Vincent, and I will not see him destroyed. Father must be made to realize that Vincent is a man full grown - capable of making his own decisions. Father is a little too free with his opinions. Vincent would be much better off if he sometimes kept them to himself.

FEBRUARY

I will never be able to go to a carnival or circus again, without wondering about what is possibly going on behind the scenes. Charles will always come to mind from now on, when I enter these settings. Although his particular story has a happy ending, I wonder how many other poor unfortunates like him are still out there, living an existence less than God intended for all his creatures?

I cannot help but see something of Vincent in Charles. Vincent was fortunate that he was found and taken to the secrecy of the tunnels. Charles was much less fortunate.

Why are some people so afraid and threatened by that which is different? Physical deformity or uniqueness of any kind seems to bring out the negative side of many people. No matter how much I see of man's inhumanity to his fellow man, it never gets easier to deal with. Sometimes, I feel deeply the hopelessness and despair of ever seeing these situations change, but then I think of my beloved Vincent. The love and care he has found with his family Below renews my faith and my determination to help in any way I can.

MARCH

Sleep eludes me. My body is exhausted, yet my mind will not shut down. It plays the scenes of Vincent, lost in his darkness, over and over of its own accord. Tonight the bond beckons not as the welcome channel of peace and comfort it usually is, but as a torturous passage leading to rejection. Vincent has closed himself off from me, completely shutting me out. Much as it hurt, I was forced to leave him tonight, knowing his thoughts were in rolling turmoil, bubbling away behind the closed facade of his self-imposing silence.

I have not yet learned to control my thoughts and feelings in these times of emotional stress. Treacherously betraying me, they escape the confines of my aching heart, to senselessly beat against the impenetrable defense he has erected between us. In panic at their inability to reach their objective, shrouded in the cold chill of his rejection, they return, gripping my heart, leaving me inwardly battered and bruised. Tonight I am truly hurt and alone.

MARCH

Father says that he will eventually snap out of the moroseness which hangs like a dark cloud over his spirit. They have sent out search parties these past few days, but have found no further signs of the intruders. Even the wild boy has vanished, leaving no trace of where he has gone. The tunnels have once again been pronounced safe. I am allowed to come and go again without an escort.

Even though Vincent is still avoiding me, the bond has momentarily opened now and again, and for this I am grateful. I feel his shame and remorse keenly, and I am sure he senses my love and acceptance. He will not listen to logic. I can't pretend to totally understand his thoughts concerning what he sees as the dark side of his nature.

We all have darkness, to some degree, within us. Things which seem a part of our very nature, that we wish were not there. He finds no comfort or release hearing that if any one of us had the ability and strength to do what he did, we would have responded just as he to protect our loved ones. He chooses to ignore the fact that I myself was forced to take another's life that night, in self-defense.

We all act instinctively in situations of this nature, sometimes looking back with sadness, wishing that it had not happened. He, however, loses himself in remorse and shame - feeling betrayed by the beast side of his nature. I am afraid his inability to face and accept the duality of his nature, will eventually have a serious effect on his emotional stability and his sanity. The fact that he is not the same as we, cannot be denied. How long can he struggle against the reality of it and still remain mentally well?

I have accepted his uniqueness and am ready to move beyond it to whatever destiny may hold for us. But until he can accept and learn to live with and understand this nature of his in all its complexities, the fear of it will rule him, if it doesn't destroy him. Only after he can accept what he is without guilt and shame, will we be able to move through it into the realm of the possibilities I dream for us. Until then, all I can do is hope and wait and support him, with all the love, faith, and trust I feel for him.

MARCH

Are we ever prepared for the death of a loved one? I think not. I was only a little girl when I lost Mom; it hurt terribly. Losing my father is somehow different. The loss goes much deeper. It hurts like a physical pain, and there's nowhere to run from it. I carry it with me wherever I go.

I think most of us feel secure in the knowledge that our parents are available when needed - there to turn to at the worst and best of times - there to share our joys and sorrows - a link to who we are.

Then, suddenly, they're gone, and we are, alone. Somehow in the space of a breath - the twinkling of an eye - the world is changed, no longer the same - big and empty and lonely. People all around you seem the same, but you are different. Surrounded by pain and grief and memories. They say the pain eventually dims and then recedes. They say the memories eventually bring happiness. But it doesn't seem so now. Now, the grief is sharp and the memories painful, filled with all the words left unspoken and the contacts never made.

There was nowhere else to go, no one else to turn to but Vincent. Suddenly, I was like a little girl who needed security and comfort. I needed someone to make the pain go away - someone to bear it for me. I needed him desperately.

He took me Below - loved me and cared for me - somehow assimilating into himself as much of the pain and grief as possible, replacing it with the sure knowledge that he would always be there for me. I would never be alone. His arms comforted me, and his voice lulled me into sleep. Gradually, I healed and made peace with my father's spirit. Because of Vincent's care, I can face the world again. Because of him, I am whole.

We talked about us and about our dream before I left. I know now that someday we will truly be together. It is not just my dream now - it is his. I am not afraid.

In our last moment together as he bent his head slightly to receive my kiss, his face was filled with wonder, and I shall never forget the sweet gentleness of his parted lips. The memory of it fills me with warmth, even now through the bond. It sings between us as an echo of what is possible.

APRIL

How can I approach the problem of getting Vincent to see the reality of this situation? Along the road through adolescence, on the way to manhood, as many young boys do, he met his Lisa. It is sadly ludicrous that such a common teenage happenstance was allowed to be blown so out of proportion in his mind. Tears of fear and shame have intervened between the happening and the telling of the incident. Too many years, to hope for a quick, easy solution.

Telling the sensitive, gentle spirit that Vincent has become, that what happened so long ago was no more or less than has happened to countless other undisciplined teenagers, facing the complexities of controlling an awakening sex drive is beyond hope at this point. How could Father have let this happen? How could he not, at the time, realize something of what Vincent was thinking and feeling? Why had he not provided the guidance Vincent so desperately needed? Can he really believe that a normal relationship is an emotional experience Vincent cannot handle or control? Is this the underlying reason for his negative attitude toward our relationship? Is he afraid for us? At his point I can only guess, but it is an issue which Vincent and I must begin to address.

I can only imagine how Father handled the situation after Lisa left. No matter what Father's intentions at the time, Vincent had paid a terrible price. To have lived all these years feeling such shame and fear, shows grave mishandling of the incident on Father's part. Vincent has concluded that he is incapable of having a normal physical relationship.

How horrible to feel that the very act of physically expressing love might release the very beast he so struggles to keep under control. To believe that such an act might lead to being lost in the darkness he finds so repulsive, must be a living nightmare. I marvel that he has allowed our relationship to progress to the point that it has. Every time we are alone, must seem to him a risk.

As I listened to his tale earlier tonight, I cried inwardly, as much for the lonely insecure boy he was all those years ago, as for the tortured soul he has become. Even relating the story, was an odyssey of shame and agony for him. I felt strongly what he was feeling.

I tried, in my own small way, to reassure him - to let him know that to me he is desirable. He reads my feelings of love and acceptance even now. I sense his presence through the bond. Hopefully, it is a new beginning bringing us closer to the reality of our dream. Through the bond, without words or physical expression, I will continue to allow him to feel the thoughts of desire and acceptance I have for him, that I have long kept buried.

APRIL

Wherever Kristopher is - whatever he is doing - he has taken something of Vincent and I away with him and left a piece of his heart in return. His portrait is beyond beautiful, capturing the essence of what Vincent and I feel for each other. The reality of what he has shown us will warm us forever.

APRIL

I should have listened to Joe. But I was too afraid to involve the police because of Vincent. Knowing there was someone out there who knew about us sent me into a panic which clouded my thinking. I was crazy to stay alone, especially after that nut got into the apartment. I should have left then and gone below to Vincent.

When Joe showed up at the lake later, after it was all over, I was never so glad to see anyone in a long time. I wanted so desperately to get out of there and back to Vincent. I knew he would be there waiting, and I needed the safety of his arms - needed to feel him - touch him - be close to him as never before.

I don't remember anything but his closeness. I don't remember him leaving, and I know he stayed until I drifted off to sleep, secure in his embrace. When I awoke, my first hazy thoughts were filled with an awareness of him. I was curled up on my bed, with the first shafts of sun just slanting in, protected from the early morning chill by his cloak. Pulling it closer, I drifted back to sleep, knowing that he was still somewhere close by keeping watch.

APRIL-MAY

Funny how I used to find it exciting and adventurous to leave home for distant places, always anticipating new sights and sounds. This trip out West, however, only served to show me once again how much I loved Vincent and need to be near him. He seemed so far away - the connection between us so tenuous - almost as if it weren't real. I felt as if a piece of me were missing - that something was not right.

I sent him a shell, which he now keeps among his other mementos tucked away in the trunk by the foot of his bed. While I walked on the beach that day, I wished he were there with me, in the sunlight, able to see the ocean as it pounded and stretched away beyond what the eye could see, and for awhile, it almost seemed as if he was there with me.

I wonder if he knows just how much I love him - how much he means to my well being? Being so far away made me realize that the times we do share are precious. While I was gone, he was always on my mind. The trip home seemed to take forever. I sensed he would be there waiting for me on the balcony, just as impatient as I, and my restless heart knew no peace till I was back in his loving arms.

MAY

Poor Elliot. I know how it hurts to lose a parent. But to lose one as he did, with so much unresolved bitterness between them, will haunt his dreams for a long time to come. Part of me wanted so badly to reach out to him in love and comfort, but I couldn't. I didn't want to let him feel there was hope for something which is impossible. Somewhere, I hope there is happiness for Elliot - someone who will help fill all the empty places in his life.

The bond between Vincent and me continues to grow stronger and stronger, allowing for very little to go unnoticed. It was hard explaining to Vincent just what Elliot seems to me, because I was not totally sure myself. There is a spot in my heart which will always belong to Elliot. I think he understands, though. Our bond exists and is a constant source of ever increasing wonder to us, allowing us to comfort and strengthen each other as we move through the situations of our lives.

MAY

Time stands suspended somewhere between hope and despair. Hope that Spirko might find within himself the capacity for compassion. Despair, knowing that Spirko's kind are without conscience, motivated only by self-interest and greed. There are some people who lack the potential for generosity, compassion, or understanding - people who feed on sensationalism, malignancy, and the need to destroy that which they don't understand. Spirko is one of these.

Where will this nightmare end? How many hopes and dreams will it shatter before it is played out? What darkness do slimes like Spirko crawl out of? What dark need deep within drives them to maim and destroy total strangers in the name of truth?

What is truth? Since meeting Vincent, my perspective has altered concerning that absolute, allowing me to believe that we are sometimes forced to make our own truth contrary to the norm. What Vincent has done was necessary and unavoidable. Before I entered his life, Vincent stood apart from our world, secure in the knowledge of who he was, safe from the cruelty and madness which are part of our everyday lives. I brought these things into his life, exposing him to the dangers and evils of my world. He was an innocent, until I

involved him in the problems of my world. Because of me, he has been forced to kill repeatedly. What he has done, he has done in my name, to keep me safe from harm and death.

Didn't I see what was happening? Didn't I realize the dangers I was exposing him to? Or did I choose, somewhere along the line, to bury the truth of it deeply in my subconscious. Ignoring the reality of it? Was I too busy proving Cathy was able to take care of Cathy, or worse yet, boldly stepping into situations knowing that he would always be there for me? My own personal savior. Did I ever stop to question if the time would come when someone would stumble onto a connection between us, which would make them wonder? Or was I just too lost seeking the land of fairy tales, to think it would ever happen?

Follow your heart. How logical that sounds. It's sad to think how easily our hearts can deceive us, coloring and shading the logic of truth. Wooing us with the hope of realizing our dreams. Deluding us into believing that life can be a fairy tale come true. Deceitfully suspending us there in that enchanted land of happily ever after, until reality comes crashing down around us, threatening all we have come to cherish.

Thank God! Vincent is still safe Below. But for how long? I don't know what to do. I feel so lost and alone. Once Spirko's story breaks, they will begin the hunt. What will happen to Vincent, Father, and all the others?

Why is Elliot doing this? Is he really so threatened by what Vincent and I have become, or is jealousy the motivation? If he truly loves me, how could he destroy everything that matters most to me? How could he do this after Vincent saved his life? What kind of love seeks to destroy that which is the object of its affection?

These are thoughts which haunt Vincent as well. His thoughts are dark and tormented. He tries to keep them from reaching me, but he can't. He's losing control. I feel it but can't help, trapped in the same darkness of foreboding as he.

Why didn't I listen to him? More than once he warned me of the risks we faced - the chances we took. More than once, he tried to get me to see the reality to us of the danger I constantly exposed myself to. Joe also, upon many occasions, has tried to make me see the stupidity of the situations I put myself into.

So many questions crying for answers. Answers which, when they come, bring no comfort or peace of mind if Vincent is lost to me. He has become my reason for living. No matter where he goes, no matter what the outcome of this nightmare, I will never leave him, forsake him, or live apart from him. Without the hope of our dream, I will only exist - devoid of all peace and joy.

JUNE

Spirko was found dead - knifed. Joe is looking to me for the answers he believes I have. Answers I dare not give even to him. The man is dead, and I can find in my heart only relief. Almost as if I've been reprieved from a death sentence. I must get word to Vincent and Father.

JUNE

Finally! The reason for all this madness is revealed - and still the nightmare continues. John Pater - Paracelsus. Spirko never had a chance against him - and Elliot had nothing to do with this charade. Paracelsus used them both as disposable pawns, as he has used me. Paracelsus doesn't leave witnesses. He won't be satisfied until he has destroyed Vincent and Father, leaving no one to challenge or oppose him. His evil knows no limitations.

He sees Vincent as his main obstacle, standing between him and control of the underground. With Vincent either out of the picture, or under his control, he knows he could easily deal with Father. For some unfathomable reason, he sees Vincent as a mythical being whose purpose is to kill and destroy. His immediate goal is to alienate Vincent from his manhood, and turn him into a killing machine which he controls.

I don't know how, but I sense that Paracelsus is manipulating Father even now. Father may be many things, but a liar isn't one of them. He would never tell Vincent one story all his life and suddenly change it after all these years, destroying the credibility of everything he has stood for for so long. Unfortunately, Vincent is not mentally or emotionally stable enough at present to rationalize these things out.

Vincent's reaction to Father's story was frightening. After all we have been through, he is still throwing up walls between us. What does he expect to find at his mother's grave, if indeed Father's story is true? Why does he still question my acceptance of who and what he is? Why is it still so hard for him to see that it doesn't matter to me?

JUNE

The destructive chain of events that Paracelsus set into motion has come full circle claiming his own life. Small consolation, as we deal with the aftermath of his vicious, cruel lies. Whether Vincent can somehow reconcile himself to his dual nature, remains to be seen. We are giving him all the love and support we can, but as yet, we see no real response.

The fragile balance between his two natures has been seriously disturbed, and he hovers even now in a state of semi-shock. The monstrous lie Paracelsus, posing as Father, told him of his birth, has succeeded in magnifying in Vincent's doubts about himself and his ability to control the dark side of his nature. Goaded into the blind, murderous rage Paracelsus precipitated by detailing for him - with such obvious relish - the gory details of his supposed birth, Vincent struck out in hatred creating a state of inner chaos, in which he is still lost.

If and when Vincent gets better, I am taking him away from here. Quietly, I have made the plans and all the arrangements. Father will not stop us nor be allowed to interfere this time. There is no reason now, with Paracelsus dead, for us not to go away. We need time alone, uninterrupted by others. Time away from here - time to heal. Vincent needs time to come to terms with who and what he is. We need time to finally explore what we might become.

JUNE

As Vincent responds a little more each day, my resolve about what I must do grows stronger, also. I have talked it over with Father, and he has grudgingly agreed not to interfere with my plans this time. His concern for Vincent's welfare is great, but he realizes that mine equals his.

Father is not happy over my decision to take a leave of absence from work when Vincent is better, but I, too, need to come to terms with everything that has happened. I have decisions to make. Is staying Above, exposing Vincent to future violence, a risk I really want to take? What has happened these past days has caused me to seriously question this course of action. Sometimes, we must forfeit one dream for the sake of another.

Vincent's well being means more to me right now than all the good I could possibly do Above. As long as I remain a part of that world, his safety is in jeopardy. I can't live there knowing that somehow, sometime, around some corner the cruelty with people like Paracelsus and Spirko, and if I stayed, we run the risk of their finding us.

JUNE

I am excited about tonight. I will meet him for the concert and afterward tell him of my decision.

JUNE

Oh God, from whom all blessings flow, in your mercy, look down upon us. Only you can help now. He seemed to be coming out of it - doing much better - once again taking an interest in the things going on around him. But, it was just a lull in the storm. Father and I are truly frightened by these new manifestations

of his increasing illness. He is losing himself in the darkness more and more. We fear for his sanity - for his very life....

Joe closed the little book, unheeding of the tears which misted his eyes. He sat long into the night looking for his own answers. Why were some lives so filled with pain and sorrow? Why did fate seem to deal a heavier hand to some more than others? Why do some stories never have happy endings?

All the pieces of their story gradually fell into place, as he mentally reviewed the past two years. He, also, knew now, that when Catherine left that coffee shop, she had gone to be with Vincent, to share his darkness. God help her!

He sadly wished that Catherine had felt she could have trusted him. He wished that she had come to him for help and understanding. But would he have understood? He hoped he would have. But he could understand why she hadn't taken the chance. He hoped that wherever they were, they would somehow make it through the darkness into the light of peace.

Joe knew one thing for sure. Their story had touched him in places within him that he didn't know existed. He knew that he would never be the same again, never take for granted all the good things life had to offer. Yes, there was ugliness, senseless brutality, injustice, and cruelty in his world, but there was also love, compassion, human kindness, brotherhood, and trust - if you looked hard enough. These were worth fighting for.

Yes, there were all kinds of people like Paracelsus and Spirko in the world, but there were also people who embodied the essence of faith, hope, and charity. There were countless hurting people like Vincent, hidden behind countless faces waiting to be helped. He would continue to plug along, doing whatever he could, hoping that somehow, someday, somewhere, he would live to see a new day dawn. A day where all God's creatures, no matter what their circumstances or background, could live in peace and harmony, finding love and acceptance. There were worthy dedicating his life to.

Joe knew that he needed a break. What he had read had taken its toll on his emotions. He hadn't had a vacation in a long time. Maybe now was the right time. He needed to get away from the job for awhile. First, however, there were a few things he needed to do - some things he knew he could do for Cath and her Vincent.

Joe entered the quiet office long before any of the others began to straggle in. He had the schedule for the next few days neatly written and on Escobar's desk ready for tying and posting. Calling her over, he filled her in on all the myriad little details which needed taking care of in his absence.

"Before I go, get me the file on the Spirko case."

He patiently waited while she located the file and brought it to him. Quickly looking it over, Joe finally located the name of Spirko's editor. Handing it to Escobar, he said, "Get this character on the phone and tell him to gather up any notes or files he still has that are Spirko's. Tell him I'll have a man there with a writ for the stuff within the hour."

Not long after, pocketing the Spirko file and the writ, Joe left the office and made his way to the *Sentinal*.

Later, fighting the traffic, he made his way across town, hoping to find the good doctor in his office. He was in luck. Entering Peter's office, he fished out the little book which lay nestled in his pocket. Plunking it down on Peter's desk, he quietly observed the doctor as he skimmed through it. He watched as Peter paled finally realizing what it was.

"Don't worry, Peter, their secret is safe with me. How are they? Have you been down there lately? What's going on?" Seeing the man's hesitation, he momentarily lost patience and growled, ***"Listen, this lady means a lot to me, and I want some answers."***

"It's not good, Joe. He's still lost in the darkness - still in a coma. But Cathy is with him. She's okay. All any of us can do now is hope and pray that her love is strong enough to reach into that darkness and bring him out."

"Thanks, Peter, for being honest. Listen, do me a favor and see that she gets this book back. I don't want to take a chance and return it to her apartment, where someone else might find it. Tell her you took it for safekeeping. Here's an order signed by my office, giving you entrance to her apartment. Look around and get anything else out of there that doesn't belong. I have also contacted her building manager and told him that when you're through, to go in and clean up the mess and after that to see that the apartment is left undisturbed until she returns or he hears from me personally. I'll be back in a few days. Keep me posted, will ya? Don't let her know about my reading the book."

Seeing the gratitude in the doctor's eyes, Joe turned and left the office and headed for his apartment.

As he drove across the city, he knew that talking to Peter hadn't been enough. As he thought of the little caricature of Vincent, he knew he still carried the pain and the burden of the lover's tragedy deep within his heart. He hoped and prayed that things would somehow work out for them - that Cath would someday walk into his office and he'd see that beautiful smile of hers once again - that he'd someday get to meet Vincent.....

As she entered the office building, Cathy felt momentarily guilty. She had been gone for several weeks now.

"Poor Joe must be frantic," she said to herself as she smoothed down the skirt which, had become tight on her. Joe was definitely not going to like what she had come to tell him - after he chewed her alive for being gone so long.

Taking a deep breath she pushed open the door and was immediately swept up into the familiar hustle and bustle of the D.A.'s office - so different from the quiet easy life Below. For what seemed like an eternity, but was actually only moments, she stood there transfixed by the surrounding activity, before people began to realize her presence. When they did, all hell seemed to break loose, as some of her closest co-workers rushed her all talking at once.

Suddenly, Joe was there also, and all apprehension dissolved as she saw the love and relief reflected in his eyes. He caught her up in a hug, which nearly knocked the wind out of her and held her as he whispered, "I'm so glad to see you Radcliffe - so glad you're okay. How is he?"

"Who is *he*?" Cathy asked, puzzled. "Oh! You mean my friend? He's lots better, Joe. He's doing just fine. Thanks for putting up with me and understanding that night. I know I wasn't too rational. I hope my absence didn't cause too many problems. I had hoped to be in to see you sooner, but I just couldn't get away."

"It's nothing, kid. Don't worry about it. As long as everything worked out, and you're okay, I'm willing to look on this as vacation time."

"Thanks, Joe. I didn't expect you to be so understanding. Maybe you won't be when you hear what I've come to tell you."

Joe's expression instantly changed. "What now!" he said.

"Got a little while? I really need to talk to you about this job. Things in my life have changed, Joe."

"Listen kid, right now I gotta run. I can't talk now. I'm supposed to be meeting with an old school chum of mine, Pat Hanlon. He has some information he wants to pass onto us. How about talking when I get back?"

"Joe, I can't. I won't be here when you get back. This can't wait. Can't someone else go for you?"

"Come on, Cath! This is too good to mess up. Hanlon said that what he has is important, far-reaching stuff."

"That's a neverending story, Joe. Please let someone else handle it for a change. We need to talk."

Joe looked at her with exasperation. "Okay, okay. Wait a minute. Let me go talk to Moreno and see what I can work out."

Cathy waited impatiently for Joe to return. He was gone so long that she began to wonder what was going on. Joe finally reappeared looking harried.

"It's all set. He didn't like it much, but Hanlon said he'd meet with the boss. Moreno just left to make the contact. He said to say hello and welcome back."

"That's just it, Joe. I'm not coming back."

Joe, who was heading toward his office with Cathy in tow, stopped abruptly and turned. "You're not serious, Radcliffe, are you?" But he could tell by the look on her face that she was. Suddenly, he remembered all the things she had written to herself in her diary towards the end, and he knew that he couldn't badger her - or pressure her - she'd already been through too much.

"Come on in here and let's talk about it."

They sat talking in his office for a long time. Joe listened intently as she told him many things he already knew. As she talked, a thought occurred to him, and when she finished, he asked, "How does a reduced work week with set hours sound to you? No more field work. Would you be willing to work three days a week straight nine to five? There's lots of court preparatory work on the briefs, and I can always use backup in court presentations?"

Cathy just looked at him stunned. He was offering her an ideal situation. She couldn't believe that this was actually happening. She had argued with Vincent for days now about just such an opportunity. She had expected to be told such a position was not needed. Vincent, all the while, insisting that she should at least ask. He didn't want her giving up her world totally.

Watching her, Joe could see she was seriously toying with the idea. All he could do was hope. Suddenly, he saw the wondrous, old Radcliffe smile and knew that this might just work out. It felt good to know that this tragedy, which he had agonized over for weeks, might now have a happy ending. His solution would keep Cathy safe and somewhat involved in the work he knew she loved - and it would keep Vincent safely off the streets. He remembered the little caricature he kept safely hidden at home and still hoped that someday - somehow, he'd get to meet Vincent.

"Joe! Are you listening to me? You act like you're miles away."

"What? Oh! Sorry kid! I was just thinking about something. What did you say?"

"I asked when you would want me to start, and if you really thought Moreno would go for this?"

"Yeah! Don't worry! I can handle Moreno. He's been kind of distracted lately, and he's been letting me make a lot of the decisions. I think I can talk him into this with no problem. I'll ask him when he gets back. Right now, get out of here. Go home. Relax. I want you back here Tuesday morning. I figure you can work Tuesday through Thursday. That gives you a four day break in between. You can't ask for better hours than those. How does that schedule sound to you?"

"Great, Joe, great," said Cathy grinning, as she backed out of his office hoping she didn't bump into anything.

Joe watched as she turned and was gone. Now all he had to do was sell this thing to Moreno. He hoped the old man was in a good mood when he returned. He should be. Hanlon had assured him that this information would knock down one of the largest drug operations in the world. He had also said that there was more than drugs involved. There was corruption in government agencies involved. The old man should be on top of the world and willing to give Joe anything. He'd know any time now.

As he sat there waiting for Moreno to return, the phone rang suddenly startling him. It's sharp insistent ring pierced the relative silence of the office. Most everybody else had gone home already. What now he wondered as he reached for the phone. Cath was right, this was a neverending story.

"Maxwell here."

Joe listened and then just sat there in stunned silence for a moment. "What happened?" He finally managed to get out. "How bad was the explosion?" Joe continued to listen and then barked tersely. ***"Yeah! I'll be right there. Get the coroner down there stat and don't let anyone near the bodies - especially Moreno's - till I get there. He has some important papers on him that I don't want lost. Make sure nobody gets near those bodies or your head will roll."***

Oblivious to the unfolding drama, Cathy made her way back toward the Central Park entrance and Vincent. She could sense that he was there waiting for her. She knew that he was aware of the joy she was presently feeling. Everything had changed so much in such a short time. Maybe now they could begin to live their possibilities. Who knew? Part of what Vincent had said to her months ago, when her father had died, seemed to already be coming true.

She was now truly a woman of both worlds.....

END