

# LINK

by Marilyn Mastin

*(from CRYSTAL CAVERN TEN)*

A special meeting of the Tunnel Council had been requested by Doctor Peter Alcott. He was sitting before them as their eyes fell upon him and he was making a heartfelt plea.

"Glenda would make an excellent Helper. She's intelligent and warm, very good with children. She could help with their education and she has some wonderful stories to tell about the world Above. She's been all over the globe."

In all his years as a Helper, the council had never seen him so motivated, but they all knew the reason why. Peter Alcott was in love.

Just over four months ago, Peter had met a beautiful, 40-year old anthropologist, named Glenda Hall. Now he longed to have her share his whole life, and that meant she would have to be told about the tunnels and the wonderful community who lived there.

The newly-married, Vincent Chandler-Wells, lay his hands on the tabletop and linked his fingers, as he asked the question.

"Peter - do you really think that Glenda can be trusted?"

"Or are you being blinded by love?" added Father.

"I am not being blinded by anything." Peter held out his hands to the assembled council. "Just meet her, you will like her. I promise."

Vincent looked at Father.

"Well, I cannot refuse our friend's request, for did I not bring a stranger here Below and tell her about our world, because I knew she could be trusted."

"Yes - and if I had found Margaret a few years earlier, I, too, would have wished her to join me here in my home."

"But we must be cautious," Mary warned. "Maybe you should meet her first, Father."

"Yes, you can use the apartment," Vincent suggested. "Then you can interview Glenda and form your own opinion of this lady of Peter's."

Everyone agreed to that.

Catherine and Vincent went Above that evening. They had been invited to Diana's home for dinner, because Diana would be leaving the following day. She had accepted a promotion and transfer to Los Angeles. It was a marvellous career move for her, but it meant leaving her dearest friends. Still - Diana would be able to visit for Christmas, Winterfest and vacations. She had also promised to invite Catherine and little Jacob out to see her, once she settled in her new home. Of course it grieved Diana enormously that she could not include Vincent, as all who loved him were saddened by the fact that they could not show Vincent the sunshine.

"Is he still having those nightmares?" Peter asked Father, over dinner.

"Yes." Jacob Wells replied as he raised his glass of brandy. "I'm desperately worried about Vincent - and so is Catherine."

"Do you think," Peter mused, "that Vincent's bad dreams stem from the fact that he and Catherine no longer have their Bond?"

"Probably - but there is more to it I think. Let's face it, Peter, none of us can really know of the agony Vincent suffered when he thought Catherine was dead. We all tried to help him, but no one could take the pain away."

"He tried to be strong," agreed Doctor Alcott as he poured another coffee. "He lived for Jacob Junior, but it was so hard. Still, Catherine is home again and they are married."

"Yes - and we must pray that his nightmares will cease in time."

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Two evenings later, Father accompanied Catherine and Vincent to their apartment, where they made ready for their guest, Glenda Hall.

Vincent would not actually be meeting Glenda on this occasion, because it was considered too soon for him to do so. He would be standing outside on the balcony. It had been his own idea. He wanted to listen in and form his own opinion of Glenda, so that he could speak of her to the council at the next meeting. He took outside a plate of sandwiches and a flask of tea, ready for his vigil.

The doorbell rang and Catherine, dressed in her smart red trouser-suit, went to open the door. She welcomed her old friend Peter with a kiss on the cheek and then held out her hand to his glamorous girlfriend. Glenda was of medium height, but her high heels made her seem taller. She wore a fitted black dress with a gold belt. Glenda's long black hair hung in waves about her and she possessed large brown eyes which caught her engaging smile within them.

The anthropologist took Catherine's hand as her hostess said, "I am very pleased to meet you, my name is ....."

"Catherine Chandler-Wells, I know, I have heard a lot about you. Especially the tale of how you first met Peter." Glenda took Peter's arm as she spoke,

"Do come inside." Catherine invited - and as she did so - Jacob left his seat and came forward. Peter had been done out of the pleasure of introducing Catherine to Glenda, he wasn't going to let it happen again.

"Glenda, this is my old and dear friend, Jacob Wells."

"Good evening, Doctor Wells." She looked Father over approvingly. "Peter just said that you were old, but surely you can't be more than 40, which is my own age."

"My dear lady," Father blushed with pleasure, "it is so kind of you to pay me such a compliment." Then Father gave Glenda the same visual scrutiny that she had just given him - and continued. "But you cannot be 40, surely you are only 25?"

"I wish I was, but thank you, Doctor Wells."

"Please, call me Jacob."

As the small party sat down with their pre-dinner drinks, Father came straight to the point. "Glenda, what has Peter told you about us?"

"Nothing much really - only that yours is a secret place - where people can begin a new life. Peter did not tell me the location of your world, but he told me that there are people who help your community to survive and that maybe I could become one of them. I certainly would like to, it sounds quite adventurous."

"Adventurous isn't the word I'd use, but what else do you know?"

"Well, Jacob, I know a few names." She looked thoughtful. "There's William, who is a great cook. Then there's someone called Rat ... no, Mouse ... who likes to invent all manner of gizmos. You have a lady named Mary, who keeps your community safe and also teaches the children, amongst other things. I have also been told of an old voodoo woman by the name of Narcissa, who likes to live alone with her cauldron." Glenda grinned at Father. "Of course, I know that you are the 'Big Boss'."

Jacob chuckled. "Well, I've been called many things, but never, Big Boss."

A few more preliminaries later and Glenda seemed to have wormed her way into Father's favour, because he suddenly said. "My dear, would you like to meet my son?"

"The Protector! Is he here?" She looked about her, expecting to see someone, but of course she couldn't.

"We have to be very careful." Father continued, "Vincent is very unusual and we only trust certain people with the knowledge of his existence."

Vincent was extremely surprised. Father had only just met Glenda Hall, yet he was willing to trust her with his most closely-guarded secret. Talk about acting out of character!

The fact that Father had not been so quick to trust Catherine did cross Vincent's mind, but he pushed the thought aside. He could no longer sense Catherine, because their Bond had been destroyed at the onset of their physical union, but he felt certain she would feel as surprised as he was at this unusual turn of events. Still, Catherine walked out onto the balcony and gazed into the face of her husband. She reached behind him and pulled his hood up, to lessen the shock for Glenda.

"Are you all right?" Catherine whispered, with concern.

"I shall always be fine - as long as you are beside me." His eyes blazed with love for her.

"I shall always be beside you." His wife leaned against him and her arms held him tight. He nuzzled into her hair and caressed her gently. They both wanted to prolong the moment - but knew that they could not.

"We must go inside."

Catherine agreed with him.

**"Oh God ... you ... you're half man ... half BEAST!"** Glenda's eyes practically fell out of their sockets as she took in the sight before her.

"Maybe that is so ... but I mean you no harm." Vincent stretched out his hands very carefully. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance."

After a slight hesitation she took the hand he offered. Then she smiled and looked into his face again.

"Protector Vincent ... you gave me quite a ... I've never seen a being like you before. You are totally unique - quite magnificent - if I may say so."

Vincent bowed his head shyly, which caused Glenda to comment.

"You are not only magnificent - you are modest as well. I like modest men, they are few and far between." She stepped closer to Vincent and reached for his hood.

"Come on ... let's get rid of this cloak of your. I want to see you properly."

That was the cue for Catherine to make her move. Smiling sweetly, she positioned herself between Glenda and Vincent. Then she pushed Vincent's cloak from his shoulders herself, her manner and body language passing on the desired message for all to see, especially Glenda Hall.

*Take your hands off him. He's mine!*

Vincent was well aware of his wife's unspoken words and his lips curled up in amusement. Then, as

she folded his cloak over her arm, he leaned forward and kissed her tenderly, on her lips. Naturally, his action caused Catherine to glow with triumph. She was very pleased with her husband. Very pleased indeed.

The meal began and the conversation flowed easily. One good thing about Vincent being able to meet Glenda that evening, was that he could eat a decent dinner, instead of a plate of sandwiches.

Glenda kept everyone amused by her story of the time when she had gone to Africa to study a very remote tribe of natives. They were such basic people in fact they had believed her to be a Goddess.

"Did you enlighten them?" Catherine asked as she helped herself to some potatoes.

"No - of course not. It is easier to study someone when they love you."

"But surely," Vincent mused, "you do not have to win love, by exerting power."

"Maybe not, Protector Vincent, but it helps."

"Then maybe you should know that, although my title of Protector is understood, it is seldom used. I do not need my title to make people love me. They love me, not just because I am their protector, but because I am also their friend. They simply refer to me as 'Vincent' and you may do likewise."

"Well ... Vincent," Glenda appeared contrite. "Please forgive me for being a power-mad fool. I can see I have a lot to learn."

"That's all right." Vincent nodded and as he did so his hand reached for Catherine's in a purely absent-minded gesture. Even without thinking, they could not keep their hands off each other - and that fact was not lost on Glenda. She turned her attention to Jacob Wells as she asked him.

"Are you married, Jacob?"

"No, I'm a widower." Father's fork was held halfway between his plate and his mouth, as he explained. "My wife died several years ago."

"Have you ever thought of finding someone to take her place?"

"If I could find a lady as lovely as you - well - she could not take Margaret's place - but she could find her own place in my heart."

Catherine and Vincent stared at each other in amazement, both of them realizing that Father was growing a little too fond of this attractive anthropologist - and they wondered what Glenda was playing at. There were three men in the room and she seemed to have worked her way through all of them in the space of two hours. Poor Peter was looking decidedly uncomfortable with the whole affair.

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"I don't think we should worry too much, Catherine." They were in their chamber Below, preparing for bed and as Vincent hung his shirt and waistcoat back in the closet, he said. "Father is a big boy now. He knows what's what."

"Yes, but I doubt he's ever met anyone like Glenda." Catherine pulled off her tights and massaged her aching feet whilst sitting on the bed. "Come to think of it, I don't think I've ever met anyone like her either."

"I have." Vincent turned and when Catherine looked at him, she understood.

"Lisa?"

"Yes ... Glenda reminds me of Lisa in many ways, but I understand Lisa much more than I used to. She needed the attentions of men and if I had realized that when Lisa flirted with me, I would not have taken it so seriously ... I would not have hurt her ..." His voice trailed away in unhappy remembrance, but then he took a deep breath and continued. "Glenda is an attractive woman who is

used to wrapping men around her little finger, just as Lisa did, but I feel certain that my father realizes this." Vincent sat beside his wife and she addressed him.

"That's as maybe, Vincent, but I would talk to him if I were you."

"Maybe you are right. It would be a good idea to say something. But I believe that Glenda is basically harmless, she just likes men - lots of them."

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**"Catherine ... CATHERINE!"**

"Vincent ... Vincent, wake up."

He was gasping for breath and soaked in perspiration. His wife drew him close and realized that he was shaking from head to toe.

"Oh ... Catherine ..." Vincent's voice was weak, "... I dreamed I'd lost you ... again ..."

He held her tight and she had to fight away the tears. When would these dreams end? When would he sleep again? Why did he have to lose her, every single night? Vincent sighed as she stroked his mane and he murmured.

"I am not being fair to you - my love. I should sleep in the guest chamber until ... until these dreams are gone."

"You will do no such thing." She scrunched his hair in her hand as she spoke. "You are mine and you are going nowhere."

His eyes met her own very determined-looking ones and she spoke with a firmness to her tone.

"You were mine when you lay helpless in that cave and afterwards I was determined that I would have you for the rest of my life. Of course, you didn't remember anything, not then, but I was willing to be patient with you. Then we were separated for so long, but when I returned, I made you mine again."

Vincent smiled, obviously remembering that when Catherine was returned to him, after Diana had learned by chance that she was still alive. He had placed Catherine in his bed, but he had slept in the guest chamber next door. However, her strength soon returned and one night she went to him as he lay sleeping. Vincent was at a big disadvantage that night - he could not resist her advances and despite his superhuman strength, he was completely seduced by the woman he had thought was lost forever.

After her seduction of him, came her proposal and she was not about to take no for an answer. Vincent had been reminded of a quotation - but he could not quite remember it, not then. Something about ... whatever doesn't kill someone ... makes them stronger ... but at the time he couldn't quite recall the right words, or who had said them. He only knew that Catherine had come very close to death and had survived to become much stronger than before. Maybe Vincent still had the edge on her physically, but Catherine's increased willpower more than made up for it.

After that night, the night when Vincent just did not know what had hit him, he moved back into his chamber and soon after that, he and Catherine were married. With a child all ready, it really was the right thing to do. Mouse made Catherine a beautiful ring set with crystals and she gave Vincent an antique ring set with a garnet, which had been in the Chandler family for generations.

Everything would have been wonderful if it hadn't been for Vincent's nightmares, but if he thought that he was going to move back into the guest chamber, then he had another thing coming!

"Just stay with me and you'll be fine." She whispered as she stroked his mane. "You're my husband

and you'll be all right again ... I promise."

The softness of her voice ... and her touch ... soothed Vincent and he fell asleep in her arms.

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One month after their first meeting with Glenda Hall, Vincent wrote in his Journal.

*'It is hard to believe, but Father is to marry again. His chosen bride is Glenda Hall and we are all striving to make her feel at home in our world.*

*Of course, it saddens us that he did not choose Mary as his life-partner. After his relationship with Jessica ended, we were certain that he and Mary had a future together, but it was not to be. Now Mary is distraught because of this latest turn of events, but whatever we may think, Glenda is the woman whom my Father has chosen.*

*When Father and Glenda first met, I did not think he would become serious about her. She seemed too flirtatious and Catherine urged me to have a man-to-man talk with Father, which I did ... although my own experience of flirtatious women has been rather limited. No sooner had I expressed my words of warning, however, then Glenda began to change. She appeared to be falling in love with Father and she had eyes for no one else. She told me that he had come to mean everything to her - and I could see no reason to doubt her words. She would have nothing to gain by lying.*

*Everyone deserves a second chance and as far as Catherine and I are concerned, she has that chance. Glenda is very well-liked in the world Below and Peter has taken his rejection very well. He just assumes Glenda was meant for Jacob all along and had not fallen out with his best friend.*

*Long life and happiness to the future Dr. and Mrs. Jacob Wells.*

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On the day of the wedding, Vincent and Catherine were getting ready, while two year old Jacob was taking a nap.

"How do I look?" Catherine twirled around in front of her husband, in her rose-pink silk gown, with its low 'V'-neck and full skirt.

"You look gorgeous." Vincent drew her close to him and gazed into her eyes. "I don't know how I lived through those ... dreadful months."

She saw the tortured look in his eyes and she slid her arms around his neck to pull him closer.

"It's over, Vincent. If only your subconscious could accept that it is, then I am sure the conscious part of you would be able to get over it."

"It could not be helped, Catherine." Vincent held her tight. "I have come to realize that sooner or later ... well ... it had to happen. I know I tried to avoid anything physical happening between us, but we loved each other so much that in the end one of us just had to start something sexual."

Vincent kissed his wife with tenderness and sudden longing, crushing her against him as his voice became even deeper than usual.

"Catherine, if we don't get to that wedding, I'm going to start something right now."

Beautiful and full of confidence, Glenda swept into Mary's chamber wearing a gorgeous wedding dress of satin and lace. She was like a white vision except that her black hair was falling around her

in soft waves.

"Do you like my dress, Mary?" she inquired of the woman who was lying on the bed with red and swollen eyes. "It was my Mom's, you know."

"Your dress is very nice, Glenda. Who did your hair?"

"Vincent did it as a sort-of wedding gift to me." She touched her long tresses. "I must say, I didn't know quite what to expect. I thought I'd end up brushing it out myself, but it turns out that he's a marvellous hairdresser. He was working on Catherine's hair as I left. She'll be dressed by now, I hope."

"Probably - and you are right about Vincent being good with hair - but I want to know why you are here?"

"Here?" Glenda sank into a chair. "I'm here to marry Doctor Jacob Wells."

"True," Mary decided to stand, believing that it gave her an advantage over her seated rival, "but I don't think you are being driven by love."

"Well, you *are* jealous, of course!"

**"Yes, I'm jealous!"** Mary stamped her foot hard on the floor. **"It's not just jealousy, though, I smell a RAT, Professor!"**

"Well, you are in a minority of one." Glenda turned her back on Mary, but Mary hadn't finished.

"Are you studying us, Professor Hall? Are you trying to find out whether our cave society has reverted back to stone-age behaviour?"

"All right!" The anthropologist turned back. "I admit I was curious about you all, but that's an occupational hazard. You've turned out to be an extremely civilized lot, so I haven't really learned much from you. Now ... if you will excuse me, I shall go to my wedding."

*She doesn't belong here, thought Mary bitterly. She hasn't even adopted our mode of dress. She wears high-heels and she'll break her neck one day.*

The wedding was beautiful. Vincent performed the ceremony and Catherine was Matron Of Honour. Devin was Father's Best Man - and just to show that there were no hard feelings - Peter had offered to give the bride away. Of course, deep down, Peter was very hurt, but he managed not to show it.

The reception was very informal. Everyone was wandering around chattering to everyone else. There were also tables full of food and drink, for people to help themselves. As Vincent crossed the floor to get some punch for Catherine, the bride approached him and touched his arm.

"Vincent, thank you for such a lovely service," she smiled up at him. "You seem to perform an awful lot of duties down here."

He gave a half-smile and tilted his head to the side, before answering.

"Well - I have performed weddings before - but very often it is Father who does the honours."

"Still, you do work hard, Protector Chandler-Wells, so hard, for everyone!"

Vincent sighed, Glenda was quite right. She seemed to know all about him, because she said.

"Sometimes 'Protector' is all you seem to be." She shook his hand. "You lose your identity because they can't think of you as anyone but their 'Protector'." Vincent bowed his head sadly, so she continued, her tone of voice warm and gentle. "You never had a mother and even though I'm not much older than you, I'd like you to think of me as the Mom you never had. I am your step-mother after all. Can you do that, Vincent?"

Vincent smiled. It was only at that moment he realized how much he had always needed his mother. He always thought he'd never really missed the maternal love which had gone from him the day that

he was born, but Glenda's words brought tears to his eyes and warmth to his heart.

"I would be ... honoured ... to have you for a Mother."

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The next few days were filled with great happiness. Father seemed years younger (whatever he was doing was certainly agreeing with him). The new Mrs. Wells was a big hit with the children and even the adults loved to hear her tales. Of course, what everyone loved about her most was her kindness to Vincent. She knew he was suffering from restless nights and was tired during the day, so she would insist he ate a good lunch when Catherine was Above at the office. She always made a great fuss of him - and he enjoyed it immensely, so when she asked a favour of him, he readily agreed.

Meanwhile, Mary still could not shake off the feeling that something was not right. She watched Glenda like a hawk, waiting for proof of her suspicions and one day Mary spied her making her way Above.

The tunnel midwife followed her to the Central Park threshold and ventured into the bright light. Disorientation set in, owing to the vast amount of space, the light and the colours, but it wasn't long before she had recovered enough to locate Glenda, who had met a tall, dark-haired man. Then Mary saw what she had been dreading, for the man pulled Mrs. Wells into his arms and kissed her passionately, the kiss was returned a million-fold, and the illicit lovers were lost to the world at that moment.

Mary felt sick to her stomach at the way Glenda was betraying Jacob Wells. She must have been using Peter, too. This evil woman had no right to either of those wonderful men. Mary crept away, she had to warn Jacob.

"Oh ... I'm sorry, Mouse, I didn't see you."

"Okay," the youth picked up the spanner which she had knocked out of his hand, "where Mary going in such a hurry?"

"I have to see Father."

"But Father gone Above, with Catherine," Mouse grinned. "Vincent making bookcase, was Glenda's idea, it's a surprise." Mouse could never keep his knowledge to himself. "Father will love it."

"I'm sure he will." Mary walked away. She considered going straight to Vincent with her information, but then it occurred to her that she should not. It did not seem fair to burden him with such a problem. She resolved to wait for Jacob and deal with it herself.

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When Glenda returned from her liaison, her step-son was hard at work. The new bookcase was nearly finished.

"Wow, Vincent," she gasped, "you've done marvellously well."

"I have done my best," he modestly replied.

"I bet you'd like a cup of tea."

"You have read my thoughts."

Glenda heated the tea and poured it into the pot. Then she placed a jug of milk on the tray along with two cups. Vincent was still busy and did not see her pull a small white envelope from her jacket



pocket, open it and pour the powdery contents into one of the cups. With a quick glance, to make certain Vincent hadn't observed her, Glenda carried the tray over to the new coffee table, in front of the new couch.

"Come and sit down, Vincent." She invited. "Have a drink, you've earned it."

He left his task and gratefully took the weight off his feet. His step-mother handed him a cup of steaming tea and he took a sip.

"Oh, I needed that."

"Lean back and relax." Glenda reached out and stroked his hair, saying softly. "You've worked very hard."

"Yes, Catherine says I work too hard." He closed his eyes and sighed.

"Don't forget your tea, Vincent." He took another large gulp and she continued to run her fingers through his mane. "I bet you like that, don't you?"

"It's very pleasant ... I'm extremely tired."

"Then lie down. The rest will do you good." She moved from her seat beside Vincent, knelt before him and lifted his legs onto the couch. Her voice was almost a whisper. "Come on, Vincent, it's time to sleep for a while."

He should have felt safe there, drifting off to sleep while she touched his face and told him he was safe with her, but something deep inside him told him otherwise. Something was badly wrong and he had lost all control. He could not stop sleep from claiming him and in his panic only one word revolved around his tortured mind. He screamed it out, just before the drug took hold.

**"CATHERINE!!!!"**

"She cannot help you now, my sleeping Beast." The Anthropologist reached for the laces of her jerkin and she began to unfasten them, while she spoke to his unconscious form. "You are going to pose for me, Vincent. Just a few pictures of you, the way nature intended, then I will have proof of the treasure I have found." She eased the jerkin from his shoulders and began to work on the buttons of his shirt. "You are going to make me famous. You're an anthropologist's dream come true and now you are mine. Nothing can stop me now, my magnificent Beast. By the time you awake I'll have taken my photos and will have dressed you again. You'll soon believe that your experience was not more than a dream, after all, I am your loving Mother and your loving Father would never think ill of me."

As she worked to prepare Vincent for his pictures there was no tenderness to her touch. There was a kind of obsessive lust, but it was born more out of ambition than desire, as he lay on his back, with his body exposed, she took her instant camera and began to photograph her find. She could hardly wait to show the snaps to the appropriate people - and then arrange to have Vincent captured in the park.

Everything was worked out. Glenda would be more than capable of dressing Vincent again for she was deceptively strong and fit. He would surely wake from the drugged sleep and not realize what had happened, he would come to the conclusion that his imagination had been working overtime and he had been safe after all. It didn't matter that he had called his wife's name, for she would never have heard him.

**"VINCENT!!!!!"**

Catherine stopped dead in her tracks. Father grabbed her arm, knowing full well that something was wrong and she needed his support to steady herself as the full force of the restored and improved Bond threatened to knock her for six. Catherine looked at her father-in-law with alarm in her large green eyes.

"Vincent's in trouble! We have to get back to the tunnels." With those words she hailed a taxi.

Mary was restless, waiting for Father's return. She walked into the tunnel just in time to see Catherine

tearing towards her, such desperation on her face.

"Catherine, what...?"

"Mary, where's Vincent? He needs me."

"He's with Glenda.. **On no.**" Mary clasped a hand to her face.

"What's wrong, Mary?"

"I thought that Glenda was just using Father to study our world ... but she wasn't. She was using him to get to **Vincent!**"

They ran. Jacob wasn't with them, he had known he could not keep up, so as yet he had no idea of his wife's treachery. On the way to Father's chamber, Mary and Catherine met Cullen and Pascal who followed willingly, but no one was prepared for the sight that met their eyes.

Six photographs lay developing on the coffee table and Vincent lay with his body still exposed, on the couch. Catherine let out a cry and grabbed his cloak from the back of a chair, and went to him and lay the garment over him, tearfully whispering as she did so.

"How dare she degrade you like this?"

Meanwhile, Cullen and Pascal had each grabbed one of Glenda's arms and she was held fast between them. She struggled to be free.

**"Just try it."** Cullen hissed in her ear. Then Mary raised her resAnthropologist.

**"How dare you! How dare you treat Vincent that way!"**

"But he's only a Beast!"

**"No,"** cried Catherine, **"the Beast is you."**

Father entered the chamber at that moment and his world fell apart. It was easy for him to sum up the situation. He could see the offending photos, see his wife restrained and see Catherine bending over the still form of Vincent.

**"Vincent ...? Vincent ...! Oh, dear Lord."** Father rushed forward and despite his bad knee knelt before his son, touching his hair gently. "Oh, Vincent, what have I done?"

"It wasn't your fault!" Catherine assured him, taking his hand, but Father was weeping.

"Vincent ... please be all right?"

"What about me?" asked Glenda.

He looked her way with eyes which seemed made of ice. **"I don't give a hoot about you! It's over between us!"** Then he stood up, none too elegantly and faced the woman he had married. Now he wondered how he could ever had believed he loved her.

"Vincent was so kind to you - and this is how you repay him." Father pointed at his son.

"He's not a man exactly. He's a link between two species - and anyway - **I don't care!**" Her voice wavered. "I learned all about men when I was sixteen." Glenda lowered her eyes. "I was raped - and afterwards - I decided that I was going to simply use men to get what I wanted. I would even have slept with that creature over there. It would not have been altogether unpleasant at that! Of course, when I realized he had eyes only for Catherine, I knew I had to get to him another way and decided upon the maternal approach."

While Glenda was speaking, Catherine and Mary were attempting to get at least some clothes onto Vincent. Catherine did not want him to wake up and realize what had happened. When he came out of the drugged sleep, he was at least respectfully0dressed and Glenda was still restrained, while everyone tried to decide what to do with her. In a sarcastic tone of voice, she had told them how she first heard of the being whom she called a **'LINK.'**

After her last trip away, which had been an unsuccessful attempt to locate Bigfoot, Glenda came home despondent. She went out on the town that night, to drown her sorrows and met a dark-haired man in a bar. They began an affair and he told her that he used to work in a path-lab.

On one occasion a strange sample of blood was sent in from Doctor Peter Alcott, the sample was not considered to be 'human' in origin - yet it was not strictly 'animal' either. Glenda's appetite had been well and truly wetted.

She said nothing to her lover. If the creature could be found she did not want anyone else sharing her glory. She contacted Peter and set about twisting him around her little finger. Soon he was telling her fragmented things about his secret life. She knew that therein lay the creature, so she begged to be allowed to share his life.

After meeting Vincent, she needed to gain his trust and love. With other men she had used her womanly wiles, but they would not work on Vincent himself, so she used them on his Father instead -- and as she had already stated - she offered Vincent what he had never really known - a Mother's love. It worked, he trusted, Glenda and left himself vulnerable.

Vincent opened his eyes and found Catherine beside him. She smiled and stroked the face she loved.

"What happened...?" His voice was weak and his expression, one of confusion. "Was it a dream?"

"Lie still." Catherine gently implored, restraining her husband with a hand on his shoulder, "Rest a moment, until you feel better." However, Vincent looked round at that second and spotted Glenda on a chair with Cullen and Pascal on either side of her. Something **HAD** happened. But what exactly?

Vincent sprang to his feet, ignoring the dizziness in his head and looked about him. Catherine dived for the photos. **OH WHY HADN'T ANYONE DESTROYED THEM!!!!** It was too late, Vincent got to them first.

Then - as he stared in horror at the snapshots, his skin began to feel it was crawling with a million tiny worms and he clasped a hand to his mouth to stifle a heave.

The pictures fell from his grasp and he clutched at his heart. "No." It almost wasn't a word, but a painful gasp.

"Vincent!" His wife reached out for him, to draw him into her arms, but there was panic in his eyes and with a sharp intake of breath he pulled sharply away.

**"Don't ..., don't touch me, Catherine ... I ... can't ..."**

"All right," Catherine held up her hands, "It's all right, just sit down." She approached him more slowly now and her voice was soft, but Vincent's eyes held a pain such as he had never known. He hugged himself, hoping to hide his body away.

"I... I need water ... need to wash myself..."

"All right ... just sit down, Vincent," begged Catherine, with tears rolling down her cheeks.

With a wave of sick horror, Glenda looked down at two photos which had fallen at her feet, suddenly seeing them for the violations that they were. She had drugged him, stripped him and touched him - supposedly in the name of science - and she had photographed him as he lay at her mercy. Then afterwards when he awoke and realized what had happened, he had cowered from his wife's touch and begged for water, that he might be clean again.

Clean again! There was a time, a terrible night when Glenda had thought she would never be clean again. A night of horror, the like of which she would not wish on her worse enemy, with after effects which were every nit as bad as what went before. She would not wish them on her worse enemy ... let alone ... him.

"Oh my God, Vincent ... what have I done to you?"

He was lying down again, very still and his complexion was deathly white. Glenda's eyes filled with tears of regret. She wanted to go to him, to soothe the pain away, but she could not.

"Forgive me, Vincent!" was her painful cry. "It doesn't matter what you are on the outside, your soul is human and I ... I robbed you of your dignity and I violated you ...."

She said no more, because suddenly Catherine placed her ear to her husband's chest and screamed. **"HE'S NOT BREATHING!!!"**

Everyone rushed towards Vincent and no one was with Glenda. All she knew was that she had destroyed him and his face appeared before her eyes. That strangely-beautiful face with its smile which came from the eyes. She saw him the way he had been, with the slight inclination of the head, and that gorgeous golden hair. In her vision he seemed so alive, just as he had been before his terrible degradation at her own hands, a degradation which Glenda had felt herself, many years ago. She had not actually raped Vincent, but she might just as well have done. She had watched him crumble under the weight of what had happened to him and could not live with her guilt.

She found herself on the bridge over the Abyss. The chasm was waiting for her, it was just a matter of letting herself fall. Mercifully, as it turned out, she did not have to do that. Her high heel caught in the gap between two of the boards and she fell down the bottomless pit.

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Vincent was in a tunnel, but it was not one of his own tunnels, this one was ringed with lights, all the colours of the rainbow. At the end of the tunnel a bright golden light beckoned him home. Vincent moved toward it.

Suddenly, someone came out of that light and walked toward him in her flowing gown. It was his Guardian Angel, the one who had appeared to him before in the image of his beloved Catherine. As Catherine, she appeared to him now.

"Vincent ... why are you here?" Her sweet voice asked of him.

"You know why, Angel." His eyes filled with tears. "I am tired and I need to rest."

"But your family needs you, your wife needs you, she loves you."

"She will not love me now. Not the way she used to." His tears were flowing freely. "She saw those photos. She will probably think I asked for what happened to me."

"You weren't raped. You were violated but you weren't raped."

"Is there a difference?" Vincent turned away. "If there is a difference, I can't feel it. I only know there is a pain, the like of which I have never known ... and never expected to know."

The Angel placed a hand on his shoulder and made him turn around again. He bent his head, so she put a finger under his chin to raise his face again.

"Look at me, Vincent." He did so, very reluctantly. "When you first met Catherine, did you ever wonder whether she had been raped by the men who attacked her?"

"Well, yes," he admitted, "of course she told me later that she hadn't been, but before I knew for sure I tried to let her know, through our Bond, that I loved her without question and respected her completely. Whatever had happened, it did not change things and I tried to show her the truth of my feelings.

"Then why won't you let her do the same for you?"

"But - I realize now that we should never have allowed things to develop between us. We destroyed

our Bond and I tried to tell myself that it couldn't be helped ... I said we'd have made love sooner or later ... but..."

"Vincent. Listen to your heart." The Angel touched his chest. "Just listen to the beat of your heart ... and concentrate on what you feel."

He did as she had asked him and fresh tears appeared in his eyes.

"It's Catherine ... she's here ... she's here with our son ... we're all together again."

"Then go home, Vincent - and let them love you," she whispered. "Remember Love."

Vincent opened his eyes. Catherine looked so tired as she gazed at him. Leaning closer, she stroked his hair and his face very gently. He saw the tears in her eyes and knew that they were tears of relief.

"Hello, Vincent Chandler-Wells." She raised his left hand to her lips and kissed the ring he wore.

"Hello, Catherine Chandler-Wells." He kissed her ring too and held her hand against his cheek.

"Darling, I did not mean to make you cry. I just could not take anymore and it was easier to simply give up this life and go away."

"I know, I almost did the same thing after the morphine injection, but my Guardian Angel made me cling to life."

"What did he look like?"

"He looked like you, my love. The most gorgeous Angel of all."

Vincent closed his eyes again and drifted off to sleep. This time, he did not dream. His sleep was deep and healing.

After a brief spell in the hospital chamber, Vincent went home and was settled in his own bed. He was looking much better and his strength was returning. That night, Catherine appeared at his bedside, wearing a sensible cotton night-dress.

"Vincent, please let me lie beside you. I ... I know how you feel ... and I only want to hold you close ... I promise."

He moved aside to give her room and she climbed into bed. Lying down, facing her husband she did not touch him, but just gazed into his eyes - and then he whispered.

"I love you, you know that."

"Yes, I do." She was closer to Vincent now and they held each other. Nothing more would happen, they both knew that. It would take time to heal that terrible wound which Glenda had caused within Vincent, but they were making a start. Still, there was something on Catherine's mind - and she had to voice it, while she held him close.

"Vincent, I've been remembering that time in the cave below the catacombs, when I made you mine - and I suddenly realized..."

Vincent stopped her words, by placing his fingers on her lips, for he knew what she was going to say, so he spoke his answer softly.

"Catherine, dearest, you did nothing wrong. What you did was ... it was an act of love ... born of desperation. I have never thought of it as anything else."

"Nor did I," her voice was shaking, "until you had **this** experience when you were so vulnerable ... Oh, you know what I mean... It seems so similar ... to what I did."

"My love, there was no comparison." He touched her cheek very gently. "You brought me back that day - and you did not make me yours - because I **was** yours already."

"I've been very possessive with you lately, I'm sorry, Vincent."

"It's all right. I can be possessive too, sometimes." He winked at her and smiled. "If I am yours - then you are definitely *mine*."

Catherine sighed and relaxed in her husband's arms, where she dreamed of a time, in the very near future, when she would feel him join with her again.

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"Her shoe was found ... on the bridge ... the heel was wedged between the boards ..." Father raised his eyes to Mary, who was sitting beside him on the new couch in his chamber. Mary laid a hand on his shoulder.

"She is dead?"

"Yes ... they also found the chain I gave her on our wedding day. It was hanging from the bridge and must have caught on the side ... when she ..."

"Oh, Jacob." Mary drew him into her arms so that he could rest his head upon her shoulder. He held her close and gave way to his sobs.

"I was ... was such a ... fool. I exposed Vincent to the worse humiliation of all."

"He'll be all right - it will take time - but he and Catherine have their Bond back and it will help them heal their pain."

Father drew back slightly and gazed into the beautiful face before him, the face which shone with love for him, despite the fact that he had broken her heart.

"Mary," he whispered, "you will please forgive me?"

"Of course I will - always - I'll always be beside you."

"And I swear, dearest Mary, I will never hurt you again." Then Father pulled Mary close and kissed her tenderly.

The End

