

# A Gift of Memories

(Season 3)

By Mel

"Where are we going, Dad now?" The five-year-old, Jacob, asked.

Vincent merely continued to walk down the streets, keeping to the shadows. Despite the late hour, the city certainly earned its phrase of never sleeping. Vincent sensed the hum of excitement from those they passed, now that the warmth of spring had finally driven away the cold harsh winter nights. Everyone within the wealthy neighborhood going about their activities and routines, without a care in the world for the darkness that could in an instant take away their own joys. Such darkness was the reason it had taken him roughly five years to find the strength to retrace his steps in this part of the city.

Vincent tried to squash those morbid thoughts and focus on the task at hand. Tonight was meant to be about remembering the good, all the beauty of life and its possibilities. And the truth of all that beauty and possibilities walked beside him, his mini shadow.

Vincent felt his son's mixed emotions of confusion and curiosity through the mystical bond that connected them. It was a rare treat that he let his son stay up so late. Such a privilege was reserved for Jacob's birthday and Winterfest. A seemingly random night in April, and Above in the city of lights, was a gift, and one Jacob wouldn't want to squander with questions or any foolishness. Indeed his son seemed very quiet as they walked, perhaps reading his father's mood. For Vincent, like each year, the days leading to this night had been a painful reminder of his loss. But Jacob had been insistent that he wanted to know more about his mother, Catherine Chandler.

Vincent paused at the mouth of an alleyway. After a moment, he pulled Jacob out onto the street and pointed upward. "Do you see that balcony?"

Jacob nodded; his interest piqued.

"That was where your mother, Catherine, lived."

"On the balcony?"

Vincent gave a gentle smile. Even with the extra insight of the bond, he couldn't determine if his son was being cheeky, or if the inquiry came from the mere innocence of a child. Jacob, even at a young age, was wise beyond his years in many ways, no doubt in part because of the bond connecting father and son, but he was still innocent. An innocence Jacob maintained even after the horrific moments just after his birth and the months under the monster Gabriel's hands. He thanked the stars his son seemed unmarked by all that evil.

"Dad?" Jacob asked.

"I'm sorry, Jacob, I was lost in thought. As to your question, no, your mother didn't live on the balcony. She had an apartment, but the balcony was a place she and I spent much of our time. And .... Jacob!"

Vincent gawked, watching his son scurry upward like a monkey. Was this how Father had felt about him in his youth? Within seconds, he hurried after; muscle memory taking over as he scaled the side of the apartment building. His heart and mind ached, chanting the same refrain: *She's not there, she's not there.*

What had he been thinking coming back here after all this time? A new family had moved in only a few weeks after. He had come back just once before. He had heard them laughing and enjoying their lives. None of them could truly know or understand the pain of the tragedy of the apartment's previous tenant... his son's mother.

He reached out, trying to grab his son, but the child had already jumped over the balcony's ledge. Vincent froze, waiting for the confused screams of the family; even at this hour a stranger scrambling outside would be concerning. It was the reason he hung just below; unwilling to see the horrified faces of strangers upon seeing his feline face. Not here of all places.

At least Jacob favored his mother in looks, especially his blue eyes. His round baby face had grown into that of a typical five-year-old, perhaps even resembling one of the children who resided in the apartment now. The only physical link between father and son was the shade of their sandy/golden manes.

Closing his eyes, Vincent let his other senses stretch outward. But not even light snores from behind the closed doors could be heard. The darkened windows also signaled the family's absence. Only Jacob's light footsteps padding across the balcony meet his ears.

A wave of surprise flowed through Vincent. Quickly, but also carefully, he climbed over the ledge, words of admonishment ready. He had expected the floor to be covered with children's toys and perhaps even a small grill for family cookouts. Each one would be a sign that this place was no longer the place he and Catherine had shared their lives. But any caution or reprimand he would give to his son, died on his lips the moment he turned.

The balcony before him was just as he remembered and saw in his dreams. Everything was in place; all the tables and chairs, a couple of candles, and all the way to white gauze curtains shielding the windows. He had always loved those curtains. Even the two-colored rose bush had been returned to its place in the far-left corner. Its flowers were just beginning to bud, another celebration of renewed life.

How was this possible? Vincent blinked a few times, certain the scene before him would fade and he would awaken in his chamber Below. But no, his eyes were not deceiving him. The balcony was just as it had been five years ago.

"Dad, look they have the same rose bush as mom," Jacob said, pointing.

Vincent smiled and stepped over to his son. The bush had just begun to bud and would soon bloom into sweet red and white flowers. Each flower was as unique and beautiful as the one who first planted it here and the one who had brought it back to life from the brink of death, along with himself.

"That is your mother's rose bush, Jacob."

Jacob glanced up at him, confused. "How did it get here?"

"I don't know," Vincent said.

Somehow it felt both completely right and wrong for it to be here, as he had grown accustomed to seeing in its new home. being tended to by a certain redhead. From day one she had made certain his son knew the flowers belonged to his mother.

His eyes scanned the place again and fell on the red book of sonnets he had gifted Catherine. His clawed fingers gingerly lifted it, cradling it like a sacred tome. How had this gotten here too?

"Perhaps it is a gift," Jacob said. He turned with a shrug, moving over to the closed doors. He tugged lightly at the handles and frowned. "Can we go inside?"

Vincent turned sharply, just as he opened the book, but kept his voice quiet. "No, Jacob."

"Why?"

"This isn't our home and who knows when someone might..." His voice tailed off as he caught sight of a piece of paper falling to the ground. Carefully he bent, retrieved it. Across one side were instructions for the plants, most likely inside the apartment. On the back it simply said that the family was away, on what was known Above as spring break vacation, until the following Monday.

Jacob sighed, annoyed. The desire to explore and learn more about his mother was evident in his eyes.

Vincent folded the note, turning back to Jacob. He gently steered his son away from the glass doors. "Besides, this was where your mother and I spent our time. Not inside."

Jacob glanced over at him. "Did you ever go inside?"

"Only once..." The second time he couldn't bring himself to recall even as his heart ached. His grip on the book of sonnets tightened as more memories resurfaced. Neither time he had stepped past the glass door threshold had been of his own volition, without death barking at his heels in one form or another. Even now his heightened eyesight noticed the differences between his memories and the present reality of the darkened interior of the apartment. It seemed the world beyond this balcony had never been in the cards for him.

"When was that, Dad?" Jacob asked.

Vincent thought for a moment. "I was sick and your mom helped me recover."

"Like Diana?"

Vincent thought for a moment. The story of what Diana Bennet had done for both him and Jacob had become its own legend. Though she and his beloved Catherine were vastly different, they did share beautiful and healing spirits.

"Not quite the same, but yes. Both our mother and Diana saved my life more times than I care to count."

"And you saved Mom's life, right?"

"I did. You know the story, Jacob."

"Tell it again," Jacob said, settling down with his back pressed against the balcony.

Vincent nodded and sat beside him. His heart both ached and mended seeing his son take his mother's usual spot. Father and son spent the rest of the evening cuddled within the sanctuary of the balcony, as Vincent told him more stories of his mother.

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Vincent tapped lightly on the window and then retreated to the edge of the loft's roof. It had been two days since he and taken Jacob Above, and the question still nagged at him. A question that had driven him Above again. How had it all come together on the balcony?

His ears perked hearing the door open, but he didn't see Diana until she had moved to her usual spot. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her mane of red hair was pulled back from her pale face. Unlike Catherine, she found jeans and a nice sweater more comfortable. Tonight she wore jeans and dark purple sweater.

Her inquisitive hazel green gaze met his. "Hi."

Caught, Vincent lowered his eyes and gave a sheepish greeting. "Good evening, Diana. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"You didn't. I was just reading a book." Diana grinned, perhaps guessing his next thought, her voice teasing. "I do read things other than case files and making profiles of criminals."

"Of course." Vincent bowed his head before he returned a teasing note of his own. "Which is it tonight, Juliet and Romeo or Henry the VI?"

Diana grinned. "Not tonight. I need to have my wits about me for any of his stuff."

Vincent's lips twitched fondly. Unlike Catherine, Diana held an indifference to the Bard's work. And if his hunch was correct, she deserved a night off, instead of another round of his feeble attempts to appreciate to show Shakespeare's skills.

A mildly awkward silene fell between them.

Vincent shifted. Despite her easy teasing and their familiarity, he took note of the gap between them. Over the years, he had sensed her desire for a closer relationship between them, and didn't she deserve more than what he had to offer?

Diana Bennet had done so much for him and his son, the moment she had found him on the edge of death. Just as she had patiently worked to bring the rose bush back, she had been just as gentle and kind with him.



She shared both the moments of joy with Jacob, and the times when the grief threatened to overwhelm him again. When she was Below, she could interact with everyone with ease, as if she had always been a part of his family and friends. To his great joy, she and Jacob had a close and unique connection. Even when he came Above and stayed in the loft, she was more at ease.

Yet up here, on the roof of *her* loft, she remained at a distance. As if fearing that by moving any closer, she would somehow be crossing some precious invisible line.

Vincent's hand slid into one of the pockets of his cloak. "I thought you were on a case tonight."

"I actually just finished a case last week," Diana said. "Why?"

Vincent shifted. "And do you keep all the pictures and documents related to previous cases?"

Diana shrugged. "By law it's required to keep documents up to at minimum three years."

A light smile tugged at his lips. Knowing her, he imagined she never threw out anything, preferring to keep everything organized in the filing cabinets just below them. In one of those cabinets would be all the documents connected to his Catherine even pictures of her apartment as it had been that day.... He let the memory shift into the one when he first saw Diana Bennett. He had watched her slowly move about the apartment, absorbing all the details she could about his beloved. Including the layout of his and Catherine's special place, the bridge between their two worlds.

"I was wondering if...?" Vincent let the question trail off and held up the plant instructions he had found. His blue eyes searched her hazel gaze for answers to the thousand questions which burned on his tongue. He saw her register the one question that shone above all the others: How had she done all it?

"Do you want to know?" Diana asked, her voice a whisper.

Vincent stepped closer, bridging that unspoken distance between them.

Their eyes remained locked on each other, taking in each subtle movement. Gently Vincent took her hand and gave it a firm squeeze. His rational mind could speculate on how the miracle of the balcony had come to be. His lips lifted into a full smile recalling the beautiful rose bush that would soon bloom under Diana's skillful care, as a gardener for indoor and outdoor plants. A more mundane, but no less powerful skill she could offer to anyone who was interested.

In the moment though, he would cherish the memories Diana had given him. Ones he could now share with his son, keeping Catherine's memory alive as it was in his heart. even as a bud of new love began to grow.

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