

The Reunion

by Melanie Strong

The car's brakes screeched in the cold winter air on the busy London street. The driver swerved, missing the pedestrian in front of him, only to hit a woman standing beside the curb. Screeching to a halt, the driver opened the car door.

"My God, what have I done?" He went over to where the lady lay, unconscious. Gently, he touched the lady's face, and turning around he called to the person next to him. "Will you please call an ambulance?" he asked. His voice was filled with urgency and fear.

'His eyes, those look like his eyes,' the woman thought as she looked up at the young man who gently leaned over her.

"Lie still, another has gone for help. Tell me, what is your name?" His voice was gentle, caressing. It brought forth memories of a voice she had not heard in over twenty years. A voice she loved above all else, one she thought she'd never hear again.

"Catherine," she whispered. It was a name she hadn't used in a lifetime. She looked up at the man before her. *'His lifetime,'* she thought. But, in this stranger, whose concern touched her, was so much to remind her of *'him'* that she could give no other name.

The young man smiled gently. "My mother's name was Catehrine. It's a name I've always loved."

The woman's face became confused. Disbelief and doubt clouded her features. "Tell me about her," Catherine requested.

The man looked down at the lined, graceful face before him and realized how beautiful she must have once looked. He sighed. It was a strange request, but he needed to talk to the woman until the ambulance arrived.

"I'm afraid I only know what my father told me. That she was beautiful, full of love, hope, courage and understanding. She died shortly after giving birth to me."

"So you grew up with your father?"

"Yes."

The woman nodded slowly and gasped as pain began to overcome her.

"Don't worry, the ambulance won't be much longer. You'll soon be in a hospital."

"I've spent... too long... living... in hospitals," the woman managed, gasping as she spoke.

The crowded street was suddenly filled with the blare of the ambulance's sirens and the crowd that had gathered around them broke apart to let the ambulance workers through.

"You'll be safe, it's here now," the stranger told her.

"Ride with me, please," she asked, as the medics lifted her onto the stretcher. Above all else Catherine didn't want to leave this man whose presence was so comforting and familiar.

The man nodded and stood up at the ambulance doors to be admitted.

"Can you tell me her name?" the attendant asked the man.

"Catherine."

"And yours, sir?"

"Wells. Jacob Wells."

"Okay, Mr. Wells. We'll do the best we can for your mother."

"No, you don't understand. We're not related."

"I'm sorry. Can you give me her surname then?"

Jacob only shook his head, while his heart called out a name he knew well. '*Chandler.*'

"Jacob," Catherine murmured weakly, then smiled. "He would call him Jacob."

"What is it?"

"You must tell me please. What is your father's name?" Her eyes were brimming with tears. There was heart-fear in her eyes and Jacob knew it had nothing to do with the accident.

"Vincent," he said quietly.

"I don't think your mother's dead, Jacob, not yet, anyway." Catherine's voice was filled with emotion.

Jacob stared at the woman, speechless. An impossible dream had come true.

"Nothing is as beautiful as the lights of this city," Catherine told her son, smiling as they rode in the taxi towards Central Park.

'I'm coming home, finally,' she told herself. Her heart was bursting with anticipation at her return, every minute she spent coming closer to the park seemed like an impossible eternity crossed.

"I told him I would meet him in the park entrance tonight. I asked that he would be alone. Usually, Mouse and the others are there to greet me, but I thought this time you'd want to be alone."

Catherine smiled and turned to gaze out the misty window. "Perhaps I should have told him, given him warning, hope, something!"

"Mother," Jacob said gently, touching her arm. "He misses you, he loves you, don't worry."

The taxi pulled up and Jacob turned to pay the driver. "Go on," he told her. "I'll wait a few minutes." Catherine nodded and turned to gaze at the tunnel entrance.

"It's still there," she whispered. Then she looked back at her son. "Thank you," she said, hugging him fiercely. "I love you both so much," and then she turned and ran to the entrance.

Her feet splashed through the stream and her hand felt the oh-so familiar roof above.

"Jacob, is that you?" a voice whispered from the darkness.

Catherine tried to speak, but her voice was lost to her, only a small strangled sound escaped.

"Jacob?" the voice asked.

Catherine forced herself to step forwards and faced the dream standing before her.

".... I...." But before another word came out, she'd been taken into his arms and all she could do was hold onto him while they both cried in released tears of sadness and joy.

Eventually they broke apart enough to look at each other. In the tunnel light Vincent appeared virtually untouched by age. Catherine's hand touched the now silver-lined hair, which she remembered as being so very soft.

"I dreamed," was all she could say.

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