

Time

by Melanie Strong

(from Crystal Cavern Twelve)

Cathy sat, head in her hands, reading through the breakdown of the Bradley testimony. She was finishing her last minute preparation on a case Joe could be begging for in the morning. She turned the page and gazed at her desk clock. The little electronic lights flashed 9:37pm at her. Cathy blinked but the numbers still read the same time.

"Time definitely flies when you're having fun," she muttered to herself through a half yawn, as she stretched the creases out of her back and arms. "I hope Joe appreciates all this extra work."

She started on yet another fresh sheet of notebook paper and a slightly tepid cup of black coffee.

Catherine managed to leave her work several hours later, finding just enough energy to drive herself home. She didn't even bother flicking on the lights in her apartment when she arrived, barely remembering to set her alarm and to get under the covers before she fell asleep. A familiar light tapping at the window awoke her.

"Vincent!" her sleep-fuddled mind acknowledged, as she climbed out of bed and went to open her French doors.

The New York night was bitingly cold and Cathy hoped that Vincent hadn't been waiting long. Even through the many layers of his thick tunnel clothing she knew he'd sense the chill.

"Vincent, what is it? Has something happened in the tunnels?" she asked, her voice displaying the concern she felt.

"No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to alarm you. I merely wanted to be certain that you were all right," the gentle voice apologized.

"Vincent, I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

"You were supposed to be at the children's recital tonight."

"Tonight?" Cathy's voice held an edge of regret. "Oh Vincent, I just completely forgot. It's just been so busy at work. Joe's new trial starts tomorrow and I was doing some more work for him." She sighed. "I'm sorry."

"I understand and so will the children," he reassured her.

His acceptance didn't surprise Cathy. It was part of who he was. But, tonight his ready forgiveness just made her guilt seem worse.

"Tell them I will definitely come next time," she told him.

"Catherine."

"I know."

"I hope the trial goes well tomorrow. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Vincent."

Cathy stood and watched as he left the balcony. After he'd disappeared, she turned to face the night sky. There were so many lights on in the city at night. Everyone was always so busy, with little time to

spend with their loved ones. Catherine waited in the chill and darkened air for quite a while, sometimes just thinking of Vincent. A busy life without him was not their dream, but it was closer to reality. In the brisk night, she wondered how the two could ever be reconciled.

The Manhattan District Attorney's office continued whirling at its whirlwind pace through to the end of the week, as crime upon crime piled up and nerves grew even tighter. By Friday, Cathy was thoroughly looking forward to the weekend and a chance to see Vincent, a chance to spend some time with him. She returned home at a semi-decent hour, determined to overcome what she perceived as her neglect of her love. After a quick shower and a change of clothes, Cathy lowered herself through her basement entrance to the tunnels and walked carefully to Father's chamber.

"Where is Vincent?" she asked from the top of the iron stairs. Father looked up from his book with a surprised expression.

"Catherine, what are you doing here?" he asked her.

"I'm looking for Vincent. I haven't seen him lately. I thought I should come to apologize for my neglect."

"He's by the waterfall. Mouse will show you the way."

"No, thank you, Father. But I'll be okay."

"Be careful, Catherine."

"And you."

Vincent sat on the edge of the rock ledge, his eyes closed, just listening to the sound of the water as it splashed against the rocks. He heard a footfall and turned to see Catherine standing and looking at him.

"Father told me I'd find you here," she said, as she walked over and sat next to him. "I wanted to apologize for this past week. We've been so busy at work..." Her voice trailed off as she looked into Vincent's china blue eyes.

"Come here," he told her quietly and opened up his arms to her. She snuggled against his chest, the safest place in the world.

"Now listen," he whispered. "Can you hear the waterfall?"

She nodded. The water cascaded down in endless torrents. Gallons upon gallons of it all rushing from the top to the bottom desperate to be somewhere else. Yet in the midst of all the turmoil its sounds were soothing, rhythmic, relaxing.

She smiled. "The peace of the storm."

"Catherine, you must never feel guilty that you don't spend enough time with me. Every moment I spend with you is like a jewel, a precious gift from you to me. I'm not the only one who needs your time. Those you work with, your friends, your family. Catherine, there is more to this world than simply me."

"But Vincent, I want to be able to spend more time with you. I don't like being this busy."

"Catherine, whatever I have, I have. I am grateful for it. If we lost all of this tomorrow, then we'd still have our past together. So much more than most people even dream of."

"It won't end Vincent," Catherine promised. "Never!"

Vincent looked down at her determined face and smiled. "I know," he replied simply.

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