

# FEVER DREAMS

by Rhonda Collins

Catherine woke with a splitting headache. She was supposed to meet Vincent later, and she hadn't been feeling very well, so she'd taken a nap, hoping it would help. It hadn't. Groaning, she walked to the bathroom, turned on the water and washed her face. *Well, she thought, If I'm going to see him, I had best begin to feel human, at least.* Undressing quickly, she turned on the shower and stepped inside. As she showered, with the warm water refreshing her, she thought about the upcoming evening and began to feel better. She washed her hair and rinsed it. *It'll be okay. I do feel a lot better.*

Catherine styled her hair with the blow dryer, then sat at her makeup mirror to do her face. The headache was still a dull thudding behind her eyes. After putting on her makeup, she opened the medicine cabinet and took out the aspirin bottle and shook a few into her hand. *A couple of aspirin and I'll be fine.* Stepping into the bedroom, she pulled a lovely blue-green dress out of the closet and examined it critically. It was new, and Vincent had never seen it. Finally nodding to herself, she smiled. *It'll be perfect.*

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When Catherine stepped into his arms from the stream of light, Vincent gasped softly. "You're lovely tonight, Catherine."

Her laughter was as soft and teasing. "Only tonight?"

Catherine's teasing always took Vincent a little off guard. He looked down briefly, his golden mane hiding his face. "Always. Only some times, more so than others." When he felt he could look at her without the smile spreading all the way across his face, he glanced up. "Are you ready for our evening?" He offered his arm, and she slipped her hand through, capturing him firmly.

"Of course."

As they walked slowly toward the park, Vincent shortened his strides to match Catherine's. At times like these he wished he could simply sweep her up and carry her. Catherine was very quiet, and Vincent could feel that she was restive.

"Is there something disturbing you, Catherine?" He asked gently.

She shook her head, then leaned it against his shoulder. "No. I think I'm only tired, is all. We finally got the conviction on the Marvell case today."

"But that should please you. I know you have worked hard to put that man behind bars."

Catherine sighed. "It does. But it was a long and grueling case, and I'm tired. That's all it is, I'm sure." She stopped, and when he turned to face her, she reached up and stroked his cheek. "Please don't worry so. I've looked forward to our evening all day. You said you had a surprise for me."

Vincent smiled once more, the smile touching his eyes. "Yes. Come." He took her hand and led her a little farther toward the concert shell. They could hear the first strains of music as the orchestra began playing. When they rounded the next corner, Catherine laughed delightedly. "Vincent! You've been busy!"

Vincent had brought quilts and candles and set up a lovely nest for them under the concert shell. There was even a small picnic basket from William. Catherine threw her arms around his neck and snuggled into his shoulder, and Vincent tentatively enclosed her with one arm. He held her close for a moment only, closing his eyes and savoring the feel of her. Then, suddenly, she had him by both hands, dragging him over to the basket. Before he knew it, Catherine was opening the basket and attacking the fried chicken like a five-year-old. Amazed, Vincent just watched, as she alternately chattered and ate, taking time to listen closely to favorite pieces of music. *She has the enthusiasm of a child*, he thought. Vincent ate a few pieces of chicken himself, and poured them some of William's ice tea, which he had brought in an old thermos. As they finished, Catherine finally slowed down, then flushed. Meeting his eyes, she commented: "I've been babbling, haven't I?"

Reaching up to brush back a strand of hair, Vincent commented with a smile. "Delightfully."

Catherine finished cleaning up the remains of the chicken and closed the basket. She slid over, and with an uncustomary boldness, settled herself firmly in Vincent's lap--to his astonishment.

"Catherine!"

Looking up at him, a totally ingenuous expression on her face, Catherine tipped her face up and gently kissed the tip of his nose. "Oh hush. You are so stuffy sometimes. Here we are in this wonderfully *fun* place...you've gone to all the trouble of bringing a picnic, and blankets, and candles...then you sit six feet away."

Vincent was stunned by the waves of sheer mischief and enjoyment rolling off

her. Suddenly, it *did* seem just a trifle silly, even to him. He wrapped his arms around her and began laughing, the laugh starting gently, rolling around in his chest as a soft rumble, then resembling a roar as he tossed his head back, sending his mane tumbling over his shoulders. When he finally composed himself, he noted that the music had stopped. The concert was over. Catherine laid her head against his chest and wrapped her arms around him. He felt her sadness that the evening was to end.

"I don't want to go home, Vincent. I want to stay here, with you." When she raised her eyes to his, they begged for him not to contradict her...not this time.

Wrapping his cloak around them both, Vincent hugged Catherine tightly against him and shook his head. He could sense her need to be with him tonight, and he had no heart for leaving himself. Resting his head upon hers, he settled against the cold tunnel wall and closed his eyes.

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Vincent woke somewhat later with the feeling of soft lips on his. Afraid to open his eyes, Vincent allowed the "dream" to continue for awhile. He suddenly realized then that he wasn't dreaming. When he opened his eyes, he was gazing into Catherine's mischievous green ones. Realizing suddenly that the "dream" had continued a little past the kissing stage, he reluctantly, but gently put Catherine from him, straightening her clothing and his own. He groaned a little as he sensed her distress. "I'm sorry, Catherine. Come. It's time for me to take you home."

Catherine pouted all the way home. She was angry and Vincent knew it. However, he simply didn't feel comfortable or secure enough in his own control to let himself make love to her. Not right now. But, he knew she wouldn't understand. He sighed raggedly. However, by the time they reached the threshold, Catherine wasn't angry any longer. In fact, she seemed very tired. She reached up and twined the fingers of her right hand in his mane and traced his lower lip with the fingers of her left. "I'm sorry, Vincent. My fault. Besides...it was time to go home. I'm suddenly very tired." She kissed him very gently.

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Catherine all but staggered up to her apartment. She couldn't believe how miserable she felt suddenly. At first she'd been angry with Vincent, but right now all she could think of was of going to bed. Her head ached horribly and her throat was sore. She checked her temperature and found it to be 101 degrees. "Oh great. Now I'm getting sick. Good going. First time I really try to seduce him and it's at the same time a bug is getting me. No wonder I didn't do too well. I was beginning to think I'd lost my touch from lack of practice!" Feeling a little better, at least psychologically, Cathy took two more aspirin and stumbled off to bed.

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The next day was miserable for Catherine. She called Joe and told him she wouldn't be in, that she had the flu, and she stayed in bed and slept. Vincent came to her balcony the night after the concert. He had felt all along that something was wrong, but the feeling had not been acute, so he had just assumed she was still a little upset with him. When he was finally able to get away, he had come to check on her. When he tapped on the balcony window she mustered enough energy to go to him and explain. He was concerned. "Catherine, you must go back to bed. Is there anything I can do? Have you seen the doctor?"

"No. My doctor is on vacation. I spoke to Peter, and he said just to rest and drink plenty of fluids. You're wonderful, but even you can't make the flu go away any faster." She hugged him and he watched as she went back off to bed.

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As Vincent entered Father's chamber, he was lost in thought. Father and Pascal were playing a game of chess, and Pascal saw Vincent. "Vincent."

Vincent's head snapped up. "Pascal." He nodded to Father. "Father." Vincent placed his hand on Pascal's shoulder and asked quietly: "Pascal. Would you mind if I spoke with Father privately?"

Pascal shook his head and rose. "Not at all. I'm losing anyway."

Father looked from Vincent to Pascal and sighed. "It is a conspiracy. I know it is. I was finally winning one."

Momentarily, Vincent didn't realize what Father meant, then he smiled. "No, Father. I assure you, it is no conspiracy." Vincent nodded to Pascal, who grinned briefly and left. After Pascal was gone, Vincent sat with Father.

"Father, Catherine is ill with the flu. Her physician is out of town, and Peter gave her instructions to rest, but...."

Father was already up and reaching for his cane. "But, you want me to check her?"

Relieved, Vincent sighed. "Yes. Please."

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Catherine was feeling better already, and she was a little irritated with Vincent for having inconvenienced Father. "Really, Father, I'm fine. If I continue doing as well as I am, I'll probably go back to work tomorrow...or perhaps the day after."

Father was busy re-packing his bag. "You're doing well. Just don't push it. You can relapse, you know."

Once Father left, Catherine snuggled back down in bed, wishing Vincent were here with her. She was feeling almost well enough to pick up where she'd left off the evening before last. Sighing, she fell asleep, hoping for pleasant dreams.

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"Hold that still, Vincent!" Winslow yelled. The railroad tie Vincent was helping Winslow carry began sliding as Vincent's head spun. The tie tumbled to the ground amid Winslow's loud curses. "What the hell, Vincent! I almost wrenched my shoulder trying to hold that!" Winslow's tone changed from anger to concern as he saw Vincent sitting on the floor holding his head. "What's the matter? Are you all right?"

When Vincent raised his eyes to Winslow's, his head hurt so badly from the movement, he thought his head was coming off. He stared up at Winslow with a puzzled expression. "I don't think I am, actually."

Winslow slid his arm under Vincent's arm and around his shoulders. "Come on, my friend. Let me get you to Father."

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Winslow dropped Vincent off in his own chamber, then went to get Father, who grabbed his bag and hobbled quickly down the tunnels. Any sign of illness in Vincent was something to definitely be concerned about. By the time he reached Vincent's bedside, his son was miserable. Father and Winslow helped him undress, then Father took his temperature, which was 105 degrees. This was high, even for him. He complained of a sore throat and violent headache, and Father confirmed that his throat was, indeed, rather raw-looking. Father simply shook his head and commented to Mary: "Of all things, Mary. He is immune to the plague, measles...everything else he's been exposed to, then he comes down with the flu...I suppose it has managed to mutate into something his system couldn't accommodate."

"I feel so cold, Father." Vincent complained, hugging himself and dragging the quilts over himself.

Father whispered to Mary, and she hurried off to find more blankets. Father was more concerned about Vincent's possibly becoming delirious with his fever. As the night wore on, Father and Mary watched Vincent as he slipped in and out of consciousness, and they sponged him with cool water to bring the fever down.

"Does Catherine know?" Mary asked.

Father shook his head. "No, and I don't want her to. She's just recovering from this herself, and she doesn't need a relapse. She'd be down here if she knew."

As they watched, Vincent tossed and turned violently. If he continued, they would

be forced to restrain him.

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*Vincent dreamed he was back in the tunnels with Catherine, and she was kissing him. When he opened his eyes and looked into hers, he ached to continue.*

*"Don't stop now." She told him.*

*Lowering his head to hers, he kissed her deeply, drawing her still closer. Lowering her to the quilts he trailed his fingers gently over her neck and shoulders, parting the soft folds of her dress. His lips trailed slowly along the line of her jaw, then down her neck. He could feel her desire, and that desire fed his own. As he tried divesting himself of his own clothing, he became more and more frustrated. The lacings wouldn't come open, they broke as he struggled with them; buttons wouldn't loosen. He roared his frustration.*

Father was becoming more and more concerned. Vincent was becoming increasingly agitated, and was tearing at his clothing. His nightshirt was coming apart at the seams. He sent Mary to get Winslow and Pascal, but when they arrived, Catherine was with them.

Pascal shrugged. "She was pounding on the pipes, and nothing could get through. I had to send someone for her."

Catherine went immediately to Vincent, and glanced up at Father. "I felt somehow that there was something wrong. Is there anything you can do?"

Helplessly, Father shook his head. "I'm afraid not. He cannot even tolerate aspirin."

Grimly, Catherine told Father. "Then leave us, please, Father. I'll stay with him. He'll be fine."

Hesitant, Father motioned to Winslow and Pascal to leave, then went to Vincent. Vincent's fever was down somewhat, and he was quieter since Catherine had arrived, so Father nodded. "Very well. But if you need anyone...."

Nodding, Catherine agreed. "If I need anyone, I'll call."

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Once Father left, Catherine slid in bed next to Vincent and wrapped her arms around him. His response to her presence was a little more ardent than she had expected from someone in his condition. She chuckled a little as he pulled her roughly against him. His urgent explorations continued for a brief time, then he subsided and slept. Catherine brushed his damp hair back from his face and kissed his nose. "Shucks. Just when it was getting interesting!" She slipped out

of bed and went to assure Father and Mary that he was fine. She told them she would stay with him, and told them not to worry. This time when she slipped back into bed, she undressed and pulled on one of Vincent's shirts. Snuggling next to him, she smiled as his arm automatically encircled her and she felt his muzzle nuzzling her neck.

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The next morning, Catherine was awakened by the teasing roughness of Vincent's fur on her neck. She opened her eyes and smiled sleepily. "G'morning."

Vincent looked confused and somewhat embarrassed. "Catherine. How? Why are you here?"

Catherine was about to explain, when Father's soft call at the door sent Vincent scooting across the bed with a look of alarm on his face. She giggled, and the look he sent her had nothing to do with *pure* love.

"Vincent?" Father called again.

Vincent cleared his throat, and answered quietly. "Father. Yes. Come in."

When the older man stepped inside the chamber, he flushed. "Good morning. I see you're feeling somewhat...better."

After examining his son, Father told both of them, "You both still need to rest, so I'm ordering complete bedrest for at least two more days." He glared at both of them. "And that means in *separate* beds!"

Vincent looked away, acutely embarrassed, and Catherine broke down into a fit of giggles.

Father continued sternly. "Catherine, you should know better! I'm moving you to the guest chamber immediately."

After Father left so Catherine could dress for the move, Vincent settled back into the pillows and watched her. He had the strangest look on his face. "Whatever is the matter?"

"You are absolutely impossible. You simply do not understand what...."

Catherine grinned. "What's to understand?"

When she reached deliberately across him to pick up her blouse, the thin cotton nightshirt did little to conceal what was underneath, and Vincent drew in his breath sharply as she brushed across him.

"Catherine!" He reached for her, and she skipped out of the way.

Shaking her finger at him, she commented: "You should have taken me up on my offer after the concert."

Vincent groaned, but a tiny smile was twitching at the corners of his mouth.  
"Catherine, I do believe you are the devil in disguise...to tempt me so."

As she headed out the door, she looked back and shook her head. "No, my love, only an angel trying to lead you to Paradise."

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