

Innocent Blackmail

by Rhonda Collins

Father had taken all Vincent's clothes and hidden them, in the hope of keeping his son bedbound so he could heal after his most recent brush with death; and Vincent was not happy about it.

"I am not a child, Father!" Vincent protested vehemently. He looked ridiculous clutching his quilt around his waist as he railed at his father.

Jacob Wells was not in the least fazed by Vincent's protests. The measure was desperate, but he'd learned from experience that it was impossible to keep his son in bed long enough for him to completely heal; so desperation would simply have to do. "No, you're not a child, Vincent. Nor do you have a whit of common sense. Therefore, you have necessitated extreme measures." He turned his back and left the room, unable to stifle a chuckle as he thought of Vincent's inadequate fury.

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Vincent fumed and fretted, but there was little he could do. As the clangor of the pipes tapered off as people found their beds, he still sat on his bed with the bedclothes draped around him, feeling foolish and angry. He was tired of being in bed. He missed Diana and the night sky and the stars. Little by little an idea came to him. What if he had no clothes? He was perfectly adroit in avoiding detection while Above when clothed, so really, what difference did it make if he went Above stark naked? He might not be able to go see Diana, but he could still see the stars and breathe some fresh air. Picturing in his mind all the sentry locations, he silently drew himself a mental map that would take him out of the tunnels without being seen. He grinned to himself. I'll show Father! How dare he steal my clothes!

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As he'd expected, Vincent had no problem at all escaping his improvised prison. He knew the tunnels far too well for anyone to see him if he didn't wish to be seen. He felt absolutely giddy, and more than a bit naughty, visiting his old haunts in the park sans apparel. My, but didn't the breeze feel odd in some decidedly unusual places! He observed any number of people engaged in generally illicit activities. They seemed oddly jumpy; though he thought it was most likely their occupation that caused their nervousness. He even stood for a

time watching the traffic from behind some trees, thinking of how erratically some of the cars were traveling. Eventually, as morning approached, he wearily made his way back through the secret ways of his home tunnels, climbed in bed, and fell asleep immediately.

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Vincent woke suddenly when a spill of papers fell onto his head. Growling, he twisted around to see Father standing over him, arms crossed, his glasses dangling from one hand. He did not look happy. With one hand, he pointed to the headlines on the morning paper.

“Sasquatch sighted in Central Park!”

Vincent blinked a few times and the print came into focus.

“Over fifty people swear to have sighted a Sasquatch-like creature roaming Central Park last night. While it is true most of the witnesses are not what would normally be described as ‘reliable,’ the sheer number of sightings seems to hint that there was definitely something unusual abroad in the dark recesses of our famous park. One cab driver insists the creature tried to hail his cab. Whatever these individuals saw...or think they saw...remains a mystery. For now.”

Vincent gulped and felt the blood rushing to his face and thanked whatever gods there were that his blush wouldn't show. He was mortified.

Father retrieved the paper and commented mildly, "I do think I will frame this particular story, Vincent. Blackmail may be useful in the future."

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Diana sat at her kitchen table sipping her coffee and smiled to herself as she read the headlines. Her digital camera sat in front of her. She'd had no idea when she left last night for a surprise visit to see Vincent after taking pictures at a crime scene that she would catch such a lucky break. Setting her coffee cup down, she picked up her camera and zipped through the photos from the previous night. Her smile turned into full throated laughter.

"Blackmail. How sweet it is!"

END