

WHEN THE NIGHTTIME COMES

by Rhonda Collins

Diana woke to the early morning darkness. The tangled sheets hindered her as she climbed out of bed. Her head hurt terribly and her eyes were sore from crying. As she looked at her disheveled image in the mirror, she thought she could see Vincent standing behind her with his long, tousled chestnut mane and gentle eyes, but when she turned, he wasn't there. She turned back and leaning on the counter, cried again.

"Damn it! I wish I could stop this. I wish HE could stop this. He doesn't realize what he's doing to me."

Diana had always used her psychic ability in her cases. That's why she insisted on working alone and on only one case at a time. But now, she felt Vincent's grief and love for Catherine like a knife in her heart. She grieved with him, even though she had never truly known Catherine in life. The trouble was, she couldn't control her abilities with Vincent, as she could with her cases... she couldn't turn it on and off.

The pain Vincent felt was always present, the feeling to Diana being somewhat analogous to a sore tooth. But in the past two days it seemed more like an abscess.

Vincent put a good face on it most of the time and went about his life fairly normally, but the pain remained, deep inside. Hidden from the world, but not from her.

She washed her face and with a little makeup tried to repair the damage the night had done. As she brushed her long red hair, the pain washed over her again. It was truly absurd. An irony of fate. She thought back to when she had found Vincent on Catherine Chandler's grave and brought him home to nurse him back to health...but it hadn't really started then.

It had begun when she had taken on Catherine's case and had slowly, through bits and pieces begun finding out about the unusual man whom Catherine had loved, and who had loved her. As she read inscriptions in books, read poems that were marked, found all the hints of this love in the bits and pieces of Catherine's life, she began to feel she knew this strange man just a little. She picked up feelings from Catherine's things, fuzzy images which tantalized her and drew her closer and closer to Vincent.

Then as she began to connect him to the many savage killings that had happened around Catherine, she didn't know what to think. But she realized that somehow Vincent knew when Catherine was in danger, and he was her

protector. It was difficult to reconcile the gentle man of the inscriptions and poetry to the savage murders, but she had known instinctively that they were connected... that they were the same man.

When she found him and saw this visage that would have frightened anyone else, somehow she hadn't even been surprised. She'd known this was Vincent -the killer- but also Vincent the lover. As he raged in his fever and deliriums and almost destroyed her apartment, she feared for her safety, but she always waited for the man she knew to be there to come out. She felt his rage and his own terror caused by his fever and hid behind her gun, and when he DID come to himself, something began happening to her. She felt a pull from him she could never explain to anyone. She couldn't get him out of her dreams, her thoughts. Vincent had had a psychic bond with Catherine and had been able to "feel" her emotions, and this bond had helped to create a greater love than Diana could ever have imagined. All her psychic ability had ever brought HER was the ugliness in people's souls. But in helping Vincent to heal, to find and rescue his son, and in the months since then of simply knowing him--now she was beginning to feel Vincent's moods more and more often.

And it hadn't been fun. Last night had been especially bad. It was Jacob's birthday today - the child Catherine had borne Vincent, and the anniversary of Catherine's death. Vincent had been up mourning all night, and would continue, she knew, for God knew how long.

Diana had fallen in love with Vincent... and because she now had this bond, she knew it was hopeless. Although his and Catherine's son, Jacob, had given Vincent something to live for, Vincent clung to Catherine's memory desperately...afraid to lose a single moment of their lives together. How do you fight a memory? How can you even want to fight a woman like Catherine?

Diana wouldn't want Vincent to forget Catherine. If he could forget a love like that, he would indeed be a monster. But how could she convince him that you CAN love again?

Diana hadn't dared to say anything to Vincent about how she felt--for fear he'd bolt like a rabbit for fear of hurting her... and himself ...and then she wouldn't be able to be near him at all or be able to help him through this.

But this had to stop, one way or another. In desperation, she'd printed out her journal from her computer - all the entries from the last year that pertained to Vincent and Catherine and bound them. She planned to present them to Vincent today to make his own decision. Perhaps if he truly knew he wasn't alone, it would help... or perhaps he would never see her again.

It was frightening to her, though, even the thought of letting him see even a glimpse inside her soul. She had never let anyone else in.

Diana pulled the curtain over the clippings, photos, and all the other information on the current case she was working on; a particularly horrible multiple rape and murder case. Today, she was forgetting it. She dressed in her sweats and Reeboks and rode the elevator down. She wished she had an entrance to the tunnels in her building as Catherine had, but she had to settle for going to one of

the other myriad of openings in the city. She'd learned of many of them and never used the same one twice in a row for secrecy's sake.

Once down in the tunnels, Diana pulled the flashlight out of her shoulder bag. She hated to carry a purse, but down here she needed things. She knew her way fairly well, but marked her way with the blue chalk just in case. She moved quickly through the tunnels: her bond with Vincent gave her an advantage in finding her way through them. She could hear the incessant tapping on the pipes as people relayed messages. She saw few people about when she got to the living areas, but it was early yet. She went first to Father's chambers.

Diana and Father had become fast friends once he was convinced she was no threat to the tunnels or to Vincent. Father had always been opposed to Catherine's tie with Vincent, but had finally accepted it, but now, he felt that Vincent needed Diana. He knew his foster son was inwardly dying a little every day with his grief over Catherine.

Outwardly, Vincent was going on with his life and having Jacob helped, but he was still grieving. Father had tried to help him let go of the grief, but had been unsuccessful. Father hoped that someday Vincent's friendship with Diana would blossom into something more, and bring him out of his despair. He knew also that Diana loved Vincent, though she had never spoken to him of it. He could see it in her face when she looked at him. As Diana came to the door of his chamber, he looked up over the rims of his glasses. "Diana, dear, please come in. Is everything all right?" Looking at her more closely, he murmured..."No, I suppose not. Is there anything I can do?"

Diana looked down, unsure of what to say. "No, Father. I came to see Vincent, but I'm not sure I should."

"He may send you away, Diana. He has everyone else. He even has Mary taking care of Jacob, which is just as well. The poor child has cried all night, sensing his father's distress. He is finally asleep."

Diana brushed her hair out of her face and straightened up. "If there is ever going to be anything for me here... with him, I have to tell him how I feel."

Father looked alarmed. "Now is perhaps not the best time, child."

"No, Father, now IS the time. He's doing himself harm, and if this goes on, he'll harm Jacob as well. It has to stop." She turned and left Father's chamber, and Father sat heavily into his chair.

Vincent's chamber was lit only by one candle and the light from his stained glass window. He sat alone, quietly staring into space--into his memories. The tears ran slowly down his face. Diana entered from behind him, quietly, but he heard her anyway.

"Diana, please...leave me. This is not a good time."

Dana moved around in front of him and kneeled in front of him. "Vincent, Catherine is dead..."

He rose, enraged, and threw the chair across the chamber. "Don't you know that is all I think about!"

"Yes," she said harshly... "That IS all you think about. Catherine would never have wanted you to bottle your love and hide it so deep within you that you smother life. You can't tell me you don't remember. 'Though lovers be lost, love is not...and death shall have no dominion' .Death Shall Have NO Dominion Vincent. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't live ... or love again."

Vincent stared at her as though he wanted to rend her limb from limb. He stood with his fists clenched so tightly his claws were drawing blood. She flinched, because she didn't just see his anger at her, she FELT it. In a minute she would lose him completely.

"Vincent... Love is like a river. It begins with a small spring...runs into a stream, changes to a river. The river has eddies and currents... and eventually it runs into the sea...to join a great body of water. Love is like that too. Catherine's love is with us still. I never met her, but I knew her...I learned to know her and love her, just as I....learned to love you...before I ever set eyes upon you. I learned to love you THROUGH Catherine."

She got up to leave, and she placed her journal in his hands. "Read this. And remember, even if I never see you again, I'll always be with you, just as you were with Catherine. Remember too, that Catherine still lives in Jacob ... and someday he will want this day to be remembered with the joy of his birth - not the horror and despair of his mother's death."

Vincent was standing, head bowed, looking at the papers in his hand as she left the chamber.

Diana told Father as she almost ran into him, blind as she was with tears, "I'll be down at the Mirror Pool if Vincent decides to see me. If not... " She stumbled through the tunnels down to the Mirror Pool and sat crying softly, for by now, Vincent was reading her story

As Vincent read Diana's journal his anger changed, quieted. He was puzzled and concerned.

How could I have been so blind as to not see what Diana was going through? She had been a more than a friend to him...had helped him find his son, rescue him. The strangest thing was that he had no feeling of bond with her, as he had with Catherine, but amazingly, she had this bond with him! His thoughts were turned completely upside down.

Suddenly he saw his relationship with Catherine in a different light as well. He perhaps hadn't fully realized why it had taken Catherine so much longer to fall in love with him ... when he had loved HER from the start. It had been impossible for him not to love Catherine: with his bond, he had felt all the good, the innocence, inside her...he could feel how she felt about him. Diana too was gentle, kind, intelligent. She had the same dedication to helping people that Catherine had...he knew he loved her...he had great respect for her. But am I IN love with her?

Vincent had never even allowed himself the possibility. To him the only love he could imagine was Catherine, and even the thought was an affront. But what would it be to be without her, as I am without Catherine? That thought was

unbearable as well. But he had so little of himself left to give to anyone ... he was afraid to hurt her, and himself.

Meanwhile, Jamie had brought Jacob to Diana at the Mirror Pool. They had become fast friends since Diana had been introduced to them. "He's a beautiful child, Jamie. I wish he were mine."

Jamie didn't know what to say. She, too, knew how Diana felt about Vincent. Most of the tunnel dwellers were able to see what Vincent had been blind to for so long. "Mouse and I wanted Vincent to be the first to know, but we haven't been able to bring ourselves to talk to him lately ... Mouse and I are in love, Diana."

Diana hugged her friend around the squirming Jacob. "Perhaps soon he will be able to be happy for you without feeling so much pain. But after what I did today, I may not be back for awhile, Jamie, so give Mouse my congratulations ... for me. Thank you for bringing Jacob to me. Perhaps you should take him back to Mary for me now, though."

As Jamie turned, she saw Vincent in the doorway. He held out his arms for Jacob, held him close to his breast for a moment, then gave him back to Jamie with a nod. Jamie glanced quickly at Diana, then left.

Vincent turned then to an extremely pale Diana. He reached out and brushed her hair back from her face. "How could I not know, Diana? I'm so sorry."

Diana reached up and stroked his face. "How COULD you know? Every love is different, that's why it's so wonderful."

Vincent looked troubled, and said quietly, "I can never forget Catherine, Diana. It wouldn't be fair to you."

Diana just smiled, and said, "Vincent, I would never want you to. Don't forget her. Cherish those memories. Just don't forget that I'm here for you, in whatever capacity you want or need... friend ... or lover. I'm with you wherever you are and whatever you do...and your grief is what's killing me. I want to help you let go of the grief, not of Catherine. Just ... don't send me away. Let me be a friend, at least."

Vincent held her for a moment, and tears glistened in his eyes. "I would never send you away."

They talked for a long while, and Vincent felt more at peace than he had in months. The constant ache of Catherine's loss was still present, but it was somehow eased. They walked hand in hand back to Father's chambers.

Father looked up, instantly taking in the change in Vincent. He was relieved to see that Diana was smiling as well.

"Well, I see you are feeling better, Vincent. Changing the subject, Father put his book away and cleared his throat, "Um..Also, Diana, Mouse tells me he has an idea for a tunnel extension to the basement of your building, with a secret door. Would that be of benefit to you?"

Diana looked as though someone had given her the world. "Oh, yes! Father, that would be wonderful! The only other tenant left in the building is an artist who uses the bottom half of the building mostly for storage, so it would work out

wonderfully! Can it really be managed?"

Vincent just looked from one to another of them, more than a little puzzled. Was I really been so far sunk in my grief that I had not realized how close Father and Diana had become, and what a good rapport they have? He shook his head, a little ashamed of himself.

Vincent walked Diana back to the tunnel exit she was planning to use this time, and they walked in a companionable silence, glancing at each other quietly from time to time.

"You're feeling better, I see," Diana said.

"And FEEL, from what I hear," Vincent chuckled, looking at her with his head cocked. "I must admit, I never realized quite how that must have made Catherine feel at times... it's a little...odd. Especially since I've been on the receiving end before. It's going to take a little getting used to."

Diana took his hand and stroked it. It feels good to me just to know you'll try to accept my love ... even if it will never be more than friendship."

"Diana..." Vincent began..."I think you know it's already more than just friendship, but where it will lead ... how deep it will grow, we will simply have to wait to find that out. I only fear to disappoint you."

Diana looked up at Vincent and placed her hand on his chest. "Life is full of disappointments, but love is all that matters, and you can't find that without risks. You knew that with Catherine. Remember it with me." She pulled his head down and kissed him gently, hiding herself in the curtain of his hair.

Diana left the tunnels, and after reaching the street, hailed a cab to go home. As she was getting out of the elevator she heard the telephone.

"Damn!" Rushing to get it, she hit her knee and was hobbling around when she answered the phone. "Diana here,"

"Well, it's about time," Joe said, his usually cheerful voice sounding angry, "Where have you been? ...Never mind. We have another one. I need you down here now."

Rushing to get cleaned up a little and change, she then hailed another taxi and headed to the morgue. Joe met her and they went to examine the body of a 26-year-old, red haired girl who had once been beautiful. Now, her raped and mutilated body was the only testimony she would ever be able to make as to what had happened.

Diana turned away. After today, she simply couldn't tolerate the sickness of the outside world. She had to get this animal.

"There's been another turn, too, Bennett. This was pinned to the body." It was a note for her. Whoever this man was, he knew she was getting close, knew who she was. "Be careful, Diana. We put a patrol outside your apartment, but we never know where you are to protect you."

Diana shrugged, dismissing Joe's suggestion. "I can't work that way anyway, Joe, you know that. I can take care of myself. I always have."

Diana left the morgue and headed home. She knew she was being followed, but

she wasn't sure if it was police or the killer...though she suspected the latter: she could feel a submerged hatred. She still had her bag with her gun in it, and opened it. Just as she reached the apartment, she was grabbed from behind and dragged into a car. Her assailant was big, and as he tied and gagged her, all her plans and struggling went out the window along with her bag. She lay in the back seat as he drove away, wishing that Vincent did have the bond with her he'd had with Catherine. Unless she was very, very lucky, or very, very good ... she was done for. The car stopped.

Diana heard the driver's side door open and footsteps coming around to get her. When he opened the door, she kicked him in the face, but he grabbed her feet first and pulled her out onto the pavement, hitting her head on the concrete. She passed out, and when she came to, with her hands and feet still tied, he had her inside an apartment, his presumably, and locked in a filthy bathroom. She looked around, dug under the sink, shoving her head up underneath and feeling behind her, and found a wrench. She began tapping the code for Vincent's name and an SOS. on the pipes. The killer didn't come and stop her, so she kept it up, over and over...hoping someone would hear.

Night wore on, and Diana could see little out of the tiny window. She continued her tapping off and on, knowing Pascal would eventually hear it, but she had to keep it up so they could locate her. She wondered where the man had gone, and how long she had before he came back. She stopped tapping periodically to rest, exhausted, against the tub, or to work at her bonds, trying to get loose. Her hands were tied too tightly, but by wiggling and hooking the rope on the handle in back of the toilet, she was able to finally get the rope off her legs. She began tapping again doggedly. They just had to hear her. "C'mon, Pascal...find me."

Pascal listened to the pipes carefully. That SOS. and Vincent's name had been going on for a while now. He had been able with the children's help, to trace it to an outskirts of the city, and pinpoint it to a specific building. He had sent for Vincent when he knew where it was coming from.

Vincent appeared in the doorway. "Pascal, what is it?"

"Listen..." Pascal whispered.

Alarmed, Vincent listened to it twice..."Everyone is accounted for?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be Diana...where?"

Pascal went with Vincent to Father's chambers and pointed out on the maps where the building was.

As soon as Vincent had memorized the location, he took off in his ground-eating stride toward the subways. He waited and leaped onto the first train going the right direction. He rode the roof of the train, clutching the grooves in the top with his claws, his mane flying behind him, He became more and more worried...and enraged. He couldn't lose Diana too. When he had lost the bond with Catherine, she had died...because he couldn't find her to save her. If the same thing happened with Diana, he couldn't bear it. He leaped off the train when it stopped near the intersection he needed. He heard the tapping again, felt the pipe, and

redirected himself. Soon he found himself underneath the building, but could find no entrance...and the tapping had stopped. He must go Above.

Inside the building the door to the bathroom opened and Diana saw a big, ugly, vicious-looking man dressed incongruously in an expensive suit... carrying a surgical scalpel. My, she thought, He is ready to do business. She backed against the wall, getting as far away as possible, but he knocked the wrench out of her hands and forced her into the other room. There were pictures of his other victims on the walls.

"Now, my dear, you'll have to join my other friends."

Diana was fighting her bonds. She knew Vincent was just outside, but she was losing her own reasoning power: she was beginning to lose herself to his rage.

As the man was closing on her, suddenly she broke the bonds on her own wrists and grabbed the hand that held the scalpel. She knocked him off balance, pulled him down, kneeling him in the groin, then growling like an animal herself, she tore the scalpel from his hand and used it to slash his throat.

As Vincent roared and broke the door down, he saw to his astonishment and horror the man lying over Diana. They were covered in blood. At first he thought both of them were dead, but then Diana moved, trying to pull herself from under the man's dead weight.

Vincent rushed to her side, dragging her from under the would-be killer, and lifted her carefully to the bed. She seemed dazed, stunned. He murmured to her, stroking her hair, and pried the scalpel from her hand. He could see what had happened, but could not understand how. He removed his cloak and wrapped her in it, then lifted and carried her gently back to the tunnels, to Father.

As Father examined Diana, Mary went to get clean clothes and water to wash the blood off of her.

When Father finished, he turned to Vincent, "She is in shock, Vincent, but I think she is coming around. She seems to be doing better. Whatever happened?"

Vincent told father all he knew... and surmised, but neither of them could explain Diana's torn wrists.

There was a small moan from Diana, then she said in a barely audible voice .

"Vincent...you're here."

Vincent smiled at her and held her hand, "Yes. You're in my chamber. You're safe." Diana slept then, and Father left Vincent to watch over her.

Vincent sat watching Diana sleeping in his bed, and thought how lovely she was, with her long red hair fanned out around her. How had he never seen it before? How had he never realized how much he had come to love her? He thought of Catherine, and how he had sat next to her exactly like this when he had found her in the park that night, dying, and how his bond had formed with her during that time of healing. Suddenly he realized that it did not matter to him if the bond never formed for him with Diana. The bond had been a gift, as Catherine had said...formed in a time of deep need for him. She had told him that there were so many gifts waiting for him in life and that all he had to do was open his arms for

them. He was amazed at how alike Catherine and Diana were, and how wise...and yet...how different.

Diana woke and saw Vincent looking gently down at her and turned away. She remembered the rage and the blood, and what she had done. Vincent didn't know the ugliness inside her. It wasn't that she fed on his rage, it was that she didn't need to have that rage to be able to kill. She had killed Gabriel in cold blood, and she was glad. And she wasn't sorry she had killed the man last night. But Vincent could never understand that, and if he ever really knew her, as he had Catherine... how could he love her? Right now all she felt was his love and concern reaching out to her, blanketing her in comfort, and all she wanted to do was to escape into his arms from all the ugliness in the world ... all the ugliness that had found its way inside of her.

"Diana," Vincent said quietly, "you're safe now. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid, Vincent, I'm ashamed." Diana whispered.

Vincent turned her and cradled her against him, tears in his eyes, "I know that shame, Diana."

Diana pulled away, forcing Vincent to look at her. "No...your shame is not the same as mine, Vincent. You believe it is, but it's not. I know that Catherine told you many times that all people have a dark side... you told me that...but you can't understand my dark side. If you did, you could never care for me."

Vincent touched Diana's face gently. "I may not have the same bond with you that I had with Catherine...or that you have with me... but I know you Diana, and there is no evil in you."

Diana flung herself from Vincent's bed, standing before him in the patched flannel gown Mary had put her in, her red hair flowing over her shoulders, and her face twisted in pain.

"Vincent, you don't understand the extent of my psychic ability. With Catherine, you bonded with her alone... In my work, I get into the minds of murderers, devils. Their thoughts become my thoughts. That is what I do. The evil is inside me. I can't get it out. I don't think I can ever get it out. I feel as though I've absorbed it. I never could love anyone ... never let them in ... because I always saw everything, and what I saw deep inside them inevitably disgusted me. Until I met you. Even your rages are clean in comparison to the filth I experience up there every day. Your soul is a refuge for mine, and I feel as though I soil you by touching you!"

Tears streamed down her face, and she shook with her need to be held by him.

Vincent seemed thunderstruck. He had never considered how extensive her abilities were. He knew she was intelligent and intuitive and he knew she had the bond with him--but what she was telling him was impossible to comprehend. He was speechless for a moment, and in that moment, Diana whirled, grabbed her clothes from the chair and ran from the chamber.

Diana fled past Father straight to Jamie's chamber, where she tore off the nightgown and dressed quickly. She had to leave here now before she did any damage to Vincent. If he ever learned of how she had fed on his own rage in

order to gain the strength to break her bonds... and kill that man, what would it do to him...or to any chance of his ever loving her?

As Vincent started after Diana, Father met him at the door and caught his arm.

"No Vincent, let her go for now. Go to her in awhile."

"Father, I have to help her. If what she tells me is true, I must go to her and be there for her."

Father was confused, "What did she tell you that has upset you both so?"

Vincent just looked at Father, torn with a desire to tell him and ask his counsel, and yet feeling this wasn't something Diana would wish him to share.

"I cannot say for now, Father...but I have to go to her."

As Father watched Vincent rush down the tunnel looking for Diana, he held onto the hope that good might still come of this woman for Vincent.

Looking for Diana, Vincent saw Jamie..."Where is she Jamie? I must find her."

"She went above, Vincent."

Jamie took Vincent's hand, concerned for both of her friends." Please. Let her calm down. She says she has to go to Joe Maxwell and tell him what happened."

Vincent hung his head as he leaned against the wall. He shook his head when Jamie asked if she could help. Slowly he made his way back to his chamber, and sat restlessly...after a long while, he lay down, exhausted by his emotions and fell asleep.

He dreamed he was following Catherine's voice through the mist, but he could not find her.

Catherine's voice told him, "We loved, Vincent. Remember love, but remember too that Though Lover's be lost, Love is not. Then he saw himself and Catherine as they had been when Catherine told him "Life has so many gifts waiting for you. All you have to do is open your arms for them. Open your arms, Vincent."

He did, and Catherine moved into them, but when he looked down at her face, it was Diana!

Vincent awoke, drenched in sweat. Going to Mary, Vincent asked if she would continue caring for Jacob until he returned.

"Tell Father not to worry, but I will be away for a while. I will be back soon."

He kissed Jacob, marvelling again at the child's beauty, and took his leave of Mary.

Vincent had decided to go to Diana's loft and wait for her there. By the time he reached the apartment, it was dark and he was able to go to the roof. This time, instead of simply waiting for her on the roof, he forced his way inside. He stood upstairs, looking down at Diana's cluttered apartment. Slowly, he walked downstairs, feeling an intruder. Suddenly, he stopped dead in his tracks...Catherine's rose bush! It was here...and alive! He knelt next to it, touching the petals softly, and the tears began to fall again. Diana had saved it and cherished it.

Rising, he went to her wall and pulled the curtain away, revealing the mass of

clippings, police photos, ... all the sordid details of the last case Diana had been working on ... the one that had almost killed her. He saw what this man had been doing, and a growl rumbled, starting deep in his throat. This is what he had intended for Diana! If she had seen into his mind... no wonder she felt soiled. Carefully, he closed the curtain and went to the bedroom.

Diana's furnishings and appointments were so different from Catherine's... more ... functional, somehow. He looked around. Everywhere he saw practicality and function...very few frills. He sat in the overstuffed chair next to the bed to wait.

A little later, Vincent heard the elevator and closed the door to the bedroom, just in case Diana wasn't alone.

When Diana came out of the elevator, she knew Vincent was here, patiently waiting. Her stomach was churning with the gruelling interview she had just had with Joe and the coroner. There would be a hearing later, but Joe said there would be no problem for her as far as her killing the man. It had been self-defence. She wished he were right... but the problems were problems only she knew about. She went to the kitchen and washed her face, preparing to talk to Vincent... she was afraid that would be almost as difficult as her meeting with Joe.

When Diana turned, she saw that Vincent had come out of the bedroom and was standing there with his arms outstretched for her, and she ran to him, but stopped just short.

Vincent dropped his arms, but said softly, "I needed to know you were well...so I came to you."

Diana's need to be in his arms was almost overwhelming, but she remained where she was.

"I'm well enough. Thank you, Vincent ... for coming. There were ... unpleasant things I had to take care of, but Joe says everything will be fine."

Vincent moved over to the window and stood looking out at the city. The lights were like jewels in the darkness, but he couldn't see anything, his heart was too sore thinking of Diana's pain.

"Diana, why will you not let me comfort you? I know there is something disturbing you ... something deeply wrong. Please let me help."

"No one can help me with what's wrong, Vincent ... it's something only I can deal with," Diana said bitterly.

Vincent turned to face her again, a little angered, but puzzled as well. "Diana, friends help one another, and we ... are more than friends. Where I would be without you, I cannot bear to think about. The darkness can be deadly, especially when the darkness is inside you." Changing the subject, seeing he was making her uncomfortable, he moved softly past her to Catherine's rose bush.

"It's like suddenly coming upon a living part of Catherine unexpectedly. For you to have done this, ... was wonderful."

"I didn't do it for you, Vincent," she said flatly, "although I'm glad it pleases you. I

don't like to see people die, and when I become involved in their lives through my cases, it's like a small part of them comes alive to me. When I saw Catherine's roses were almost dead, it became important to me somehow to save them. It was before I met you. Catherine's mind and heart were clean and innocent. When I touch her things I feel that innocence, that goodness."

She paused, considering how much to say, then continued, blushing..."You know, Vincent, I even talk to her sometimes...about you, and Jacob. I sit talking to that stupid rose bush as if she were here."

Touched, Vincent didn't know what to say at first. Then, he just smiled and said, "I talk to her too. But I talk to her about Jacob...and you."

Vincent took Diana's hand and led her to the roof, where they stood looking out at the city. Tentatively, Vincent put his arm around Diana and felt her tremble. "Are you cold," he asked, starting to remove his cloak.

"No, Vincent. I'm fine. Just hold me, please. I need to feel your quiet." As Vincent's arms enclosed her, Diana let her mind go. Let it heal a little. His strength and goodness were all she wanted now. Tomorrow would have to take care of itself.

After a while of standing there, her head against his chest, listening to his heartbeat, she looked up at him and smiled.

"Somehow, this reminds me of a poem I read recently. Have you ever read Rod McKuen, Vincent?"

"Yes. Some. Why?"

Diana quoted: "Caught in the quiet off on our own, coming together staying alone."

Vincent brushed her hair back and kissed her forehead. "I must leave soon. I have Jacob to think of. But you are not alone. If you need me...ever...you know where I am. When you become tired, and afraid of the darkness... let me be your safe harbour, your quiet place.

Diana watched Vincent leave then went inside. She picked up a volume of Rod McKuen's poetry, turned to a page she had marked, and read, 'From your arms I'll make a wall, then I'll never be alone, I'll let your arms encircle me, When the night time comes. From your smile I'll build a wall, the tallest wall that man has known . Then I'll hide behind your smile, and I'll never be alone. '

She closed the book thoughtfully, then went to bed. She could still feel Vincent's peace and innocence. How a man could be as wise as he and still have that ... essence... of innocence despite all that had happened to him, she didn't know, but however he came to be what he was, he was unique...in every way.

END