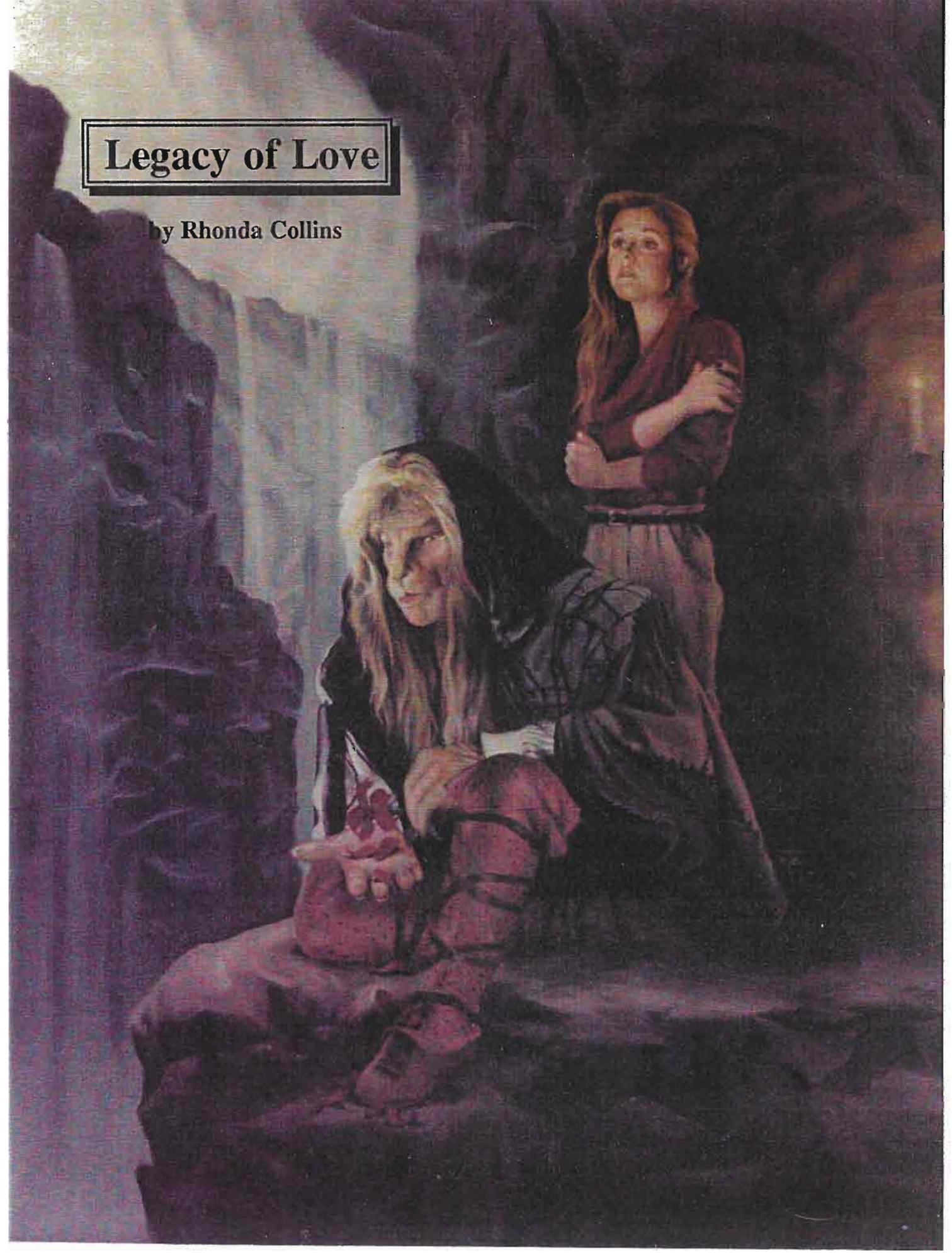


# Legacy of Love

by Rhonda Collins



# Legacy of Love

A *Beauty and the Beast* novel  
by Rhonda Collins

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This revised version of **Legacy of Love** is dedicated with love and gratitude to  
Nancy Dibble  
Helper, teacher and friend.

I would also like to thank my other friends, Kevin Barnes, Jan Durr and Rosemarie Hauer whose lovely artwork grace this book. Their talent and endless generosity in sharing it humble me.

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This revised version of **Legacy of Love** has been a long time in coming. It's been almost three years since I was told Cinemaker Press wanted to publish the book. It's been three years of frustration but oddly enough it hasn't been all bad. I learned a *lot* about rewriting. And about waiting for publishers who don't always come through.

I've always felt that third season was an amazing piece of work whose storyline deserved to be continued. Despite whatever else *Beauty and the Beast* was and is, it remains Vincent's story. It's the story of a unique man who in third season comes to full maturity, just as the story itself matures and comes full circle. Diana, who is so often seen as "the other woman," merely by virtue of having come second, is an amazingly multi-faceted character. She is both light and dark, strong and weak. A mirror of Vincent himself, in so many ways, with her own "dark side" which needs to be faced and understood. A hunter. The story possibilities for these two characters are intriguing and endless.

When I wrote **Legacy of Love**, I'd hoped to help ease people through the grief of Catherine's death and heal some wounds. To show fans that the story--as it was written--really wasn't over at all, but instead only beginning. To me *Beauty and the Beast* was never simply the love story between Vincent and Catherine. It's a story of love in all its aspects and how that love can be a motivating and molding factor in our lives. It's a story of triumph over the darkness that each of us face every day within ourselves and in others and an example of what man can aspire to be. The "Beast Within" is the beast within all of us. And the "Beauty" is the beauty of what we are all capable of. The characters are symbols that help us learn about ourselves, and help us remember love. This show has touched all of us, no matter who our favorite characters are, no matter what "seasons" of the show we lean toward. It brought us together and it has made us stronger and better. We will not, and should not forget.





# LEGACY OF LOVE

Story by Rhonda Collins  
Based on the series created by Ron Koslow

## WALLS OF SILENCE

---

Vincent lay awake staring into the darkness. He could hear soft sounds from the cradle next to him, and could feel his tiny son's sleeping presence. But sleep eluded Vincent, as it had for so many haunted and sorrow-filled nights during his search for Catherine. Now, there was no terror. There was only the aching loss and a certain resignation. A small portion of the aching had been stilled the moment he'd held Catherine's son, but the rest was a devouring emptiness that called out to be filled.

Soon Vincent knew he would be called upon to name this small life that he and Catherine had brought into the world. He knew what the name would be. The name would please Father, and honor him. That thought brought some small comfort to Vincent. *At least Father can be proud of his grandson and have no fear of his being different.*

Finally deciding that sleep was not an option, Vincent rolled over and threw the covers back. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he slipped into his sandals and pulled on a long robe against the chill. He stood a moment in the darkness, gazing down at the sleeping infant, then reached down and tentatively touched the soft cheek, drawing back as the long hair on the back of his hand tickled the child, who stirred. When the baby settled once more, Vincent sighed. *So small.*

Vincent flexed his hands. The skin of his palms was still tender from the burns he'd received escaping from the cage where the man, Gabriel, had kept him. Father had removed the dressings only last night. Vincent blessed the fact that his body healed so quickly, but even so, he'd resented the fact that someone else had cared for his son the first few days home. This was his first night alone with him, and even at that, he'd had to practically beg Father to allow it.

Restless, Vincent walked over, sat at his desk and opened his journal. He carefully lit the stub of the candle on the desk and in the flickering candlelight stared at the latest entry. He flipped back a page or two and read those entries as well. He shook his head ruefully. *They make no sense. They are only cries into the darkness.* He picked up his pen and began to write.

*A few days ago I brought Catherine's son home. I can feel him near me, and he is well. I should be able to rest now, but I cannot. The emptiness draws me in. I can sense Father's relief that it is over. But it will never be over. Not for me. Father wishes for me to stay here, in the Home Tunnels. I cannot, not permanently. At least not now. Not yet. I must go back into exile after tomorrow. Gabriel is*

*dead, and not by my hand. Diana spared me that. Diana sent a messenger to us with the news: she tells us Gabriel is dead, but no more. But even knowing that, I cannot sleep. Even with our child beside me, even with the tentative bond that the child and I share, it is not the same: I cannot feel Catherine. My sense of her has been gone for a very long time, but now there is no hope it will ever return. There is no hope that she will ever return. I feel Catherine would despise me for my lack of desire to live, to love our son. But it is so large, this emptiness. Catherine gave me this gift, our son, and I cannot even remember the giving.*

Tears blurred his eyes, and a large drop smeared the last line of text. He rubbed at the wet blotch futilely with his thumb, only succeeding in smearing it worse. He sighed and closed the book. Vincent went through the motions of putting his pen away and tidying the desk, then wrapped his arms around himself as he walked slowly to the bed and climbed back in, pulling the quilts over his shoulders. The baby would wake soon and need feeding.

Trying to relax and empty his mind, Vincent let the soft sounds of the Home Tunnels at night seep into his consciousness: the rumble of a subway car, the soft, gentle *all's well* tapped by one of the sentries, and the ever-present muted emotions of those he loved around him. Finally, he fell into an exhausted sleep, only to be awakened immediately, or so it seemed, by the insistence of his son's cries and the pull of the child's need.

Moving more clumsily than usual, Vincent picked the baby up and cradled him against his chest...and each drew comfort from the other. *Peace, little one,* he thought quietly. He hummed Catherine's lullaby as he lit the kerosine stove, took the bottle from the ice chest, and placed it in the pot of water to warm. As the water heated, Vincent laid the child on his bed to change him. Taking care not to re-injure his hands, the new father cleaned the tiny bottom and struggled with the diaper. *It looked so simple when others did it.* The infant watched his father with wide blue eyes and reached out to grasp the long chestnut hair that hung in front of him. He smiled and kicked as Vincent struggled to get him re-dressed.

Once both tiny feet were safely encased in the sleeper and all the tiny snaps done back up, Vincent held up his hands and stared at the nails balefully, then back at the infant. Then he chuckled a little at the thought of how ridiculous he must appear trying to dress his child and fasten such tiny snaps with his long nails. Thus far he had never cared for the very small infants. Now, he had an idea



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why. He murmured, "Well, my son, at least I didn't put holes in your sleeper...though it took a while. Perhaps it will be easier with practice." Resting the child in the crook of his right arm, the new father struggled with his left hand to check the bottle's temperature and turn off the burner on the small stove. Eventually, Vincent curled up back in bed with the baby cuddled next to him as he fed him the bottle. Once the baby burped, Vincent tucked the child in next to him in bed, and both father and son fell asleep.

---

It was late and Diana Bennett rubbed her eyes with the heels of her hands. *Feels like I've got sand in there.* Joe Maxwell wanted her report on his desk tomorrow, and there would, of course, be an inquiry as to the specific details of Gabriel's death. Diana sat back in her chair and stared at the computer screen, watching the cursor flash. Her head throbbed in time with it. *Okay, Bennett. What do you tell him? Oh, yeah, Joe...I killed the bastard. Plugged him right through the heart. Some people just need killing. I did the world a favor.* Somehow, she didn't think she was going to say much of anything. They could take it or leave it. There were so many questions in this case already, what were a few more? She'd tossed Catherine Chandler's gun down next to the body, turned her back, and left. In her report she merely wrote, "I thought he was going for his gun." Let them figure it out. "If I lose my badge, so be it."

She stood and stretched, then picked up her coffee cup and walked to the window. Flipping off the loft lights, she stared out at the lights of the city.

Immediately after killing Gabriel and after talking to Joe, Diana had sent word to Jacob Wells about Gabriel's death with...*What was the guy's name? Oh, yeah. Bennie...* She'd wanted to make sure Vincent knew Gabriel was gone. She knew he'd heard the shot, but she just wanted to be sure. Diana shuddered a little. It hadn't felt good to kill Gabriel, like she'd thought it might. She'd killed before on cases...in self defense...even in anger. The fury of the hunt made it easier. Defending yourself or someone else from immediate death also made it easier. Killing in cold blood was something she'd never done before, but when she'd felt Gabriel's evil and listened to his threats against Vincent and the baby, she'd known it was the only way. *I'll live with it. At least he doesn't have to.*

Draining her coffee cup, Diana walked back to the computer. She sat and finished off her meager report, knowing full well Joe Maxwell would be angry with her. As Acting District Attorney, he deserved answers. She wished she could give them to him. *Hell. I wish I could give a few to myself!* Starting the printout, Diana took the cup to the sink, rinsed it, then popped a few aspirin for her headache. *God, I'm tired. I need some downtime badly.* She'd had a few days off. Not much. Maxwell had granted her that much time before the report. *Once the report's in, maybe a few more days...some time so I can crash.* When the printout finished, she tore it off, folded it, exited the

program, shut down the computer, and stumbled off to bed. *Maybe tonight. Maybe tonight he'll let me sleep. Maybe it'll all go away and things can get back to normal.* She crawled into bed, not bothering to undress, and pulled the covers up to her chin. Her exhaustion put her out like a light.

*Peace. At first all she sensed was peace. She was so relieved. Maybe it was over. She was dreaming she was asleep. Weird. Then she felt the ache begin. It hurt. God, does it hurt. She wandered in the darkness and she could feel the ache, the loneliness, the desire, and the rage pressing around her...almost a palpable presence: heavy and oppressive. She saw a bright image ahead in the dark. It seemed to be wandering aimlessly, without direction or hope. As she got closer, she could see Vincent, though she hadn't needed to see him to know who it was. This version of the dream was always similar. Vincent turned to her, face ravaged by grief and wet with tears, but when she reached out to embrace him, to comfort him, he passed right through her as though she didn't exist. She turned and followed him. He moved toward another bright spot, which turned out to be a cradle with his son lying in it. She watched as he picked the child up, and the oppression lightened a little. Vincent sat and cradled the child, crooning a lullaby, his golden head bent carefully over the small form. Diana's sense of him faded a little, and she woke.*

Diana sat with her arms wrapped around her knees, staring into the darkness. Thinking about her dreams. *No. His dreams.* And the bond that seemed to be forming between them. Vincent seemed totally unaware of any connection, and she was afraid to ask, afraid she'd scare him off. The connection wasn't constant or all-pervasive. Sometimes it would catch her by surprise while awake...a surge of emotion that was very disturbing. But mostly it was the dreams.

While awake, Diana routinely kept her mental barriers up to protect her from overload, but at night--when she was alone--her sense of him would creep its way in, almost as though she were reaching out...or he was, unknowing. *Hell. Maybe it's both of us.* At any rate, there was little she could do, except keep track of the dreams, try to figure out what they meant, and try to keep him from knowing how she felt. *Yeah. That's just what he needs right now, more pressure...another woman. Hardly the cure.*

Losing the woman he loved had been devastating to Vincent. Diana knew that. She'd been assigned Catherine Chandler's case only after months of searching for her had failed and her body was discovered in her own apartment. Seventeen floors up with no witnesses to explain how it got there. Autopsy had established cause of death as lethal injection of morphine. She'd just delivered a child. Through bits and pieces of evidence and her usual hunching and prying, Diana had tracked Vincent, the man who'd loved Catherine. Then, together, they'd found Gabriel and rescued Catherine and Vincent's son. *At least I didn't lose*

*the baby.* For Diana knew that right now, the child was all that kept Vincent alive at all.

Diana sighed, rubbed her eyes and curled back up under the comforter to try to sleep. She had to take Joe and the Commissioner her report in the morning and field I.A.'s questions. She was becoming accustomed to having her nights broken up by Vincent's dreams. Both good and bad.

---

Diana's head still hurt, and there was a ringing sound echoing inside it, making it hurt even worse. She wished it would stop. Eventually the sound penetrated her subconscious and she realized it was the telephone. Dragging herself across the bed, she reached for the receiver. "Hello," she croaked.

"Bennett." The tone of the voice on the other end of the line indicated that the owner really didn't give a damn whether she'd slept or not. "Bennett, you were due here ten minutes ago. Where the hell are you?"

Diana rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and cleared her throat. "Um. Sorry. Overslept."

Joe Maxwell was livid: Diana could almost feel his anger over the phone. His voice vibrated with it. "I want you down here *now*. No. Yesterday! I've got a corpse in the morgue killed with a gunshot to the heart from Catherine Chandler's gun--which bears *your* fingerprints--and slash wounds on his face. And don't tell me that's not Vincent's signature! Damn slasher might as well be Zorro, leaving his mark. I need that report and you've had plenty of time. NOW!"

Diana flinched as Joe slammed the phone down on the other end. She rubbed her ear and grimaced a little. "Good morning to you, too, Mr. Maxwell. Guess I don't have time for a cup of coffee."

Forcing herself up and into the bathroom, Diana showered quickly, then dressed in slacks and green silk shirt. She dug under the bed to find her boots, then hurriedly combed and braided her hair. After spitting toothpaste into the sink, she heard the phone ring again, but didn't answer. The machine picked up and she heard Joe Maxwell's steely voice saying, "You'd better be gone, Bennett."

As she swung through the loft, grabbing her carryall, the report, and a stale donut from a box on the counter, she muttered, "Okay, okay...I'm gone."

---

Vincent had reluctantly left his son with Mary and gone to Father's chamber to check with him on details regarding security. The Central Park entrance needed final repairs done, but Vincent had asked Jamie and Mouse if they would see to it. Visiting that particular threshold was almost as painful as visiting the place where the threshold under Catherine's apartment had been. It held too many memories. He wished he could have asked them to seal the Central Park threshold as well. He would if it weren't

impossible. To seal it would only cause suspicion on the part of the city above them. Vincent had requested more sentries be posted until they were sure there would be no retaliation from Gabriel's organization.

Vincent yawned and rubbed his eyes tiredly. His exhaustion and the relief of finally finding the child were beginning to catch up with him. He'd run on adrenaline and desperation for so long he couldn't remember the last time he'd truly slept. And he wasn't doing much better now. He nodded at Brooke and Livvy as they passed, noting that their conversation stopped when they saw him. He sighed after they passed. He felt himself becoming irritated with them. *Don't they know by now that I don't need to hear what they say to know their topic of conversation? Nor do they need to feign cheerfulness for my sake.*

Vincent longed for someplace where he could retreat to for some peace...at least from everyone else's feelings. His own sorrow and loss were enough to deal with right now, along with the other emotions that surged against his restraints. Keeping control was becoming ever more difficult. He thought desperately of the darkness below them, the solitude of the catacombs and the nameless river running far below. After the Naming Ceremony, he would go back into exile until he knew it was safe. He had to make sure his presence in no way endangered those he loved, but he knew he couldn't stay away forever.

He had told Father he wished to be sure that their world was safe from more intruders like the assassin from Gabriel who'd come hunting him--and that was true. He had been the assassin's target, but in his hunt the killer had taken the lives of two of Vincent's friends. Vincent felt his presence to be a danger to those he loved. But also, at this time he simply couldn't face everyone else's feelings of sorrow, grief and sympathy. He felt pulled apart, and that division could be dangerous. The darkness below drew him: it was so much easier to cope down there. But he had the child to think of, and though he knew there was an endless supply of willing babysitters, even the thought of separation from that tiny being for more than a short time brought him a sharp stab of pain and anxiety. The child's presence was all that was keeping him here in this life at all. Otherwise, he would truly have been tempted to simply walk with Catherine's body over the edge of the roof. *Catherine would have hated that--would have despised me for doing it.*

Vincent leaned in the doorway to Father's chamber briefly, waiting for Father to look up...watching him. He thought how tired the older man looked. *This has been devastating for all of us*, he thought as he called softly, "Father."

Jacob Wells looked up, then motioned Vincent inside. Vincent came slowly down the stairs and sat in the chair across from his father.

"Vincent. Pascal checked in a moment ago, and the sentries still report nothing unusual. There are now sentries at all the additional entrances, no matter how deep or

inaccessible those may be. Mouse and Jamie have scavenged supplies to repair the park entrance."

Vincent nodded briefly. His mind felt as if it were padded in cotton. "Perhaps I can meet them later to help work on the repair." He had no intention of going anywhere near that site, but he'd felt Father was awaiting some kind of response. And after all, he hadn't promised that he *would* go.

Removing his glasses and rubbing his nose reflexively, Father said quietly, "Actually, Vincent, I told them to wait on the repairs. You do have other things to attend to."

"I'm sorry...." Vincent looked up, a little startled. "What is it?"

Clearing his throat, Father continued. "Tonight is the Naming Ceremony for your son. I'm sure you have special invitations to make."

Vincent sighed heavily and looked away. "If you are reminding me of Diana Bennett, I know. I have not forgotten the ceremony, nor have I forgotten simple courtesy. I intend to surprise her tonight. Bennie has already informed me that she is almost always home on weeknights...and most other times as well, it seems. He also tells me that she is between cases, so she should not be involved with work. Somehow, I do not think Diana will care if she is not issued a formal invitation, and I thought perhaps a surprise would break her routine."

"Vincent...." Father began quietly.

"Enough, Father, please." Vincent said wearily. "I know my responsibilities. All will be well. For now, I need to do my maintenance rounds. It has been wet lately, and the water tunnels need to be checked for erosion, as do the Ripley branches." Any excuse to leave. Before Father began reminding him of duty, honor and responsibility. He didn't think he could bear a lecture, however well-meant. *Not today. Not yet.*

As Vincent turned to go, Father put a hand on his shoulder, causing Vincent to flinch from the sudden outpouring of sympathy he felt. That was even worse for Vincent than the knowledge he wasn't living up to Father's expectations.

"Vincent. Please. Promise me you will rest this afternoon, before you leave to invite Diana. I will keep my grandson if you need someone."

Forcing a smile, Vincent replied quietly, "Perhaps. We shall see, Father."

---

Upon leaving Father's chamber, Vincent leaned heavily against the tunnel wall. *Weary. I so am weary of it all. I am tired of fighting myself, tired of despair and heartache. Tired of trying to be what I am not. Catherine...where are you now? I have such need of you. Why can I not simply join you?* He reached out and tried to feel his son. The bond was so tentative it seemed to elude him at times, but touching it, he could feel innocence and a sense of startlement with the world. Vincent had ceased to feel that so

long ago. He closed his eyes and absorbed the feeling. The child slept. *So peaceful.* Vincent came to himself abruptly when he heard William coming down the tunnel. Shoving away from the wall, Vincent greeted the rotund cook and forced a smile. Then, passing William, he continued on to the lower tunnels to begin his maintenance rounds. Perhaps if he kept himself busy he could make it through the day. *One day at a time.*

---

Diana sat tensely on a chair in the Commissioner's office, trying to look totally unconcerned. Inwardly she was seething, but outwardly there was no sign of the turmoil beneath. She listened as the Commissioner read the report and commented to Joe Maxwell. Her boss, Greg Hughes, simply sat quietly in the background, shaking his head, though he winked at her a few times. Greg was accustomed to her unorthodox behavior and odd leaps to conclusions in cases. As long as she got results and had enough evidence to make a case, he was happy. The Internal Affairs officers simply stood in their dark suits and stern expressions taking notes.

Joe's voice was hard as he questioned her once more over her shooting Gabriel. "Was he armed, Ms. Bennett?"

"No."

"Did you know that when you shot?"

"Not for certain...no."

"Then *why* did you shoot? We needed him for questioning. Maybe he could have cleared up some of the mysteries in this case...or is that why you shot him?"

Diana stared tiredly up at Joe. "For the fourth time, I shot because I thought he was going for his gun. I felt threatened. I can't explain any further than that. If it's not good enough, you can have my shield." She tossed her shield onto the Commissioner's desk without dropping her eyes from Joe's. Without blinking an eye, she said quietly, as though Joe Maxwell were the only one in the room...the only one who was important, "It was Cathy Chandler's gun, Joe."

Joe dropped his eyes first. "Yeah. Well, I don't like anything about this case. There are too many unanswered questions. Like, where'd you *get* Catherine Chandler's gun? What did Gabriel keep in that cage in the basement and where did whatever *it* was go after it pulled the cage apart? Where is the baby that the coroner says Cathy delivered? Who is Vincent? Damn it, Bennett, I *need* those answers. I need to find that baby. I owe it to Cathy, and now we may never do that, with Gabriel dead."

Diana sighed and ran her fingers through the loose hair on her shoulders and thought abstractly, *Damn braid won't ever stay up.* "Yeah, I know. We'd all like some answers, Mr. Maxwell. You're not the only one." Diana felt sorry for Joe. He'd loved Cathy, too. She wished she could tell him that Cathy's baby was safe, but Diana knew she couldn't. Some secrets just had to be kept...no exceptions.

Obviously tired of the whole thing, the Commissioner

interrupted. "All right. Enough of this. Bennett, you did some good work in finding Catherine Chandler's murderer. I'm unhappy about a great many things in this case, but unless there are any further objections, I'm closing the file." He stared at the I.A. officers and got a nod. "Mr. Maxwell has requested you be made available for him for future investigations, and I've agreed."

Diana looked at Joe, startled. "The 210 is always available to the D.A.'s office. What's the deal?"

Joe's eyes just glinted with a combination of amusement and malice. "Not the 210, in general. Just you, Bennett. Maybe I've grown attached."

Diana stared into the hard eyes, then over at Greg Hughes, who just shrugged again. "Yeah.... Maybe." *And maybe he just feels if he keeps me close he can learn something.* She nodded resignedly. "What about my downtime?"

Joe shrugged and glanced at Greg, who commented: "Until something comes up, you're officially listed as on vacation. Can't say for how long."

Diana stood and slung her carryall over her shoulder. She reached down and picked up her badge. "If that's all, gentlemen...."

The Commissioner waved her out, and Diana walked slowly to the door. As she opened it, she glanced back at Joe Maxwell, to find his eyes still on her. *Yeah. It's gonna be a real close relationship. I can tell.*

Vincent took his time dressing for the ceremony. He dressed carefully, formally, though he still had no heart for this without Catherine here to share it. Mary and Brooke had his son, so all he needed to do was go get Diana Bennett. Despite his comments to Father earlier, he was not at all sure Diana would appreciate such a sudden invitation. He barely knew her. Earlier, he'd felt quite comfortable with the idea, but now, he wasn't sure. He spent an inordinate amount of time brushing his hair, not necessarily because it needed it, but to put off the inevitable. Finally, because he could wait no longer, Vincent laid the brush gently on the desk, picked up his cloak, and headed out the door. As he walked, he rehearsed what he planned to say.

Diana pattered around the loft nervously. Something was going to happen. She wasn't sure what, but when she heard the faint tapping on the window above, she dashed over to look up, certain of what she'd find. "Vincent?"

Seeing the figure with the voluminous cloak perching like a giant bat above her, she headed for the roof. When she came through the door, Vincent turned toward her, and her heart seemed to be doing its best to make its way into her throat. Steadying herself, she noted how formal he seemed in the military-appearing vest with buttons and



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chains. Even the cloak added elegance. Each time she saw him it struck her anew how majestic he was. What a mythic figure he presented. Gathering courage, she walked slowly across the roof to him. Crossing her arms, as though putting up a barrier between them, she spoke quietly, feeling a little shy suddenly. "I was hoping you'd come."

His voice when he spoke was soft, with the rasp of sandpaper over silk. It sent shivers down her spine and her stomach turned flip-flops. "I wanted to see you...to thank you...for everything."

Diana's breathing was a little uneven, and she tried consciously to steady it. She was picking up mixed emotions from Vincent, and her own were none too understandable. She was glad he seemed so preoccupied, because she was having trouble holding her barrier against his empathy at the moment...she *wanted* to feel him, so she'd make no stupid blunders. She was never any good in social situations when her block was up...she always put her foot in it. This was new territory for her. In a lot of ways. "It's over now," she tried to reassure him. Let him know she'd done what needed to be done. "He's dead." She sighed. "Gabriel's dead."

Vincent looked down briefly, and Diana sensed he was uneasy around her. When his eyes met hers again, he commented, "For so long, he was a shadow between us."

As she hugged herself tighter, Diana's thoughts turned inward, and she raised her barrier between them...not wanting to risk him sensing her at all. When she spoke, it was more to herself than to him. "When I was alone in that room with him, everything seemed so...simple. Um. So..."

Vincent met her eyes, a hunter's understanding flashing between them. "Clear?"

Diana's nod was almost imperceptible. "I knew exactly what I was thinking." She sighed shakily again, confused by the look she'd seen in Vincent's eyes. She shivered a little...not liking the feeling it gave her. "But when I try remembering, it's almost as if..." She looked away briefly... "it never even happened."

Vincent shifted a little, and he too, seemed very introspective and uneasy. "Memory can be a forgiving thing."

Shaking her head gently, Diana firmed her resolve. "I don't want to forget."

Eyes met once more, then slipped away, as he answered her. "Sometimes it's best to forget."

Vincent seemed uncertain, but Diana responded firmly, "I don't believe that."

Raising his eyes briefly to the heavens, Vincent sighed, then looked down, and back at her before continuing softly. It seemed to Diana that the subject had just been closed.

"Diana. There is something I have kept from you. A secret that I couldn't share with you before. About where I live...those I live among."

Suddenly eager, but not wishing to appear so, Diana forced her voice to a steady calm. "I know about Jacob...."

In her anxiety, she opened her senses to him again and

could feel his flash of irritation at her interruption...but he continued. "Yes.... There are many others. Good people, whose lives depend upon the secret of how...and where we live."

Again, Diana couldn't restrain her eagerness. "I've tried imagining, but...."

This time, however, her interruption only brought a slight smile to her companion, almost unseen except for the glint in his eye as he continued. "It is more wonderful than you could imagine...because it is real." Vincent paused and looked past her, and she sensed his attention on her was very tentative. "Ours is a world woven of the most delicate threads. Our only protection against those who would threaten us is trust."

Softly, hardly daring to breathe, to interrupt, Diana said softly: "Tell me more about this world."

Vincent shook his head a fraction, but she knew that now his focus was momentarily back on her. His attention was so *scattered*. He lifted his arm, almost as if to put it around her, to guide her...but never touching. "No. Let me show you."

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Diana met Vincent in the alley behind her building. After following his dark form for a short distance, she stopped, waiting as he lifted a manhole cover. He disappeared, descending the ladder, then handed her down, his touch brief and impersonal. Diana knew there was no need to block him. She sensed his total self-absorption. *He doesn't want to feel anything from anyone and what he does pick up is disorienting to him.* To her, however, the touch was searing. The impressions of grief, despair, love, and loss she received from him were devastating. He was trying so hard to appear normal, but his control was brittle. She shook herself briefly and followed as he led her through the tunnels. She looked around, listening to sounds of what appeared to be someone tapping on the pipes. The sound was too rhythmic to be accidental. She could pick up repetitions. She began subconsciously filing things away for future reference.

They walked a while in silence, then Vincent noted her absorption and interest in the pipes and explained. "It is people...talking with one another. It is our method of communication: a code, and a beautiful language in itself."

Speaking very quietly, Vincent began explaining to her about Pascal and his pipes, and Diana tried to sort out the strange barrage of feelings she continued receiving from him. She stayed alert for any sudden shift in his interest to her so she could put up her barrier, but at the moment it was almost as though she wasn't there. He could have been talking to himself for the amount of interest he had in her. Suddenly, they walked together into a huge cavern where the wind whipped Vincent's long mane and cloak and pulled tendrils of her hair from the braid. She called out over the wind, "Where are we?"

With a slight smile--Diana even caught the momentary

flash of his canines--Vincent told her, "The Chamber of the Winds."

"It's amazing!" She was absolutely delighted. The wind sang all around them as it whistled through unseen crevices.

Her guide led her through the chamber, down stairs carved in the living rock. He stooped to lead her into a vaulted cavern where gorgeous waterfalls roared their way over cliffs, and the mist rose at their feet. Vincent gestured toward the falls, and there was a touch of pride in his voice as he explained. "Its source remains a mystery, but the water is pure."

With his right hand Vincent pointed farther downstream and tilted his head, his voice taking on a softer tone. "Past that point there is an inlet where we used to swim as children." Diana watched him as he spoke, and reached out to sense the emotions behind the words. For a brief moment, Vincent's grief was muted as he took her back with him into childhood to a time when grief did not exist. "We would shed our clothes and dive in, but we couldn't stay for long."

*I'd have liked to have known him then. A golden child. All innocence.* Her musings were interrupted as he turned toward her--and the moment was over. The innocent child gone, replaced by the grieving adult. But he smiled gently, saying: "Come. Today is the Naming Ceremony for my son. It is the reason why I wanted you to be here."

Following Vincent through the tunnels, Diana was astounded at the number of people she met and the absolute warren of chambers. It truly was a separate world. She was led to a chamber stacked with piles upon piles of books and a lavish clutter that amazed her. Lit by candles everywhere and glowing with a warm radiance, the chamber was slowly filling with people, most of them dressed in the same type of piecemeal and ragtag clothing that Vincent and Jacob Wells wore, but a few wore newer, matching... even stylish and expensive clothing. Many of the faces Diana had seen before as they had passed her and Vincent on their leisurely way here. She tried to file away names, but they were being lost in the confusion. She knew that when they were needed, the trusty data retrieval file in her head would supply them. Keeping track of names, faces and facts was what she did.

Vincent left her with a pleasant older woman whom he introduced as Mary, trusting she would be fine in the woman's care. Truthfully, Diana was comfortable in the woman's presence, and that was surprising to her. She felt that way with few people.

Mary spoke quietly to her, pointing out people and putting names to faces for her. However, despite Mary's steadying presence, being around so many people was becoming difficult for Diana, and she put up her barrier to shut out the clamoring of the unwanted emotions and desires she felt around her. It was an almost automatic



reaction by now, something she had to do simply to exist, but once the barrier was up, she felt alone. Either way it was painful for her. Mary quieted and Diana watched Vincent solemnly as his father began the ceremony.

Vincent had told her that everyone called Jacob Wells, *Father*, but indicated that he was, in truth, Jacob's son...perhaps not biologically, but in every other way that mattered. She was beginning to understand how and why the older man had earned the title. It didn't take any special empathy to feel the sense of family here, and Jacob Wells was definitely the patriarch.

With his son cradled in his arms, Vincent stood beside Father as the older man began the ceremony. "Together we have weathered a storm. A great storm, which at times I feared would never pass, but finally it *did* pass."

Watching Vincent, Diana saw a momentary shadow pass over his face, but otherwise his facade held. She wished she could reach out to him and comfort him. No one else seemed to notice the strain he was under, or how desperately he clung to his control.

Father continued. "After much sorrow and loss, the time of darkness is ended, bringing us to this day...allowing



us a time of peace and rejoicing."

Vincent spoke carefully as Father paused. He gazed down at his son, then over the crowd. Though his voice was steady and gentle as always, Diana knew he was thinking of Catherine. *How could he not be thinking of her, at a time like this?* His voice broke over the crowd, a gentle wave that touched everyone equally. "Holding my son in my arms, I feel as though two lives have been given to me. There are no words to express my gratitude to each of you...to all of you. My family." Diana startled just a little as Mary placed her arm gently around her shoulders, drawing her in, indicating that she, too, was part of that family. She felt tears start and blinked them away. It had been a very long time since she'd felt a part of anything.

Father continued quietly with the ceremony. "It has been said that the child is the meaning of life. The truth of that has never been more apparent to me than on this day, when we celebrate the child...this new life that has been brought into our world. We welcome the child with love, so that he may learn to love. We welcome the child with gifts so that he may learn generosity, and finally, we welcome the child with a name...."

Still looking down at his small son, Vincent's voice broke the expectant silence that followed Father's statement. "I have named my son Jacob."

A hushed murmur of approval followed, then people began talking softly. Diana could tell the name had been well-received. Immediately, friends began wishing Vincent well and taking small gifts up to him for the child. Diana hung back, noticing how graciously he spoke to each person individually. Treating each one as friend or family member. The man's inborn graciousness delighted her. And his control amazed her. Her attention was diverted by several people approaching her and making introductions almost all at once. Everyone seemed to want to know all about her and to thank her for helping to find and rescue young Jacob.

Diana spoke in halting sign to a young deaf girl who introduced herself as Laura, and met another woman who introduced herself as Livvy...and her young son, Luke. In the confusion afterwards, so many names and faces passed she could scarcely remember any of them, much less all of them, and she was swiftly developing another of her headaches from trying to hold her block for so long against so many people...a fairly common occurrence for her.

The feast was pleasant, however, despite the oncoming headache. She was introduced to a delightful young girl named Jamie, whom she had seen before...and had liked immediately, and a strange young man with a shock of unruly blond hair and startling blue eyes: Mouse, he was called. His antics enlivened the table and kept Diana's attention from being too pointedly directed at Vincent. Mouse spent a good twenty minutes explaining some new invention of his to her, the details of which went right over her head. Trying to follow his peculiar speech pattern as well as his interesting choice of words would have been

fascinating if Diana were not a great deal more interested in where Vincent was. She kept craning her neck to look around Mouse's blond head and was only successful in catching brief glimpses of golden mane, and sometimes hearing a snatch of conversation in *that* voice. Eventually, when weariness was about to overtake her, she saw Vincent weaving his way through the crowd toward her without the baby.

He bent his head briefly in greeting and apologized. "Diana. I am sorry to have left you to Mouse's tender mercy for so long. It seems everyone wishes to know everything there is to know about Jacob, and many of these people are helpers who have not seen him before."

Diana could see the lines of strain around Vincent's eyes, and one hardly needed to be empathic to tell he was desperate to leave. She decided to give him his excuse. "I'm on my last legs, Vincent. It's been a long day. Do you mind if we go?"

The relief in Vincent's face would have been comical, had Diana not understood all too well. She knew he must have the same problem she had with large gatherings, and also understood that his underlying grief wasn't helping. *How does he handle all this, I wonder? All the adoration, the constant expectation to be the knight in shining armor. To be perfect...especially when he doesn't want to be anything at all?* Diana had felt some of it, before she'd blocked...some of the mass adoration. They all expected so much of him. And the constant feelings of sympathy from everyone.... *How does he stand it?*

Vincent nodded toward the doorway. "Come. Mary has Jacob, showing him off to everyone. Let us escape together."

They walked toward her loft leisurely speaking of several subjects...whatever happened to come up. Vincent mentioned the upcoming repair of the Central Park tunnel entrance, which Gabriel's assassin had blown apart when he'd come hunting Vincent. Diana asked him if he would like the piece of concrete with his name carved on it, so he could re-set it. Vincent nodded briefly and thanked her for her kindness. She wondered about the story behind the names, but she was letting Vincent take the lead in the conversation, not wanting to push him. They spoke of the woman, Jessica, whom Diana had met briefly at the ceremony. The woman had seemed out of place in some way, and the difference had disturbed Diana. Apparently Jessica and Jacob Wells had once been involved years before, and Vincent commented on how pleased he was at his father's opportunity to renew their acquaintance. Eventually, though, the quiet camaraderie ended, and Vincent became quieter and quieter. Diana dropped her mental block and allowed herself to feel his emotions. The ever-present sorrow. Relief at the blessed emotional quiet around him. Walking slower and slower, they finally found themselves at the same place he'd brought her down.

Vincent had grown very distant and seemed hesitant. His voice sounded flat. "This is where we began."





Trying to inject a little levity, Diana commented shakily: "Now I know how Alice felt."

A hint of a smile was her reward. "I'm sorry the Mad Hatter couldn't be at the feast."

Diana graced him with a small laugh, more of a chuckle. She hoped she didn't sound *too* foolish. "Well, I think that Mouse was about all I could've handled." She paused and shifted restlessly, not sure how to continue. She didn't want to say too much. "I want to thank you for making me feel so welcome."

His eyes rested upon her briefly, and his voice grew a little warmer. "You felt welcome because you are welcome. If ever you need a home or a place to rest, these tunnels and chambers will be kept warm for you by friends."

Diana scanned his face, felt his emotions. *Back to the script again.* His voice was warm, but his expression was distant, his emotions tightly under control. *He's already going away--plans on going away.* She desperately wanted something to hold onto, something that would give her a hint that there was anything at all to look forward to. "When will I see you again?"

His voice was flat, expressionless, but she could feel the turmoil beneath his facade. "I don't know."

Vincent watched Diana as she climbed out of his world and back into her own. He felt stifled. *One more duty done.* Though, to be totally honest, his trips back and forth with Diana had been almost enjoyable. Heaving a sigh, he turned and headed back toward the Hub. Tonight, after putting Jacob to bed, he would head back into exile.

His steps grew slower and slower as he neared the nursery. He knew that by now Mary would have young Jacob ready to go to bed, as he had asked her. The leave-taking ahead was what slowed his stride. He could not stay, and he hated to go. Finally, as he entered the long, low chamber of the nursery, Mary raised her head and smiled sweetly at him.

"Vincent. It went well, don't you think?"

All Vincent could see was his son. He nodded abstractedly at Mary's comment. The child kicked gleefully on the large bed where Mary usually changed the infants. He raised his small fists and smiled as he saw his father. The instant recognition...the pull of the bond was all that mattered.

Mary left the chamber quietly...unnoticed.

Lying next to the child on the bed, Vincent placed his hand over the squirming bundle, and the child quieted. In his softest voice, Vincent murmured, "I will not be far, Jacob." The child wrapped one hand around one of Vincent's fingers, and pulled on the long golden mane with the other. He watched Vincent solemnly, then seeming to feel his father's sorrow, his small face wrinkled and he began to cry. Trying to distance himself and put his own emotions aside, Vincent calmed the child and tried instead to absorb the baby's innocent feelings of the world around

him. When they were both calm, he picked Jacob up and held him, stroking the tiny back as he hummed Catherine's lullaby to him once more. When the child slept, Vincent put him in the cradle, covering him gently with his small quilt. He stood over his son a moment, hesitant still. Eventually, he turned and forced himself to leave, to head back down to the catacombs. He stopped only long enough to speak with Mary about keeping Jacob, and to pick up a few things from his chamber.

Diana opened the accordion door on the elevator, stepped out and slapped the button to close the door. Warily, she dropped her block and sighed heavily. The loft felt so empty. *Guess I should be grateful. Damn, my head hurts.* Rubbing at her forehead with one hand, she pulled at her braid with the other, sending her red hair tumbling over her shoulders. She fell onto the battered couch and laid her head back, closing her eyes and wishing the pain away. It didn't work. She curled up and pulled over her shoulders the old afghan her mother had made. She fell asleep almost immediately. She slept quite dreamlessly for several hours, then she was once again in that dark place where the darkness around her was a sense of pain and oppression more than the dark of night. She had become quite familiar with that darkness of late, as in one form or another many of Vincent's dreams became hers.

*Diana was wandering in what appeared to be rough caverns, or caves. A maze of sorts. All alike, dark, damp, oppressive. She knew Vincent was ahead, somewhere. She kept wandering. It was almost black, and she couldn't see, but for some reason she moved sure-footedly, unafraid of falling or stumbling. She could hear Vincent before she saw him: the roars shook the walls. When she came upon him, he was crouched in the cave. He appeared more animal than man...and another figure was walking toward him ahead of her. Catherine. Vincent roared...hand raised to strike. "Vincent!" Diana heard Catherine's voice...watched Vincent struggle within himself...felt him retreat into himself. He fell, dragging Catherine with him. The figures began dissipating, drifting away like fog, and Diana opened her eyes to the darkness of her loft.*

Finding herself suddenly sweating and clammy, and weighted by a sense of fear and dread that wasn't her own, Diana threw off the afghan and shoved her hair back. She got up and went to the window. Staring off into the dark, she thought, *What now? What was that supposed to mean?* She struggled for a while, trying to make some sense out of what had obviously been Vincent's dream. Padding quietly in her stocking feet over to her computer, she booted it up and pulled up her journal. She sat and typed furiously, before the images left her.

*Dreamed again. Cave. Wandering in the dark. Vincent*

wild, savage. Catherine there. Must be the time he spoke of, before Catherine was kidnapped, when he "lost himself." Wish I could truly understand what he meant. Nothing comes together, means anything. He seemed almost to have lost his humanity.... Maybe that's what he meant. Said Catherine brought him back, but they had lost their bond, their connection. How did she bring him back? All this is too much for me. Too close to it. Can't pull back. Can't sleep, and I have to sleep.

Deciding she'd had enough, Diana saved the file, exited the program and switched the computer off. She stalked to the bathroom and pulled open the cabinet. She dug through the various bottles and standard junk on the shelves, and found her prescription sleeping pills. She tried not to use them too often, but sometimes during cases it became necessary. Right now, it felt necessary. She took two, then took three aspirin, and staggered into the bedroom, climbed into bed and pulled the sheet over her shoulders.

Normally, the sleeping pills kept her from the dreams, but this time as she drifted off another dream involving Vincent began.

*In Diana's dream, she was once again with Vincent, but this dream was one of passion and love. Not memories, not fears...just pure and simple desire: hers or his, it made little difference. Vincent's fingertips caressed the nape of her neck as his lips trailed softly along her jaw, the firm cleft of the upper lip creating strange, exhilarating sensations, and the soft scratch of the fur on his face sending shivers through her. When she raised her face to his, his mouth closed over hers hungrily, and his tongue teased her lips open. She clung to his vest, clutching him desperately as his arms moved lower, lifting her. She felt the soft, short fur on his face brush against her cheek, and his breath, soft and hot in her neck. The dream shifted suddenly, and he was lying full length on her, their clothing miraculously gone...no impediment to their lovemaking. The silky sensation of his hair as his arm brushed across her was delicious. Her arms snaked around him, pulling him closer. Diana moaned softly as his kisses trailed over her, pausing briefly to nuzzle or nip softly. He shifted his body, pressing with his knee to separate her thighs. Arching toward him, she tangled her fingers in his mane. "Vincent... God, yes..." Azure eyes, smoky with passion, met hers. "Catherine."*

Diana woke abruptly, the dream vanished. She was shaking. The intensity of the shared dreams worried her. She didn't know how long her sanity could hold if Vincent continued his spiral downward. For that matter, she didn't know how long she could handle going constantly on as little sleep as she'd had. She turned over and tried to relax. Soon her exhaustion took hold and she slept.

In the catacombs, Vincent wept. As usual, the dream hadn't lasted long enough to give him any relief from his desire. In addition, he felt shame...to have these dreams, yet not be able to remember his true experience with Catherine. He wished he could go back to the days of innocence, when he and Catherine had been so happy. He'd known desire then, but not like now. Before, there had been the bond for intimacy. Now there was only the longing. He ached to hold her...or even just to feel the bond once more. He was almost afraid that if by some miracle Catherine should suddenly appear to him in truth, that he would ravish her...become once more that uncontrolled beast. *Perhaps that is what happened in any case. Perhaps that is why I dare not remember.*

The next morning, Diana woke feeling a lot better. The sluggish feeling from the sleeping pills wore off fairly quickly. She spent most of the morning trying to catch up on all the things she had left undone while hunting Gabriel. The loft was a mess. She rooted in the refrigerator and pulled out all the indiscriminate odds and ends covered with mold, and poured out the sour milk. She dug dirty clothes out of every corner and from under the bed, and tossed them into an old duffel bag that her last boyfriend, Mark had left. She dragged the bag downstairs to the laundromat at the corner.

While the clothes washed and dried, Diana sat on a foldable metal chair, one foot braced against the windowsill. She read a light mystery novel, chuckling over the improbable situations. She felt good. She'd been off a couple of days, and it was nice to relax. The sun shone hot through the glass and fell on her arm, and she reached out and touched the sunbeam almost reverently, thinking suddenly how beautiful it was. Leaning her head back, she stretched luxuriously. *Okay, Bennett. The world's great. You're great. But you know that's not why you feel that way. Don't evade. It's him, dammit. How can you ever look at anything the same way again after simply knowing he exists?* What she really would have liked would have been to see Vincent's hair in that sunlight... see laughter in his eyes instead of sorrow.

Two kids ran past yelling and squirting each other with squirt guns, stray streams whacking her in the face. Instead of irritating her, it made her laugh. *Yeah. Got it bad.*

Seated quietly in the darkness in his small chamber near the catacombs, Vincent tried to arrange his thoughts and come to terms with himself. He had so many parts of his life to put together. The dreams and his grief were one thing, but in addition, he now had other problems as well. For so long now, his connectedness with the world through his empathy had been lacking. No one had understood how he'd felt, nor could he explain, though Father had tried to understand. Even Catherine had been irritated with him that



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he'd been so bereft by the loss of the bond. She'd felt that *she* was still there, and that should have been enough. Vincent felt guilty that it *hadn't* been enough. But it was impossible for anyone to understand. Impossible unless experienced in some context.

Perhaps it could be likened to someone losing their sight--but to Vincent it was all-encompassing...even more than loss of sight. His empathic sense had colored all his perceptions throughout his entire life. Without it, nothing was quite the same...not touch, sight, smell, taste, or even hearing.

When Vincent had awakened with Catherine in that dark cave, nothing made sense anymore. Everything and everyone were strange to him--even Catherine. Only touching her could he be happy. It had disturbed him that he could no longer sense her...it disturbed him more than he could admit. Yes. Everything was strange. He knew Catherine, remembered what they were to one another, remembered their lives--but pieces were missing. Eventually the names came for all the things he had forgotten. No. Not forgotten...didn't recognize...and pieces were filled in. But some things remained dark, even now. Without his empathic sense, life in general had been very much like being encased in glass, and he'd felt as though he were smothering; as though some element as vital as air, water, or food were missing.

But when Catherine disappeared, there was nothing--absolutely nothing--more important to him than finding her, and he'd mourned the loss of the bond anew, but for very different reasons. Nothing touched him except the emptiness and the hunger that was inside. His dark side fought him from within, and the emptiness outside and inside all but overwhelmed him. The despair and hopelessness had grown daily. Then, he'd felt the child. And Catherine died.

He felt as though there was no center to his life any longer. When Catherine had lived, his every breath had been shaped by her presence--and before the loss of the bond, by his sense of her. Now, there was only silence where her presence had been. The emptiness was filled with grief, and the hunger had become rage and barely controlled desire. But even that was preferable. At least he was beginning to feel again.

Over the time he'd hunted the child, slowly his sense of things had returned. Because of the child. And now, also because of the child, at times he had peace.

Raking his fingers through his mane, Vincent hung his head. The child was truly beautiful. Catherine's child--and his. *Her gift to me.*

The child had now become a lifeline to hold to when everything else was slipping away. He clung to the child and to the bond they shared...both as the only link he had left to Catherine, and for love of the child himself. He needed to be with him, yet his emotional state upset the infant. Fortunately, the bond was still tentative enough that distance helped; therefore, this exile helped the son, though it made matters worse for the father.

In addition, the return of his empathy was both a relief and a disaster. He had almost begun to think he would live the rest of his life without any sense of being connected, that perhaps he would feel that "blindness" the rest of his life. But he had forgotten in his own despair and with the depth of his own desperation and grief, how difficult it could be to try to live with everyone else's feelings and expectations. He was now having to re-learn that control as well. So, he continued his exile. Down here, it was easier. And he still had so many things to try to remember. The child was near, and safe. He could see him when the need became too strong. And when he saw the child, he saw Catherine. *I will go back tonight for a while.*

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"But why, Mouse? Why is he staying away? It's not good for him to be away from everyone who loves him."

Mouse just shook his head. Lena had been badgering him for almost an hour, and his head was buzzing. "Don't know, Lena. Says to keep us safe. You know Vincent."

That remark made Lena angry. "So who's keeping *him* safe? Doesn't anyone care about *him*?"

Mouse rounded on the young woman, angry that she should even think that others didn't care about Vincent. "'Course Mouse cares. Everyone cares. It's *Vincent* doesn't care. Can't make Vincent care. Only Catherine."

Mouse swung away and Lena followed doggedly. "What about the baby...Catherine's baby. That should make him care."

Mouse just shook his head. "Only a baby. Not Catherine. Not the same."

Following Mouse, Lena badgered and cajoled until finally, in his distraction and irritation, he inadvertently let her know where Vincent was. The catacombs, down near the west end.

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Lena bustled around her small chamber, readying herself to go see Vincent. He was still in his self-imposed exile far below them, but Lena had determined that this had to end. From the time Catherine had brought Lena Below, pregnant and suicidal--rescuing her from the life of prostitution she'd fallen into in desperation--Lena had loved Vincent. Helplessly and hopelessly. She remembered the first time she'd seen him, how he'd tried to hide his face from her. She wouldn't let him. And when she'd seen him she hadn't been afraid. The only thing she'd felt was love. Then, and now.

Lena turned from side to side, critically viewing herself in the cracked mirror. Brushing her cornsilk hair until it flowed over her shoulders in waves, she smiled. *I'll bring him back. He needs me now. He needs someone to love him.*

Lena had tried, really tried to only think of Vincent as a friend. She knew he'd loved Catherine, but Catherine was dead. Vincent had his son to think about now. *I know how*

*much difference having a child can make, but it isn't enough.* Katie hadn't been enough. Katie: the daughter she'd named after Catherine. That had pleased Vincent.

Lena had tried to be a good mother, and Katie was growing like a weed, a happy child. But Lena could feel her life slipping away from her. All she really wanted was Vincent, and she believed that now, perhaps she had a chance to make him see her...and to help him to find a reason to live, as he had helped her. *Yes. He needs me now. Now is the time.* Pulling her knitted scarf over her shoulders, Lena headed toward the catacombs, certain she could find her way.

When Mouse appeared at the door of his chamber, Father looked up, puzzled. "Mouse. What is it?"

Mouse appeared uneasy about something, poking his hands into pockets and appearing to search for something. He never met Father's eyes.

"Mouse...please. Stop puttering about. Did you need to ask me something?"

Mouse shook his head, peering with wide blue eyes through a tousled mop of blond hair. "Not ask. Tell."

Father sighed. He was never sure just how long it would be until he could get a straight answer out of Mouse. "Very well. Tell me what?"

The young man flopped gracelessly into a chair and once more began fiddling with laces on his vest.

"MOUSE."

The boy jumped, wide blue eyes startled and innocent. "Sorry. Need to tell about Vincent."

Father started to rise. "Vincent? What about Vincent, Mouse? Is there something wrong? I've heard nothing on the pipes."

Mouse blushed. "Told Lena where Vincent was." At Father's indignant look, Mouse rushed on. "Didn't mean to tell. Just asked and asked, bothered and bothered."

Scratching his chin, Father smiled, picturing the scenario. He could well believe that Lena had pushed Mouse to distraction. "I understand, Mouse. Never mind. I'm sure Vincent won't mind." *Much*, Father added to himself. He patted the boy on the shoulder reassuringly. "Go on, now. Don't worry."

Once reassured that his friend would probably understand, Mouse trotted up the stairs and out the door obviously without a care in the world, leaving Father hoping that Vincent would indeed, not mind *much*. Father worried about his son's delicate state of mind since Catherine's death, though he seemed to be doing quite well, other than his insistence on the exile. Vincent made reassuring noises to everyone and his attitude had improved, but Father was aware he wasn't sleeping well. Father did not believe for one moment that his son was still concerned about retribution over Gabriel. And he was well aware of Lena's feelings toward Vincent. *Honestly, I wish the girl would find someone to marry and leave him alone.*

Realizing there was little he could do about the situation, Father simply re-opened his Shakespeare and hoped for the best.

Picking her way through the puddles of seep-water and mud, Lena grimaced as the filthy water splashed the hem of her dress and muddied her shoes. She shivered as she wandered in the darkness with only the glow of the lantern lighting her way. Down in these reaches there were no carefully tended lamps or torches to push back the darkness. There was only the dark, the damp, and the silence. She touched the wall and drew back in distaste as it crumbled under her fingers. If this kept up, she wouldn't be in any shape to face Vincent at all.

After traveling for what seemed to her a great amount of time, Lena began getting frightened, but she tried desperately to reassure herself. *I'm not lost. I'm not. I listened carefully to what Mouse said. I'll find him anytime. I know it.*

Lena stumbled and fell, crying out. Her cry echoed through the tunnels, and a rumble began behind her. As the ceiling began to fall, she ran, stumbling ahead in the darkness, the lamp lying buried under the rubble. She was coughing and choking on the dust, and nearly hysterical when she blundered into a solid form, whose long arms reached around her to steady her.

"Lena!" Vincent's gentle voice, coming out of the darkness, brought such a surge of relief...and love, that Lena was speechless. All she could do was cling to him desperately, praying he would stay just as he was, with his arms around her. She buried her face in his chest, her tears dampening his vest. His strength and warmth...even the scent of him, was comforting to her.

Vincent had heard a cry and both heard and felt the rumble of the cave-in. Leaping to his feet, he rushed toward the area in the hope that whoever had been caught in the collapse had not been buried. When Lena's small form impacted with his, and he reached out to steady her, he was dismayed by the intensity of the feelings which bombarded him. He tightened his hold on the small, shaking figure, and momentarily laid his head atop hers. He forced himself to be still and gentle, to allow her a moment to realize she was safe, then he attempted to release her, but Lena clung to him tightly.

"Lena, please." He pleaded, softly. "Come, you are not injured. Whatever are you doing down here?" Vincent managed, with some difficulty, to extricate himself from the clinging fingers.

Drawing herself up, Lena brushed the tears away. Vincent knew she was all but blind here, but he no longer felt any fear from her...only relief and love. When she reached to touch his face, he steeled himself not to flinch. Contact with anyone except Catherine's child was almost

more than he could bear of late. He thought, *Please...I can't handle this.*

"Vincent. I was coming to see you, and there was a cave-in." She began crying softly again, and Vincent reached up reflexively to wipe away the tears. She caught his hand, and this time he couldn't help flinching. "It's all right, Vincent. I know you hurt. But you don't have to be alone. Please let me help."

Vincent sighed raggedly. "Lena. You cannot help. I know...."

Lena stumbled as she moved toward him, and sat down hard, crying when no support was forthcoming from him. "It's all going wrong. I can't even see you!"

Vincent considered his options. He could carry Lena through the darkness, or he could leave her here and go get a candle or lantern for light. Running his fingers through his tangled mane, he sighed once more. He couldn't leave her here by herself. Finally, he forced himself to reach down and touch her shoulder. "Come, Lena. I'll carry you to where there is light, then when you are rested I will take you back."

Lena moved into Vincent's arms with an eagerness that made him cringe. The contact was searing, as her love for him, her desire, and profound sympathy poured over him. He was shaking by the time he carried her into the low chamber where he had been living. He hastily laid her upon the pallet and moved to light the lamp.

Lena started to come to him and he motioned frantically for her to stay where she was. "Please. No." He was relieved when she settled back on the quilt. After his dreams leaving him desperately unsatisfied and with Lena's desire all but radiating at him, he was having tremendous difficulty holding his control. He knew that what he desired at this moment would be wrong for Lena and catastrophic for himself...even if he managed to accomplish it with any control at all. After swallowing convulsively several times, he faced Lena and forced himself to speak. "Lena. Why did you come? Where is Katie?"

Lena cocked her head and held out her hand to Vincent, which he not only ignored, but backed away from. She dropped her hand and said quietly, "Katie is fine. She's with Mary. I came...to see you. I miss you. We all miss you."

Vincent turned away. "I miss all of you as well, Lena, but I must be here now."

Lena moved over to Vincent and slid her arms around him. Vincent tried to move away, but there was nowhere to go, short of flinging her away, so he simply stood there, shuddering with his struggle to control the conflicting emotions and desires...his own and hers.

"I came to be with you." Lena said. "You need me now. You need someone to love you."

Vincent could feel Lena's desire to help him, to love him, but this only added to his own pain. Here was just one more person who needed him...one more person with expectations he couldn't fill...didn't dare to try to fill, even

if he'd felt it was right. Just as he could never have fulfilled Catherine's. He turned and gently held her away. "No. I know you mean well, Lena, but believe me when I tell you that nothing you do can help, and your presence...anyone's presence...only causes me pain. I will take you back, then please forget about this. Forget about *me.*"

Lena tried again to embrace him but Vincent shook his head and held her firmly away. "No."

The trip back seemed interminable. Lena was angry and hurt, but she hurt even more for Vincent. *But there is nothing I can do if he won't let me.* After a long stretch of silence, Lena couldn't stand it any longer. She'd been thinking for a long while of leaving the tunnels: of trying to make a go of it Above. For Katie's sake. She and Vincent had spoken of it several times, long ago, before Catherine died, and he too, felt that Katie should have the opportunities Above that were open to her. They'd spoken of Lena's childhood with an abusive father and her life on the streets. Lena had been ashamed, but Vincent had always seemed to know how to make her realize that it hadn't been her fault.

Through it all, Lena had thought she'd grown accustomed to the knowledge that Vincent didn't love her. At least not *that* way. Not like he loved Catherine. But always, the hope had remained buried in her heart that Vincent would someday open his eyes and really *see* her and see how good she could be for him. Not that she'd thought about it consciously, but she realized now that she'd never let the hope die. She sighed heavily. It was time to make decisions, and perhaps Vincent could help her make them. If nothing else, they *were* still friends.

"Peter came, last night," she said cautiously.

"I know. For Jacob's Naming. I spoke with him."

"I spoke with him, too." She glanced up at the closed, silent face of her companion. "I'm leaving the tunnels, Vincent."

Vincent asked her quietly, "Where will you go?"

"Peter told me of a friend who will give me a job...train me as a receptionist. He isn't a helper, but he is a friend of Peter's, so it should be okay." She hoped that perhaps Vincent would tell her not to go, but she knew that wouldn't happen.

Vincent nodded slowly. "Perhaps it is time, Lena, for you to reach for your dreams."

Lena thought briefly and bitterly about the dream she'd reached for and failed to find, but she knew to speak of that would only hurt him and spoil what they *did* have. "Remember how we talked about the mountains--how I used to dream of seeing them?"

"Yes."

"Maybe someday I'll even see those mountains." Glancing up, Lena thought she detected a slight smile that even reached his eyes as he remembered their conversation.

"Perhaps you will." He hesitated a moment, then continued. "I think this will be best for you. Besides, you

always know where home is." Without warning, Vincent startled her by reaching out and drawing her into a fierce hug. "Be well, Lena. See the mountains for both of us."

By the time Lena's tears allowed her to see clearly, Vincent was gone. She looked around and noted that he had brought her to the edge of the maze. She turned and resolutely headed for her chamber to pack and to contact Peter. She told few people goodbye, Father being one of the few. As they spoke, it became apparent to Lena that Father had anticipated this and seemed relieved. *He would. Always wants to keep Vincent under lock and key.* Lena knew that Father and Peter would relay the news that she was gone...as she knew Vincent would say nothing. Lena wished things could have been different. "Maybe someday, Vincent. Maybe not now, but someday." She didn't look back. She would have to learn how to live on her own. It was time, and now, with help, perhaps she could do it. She hoped Vincent would be able to learn to live without Catherine.

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Vincent left Lena, at first intending to retreat back to the maze. He hesitated after traveling only a short distance. He was restless and frustrated. The exile wasn't helping. All it was doing was separating him from those he loved, and in doing so he was harming them. Lena had pointed that out to him most forcefully, though that hadn't been her intention. He knew that he was no longer protecting his loved ones from Gabriel; he was protecting them from himself. He paused, unsure of himself. *I must decide. I cannot be so ineffectual. Must be strong--for them--for Catherine's son.* It seemed impossible for him to make a decision and yet he must. He glanced both ways in the dark and shook his head with frustration. *Lena was brave. She made her choice. Knew what she needed to do. I must follow her example.* Vincent forced himself to move toward his small chamber in the catacombs. *I will retrieve my journal, then go home.*

When he reached the tiny, cramped space he'd been staying in, his eyes darted from one side of the cavern to the other--searching for some lingering evidence of that *Other* who persisted in haunting him. But it was safe. Quickly, Vincent gathered his things. His journal. His pouch with Catherine's crystal and the porcelain rose she'd given him. *To keep. To hold close.* His hands shook as he placed the crystal and rose back into the pouch and hung it carefully around his neck...clasped the pouch tightly once it lay against his heart. Sensing a growing darkness and hearing a muttering presence, Vincent snatched his journal and dashed from the chamber. As he hurried back toward the Hub--and home--he thought a little desperately of Lena's bravery. *She has her own fears--her own darknesses to face--yet she faces them to become what she must. For herself and for her child. I must do the same. For myself. For Jacob.*

Vincent forced himself to slow his steps. To walk

slowly back to the Hub and safety from what lurked in the darkness. Back to his chamber. Once there, he wandered restlessly, almost feeling a stranger in the place he'd grown up in. He noted almost absently that Mary had been cleaning for him. He automatically re-settled a few things back in their proper order.

Finally, Vincent felt his son stirring as the child woke and he headed for the nursery.

Mary looked up when she saw Vincent come through the entrance. "Vincent! If I had known you were coming, I would have had him ready for you...." Her voice trailed off as Vincent simply nodded at her and reached out for young Jacob. His quiet, "Thank you, Mary," barely reached her ears.

The tiny hands tangled in Vincent's red-gold mane and the baby stared solemnly up at his father. Cradling his son close to him, Vincent turned and walked slowly back to his chamber, all the while letting the bond they shared touch his soul. Here was the one being in the entire world who loved him for himself...who had no expectations of him that he could not fill. There was a completeness here. Sometimes it was almost enough.

Reaching his chamber, Vincent sat in the old rocker that Father had brought for him...the same one that Father had used to rock him. The old chair barely accommodated his bulk, but its familiarity was comforting. As Jacob lay listening in the crook of one strong arm, Vincent read to him. The words blurred a little, but he continued. His strong, gentle voice resonated softly through the chamber. Jacob's eyes closed and Vincent murmured: "Hold my hand, Jacob. I need your guidance for the road ahead."

As the infant curled against him in comfort, a sense of peace settled over them both. *Perhaps providence gave you to me to find the way ahead...and perhaps even I have a few expectations left in life. We can find out together.*

He continued rocking Jacob, humming tunelessly, until he noted Father standing in the entrance. "Father. Come in." Vincent rose and walked with Jacob to his crib and laid him down, covering him gently.

Father came to stand beside Vincent and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Since you are putting him down in here, I am assuming you are staying."

Vincent shrugged and chuckled just a little. "You spoke with Lena."

"Yes. I am assuming as well that you know she has left."

Vincent walked past Father over to the bed and sat, leaning back against the bolster, trying to appear as relaxed as possible. He drew one knee up and draped an arm across it. "I knew." He looked down casually and played idly with the laces on his knee. He could feel the questions chasing around in Father's mind. He decided to change the subject. "Where is Jessica?" Vincent could tell very well that Father knew he was being sidetracked, but he noted Father's smile, and knew he'd been successful at dodging the imminent unpleasant question-and-answer session.



"She's Above. She has invited me to go with her tomorrow to view her photographs in the exhibition."

Lacing furred and long-nailed fingers around his knee, Vincent cocked his head, looking up at Father. "You're going, of course?"

"Yes, yes. I'm going. Jessica can be very persuasive...as I'm sure you remember." Father pulled up a chair and leaned on his cane. "Vincent.... Is everything all right?"

Clear-eyed, without a blink, Vincent lied through his teeth, hating himself for the falsehood. "Of course, Father. I'm here. Am I not? Lena...convinced me to come home. Convinced me I needed someone to love me." At Father's skeptical look, Vincent nodded toward Jacob, and smiled gently at Father. "That is what you wished, is it not?"

Watching Father, Vincent could tell that his father was not entirely fooled. But he also knew that Father wanted to believe all was well. Because that desire was so strong, he knew Father would accept his statement...for now.

Father glowered a little...obviously unconvinced, but he agreed. "It's what we all wished. Very well. But you need to rest. You are still overtired, and I am not sure you have completely recovered."

"I will rest. Enjoy yourself tomorrow, Father. Goodnight."

Father nodded. Vincent's tone was obviously a dismissal. "Goodnight, Vincent."

After Father had left, Vincent lay unmoving for a while, then went to his journal.

*I have come home. To stay...for now, at least. It seems it makes little difference where I am. If I am not here, the problems follow me. It would be almost comical if it were not so serious. But Lena cares. They all care, and as difficult as it is to be here, it is almost as difficult to be gone. I simply must learn to cope once more. I once was able to do it. I shall simply have to re-learn the method, and I cannot do that if I am not here. If Catherine were here, she would laugh at me for my foolishness, chide me into realizing my errors. But...if Catherine were here, all this would be merely a nightmare, and I could wake.*

Rising and walking to the corner of the chamber, Vincent uncovered the painting that stood there. He stood for a long while gazing at the oil painting of himself and Catherine that the ghost, Kristopher Gentian, had done. The candlelight flickered, making the painting glow. *Ah, Catherine. It is magical...as magical as our love. As magical as our son. I will live, Catherine. I will not disappoint you. And I will remember.*



## LOVE'S LOST VOICE

by Rhonda Collins

A search of the silent, empty night--  
reaching for a whisper of her voice,  
a glimpse of her face--  
reveals no faint trace  
of the lost language we once shared.

Shattered dreams deceive my sleeping sight--  
beguiling me with wasted choice,  
forfeited desire--  
and set me afire  
for the touch, the taste of love once dared.



## VISIONS OF THE DARK NIGHT

After returning from the laundromat, Diana was startled when the telephone rang. Dropping the duffel bag at the end of the couch, she dashed for the phone.

"Hello?"

Joe's voice at the other end of the line sounded stressed. "Bennett. Joe Maxwell. You ready to come back? I could sure use you."

Diana was surprised at the eagerness she felt. Perhaps it was time to get back. "Yeah. I'm ready. Where are you?"

As Joe gave her directions, Diana jotted the address down on a notepad. "Be there as soon as I can get there."

As Diana entered the tenement, she flashed her badge and the officers let her in the door. She swung into the room and glanced up at the Acting District Attorney. "Joe."

Joe Maxwell nodded briefly. He seemed relieved to see her, which amused Diana just a little, considering their past relationship. "Thanks for coming."

"Yeah, well...thanks for the extra time. I needed it." She glanced past him, then back. "What've we got?" She glanced around, automatically taking in details. Joe looked haggard. *Good. Just what I need, a case that will keep me involved.* She listened carefully as Joe answered her question.

"Older man, late sixties. Strangulation. Death sometime last night."

Diana thought a moment. "Strangled how?" Sometimes the method of strangulation itself could afford a clue.

"Bare hands, it looks like." Joe looked away briefly. It seemed to Diana that he was trying to gather bits and pieces of information together in his mind to parcel them out to her in one packet. "Apparently he let the killer in. There was water on the stove, a couple of cups with teabags..."

When Joe paused, Diana looked up, sensing his hesitation. "Something else. What is it?"

Sighing, Joe replied, "Follow me." He led her past the officers into the room. A man Diana recognized looked up as they came in, and Joe greeted him. "Jimmy." Joe opened his mouth, starting to introduce Diana.

Jimmy Faber turned, saw Diana, and his face took on a cynical appearance, his voice mocked. "Hiya Bennett. Long time."

Resigned to Jimmy's dislike, something stemming from jealousy over her being promoted over him, and one particular case long ago...Diana sighed, and said quietly, "Hi, Jimmy."

Joe's look swung from one to the other as Jimmy continued, "Little early for the big guns, isn't it? I mean, not that we don't welcome your help, *Detective.*"

Diana tried very hard to separate herself from the

situation and remain professional. She couldn't put up her block or she might miss something, but Jimmy's dislike was like a dagger, interfering with her concentration. "What've you found so far?" She glanced around the small apartment, her mind automatically noting images and cataloging them for future reference.

Jimmy continued as though he'd never been interrupted. "Wife's fine, kids are fine. Jimmy Jr. starts NYU next month. Can you believe it? I got a kid in college!"

Diana could feel Joe's irritation and disgust with Jimmy's attitude. He'd obviously had enough. "Jimmy, please."

As though Joe had flipped a switch, Jimmy became all business. He turned, and indicated the scene in the kitchen. "This is where it happened. Scuff marks on the floor. Not much of a struggle, judging from the glassware." Jimmy led them through the kitchen, turning abruptly. He looked at Diana almost gleefully and demonstrated as he talked. "Now this is where it starts getting weird. The guy drags the victim into this room, drops him against the wall, and then he pulls up a chair...real close, like he was having a conversation with the victim."

Diana followed Jimmy as he imitated the killer, dragging his victim into the other room. Jimmy was squatting in front of the taped outline of the victim on the floor and the wall. Diana sat on the window sill and her eyes met Jimmy's a moment. She could see the mixture of dislike and old jealousy mirroring his feelings.

Jimmy continued: "Do you want to know what he does next, Ms. Bennett? He plays Picasso." At her slight change of expression, Jimmy smiled a little. Anything to try to throw her. "Yeah. He paints the guy's face with some white powder...like a death mask."

Diana hiked her carryall's strap a little higher and looked up. "I want to see him." She stood and went to the stretcher.

Cheerfully, Jimmy told the officers, "Guys, give the little lady a look." The officer pulled the sheet back, and Jimmy commented, "Work of art, huh?"

Diana closed her eyes. Jimmy's sarcastic voice faded to the background as the victim's fear swept over her. His last impressions. *He'd known his killer, yes. Hadn't expected his death. Very sudden. An impression of--what? What would that be...? Resignation...satisfaction.... But who was it from, the victim or the killer? I'll have to come back. Too many people.*

Joe startled her with a hand on her shoulder. "You okay, Bennett?"

A little dazed, Diana looked up into Joe's face, felt his concern. "Yeah," she managed. "I'm okay. Do you have any names yet of anyone he knew I can speak to?"

Joe nodded and she followed him out.

Mouse accompanied Vincent on his security rounds. The two friends followed the well-known paths almost automatically. Mouse was quiet, even for Mouse. The boy kept glancing up at him questioningly, but Vincent's mind was far away and he barely noticed. As time went on, Vincent forgot that he wasn't alone.

A question came suddenly out of the silence. "Vincent. Not mad at Mouse? Father said you wouldn't be."

Vincent had been thinking of Catherine and times they'd shared. When Mouse's voice broke through his concentration, it startled him back to reality. "What? No, Mouse. Why on earth would I be angry with you?"

Mouse stopped and shuffled his feet a little. "Told Lena where you were." He looked up quickly, searching Vincent's face. "Didn't mean to! Just bothered and bothered!"

Mouse's anxious look distressed Vincent. He hated to think that his friend had been worrying all this time over something so small. He shook his head softly and patted Mouse's shoulder, though the contact brought an intensification of Mouse's anxiety to him. "No, Mouse. I'm not angry. In fact, though Lena does indeed, *bother and bother*, she means well." He spread his hands. "And I am here, am I not? So perhaps it was for the best."

Grinning and starting back down the tunnel, Mouse replied: "Lena left. Good riddance. Too much trouble. Jamie misses her though." He glanced back up at Vincent and said in an awed voice: "Father went *Above*, Vincent! Never goes *Above*."

Vincent's blond mane bobbed a little as he nodded. "Yes. He went above to see Jessica's photographs. He and Jessica were very close once. I am glad he has this chance to see her again."

Satisfied, Mouse lapsed back into silence, and they continued their rounds. Vincent sighed. At least he'd been able to satisfy Mouse. But Mouse was easy to satisfy...and they understood one another well. They were both children of the dark and understood that silence was often the best guide. Mouse was capable of deep silences as well as chatter. With Vincent, he instinctively chose the silences.

Later, Vincent was reading to Jacob, enjoying the feeling of simply holding Catherine's son and relishing the total acceptance this small being had for him. The love was palpable. Vincent's gentle, grating voice read softly from Milne. The child watched his father's face.

Vincent looked up as Mary came quietly up to his door. "Come in, Mary."

Looking down lovingly at the child, Mary asked in her gentle voice, "How is he?"

Vincent's heart was full of pride and wonder as he answered, gazing down at his son. "Fearless. Wonderful."

"Such a miracle." Mary said, amazement in her voice.

Vincent could feel Mary's love, both for him and for his son, and it warmed him, but he could also feel her distress, and he waited to hear what was upsetting her so.

"Vincent. We've had some disturbing news from the world *Above*."

Carefully standing, Vincent walked over and placed Jacob in his crib, then turned to Mary. "What is it, Mary?"

"One of our helpers has been murdered."

Vincent was shocked. He couldn't remember anything like this ever happening before. They had been fortunate, he supposed. He looked away, then down, away from Mary...not sure he wanted to hear the answer to his question. "Who?"

"Winston."

The name didn't register at first, and Vincent had to think for a moment to place a face to the name. "Winston?" Then, the memory returning, he added: "He lived with us once."

Nodding, Mary said quietly, "A long time ago. When you were still a small boy."

"What has happened?"

Vincent could feel Mary's frustration and dismay. "I don't know much yet. I've tried to find Father, but...."

"Father's *Above*."

Mary's startlement and dismay were apparent. "Above?"

Watching Mary closely, listening to her feelings, Vincent added softly--wanting to proceed gently: "With Jessica. Seeing the photographs." He could feel Mary's annoyance now...and jealousy. He added hesitantly: "We should send word."

Mary tried very hard not to appear disturbed by the news, though Vincent knew she was aware of the futility of trying to hide her feelings from him. "Don't bother him with it. Nothing he could do, really. Let him enjoy himself. I'll see to the arrangements myself."

As Mary left, Vincent sighed deeply and looked down. The despair he'd sensed from Mary was upsetting. He knew Mary loved Father, and he felt her pain. Once more someone he loved was in pain and he was unable to help. Glancing over at Jacob, who was by now sound asleep, Vincent sat at his desk and opened his journal.

*Mary's pain is difficult for me to bear. I know the pain of loving someone and feeling them slipping away. I felt that pain when Catherine was involved with Elliot. Mary has been mother and friend to me all my life, and I wish her happiness. Yet I felt Father's joy when he saw Jessica again. They were very close once. Life is never simple. Now, when Father returns, he must hear of Winston's death and will have to deal with that as well.*

Vincent sighed as he closed the journal. Glancing back at his son, he left to ask Brooke if she would keep an eye on the baby while he taught his Literature class. *Yes. Life is complicated. It appears there will be many things I will*

*have to become accustomed to.* As he walked, he felt the hum of the life around him, a subliminal cocoon of emotion that he was once again becoming used to dealing with. Lena had been right. He needed to be among his family and the comfort of their love, but it would *still* feel good to escape occasionally. The press of emotions added to his own was still confusing and disorienting--and he still was not sleeping well.

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Joe leaned back, foot braced against the top of the desk, listening to Jimmy's oration and putting up with his temperamental monologue.

Diana leaned casually against the wall, trying to remain as neutral and non-threatening a presence as was possible. Joe was tapping his fingers together in front of his face and finally broke in: "You're upset because you're frustrated."

Jimmy paced angrily. "Psychics. Palm readers. It's a load of crap." He glanced sardonically at Diana. "No offense, Bennett."

Quietly, Diana answered: "It's called behavioral criminology."

Jimmy spat back venomously, "It's called the department losing confidence in the tried and true."

Joe sighed heavily and tried again to convince Jimmy of Diana's usefulness. Diana could tell he was having difficulty keeping his own temper. She had the feeling that Maxwell was not one who liked to put up with prima donnas. "Jimmy, I'm not asking you to cave in. I'm just asking you to give Diana a chance."

A pleading tone entered Jimmy's voice as he looked to Joe. "I've been on this case less than twelve hours. How's it supposed to look for me?"

"That's why you're here; to request her help." Joe said. Diana smiled grimly. *Good move, Joe. Put him in control. You're a natural, all right.*

Diana tried again to make Jimmy see that she could help. "You're dealing with a psychopath, Jimmy."

Tossing his magazine down on the desk, Jimmy answered bitterly. "So what? I can't catch a psychopath? What is a psychopath anyway? So the guy smears white ash on their faces after he kills them--in my opinion he's still a murderer."

"Jimmy!" Joe interjected, frustrated.

Diana swung her gaze back to Joe for confirmation. "Are we sure it was ash?"

Jimmy broke in, answering for Joe. "That's what the lab says. I've got people out on the street checking ash cans, fires...fires, vacant lots, taking samples."

Wheels turning, Diana asked Jimmy: "So you're thinking that the killer was homeless?"

"Maybe."

"You get any prints?"

"No. The guy must've worn gloves the whole time."

"Did you dust the faucet in the kitchen?"

"Why?"

Diana was becoming frustrated. To her, dusting the faucet seemed like a logical thing to do. It annoyed her that she had to point out such an obvious detail, and she was afraid that irritation showed in her voice. "Maybe after this guy did his finger painting, he took his gloves off and washed his hands afterwards."

Jimmy pursed his lips and looked thoughtful. "I'll check that."

Joe shot Jimmy a question as he was on his way out. "So, Jimmy, are we sanguine on this?"

Jimmy shrugged. "Oh, yes. We're *sanguine*. Since we're also gonna look pretty stupid when it turns out to be some bum he invited in for a hot meal. Arrivederci!" Jimmy turned toward the door and was gone in a moment, leaving a blessed silence behind him.

Diana felt herself sagging as some of the tension left her. She looked at Joe helplessly.

Joe shook his head. "He's gonna be a problem. You going back to the scene?"

Nodding, Diana hiked her carryall to her shoulder. "Yeah. See what I can find out."

---

Diana sighed as she entered the old tenement. It always took her a few moments to steel herself to begin. Living in the heads of monsters was enough to make anyone crazy. That's why the elite of the 210 were pushed so hard: they didn't last long...they burned out. *And it's harder when you do it my way. Then you really feel it.* Diana dropped her emotional barriers and opened herself to any impressions that might've been left. She stood a moment in front of the old door, noting the many layers of scratched and worn paint. Then, with great effort, she forced herself to lay her right palm on the door. She closed her eyes a moment, then let the images flood in.

"Your hands were clean. You like things clean, don't you?" *Impression of hands washing in a sink.* She raised her eyes to the ceiling, eyes wide, but unseeing. "Were your gloves already on, or did you put them on before you knocked?" She rapped the door once, hard, already moving into the man's persona.

Opening the door, she went in and closed the door behind her. She stood a few moments leaning against the window frame in the dark. Her voice was soft in the darkness: she was speaking only to herself. Trying to put herself back in the time...the place of the murder...to *become* the man she sought. "It was cold out that night. Inside, the air felt warm against your skin. As you talked, you put your hands inside your pockets so he couldn't see the gloves." Her own hands stuffed deeply into her pockets, she walked quietly into the kitchen. "You followed him into the kitchen and you watched him make tea. You knew him from somewhere. You knew his name. Maybe you called out to him softly."

Her analytical mind ran constantly over what little they knew and tried to mesh it with what she was feeling and



seeing. "You're strong. You crushed his windpipe with your two thumbs. No struggle. Did you watch him the whole time...did he watch you? Why didn't you just leave him in the kitchen?"

She walked into the other room and stood next to the taped outline of the victim. "Because you had to do something." She knelt in front of the outline and stared at it. "You pulled up a chair and you took your gloves off." She was remotely aware she was wringing her hands reflexively. "You were very careful with the ash. You didn't spill any on the carpets or on his clothes. The ash was important to you. Where'd you keep it?"

The feelings flooding into her were becoming more intense...stronger impressions. She put her hand to her face and paused, thinking, asking herself questions...or asking the killer. "Where'd you keep it? In your pocket. No. Not in your pocket...you would've wasted some. The ashes were important to you...you treasured them in your hand." She felt a strong feeling of awe... "They felt incredibly light and pure against your skin." Musing, trying to put it together, she muttered quietly: "Ashes. The cool remains of something that once lived.... Death." Suddenly, she knew, and stood, shocked. "Ashes. Human ashes."

Diana couldn't take it anymore and pulled herself out of the contact. She knew. This was retribution for something, for a murder or some great wrong. She could feel the murderer's satisfaction. And she knew he wasn't finished. She slammed the door on the way out, as she fled into the darkness.

---

That same evening, Vincent was once again rocking his son when Father returned from his trip Above with Jessica. Father had apparently heard of the murder and was irritated that he hadn't been informed.

"Pascal has told me about Winston. Why wasn't I contacted? You knew where I was."

Vincent rose and laid Jacob in his crib, commenting quietly: "What could you have done?"

Vincent and Father regarded one another silently, then Vincent walked restlessly past him, across the chamber. "Mary is arranging a memorial service for tomorrow. She was hoping you would say something." Vincent was unsure exactly what else to say. He could feel Father's turmoil, and waited for him to speak, not knowing what to say when the time would come.

Father walked to Jacob's crib and bent over his grandson. "Yes. Yes, of course."

Softly, tentatively, Vincent asked: "How was your time with Jessica?"

Now that the question was asked, Father paused, then sat heavily on Vincent's bed. His voice was soft and as hesitant as Vincent's when he answered. "I'm not...sure. I think...we fell in love...if such a thing is possible. I...don't know. All I know is I want to be with her...."

Vincent was torn between sorrow for Mary, joy for

Father...and despair for himself. "And she feels the same way?"

Father shook his head slightly...not in negation, but merely a gesture born of his confusion. His voice when he answered was full of wonder. "She is amazing, Vincent. So alive. So willing to share love with an old man like me."

Trying desperately to keep his voice calm, sure, and gentle, Vincent told him: "There is not a man who better deserves a woman's love."

Almost choking, Father said, "It is a very...strange...feeling for me, Vincent.... Um. It's actually...physically painful not being with her."

Father's pain and his own made Vincent pause. He knew all too well how Father felt. He looked down. He felt a small flash of anger. *Perhaps now he will understand...now, when it is too late.* "I understand."

Rising, Father walked past Vincent, as though to leave, then turned to him. Quietly, he told his son: "For Jessica, this could never be home. Living here again for her would be impossible."

Vincent felt a stab of what could only be interpreted as fear. The thought of Father leaving the tunnels to go Above left Vincent feeling destitute, but he forced his voice to remain calm and gentle. "But you would go Above?"

"I don't know. I have to sort things out in my mind."

Drawing himself up and steeling himself for the inevitable, Vincent tried to offer support. "Father, whatever path you chose, know that I would help you follow it."

Embracing one another rather desperately, Vincent felt the sudden surge of Father's relief battling with his own fears. He knew that Father would expect him to take over the responsibilities of leadership. That was, after all, what he'd been trained for all these years, but he wasn't sure he was ready. However...if that was what Father expected of him, he would try to oblige.

Once Father left, Vincent paced the chamber. He felt trapped. No matter how loving the enclosure, a cage was still a cage. He had come back from his exile before he was truly ready--for his son's sake--and, if he were to be honest, for his own. He knew he needed the contact...the love that surrounded him. But still, he had known he could leave if he needed to. He could escape the pressure when it became too heavy: there were always people to watch over Jacob. He'd had a choice. But now...if Father left, leaving him in charge...and under these circumstances... then there was no escape, and no relief.

The baby stirred restlessly, sensing his father's distress, and Vincent forced himself to a calm he didn't truly feel. He packed the emotions away carefully into the deepest part of himself--as he always did. *How much longer can I keep myself under control? I must. There is no other choice.*

Lighting another candle on his desk, Vincent sat to make his journal entry:

*All is gone. Fled from me, Catherine. It is so hard to remember our dreams now you are gone. This husk is being*

*filled with others' expectations and needs. I need...No. I must forget my needs. Have none. I must stay strong for them all now. They have always been here for me, and Father must have his time. My time is gone. Our time is gone, Catherine. But perhaps now, Father understands how it feels to be in love with a woman from another world...one who cannot share his world with him, or be with him despite her love for him. He, however, has the advantage of choice. I did not have that choice, Catherine. Why could he not have seen, understood earlier? It would not have solved the problem, but at least we would have had his support.*

Vincent laid his forehead on the pages of the journal and wrapped his arms over the back of his head...seeking to shut out the world...unsuccessfully. *All my visions at night are of loss and pain. And my waking dreams of life have very little light. They only serve to remind me of what I have lost.*

Finally, with a great sigh, he heaved himself up and went to bed...to his dreams, both light and dark.

---

The next few days passed swiftly, with Father preparing to go Above, and with the memorial service for Winston. Apparently, the police still knew nothing of his murderer. Then the shocking news arrived that another helper had been murdered: Deborah White, an attorney who had been a helper since the first. The circumstances were similar--she'd been found in an alley, strangled like Winston--and the rest of the helpers were becoming frightened. Father considered staying Below, but Vincent insisted that he continue with his plans. "There is nothing you can do, Father, that I cannot do. Nothing that you haven't taught me how to take care of. I know where you will be if I need you."

A Common Meeting was called, and Vincent presided. Father was not present, much to the dismay of many. Vincent knew he had purposely absented himself so as to enforce his son's authority in this crisis. Vincent could feel their anxiety, both for the situation, and because they were unsure of his capability, having had Father at the helm as long as they could remember. It did nothing to assuage his own feelings of insecurity, but he hid his own fears as well as he could and tried to live up to Father's expectations.

The chamber was buzzing with whispers and anxious comments. Laura was speaking to Vincent in sign with Rebecca, the Chandler, interpreting for everyone else.

Laura was obviously frightened. She and her boyfriend, Jerry, had been living Above, and she didn't know what to do. "Why is this happening? Doesn't anyone know? All the helpers are frightened. Winston, and now Deborah."

Vincent spoke clearly and calmly as he could as he signed back to Laura, trying to reassure her...and everyone else. "No one knows who is responsible for the terror we are all feeling, but we mustn't let fear govern us."

From the steps above Laura, Livvy spoke up angrily: "Where is Father!?"

There was a murmur of assent, but William firmly interrupted, trying to defuse the situation. "Vincent is the one dealing with this. Let's...hear him out."

The murmurs of both assent and objection were stilled as Vincent's strong voice broke through. "Above everything else, we must continue to organize ourselves and must stay in constant communication. I've asked all of the helpers to travel and to sleep in pairs. For those helpers who would like to stay down Below...." Vincent paused as he saw Mary leave. He felt her pain at Father's absence, but there was nothing he could do. He continued... "The Great Hall and several of the satellite chambers have been converted to dormitories."

William scratched his chin and thoughtfully interjected: "There'll be plenty of food."

Nodding, Vincent responded, "Good." He looked down sadly. Away from the anxious eyes watching him. Judging him. He felt he simply wasn't measuring up...but he must.

The meeting continued on for a while with security measures being discussed further, then Vincent called an end to it and left to escort Father Above, which in itself was a trial to him. When Father asked him to look after Mary, Vincent told him he would. Father was torn enough right now, and Vincent wanted to do whatever he could to make his choices easier.

On his way back to his chamber, however, Vincent thought about Diana Bennett. She was the person to go to for help in this. He found himself turning with a sense of hope toward her loft.

---

Diana stalked out of the press conference after watching Joe give his announcement of the joint D.A./NYPD task force headed by Jimmy Faber. She was worried. She'd told Joe that this guy was on a seven day cycle. He'd killed again last night. Six days to go before he did it again. The old man and the woman, the attorney. The two didn't fit. No connections except that the killer knew both of them. The meeting prior to the press conference didn't reveal much. Something about this case really bothered her. Too many loose ends, and she hated loose ends.

Diana went to the alley where the woman had been killed and felt again the killer's awe and reverence as he painted his victim's face with the ashes. *Whose ashes? Who was this person to you? What did they do to him...or her...to cause you to seek this retribution?* Again, she felt the killer's satisfaction once the task was done.

After leaving the crime scene, she spent the next several hours interviewing people who had known the woman, Deborah.

Taking all her notes home, Diana dumped them on the desk and went to take a shower. She stood in the stream of water, shivering a little despite the warmth. Her skin was stinging a little: she'd scrubbed so hard she felt she'd taken



the first layer of skin off. Diana always felt this way after opening herself up at a crime scene. She tried to wash it all away, but the shower really did nothing except refresh the memory.

Afterward showering, she sat for hours in front of her computer entering the data. She got on the modem and researched until finally her stomach reminded her that she'd missed both lunch and dinner and that breakfast had been all too hurried. She saved her file, blanked the screen so the text wouldn't etch it, then went to dig in the refrigerator for something edible.

Once Diana had made herself a sandwich and poured a glass of milk, she turned back to the computer. She was finding it difficult to work. She kept thinking about Vincent. She'd been so occupied lately that she'd rarely thought of him during the day, but nights... *God, the nights...the dreams.* They'd been tumbled impressions that confused and disturbed her. Nothing made sense anymore. While sitting there musing, she heard a tap at the skylight window and knew it was him. She shot out of her seat and up the stairs.

---

As Diana stepped through the door to the roof, at first joyfully, she slowed. *Now what?* Vincent was leaning on the low wall surrounding the roof, staring out across the city, and she could feel the familiar dark depression hanging over him, mixed with a more immediate anxiety.

She joined him silently at the wall. When he spoke, his voice was sad and a little bitter. "I am remembering how I once loved this city at night. Imagined myself a part of it. Saw stories behind each and every light."

Still unable to look at him fully, unable to center herself, Diana responded. "And now?"

Vincent sighed, and Diana sensed a pervasive sadness that made her heart ache. "Now I am a stranger here."

Diana felt unable to bear his sorrow, which was almost palpable. She tried reminding him of better times. "You found Catherine behind one of those lights."

"And lost her in another." His head bowed abruptly, then she could feel his great effort to shake off the depression as he turned to her. "I came here to ask you for your help."

Still looking down, avoiding his gaze, Diana was beginning to feel uneasy. Tension spiked at her. Something was very wrong. "What is it?"

"Last week, one of our helpers was murdered. We mourned for him...but then it happened again."

She knew now. It was funny how Fate worked. She asked resignedly, "When?"

"Last night. The fears are growing that our secret has been discovered...or that someone we know is trying to destroy us."

Diana turned to face him. "The helper who was killed...was it a woman? Deborah White?" Diana needed no special senses to know how surprised Vincent was at her knowledge. "And the one before that--Winston Burke?"

The astonishment on Vincent's face and in his voice increased. "Diana!"

Diana sighed, but she was becoming a little excited as well. Something solid! This was something she could grasp onto. "I've been working on this case, Vincent, and I haven't been able to come up with anything...until now. So what can you tell me?"

"Only that these were great friends to us.... Diana...you must be very careful with this knowledge."

"I know."

There seemed to be no more to say, and they stared at one another awkwardly for several long seconds. Finally, Vincent broke the silence. "I...we...appreciate your help, Diana. You have become very important to us."

Diana ducked her head, not sure how to take his words or his feelings. *Important to who? To them...or to you?* "Thank you." When Diana found the nerve to look up, she asked him a quiet question. "Is there something else bothering you? You seem...I don't know...."

She could almost feel Vincent's struggle, his desire to talk to someone, warring with his natural reticence...but finally the latter won. "No. Nothing. Thank you again for your help."

"I'll let you know if I hear anything."

Vincent nodded and left, swinging over the side of the building. Diana stood there a while longer, thinking about everything Vincent had just said...and not said. Most of the time, her impressions were so much truer than anything else. He was really disturbed, and not just by the murders, though that was part of it. *I'm gonna dream again tonight. I know it.*

---

Vincent returned to his chamber and relieved Brooke, who had been staying with Jacob. Picking up his son, he cradled the child against him and tried to keep the suffocating fear and darkness at bay. He was able to do it by thinking of Diana, and how strong she seemed. How quiet and at peace...like an anchor in turbulent seas. *Perhaps she will be able to help.* But what, exactly, he was seeking help for, even he was not sure. He was simply grateful that he was not alone in this.

---

Diana worked until she was exhausted, day after day. She had files pulled on Deborah White and Winston Burke. She investigated every lead. Nothing. Thursday came quickly...the seventh day. He would kill again.

Working late into the evening, the task force continued going over every bit of evidence. Diana's mind and heart weren't in it. She listened with half an ear to Jimmy and Joe tossing comments and bits of information at each other. She heard Jimmy's comment that forensics had dated the ash and placed the death at 20-30 years ago. Joe commented that they were out of time, that the killer killed every Thursday at 10:00. Diana watched the clock morosely. *In*



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about fifteen minutes, someone else is gonna die. She felt as though a noose were strangling her. She felt helpless--listening to Jimmy say there was no connection between the victims. Diana knew there was a connection--they were both helpers--but she certainly couldn't point that out. But there was one point that should be made. She shifted uncomfortably and finally commented, "There is a connection." Everyone's attention turned to her. That had been her only comment in quite some time. "This guy is compulsive. His whole life is pattern, order, routine. He kills once a week, same day, same time. Uses the same ashes to paint the faces. Whose ashes? You tell me. You tell me that...I'll tell you the connection. This isn't random killing, it's retribution."

As usual, Jimmy was skeptical. "For what?"

"Something that happened twenty years ago," Diana said, resignedly.

Perking up, Joe added, "Yeah. May be, Jimmy."

Finally, Jimmy couldn't seem to take it anymore. His irritation with Diana, always just under the surface, was beginning to show. "Look. I'm not buying this, Joe. This isn't police work, this is guesswork."

"There's a connection, Jimmy." Diana tried hard to be calm. She had no patience with unimaginative people. "You're just not seeing it."

Turning toward Diana, Jimmy said angrily, "I'm not seeing it because it's not there." He stood and paced, addressing everyone. "Deborah White lived in a high rise in Yorkville. Winston Burke had a grungy walk-up in the Lower East Side. He lived off his Social Security. She had a six figure income. He's a native New Yorker. She moved here from Dubuque. As far as we know, they never met. We can't find a single person who knew them both."

"There was one person who knew them both," Diana said flatly. "The killer knew them both."

When the clock read 10:00, Diana simply got up and excused herself. At Joe's questioning look, she shook her head. "Let me know when they find the next body. Until then, we're stuck...and it's too late now, anyway."

---

After spending all afternoon on security rounds and in council session, Vincent was in his chamber going through an old chest with his books. The activity helped him to calm himself. As he'd read the titles and run his hands over the spines, he'd remembered his own childhood so vividly. Rudyard Kipling. Jack London. Mark Twain. So many stories. Father had taken him all over the world with his words. Vincent delighted in the knowledge that he could share these with Jacob, and in doing so reclaim some of the feeling of his own childhood.

Mary came by his chamber to visit, and they had spoken of this, but then she had finally broken down, confiding in him her love for Father. It wasn't as though Vincent hadn't known, but hearing her story almost broke Vincent's heart. Mary's story, like his own, was so sad...a

matter of letting love pass you by. He, too, had waited too long. Someday never came. Now he and Mary were both suffering for their mistakes.

After Mary left, Vincent received a message from Diana. He was re-reading Kipling's *Jungle Book* when Kipper dropped it off on his way to bed. Reading the message, Vincent's heart stilled a moment. All it said, was "Meet me." He caught Brooke on her way back from supper and asked if she would keep an eye on Jacob. Then he left for Diana's loft.

---

When Diana came out onto the roof Vincent stood waiting. He asked, "There's been another killing?"

Nodding almost imperceptibly, Diana replied softly, wishing there were some way to soften the truth. "I'm so sorry."

Diana could feel Vincent's resignation as he paused, then answered, "As soon as they brought your message, I knew."

She sighed, always hating giving bad news. "His name was Raymond Hensen."

"Raymond Hensen?" Vincent's voice was surprised. "Diana. There is no helper by that name."

Diana was confused. Anxious. That was impossible. It didn't fit, and things always fit if you tried hard enough. "His face was smeared with ash...just like the others. There's gotta be a connection, Vincent."

Vincent shook his head. "I know all of our helpers."

Diana just stared. "This is a black man. He's over fifty...works for the public library. Walks with a limp." She paced back and forth in front of him, becoming more agitated--trying to put everything into perspective, both for him and her. "The coroner says that it was about twenty-five years ago that he had his leg crushed."

When she looked up, Vincent seemed deep in thought, obviously straining to remember details from so long ago. "There was a black man. Father used to take me to visit him in the hospital chamber. Sometimes we took turns reading to him.... He was afraid to go to sleep."

"Why?" Diana pounced on the information.

"He had nightmares. He was involved in a terrible accident...a cave-in. The dreams made him relive it. Finally, he went back Uptop. We lost all ties with him." Suddenly he turned abruptly to face her. "Diana! Winston and Deborah were caught in the same tunnel collapse!"

Diana felt a sudden, fierce surge of hope. "Were there any others?"

She could feel Vincent's effort to remember, and it was reflected on his face as he answered carefully. "A man was killed...I didn't know him. His name was...Nathan. Nathan Coyle."

"What about his body? Was it cremated?"

Vincent had read the newspapers. Comprehension of what Diana was getting at began to dawn. His eyes met hers and he nodded. "Nathan had a son. His name was



Gregory. He was seven years old. After his father died, he ran away. We never found him."

Diana hugged herself, shivering a little. "Yeah. Well. He just found you." She sighed. "If it is Gregory, the other helpers are safe. This guy's been workin' down a list, and he just ran out of names." She stared. "You're sure there were only four?"

A nod. "Yes."

Relief flooded through her. "Well, at least the killings are over. And now that I know who he is, we can find him."

Diana wandered over to the wall, and Vincent followed. There was a deep silence for a few minutes, then Diana turned to him. "I was just getting ready to eat a sandwich when you came. Will you come down and keep me company?"

Diana could almost feel him retreating before he ever moved, turning away from her. "No...truly, I need to get back."

"Please. Don't go." She caught the sleeve of his cloak, then dropped it as though she'd been burned. She was desperate to have him stay, just for a while. She couldn't bear to have him leave so soon, when she could never get enough of him. "It's just...sometimes...after I've been working on a case for a while, I don't want to be alone. This one is basically over now--now that I know who the killer is--and I can begin letting go." She could feel his indecision, and she took full advantage. "It would help, Vincent."

Vincent's resolve seemed to crumble. "Very well. For a while at least."

---

Vincent followed Diana hesitantly down the stairs to her living room. He stood a moment, remembering the room from the last time he'd been here. He thought of Diana's kindness while he was healing. Diana motioned for him to sit on the battered couch, and when he did, asked quietly, "Can I get you anything? Some tea maybe...coffee?"

He shook his head. "No. Please, just eat. It seems your milk has been sitting a while. Is it still cold?"

Tasting, she commented, "Yeah. It's fine." Curling up next to him on the couch, she reminded him of the small red kitten that Kipper had found: young, lost, and very tired. He had an almost overwhelming urge to reach out and brush the loose hair back from her face. He resisted it. He sat very quietly, trying to think of what it was that was strange about her...something he couldn't quite put his finger on. *What is it?...The quiet.* Suddenly he began to realize why he felt so comfortable in her presence. He could feel nothing from her. No intrusions of her desires, aches, fears...or expectations. He had never been around anyone before that he could sense nothing from. On one hand, it was pleasant, but on the other, the oddity of it bothered him.

After taking a few bites of sandwich, Diana spoke.

"Tell me about yourself. I mean, tell me what you do. How you spend your days. I chase bad guys. You know that. Tell me about you. It'll relax me."

To Vincent, this was such an unusual request that he had to stop and think a moment. Everyone who was acquainted with him was already aware of how he spent his days. He realized suddenly that Diana knew very little about his world, his life. So he began, and as he talked he found himself relaxing with her and telling her more than he'd told anyone, except Catherine. "I do a great many things. I teach the children: literature, history, reading, math. When things break, I help fix them." When she grinned, he couldn't help smiling back. He shrugged. "Things break...especially when they are pieced together from nothing most of the time anyway."

She nodded. "Jack of all trades, then."

Diana took another bite, and Vincent found himself watching the delicate teeth sinking into the bread. He shook himself mentally.

"Yes."

"What else?"

Visions swam before Vincent's eyes of the men he'd killed in defense of his home...of Catherine. With his voice flat, staring into her eyes, he said, "I kill."

She didn't flinch. She just nodded and took a sip of milk. "Security. Makes sense."

Vincent began to rise, flustered at the thought of discussing such a thing with her, but she stood and pushed him back down. Staring down at him, her hand squeezed his shoulder. "I'm in security as well. I kill too, Vincent."

"Not like..."

She walked calmly to the sink and deposited the dishes there, then came back. Sitting once more, she shook her head. "No. Perhaps not. But ultimately they're just as dead, aren't they?" Diana trembled a little, but smiled. "Hey...c'mon. I didn't ask you down here for us to get morbid. I asked you because both of us needed a break. Listen...I need to organize these files, and while I'm doing that, why don't you listen to some music?"

Vincent watched as Diana placed a small, rainbow-hued disk into a machine and a delicate harmony of voices and music began.

"Ever heard Simon and Garfunkel?"

Vincent listened to the pure, delicate harmony of the two voices and settled back into the couch, interested in spite of himself and caught in the flow of music. "No."

Diana patted his shoulder as she passed. "Good. Relax and enjoy."

Vincent laid his head on his arm, closed his eyes and let the music wash over him. When it was over, he heaved a great sigh...and startled. Diana was once more sitting across from him, smiling quietly. He hadn't noticed her sit down. It was a disconcerting experience.

"Gets to you, doesn't it?" she asked gently.

He nodded as he settled again. His eyelids felt heavy. He had become very relaxed. More so than he'd been in

some time. It seemed as though it had been forever since he'd last listened to good music. "The music is very powerful; the harmony brilliant." He started to rise. "Thank you, Diana. It was wonderful, but I must go."

"All right. But I'm glad you stayed. Thanks."

Diana walked with Vincent up to the roof, then before he left, she smiled...a little grimly, he thought. He listened carefully as she told him, "Tomorrow, I plan on checking with Social Services, checking mental health facilities. If Gregory disappeared that long ago, and if he's this disturbed, it's possible he's been confined...maybe just released. I'll find him. I'll let you hear."

---

On his way back to the tunnels, Vincent thought about the evening and how strange it had been. He had come Above in horror, knowing another of their friends must have died...and had learned that was indeed true. But now, the killing was over. Surely Diana was right. It made sense. He felt as though a huge boulder had been lifted from his shoulders. The relief was overwhelming. And the visit afterward...and the music: his heart ached from the beauty of it. The sadness. But it had touched him. *And Diana herself...she has touched me as well.* She was an enigma. She was intriguing. One minute soft and gentle, the next a veritable lady justice, ready to mete out justice herself if need be...as with Gabriel. Vincent had felt her eyes on him as he left, and it made him feel very strange. *Why do I feel such peace when I am with her? Surely not simply because I cannot sense her. And why is that? And why do I feel drawn there? Puzzles upon puzzles.*

Reaching the nursery, he picked up Jacob from Mary, where Brooke had left him. He carried the sleeping child to his chamber and put him in bed. It was late, so he decided to wait until morning to inform the others that the crisis should be over. Undressing for bed, he gratefully slid beneath the covers and fell into a peaceful sleep...the first he'd had in a long while.

---

The next morning, Vincent was visiting with Jamie and Brooke, who had come to play with Jacob. Brooke held the child gently, and breathed softly: "Oh. He's so beautiful."

Vincent gazed down at his son with pride, but his pride held a touch of sadness as well. "He looks so much like Catherine."

"He's got your eyes, though." Brooke glanced up at Jamie. "You want to hold him?"

Jamie looked a little frightened, and that amused Vincent a little. "No...I don't know how."

They were interrupted when Pascal ran in, out of breath and upset. "Vincent! Come quickly."

Vincent looked around with surprise at Pascal. "What's wrong?"

"A call for help over the pipes. Urgent."

There was a sinking sensation in the pit of Vincent's

stomach. "Who sent it?"

"Don't know. The message broke off. No one's reported an intruder, but..."

Vincent swung to face the two girls, thinking to ask their assistance with Jacob, and Jamie nodded before he asked. "Go ahead. We'll look after him."

Snatching his cloak from the back of the chair, Vincent headed out the door with Pascal, forcing his steps to match his friend's. "Show me the place, Pascal."

---

Reaching the tunnel where Pascal had determined the message originated, Vincent stopped. He smelled blood and glanced quickly down. He picked up a rock. *Blood.* "I thought the danger was over." He handed the rock to Pascal. "I was wrong. Go back to the Pipe Chamber, Pascal. Tell William to gather the others in the Great Hall. Alert all the sentries."

Pascal nodded. "I have to warn the helpers, too. I'll put out the call." Looking up at his friend, Pascal asked, almost plaintively, "What's happening, Vincent? Who's doing this?"

"A boy." Vincent answered sadly. "A lost boy. Someone from our past."

"I don't remember." Pascal was upset and confused, and Vincent sensed it. They were very close, and had shared many years.

"No. But he does." Vincent turned and left, and Pascal followed.

As Pascal sent out instructions to the sentries and William, Vincent left the tunnels to inform Father of the development and ask his advice, but once he reached Jessica's apartment, he found that Father had left there early that morning to return home. Vincent tasted the metallic tang of fear...sheer terror. He knew immediately who had sent the message for help. He tried to reassure Jessica with platitudes he certainly didn't feel, then left to search for Father.

---

Diana spent her morning making the rounds of several county-run mental institutions and the County Mental Hospital. She'd already decided before the last killing that she needed to do this. The killer's desire for order, regimentation, indicated a fixed schedule in his life. The type of schedule you only got in an institution. Vincent's help in supplying a name only made it easier. It took her until late afternoon. She was able to determine where Gregory Coyle had been for the last fifteen years, but was unable to obtain copies of his records without a subpoena...and she couldn't get the subpoena without telling how she knew his name. She was, however, given the address of his last place of residence, so she drove to the hotel.

By the time she reached the old hotel, it was already getting dark. She flashed her shield and the manager let her inside.

Diana closed the door and went to work. The neon light outside the window flashed on and off, the red glow making eerie shadows. She turned the light on, but it didn't help much. Hands on hips, she stood surveying the room. She opened herself up for the impressions...reached for whatever was there. "Where are you, Gregory?" There was a postcard on the bedside table. She picked it up and looked at the back. Blank. "You finished your work and you straightened everything up for Nathan. So, when are you coming home?" She paced around the room, opening and examining the empty drawers. "You're not coming home. It's over and you're tired, but you're not coming home. Okay. Where are the ashes? Where are the ashes? You took them. Why? You took them. Why did you need them? It's over." She paused, suddenly knowing it was *not* over. She shuddered. "Who are the ashes for?"

Diana was intensely frustrated. *Think, Bennett! Think. There was no one else in the tunnel collapse. Who else might he be seeking restitution from? Who else might have survived when his father died...who was left to blame? Authority figures perhaps.... Father!*

Comprehension dawned suddenly, and she whirled. *Have to warn Vincent! It's not over.*

---

Diana made her way through the tunnels, moving carefully down the serpentine stairs, keeping close to the rock wall. She hoped she remembered her way. Remembering things like that was part of her job, but she'd been this way only once. All she could remember was this stairway in the rock and that bottomless abyss. She figured as long as she kept to the wall and kept going down, she was bound to run into someone sooner or later. Then, in the gloom ahead she saw a figure below her, sitting on the steps, his feet dangling into the Abyss. Gregory. She recognized him from the picture the social worker had shown her. She could feel his satisfaction, and it chilled her. She knew she was too late. Coming closer, she could see a funeral urn clutched awkwardly in his hand. He was attempting to untie his shoes.

Crouching carefully on the step behind the man, not wanting to frighten him, Diana spoke to him softly. Reassuringly. "Gregory."

There was a small abstracted shake of the man's head as he continued removing his shoes. "Not for long."

Very carefully inching closer, Diana asked, "What're you doing?"

"I made it right. I made it all right again."

A small shudder passed through Diana. She could only assume Gregory felt he'd managed to give just retribution to everyone involved somehow in his father's untimely death. *I was right. I'm too late*, she thought in despair, thinking of how this would affect Vincent. In that same moment her mind clicked with the knowledge that Gregory was *finished*...and now he intended to end his own life. She wanted desperately to stop him. He was a sick man, not an

evil one. She wished she knew more about what had happened...why Gregory felt he needed to avenge his father's death. Wished she had something to work with. "Are those your father's ashes?"

Gregory looked up, hope and interest briefly on his face. "Did...did you know my father?"

Diana nodded, inching closer...trying desperately to distract him. "Yes. He was a very brave man."

"His hand moved," Gregory said--his eyes boring into hers with an intensity that begged for her to understand. "But I made it right. But...I made it all right again." He turned away, clutching the funeral urn closer to his chest.

Diana reached out and gently took a firm hold of Gregory's coat sleeve. "Gregory...get back from the edge."

Gregory leaped, and Diana clung to his coat sleeve, her knees scrabbling for purchase on the rock. She hooked her toes into a cleft in the stone step. "No! Gregory! Pull up! Gregory! Pull up! You're slipping! Give me your other arm...I can't hold on."

Diana felt Vincent coming, but Gregory was slipping, and she felt herself slipping with him. He wasn't going to make it, and if she didn't let go, neither would she. But somehow, she couldn't force her fingers to open. Vincent's arm reached out just as Gregory slipped from Diana's grasp...missing Gregory, but catching Diana and pulling her back from the edge, to safety. They both watched in horror as Gregory plummeted downwards. Vincent's hands tightened on Diana's shoulders.

---

Vincent helped Diana stand. She was still a little unsteady.

Diana covered her eyes with a shaking hand. "So close, Vincent. A minute sooner, and we might've saved him."

Vincent shuddered. "A moment later, and you would have gone over yourself. They were walking slowly to Father's chambers. Vincent shook his head and remarked on her last statement. "Gregory did not wish to be saved, Diana. Even if we had stopped him then, eventually...."

Finally, Diana managed to clear her mind enough to ask Vincent about Father. "Vincent...is Father safe? I mean...Gregory came for him, didn't he?"

Vincent didn't answer at first. Diana could feel his distress. "I don't know, Diana. Father sent out a call for help this morning."

Diana said nothing, but her heart sank.

Once they reached Father's chamber, Vincent called a small meeting, including only the people most closely involved. Diana paced back and forth in agitation, going over what they knew. She still hoped that somehow she was wrong. "He said that it was all right now. That he had made it all right."

Jamie burst out with a frustrated cry. "That could mean *anything*. Are you *sure* he was talking about Father?"

Pascal nodded. Always logical, he commented as calmly as he could, "It had to be Father who sent out the

call for help. We've accounted for everyone else."

In an obvious effort to help, Jessica added, "Jacob left hours ago."

Mary leaned on Father's desk for support, she was becoming frantic. "Maybe Father got away from him somehow. Maybe he's lying somewhere...hurt, bleeding... maybe unconscious."

Diana was shaky, but she kept her voice firm. These people were already on the ragged edge and what she had to say wasn't good. "Gregory was ready to die when I found him. That meant it was finished." She dropped her eyes. "Um. He couldn't have left it unfinished...he couldn't."

Mary began crying, and Jessica moved to comfort her.

In a wondering voice, Pascal mused quietly, almost to himself, as the possibilities sank in. "I don't believe it. How can we.... What will we do without him? He's always been there."

Vincent had been staring at the floor all this time, and his voice, razor edged, but gentle nonetheless, cut through the silence. "Father is not dead."

Everyone looked to him, hopefully. He rose and stared at Diana. "He's alive someplace. If he was dead, I'd know it."

Diana drew in a breath. If Vincent believed this...then maybe there was hope after all.

Pascal looked hopeful as well, but asked firmly, "Then where is he? Why hasn't he answered our calls?"

Looking around at all of them, Diana's gaze settled on Vincent. Her mind was whirling. "Gregory is a compulsive personality. Once he sets himself to do something, he has to finish it. Even if it is only in his own mind." She thought a moment. "Now, how did he make it all right? The body was not there. There was no body. Father was not with him. An eye for an eye." She looked up suddenly. She knew without a doubt what had happened. "Where did the accident happen? Where did Gregory's father die?"

"It was under the river, past the old landfill," Mary answered quickly.

Diana's eyes fastened on her. "Do you know exactly where it was?"

Interrupting, Pascal told them, "Those tunnels have been sealed for years. We'd have to find the exact location in Father's maps. Why?"

"Because that's what made it all right. He buried him."

Without waiting for any further discussion, Vincent was on his feet and moving. Diana watched as he rushed from the chamber, then slumped against the railing.

Cullen came to her and put his arm around her for support. "If anyone can find him in time, Vincent can."

---

Vincent tore through the tunnels recklessly, almost careening into walls as he made the turns, frantic to reach Father before it was too late. His throat was dry, his heart pounding and his chest burning by the time he reached the

area of the cave-in.

Vincent knew immediately he was in the right place. As long ago as it had been, he remembered the confusion after the cave-in, and the panicked efforts to close off the area. Boards used to close off the section of tunnels had been nailed haphazardly, one across the other in a thick patchwork of layered wood. Now, instead of this thick layering, there was a section where the layers had been carefully removed to allow entrance. Roughly ripping off several more boards, Vincent squeezed quickly through the opening. Once through, he hurried through the remaining rough tunnels to an open area covered with rubble.

It took only one glance to recognize the area that had been disturbed: no effort had been made to conceal it. Vincent could sense Father, but only weakly. There was little time.

Without thought as to how deep the covering of soil might be, Vincent dropped to his knees and punched his fist through the dirt--through the wood of the homemade coffin Father was buried in--dragging the lid off and Father out. "Father." Father didn't answer, but Vincent could feel his life holding on. "Father!" Vincent shook him a little. "Father!"

The older man finally took a gasping breath and answered in a choked voice. "Vincent."

Embracing Father gently, tears rolled down Vincent's face. *If I'd been a few minutes later....*

Half-carrying the older man, Vincent led him to the opening and helped him through. But Father refused to be carried all the way back to his chambers. His pride simply wouldn't allow it, and Vincent smiled a little through his grateful tears and blessed his parent's stubbornness. Once Father had recovered a little, Vincent told him about Gregory's death. "Gregory told Diana that his father's hand moved."

Father shook his head and said sadly, "It seems the boy saw his father's hand move after the cave-in. He thought his father was still alive and we were abandoning him. He couldn't understand that it was merely an automatic muscular reflex." Father began coughing and they stopped a few minutes. When he could breathe again, he told Vincent in a halting, rasping voice: "Gregory couldn't let go of his vision of the past."

Father and son stared at one another silently a moment, then Vincent said quietly, "Let me take you home, Father."

Nodding and finally accepting his son's supporting arm, Father finally said, "I think I'm ready to go home, Vincent."

---

Once Father was settled, Peter was called to check him out. Vincent insisted everyone else leave but Mary and Jessica, and he and Diana waited until Peter proclaimed Father well enough. Afterwards, Vincent escorted Diana home and lingered on her rooftop with her for a while.

Relief was all Vincent could feel at this particular



moment. All else was submerged in that one emotion...even his grief for Catherine was secondary. He hadn't lost Father. *Thanks to Diana.* He turned to Diana, standing so quietly next to him, and gazed at her. She seemed embarrassed at his attention, but she didn't look away. "Again, it seems, I owe you my thanks, Diana. You have become... indispensable...." He chuckled a little, and she blushed, her fiery hair clashing with the red in her face.

"Yeah. Well. I'm just glad you weren't too late."

Shaking his head gently, long blond mane swinging over his shoulders, he commented, "I *would* have been too late...if not for you. I doubt we would have found him. How...how did you know, Diana? What magic do you use?"

Diana turned and leaned on the parapet, staring out at the lights of the city. He could see her lip twitch in a smile, and he tried with his empathic sense to feel her...to help him understand, but he could still sense nothing from her. "No magic. It's what I do." She shrugged a little. "That's how Gregory's mind would have worked. I put pieces together, like a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes I'm right. Sometimes I'm not. I'm glad I was right." Diana was quiet a few moments, then she asked, "Vincent. Who is Jessica?"

Settling his bulk against the wall, Vincent told her about Jessica. "She was one of us once, long ago. I was still very young, but I remember that she and Father were very close."

"Why did she leave the tunnels?"

Vincent shrugged. He really did not wish to talk about this. "She wasn't really very well-suited to living Below. She had far too many schemes and plans, and far too many personal aspirations." His eyes met hers. "She left to pursue a career, and has done well with it. Now that she and Father are back together, I do not know what will happen...but I do not believe she will stay."

Silence settled again, then finally, reluctantly, Vincent told her he needed to leave. "You, also, need your rest."

"Yeah. I don't sleep well when I'm on a case. But I'm used to it." Vincent noticed she seemed uneasy each time the subject turned to her.

As he turned to go, Diana's soft voice stopped him. "Vincent."

He turned, wishing for an excuse to stay. "Yes?"

Diana's voice and eyes were pleading. She seemed very lonely. "Come back again. Keep me company sometimes. You're good company." She smiled. "I can always bribe you with the music."

He nodded almost imperceptibly. "I will...even without the bribe."

---

After Vincent left Diana's loft, he traveled slowly through the uninhabited upper tunnels toward home. He was almost dizzy with relief at Father's rescue, and after traveling a short distance, realized he was actually shaking. He knew without a doubt that had he lost Father he'd never

have recovered. Even Jacob's presence would not have been enough to keep the madness at bay. There had been too much loss in his life recently. His gratitude to Diana knew no bounds.

The tunnels widened as he neared the Hub. The messages on the pipes reassured him that Father was improving, and he turned toward Father's chamber.

As he neared the study, Mary passed him heading back toward the nursery. Vincent sensed her distress, and the good woman barely nodded at him as she passed. He sighed ruefully. *Jessica.* Vincent paused momentarily, considering. He shifted a little uneasily, thinking of Jessica. He didn't wish to intrude, but suddenly he *needed* to reassure himself that Father was well. Eventually his concern overrode his sense of propriety and he entered the study. Standing at the foot of the stairs, Vincent called quietly: "Father?" He could sense nothing except peace from Father.

Jessica appeared at the top of the stairs and motioned for quiet. Vincent retreated as she descended the stairs. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "Is he sleeping?"

"Yes." Jessica seemed smug. "He's finally resting." She turned on Vincent, her gaze accusing. "If he hadn't insisted on returning, none of this would have happened. It's time for Jacob to have a life. A *real* life."

Vincent felt a dull resentment building. Jessica was just the same as he remembered her. She'd never truly understood Father's life here. She hadn't changed at all. Exerting all his self-control, Vincent commented quietly, "He *has* a real life here. A purposeful life."

Jessica's eyes snapped and narrowed. "But is it a *happy* life?"

Echoes of memories stirred and Vincent's resolution faltered. Who was *he* to say where Father would be happiest? "What *is* a happy life, Jessica? I think perhaps it must be Father's decision. Whatever he decides I will support." Turning on his heel, Vincent left Jessica standing in the middle of Father's study.

Stalking off to his chamber, Vincent tossed his cloak over the chair and sat on the bed. He and Jessica had never gotten along. When she'd been here before, Vincent had been a young boy who'd resented sharing Father's love and she'd been a strong-willed, opinionated woman who was determined to have her own way. Oh, they'd tried. Both of them. She was a good woman. Vincent knew that. He'd known it even as a child. It changed nothing. Eventually she'd chosen to leave the tunnels and Vincent had been relieved to have life return to normal. To have Father to himself again. But now, Vincent knew things were not so simple. He was no longer a child, and he understood all too well how Father felt. He would not allow his own feelings to come between Father and his happy life.

After lying quietly in the dark for a time, Vincent decided to leave Jacob sleeping in the nursery with Mary rather than disturb him at this late hour. He undressed and washed, readying himself for bed. His thoughts were still running in circles. He and Catherine had never found their



JANDRA  
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happy life. And right at the moment Vincent himself was acutely *unhappy*. And not sure at all what to do about it. Eventually his eyes closed and the strains of the day--and the recent weeks--caught up with him. He slept.

*Vincent dreamed he was a child again. A young boy. In the dream, Vincent relived the pain he'd felt in sharing Father's love. Huddled in a secret corner of Father's study, the young Vincent tried not to listen to Jessica trying to tempt Father away into the world Above. Tears blurred his vision. He was certain Father would go with Jessica. Father loved her, and Jessica was unhappy Below. Unhappy not to see the sunshine or the mountains she loved so much. If Father went away, there'd be no one left who really loved him. Not Devin. Not anyone.*

Vincent woke with tears streaking his face and wetting his pillow, with the overwhelming grief of a child bringing shuddering sobs to his large frame. He wiped his eyes hastily as he realized it was only a dream. *Only*. He drew a deep, painful breath and steadied himself. And realized that his grief had upset Jacob. Vincent hurried down the passage, past Father's study, to the nursery where Mary was comforting a very distressed child.

Jacob reached for his father, and Vincent took him from Mary. "Hush, Jacob. It's all right, truly." Seeing Mary's bewildered expression, Vincent smiled at her. "He will be fine, Mary. A bad dream, I think. I will keep him with me."

"All right, Vincent. You know best, I'm sure." Mary glanced up at him with a sweet smile. "You'll let me know if there's anything I can do?"

On impulse, Vincent touched Mary's cheek softly. "I will. Thank you, Mary."

As Vincent walked back to his chamber, cuddling Jacob and murmuring to him, he tried to think more objectively about his dream and about that time of his life. It had been a tumultuous time for him. Devin had only been gone a scant few months. Lisa--his first love, gone--because of him. Father had just nursed him through the darkest time in his life--the first time the darkness had almost overtaken him--and he'd been very fragile. Father, too, had been very needy. When Jessica had come into Father's life, she'd brought a great deal of joy, but she also brought heartache and an unneeded emotional upheaval.

Reaching his chamber, Vincent settled into the old oak rocker and rocked his son. Just as Father had so often rocked him. The action gave him a measure of peace. "Oh, Jacob," he murmured gently, "I do not know which is hardest, my son: growing up or living once you've reached that exalted state. Do not be in a hurry to grow up."

Vincent rocked until he was certain Jacob had settled back into a contented sleep, undisturbed by his father's restless thoughts. Carefully rising, he placed the child into the small bed on the far side of his chamber and covered him gently.

Still unable to sleep, Vincent then pulled out his journal to record his thoughts, hoping for some resolution.

*Childhood fears come to haunt me. I suppose anyone would feel the same after almost losing a beloved parent. Those memories were so fresh. So real. Do we ever completely recover from our losses, Catherine? Gregory didn't. Will I ever recover from losing you? I only know I could never have borne it had I lost Father as well. Yet in a sense, lose him I will if he leaves our world to live Above. I must bear it. For his sake. Even for ours, Catherine. Father's love for Jessica only serves to remind me of how much we missed. How much I missed. He must not lose this chance at his happy life. I will not be the cause.*

After staring at the page a few more moments, Vincent capped his pen. He was achingly tired. He blew out the candle, stumbled to the bed, and was asleep within a few breaths.

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After Vincent left, Diana leaned on the low parapet surrounding her roof and watched the city lights for a while. She brushed the stray wisps of hair out of her face as the wind teased it loose. She felt more satisfied than she had in a long time. It was good to know there would be no more killings, though she wished there had been a way to help Gregory. Her heart had been in her throat when the last piece of the puzzle had clicked into place and she'd realized that the next victim *had* to be Father. He'd been the only one left from that time whom Gregory could have thought of as being responsible for his father's death. She'd known almost in the same heartbeat that Vincent couldn't take a loss like that so soon after Catherine's death. The thought had terrified her. The thought of facing the world every day, knowing that Vincent wasn't in it.... She shook her head, amazed at herself that she'd been more concerned at the possible loss of Vincent than at the much more immediate loss of Father. She was disgusted with herself. She *never* let anything be more important than the victim. "You're lettin' yourself get too close to this."

But it was too late, and she knew it.

Diana sighed and turned back toward her loft. Spinning her computer chair around, she settled into it and booted up her word processor.

*Case is over. Gregory found his last victim. Himself. Vincent managed to dig Father out of that shallow grave just in time. I'm glad I guessed right. Sometimes despite the hunches, the impressions, and the bits and pieces of facts, it takes too long to add up and I still lose somebody. In a way it's easier working when I know the victim's already dead and all I have to do is find the killer. I hate serial cases. As far as Vincent's concerned, I wonder if now things can settle down. Seems I can't separate my life from his anymore. No matter what, the connection just seems to*

*pull tighter. Strange. I've gone my entire life, my whole career without even knowing the man exists, and now every time I turn around, the thread of my life gets tangled with his. Now even my cases wind their way down there. Doesn't matter anyway. The dreams aren't going away. They're just getting more intense. I never believed in Fate before and I'm not starting now. We make our own destinies. I've gotta keep believing that or I'll go nuts.*

Diana re-read the file and shook her head. *Disjointed as hell. Good thing I don't write for a living.* She carefully saved the file and exited. Picking up her empty coffee cup, she deposited it in the sink, then wandered to the window. She dimmed the lights and looked out over the brightly lit city. "G'night, Vincent," she whispered.

Later that night, Diana dreamed of a young Vincent. A frightened, lonely Vincent. Afraid to lose the only love and security he'd ever known. Diana tossed and turned in her sleep and woke shivering and alone with an aloneness that belonged to both of them. The angry tears she'd refused to shed when her father died still ached in a deep corner of her heart. She shoved them away and tried instead to understand what the dream had meant in terms of Vincent.

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The following morning, after leaving Jacob with Mary, Vincent was eventually allowed to see Father. He was relieved to see Father appearing far more irritated than ill as he sat up in bed leafing through a book.

Father glanced up from a book when Vincent came through the door. "Finally! Someone with some sense! Vincent. Get me out of here!"

Jessica commented with some acerbity, "Jacob, Peter said you were to rest today, and that's final."

Father and Vincent glanced quickly at one another, and Vincent could sense Father's irritation. He shrugged. "Perhaps it would be best if you rested for a while. It cannot hurt."

"Hmph. Only my pride, I suppose." He adjusted his glasses and said quietly: "I hear I have Diana to thank for my rescue...as well as you. I would like to see her."

"Diana is Above, now. But I am sure she will see you soon." He looked down at Father's drawn face. "Jessica is right, Father. You need to rest. I can convey your thanks to Diana, if you wish."

Father nodded. "Very well. But I will wish to thank her myself as well. Remind her that she is always welcome here."

Jessica was standing with her arms folded, glaring at him, and Vincent shifted nervously. He wished he didn't always feel like a child in her presence. Bending his tall form to kiss his parent, he murmured, "I will return when you are rested, Father."

Jessica ushered Vincent down the stairs and out the door, shooing him as she went. Jessica could be very intimidating when she wished to be. After he was safely out

in the passageway, Vincent leaned against the stone wall and chuckled. The comedy in the situation began to far outweigh his concerns. Suddenly, he felt much better. He was sure things would sort themselves out, somehow.

Vincent spent the rest of the day helping Pascal fix a break in a pipe down below the Serpentine. The break had been interfering with communications, and Pascal refused to trust anyone else to restore the proper tone. Zach had been proud to be trusted with the pipe chamber for the entire afternoon. Pascal, however, was a nervous wreck. He kept checking in with Zach every half-hour, until Vincent gently placed one hand over his friend's.

"Pascal. Don't. Please. Zach will feel you do not trust him. Truly. Everything will be fine."

Pascal blinked a time or two, then smiled hesitantly. "You're right, of course. But...."

"No buts. Believe me, the pipe chamber will still be there when we return."

Pascal returned Vincent's gentle teasing with a lopsided grin. "It's hard, Vincent. I feel..."

"Displaced?"

"Yes! Exactly!"

Vincent nodded, and the two men returned to their job, each somehow reassured by the knowledge that there was someone who understood. Vincent knew how Pascal felt. Pascal, at least, had someplace he belonged. Always. Sometimes when Vincent looked around, even here--in his home--he felt displaced. Especially now that Catherine was gone. How would he feel if Father left as well? Father was the cornerstone of his world. Vincent felt the anxiety of the past night returning, and he forced it down. Shoved it away. He concentrated on the job at hand and managed to make it through the day.

Much later, after washing up and caring for Jacob, he was sitting at his desk writing in his journal, when Father appeared at his door.

"Vincent. May I come in?"

Delighted to see Father up and about, Vincent motioned him inside and saw him settled into the old rocker. Father's hands caressed the scratched and worn rocker arms and Vincent could almost see the memories as they wound their way through Father's mind. "You're feeling better."

Father nodded. "I'm fine. I do wish everyone would stop fussing."

There was silence for a few moments, then Father said quietly: "Jessica still wants me to move Above."

"I know." Vincent's throat felt dry and his heart was hammering. He knew he must not let Father know how he felt. "Have you made a decision?"

"Yes." Father sounded tired and distressed. "I can't do it, Vincent. As much as I love Jessica, I simply cannot leave here. This is where I belong." He raised his eyes to his son's. "And up *there* is where she belongs."

Vincent nodded. And tried to disguise the relief and joy that flooded through him. Then he felt the sorrow ease its way into his heart. "I understand."

Father heaved his way onto his feet, casually brushing off Vincent's reaching hand, his smile softening the refusal to accept help. "I'm not feeble yet, but thank you." He paused at the doorway and looked back. "It's not because of you, Vincent. Or even *for* you. I want you to understand that."

Despite his efforts, tears blurred Vincent's vision. "You're certain?"

"Think of Catherine, Vincent. Dear God. I love Jessica. I loved Margaret as well. But romantic love isn't everything. Belonging is important as well. And being needed." He smiled a little wistfully. "Jessica loves me, but truthfully, she doesn't *need* me." He motioned to indicate their world. "I belong here, now. Where I'm needed. *And* loved."

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## Nothing is the Same

by Rhonda Collins

I just need some help here  
making everything meet;  
beginnings and endings.  
I don't know where I'll be  
from one day to the next.  
I'm only passing through,  
you know.

Besides--

He won't ever love me  
the way he still loves her.  
But does he feel it too?

Or is it only me,  
imagining the dream  
of his heartfelt desire?





## BRAND NEW QUESTIONS

---

A week after Father's rescue, Diana was organizing files on her computer, trying to figure out how to word her report on Gregory. She'd eventually decided the easiest thing to do was just to let it go. Let everyone assume it was just over. No explanations. The hardest part was pretending daily that she was still looking. She hated to waste time. She heard a tap on the window and walked over to look up. Vincent. Quickly, she built her emotional barrier and went up to the roof. The feelings she'd been having about him lately didn't bear sharing...not if she wanted him to stick around.

When she reached the roof, he was sitting on the parapet, his back against the building, one leg drawn up, hands linked around his knee. She stopped a moment, awed by the sight. The moon shone behind him, casting silver shadows. He looked so different in moonlight than he did in candlelight or artificial light. More ethereal. His eyes were closed, but they opened as she approached. He smiled, and her heart turned over.

"Good evening, Diana."

"Hi."

He sighed gently. "I love nights like this. The air is so crisp. Everything feels so fresh."

Diana hugged her sweater around her a little tighter. "Yeah. It *is* nice." She sat on the wall next to him, a few feet away...not intruding into his "space." "So, how's Father?"

Vincent chuckled. "Back to his old self. Jessica left yesterday. He is a little saddened by her leaving, but he is handling it well."

Diana could see a shadow pass over his face. "And you?"

"Pardon?" Vincent's eyes were a little startled as he glanced up.

"Why does Jessica's leaving sadden you?"

"Why do you ask?"

Diana shrugged. "You seemed sad."

"I am saddened mostly for Father's sake. For myself...I suppose, it reminds me of my own loss."

"Catherine."

He sighed. "Yes." Diana felt Vincent's gaze on her. He seemed very intense tonight. Diana wasn't sure why. But when he spoke, the reason became apparent. "It seems she has been gone for so long, Diana."

Without turning, Diana said quietly: "She has been."

"A few months are nothing!" Vincent protested adamantly. "I have eternity yet to go!"

Diana shook her head and looked into his eyes, then away. "She's been gone...to you...almost since the time you lost the bond, even before Gabriel kidnapped her. And that's been well over a year now. The bond itself has been gone for a very long time...and it began then."

"Yes," he conceded reluctantly.

Diana still hadn't looked back at him. She couldn't bear meeting those sad eyes. Her voice took on a softer tone. "I remember you telling me about your bond with her, and how your voice ached when you told me of losing it. The bond *was* Catherine, the part you could hold the closest."

There was another long silence. When Vincent's voice drifted to Diana, it was the merest of whispers. "It was so different, after the bond was gone. Catherine was there, but she was...distant."

Diana tried to put into words what she knew he was feeling. "And then she was truly gone...and you couldn't find her, and you blamed yourself." Vincent was silent for so long, she finally turned to look at him.

Vincent's head bowed, his cascade of red-blond mane falling forward to hide his face. "Yes."

Vincent eventually broke the silence, changing the subject: "Father sends his gratitude for your help. And he wishes to remind you how welcome you are...Below."

Diana nodded and looked down, not sure what to say. It always embarrassed her to be thanked for what she did. Diana leaned against the wall and stared out over the city, and neither of them spoke for a while. Finally, tentatively, Vincent asked quietly, "I have noticed, Diana...when I was here before, when I was healing...there were men's things around, and you spoke of a man..." His voice trailed away, but when she turned to him, awaiting his question, he continued, seeming embarrassed to be asking. "But now, there seems to be no one in your life..."

Looking back out at the lights, Diana murmured, "That's over." She sighed. "It was time, I suppose." She forced herself to keep going. It was hard, talking about herself. "Poor Mark. He tried so hard, but I just couldn't be what he wanted. He wanted more than I was able to give."

Diana was curious about something, and a little confused. There were things she had been dying to ask, but never had the chance. Never felt she had the right. But perhaps now was the time. He seemed to be inviting confidences tonight. "Vincent...do you...well...do you have any idea *why* the bond was broken? What caused it?"

Vincent's entire body seemed to tense up, and Diana thought, *Uh-oh. Wrong question. Why?*

"No. I have little memory of the time just before." He turned to her, his face and voice pained. "I told you how I had lost myself to the madness...how I had retreated far below even the catacombs...our burial place...to hide myself. To keep the others safe. I vaguely remember going there, and there are parts even before that which are unclear to me. But I remember only bits and pieces past that, until I once again realized I was in my chamber, with Catherine and Father." He looked away. "Diana...I didn't



even remember people's names for a time after that...or places, things. It was as though everything I touched, everyone...was strange to me."

Diana hitched herself down from the wall and wrapped her arms around herself once more. "Even Catherine?"

Vincent answered, eyes staring into the darkness. "Yes. And no. I knew she was the woman I loved. But yes. Even her name I had forgotten." He swung toward her, his face a mask of agony and indecision. The tension in the air was palpable. His voice broke. "I had forgotten her name, Diana! Even as I had forgotten what passed between us in that cave."

Vincent's voice became more anguished, and Diana thought desperately: *I shouldn't have started this!* She flinched at the pain in his face...the agony in his voice as he continued. "She has left me a son, Diana...and I cannot even remember his begetting...cannot remember the love we shared...must have shared."

Diana gasped in shock and distress before she could stop herself, and Vincent turned away. "I must go."

Before she could stop him, he was over the wall and gone. She dropped her barrier and reached out for him, and felt such pain it made her cry out. She stood in the crisp air a few moments, her tears sliding down her face and wetting her cheeks. Angrily, she wiped the tears away with the heel of her hand and descended the stairs. The tears weren't hers, in any case...they were his. She was only crying them for him.

---

Diana sat back down at the desk and exited the file she was working on. She pulled up her journal.

*I'll never learn to keep my mouth shut. I feel something, and I open my mouth and put my foot in it. Did it all the time as a kid. At work, it's different, but around Vincent I turn into a goose. Sometimes I don't know what to do, what to say. I feel as though I have no beginning and no end. Where does he end and I begin? I used to have a life of sorts. Now there is only him. He's all that matters anymore and sometimes even my work can't distract me. His pain is so tangible, even when my barrier is up, that I can't help but react: I'm so aware of him. I hope he'll be all right. He seemed okay when he got here, then I had to go asking questions. But in a way, I'm glad I did. So that's what the dreams are about. He doesn't remember making love to Catherine. In the dreams...his dreams...I keep seeing him...and her in that cave, but then it's gone. The memories are there...buried...but they are there, somewhere. Why doesn't he remember?*

Diana shoved the chair back and reached out with one hand to save the file. That done, she exited and turned off the computer.

She crossed her arms and stared into space, thinking about Vincent's comments...and the way he said more with

his silences than with all the words put together. On one hand, he was the most honest individual she'd ever met, but on the other, he lied by omission. She'd just about bet there wasn't *anyone* who knew him as well as they thought they did, not even Father. She recognized the tactic: she'd used it herself countless times. But somehow, she didn't think he was even truly aware that he was doing it. *He needs to talk about this to someone. Anyone. But he won't.* Diana stretched and groaned at the aches. *Guess I can count on strange dreams again tonight.* She pattered around the loft for a time, cleaning up. She was reluctant to go to bed. Eventually she gave in, curled up under the covers and fell into an exhausted sleep.

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Vincent walked the park for a long while after leaving Diana's loft. *Why did I tell Diana that? How does she manage to put me so at ease that I feel I can say anything? Even things I shouldn't say. Things I could never imagine telling anyone.*

A familiar voice whispered in his ear, making him shiver slightly. *What's wrong? Catherine's gone. Doesn't matter to her that you can't remember.*

"It matters to me."

The voice turned surly. *Well, I remember, even if you don't. We were both there that night. I can't help it if you can't see the forest for the trees.*

Trying his best to ignore the voice, Vincent headed for home. It was past time for Jacob to be in bed, and he tried never to miss putting him down. He'd missed far too much already.

*In more ways than one.* The voice was persistent.

"Silence. Enough," Vincent insisted.

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Diana slept peacefully for a while, then the dreams began. The cave again. Vincent. Catherine. But this time there was a third figure...another quieter, gentler Vincent, who merged with the Beast before Diana lost the vividness of the scene. She woke and grabbed a pencil and pad from her bedside table to make a note so she wouldn't forget. Once that was done, she snuggled back under the covers and immediately fell asleep...knowing instinctively that for now, anyway, she could sleep.

---

Another week passed before Diana saw Vincent again. She had spent the past week grudgingly pretending she was tracking down information given to her by people who had known Gregory's victims. Joe and Jimmy were frustrated, but Diana felt that no one could be more bored than she was. Living a lie was not her style. Joe was beginning to be hopeful that there would be no more killings, so Diana expected he would downgrade. It seemed she was right. She sat in the meeting and listened to Jimmy angrily argue with Joe about downgrading the case. Joe reminded him that it



had been three weeks since the last killing, that three Thursdays had gone by. Diana glumly, but silently reflected that actually it had been two...Gregory had at least *tried* to kill Father. So, actually, it was two weeks. But, Jimmy wasn't buying it. "....He's a murder spree waiting to happen!"

Diana finally sighed and joined the conversation. She couldn't stand this tennis match of wills over something that was a dead issue...literally. "No.... It's over."

That really ticked Jimmy off. "Oh, great! The Oracle has spoken! We can call off the hounds. Your Ouija board tell you it was safe, or what?"

"It's not a joke, Jimmy." Diana fought to keep her voice level and reasonable.

"What *would* you call it?"

Diana leaned forward, eyes directly on Jimmy. She could hear the edge to her voice. "I'd call it imagination. Look. If all you're willing to see is what you've seen

before, you're gonna miss half of what's going on. That's the difference between you and me."

Jimmy's voice raised, threatening hysteria, Diana noted idly. "Difference? I don't see any difference, Bennett. Seems we both struck out on this one." Jimmy stalked past her and headed out the door, and a silence fell over Joe and Diana briefly.

Joe found his voice finally. "He's wrong, isn't he?"

Diana looked down, trying not to smile. "What do you mean?" She glanced up to see Joe's charming, quirky grin.

"You know what I mean. You're not gonna make this any easier on me, are you?"

Finally, Diana couldn't help it. She smiled. She and Joe were beginning to understand one another a little. She liked him. *He's such a boy scout.* Her smile gave nothing up to him, though. *Make him dig.* "Nothing's ever easy in life, Joe."

"The killings are over. You know that, don't you?" His wondering smile forced a half-hearted agreement from Diana.

"I guess."

"No. You don't *guess*, you *know*. How is it that you know, Diana? How do you *know*?"

Reaching out to dig her knuckle into his arm, Diana smiled a little broader. "Ouija board."

Swinging around, Diana left Joe standing there, mouth gaping. She felt pretty pleased with herself. She'd had a lot of down time, though technically she'd been working. She hoped Vincent would come tonight. He'd stayed away since the fiasco on her roof, and all week she could feel the tension building in him. The dreams had come every night, with some snatches of very erotic memories. *Or were they only wishful thinking?*

Diana hadn't taken so many cold showers since college...right after getting out of Catholic school...when she was still trying to be what everyone else wanted her to be. If he *should* choose to come again...tonight or any other time, she promised herself she would be more careful. *He has a lot to work through, right now. Help...don't push, Bennett.*

Finding that she had extra time off, Diana climbed into her battered Chevy and eased into traffic. She'd spend the day with her sister, Susan, who had been bugging her to come. By the time she got home, maybe her mind would be settled enough to deal with whatever Vincent would throw at her. Because he *would* come...if not today, then soon. Diana could feel the pull. He needed to get away. She headed almost happily to visit her sister.

---

As Diana suspected, Vincent was edgy. He sat in the council session through the interminable discussions over whether or not there was enough flour and sugar, enough other provisions to last the rest of the winter, whether the aqueduct in the east tunnels was ready for repair, more discussions on security, with people complaining to him of

overwork with the added sentries. His answers were monosyllabic for the most part, and Father glared at him. But security was his province, and he knew Father would not question him...at least not in council.

The fingers of Vincent's right hand drummed on the table in front of him, the nails clicking with an irritating rhythm. He knew it was annoying to the others, but he simply couldn't stop himself. At one point, he forced his clenched hands between his knees, until he realized how childlike that was. When Father finally ended the session Vincent all but rushed for the door, only to be stopped by Father's voice.

"Vincent. Could I have a word with you, please?"

Throwing his head back with a groan, Vincent leaned on the balustrade wearily. "What is it, Father?"

Clearing his throat, Father asked tentatively, "Are you headed Above again?"

Inclining his head briefly in assent, Vincent eyed Father through strands of blond mane. "Yes."

"Do you think that is wise? You've been so...distracted...lately."

"Yes. I think it is wise, Father."

Obviously changing tack in what Vincent could tell was a last-ditch maneuver to influence him, Father commented, "Jacob has been fussy lately. Perhaps he needs to be with you more."

"Or perhaps he needs to be with me less." Vincent sighed. "Father, leave it alone, please. You know Jacob is teething. He is going to be fussy." *And the bond between us can be disturbing him as well, with the way I've been feeling.* "He is with Mary and already asleep."

Father levered himself back down into his chair. "Very well. Go on then. You're impossible when you are like this. But Vincent...be careful. You may not care what happens to you, but everyone here does."

His stern attitude relenting just a little, now that he knew Father had given up, Vincent came back down the steps and embraced Father. "I will be careful, Father. Goodnight. Sleep well."

---

Vincent traveled toward Diana's loft with mixed emotions. He wanted to see her, but at the same time he was almost afraid to. Whenever he was around her he found himself speaking of subjects he didn't want to discuss...subjects that caused him pain for days afterward. But he also found he enjoyed her company, her quiet presence and her no-nonsense acceptance. To be quite honest with himself, the woman fascinated him more and more. And he still had not unraveled the mystery of his lack of empathy when he was around her.

Once Vincent reached the loft, he perched above the skylight for several long minutes before venturing to tap on the glass. When he did tap, almost immediately her face smiled up at him through the skylight. *Committed now. To leave would be unbearably rude.* He felt relief that the

decision was made.

Swinging over the edge onto the roof, he leaned against the wall of the building to wait for her. It was only moments before she stepped through the door with her usual hesitant, almost shy attitude. Diana's long red hair was worn loose this evening and flowed over her shoulders. In her baggy sweatshirt, she reminded him of a little girl.

"Vincent."

Her voice was breathy, and she seemed pleased...but still he could sense nothing. *Why can I not sense her?* The thought irritated him a little. "Good evening, Diana."

"I'm glad you came."

"I felt I owed you an apology for leaving so abruptly last time I was here."

Diana looked down, seeming embarrassed. "You don't owe me an apology.... Look, I was just getting ready to eat, I ordered some Chinese. Would you join me?"

Vincent hesitated. He wanted to stay, but did not wish to intrude. Not being able to feel her emotions made it difficult for him to know if she was merely being polite or not. He'd always had his empathy to guide him around others...and he'd become accustomed to relying upon it. Her expression decided him: she looked so hopeful. He nodded slightly. "If it will not be an imposition, I would like to stay, though I've already eaten. Perhaps some tea?"

Diana released a breath almost as if she'd been holding it, then seemed enthusiastic. "Great! I hate to eat alone."

Suddenly, Vincent felt as though a weight had lifted. Diana's face lit up with her enthusiasm and she positively beamed. He'd never seen her look so pleased. In fact, it occurred to him he'd almost never seen her when her problems...or his...weren't weighing her down. He had pleased her by staying, and that relieved him. He was so used to trying to please people, and with Diana, it was so difficult to know what to do. She was a very special friend, and he cared for her, and *wanted* to please her. He followed her down the stairs and joined her as she motioned him into the small kitchen. She began handing him still-warm Chinese take-out containers and asked him to take them to the table.

"The tea's almost ready."

Vincent watched as she brought the teapot to the table and poured the water for the tea. She sprinted back, picking up the sugar and honey, then rummaged in the refrigerator a moment before dragging out a bottle of soy sauce. He was still standing next to the table when she pulled out a chair and sat. She was so...energetic. He pulled out a chair and joined her, watching as she poured his tea.

"I'm really glad you stayed. Company always makes the food taste better." She got up and slid a CD into the player, and the room was suddenly filled with music.

"Chopin." Vincent closed his eyes and listened, intent on the music briefly, then returned his attention to Diana. By the time Diana finished eating, the music was over. He helped her clear the table afterward, ignoring her protests. They worked together silently, the quiet not at all unpleas-

ant to either of them. He found it vaguely amusing--and a little strange--that they automatically seemed to know where and when the other would move. There was none of the discomfort or awkwardness with another that one would expect in such a situation. When she finished rinsing the dishes, Diana put on another pot of water for tea and motioned for him to join her in the living room. She sat on the couch, drawing one leg up underneath her, and he could feel her eyes on him as he walked to the window and looked out. He noted that she dimmed the lights so he could see out. He turned toward her. "I remember the first time I was here."

"So do I," she murmured, smiling over her teacup. "You look a lot better now."

"I owe you so much, Diana."

She shook her head. "No. Friends don't owe friends. Besides, we're not talking about anything heavy tonight. Okay? It's been too nice."

Relief shot through him, and he moved to sit next to her. "Very well. I won't ask you about your work, then."

Running her hands through her hair, Diana leaned back and laughed. Vincent found himself watching the strands slide through her fingers like liquid fire, and wondering what it would feel like in his own hands. Guiltily, he pulled his attention back to what she was saying. "...nothing at all for the last week. I've felt sinfully relaxed. The only thing I hated was the pretense that I was still working on the case. But it's over now, and Joe has downgraded. He knows there won't be any more killing, so I suppose I'll get a new case any day and my play time will be over."

Vincent sipped his tea. "That bothers you?"

"No. Not at all. I'm ready for another challenge. It's just been kind of nice for a change. I went to visit my sister today, and she commented I looked more relaxed than I had in a long time. She was right."

"Your work is very demanding. But you seem very dedicated." He thought immediately of Catherine. In many ways she and Diana were much alike...but in others, very different. Both the similarities and the differences disturbed him...and he didn't know why.

Diana shifted restlessly. She glanced up. "Nothing heavy tonight. That's the rule...okay?"

He shrugged and smiled. He rose and walked to her bookcase, reading the titles. Most of them were mysteries or college textbooks, criminology texts, and psychology. There was a small section of poetry. He started to reach for one of the poetry books, then decided against it, and came back to the couch.

"You can look at whatever you want, Vincent. I don't have much time for reading, for the most part."

Vincent stretched his long legs out in front of him and leaned back into the couch pillows. He glanced over at Diana. He was feeling rested, and extremely comfortable. "I feel so at ease here, Diana. There's such peace. When I'm Below, it's impossible for me to not feel the emotions of everyone around me. I've known them all for too long,

and the impressions come so easily. On one hand, it's comforting...a sense of home, of family. But at times, it becomes oppressive. Here, I feel nothing...." Then, realizing how that must sound, he stammered, "I mean--"

She smiled and waved away his protests. "I know. Being an empath...must...be difficult at times. A curse as well as a gift. I'm glad you feel comfortable here, with me...for whatever reasons."

Vincent reached out to take her hand, and she pulled back. The action reminded him once more of his differences and his look must have reflected that, because she then gently took his hand, the soft skin a caress on his, callused from the heavy work required in the tunnels. Her voice was reassuring. "No, Vincent. It's not what you think. I just don't like to be touched...by anyone. It's not you. It's kind of...reflex, that's all."

Vincent rubbed his thumb across her palm, then glanced quickly up at her as he felt her shiver. For some reason he couldn't quite define, that shiver pleased him. "I don't understand, Diana. Usually, with touch, the impressions I receive become stronger, much more clear. I have never encountered anyone I could feel nothing from."

Diana's smile was strange. A little sad. "You feel nothing at all?"

"Not exactly." He smiled a little to tease her. "I feel a very delicate, soft hand in mine, given to me in friendship and trust. That is not *nothing*. But of your emotions, I feel only a blankness. It's very strange."

"Maybe that blankness is what makes this place pleasant for you, after Below?"

"Perhaps. That...and other things."

Diana blushed a little, and Vincent released her hand. "I must go, Diana. It's getting late. I truly enjoyed my evening."

She looked up at him, her eyes smiling. "I'm glad. I enjoyed it, too. Maybe you'll come back sooner next time."

"But you will have another case before long, and will be occupied."

Diana shook her head. "Doesn't matter. If you want to come visit, don't hesitate. If I'm working you can listen to music or read. And believe me...nothing disturbs me when I'm working, short of a nuclear blast. You'll see."

"Then I will come, surely." He inclined his head briefly. "Goodnight, Diana."

When she started to rise, he shook his head. "No. Stay. I know the way out."

---

Vincent *did* return a few nights later with an invitation for Diana to come Below for a play the children were producing. As they stood out on her roof, Vincent explained that the children had been practicing for several weeks on this, and they wanted him to invite her.

Diana turned the small, carefully printed card over and examined it, wondering a little that the children should care if she came or not. She remembered the concert invitation

she'd found in Cathy's things during the investigation and knew immediately where it had come from. Most of the children had never met her, but Diana was touched, nonetheless. "The invitation is lovely, Vincent. Who made the card?"

When she looked up, Vincent's eyes were almost twinkling. "The children. They took it upon themselves to make a special invitation for you."

A tiny smile lifted the corner of Diana's mouth. "Are you sure it was the children who wanted me to come?"

Vincent's "No" was so soft, Diana barely heard it. Then when he realized she had seen through his pretense, he shrugged, and she repressed a grin. "It is I who wish for you to be there. But truly, Diana, you are a helper now, and we all would like for you to become more a part of our world."

Diana struggled to hide her joy that he wanted her with him there. "I'd love to come, but until then, would you care to come inside? I started a case today and I'm entering the information into my data base."

"Very well. For a time. As long as you are certain I won't intrude."

---

Once downstairs, as Diana retreated to her desk, Vincent told her he would browse through some of the poetry books she had in her library. He carefully examined the poetry volumes and found Rod McKuen, Rilke, Lois Wyse, in addition to many others. He selected a few volumes and settled on the couch--ostensibly to read--though he found he spent more of the time watching Diana. It didn't seem to bother her for him to watch her, and he found her intensity fascinating. Diana punctuated her silence by strange grunts and sighs and an occasional expletive. She seemed to have little awareness of his presence. That too, was strange to Vincent. He was accustomed to dominating a room whenever he was present: everyone was always aware of him. It was a pleasant feeling, therefore, to be here, and yet not be noticed...comfortably companionable.

Vincent looked down and flipped through some of her Rod McKuen poetry. There was a bookmark on one page, and the page was dogeared. Obviously the poem meant something to her. The poem spoke of loneliness. Of not belonging. "Sometimes I feel I've always been just passing through..."

Studying the poetry, he wondered. *She is waiting for an echo, but doesn't want an answer? She searches for the questions because everyone else has the answers? But that is what she does--seek the answers. The poem is so...yearning...and yet cynical. She doesn't feel that she belongs.*

Vincent looked up to see Diana leaning on her desk, chin in her hands. She stared at the computer screen as though by sheer intensity she could make the answers appear...or perhaps that elusive "brand new question" that the poem spoke of. *She is so alone. Separate. Like myself.*

*But does she force that separateness upon herself, or is it forced upon her, as it is upon me?* He looked down at the poem once more and read it again, wondering further at the conundrum Diana presented. He watched her for a very long time, then drifted off to sleep, his head lying on his arm as it rested on the back of the couch.

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Diana stretched, locking her hands behind her head and arching her back. This one was going to take a while. Several teenage girls had gone missing recently in New York and surrounding cities. No bodies had been found yet, though. The police suspected the same person was responsible for all the abductions. There were similarities in the appearance of the girls and the places they were last seen. All disappeared around the same time of day, after school. Diana had been staring at maps of New York state all day, it seemed, checking sites of disappearances and trying to hunch her way into something. The last two girls had vanished from around the Hudson River area, which was pretty central to the others...almost like the hub on a wheel. She'd begun thinking he was from that area, but why would he grab girls from where he lived? *Damn, I'm tired. Maybe he's tired too.*

Suddenly, Diana turned and realized that Vincent was still there. *I forgot all about him! How could I do that?* Hastily, she double checked to make sure her block was still secure...not that it mattered. She'd been so engrossed that all he'd have felt was her frustration at the case. She grinned when she saw he'd fallen asleep on the couch. His gold mane all but obscured his face, though his nose peeped out. She moved quietly toward him, noting the soft huffing of his breath through his teeth as he slept with his mouth just a little open. The sight of him sleeping reminded her of him asleep in her bed when he was healing after the explosion on the *Compass Rose*. She'd thought then, as she did now, how lucky she was to have found him. Just then, his eyes opened and he sat up, startling her into a blush. She stammered. "I'm...sorry. I didn't mean to wake you."

Vincent's sleepy blue eyes gazed up at her a moment, then cleared as he stood hastily. "No. It's best that I go. I can't believe I fell asleep."

Diana longed to reach out and touch him, to brush that tousled golden hair back off his face. She only said quietly, "Perhaps you needed the rest."

Vincent glanced quickly in her direction. "Perhaps so. I haven't been sleeping well of late," he admitted. "One would think that with Jacob home, and Father safe, I would sleep. But still I am pursued by dreams...nightmares."

"Well. You seemed to be sleeping soundly enough just now. Perhaps you should stay."

Vincent looked as though she'd goosed him. She almost laughed. If he could have blushed, she was sure he would have. "No. I must get back. Jacob will need me soon."

She walked with him up to the roof and told him she'd be ready when he came to escort her down for the play.

She watched him disappear over the edge of the building, then reluctantly went downstairs to shower and head to bed.

As Diana showered, she found herself wishing Vincent were not so vulnerable right now. She felt as though with every step she was walking on eggs. She ran her hands sensuously over her soapy body, her eyes closing. It had been so long.... Suddenly she felt as though Vincent were here with her. She *felt* his presence, almost felt his hands on her. She gasped and reached for the hot water faucet, turning it off and bracing herself against the icy flood of the cold water, and wrenched herself out of the bond. When she couldn't stand the cold and was shivering, teeth chattering, she turned off the water and reached for a towel. Shaking uncontrollably, she dried herself. *God. What was that? Did he feel it too, or was it only me?* More importantly, had *she* instigated it, or had *he* somehow done it?

She stood in front of the mirror blow-drying her hair, and regained some semblance of control. That had never happened before. Not like *that*. Not awake at any rate. She didn't know whether she hoped Vincent had felt that or not. If he had, his dreams ought to be interesting tonight.

Her weariness catching up with her, Diana pulled on fresh socks and one of the old, worn, super-soft T-shirts that she liked to sleep in, and crawled into bed. It would be impossible to get back to the case tonight...after *that*.

---

On his way home, Vincent thought of Diana and of her offer to let him stay. Such a simple, straightforward offer. It had been tempting. Diana's loft was a place of peace for him. With sudden, sure instinct, he was certain he would have slept better there. Then, suddenly, he had a vision of her standing in her shower. The water washed over her, plastering that fiery hair down her back like a molten tide. He could feel his hands on her skin, slick with soap, felt the curves slide under his palms. He shook his head hard, trying to clear it, an involuntary growl escaping. The image, and the sudden surge of desire was so strong it shook him. Then he became angry with himself. *Forgive me, Catherine.* He tried to put the image from his mind, but as he neared the home tunnels, he knew he was losing his battle for control. That insidious voice was back.

*What? Saint Vincent had an impure thought? For shame. Whatever would Catherine think of you? If Lancelot was fatally flawed, then what about you, my friend? You can't even stay true to her now she's dead! Of course...you don't remember how good it was, do you?*

"Leave me alone!" Vincent roared, his voice echoing back to him from the enclosing walls of the tunnel. Once he sensed the voice was gone, he shakily turned toward his chamber. *I will leave Jacob in the nursery until he wakes. Being near me now would only upset him.*

He sat on the bed and looked around his chamber. *Nothing out of the ordinary. But lonely.* He undressed, removed his boots and pulled on his long sleep shirt.



As he settled at his desk and reviewed his last entry, a smile twitched. *At least I am more coherent.* Picking up his pen, he began to write.

*I am so tired. It seems peaceful sleep still eludes me. The nightmares always come. It is not that I do anything horrible in the dreams. The nightmare is that I cannot remember what happened. How can I not remember her loving me...or loving her? Worse yet, was it not me that loved her, and is that why I cannot remember? He was there. He taunts me with it...and he remembers. I do not. Perhaps that is the true nightmare. But I am reminded that when I kill...when he kills...I remember everything. Why would I not remember loving her, even if he was loving her? Surely he would use that to taunt me as well.*

He paused a moment, wondering how to express what he was thinking. Then he began once more.

*In Diana's loft--with her--I am at peace. She is so quiet. So self-contained. There are no invasive emotions battering at me when I am up there. There is only myself. That is strange to me. I do not make myself very good company, yet she does not complain, and...I crave that silence as well, right now. It is better than being completely alone. She is company, pleasant company at that. A human presence...yet not invasive. I am not expressing myself well. I do not understand her at all. How is it that I do not feel her, as I feel everyone else? It is as though she is encased in a protective shell, she is so distant. Tonight, though, I had such images in my mind as I came home. I saw her showering, felt myself with her, my hands upon her. Such vivid imagery. I could feel myself moving toward her with such hunger.*

Vincent threw his pen down in disgust and shoved away from the desk. *What am I--that I cannot control this? Catherine is barely cold in her grave, and I have thoughts like this!* He reached out, closed the journal and stumbled off to bed...knowing his sleep would be disturbed, but too exhausted to do anything else but try to rest.

*This time, the dream was different. Instead of dreaming of Catherine and the cave, Vincent dreamed he was showering. But the water was warm, unlike the showers Below. He luxuriated in the warm water as it soaked through his thick mane, plastering it to his face, neck, and back. Suddenly, sharp as an electric shock, he felt soft hands on him, on his face, his neck, then sinewy arms encircled him and a woman's body pressed against him, the cushioned curves clinging to him. He was terrified of opening his eyes, lest that softness disappear. Eyes still closed, he let the woman kiss him and carefully allowed his hands to come up to slide over the curves, the delicacy of her hips, and up to her breasts. The kiss became deeper and her tongue explored, sending shocks of desire through him. He groaned and*

*pressed her closer, moving against her--with her. "Catherine." Suddenly, she was gone and he was left once again with his desire unsatisfied. "No!"*

Vincent sat, bolt upright in bed, his anguished "No!" resounding in the chamber. Realizing it was only a dream, and that the images had originated with his earlier thoughts of Diana, he was shamed. This had been a true dream, not a memory...simply his subconscious telling him things he needed to know...but did not want to face. Turning his face into his pillow, he tried again to sleep, though chaotic images kept flitting through his mind.

Diana slept restlessly. Her dream images shifted from images of the missing girls to fleeting sexual images of herself and Vincent. The vast amounts of information on the case bounced around in her mind, replaying over and over again. When she finally managed to settle into a deeper sleep, the connection she shared with Vincent became predominant.

*She was back in the shower, the water warm as it washed over her. Once more, she longed to feel Vincent next to her...and suddenly he was. With a feeling of disbelief, she traced his face with her hands, the sculpted angles familiar under her questing fingers. Her hands traced the thick pillar of his neck to his shoulders...his arms, and with a feeling of gladness she pressed herself against him, molding herself to his body as closely as possible. Her own desire grew as his hands slid over her hips up to her breasts, and she opened herself to his kiss. Felt his desire. His movements and breathing became more insistent. "Catherine." Shock and dismay rocked her. Brought the dream to an abrupt end as she woke.*

Diana's own voice echoed back to her as she woke. "Stop it!" She stared frantically around the darkened room as her senses cleared. Empty. *Of course. What'd you expect, Bennett?* She considered recording the dream in her journal, then thought better of it. She wasn't at all sure whose dream it had been, originally. Or if it even mattered. It had no bearing on Vincent's dreams of the cave. Except that it was just another symptom of his frustration. And hers. She shivered a little, curled up on her pillow and pulled the covers up to her chin. She muttered quietly: "Stop it, indeed? Just how do you intend to do that? And who is it that you're telling to stop? Yourself, or him?"

Diana sat through the task force meeting with Joe, Greg, Allen, and George, trying to force her mind onto the task at hand. She was disgusted with herself. She never let anything come between herself and a case. She never had, anyway...until now. All she could think about was that it was only a few days until she would see Vincent again. Joe



finally got her attention.

"Hey, Bennett. If you want to sleep, do it on your own time. We need you here."

Mentally shaking herself, Diana answered. "Yeah. Sorry Joe. What was it you were saying...about going to Jersey?"

"I said, I need you to go to Jersey for a couple of days to check on those two abduction sites. The Jersey police department has asked for our cooperation, since we've been working on this longer."

*Good. Get me away.* "Sounds good, Joe. Being on the site and talking to the family will help a lot."

The meeting broke up shortly after that and Diana headed to her loft to pack a few things. Before long, she was on her way to Jersey in her battered Chevy, and feeling more like herself than she had for weeks. *Time to concentrate on the victim's problems...not my own and Vincent's.*

---

In Jersey, Diana was able to settle down to work. She interviewed the parents of one of the victims, Rosetta Johnson. Sixteen. Last seen after school when she left the bus and headed home. Same scenario as with the other girls.

Diana sat in the girl's room and examined her things, read her diary. There was nothing to indicate she was meeting anyone. Even her steady boyfriend seemed totally innocent. Diana could pick up nothing unusual from him at all. Seemed a nice guy, and totally devastated that Rosetta was missing. Diana wandered the cheerful pale yellow room and realized what a gentle soul this kid really was. "Save the whales posters. Baby seals. Hamsters. With babies yet." She knelt next to the hamster cage and watched the tiny babies run around in circles. "You're a soft touch, but you're serious, too." She folded her arms and leaned against the wall. "You like the sunshine. Lots of bright colors. But you understand what it's like to be alone, too. You'd be sensitive to that." Diana picked up a picture of Rosetta with her boyfriend. The girl was happy there. "Where are you now?" She glanced up and looked through the open window to the field outside. There was an ancient oak tree on the far side of the field. Diana leaned out the window. "He was watching you. Knew you. Somehow. It wasn't casual. Who did you know who was lonely, Rosetta?"

Diana closed the door to Rosetta's room softly and smiled at her parents. "Gonna go outside for a bit. Walk around."

The couple nodded, but seemed perplexed. Their attitude didn't surprise Diana. She confused most people. She walked through the field, carefully looking around to note if there was anything out of the ordinary. Nothing. She walked around the tree. Leaned against it. Diana loved trees. So solid. So *there*. There were scuff marks on the bark. Someone had been climbing this tree lately: the scuff marks were fresh. "Did you climb the tree, Rosetta? No. I

don't think so. No time. New boyfriend. New school. Your diary says you were on the student council. No time for sitting down and smelling the roses, so to speak. Maybe before, but not now." Diana patted the tree, like she'd pat a faithful old dog. She leaned against it and looked toward Rosetta's window. "No. You didn't climb it. But *he* did." Diana kicked off her boots and pulled off her socks. Grimacing as the bark snagged her pants, she hauled herself up into the tree. From the spreading branches she could see straight into Rosetta's bedroom. She could also see into the living room. She tried switching gears. Tried to pick up some of the sense of the man who'd been here. "You were lonely, and Rosetta'd been nice to you. Maybe just once. Maybe more than that. Was it sexual? Or were you just desperate for a friend? What about the other girls? Did you kill 'em or stash 'em?" Diana felt it. The loneliness. But she couldn't tell if it was his or her own.

She spent the rest of the afternoon interviewing people who knew Rosetta. Her impressions had been pretty much on target. Exhausted by evening, she headed back to the dingy, smallish hotel she'd picked out. The Jersey P.D. wanted her there, but they weren't overly generous. The night was miserable and totally unproductive. She found she missed Vincent dreadfully--which was ridiculous, as she seldom saw him more than a couple of times a week, anyway. She missed her computer almost as much. She was used to correlating data and accessing the network to make things easier. She stayed up late with her notes, the other detectives' notes and pictures of the missing girls spread over the bed, trying to feel her way into the kidnapper's mind. She refused to call him a murderer. Not yet. They hadn't found any bodies. She compared the girls, their lives. All of them were high achievers, pretty, gentle...all of them sensitive kids...sensitive to the feelings of others. Diana sighed tiredly and ran her fingers through her tangled hair. "Who are you? Where are you? What did you see when you watched these girls? Friends, lovers? Lost sister maybe? Just someone to talk to, or is it more sinister?" When she started staring at the wall and dozing off she called it a night, tossed everything back in the box and crawled into bed.

*Diana walked through the tunnels and the sense of aloneness was almost more than she could stand. She'd given everything there was to give and it wasn't enough. She wasn't Catherine. Shoulders slumped in defeat, she wandered through the darkness. There wasn't anything worse than feeling this alone. And knowing there wasn't much she could do about it.*

Diana woke the following morning feeling as though she'd been beaten. Everything ached. But she was up early and ready to go. She grabbed an Egg McMuffin from McDonald's and drove over to the supposed site of the abduction, having to stop twice on the way to adjust her carburetor. By the second time, she was getting irritated.

*Damn thing! Got to put this in the shop when I get back!* Slamming the hood down, she slapped at the hair that had come loose from her braid and was tickling her face, managing to smear grease down one cheek in the process. *Great. Now I look like a grease monkey.* Suddenly, clearly, she felt Vincent's joy as he held Jacob while playing with him...just that one flash...then it was gone. *Even here...even now, in the midst of everything else...I can still feel him when my barrier slips.* A silly grin on her face, Diana slid behind the wheel and continued on, feeling as though she'd just been given a gift. Her loneliness had lifted.

There really wasn't much Diana could pick up at the so-called abduction site. No one was even sure exactly where that was. She stood at the intersection leaning against the lightpost. Arms crossed, she thought frantically, trying to piece things together, all the bits and pieces of all the abductions, trying to find more of a common denominator. She started to leave, but suddenly she had a flash of extreme loneliness from someone. And fear.

*Yes!* she thought. *This is where it happened.* Without thinking about how it might look, Diana slid down the lightpost and crouched--unseeing--on the sidewalk. She tried for more impressions, but nothing came. Sometimes the emotions she picked up helped, sometimes they didn't.

She sighed as she stood and hiked her carryall up onto her shoulder. She scanned the area. A few shops. Maybe someone saw something. Diana headed up the street resigned to another day of probably futile questions.

She was on her third stop before she hit paydirt: a small used bookstore near the bus stop. The owner, a thin, grayhaired man, greeted her pleasantly. His smile was quiet and the atmosphere of the store was peaceful. Diana felt herself relaxing as she smiled back at him. Hesitant to move abruptly into questioning, Diana glanced around the store curiously. Vincent would love this place. And Father. She ran her fingertips over the leather bindings on a particularly fine book. The owner watched her with a gentle smile.

"You like books."

Diana startled and felt herself flushing. "Yeah. I mean, I didn't used to. Not so much, anyway."

The man came around the counter to stand at her side. "I can always tell when people like books. Respect them. It shows a strength of character." He paused a moment, then seeming to realize he was embarrassing her, he asked: "Can I help you with anything? I've been watching you all morning, you know...walking up and down the street."

Diana glanced up at him. The man's eyes were quick and intelligent. He was a watcher. She glanced back at the front of the store. All windows. Where he could watch the world go by. This man studied people. Knew them.

The bell rang and a young girl came in. The man smiled. "Excuse me a moment. Hi, Sarah. Let me get it for you."

Diana watched as he went to his counter and rummaged

underneath. "It came in yesterday. I knew you were looking for a copy. I'm glad I was able to catch you at home."

"Thanks, Mr. Roberts. I really appreciate it. The book's out of print and it's kind of hard to find."

Diana listened to the easy exchange. Here was a man who obviously paid attention to his customers and let them become his friends.

Mr. Roberts rang the book up and talked a few more moments with the girl then came back to Diana. "I'm sorry. Now. What can I do for you? I know you're not here for a book."

Diana smiled a little, shrugged and pulled out her ID. "I'm Diana Bennett, N.Y.P.D. I'm working with the Jersey police department on the disappearance of Rosetta Johnson. We suspect her disappearance to be connected with other similar missing person cases in the New York area in the past few months."

Mr. Roberts watched her a moment, then he smiled. "I'm not sure what I can do to help, but I'd be glad to try."

Diana pulled out a picture of Rosetta and handed it to him. "Have you seen her?"

"Certainly. Rosetta came in here frequently."

Rosetta. He knew her. "Was she usually alone when she came in?"

He nodded. "Usually. Sometimes her boyfriend comes in with her." Mr. Roberts smiled. "He's one of those people who's a little uneasy around books. It's always a little amusing, seeing him standing here fiddling as she browses."

"What's she like? Rosetta."

"Intelligent. Caring. A wonderful young lady."

Diana turned to look out the window. "You have a clear view here of the bus stop and the surrounding area. Did you ever see anyone watching Rosetta. Or maybe bothering her?"

A frown creased the man's brow.

"You look disturbed." Diana wondered what the man was thinking...why her question bothered him.

"I am. I don't know why I didn't think about it before. Just never occurred to me, I suppose, he's so much a part of the background."

Diana felt a touch of excitement. "Who? What is it you're remembering?"

Pale blue eyes met Diana's with a hint of anxiety. "Granger Bellwood. Our resident hermit. He'd kind of attached himself to Rosetta lately. She'd taken him on kind of as a project, I think. Felt sorry for him. Even bought a book or two for him. I've seen him waiting for her by the bus stop. But I didn't see either of them the day she disappeared. I'm afraid I was in the back, rearranging the poetry section."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Over near the river. Everybody knows the old Bellwood place." He looked concerned. "Surely you don't think.... No. I can't believe that Granger would harm anyone. Certainly not Rosetta."

Bells were ringing in Diana's head. Her own instincts matched what Mr. Roberts was saying. She didn't think the hermit would hurt anyone either. *Why* she was so certain, she could never have said. It just didn't feel right. But the hermit was lonely. He knew Rosetta. He'd been watching her. It fit. She stuck out her hand and said fervently: "I'm sure you're right. Thanks. You've been a lot of help." She glanced back at the shelves of books and smiled at the owner. "Wish I could bring my friend here. He'd love this place."

Diana tucked her notebook back into her carryall and left the store. She restrained herself until she got around the corner, then dashed for her car and headed for the Johnson house.

Rosetta's father told Diana that his daughter had met Mr. Bellwood once or twice in passing while she'd been with her boyfriend, and they'd both mentioned the man's strange behavior. Mr. Johnson had cautioned Rosetta to stay away from Bellwood, but she'd obviously not listened. "Has a heart like a marshmallow, that kid. She'd take in every stray she found if we let her." However, Mr. Johnson hadn't even thought to mention the man. Again, he was simply too much a part of the area. He faded into the background.

Diana went back to the local police station and met with the chief and team working the case. She had a little trouble convincing the chief to push for a search warrant, but in the end, he agreed. They arranged for some backup, then started on a search warrant before she and two cops headed out to the hermit's property. Staring at the barbed wire surrounding the area, she didn't doubt that Mr. Bellwood was lonely. She and the other officers picked their way through the grounds and headed up to the small house. Diana knocked on the door but didn't receive a reply.

Diana turned to the other officers. "Tell you what. If you don't mind, could you go on back to the car? I want to sit here a few minutes and think." They looked at her as though she were crazy. They weren't used to her idiosyncracies.

After they left, Diana sat, back against the door, and closed her eyes. *Darkness. Tunnels? No...C'mon Bennett. Get your mind off of Vincent. Maybe the house was built over a cave. Lots of them around here. Damp and dark. Fear. Lots of fear. Not just Rosetta. All of them.* Suddenly her eyes flew open. *They're alive. All of them.* She knew it as well as she knew her own name. And they were right below her.

She dashed out to the squad car and radioed to check on the status of the warrant. They told her they'd radio back when they had it. It took forever until the radio squawked out the message that they'd gotten the warrant, and Diana felt as though her nerves had been shredded with sandpaper.

When they entered the hermit's house, the filth was appalling. Newspapers were stacked halfway to the ceiling and garbage littered the floors. Cats ran everywhere,

scattering as they approached. The house had been nice, once. Checking doors, they finally found the one leading down to the cellar, which in turn led to a cavern. The officers with Diana were shocked as they saw the girls chained to the walls. The girls cried out to them joyfully when they approached, but the man sitting in front of them just turned and smiled. "Did you come to keep me company, too?"

With sudden sympathy, Diana patted his shoulder. "Yeah. It's okay. You'll have lots of company now."

Bellwood was most cooperative. He unlocked the manacles and explained how he'd taken very good care of the girls. "They're so pretty and were so nice to me."

Ambulances were called for the girls so they could be treated for malnutrition and checked over for any other physical problems, though it appeared they had not been abused...except for being kept chained. Bellwood was escorted to a holding cell for the time being. He'd end up in a psychiatric facility. *That's what happens to you, Bennett, when you let the aloneness get to you. Become a way of life.* She shuddered.

After calling Joe and telling him the situation, Diana headed back home. She began to feel the usual letdown. The adrenaline high was backing off and she was just feeling tired. *At least this time we didn't find bodies...we found them alive.*

Stopping to check in at the station and make a sketchy report, she grinned a little at Greg Hughes' bantering. "Hey Bennett...did you know you've got a new nickname?"

Diana grimaced. "The Oracle" had been bad enough. "I'm almost afraid to ask, Greg. What is it now?"

"Bring 'Em Back Alive Bennett," Greg answered, his laughter holding more than a touch of relief.

"Yeah, well...I can always hope the name will bring me luck in the future." She shrugged her battered carryall onto her shoulder and headed out the door to her car.

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When Diana pushed the accordion door back on the elevator and entered her loft, Diana breathed a sigh of relief. She'd dropped her car off at a nearby garage and walked the rest of the way. She felt tired, sweaty, wind-blown, and her head hurt. Immediately, she saw her calendar, today's date marked with a thick red circle and a big V. She remembered what tonight was: the play the children were producing. Hastily she glared at her watch. *Damn! Vincent said 8:00 and it's 7:30 now. When Vincent says 8:00, he means 8:00.* She threw everything she was carrying onto the couch and dashed for the shower.

With her shower completed in record time, she blew her hair most of the way dry and hastily braided it. Running stark naked through the loft to the bedroom to grab some clothes, all she could think of was: *God, I hope he's late...or at least not early!* She grabbed her best sweater, which was dark blue, and her rust-colored skirt. She wriggled awkwardly into the skirt and sweater, grabbed a

pair of socks and made for the living room where she pulled her socks on and stuffed her feet into her boots. Shoving her keys into her pocket she dashed out of breath for the roof.

When she came through the door onto the roof, Vincent was waiting quietly in the shadows. She could see the moonlight glint off the metalwork of his belt. His face was shadowed except for the shine of moonlight in his eyes. She silently thanked the saints that she'd thought to build her block before she came up, because he would surely have caught her emotions tonight, as quiet as he was himself...and as intent upon her as he was. At least he couldn't see her flush in the dark, despite his incredible night-sight. She *hoped*, anyway. "Sorry. Am I late?"

A slight shake of that magnificent head. "No. Not really. I heard you coming up the stairs when I arrived. Are you ready?"

His voice reminded her of smooth bourbon and relaxed her just about as much. She felt the tension drain out of her. "Yes. Meet you downstairs?"

"In the alley, as usual." He disappeared over the side of the building and Diana headed downstairs.

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When Diana joined Vincent in the alley, he removed the manhole cover, descended the metal ladder, then handed her down. The tunnel was dark, but still light enough for Diana to see a little. Their eyes met briefly as she stood beside him. She was glad he couldn't feel anything past her block, because her stomach turned over and her knees felt weak whenever he looked at her like that...like he could see straight through her down to her toenails. His voice came softly to her through the dark, almost caressing. "Your case is over."

Diana was startled. "How'd you know?"

There was enough light for her to see the small lift of his mouth. "Because you smile so effortlessly. You do not seem preoccupied. How did it come out?"

As they walked, Diana easily matching his strides, she told him of the outcome. "It was so *good*, Vincent, to find them alive. Not just one of them, but *all* of them. I feel like I won the lottery." They had come to an area of the tunnels lit by torches, and the amber light allowed Diana to finally see Vincent clearly. He was listening intently and seemed pleased. Diana continued excitedly explaining how she felt. "The rush when it was over was incredible! There's nothing like it. It's times like this that really make what I do worthwhile. I don't get one like this very often...one I can really *win!* I usually never see the case until the victim is dead."

Vincent nodded, and then cast her a sideways glance. "It is good to see you smile. Truly smile, with relief and gladness. I think I have not seen that before, not really."

"You make me sound pretty depressing." She shrugged a little. "I smile...I *do*," she protested as his glance slid over her again.

"You smile, but it is so often a smile of relief, or compassion...but never of genuine amusement or happiness. Not like tonight." He smiled himself, the emotion touching his eyes. "It is contagious."

Diana laughed outright and dared to link her arm with his...winning her a startled glance from those exquisite blue eyes. "I'm glad. I like to see *you* smile, too."

"Then tonight, at least, the two of us will enjoy ourselves and put our worries aside. The children will feel honored to bring a smile to either of us, I am sure."

"What play are they performing?"

"Well, to be truthful, it is not an entire play, but only one act. As their assignment they were to pick one act of *Macbeth* and perform it, and they could choose any one they preferred."

"*Macbeth* is not a particularly cheerful play, Vincent." Diana's lip lifted helplessly in a small smile. "Are you sure they will be 'honored' if we smile?"

Vincent was obviously making an effort not to laugh outright. "I am sure the children could take the most grisly piece written and manage to elicit a few laughs. But we must definitely try to make them realize we take their efforts seriously."

"All right. So which act are we watching?"

"Act IV."

Diana strained to remember, but was totally unsuccessful. "You're going to have to be more specific. I'm afraid my memory isn't as good as yours."

Turning toward her, Vincent stood as though considering his answer. He raised his eyebrows and waggled his fingers: "Double, double toil and trouble...."

Shrieking with laughter--he had taken her so by surprise--Diana leaned weakly against the tunnel wall. When she had some semblance of control, she whacked his arm playfully. "That was *mean*. Now when they start, all I'll see is you doing that, and I'll go into hysterics and insult them."

Vincent smiled at her, his eyes dancing. "I'm sorry."

She could tell he wasn't, and grinned back. "You're in a good mood tonight."

He nodded. "I'm thinking of the children. It will be delightful. I haven't watched them perform in a while."

Diana reached down and took his hand, curling her fingers around his in unspoken sympathy...for a moment only...then releasing him. They both knew why he had avoided the various entertainments offered Below for so long. Gatherings reminded him of love. And Catherine. And for so long he couldn't block out the emotions. It was getting better, now. Slowly. They walked in silence a while, but the sense of companionship and the playfulness of the moment remained.

They stopped in at Vincent's chamber to pick up Jacob from Brooke, and the child's delight in seeing his father again made Diana's heart constrict. She teased Vincent as she crossed her arms to keep from reaching for the little boy. "Don't you ever hold that child, Vincent? He acts as



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though he hasn't seen you in weeks."

Jacob had wrapped his tiny arms tightly around Vincent's neck and had buried his face in his father's mane.

Vincent merely shook his head, smiling softly. "He is like this always, Diana. If I leave him for only a moment. Yet he does not appear to mind when I leave."

Brooke's merry laughter reminded them that she was still there. "You two had better hurry, or the children will think you're not coming. Are you sure you don't want me to keep him until you get back? I don't mind."

"No, but thank you, Brooke," Vincent answered, seeming content.

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An area had been cleared in Father's study to make a small stage, and Diana wondered briefly what they'd done with the mountains of books. She blushed when Father reached over to hug her and thank her for effecting his rescue. "S'okay. It's my job."

Father tilted an eyebrow at her and smiled. "Ah. But you seem to go above and beyond the call of duty, my dear. In any case, I owe you my life, and I won't forget."

Diana could feel Vincent's attention on her, and she didn't want to draw this out. She just shrugged helplessly. "Glad to help." Glancing up at Father, she smiled and was relieved when he merely nodded.

Zach began asking everyone to take their seats, so Vincent ushered her to a row of mismatched chairs. Once they were settled, Diana paid careful attention to the children's play. For such young children, the performance was well done, complete with sound effects and props. Samantha had an old mop on her head to serve as witch's hair; Magda, a little younger, had somehow come up with an old wig. Tabitha and Sally, without such aids for their enhancement, had managed to wildly tousle their long hair.



Some old silly putty made wonderful witches' noses for the lot. Vincent leaned toward Diana and informed her that Pascal had helped with the makeup, and one of the helpers had contributed dry ice to make the cauldron smoke. Diana wondered where they had actually found the cauldron itself for Scene I, because that was certainly what it looked like. She asked Vincent.

"It was in one of the storage rooms. No one remembers any longer where it came from originally. William is delighted to have unearthed it. He says he can find many uses for it."

There was a "Shhhh!" from Father, who pointed to the "stage."

Geoffrey, lurking in the background, rattled some old tin for the effect of thunder.

The three "witches" entered, and Diana felt herself rise reflexively an inch or so...automatically reaching to help...as Magda tripped on her long black dress and pulled it up hastily. Vincent didn't pull his hand back when Diana slipped hers inside it.

Samantha as first witch:

"Thrice the brindled cat hath mew'd."

Tabitha as second witch:

"Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined."

Magda as third witch:

"Harpier cried 'Tis time, 'tis time."

Samantha as first witch:

(beginning to walk around the cauldron)

"Round about the cauldron go;

In the poison'd entrails throw.

Days and nights has thirty-one.

Swelter'd venom sleeping got.

Boil thou first i' the charmed pot."

Diana braced herself and squeezed Vincent's hand...hard. She glanced up to see his lip twitch in an almost-smile.

All witches:

"Double, double toil and trouble;

Fire burn, and cauldron bubble."

Diana managed not to disgrace herself by giggling, and Vincent's gentle squeeze on her hand told her he was pleased with the evening. Her block was up, so she had to rely on touch alone for encouragement, so she was glad he'd let her hold his hand. *S'okay*, she thought. *He's gonna be okay. Maybe not now, but eventually.*

Father seemed pleased with the performance and congratulated the children on a job well done, and Vincent and Diana offered their praise as well.

After the play was over and the sets and special effects removed from Father's study, Vincent helped William move the huge cauldron to the kitchen. Diana walked companionably with Vincent back to his chamber to put Jacob down in his crib. They laughed quietly over some of the incidents in the play, but agreed that overall, the children had done very well. Vincent had become quieter, and Diana unaccountably felt more shy around him than she had for some time.

Once Jacob was settled, they stood over the baby watching him, with Diana leaning over, hands on the sides of the crib.

Vincent's voice when he spoke was full of love. Though he spoke very gently, very quietly, Diana wondered how such a soft voice could fill a room...fill her very soul. "Every time I look at him, the miracle fills me anew."

Diana smiled. That much she could definitely understand. "He *is* beautiful."

The wondering voice behind her continued, and she dared not look toward its owner. "I've looked into his eyes a thousand times. Why does his power never diminish?"

With that small miracle gazing back up at her, Diana knew the answer. "You can never run out of hope for a newborn child."

Vincent's voice became very sad, and Diana's heart constricted with sorrow for him. "Sometimes...in my nightmares, I relive what happened. All the loss. All the pain. All that I put us both through."

Diana turned to look up at him. She wasn't really sure who he meant by *us*...him and Catherine...him and the baby, or him and her...perhaps all of them...but she wasn't about to interrupt.

"But then...in an instant it vanishes. Carried off by his wailing cries."

Diana stepped back from the crib and folded her hands...to keep herself from reaching out to the man beside her. She wanted to embrace him...promise him that it really *would* be better eventually. "He can make it all right," she assured him.

Vincent's eyes didn't leave the small form in the crib. "Nothing can make *all* of it right." His thoughts appeared to take a sudden shift, and his eyes lifted to meet hers. "Diana.... You have done so much for both of us. Why?"

Now, Diana *was* embarrassed...and caught entirely off guard. She hated it when she had to block him. She never knew how he was feeling then. How could she tell him why, when she didn't even know the answer herself? Now, of course, it was different. She would do anything at all for him. But *then*--when it was happening--*why*? She looked down, then up again, smiling tentatively as she hugged herself. "I... When it was happening...I never questioned it.... I don't know, Vincent. *You* make everything so possible.... I couldn't help but want to help you."

Looking down, Vincent seemed uneasy...as embarrassed as Diana felt. Then, his gentle smile as his eyes touched hers again sent shivers through her. "Jacob is not

my only blessing," he said quietly.

"You're thinking of Catherine." Once more, for the moment, Diana felt safe. The focus was off her.

"Always...." His pause was longer this time, more deliberate. "And...I'm thinking of you."

That comment once again set her emotions reeling. For a second she almost didn't breathe. She looked away, then down...back up...anywhere but directly at those intense eyes. She simply didn't know what to say...how much or how little...but she had to respond. Almost stammering, she said quietly, "Sometimes I wonder...how all of this can be happening, and whether I really belong here or not." She finally met his eyes a moment, and he seemed about to speak, but she rushed on, "Your...your world is...." She shook her head. She couldn't think. *What am I trying to say?* "I don't know...where I'm going anymore. I don't know where I'm going to be tomorrow...." She didn't know what he was trying to tell her, or what she was trying to tell him...only that something was there, between them at this moment, and something had to be said. But she couldn't promise anything any more than he could. But when she looked up, resting her eyes on his gentle, strangely beautiful face, he shook his head ever so slightly, and there was an acceptance there, in that face...those eyes...that had not been there before. A feeling that life still held promise. "Tomorrow will come, Diana. We can only live each day as it comes to us...with its pains and joys, and all of its gifts."

*Oh, God,* Diana thought, with a pain that was so achingly sweet. *What is happening to me?* She struggled to change the subject...which was becoming so confusing. Her voice broke a little as she asked, "Could I hold him?"

Without a word, Vincent leaned over and gently picked up his son and placed him in Diana's arms, where she held him, feeling as though she'd been given a treasure beyond all measuring. She looked up at Vincent, but his eyes were still on his son. Her heart felt as though it would burst from her. Vincent stood so close she could feel the warmth of his body, felt the brush of the leather against her sweater...could smell the wonderful scent that was so uniquely his own. But it was all right. It wasn't desire she felt right now...only an overwhelmingly tender, protective love for this gentle man and his miracle child.

"There is no one, save myself, who has more right, Diana."

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Later, as Vincent walked Diana home, the silence, the quietness between them was, as usual, comforting. Her presence tonight had given him much joy, and had also given him much to think about...about his life. She had told him that he made everything so possible. Such a strange thing to say, yet...he could see the truth in it. He had been born, had survived...and he had loved Catherine and been loved by her. So much more than he had ever hoped for in his life. And now, he had his son...his and Catherine's.

And such a friend as Diana.

The exit loomed near, and the end of the evening. They both hesitated. Finally, Vincent nodded at the ladder leading Above, to her world. "Here we are, once again," he said, thinking of the first time he'd escorted her out after the Naming Ceremony.

Diana fidgeted restlessly, but smiled up at him. "I had a wonderful time, Vincent. I haven't enjoyed myself so much in a very long time. The children were wonderful, and...I enjoyed your company."

A smile lifted the corners of his unusual mouth. "I, too, had a wonderful time. I'm glad you came."

"Goodnight, Vincent."

He nodded. For a moment, he had words on his tongue, in his mind, that he would have liked to have spoken, but those words would have taken him into subjects that he was not ready to face. He wanted to discuss Catherine with her, but he did not wish to take advantage of her generosity. Besides...her openness with him encouraged confidences. Too many at times. But there was trust between them. "Goodnight, Diana. Sleep well."

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After Diana went Above, Vincent found his footsteps drawn Above also, to the cemetery. To Catherine. He had not been there since the night Diana had found him when he had gone there to die.

He approached the grave slowly and stood before the cold stone where Catherine's name was carved. The grass had grown in and the mound had settled. Folding his long legs beneath him, he sat, plucking at a strand of grass. "Catherine." His voice broke. He had come to talk with her, but now he was here, he didn't know what to say. "Our son is beautiful, Catherine. He gives me strength, and courage to go on. I am trying, Catherine, to go on. As I know you would wish. But it is difficult without you...knowing that I will never again feel you coming toward me, or see your face lit with love...and know that you love me. I never deserved your love, Catherine, yet you gave it freely and with such courage. Even when the man you loved was gone and only the beast remained. I am so sorry I cannot remember.... I cannot even give that to you. I do not even have the grace to remember your loving me."

Vincent did not take any notice of the tears that fell. He tried, finally, to talk of other things...kinder things. "Diana came Below tonight to listen to the children. They performed Act IV of *Macbeth*." He smiled a little through his tears. "You would have loved it, Catherine. How Samantha spoke so seriously through the strands of that ridiculous mop on her head, and how small Magda tripped on her mother's dress as she came in. They performed very well, with few errors and little need for cuing. I laughed with Diana tonight. I think it is the first time in a long time that I have genuinely laughed. I think you would like Diana, Catherine...but she puzzles me...even disturbs me at

times."

Vincent did not care for the turn his mind was taking. He wished to discuss Catherine with Diana...but it felt traitorous somehow to speak of Diana to Catherine. He wished to think only of kinder times and to try to recapture some of the magic. His mind wandered back through his memories: times with Catherine when they had laughed with one another. Life had seemed so precious then. He tried to hold those memories close for tonight, and to forget the darkness. Rising, he dusted off his pants, and spoke again. "Goodnight, my Love. Sleep well."

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Sighing as she stacked the dishes in the drainer, Diana dried her hands and headed for her computer. Later, she would finish her final report on the Bellwood case, but for now, she wanted to record her feelings in her journal. She turned the computer on, pulled up the word processing program and her journal.

*Tonight was so strange and wonderful. So different from all the other times with him. We laughed. Both of us. I was afraid to let down my barrier even for a moment tonight. But he seemed so much better. I even felt comfortable teasing him, and he in teasing me back. But later, in his chamber, it was as though both of us came too close to something we were unsure of. At least that was how I felt. He, too, seemed hesitant and shy. Now, though, if I reach out for him, I still sense that underlying sadness. Still, it is not so deep tonight...as though our evening let some light into those dark places. I hope that's true. I look at him and I become lost. As I told him, or tried to, I don't know what I'm doing anymore. His very existence, his presence in my life, has so changed the way I look at everything; what I want for my future; how I view everything I've done in my past. Each morning when I wake up, the day is colored by my emotions toward him and my sense of him. Nothing is the same. And he doesn't know, doesn't understand. Right now he's still so full of his own grief and despair that he can't see anything clearly, and I can't let him see, in any case. If I do, he'll never come back. I know that. Worse, he would stay away to protect me from him...just as he always protected Catherine. We have to go so gently...both of us. He still has to face the fact that Catherine is gone and that he is alive, with the same needs and desires he had before she died. He feels such guilt for still living...and for his desire; he believes he shouldn't experience desire now that she's gone. Because he doesn't remember the love they shared, the guilt is tearing at him. Until he comes to terms with those issues, he can never go forward, and he will destroy us both. He must talk about his nightmares. Work it out. He's got to.*

Diana saved the file, then exited. Reluctantly, she pulled up her report file and began working. After another half-hour or so she was done, and she headed for bed. She



knew that tonight the dreams would be different. She still wondered if any of *her* dreams or her part in his ever penetrated more than Vincent's subconscious. She thought not. He would refuse to recognize them if they did, or he would attribute them to his own desire, and feel guilty. The thought that she might be adding to his load of guilt disturbed her, but she really didn't see what she could do about it, so she settled in for the night.

*When Diana did finally dream, she walked with Vincent in the park. She knew he didn't see her as herself but only as Catherine as he bent his head to hers, whispering. That would hurt, later--when she woke--but for now it didn't matter. She would be whatever he wished for her to be. Whatever gave him peace. Right now, that was all that mattered. It was all she could give. As she murmured her words of encouragement, she knew he heard only Catherine's voice...but that, too, didn't matter. She'd told him, and he'd heard. Somewhere, deep inside him, he was aware of her. She had to believe that.*

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## GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

We play games with one another,  
each pushing the other around  
like pieces on a checkerboard--  
The strange and unsure dance of friends  
learning to become lovers.

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Several weeks passed fairly uneventfully. Diana started another case--a murder investigation which had her stumped. When Vincent sent Kipper with an invitation to come Below, just for a visit, she was delighted. Vincent had come to her loft several times in the past weeks, and his quiet companionship had been as comforting for her as she felt hers had been for him. It kind of tickled her, the way he watched her. *Trying to figure me out*, she supposed. The dreams, however, were becoming more intense, and the lack of proper sleep was playing havoc with her concentration. She knew something had to be done, but in order to help him, she first had to get him to open up about what was bothering him. She wished she didn't have to be the one to do it.

Diana had been thinking about the problem when Kipper came with his message, and as the boy led her through the twisting tunnels, she was still trying to figure a way past this impasse. Every day that passed, Vincent's wall became thicker and harder for anyone to penetrate. She knew he needed to talk about the problems bothering him.

Even now, after all this time, Vincent rarely spoke of anything personal, only surface ideas, polite table-talk type of stuff, or if it *was* personal it was usually about his activities, his friends, or about the baby. The first major exception to the rule had been when he'd been with her in her loft after the explosion on the *Compass Rose*. Once he'd begun speaking, he'd talked almost compulsively until he reached a certain point. Then there was the other time, when he'd made the astounding statement that he could not remember when Jacob had been conceived. The desperation she'd felt from him before he'd broken off and left abruptly, had been intense. *He needs desperately to talk to someone, to share his pain, but the door to that pain is tightly closed and locked against the world. Even, perhaps, against himself.*

Diana knew Vincent prided himself on his honesty and frankness. He would never tell an outright lie. But Diana knew him better than he knew himself. She knew he lied to *himself* daily. And those lies by omission became harder and harder to ignore. *The longer it goes on, the thicker the wall becomes between the truth and what he perceives as truth. No one else seems to notice. It's got to be me.*

As they traveled, Kipper told Diana about Jacob, and about how pleased Vincent had been when the baby sat up for himself, just yesterday. When he finished his story, Kipper pointed down the tunnel and announced cheerfully,

"You know the way from here. I gotta go. Samantha wants me down at the Reach."

Diana followed the tunnel past several branching pathways to Vincent's chamber. "Vincent?"

Vincent's vibrant voice called softly from inside. "Diana. Come in."

When Diana walked into the chamber, she stopped, absolutely charmed. Vincent was lying on the patterned rug, playing with his son. The stained glass behind them cast an amber glow over the scene that almost made it look like a painting. Jacob was sitting by himself, waving his chubby arms playfully in Vincent's direction. When the baby tried to swivel his head to look at Diana, however, he began toppling over, but Vincent's hand was immediately behind him, catching him and steadying him.

"He's getting so big." Diana knelt beside the baby.

Jacob threw himself forward enthusiastically, missing the floor with his nose by scant inches, then half pulled, half crawled into Diana's lap. Diana was delighted. Vincent had regaled her with tales of how Jacob was beginning to crawl, getting into things everywhere, and how Jamie and Mouse had somehow come up with a playpen to keep him from hurting himself. Vincent had concluded that eventually they would have to affix some kind of net over the top to keep him in, as he was already trying to climb out.

Diana hugged the child and murmured to him. "Such an athlete you are!"

The baby's pudgy fingers pulled at her braid, stuffing it into his mouth, chewing and pulling until it was almost entirely undone. She rocked back and forth as the baby chewed on her hair until he finally began falling asleep.

When Diana looked up, Vincent's face was still and his gaze distant. "What is it, Vincent?"

He brought himself back from wherever his mind was--obviously with effort--and managed a smile. "I take such joy in Jacob, Diana, but it saddens me that Catherine cannot be here to see him grow, watch his accomplishments and delight in them."

Diana drew in a ragged breath. She knew, even without dropping her barrier, that he was starting down again into one of his dark moods. *Damn. Got to do something.* "How do you know she can't, Vincent? She's always with you. I know that, just as I know that my Mom and my Dad are still watching over me, though they're gone."

Vincent looked up finally, but his eyes were shadowed a deeper blue. Diana said quietly, "Let's put Jacob down,

and then I'll play you a game of chess."

"You don't play chess." Vincent smiled...just a little, but it was a smile.

"How do you know? There's a lot you don't know about me. I'm full of surprises."

As Vincent reached for Jacob to put him down, his eyes met hers and he chuckled. "I imagine you *are*."

---

Diana sat staring at the chessboard with such intense concentration that Vincent thought perhaps she was trying to bore a hole through it. It had been so long since she'd looked up or said anything, that Vincent finally asked: "Diana? Have you fallen asleep?"

"Hush. I'm thinking."

Vincent smiled ruefully. When Diana thought, life could get complicated. He sighed, waiting for her to make up her mind. There was no way she could get out of the trap he had her in, but she was determined. He knew she hated to lose, and obviously he'd been right: chess was not her game.

As Diana continued staring at the board, Vincent thought back over the last few months. He had been so depressed for so long that it seemed a natural state of being by now. *Catherine*. The name hung in his mind, along with her image, constantly. Only the naming ceremony for Jacob had helped at all, and the visits he'd made to Diana's loft. He'd managed not to lose himself to the darkness, or retreat to the quiet of the lower tunnels only due to Diana's quiet solidity. She helped anchor him. He watched her and remembered that she used that same intensity in her work...in everything she did. Leaning his elbow on the table, he rested his chin in his hand. He allowed his thoughts to return to Catherine. It was hard to pinpoint what it was he missed about her the most. He missed everything about her. Lost in his thoughts, Vincent was startled out of his reverie by Diana's voice.

"Damn. I give up." She sat back and stretched, her hands locked behind her neck. Their eyes met for a moment and she grinned. "I hate chess."

Vincent chuckled, a low rumble resembling a purr. "I know. I also know you challenged me to this game only to keep me occupied. Don't you have other things you should be doing?"

Diana reached over with a forefinger and flicked his king over. "Tons. But I don't want to do them any more than I want to play chess, and I'd rather be here. Avoidance can be an art form."

Vincent sighed hugely once more. He knew about avoidance: he'd become an expert in that long ago. Avoiding Diana's gaze, he rose, stretched, and wandered across the chamber to the crib where Jacob slept. He stood looking down at the infant, hiding behind the fall of his chestnut hair as he bent his head in sorrow. When he looked back at Diana, she had turned and rested her arm on the back of the chair. Diana's look was watchful, but not pitying. She

never pitied him: or, if she did, he was unaware of it. He was grateful for that.

He turned back to Jacob. Behind him, he heard Diana stir, but didn't turn. Finally, he heard her voice, soft as the darkness, behind him...and he turned to her. He noted she'd put away the chess pieces.

"I'll take the set back to Father, Vincent. Perhaps we can take a walk when I get back?"

Vincent nodded silently, then added noncommittally, "Perhaps."

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Father looked up from his reading and smiled when he saw Diana in the doorway. "Well? Who won...as if I don't know."

Diana smiled, but not enthusiastically. "He did, of course. Chess just isn't my game. Don't know why; I understand it well enough, and I like puzzles. I guess I'm just not enough of a strategist. I feel things instead, and chess isn't about feelings." She placed the chess set on the desk in front of Father, then thrust her hands into the pockets of her sweatsuit and wandered the room. She obviously wasn't ready to leave. She walked from bookshelf to bookshelf, sometimes craning her neck to read titles on books set upside down or sideways.

Father put aside his book and patted the seat of the chair next to him. His years in the tunnels and his role as father to so many children had given him a sixth sense when it came to knowing when people needed to talk. "Come sit down, my dear. What is it?"

Diana shrugged, but obeyed rather meekly, which surprised Father tremendously. Diana didn't seem like either the meek...or obedient sort. For the short time he'd known her she had always seemed extremely independent and strong-willed. He watched her a little critically. When Diana sat, she still said nothing, and didn't quite meet his eyes. She twisted a strand of hair abstractedly while continuing to run her eyes over the room. Father cleared his throat and asked: "Is it Vincent?"

Diana raised her eyes briefly and nodded. She sighed. "I don't know what to do to help, Father, and I can't bear it."

Father shook his head mournfully. "This kind of pain can only be endured until it passes. We can only be here for him, and you are doing that." Father paused a moment and watched the changing emotions on Diana's face. Diana had become very dear to him in past months. Her rescue of Vincent and Jacob, then of himself, had broken down any barriers he might have had against a stranger. And Diana was certainly no longer a stranger, but a dear friend. He had learned to read her fairly well past that mask she presented to the world. At least, he felt he could. "I do, however, get the definite impression that there is more you are not telling me."

Diana seemed to pause a moment...even opened her

are not telling me."

Diana seemed to pause a moment...even opened her mouth to speak, then snapped her mouth shut, shook her head slightly and smiled. "No. Nothing. Don't mind me, Father. I guess I'm just used to being able to grasp a problem and wrestle with it until I solve it. I feel...helpless...is all. Guess I don't like it much." She rose awkwardly, all long legs and angles, her long red hair down in her face, and brushed the dust off her arm. She grinned at him then and offered, "I could get Mary and we could give this place a good cleaning for you...."

Father looked alarmed. "Don't you dare!"

Her face softening, sobering a little, Diana tapped the desk with her fingertips and glanced up at him once more. "Thanks. Gotta go. Vincent's taking me for a walk...or I'm taking him. I'm not sure which. Could you keep an eye on Jacob for him? I know he won't want to leave...he's in one of his moods."

Father rose and picked up his book. "Certainly. I'll come with you just to be certain he does."

As they walked back to Vincent's chamber, Father felt he should give Diana one small bit of advice. "You know, chess is a great deal like life, Diana. A lot of things take you by surprise, but there are rules to be followed...and a proper time for everything."

Diana's huge eyes lifted to his and she smiled a slightly deprecating smile. "I know...believe me...I know."

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Arriving at Vincent's chamber with Father, Diana stopped a moment when she saw Vincent. He turned to face them when they entered, his red-gold mane tousled and gleaming in the candlelight. When he turned those incredible azure eyes to hers, though, she looked away. There was an awkward silence: no one spoke.

Finally, Father broke in, "I came with Diana to watch Jacob so you could go Above for a walk."

Vincent glanced once more at his son, then smoothed the small quilt with one long-nailed hand. "I hate to leave him, but...thank you, Father." He glanced up at Diana. "It *would* be more polite to escort my guest at least partway home."

Hurt a little by the implication that Vincent only wished to be with her for politeness' sake, Diana commented a little caustically, "I hardly need an escort, Vincent. I'm a big girl now, but the *company* would be appreciated."

Vincent sighed, walked to his desk and lifted his mantle from the back of the chair and swung it over his shoulders. He held out a hand for Diana...which she did not take. He dropped his hand back to his side and shrugged.

They walked side by side quietly, not looking at one another. Vincent's dark leather and wool cloak swept against Diana's legs and her arm brushed against his leather sleeve briefly before she drew back. Once her barrier was built carefully between them, and it was safe to touch him, Diana reached out tentatively to take his hand...almost an

apology...and when he felt the warmth, the softness of her hand in his, he stopped and gazed at her.

She smiled briefly at the confusion she knew he was feeling. She was so unlike anyone he'd ever known: aloof...alone...quiet. She liked the fact that she was a puzzle to him. *Keep a little of the mystery of the old country about ye, dotter*, her Dad used to tell her. Well, she was following his advice...even if it *was* because she had no choice. Vincent was still looking down at her with that intense gaze, and Diana finally smiled a little self-consciously. "What is it?"

Looking a little confused, he shook his head slightly. "I don't know. You just puzzle me, Diana. Sometimes I wonder why you bother with me at all. I know I must be a terrible trial to you. I must depress you unutterably...yet, you keep trying to cheer me up."

Diana swallowed through a throat made dry with emotion. "I'm a helper now...remember? helpers help. Besides, that's what friends are for. Now shut up and let's go for our walk." She smiled to take the sarcasm from her comment, and squeezed the hand she still held.

They walked for a while, eventually heading out into the park after all. Diana smiled briefly when Vincent finally asked, "Are you working tonight?" She knew he liked to watch her work.

"Yeah. Have to. I still can't figure out what's going on. I know that the warehouse owner was doctoring records, but I still haven't found any clear indications of who killed him. Too many people had reason to want him out of the way." Diana sighed, then cocked her head, taking in the sight of Vincent standing there, leaning against the tree. *Looks like some damn mythological hero standing there, the moonlight making his hair silver instead of gold. All he needs is a sword and a sidekick. He already has the cape.* She pictured herself dressed as he was, both of them with swords at hand, horses ready to go.... *Easy, Bennett. Time for a reality check.*

Vincent shifted uneasily under her gaze. He seemed once again to be fighting some kind of battle within himself. Diana temporarily dropped her block to see what she could sense, but strangely felt very little from him. There had been many times in recent weeks when her sense of him had all but disappeared temporarily...always after some deeply painful memory...or after or during those intensely sexual dreams she'd been picking up on...the ones that had been playing such havoc with her sleep.

Diana still had no idea how to turn the key to the lock in Vincent's mind and heart; how to get him to look beyond that door to face what was inside, and until he did, she knew he could never get beyond his pain. Suddenly feeling a little depressed, she sighed suddenly. "I need to get back to work. Would you like to come along? Maybe you can come up with something. Perhaps you can see something I missed, or reinforce something I already know."

He hesitated. "I need to get back to Jacob and relieve Father."

"I'll meet you at the loft...the roof. Race? It'd be fun."

"Race? I would beat you easily...even having to detour through the tunnels."

Diana grinned as her hope rose. She knew Vincent loved a challenge. Few people challenged him, even playfully. *This has potential. Play this right, Bennett.* "Are you sure you can win?"

Vincent looked perplexed, but she could feel his amusement growing. He was so seldom amused by anything lately. "You would lose."

"Um. Depends." Diana could almost feel him weighing his options and mentally comparing the separate routes they would have to take to reach the same destination. He was a born strategist. Finally, he answered. "Are you ready?"

"Yes." Diana grinned.

Vincent turned back toward the tunnels, then nodded. "Go."

Diana ran. She jogged regularly and trained periodically at the NYPD training grounds: she was in top shape, and knew it. Besides...she knew a short-cut.

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Vincent ran steadily through the tunnels to reach the alley near Diana's loft. It was still a little too early to be safely traveling the streets Above for the entire distance; too many people were still abroad. His route was a little longer than Diana's path through the park, but he was still fairly confident. Then he began worrying: he'd seen Diana run. She was fast, and she was tenacious. He decided to try for a train. It was a calculated risk, especially since the subways were often crowded at this time of night. When he got to the station it was far too crowded, and even the shadows were not safe. Annoyed, he turned and headed down the tunnels on an alternate route. He'd lost, and he knew it. Somehow, Diana would get there ahead of him.

By the time he managed to reach Diana's roof, she was already there. She looked like she'd barely beaten him home. Despite the cold, her hair was plastered to her face and neck and her sweats clung wetly to her back and breasts. The sweat glistened on her face. As the wind whipped around the building in a sudden gust, she shivered, and Vincent slipped his cloak off to wrap around her.

She laughed between gasps and shrugged the cloak off, handing it back to him. "Come on. Let's go in, and I'll shower while you look through my notes on the case."

Vincent saw her through the door, then backed up. "Perhaps I should go." He was strangely ill-at-ease in her presence. He wanted to leave. Badly.

She grabbed his mantle and tugged at him. The action was totally useless. "Uh uh. C'mon. You *said* you'd help. I really wanted you to take a look at my file. Maybe you can see something I've missed. It really *would* help."

Reluctantly, Vincent allowed himself to be drawn inside. He was intrigued in spite of himself, and coaxed out of his shell once more. Putting aside the vague unease, he followed Diana into her office space, which made up the

greatest part of her loft area. He thought of how often recently he had rested on her couch, or on the floor and watched her work, fascinated by her intensity and enjoying the blessed quiet of the loft. Sometimes he read or listened to music, but mostly he watched her. Strangely, she didn't seem to mind. Even when his eyes were on her for hours, her intensity never wavered. Often he had to stop her to remind her to take a break. He knew few people who were that intense about their work...could lose themselves in what they were doing so thoroughly. Pascal was one of them. Strangely, Mouse was another. He smiled at the comparison; envied them.

Diana called him over to the computer and he watched as she booted it up, called up the word processing program, selected her file, and began the printout. The noise of the printer seemed very loud as they stared at one another. Suddenly, Diana's scent hit Vincent like a blow. Here, in the closed air of the loft, with no wind to blow the odor way, her perspiration brought her scent--heavy and very female--to him. It hung in the air around them, and his desire rose abruptly.

Angry with himself, confused, and more than a little frightened, Vincent spun away and paced to the window. He flipped the light off and looked out at the lights of the city, feeling very alone and lonely. And very needy. Taking deep breaths, he closed his eyes and fought the tide that rose within him. *Catherine. Catherine. Catherine.* He repeated her name...a litany and a chant, trying desperately to put something between himself and this presence which fought with him from inside, as it tried to eat its way through him. He was angry with himself that he could even imagine desiring anyone else but Catherine. He'd tried so desperately never to even allow himself to think of Catherine whenever he felt this way. It was...unsuitable...and very dangerous.

Finally, he managed to force the feelings to the background. He turned, expecting to find Diana, and was surprised and relieved that she had gone from the room and left him the printout. He'd been so involved in his inner battle that he'd not even noticed that she'd left. Gratefully, he walked over and picked up the printout, and took it to the couch to read it. He settled back into the comfortably worn cushions.

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When Diana had felt Vincent's sudden surge of desire, it had affected her just as profoundly as it had him. It took her completely by surprise, and she was grateful when he spun away to face the window, because her knees felt so weak she almost couldn't stand. After taking several deep breaths, she detached the printout and laid it carefully on the desk for him, then shakily traversed the short route to the bathroom. The shower--cold, of course--brought her feet firmly onto the ground.

Vincent was still reading when she returned to the living room, wrapped comfortably in her worn terrycloth

robe over fresh sweats, and heavy socks, her wet hair plastered to her head and beginning to curl softly around her face. The layers of clothing provided a psychological barrier. She understood now that there was another reason--besides the chill of the tunnels--why Vincent dressed the way he did. Diana stood watching Vincent as he read. She knew he was aware of her, and aware of her scrutiny. She towed her hair and smiled. *Score one, Bennett. At least he noticed you're a girl.* Unfortunately, her own desire hadn't ebbed in the least, despite the shower. It was going to be a very lonely night tonight after he left. Sighing, she built her barrier once again and walked across to join him on the couch. She watched him silently while he finished reading.

Finally refolding the last page of the printout and straightening the pages, he handed it back to her and stated: "The wife had a lover."

Startled, Diana answered, "Yes. So what?"

"The lover killed him."

Diana grunted and drew her feet up, wrapping her arms around her knees. "I thought of that. But there's no proof. I have a gut feeling you're right, but you can't convict on that. I just wanted to see if you saw the same pattern I did." She shrugged. "I'll get it eventually."

Vincent's wry voice commented, "You always do." When she glanced up at him, he was smiling, his gaze penetrating. "I've wondered how someone with a mind like yours could possibly play such an abominable game of chess."

Diana kept her eyes and voice level. "Just my fate, I suppose." She stretched and tossed the printout onto the end table. "Thanks. Now that I know you see the same things I do in the case, it gives me incentive to keep digging. Sometimes I lose track, y'know? Get too close. I *knew* it was the lover, but I can't find the one shred of evidence I need. Now it'll be easier to go through the existing evidence with a clear head."

"I enjoy helping. It is not often you ask for help of any kind from me."

Diana got up, stretched, and walked to the window, and Vincent rose as if to follow her. *That's true*, she thought. *Vincent helps*. That was much of who and what he was. He couldn't exist without giving. Diana glanced back at the serene gaze, knowing the terror and loneliness that seethed just below the surface. Hidden. Always hidden, because he couldn't bear to distress those he loved. So he gave them peace instead, even if it cost him his sanity to do it.

Diana's facade was not as solid as Vincent's, nor as controlled. She turned back to the window. She wasn't sure she could do this, but she'd gone to a lot of trouble to make sure he came up here tonight. Tempting him with the case...with the challenge of the race. She wasn't sure that now was the best time to address his lack of openness--with her, with his problems--with himself, but it had to be done sometime. And he'd just given her an opening. She took a deep breath. "I need to help, too, Vincent. But I don't

accept help real well."

Vincent's voice was gentle. A little rough. "Everyone must accept help from time to time, Diana. That is a basic precept in our world. Giving and receiving help."

"Yeah? Well you wouldn't know it by you." Even with her barrier up, she could sense his sudden wariness. Like a jungle cat who'd just scented danger.

"I...accept help," he protested. "From time to time. You have helped me."

Diana turned back to him and leaned hard against the window ledge. Felt the bite of the ledge into her arms. "You're such a liar, Vincent."

*That made him angry. "I never lie, Diana."*

"Only by omission. And mostly to yourself." Her level stare forced him to look away. "You're still having the nightmares, aren't you?" When he didn't answer, she wrapped her arms around herself and stared out at the lights of the city. Dropping her barrier once more, she felt Vincent's growing anxiety. *Carefully, now, Bennett. Watch your step. This is going to be like stepping on a mine. Got to open the wound, it's festering...but watch out for the backlash.* Never looking back at him, she stared out the window and finally asked quietly: "Tell me what it was like for you, never to have made love to Catherine. And now...after finally loving her...not to remember. At least not fully. How'd you deal with it then, and how are you are dealing with it now?"

She felt his shock at her question, and when she turned, his face was hard, his eyes like dark glass. "I should never have told you that to begin with. You are taking unfair advantage of our friendship. How can you ask me this?" She could feel his shock turning to anger, and she could see it evident in his face and the rigid set of his shoulders. She flinched a little inside, but her face remained impassive. He stepped back an unsteady step and looked away.

More gently, she added the quiet comment: "You need to talk about it, Vincent. Believe me. I know what it's like to hide from the truth. But it always finds you. In your dreams. In the silent steps behind you. In the mirrors of others' eyes."

He startled...stared at her for a moment of unseeing panic. She brought him back with a touch and drew him to the couch. She casually curled up next to him--just as though she didn't feel like she'd just dropped a snake in his lap--and drew her legs up under her. She locked eyes with him. "So talk. Please. I'm not being judgmental. I didn't know Catherine and I didn't know you, then. So it'll be like hearing about two people I don't even know. I want to know the Vincent you were then. Let the Vincent you are now tell me about him. About Catherine's Vincent."

Diana shivered a little as Vincent stared into her eyes. He was quiet for a long moment, then stood abruptly. He took a deep breath and began. "It was...is...difficult." He moved restlessly, pacing the rug in front of Diana. She was sure he was now unaware of her presence. Had dismissed her from his mind. He was obviously trying to organize his

thoughts, feelings. He looked as though he were about to unravel completely.

"Catherine was everything to me. A part of me. The desire was there, but the bond made it easier. I could feel her love surround me even without touch. But at times, when we were together...when I could feel the warmth of her body, when I held her close to me...yes. I wanted more. But we were both afraid. She had been brutalized by men: controlled by them. She needed me to protect her, not cause her additional distress. She wanted me. I could feel that. But she feared losing herself to...to me, I suppose. She was only just beginning to become *herself*. Separate from her father, her previous lovers. Everyone who had always controlled her. To give herself to me...and me being what I am, frightened her. As much as she loved me, that dark part of me frightened her, made her unsure."

He shook his head, blond mane flying, gesturing helplessly with his hands. Diana was a little afraid of what she'd unleashed. What she'd done to him. He paced a little faster and clenched and unclenched his hands. "And I...I feared losing control. I might harm her. And sometimes, when I killed for her, the rage and desire were mixed. I was so afraid. There was no way...no way we could get past the fear...until it was almost too late: I, when there was no control...no self left...and she, when she feared that unless she came to me, I would die and she would lose me."

When he raised his face to her, it was slick with sweat and tears, and lined with pain, the eyes shadowed to a deep indigo. "How can you do this to me, Diana? You, who claim to be a friend? No one else would dare."

Diana tried to remain impassive. Cold. To separate herself from his pain. "I can because I *am* your friend. Go on. You haven't answered the last part of the question."

Vincent scrubbed angrily at his eyes with the long hair on the back of his hand. "No. This is none of your business. I cannot believe I've said as much as I have. I cannot understand how you manage to drag things out of me that I can barely tell myself, much less anyone else." He drew himself to his full height, reached deliberately across her for his cloak, which he'd thrown over the back of the couch. "Goodnight, Diana." He strode, without looking back, up the stairs and out the door to the roof.

Diana didn't move after Vincent left the room. She chewed nervously on a nail, biting off the ragged edge. She was shaking. While Vincent had been speaking, she had opened herself to his emotions, and she was devastated. She'd known it was bad, but just how bad, she'd really had no idea. *God. What have I done?* She looked up toward the loft windows. She could sense him up there. He was so shaken he couldn't leave...and she didn't dare go to him. *What could I say?* Suddenly, she felt nothing from him. Her sense of him was completely gone. She rushed shakily up the stairs to find the rooftop empty. *Where'd he go? Why can't I sense him?* Diana turned and stumbled back down the stairs, panic making her careless. *You blew it this*

*time, Bennett, she told herself. Chess, indeed. You've got to be the lousiest strategist in the world. You should've known better. What did you expect him to do...or say? This isn't a case...he's not some suspect. You know enough psychology to know better than to try to get someone to face their problem by bludgeoning them with it.*

Diana paced the loft restlessly, looked out the window a while, then sat and tried to work. She attacked the keyboard as though it were the enemy...not her own stupidity. Perhaps if she lost herself in the case, she could calm herself. She dug into the file to find any indication that she and Vincent had been right. She flipped through photos, re-read transcripts of interviews, listened to her own tapes of her thoughts. Suddenly, standing in front of her evidence board, she spotted it. The one tiny piece of the puzzle that had been missing. She let out a whoop when she finally found the one thing that would place the lover at the scene of the murder. Evidence that would prove without a doubt that the murder had actually been a crime of passion rather than a retaliation. The lover had killed him, and now she could prove it. She made a quick call to Maxwell, who praised her for her persistence, and she told him she'd have to check with forensics for fingerprints. It had been a relatively unnoticed piece of evidence. She hoped they'd dusted it. Maybe if they were lucky they'd get prints. If not, she could still make it stick...it'd just be easier with prints.

Exiting the file and shutting down the computer, Diana walked to the kitchen to make some coffee, and her thoughts went uneasily back to Vincent. She wondered where he was...hoped he was all right. *I miss him when I can't feel him.* Finally, she couldn't stand it any longer. She threw her coat on, then headed Below. If she got lost, she'd find a sentry or beat on the pipes. If she irritated Pascal enough, he'd send someone. She couldn't count on her bond with Vincent to get her down there, because she couldn't feel him.

---

Outside, Vincent leaned against the rough brick of the wall and tried to regain his composure. The tears were coming faster now, as though the hole that Diana had punched in the dike had ruptured. He shook with anger that Diana had done this to him: that he had *allowed* her to do this to him.

After he left the rooftop, he became more and more upset. That taunting voice inside himself was becoming louder, more frequent lately, and he often saw the image of the creature within himself. He knew the creature was only a projection of his own subconscious, but it didn't matter; he was real enough to Vincent. That was all that mattered.

*Can't face reality yet, can you? I am you. You don't even remember completely...but I do.*

Vincent sought escape the only way he could, until finally the darkness overtook him and gave him peace. At least for a time. When he came to himself a while later he

was down in the maze. He had no sense of the time, but he knew he needed to get back to Jacob, so he headed back to the living area of the Hub. He hoped Father would not have been too worried.

When Vincent reached his chamber, he found Jacob's cradle empty, but could sense the child asleep and well in the nursery. Father had probably given up on him and taken the baby to Mary. It was late, but he knew Father would be waiting up for him, worried, so he made his way to Father's chamber to apologize for the inconvenience.

---

Diana had finally reached the Hub with Geoffrey's help, reaching Vincent's chamber, only to find it empty. She went then to Father's chamber and asked if he'd seen Vincent.

Father looked perplexed. "I thought he was with you. It is late, but he is often out into the early morning, so I left Jacob with Mary to put down with the infants. Is there something wrong?"

Suddenly realizing that there was no way she could tell Father what was wrong, Diana temporized. "No. Not really. I just...irritated him more than usual, and he left in a huff. I just wanted to check on him. Maybe apologize. It's nothing. I'll apologize next time." She turned and was about to leave when Vincent's bulk filled Father's doorway. They stared at one another for a long moment, then Vincent slowly descended the stairs, his mantle a soft whisper against the rails. He spoke to Father, his voice level and seemingly unconcerned.

"I regret I was delayed, Father. Was Jacob a problem?"

Father glanced from Diana to Vincent, then back again. Finally, he answered. "No, not at all. Mary has him now. Why not just leave him until morning?"

Vincent nodded, then swiveled his head her way and acknowledged Diana. "Diana."

Diana knew by now that Vincent's not acknowledging her immediately when he came in was an intentional rudeness...and that he knew she knew. She was also receiving extremely odd impressions from him. One moment he seemed to be glad to see her, and the next his mind swung toward anger. *Perhaps we're both confused.* She finally asked rather tentatively, "Could I have a word with you, in private?"

"Very well." Vincent looked to Father. "Excuse us, please. Thank you for keeping Jacob."

Father nodded, saying nothing.

Vincent walked silently at Diana's side toward his chamber, the only place they could be sure of any privacy. Diana felt as though there were a wall of ice between them, and she cursed her own stupidity. When they reached the chamber, Vincent lit the candles then turned to Diana. He didn't invite her to sit. Each seemed to be waiting for the other to speak, but eventually, Diana broke the silence.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked. It wasn't my place."

Vincent's gaze never wavered as he answered, his voice a little harsh: "No."

Diana felt his anger, but found courage to begin once more. "I never meant to hurt you...or at least hurt only to help."

Vincent dropped his eyes and his fingers explored the curves of the wooden chair next to the desk. Diana could feel a slight softening of his anger. She knew it was difficult for Vincent to maintain anger against people he cared about, and who he knew cared about him. "Perhaps. But you cannot know...even if I were to tell you...you *cannot* know. And it is too much...too large a thing for me to speak of. With anyone." When he raised his eyes, they were filled with pain. "In answer to the second part of your question: I do *not* deal with it...ever. I cannot, and will not. Now please, if you would be a friend, leave this."

Diana ached to go to him and embrace him. She wanted to enfold him and protect him from himself. But she knew that it would only cause more problems. One touch the wrong way right now and he'd be over the edge. Finally, she sighed heavily, built her block in her mind, and took his hand. As she looked into his gentle face, so scarred with the pain he'd suffered, she nodded. "All right. For now. But I'm here if you need to talk. Whatever you have to say won't shock me...won't make me not like you, or not accept you. You know that, don't you?"

Vincent nodded slightly. "I know. And I know you meant well, though I do not understand your purpose."

Diana squeezed his hand briefly, then rose to leave. "Someday maybe, when you're old enough, you'll understand. G'night."

---

Father was waiting in the passage as Diana left Vincent's chamber. He summoned her with a gesture into his study. She stood a little awkwardly on the stairs, balanced as if to run, and asked hesitantly: "Yes? What is it, Father?"

Father cleared his throat. "I assume all is well again?"

Shrugging uneasily, Diana answered, "As well as can be expected, I suppose." She met his eyes. "I'm truly a poor strategist, Father. But in this game, unlike in chess, people get hurt."

Father leaned against his desk and smiled. "Check, but not mate, eh?"

Diana looked at him oddly, then flashed him an embarrassed grin, her skin mottling in a blush. "No. But I'm working on it."

Diana turned and left, and Father stood staring after her. *Such an unusual woman. Perhaps as unusual as Vincent, himself, in many ways. She is good for him.*

He heard a slight sound at the doorway and turned to see Mary standing there with young Jacob in her arms. "Father, may I speak with you?"

"Of course, Mary. What is it?" Mary seemed anxious, so immediately Father became concerned. "Is something



wrong with Jacob?"

"Yes, Father. I didn't want to disturb Vincent, but Jacob has been crying all evening. In fact, he's been much fussier than usual lately in general."

Father laid his hand on Jacob's head. "He's cool, Mary. He hasn't been running any fever?"

Mary shook her head.

Patting her shoulder, Father tried to reassure her. "More than likely he's only teething."

She shook her head. "No. It's more than that. The bond between Vincent and the child has become stronger, and Vincent has been more distressed lately. Jacob feels it. I'm not sure how to approach Vincent about it."

As they were speaking, Vincent came to the door, and Mary glanced up quickly. Father called Vincent over. "Vincent, Mary tells me that Jacob has been more than usually fussy lately." He noted that Vincent did not immediately reach for the child, and instead, spoke gently to Mary.

"I'm sorry, Mary, that he has been difficult. I think, perhaps, I can remedy the situation, if you will consent to keep him for me a time."

Jacob obviously wanted his father to pick him up, and was pulling on Vincent's long mane and grabbing for the laces of his vest. Vincent simply murmured to him quietly and extricated his hair gently.

Mary looked from father to son, then said, "Of course, Vincent. You know I adore any chance to be with him."

Nodding and touching her face gently, Vincent whispered, "Thank you, Mary."

Once Mary had left with Jacob, Vincent turned to Father. He handed him a small envelope with Diana's name on it, written in his bold, exquisite handwriting. "I would appreciate it, Father, if you could see that Diana gets this. I will be unable to deliver it myself."

Father took the envelope and stared at it, then asked quietly, "Are you all right?"

Turning, leaning on the desk, Vincent spoke without facing his father. "I will be. In time. I have...matters...I need to attend to, Father. I must go away for a while." Vincent turned and started to leave, but Father caught his sleeve. Vincent stopped, though he didn't turn back.

"Vincent. You cannot always run away."

Vincent's head shifted a fraction, and he stared at Father through strands of hair. "Has it ever occurred to you that I might at times be running toward...or trying to? Besides, in this instance it is of no consequence anyway. Jacob cannot tolerate my presence when I am like this, so I must give him peace in the only way I can."

"And Diana? Does she also require this *peace*? Is that why the message?" Father's question held an edge of mild sarcasm.

Leaning his head back, Vincent sighed. "Perhaps I am the one who needs the quiet...the distance...in that case. Diana has a tendency to make me speak of things I do not wish to speak of, or even think of." He turned to Father with a rueful smile. "All right. I *am* running away. But I do

not wish to see her at this time. Does that satisfy you?"

"Not entirely. But I know by now that when you have your mind set, there is no changing it. Go. I'll see she gets the message."

Vincent nodded briefly and met Father's gaze. "Thank you, Father. I may be gone a while, so try not to worry."

After Vincent left, Father sat and stared at the envelope for a few minutes. He made a decision. He would deliver the note himself. Diana had seemed a little fragile when she'd left. If Vincent was as curt in the note as his attitude indicated, then perhaps he could soften the blow a little. Father was irritated with his son. *I made a huge mistake with Catherine. I hope I can make fewer of them with this relationship...if, indeed, it can even be called that.*

Father retreated to his bedchamber and changed to street clothes. While doing so, he thought back over the changes in his son's life since finding Catherine. Before Catherine Chandler had entered his life, Vincent's life had been productive and peaceful. But sterile. Father knew that. As Jacob Wells he knew it--and as the father of a very different son. *I knew, though, that he would be hurt. There was no way around it. I was right.* It gave Father very little satisfaction that he'd been correct. He wanted his son's happiness, but as with any parent there was little he could do to achieve such a miracle. He'd had to accept the hard fact that no one person can *make* someone else happy. Peace, satisfaction and joy had to come from within...with the individual's own decisions and the manner with which he faced his...or her...problems. He realized that within the parameters they'd established, Catherine and Vincent had been very happy. Their love miraculous. And had Fate not stepped in, perhaps in time they would have faced the obstacles to their relationship and overcome them.

Father took his cane and started up the stairs. He continued his silent reverie as he walked slowly toward the nearest tunnel exit. He tried to consider what would have happened had Catherine never come into Vincent's life. He realized that his son might well have withdrawn into himself over the years. It was Vincent's way to retreat into himself when he was unhappy...even as a child. *He is so generous and giving of himself that it's hard to believe, but it's true. There are few he's ever spoken to about himself...except myself and Devin. Now Devin is gone, and I...I disagreed with him so over his relationship with Catherine that I pushed him away.* Not that Father felt his objections had been unreasonable. The situation with Catherine had been unstable at best and always dangerous.

But now the situation was intolerable. Vincent still thought of Catherine constantly--but now Father knew that his son's thoughts were not of the joy they'd shared, but of all the anguish and grief that her loss had caused him. He knew because he, himself, had been in the same situation--barely existing--after his forced annulment from Margaret. Until his fortuitous meeting with John Pater had helped to give him a dream. The dream of building a new world. *It takes dreams to overcome nightmares.* When

Catherine had found Margaret and had brought her Below for her final week, it helped to heal him of the bitterness. *Catherine gave me seven days to say goodbye to Margaret...and to remember and relive the splendor of our youth.*

Father's limp was becoming more pronounced. His hip was bothering him, and he was unaccustomed to this much walking, but he was determined to see Diana. *I cannot give Catherine back to my son...to say goodbye to. I cannot...but Diana can.* How Father knew this, he wasn't sure. But he knew that Vincent spoke...actually *talked* with Diana. As he no longer did with anyone Below. *We are all too much a part of his old life. Of his memories.*

All Father could think of to do was to go to Diana and try to help heal the breach that seemed to be forming between them. There had to be *someone* that Vincent could speak to of his pain. If the spiral continued, madness would result. Father wasn't sure just what Diana and Vincent's relationship *was*. At this point he didn't care...as long as somehow she managed to hold Vincent in place. *And if anyone has determination enough to do it, Diana does.* Father smiled at the thought of the brash, redhaired detective. He wished he could have had some part in the rearing of her. Like Vincent, she'd have been a challenge. In the end, he'd loved Catherine. For herself, but also because she, too, had held Vincent in place. He was very fond of Diana.

---

When he left Father, Vincent began heading down, but before he ever reached his destination, his feet had turned the other way, and he headed back Above. He wandered the dark alleys, watching the late-night activities from the shadows. He was restless and anxious. Almost hungry for some way to release his frustration. Eventually, he found himself on the rooftop where Catherine had died. He remembered watching Gabriel as the man stared down from the helicopter...and once again felt the urge to rip the man's throat out. He knelt, resting his forehead on his knee, and wept. But when he finished weeping and the tears dried, the rage began again. Diana had denied him the opportunity of killing Gabriel. At the moment he wasn't grateful. So much had been taken from him...even the satisfaction of killing Gabriel with his own hands. He roared his frustration and anger repeatedly, then took again to the alleys to head once more to the lower levels of his world.

Fate, however took a hand.

Hearing a scream for help, Vincent turned immediately toward the sound. There was no way he could ignore a cry for help, and there was a surge of anticipation as he ran. He knew some part of him had been hoping--waiting--for this. He turned a corner to find two men with knives threatening a woman. At his roar, all three looked up. The woman screamed even louder, and ran. Vincent lost interest in her immediately. The two men, after their initial shock, stood their ground. The smaller assailant had a gun as well

as a knife, but one swat of Vincent's right hand sent it flying. The blood rushed through him and the battle song became louder. His rage and the blood lust took him completely. He no longer listened to the part of himself that cried quietly that this was wrong...but only heard the part of him for which this was life. The small man lunged with his knife, but only succeeded in slashing Vincent's shoulder before having his belly laid open. With the copper tang of blood feeding his rage and turning the world to a red haze, Vincent turned to the other man. With nowhere to go, his opponent fought fiercely, and Vincent was lost in the glory of battle. Finally, Vincent stood there alone, swaying silently in the dim glow of a distant streetlight. The alley was quiet and the blood scent was heavy. The red rage began clearing as Vincent fought for control, and when his mind cleared completely, the shame set in. After one horrified glance at his victims, he turned and stumbled away, rushing for the tunnels and darkness to hide that shame.

Once he reached the lower levels--far below the Home Tunnels--he slowed. He bathed in the black river that ran far below the city, and carefully washed his clothing. The wound in his shoulder was shallow and would heal quickly...unlike those wounds he'd left on the men Above. And what of the woman? Somehow, it really didn't matter to him if the woman said anything. She was inconsequential. She wasn't Catherine. He wasn't concerned that she'd seen him. Other than his visits to Diana, he intended to stay Below...and he'd already told Diana he would be gone a while. Even the killing, though it had been foul, failed to devastate him as completely as it usually did. He was too tired even for that. The initial shame had faded. Enough time later, for remorse. For now, he only felt satisfied. The rage was spent, and much of the desire. His mind was clear.

After sitting, naked, on the rocks without moving for a very long time, Vincent checked his clothes. They were, if not dry, at least dry enough to dress in. He did so, then continued his journey...his quest for memory and peace.

---

Diana was finishing up her report when the intercom buzzed. Puzzled, she went over to the button, pushed it, and asked, "Yes? Who is it?"

There was a hesitation, then the tinny voice came back: "Jacob Wells."

"Jacob?...FATHER? What...?" She stammered a moment. Of course she knew Father's name, but she'd forgotten momentarily. She'd become accustomed recently to thinking of him as *Father*...like everyone Below. But she knew that for Jacob Wells to come Above, from both what she'd observed, and what she'd been told, generally took an act of Congress...or at least an act of whatever served as Congress Below. Besides, she'd just left him. "I'm sorry, Father. I was surprised. Please, come on up."

Diana paced as the whine of the elevator filled the loft.

When the accordion door opened and Father stepped in, she knew something was wrong. "Okay. Give it to me. What's wrong with him now?"

Father fumbled in his pocket for Vincent's message. "Please. Don't be upset. He's simply gone below us to the lower levels again...exiled himself. He was upsetting Jacob."

Diana's perception of the room swirled a little. She could almost feel the blood rush to her head. She whirled away. "Damn, damn, damn." She stalked past the couch and swatted the cushion off and onto the floor. Then she stopped and turned. "What do you mean, *again*? Does he do this all the time, or just when he's pissed with me?"

Father's face changed color. He blushed. Then he pointed to the couch. "Diana, do you mind..."

Diana hastened to take his cane, "Oh, no, Father. Sorry. Please, sit." She took his hat, as well, then used the time it took her to take them to the coat tree to try and calm herself...and try to watch her language.

When she got back, she sat. "Sorry, Father. I just...I'm concerned. I mean, I said some things...inexcusable things. None of my business, really." She looked up. "He seemed okay, though, when I left...not *too* mad. I thought maybe he'd forgiven me."

Father sat fingering the message under his hand. "Diana. He often goes away by himself to think. It does not necessarily mean he's pi...um...angry with you." He handed Diana the message with a hand that shook a little.

"I don't know what it says, but..."

Reaching out for the message, Diana stared for a moment at the boldly written "Diana" on the outside, then opened it.

*Diana,*

*You have been a friend, and more than a friend, and I value that friendship and the trust we bear one another. I hold that very dear. At times, though, even friends may become too close, and for a time must be apart, for their friendship's sake. I think now is one of those times. I must be away for a while. You are always welcome Below, and please do not feel my presence is necessary for you to visit there. I know you and Father have become close.*

*I would tell you not to feel responsible for my leaving, but that would be a falsehood, and I would not have that between us. You have given me much to think on. Please do not feel you must come to me to make things right between us. There is nothing to be made right. You have done nothing wrong, but only given me food for thought. But for now, I think it is best we be far apart.*

*Vincent*

Diana stared so long at the note that she didn't notice when the words began blurring. She blinked to clear her vision then crumpled the note and threw it...hard. It



bounced off the wall. "Damn!" She stood and paced across the room, barely aware of Father at all. When he spoke, she turned to him, surprised.

"Is there anything I can do, my dear?"

Diana shook her head. She was angry and hurt. "No. Nothing, Father. Thank you." She headed to get Father's hat and cane. When she returned, she told him: "If Vincent comes back in the next week or so, tell him not to bother comin' around, okay? I got a lot of vacation on the books. Now this case is done, I think I'm gonna take some. Get away for a while."

"Diana...." Father began, but seeing her stricken look, he only patted her shoulder, helplessly. "I'll tell him, but promise me, Diana, that you will come back."

"Come back? Sure, Father. I live here. Work here. I gotta come back."

Father's eyes were moist with unshed tears, but when their eyes met, he said quietly, "No. I mean, back to Vincent."

Diana's lips tightened. "I don't know, Father. Can't promise anything. Remember how you told me that there's a time for everything?"

Father nodded.

"Well, maybe it's just time to call it quits, to run and not look back...before the time comes when it hurts too bad either to stay or to go."

Father started to say something else, but the shake of Diana's head stilled him. "'Bye, Father."

---

After Father left, Diana very calmly printed out her report and put it with her carryall. Then she went to the bedroom and pulled her Dad's battered suitcase out of the closet. She started throwing clothes in, not really paying a lot of attention as to what they were. Her mind was on other things. On Vincent. On Jacob, and Catherine...definitely on Catherine. *I'll never measure up. It's just as well. Maybe that's really why I block him, don't let him in. Not to protect him, but to protect myself.*

She dug around and found her boots, her worn tennis shoes, then dug in drawers for underwear, socks, Mark's oversize sweatshirt. She stopped, fingering the sweatshirt. She wondered how she'd thought she'd truly loved Mark...or any of them. What she'd felt for them was nothing in comparison to this. *Mark was right. I never let anyone all the way in. He came closest...and he knew.* But he was the only one who'd been at all aware. The rest, they hadn't even come close. But it hurt too bad, reaching out to give to them, and they couldn't feel it. It hurt. She wanted them to feel how much she cared, and they couldn't, and that killed it before it ever got started. But Vincent could feel her reaching out...if she let him...and she didn't dare let him...because he'd see too much. *Damned if I do, damned if I don't.*

Of course, Diana had also begun to suspect that she was too paranoid about blocking Vincent. It was almost as

though he'd deliberately--though subconsciously---blocked himself off from *her*...from any possibility of a bond forming. *He's too afraid of betraying Catherine, and somewhere, deep inside, he feels something for me. And he's scared.* She picked up a pillow and threw it against the wall. "Hell, Vincent. I'm scared, too. Why can't we be scared together?"

Once she was finished packing, Diana looked around, then made a decision. She picked up the phone and called Joe at home. When he answered, she could hear the TV in the background. At least she hadn't gotten him up. "Hey, Maxwell. It's Diana."

His voice lazy at first, Joe immediately snapped to attention. "Bennett. Something wrong?"

"No. Forensics confirmed my hunch about the fingerprints. The case is about sewed up, now, and the report's ready.... Listen, Joe. I need some down time, and I've got vacation on the books. Do you mind if I drop my report off at your place, then take off for a week or so? Can you clear it with Greg for me? I don't want to bother him this late."

Diana could almost hear Joe's wheels spinning. "You sure you're okay, Bennett? From what Greg Hughes tells me, and if the rumor mill is correct, you never take vacation unless you're forced to."

"Yeah. Normally. It's kind of personal, Joe. I just need to get away. It's been a hard year or so. I need to see my sister...you know...just get away."

"All right. No sweat. But leave me your sister's number, so if a hot case comes in and we need 'Bring 'em Back Alive Bennett' I can get hold of her."

Diana thought a long moment, then she gave him Susan's number. "Only call if it's bad, Joe. I need this time."

Joe must have heard something in her voice. "Hey. You take your time. If a week's not enough, you call. Can't have you burning out on me."

"Thanks, Joe," Diana said quietly. 'Bye.'"

---

Diana soon found herself out on the highway headed for Susan's. Susan had always understood her. Her Dad had understood, but he'd died when she was ten...killed on the job. Susan had stood between her and Mom for years. Mom had always wanted to re-make her. She'd wanted a girl, not a tomboy...especially not a tomboy who was more "different" than any other kid anyone had been around. A kid who knew too much. A kid with an attitude problem.

Diana hoped the mechanic was right and that the car was through acting up. She didn't feel like playing grease monkey tonight. Her foot heavy on the accelerator, Diana remembered all the times Susan stood between her and Mom over all the issues that had come up over the years. Somehow, she didn't think Susan could help much this time. She couldn't stand between Diana and the pain.

## THE CHANTS OF NIGHT

The night knows nothing of the chants of night.  
It is what it is as I am what I am:  
And in perceiving this I best perceive myself

---

Susan and Diana were curled up on Susan's couch. Susan's hair was as red as Diana's, but her face was wider, her smile more mobile. Alexandra, Susan's daughter, lay sleeping in the next room.

Drinking her third cup of black coffee, Diana continued talking, and Susan listened. Somehow, she'd talked for two hours and managed to talk about everything except Vincent. They'd talked about Dad, and Mom, and the years after their father had been killed. They never skirted issues between themselves. Susan knew all about the years that Diana had tried to be what Maureen Bennett had wanted her to be, and she knew the impact Patrick Bennett's death had had on Diana. It had been so hard for her when Patrick had been killed in the line of duty. He'd been the only one of her parents who understood about her gift and valued it. Susan had helped Diana through her grief, and through a traumatic adolescence. She'd been there through all Diana's failed affairs...and understood as well as anyone could just why they failed. So Diana was sure that Susan knew *what* she was talking about, if not *who*.

"It's a good thing you're off tomorrow. I'm really sorry, Susan. Didn't mean to keep this up all night."

"Aw, doesn't matter. We haven't had a good sister-to-sister talk in a long time. We're always too busy."

Diana uncurled and walked to the window to watch the sun coming up. She thought of Vincent. She knew if she tried, she could feel him, but instead she tried hard to ignore the connection. She built her walls and hid behind them.

Susan came and stood beside her. "I'm sorry. I wish I could help, but...."

Diana laughed a little ruefully. "I know. It's hard to help when you don't even know what's wrong. Hell, Susan. I know what's wrong, but I don't know how to fix it. I push them away...yet I reach out for them at the same time. Now is that crazy, or what? They all leave, or I do. And now..."

Susan was quiet, then she said, "And now, you've met someone who's changed everything. You want him, but you're afraid...because if you let him in...really let him in...maybe he'll see you're...human? Not perfect?"

Diana shook her head. "No. Yes. I don't know." She smiled ruefully. "He doesn't think I'm perfect *now*. We're just friends...and I almost blew *that* by asking him questions that were none of my business. I only know I'm not her...."

"Her who?"

"Someone he loved." She sighed. "Someone who died, and in that dying gained a sainthood that was not entirely unearned." At Susan's skeptical expression, Diana smiled wearily and waved her away. "Don't worry about trying to understand. I don't even know what I mean. I've done things, Susan...that he could never understand. Things that even I have trouble understanding. But I'd do it again to protect him." She glanced at Susan and shrugged. "Or you. Love is worth everything."

As she looked back out the window, Diana's voice went quiet. "There have been so few I've let myself really love. I'll do anything I have to do to keep safe the ones I do. I see every day what evil there is out there, Susan. If it tries to touch me...I can handle it. But if it tries to touch someone I love...I can't leave it to chance. Not if I can do something."

Susan touched her shoulder, and Diana could sense her understanding and sympathy. The last time she'd cried on Susan's shoulder like this she'd killed a 17-year old boy to save her partner's life. It was necessary...the boy had been armed, drug-crazed, and her partner was already down. It had taken a long time for Diana to get past it. "You killed for him?"

Forcing herself to turn and face her sister, Diana said stiffly: "I committed murder for him."

Now that shocked Susan...Diana could feel it. "Tell me."

Diana told her a little about Gabriel, knowing that her sister would keep this secret as she'd kept all her others over the years. She would never say a word to anyone, even if she ever *did* connect anything to Vincent...or the tunnels. "The man was evil incarnate, Susan. I felt the chill of that evil radiating toward me. I heard his taunts, and I knew what he said was true. It would never be over. And eventually he would win, and everything...*everything* would be gone. I couldn't let Gabriel hurt him again. So, I shot him. Even Gabriel couldn't survive a heart shot." Her chin lifted and she stared stubbornly out the window. "I killed an unarmed man in cold blood. And I got away with it."

Diana knew Susan was listening, as she always did...not judging. Susan had once told Diana that she was her own judge, and she'd seen how Diana judged herself...usually far too harshly...and meted out her own kind of punishment.

"He *was* armed." Susan said. "He was armed with his power. You knew that. And you were armed with truth...and love. Have you told...your man...about Gabriel?"

Diana's finger was tracing a smudge on the window with great intensity, her eyes fixed to the spot. "Yes. He knows about it. At least he knows that I killed him...not really *how*. He told me that sometimes it's best to forget. I can't forget. I don't even think I want to."

"Have you told him you love him?"

Diana shook her head. "I don't know *what* I feel, Sue. I care. That's all I know. Besides, if I told him, he'd be gone. He still hurts too bad. Doesn't need any more pain...and I just hurt him worse every time I try to help." Her eyes met her sister's. "You know how I am...every time I open my mouth I say too much, put my foot in clear to the hip."

Susan's eyes reflected Diana's pain.

Vincent retreated to his tiny chamber in the catacombs. He'd brought no supplies and had made no arrangements to acquire any. He intended to fast. There was plenty of water. He thought of Narcissa, the tunnels' seeress. Often she entertained visions such as he sought. Yet the last time he'd visited, asking for her advice, she'd sternly reminded him that life should be lived in the here and now, not in the past. "Your dead are not here, Vincent. They are within you," she'd told him disapprovingly.

He didn't know if she'd approve of his present course or not. In any case, he felt it was the only one left to him.

As Vincent fasted, the hoped-for visions came...but usually as conversations and arguments with his other self. The dreams were as disturbing as before.

He tossed and turned on his makeshift bed, sweating in the chill of the tunnels. Had there been light for anyone to have seen him, they would have been shocked at his appearance. But in the darkness, there were none to see the tangle of his mane or the state of his clothing. No one to hear his cries.

Diana remained at Susan's apartment for the full week, blocking Vincent out of her mind during the day, but at night, the dreams came...despite what she could do. The only thing that helped was the sleeping pills. She knew it was her own fault. Subconsciously, she was still *calling*... and equally subconsciously, he was answering. Neither could stop. But even at that, no bond could be formed from his side without Diana's full cooperation and his desire for it to be there. She wasn't sure either of them was ready for that, or if they ever would be. As long as Vincent grieved, and as long as he held Catherine up on that pedestal--ever perfect--with no flaws whatever, he would never be able to see past her to anyone else. Or even to life.

Sitting cross-legged on the rug, Diana watched the news. At least, her eyes followed the movements on the screen. None of the words ever made it into her brain. She picked at the pile on the rug and tried to figure out what to do when she got back. Suddenly, something *did* occur

which caught her attention. A news broadcast of a killing on the lower East side: a double killing...a slaughter...days ago. *Oh God, oh God, oh, God. Vincent.*

Diana was up and out of the room in moments, into the bedroom and dragging her suitcase out. She threw all her clothes, dirty and clean, into it, and slammed it closed. A scribbled note to Susan was left on the table on her way out the door.

Diana no sooner opened the accordion door to the loft when the phone began to ring. She dashed for the phone, tripping on the edge of the carpet. Grabbing the receiver, she tried to sound calm. "Hello..."

Joe's voice on the other end was indescribable: angry, exhausted, frustrated. "Bennett. Don't you ever answer the phone at your sister's, either?"

Diana cringed. She hadn't been answering the phone. Susan told her not to bother for her sake, and she simply hadn't wanted to hear from work. They hadn't been in much when Susan was off. "Sorry, Joe. I was busy. Wasn't around much. What is it?"

Voice hard and totally unyielding, Joe spat at her. "What is it? Cathy's boyfriend...*Vincent*. That's what it is."

Diana's hands were sweating so badly she almost dropped the phone. "What're you talkin' about, Joe. Make sense."

Joe exploded. "Don't you even watch the goddamn news?! The damn killings have been all over the media for days. Don't tell me you haven't heard."

"I haven't. So tell me."

Diana could tell even over the phone that Joe was making a tremendous effort to calm himself. Finally, after a few moments, he began. "Same night you left, two toughs who worked for Jacko..."

"The pimp...yeah. I know him."

"Yeah, well, two enforcers of his were roughing up some girl, hooker named Tina Martin. They were... interrupted. Permanently."

The lump in Diana's throat almost prevented speech, but she finally managed to ask Joe the one question she was most concerned about. "She saw the killer?"

"Yeah. She saw him. But she's not too coherent. Says it was dark and she didn't get a good look, but it was enough to scare her into running. Says he's more like an animal than a man. He wore a cape though, and she couldn't see much. But you know the M.O. Bennett...it's gotta be him. And I know you know more than you let on. I've still got all the pics of all those previous cases where you said Vincent was *protecting* Cathy. I want you down here, *now*."

"I'll be there. Wait for me."

Diana hung up the phone and stood there sweating. *Jesus, Vincent. Why? How am I gonna cover this? Joe's getting harder and harder to throw off.* She grabbed her carryall, kicked her suitcase out of the way, and left for

Joe's office. There was a slow anger building.

---

Vincent had returned from the lower levels after four days. He still had no answers, but the pain had burned through him until he was exhausted with it. He was gaunt from fasting, but clear-eyed and totally rational, though he'd wrestled with his darker self for days. He finally realized, however, that he needed help with this, and the only one he could go to was Diana. When he stood above her loft tapping on the windows, and the rooms remained dark...no light came on, he realized she wasn't there. He stood for hours on the roof, hoping she'd come in. But she never did.

---

As Vincent passed Father's door on his way to his chamber, Father looked up and called out to him, stopping him. "Vincent! You're back. Come in here, please."

When Vincent stepped through the door, he could sense Father's dismay. Vincent knew he was filthy, looked as though he hadn't slept the entire time he'd been gone...which he hadn't...and he'd lost weight. "My, God! Vincent! What are you doing to yourself?"

Despite his exhaustion, Vincent felt relief. Father at least was always consistent. One always knew what to expect. Unlike with Diana. Vincent rested a hand softly on the older man's shoulder. "Don't worry, Father. It is over, for now. Truly, I look worse than it is. Once I have a shower and something to eat...a little sleep, I will be fine."

"I will have Mary make you some tea, and have William bring some of his biscuits and honey. Something small, for now." As he started out, he turned back toward Vincent. "Diana said for you not to come. She will be gone for a while."

Vincent started to ask if his note was the cause for her leaving, but then he decided against it. He knew it had been. Mentally kicking himself for not being more tactful...for shoving away someone who truly cared and only wanted to help, he simply nodded. He drew a deep breath, and told Father, "I will shower and eat. Then I wish to see Jacob."

Father pushed him out the door. "Then some sleep."

---

Vincent showered and thought about his trip into the deeps. He still remembered very little...some wonderful flashes of memory. Surely it *was* memory and not merely his own fantasies. But the darker side of that time below haunted him as well. The voice. Even the image of the beast taunted him that he couldn't remember. *Why should he remember, and I forget?* But Vincent *was* remembering some things, and perhaps if he talked to Diana--forced himself to talk to her--if he let her probe with that inquisitive, questing mind, perhaps she could help. *I should not have shut her out, before. Now I have hurt her.* Somehow,

he had no doubt that Diana would be back, or that she would help. There was trust between them. He was sorry he had hurt her.

Stepping out of the shower, he shook the excess water from the light fur covering his body and finished drying. He dressed in the clean clothes he'd brought, then headed back to Father's chamber for something to eat. On the way there, he met Mouse and Jamie as they headed out for sentry duty, and it occurred to him that once again, he'd been neglecting his duties. *Security. The teaching.* He wondered who had taught the children while he was gone. *I will have to ask Father.*

---

As Vincent sat eating the light meal that William provided for him, he asked Father how classes had been going, and security.

Father listened to the questions, then commented with some acerbity. "Now you ask, after you walk out." He shrugged resignedly. "Classes have been progressing. I have taught most of them myself, in fact. As for security, Cullen stepped in and took over the duty roster. We've been fortunate that there have been no intrusions past the surface tunnels while you have been off doing whatever it is you do." When Vincent didn't respond, Father continued. "In addition, you've hurt Diana terribly, and that is totally unlike you. She has done too much for you, for you to treat her in such a manner."

Vincent sighed and pushed away his plate. "I agree with you completely and plead guilty on all counts, Father. Thank you for taking up the classes. Now, as you suggested, I will get some sleep after seeing my son."

Vincent felt Father's eyes on him as he left to check on Jacob. As he stood looking down at the sleeping infant, feeling the soft touch of their bond, his heart swelled with pride and love. He knew, now, how Father felt about him--why he was so protective. It had very little to do with his differences.

---

Vincent spent the remaining three days until Diana's return trying to get his life back to some semblance of normalcy. His classes and his security rounds were resumed. But he did not return to Diana's loft. He knew that by now she would have heard of the killings, and he was ashamed. Perhaps she'd even been assigned the case. Joe Maxwell was no fool, and Diana had told him that Joe knew enough to be dangerous.

Leaning against a boulder at the Mirror Pool, Vincent stretched his legs out and tossed pebbles into the water, watching the ripples spread. *One loss of self...the ripples spread and touch everything...everyone.* A vision came to him of the men lying at his feet in the pool of spreading blood. The scene was so clear to him that he could almost smell the blood scent in the air. He bent his head to his knee and wept. *I am a monster...and all I touch becomes*





*monstrous. Everyone lies for me...to protect me...and in doing so, they compromise their own principles. Catherine. I should have died with you. Then it would be ended. Truly, I do not wish to continue.* As the ripples cleared and his reflection returned, Vincent saw the image of the beast he was inside. He turned away.

At the edge of his consciousness, Vincent felt the tug of the bond with Jacob. The child felt his father's anxiety. Vincent sighed and forced himself to relax. He glanced back at the pool at his reflection. *Whatever I am, I am also Jacob's father. Catherine's lover. Nothing can change that.*

---

Diana had dutifully spread the photos from Catherine's file over the table along with the newer photos. Vincent had done one hell of a job this time. Not that the two victims would be mourned by the city at large. Rick "Rico" Valdez and John Brown. Both were heavy-duty enforcers for Jacko Vernon. There were a lot of women in the city who would sleep better knowing they were gone. Diana rubbed her tired eyes in frustration. *How am I gonna do this, Vincent? How can I convince Joe it wasn't you...lead him away?*

Joe was like a bulldog with a bone. "Now, Bennett. Talk to me. It's him, isn't it?"

"C'mon Joe." Diana pleaded. "You remember the subway killer. You know there've been a lot of copycat killings since then. The lab didn't get any prints...there's nothing except the bodies, the *style*, for Chrissakes, and the word of some hysterical hooker...who probably *also* remembers the subway slasher. Jesus, Joe...she's gotta be grateful to this guy, whoever he is. Do you *really* think she's gonna turn in the guy who saved her from these two?" She gestured at the pictures.

If looks could kill, Diana would've been six feet under, with a month's worth of grass on her grave. Joe was *not* impressed. "You're not gonna help, are you?"

Diana waved her hand helplessly over the pictures strewn over the table. "What's to help? We've been through this before and never found anything. There's nothing to go on unless he kills again...and probably if he does there'll be just as little evidence to help. Joe...it could be any number of people copying the subway slasher. With no fingerprints, no better identification...there's just nothing to go on. I'll talk to the woman if you want."

Joe threw the file down and began raking up photos. Diana could feel his disgust and frustration. She felt sorry for him. "Hell no. No sense in it, you said. She's already been questioned. Get out of here, Bennett. I'll call you when I need you, and when I know you really want to help."

---

Diana stormed into her loft after her meeting with Joe. She was about killing mad...at Vincent. She hated lying to Joe, compromising her job. First she'd committed murder for him, and now this. Diana knew what had happened, as

well as if she'd been with Vincent, and as she thought about it she realized that she had to accept some of the guilt for these killings. The rage and desire that she'd brought to the surface with her questions had needed an outlet. Finally, he'd been unable to control it, and the men had given him an excuse. *Damn you, Vincent. You stubborn, impossible... foolish...man.* She sat for an hour with a pillow against her stomach and knees drawn up, scrunched down into the couch cushions, her mind whirling with questions with no answers. When her thoughts stabilized, she got up and headed down to the tunnels to confront Vincent. *I sure hope to hell he's finished sulking, because I'm about to give him something else to sulk about.* As she walked, her white-hot anger dulled to a sullen resignation.

---

Diana simply followed the bond to where Vincent was. She was too upset to care if anyone questioned her ability to find him without help. When she neared, she closed down and put up her barrier. He was still at the Mirror Pool when she approached softly. He must've heard her behind him and turned. He didn't seem surprised to see her standing in the entrance, and acknowledged her with a short nod and soft greeting. "Diana."

She sat next to him, folding her long legs and leaning with her elbows on her knees. "You through sulking?"

He shook his head. "No."

"It figures."

Vincent stared out over the water, his face hard. "I suppose you know..."

"That you killed? Yeah. Almost got yourself and me into a fine mess."

Diana could barely hear Vincent's answer. "I am sorry to have gotten you involved."

"Yeah. Well. It's kind of hard *not* to get me involved when Maxwell sees anything that reminds him of Cathy Chandler's death...especially dead bodies with your signature on them." Diana could see the shock run up Vincent's spine at the mention of Catherine's name...and the blunt way she treated his killing. She sighed. "You've *got* to talk about this, Vincent. You can't keep it all inside forever. Or did you plan on keeping it inside until every so often it blows and somebody dies?"

"No!" Vincent's explosive answer was intensely satisfying to Diana.

"Good. Then maybe if you talk about it, things'll get easier. Will you try? I'm here if you need me...anytime."

Vincent shifted, then took a handful of pebbles and began tossing them into the pool. "I will try, Diana. But to talk with you, or *anyone*, about these things is difficult. Almost impossible."

Diana knelt beside him. Chin in hand, she watched the ripples spreading from the pebbles. "You want to talk now, or come to the loft another time?"

Vincent sighed heavily and dusted his hands. "I suppose now. But Diana...if I react...badly, please understand."

Diana shifted around to face him. "I *do* understand. I guess it is best if we start this here, so that if you go off half-cocked again at least you're already Below. Now. What exactly is it that is bothering you the most?"

Leaning against the boulder, eyes closed, Vincent was silent a few long moments. Then he began speaking quietly. His voice was gentle and controlled...but there was a grating edge to it that hinted of deep anxiety. "The desire. The dreams. And I want to remember...*must* remember." His voice shook a little, and Diana could see a tear at the corner of his eye. "I loved her, Diana." His hand clenched as it rested on his knee. "I made love to her. I must have. There is Jacob. But I only remember flashes...and I cannot be certain those are true memories or only what I desired."

"Tell me about the dreams, Vincent." Diana knew all too well about the dreams, but Vincent didn't know she knew. Besides, he needed to talk.

"I remember vaguely going to the cave. So I could hurt no one but myself. I was losing myself."

"You keep saying *I lost myself*, or you were *losing yourself*. What exactly do you mean?"

Vincent's eyes opened and met hers briefly, then he looked away, back at the water. "There is a part of me that is not a man, Diana. A darkness, powerful and compelling. This darkness takes me when I kill." He looked down. "And when I feel desire. In both cases there is a hunger...a will beyond my own. One that I cannot fully control."

Diana's stomach knotted. *Now we're getting to the root of the problem.* "That lack of control frightens you?"

He glowered at her with exasperation. "Of course it frightens me, Diana! You have *seen* me kill. You have seen the results of that loss of control just recently. How can you ask that?"

"Easy. I need to understand. And asking questions... finding answers is what I do. So. You were *losing yourself* and you retreated to the lower caverns for the safety of the others. What else do you remember?"

Vincent's head fell forward, his long blond mane falling forward over his face. "I remember screaming, roaring in rage...in need. Then Catherine came. I tried to speak to her, but only roars would come. I was so ashamed. For her to see me like that. In my rage I actually raised my arm to strike."

Diana was shocked, but tightened her barrier and kept her face calm. "To strike Catherine?"

His head moved back and forth slightly. "No. I don't know. I was striking at the world...at anything. There was no *reason* to it...just a need to strike out...to release this anger and hatred...self-hatred. Perhaps I wished to strike at myself."

"What stopped you?"

"She screamed my name...in fear...for herself...for me. It penetrated through the darkness. I...think...I died, Diana."

Diana could barely speak. Her mouth was thick and dry as she remembered the dream herself, but when she *did*

manage to speak, her voice was soft...purposely so, to avoid disturbing him. "Why do you think you died, Vincent?"

His voice had become dreamy and drifting. "I remember standing and watching as she held me, crying out. I was separate and apart from the scene. She listened for my heartbeat, and she said, 'No. You can't. Not without me.' She kissed me."

"Then?"

An anguished moan answered her. "*I can't remember...can't be sure.*" He was rocking a little now, arms held tight around himself.

Diana shuffled forward onto her knees and tentatively put her arms around him. He turned to her, crying into her shoulder. "It's all right." Winding her fingers in his mane, Diana rocked with him, aching for him. "It's okay. You'll remember."

"I didn't hurt her, Diana. I couldn't have."

She ran her fingers through the thick mane, reaching under his hair and stroking the dense mane that grew between his shoulders. The hair was bristled and raised, but as she stroked, she was rewarded by feeling the tension ease and the shudders cease. Eventually the stiffened hair lay flat. "Of course you couldn't have hurt her, Vincent. Think about it. She was fine when you left the cave, she still loved you. She wasn't hurt." She chuckled just a little, and he drew back, smoky blue eyes startled. She smiled softly up at him. "She wasn't hurt...she was just pregnant."

"Is that supposed to be amusing?" he asked.

"Well...yeah. Kind of. But you have to have a sense of humor to see it." Diana smiled and reached up to brush away the wetness on his cheek. "Don't worry, Vincent. We'll get you through this. Okay...now...you have these dreams where you're trying to remember, right?"

Vincent glanced up, his eyes questioning. "Yes."

She shrugged. "Come up to the loft tonight and sleep on the couch. Be near. I'll keep an eye on you, and when you start dreaming, I'll wake you, and we'll see if that helps you remember."

"No!" His answer was so explosive, it startled her.

"Well...why not?"

"I might..."

"Lose yourself?" Diana had a feeling that the *losing himself* he was concerned about had a lot more to do with her being around him when he was aroused. The thought both excited...and frightened her a little. She wasn't at all sure *she* would be safe to be around under those circumstances. She had to restrain a grin. "Well. It just seemed like a good idea. Think about it."

---

Diana stayed with Vincent the rest of the evening. She helped with caring for Jacob and Vincent spent a good hour discussing with her the values of learning to play a proper game of chess. Much later, with Jacob asleep after his bath and left with Mary, Vincent walked with Diana back to her



loft, still debating with himself the wisdom of staying Above in her loft tonight. "Are you sure, Diana, that you wish this?"

Taking his hand, Diana continued walking next to him very quietly. When she finally spoke, she sounded very sure. "Vincent. Something has to be done. You simply can't continue the way you've been going. You can't even grieve for Catherine properly. You can't put anything into perspective until you resolve this. Once you have your memories of that night, I think you can begin to heal. But not until." She stopped and looked up at him. Her eyes were wide and serious. "I'm not afraid of you, Vincent. I stopped being afraid the moment you truly woke up in my loft and I heard your voice. The only reason I was ever afraid at all was because you were delirious."

Vincent sighed raggedly and leaned against the tunnel wall. "When I *lose* myself, it is much the same. I have no control, Diana. I cannot guarantee my conduct." He pulled away. "I cannot do this. I cannot risk your safety...certainly not just for my peace of mind."

Diana stood, arms wrapped around herself, her large sweater enveloping her almost like a cocoon. "It's up to you. But even when you were delirious in my loft, you didn't hurt me. Even when you were in that cave with Catherine, you didn't hurt her. I think you worry too much. C'mon, Vincent. Try it."

Vincent could feel nothing from Diana. He wished he could sense her...but she seemed so resolved to do this. Finally, he relented. "Very well. But you must keep your gun close at hand. In case."

Diana grinned again, obviously relieved that she'd convinced him to try. "Yeah. I could always shoot you in the foot...slow you down."

---

Diana made up the couch for Vincent, then stood considering. The couch really wasn't large enough for him. "Vincent. Would you consider sleeping in my bed? I could put my sleeping bag next to the bed just as well."

He shook his head. "No." He seemed so adamant that Diana looked up. "Keep your gun close at hand, Diana."

Diana unrolled the sleeping bag next to the couch and slid in. When her head was settled on her pillow, she looked up into Vincent's azure eyes. He was watching her with a concerned expression. She smiled. "Don't worry so. Go to sleep."

Diana lay in the sleeping bag, eyes closed, her mind and heart completely open to Vincent. She pretended to sleep, so that he would relax and try to sleep himself. Eventually, she sensed the turmoil slowly quieting, and as she listened, she heard his breathing...that soft puffing through his open mouth. She opened her eyes and watched him sleep. She could see the white tips of his canines resting against his full lower lip. His mane flowed over his shoulders and as the moon peeped through the clouds, the moonlight streaming through the windows picked up and

highlighted his high cheekbones, making the angles of his face even sharper. She watched the pulse beating in his throat, noticing the faint down of soft hair, or fur, that began just below the hollow. She swallowed convulsively. *God. He's so beautiful.* She leaned on one elbow and rested her chin in her hand. She sighed softly, and continued watching, heart pounding. *Perhaps this really wasn't the best idea in the world.*

Vincent's eyelids fluttered, and his eyes moved rapidly back and forth beneath the lids. He shifted restlessly on the couch and groaned...a deep, low sound that set Diana's heart racing even faster. He shifted again, drawing one heavily muscled leg up. Diana shivered and turned her eyes away with difficulty...then snapped to attention as he murmured, "Catherine...."

Diana could feel the dream building. Not being asleep herself, she wasn't seeing the images, but she knew the sequence. If she concentrated, she could see what he was seeing, but then she could also be drawn in. As she watched him, she visualized in her mind where he must be in the dream. She had noted there was a point in the dream sequence where there were two Vincents, who merged just before the lovemaking began. She wanted to wake him right at that point, if possible. She bit her lip so deeply she tasted blood. Finally, as Vincent's agitation became more acute, she reached out to shake him awake. "Vincent! Vincent...wake up."

Vincent sat bolt upright suddenly, closing his hands around Diana's forearms almost painfully. His eyes were glazed, sleepy, as he blinked and pulled her toward him. When he pulled her onto his lap, she could feel his arousal, even as she could sense it. *No! Not like this!* Diana pushed away violently and yelled, "Vincent! Wake UP!"

Still, Vincent didn't release her, so out of desperation, she slapped him--hard. Vincent released Diana so suddenly that she fell off his lap onto the floor and sat, knees up, arms behind her. "Well," she commented, laughing shakily. "At least I didn't have to shoot you.... What do you remember? Quick...before you forget."

Collapsing back onto the couch cushions, Vincent closed his eyes. Several long moments went by, then he said quietly, "Nothing. Nothing more than before." He raised up onto one elbow and looked into her face. "I remember nothing more at all. It's no use, Diana. I will never remember."

Vincent's voice was so pained that it tore at Diana's heart. "Don't give up, Vincent. It was just an idea. It didn't hurt to try. And we won't give up. We'll think of something. You'll see."

Vincent rose and spoke softly, his voice drifting to her as he walked to the window to look out. "It was...generous...of you, Diana. To try to help."

Diana knew he had turned and moved away to hide the evidence of his arousal. He was still aroused, and he was not about to admit to her how he was feeling. Of course, he had no idea that she knew *exactly* what he was feeling. "It

was nothing, Vincent. I just wish it had helped. Don't give up."

With a tremendous sigh, Vincent turned back to her. "I must go, Diana. There's no point in my remaining tonight...and I am certain you will rest better with me gone."

Diana shifted from one foot to the other, then looked up at him through her own tangled mane of hair. "Okay. Just...don't give up...all right?" Then, forgetting she wasn't blocked, she reached out to touch him, and for that brief instant their eyes met. She felt a shock go through Vincent as he picked up her desire. But the touch was so light...so instantaneous--with her block going up immediately--she could tell that he was thinking he'd imagined it. *Damn! It's no wonder he felt that--"reaching" for him as I was--have to watch myself!*

Diana walked with Vincent to the roof and watched him leave. As she went back down the stairs and returned to bed, she thought about that brief moment of contact. *Normally, he's so guarded against his own pain. Subconsciously, he doesn't want another bond. Plus, I stay so guarded against everyone to protect myself--especially against him--that there's little likelihood of his accidentally picking me up. But that one moment....*

Diana walked to the window and looked out. It had finally started raining and clouds had covered the moon. She grimaced, thinking back to the first time she'd ever been in love...the first time she'd ever let herself care enough to "go all the way." Andrew. He'd been so good to her, so sensitive. But in the end, it hadn't mattered. She knew he loved her: she could feel his love for her coming across to her, and she reached back, trying to give him what he was giving her. But it was impossible. The physical love was wonderful, but in the end her heart was broken by her sheer effort of trying to reach him and never succeeding. It was almost like one of the lines drawn on ancient maps, saying "Here be dragons"...or perhaps..."here be wonders beyond your imagining." But she was never able to step beyond that line to find out. Andrew never understood why she always cried afterwards, and eventually her pain drove him away. Diana blamed herself, and for a year she kept to herself, afraid to try again. But eventually she did. Again, and again and again...always to fail miserably. Each encounter ended worse than the last.

*Vincent. Would it ever be any different with you? Or have you tied yourself so tightly to Catherine's memory that you wouldn't be able to let me in, or reach out to me?* The tie Diana felt to him was impossible to resist. But she still couldn't tell if the calling was from herself or from him. If it was from him, he was totally unaware of it. At least consciously. Diana on the other hand, knew very well what she was doing...how she was blocking him, and everyone else...out.

On a day-to-day basis, she routinely blocked most people so their emotions couldn't reach her, but with Vincent, she was afraid to let him in for a variety of

reasons...mostly because he could see *in*. Could sense *her* emotions and know who she *was*. *Dammit! That's what I want...isn't it? Well? Isn't it?* She stared blankly out at the rain, waiting for answers. But none came.

Vincent hurried through the tunnels toward the Home Chambers. He felt flushed and confused. That moment when he thought he'd felt Diana. It had been so intense. *Nonsense. It was the after-effects of the dream. That's all.* He was grateful that he hadn't lost control. At least not completely. He hoped Diana hadn't noticed and wasn't aware of how aroused he'd still been after waking. Or had she? It had been as he'd feared...though not as bad. At least he hadn't done anything to hurt Diana, or frighten her. *No, he thought ruefully. Only to embarrass myself.*

He was still restless after reaching his chamber, and felt sleep would be long in coming. The nights were becoming unendurable. Nothing comforted him anymore. Catherine had been his comfort, and she was gone. Now, he couldn't even think of her in peace--the desire drove even that from him. He picked up a book and tried to read, but it was useless.

Vincent laid the book back on his desk, then walked swiftly down to the Chamber of the Falls. It was late and the likelihood of anyone coming by was remote. Quickly shedding his clothes, Vincent dove deeply into the water under the falls, going as deep as he could, then slowly allowing himself to come up. Lungs about to burst, he finally broke the surface and took a great gasp. The water was freezing, but Vincent dove again, this time directly under the falls, feeling the weight of the water pushing down on him. He tumbled downward with the water, fighting instinctively to free himself of the inexorable push of the current. Once more he broke the surface and gasped for air. He continued, diving and fighting the current and the pressure twice more, until he was totally exhausted, and swam for shore.

Pulling himself out, Vincent shook then sat shivering on the bank. A light breeze from the Chamber of the Winds teased at his fur, causing him to shiver even harder.

The game of fighting the falls had originated far back in his childhood, with the older boys striving to prove their strength and endurance. It had begun as an adolescent rebellion against Father's concerns for their safety, but it had become, for Vincent, more than a testing ground. He had come here often in past years when he couldn't sleep...and more often since he'd found Catherine. His desires had driven him here often to allow him to exhaust himself sufficiently to sleep. Now, once again, he could think of Catherine with love and gentleness...not simply with desire. *Catherine. Love. I miss you. Diana is right. I cannot let myself give up. I will remember, Catherine. I will remember our night...our one night together.*

Once he'd dried sufficiently, Vincent dressed, then headed back to his chamber, where he pulled off his boots,

then simply fell into bed. He was asleep almost before his head hit the pillow.

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A few days later, Diana took time off from her current case to visit Below. Things were going well for her: the case was easy--almost ridiculously so. She thought it was a waste of time for the D.A. to call in the 210. She'd not slept well the last couple of nights, but the dreams were erratic. Sometimes she felt as though she'd been plunged into ice water and woke, shivering...but afterwards she usually slept fairly peacefully. Heaven only knew what the hell he was doing to cause *that*. She just knew it wasn't anything to do with her case or her, so it had to be Vincent. So, having heard nothing from him, she wondered just how things were going. She took out a small battery-powered lamp and took it with her. It didn't shed much light, but she didn't figure on needing it too awfully long.

As she traveled, she got turned around a time or two, and stood, perplexed, as she stared at a brick wall where a tunnel should be. She touched the mortar. *Fresh. Dammit.* She knew what had happened. Just like when she'd been investigating below Catherine's apartment, they'd closed off the tunnel. *The ways change*, Vincent had told her. *For security reasons. Great. Understood. Just wish they'd clue in the helpers.* She stood a moment more, considering, then found a pipe. She didn't know much pipe code, but she'd heard Vincent's name often enough--and had it patiently pointed out to her, just as Vincent had insisted she learn the emergency code. All the helpers knew those two things at least. *Interesting thought, that.*

Diana tapped Vincent's name repeatedly until she got an answer of some sort from Pascal. Not knowing what to properly answer, she tapped out the rhythm to a song. Dead silence was her answer. She grinned and sat down to wait.

When Vincent appeared at the bend of the tunnel, she wished she could see well enough in the dark to read the expression on his face. He stopped and stood there...a massive shadow amidst other shadows. "Hi," she quipped, without rising.

Without commenting, he moved to settle beside her. After another long moment of silence, he said quietly: "You pick strange meeting places."

"What'd Pascal think about my unique style?"

Vincent chuckled. "His sense of propriety was offended."

"But he knew it was me, right?" Diana had somehow figured Pascal would know. At least know it wasn't a stranger. She hadn't wanted to cause problems...just find her way in.

"Actually, he knew it was you *before* you tapped your refrain. Pascal's ear for tone, rhythm and...style...is phenomenal. He's heard you practicing my name before. Recognized it. But the song did, at least, tell him that there was nothing wrong."

They were silent again for a few moments, then Diana

sighed. "I've wondered how you've been. You didn't come back. I was worried."

"I have been well."

"Liar. Still dreaming? You sound tired." Diana took his hand in hers to soften her comment. He responded with a gentle squeeze.

"You are incorrigible."

"Yeah. I know. Prickly, pushy and nosy too."

Vincent sighed heavily. "Diana. You ask me questions I cannot answer. You insist on honesty...even with myself. You are harder to deal with than Father, even."

In the silence that followed, Diana tried to think of something to say. "I'm sorry. I just want to help."

"I would not wish for you to be different than you are, Diana."

Embarrassed and pleased, she turned away. "Prickles, pushiness, inconvenient questions and all?"

She heard that soft chuckle that never failed to start a slow heat building in her midsection. "Yes. Prickles, pushiness, questions and all. You help me put my life into perspective, whether I like it or not."

"Well... *Do* you like it?"

He laughed outright. "No." Vincent watched her for a few moments, then finally spoke quietly, his gentle silk and granite voice sounding just a little hesitant. "Diana...I am sorry if at times I say, or do things to hurt you. But with you, it is different for me than it is with others."

Diana's stomach seemed to develop a hard knot somewhere just below her navel, and she tried very hard to keep her eyes steady and her face calm. "How do you mean...different?"

Gesturing helplessly, Vincent shrugged. "I cannot sense you, so I am never quite certain what is expected of me...what to say, or do...and often I choose wrongly." He looked down, obviously embarrassed. "And I have been rather self-involved since before I met you. It tends to show."

Swallowing a few times to remove the lump that had moved from her stomach to her throat, Diana patted his arm in an effort to keep from hugging him. "S'all right, Vincent. Everybody does that...puts their foot in it, I mean. You mustn't worry. I don't *expect* anything from you except your friendship...your trust. Everybody makes mistakes." When he looked up gratefully, Diana grinned and squeezed his hand. "If I'm still welcome around here, can I come visit Jacob a while? I miss the little rugrat."

Vincent rose and took her hand to help her up. "Certainly. Come. Jacob will be glad to see you. And Father." He smiled. "And Pascal. He says he has a thing or two to teach you about the proper use of the pipes."

---

Much later, Vincent escorted Diana home. The evening had been pleasant, but he knew Diana wouldn't leave without again bringing up the subject of his memory. Of his nightmares. They'd reached the threshold near her loft



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when she finally brought it up.

"So. You haven't remembered?"

"No."

"Want to try something else?"

Vincent cringed inwardly. "What did you have in mind this time?"

She sighed. "I don't know. Maybe questions and answers. Maybe if I just asked you questions it'd tap a memory."

Uneasily shifting, Vincent shook his head.

"I thought you said you liked me. Questions and all," she teased.

"You take me too literally. Besides. As I recall, I said I *didn't* like the questions."

"When did you first feel desire for Catherine?"

"No."

"No you didn't or no you won't answer me?"

With a small growl of real irritation, Vincent answered:

"No. I will not answer you. Not tonight, Diana. Please."

"Answer one question. You don't really think you're all that different, do you? That no one has ever felt the things you are feeling? Have felt."

The silence stretched until even Vincent had to answer.

"Yes. And no."

Diana started to comment once more upon his tendency to avoid the truth, but he seemed to understand what she was thinking. "It is not what you think, Diana. And more than you could ever imagine. Please. Again I ask you to be patient with me."

She studied his face, then nodded. "Okay. For now. But not forever. And if you need me, you know where I am."

"Yes," he said quietly. Gratefully.

"Goodnight, then."

---

After Diana had disappeared through the opening and the threshold was closed, Vincent smiled slowly, shook his head and murmured: "Good night, Diana."

He walked slowly down to the falls. He had been fighting the falls almost as a ritual for the last few weeks, and it had helped some. The dreams were less frequent, but no less intense. He had, at least, been spared the voice or image of the beast. He sighed as he stripped for his almost nightly battle. Leaning against the boulder, he looked down the length of his body, trying very hard to be objective. Underneath the long, silky red-gold hair that covered his chest, thighs, arms and legs, he supposed the body itself was normal enough. He knew, though he couldn't see, that his back also was covered with light golden down and that he had a far heavier and stiffer ridge of hair which ran from the nape of his neck down to about mid-back. A mane. That was, after all, one reason why he wore his hair long—to make that oddity less obvious.

He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. He knew he was fit. He had always been trim and well-muscled. The

strenuous nature of the work he was called upon to do just to keep his world going, plus the constant activity of his security and maintenance rounds, almost assured that. But with all the added exercise he'd gotten in recent weeks, he knew that he was in better shape...physically at least...than he'd ever been. He found himself wishing for the thousandth time that he'd been able to see himself through Catherine's eyes when she had loved him. *If I could only remember.* He couldn't help wondering what Catherine had finally thought of him, when the time had come.

With a sudden roar, Vincent threw himself into the water, one thought in mind: *Everything, Catherine. If I could only remember.* Coming back up, gasping for air, he dove repeatedly, fighting the currents. By the time he dragged himself out and sat shivering, he was so exhausted he didn't even wait until he was dry to drag his pants on and head back to his chamber.

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Diana had gone to bed immediately upon reaching her loft and was asleep when Vincent began his "ritual" of fighting the falls. His emotions at the time flooded through, into her, and she sat upright in bed, freezing, teeth chattering...just as though it were she, herself, who was plunging through the icy water. Still shaking, she reached over and pulled a heavy fleece robe over the old T-shirt, and she huddled under the covers. Wrapping her arms around her legs and resting her chin between her knees, Diana wondered ruefully if she would ever have a night when her sleep was not disturbed in one way or another. She knew from experience that after this, once Vincent went to bed, at least he was unlikely to dream. Once she'd warmed up, she shed the robe and curled back up to try and sleep. *Daylight and work still come 'round at regular hours up here, Vincent. Let me sleep. I still gotta pay the bills.*

However, tonight was *not* one of the nights that Vincent slept peacefully. Exhausted or not, he was still restless, and before long Diana's sleep was disturbed once more.

*This time, the dream was a little different. Diana felt more "there," more a participant than a watcher. Vincent lay on the floor of the cave, unmoving...so still...and Catherine wept over him. Diana could see again the two separate Vincents begin to emerge. She made her way to the body lying on the floor. As Catherine kissed him, Diana pulled hard on the sleeve of the Dark Vincent. He came to her, leaving the gentler Vincent in Catherine's arms. The Dark Vincent was angry with her, but he laughed, long canines flashing. "It is only a dream. Both of us dream, you know." Diana stroked his face, amazed that the sensation was as perfect as if he were truly standing there before her. She could feel the soft, velvety stubble covering his chin. "I know. And you're keeping those memories from him, deliberately. Why?"*

*The Dark Vincent tried to pull away and return to the figure on the ground. Diana ignored the lovemaking going*



on behind the "Dark Vincent," and held onto him. He didn't truly want to leave her, so he was fairly easy to stop. His sardonic visage stared down at her. "I'm angry with him. He kept control then. Even then he wouldn't let me touch her...not truly. I was there, but not there." He grinned a little. "It was rather like it is for him when I kill...there but not there...except I can keep the memories from him if I wish. In some ways, I am stronger." But when he looked down, his face was sad. "It isn't fair, you know...it would've been so much better had I been in control."

Diana reached around him and hugged him. The heavy arms came around her almost tentatively, as though he expected her to pull away. She nuzzled the soft leather and murmured into his chest. "Please leave him his memories. You both need those to heal...to end this turmoil. If you don't, he'll die, eventually...and so will you."

She lifted her eyes to his, but his expression was unreadable. He shook his head and turned slightly away and Diana moved with him, determined to get through to him. "Why not?"

"I can't." He lowered his gaze to hers and frowned. "I must protect myself. Him."

Diana was still puzzled. "I don't understand."

He sighed. "Nor do I. But I must. Ungrateful though he is." He smiled and released her, spreading his hands in a gesture she found totally endearing. "Without him, you see, I wouldn't exist."

Diana's mind began putting it together. She understood how the backlash felt from trying to give everything to someone and having it all come back, unfelt. This being--this Other--was Vincent's block. Not just an empathic block, but a block against everything that provided too much stress. A relief valve. A little drastic, perhaps, but effective. Too effective.

"Still," she told him, "you've got to let him remember. It's the only way."

The Dark Vincent was nuzzling her hair. "It is too dangerous."

"You're stronger than him. Remember?" She smiled up at him, teasing a little, trying to make the rivalry work.

He seemed to think about it. Eventually, with a heavy sigh of resignation, he growled roughly, "Oh, very well. For you. But even then, he won't be satisfied...I know. He always expected too much from Catherine. She always had to be perfect. No one is perfect, not even him. My expectations have always been more realistic." He touched her cheek delicately, then his mouth closed over hers in a searching kiss. Diana was a little amused at his total lack of shyness in comparison to his other half, and leaned into the kiss. When she opened her eyes, she was alone. Turning to the scene behind her, Vincent was lying with his head in Catherine's lap, and Catherine was stroking his hair. Both Vincents were together again...for a time.

Diana woke, then lay quietly in the dark. With wry humor, she commented to herself: "I wonder if that's the

only way I'll ever kiss him? In my dreams. It lacks a certain something." She slid out of bed and padded in her stocking feet over to her computer. She pulled up her journal after waiting impatiently for the system to boot up.

*I wonder if my intervention will help. He said Vincent wouldn't be satisfied; that he'd always expected too much from Catherine. I suspect he may be right. He must accept Catherine as Catherine. Only what she was. No more. Certainly no less.*

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When Vincent woke to the darkness of his chamber, he felt a sense of wonder, and peace. He could remember everything. Every touch. Every murmured endearment. He closed his eyes and the memories swept over him.

*He couldn't remember when he'd first realized life and breath. Only that gradually he'd become aware of his own labored breath. His heartbeat. And Catherine's heart beating in rhythm with his own. The sweet weight of her across his chest. She'd stroked and caressed him gently, awakening his senses...which came vibrantly alive as he focused on her: on her scent, the touch of her hands, her hair falling in a silken mass onto his face. He lifted his hand to brush back her hair so he could look into her eyes. Her reactions to his movement...his touch...had intensified his own. The sensation had been almost painful--this coming awake. For so long he'd held it all inside--not allowing himself the joy of Catherine's touch--so that now it was like feeling sudden pain in a long paralyzed body. Strangely sweet and frightening at the same time.*

Vincent drew a deep breath, releasing it in a long, shaking sigh as the memories continued. The sound of the pipes faded to the background as he let himself be drawn into the past...now more *there* than in the present. Nothing else was real. Nothing else more important than the images and fleeting sensory memories that were returning.

*Distantly, Vincent was aware of his state of undress--his clothes in tatters, his shirt open--but the aching sweetness of their desire overrode all else. Even the ache of strained muscles and torn, bleeding nails acquired in his attempts to punish himself. He couldn't speak--the Beast was all-too present. Only growls emerged from the lover-dragon Catherine was so intent upon awakening. And she was fearless, relentless in her determined explorations, forcing him back to life...to her radiating expectations of love. Impossible to ignore. Her presence surrounded him. She was the world, and he was a part of her. "Someone to be a part of," Vincent remembered thinking--amazed--knowing for the first time that this was true. The exquisite gift of Catherine's love--of her very soul--was overpowering. He could sense her love--her complete acceptance of him--and in that moment knew himself to be beautiful. She gave him*

*all of herself and he accepted her joyously, trying to return the gift in kind. And knew she couldn't feel it...couldn't receive what he gave. There was an intense flash of pain and sorrow momentarily...and then unbelievable, almost unendurable pleasure.*

Vincent roused, raising himself up on one elbow. He gazed bemusedly around his chamber. He knew Catherine had been unable to sense the joy he'd felt in receiving her love. He remembered the overwhelming lassitude that had taken him afterwards. He'd been so tired...so drained from his inner battle and the intense pleasure following, he knew he must have slept. *When next I opened my eyes, I was lying in Catherine's lap, and Father was there...I knew something had changed.* But he'd been so tired, he hadn't been able to pinpoint what the change was. It wasn't until much later that he'd realized he could no longer sense Catherine. *And when I looked at her, I couldn't even recall her name, though I knew I loved her...and she loved me.*

He remembered it now. All of it. And the memory was both bitter and sweet. He knew now how Catherine had seen him, and he felt beautiful, truly beautiful for the first time. And he realized again how blessed he'd been for having known her love. But there was a touch of bitterness as well, because he felt he'd somehow failed her...and that failure had broken the bond. He remembered the flash of pain when all the emotion came back to him--ungiven. *Because of that, the bond was lost...and I couldn't save her.*

Vincent walked to Jacob's empty crib, wishing the child were not in the nursery. As upset as he was, he knew he shouldn't see the child, but he longed to hold him: the one part of Catherine he hadn't lost. He wept silently.

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The next day at work, Diana felt like the walking dead. It took everything she had just to stay on her feet. Greg finally took pity on her and sent her home.

"Look, Bennett, you've been worse than useless today. Maybe you're coming down with something, I dunno, but you're sure not up to par."

"Sorry, Greg. I didn't sleep well last night."

Greg just tapped his pencil on the desk a few moments. "This case is almost finished anyway. We'll let George here tie up the loose ends." He nodded at the other detective sitting across from Diana.

"George?" Diana asked, looking a question at him.

"Hey, Di," the other officer said with a shrug. "Seriously, you look bad. Can't have you coming down sick on us. Yeah. I can finish up. We'll be going out with the warrant to pick the sleaze up this afternoon. You don't have to be in on it unless you want."

Staggering gracelessly to her feet, Diana slung her carryall over her shoulder and smiled wanly. "Thanks, guys. I owe you. I really am on my last legs."

"Go home and get some rest, Bennett." Greg said.

"That's an order."

"Okay, boss."

Diana managed to maneuver her cantankerous and ill-mannered car through the traffic without falling asleep at the wheel or running over anyone, and she considered that a triumph. *The high point of my day.* Stumbling into her living room, she fell across the couch and slept deeply, dreamlessly, for the rest of the day and into the night.

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Diana heard the tapping and immediately snapped awake, though her eyes felt gummy from her long sleep. She raked her hands through her hair, which had come most of the way down as she slept. *God, I must look a mess. I feel like one, anyway.* Hurriedly, she pulled at the braid until it came the rest of the way down and grabbed her hairbrush out of the carryall. On her way up the stairs, she ripped at the knots, then tossed the brush aside.

Stepping out onto the roof, she found that the warm air and the smells of the city woke her a little, and her heart lifted--as it always did--at the sight of Vincent. The slight breeze stirred the ends of his hair as he stood waiting for her. Otherwise he was still as a statue. The faint moonlight highlighted his face, casting shadows under his cheekbones and making dark hollow secrets of his eyes. The only other hint of brightness was the glint of the metalwork on his belt. She left herself open to him for a few moments, trying to understand the strange mixture of joy and sorrow she was sensing from him, but moving closer, she reluctantly blocked.

She leaned with her back against the low wall, facing away from the city, and looked up at him. "You okay?"

He didn't answer at first, then looked back out across the city. "I remembered, Diana."

Diana caught her breath. When she realized what she was doing, she let it out slowly, deliberately. "Yeah? I don't see you being happy." She leaned down and looked up under the tent of his hair. "Again I ask that inconvenient question. You okay?"

He reached out with one arm and moved her back from the edge of the wall: automatically protecting her. She allowed it...deciding not to be prickly just this once, because it made him smile, just a little. "I am. I suppose." He was quiet again, and Diana turned out to face the city lights, waiting for him to work up the courage to talk to her. She couldn't appear to know more than she should.

Eventually, Vincent broke the silence. "I know now why the bond was lost, Diana."

"Why?"

He sighed. "I blocked it myself. At least I think I did."

There was another long silence, then Diana said quietly, "Are you gonna tell me why you think that, or do I have to guess?"

When Vincent turned toward her, Diana could see wetness glint on his cheekbone, but she pretended not to notice. He was distraught enough without her adding to it.



Eventually, he bowed his head and spoke so quietly she had to strain to hear. "When...we loved...Catherine and I...she gave me everything. I felt that through the bond." He glanced up, seeming embarrassed, but Diana could see he needed reassurance that she was following. She nodded, and he continued. "But when I tried to give her everything I was, everything I could be...to reach out to her...to let her feel my joy, there was no response. I knew she couldn't hear, couldn't sense anything...and all I tried to give came back to me...ungiven."

Diana put her hand over his in sympathy, and he raised his eyes to hers. She asked a question gently. "It was a kind of backlash, then?"

He nodded miserably. "I must have blocked the bond, then, to protect myself. Diana. Do you realize...if I had not done that, Catherine would be alive today. I could have found her when Gabriel took her." He began pacing back and forth in front of her... short circles and long, feverish strides.

Aghast that he was thinking along the lines he obviously was, Diana took his arm and shook him. "Vincent. That's nonsense. It wasn't your fault."

Vincent looked absolutely wretched as he turned toward her. He shook his head. Diana could feel the stubborn imperviousness of the man. He had determined in his own mind that somehow the loss of the bond was his fault, so quite naturally it followed that Catherine's death was his fault as well. *I've got to stop this. I've got to stop it now!* She grabbed Vincent on one of his wide swings past her and was almost pulled off her feet...but he stopped. "Come with me, Vincent."

Vincent's hesitation was so slight it was barely noticeable. He followed Diana down her stairs, continuing his pacing, however, back and forth across her loft as Diana watched him from the couch. She waited a few moments then called to him in her gentlest voice. "Vincent."

The softness of her voice stopped him as probably little else could have. Diana patted the couch next to her. "Please, stop your pacing. I'm getting a neck ache watching you...and truly, it does no good. It changes nothing."

"I cannot, Diana. I cannot be still. The pain. Diana...it is my fault. I could have saved her, otherwise." Unable to remain still, he resumed his pacing.

Exasperated, Diana flung her comments at him as he passed. "What makes you think it was *your* fault? Why does it always have to be *your* fault?"

That comment angered him, and he glared at her. "It certainly wasn't *Catherine's!*"

Diana fought to restrain her impulse to shout...to hit him...anything to cut through that single-minded determination to take it all upon himself. "Did it *have* to be someone's fault, Vincent? This isn't a case of anyone being at fault...only of being different. Apples and oranges. She couldn't accept what you were trying to give her because she wasn't empathic...not because of any lack of love on your part or hers. But you...you...*masochist*, you...you

insist on taking all the blame on yourself. The backlash of all that emotion coming at you is what took the bond...nothing more, nothing less. It wasn't something you could have anticipated...or stopped. Perhaps the bond would've returned eventually if Catherine hadn't been kidnapped. Perhaps not. But it wasn't your fault, Vincent. Not the fact that she couldn't feel you, nor the loss of the bond! You didn't *do* anything. It just happened. You sensed what *Catherine* was feeling when you loved. Was she disappointed?"

Vincent had stopped pacing and was staring at her intently. He shook his head slightly. "No. She was..." Words failed him as he stood there, hands and heart open.

Diana stood then, crossing her arms. Her fingers grasped the loose sweater she wore to hold her hands in place...to keep herself from touching him. "She was blissful? Ecstatic? Satisfied? Contented?...In love?"

Vincent smiled slowly, the smile touching his eyes. "Yes. All that and more."

Diana allowed herself to go to him. She touched his face very tenderly, turning him to face her more fully. When he lowered his gaze to hers, she nodded. "Then remember *that*, Vincent. The fact that you were able to accept all of Catherine's love into yourself was wonderful...to know so intimately what she was feeling. But she received your love as well. Men and women have been making love since the beginning of time, and I'll wager there have been very few who could sense what their lovers were feeling in the very tangible way you were able to with Catherine. Catherine was happy. She was fulfilled. She had never known the bond to the extent you did, so she couldn't miss it. Only you could do that. Please don't torment yourself over something you had no control over, and can't change in any case. Remember the love. Remember Catherine."

He pulled away and shook his head violently. "But Gabriel. If I hadn't suppressed the bond, I could have saved her, Diana."

Diana's voice shook with intensity and a touch of anger...she knew it, and it upset her. "And if wishes were horses, beggars would ride, Vincent. You don't even know for sure that *you* did it...and I don't think you did. For all you know, it may have been a natural occurrence, or just simply the result of the backlash...not something you could have had any control over. Besides, even *with* the bond, you can't be a hundred percent positive that you could've saved her anyway. Gabriel might have simply killed her earlier, and then Jacob would never have been born. Accept that it's over. Live with it. And remember."

Vincent turned gracefully and faced Diana. He started slowly back toward her, and when he reached out to wrap his arms around her, Diana froze. He gathered her in against his chest and rested his head on hers, relaxing just a little as her arms came up around him under his cloak. They stood that way for a few moments, as Diana listened to his heartbeat. Closing her eyes, she savored his unique

scent of wool, leather, candle smoke, and musk. She felt that if she could've stayed that way forever, she could've been happy. When he released her, he said quietly, "Thank you, Diana. What is it that makes you so wise?"

Diana just shrugged, then laughed a little shakily. "Just born that way, I guess. Or maybe knowing you does all kinds of things to one's powers of perception."

Vincent settled on Diana's couch with her beside him. They talked for a long while, and Vincent spoke at length of Catherine. He explained how the bond formed in the beginning, and how it seemed to grow stronger over the time he'd known her. He spoke to her of the months after he'd returned Catherine to her world, when he'd been determined to stay away; to let her have her life, because he knew the relationship could only cause them both pain. Diana, with her usual perceptiveness, asked him if Father'd had anything to do with that separation.

Vincent's eyes glinted a little. "Father has always been over-protective of me. I think Catherine's social status reminded him of Margaret, the woman he'd married before he came Below. His and Margaret's love was wonderful, but her father forced a separation and annulment. He was very bitter."

"What ever happened to Margaret, Vincent?" Diana had drawn her legs up underneath her, and leaned on the back of the couch. She listened avidly, fascinated that Vincent was opening up so much of his life to her.

Vincent's gaze was distant, and his voice soft. "She came back to him, in the end." He looked down. "That, too, was Catherine's doing. Margaret was dying, and...well, eventually, Catherine brought her Below. Father and Margaret had a week together."

"I'm glad. I'm glad they were together in the end."

When Vincent looked up, there were tears glistening in his eyes. "Catherine thought it was so sad, for them to have had a beginning and an end...but no middle. I told her that...they had seven days. It sounded so wise to me, at the time." He shook his head, and Diana thought she caught a hint of amazement that he could have been so foolish. "Catherine and I had two years before Gabriel took her. According to my own words, I should be grateful."

Diana, seeing that Vincent was close to tears, changed the subject back to Father. "So. Father resented Catherine's social status--feared she would hurt you. He was really being over-protective, Vincent."

Vincent steepled his fingers, leaning his elbows on the padded knees of his jeans. "I realize that now. But then, even as an adult, for me to go against Father's well-meant advice was difficult...almost impossible."

Diana smiled, relishing these confidences. "But in the end, you did."

Vincent lifted his eyes from the afghan, whose design he'd been tracing with a nail. "Yes. In the end, I followed my heart."

Tightening her emotional block, Diana took his hand, stroking the long reddish hair on the back. She didn't meet

his eyes. "Good. I'm glad. But I assume Father did not accept your decision with equanimity."

Squeezing her hand gently, then releasing it, Vincent chuckled. "No. My relationship with Catherine became a bone of contention for a very long time. Eventually, he accepted her, grudgingly at first. But her spirit, her generosity, and her bravery won him over."

"No, Vincent. Her love for *you* won him over, I suspect."

Vincent seemed distant, but then he spoke quietly, his gaze sliding back up to hers. "It is interesting, Diana. Father accepted Catherine finally, and I truly believe he is sorry now, that he placed impediments. But I think he did not truly understand what he'd done until Jessica came back into his life and gave him the personal experience of loving a woman from another world...one who could not live in his. *Then*, I think, he truly began to understand. I felt something of that in him...but he has never really spoken of it."

Diana laid her head on her arm, which was draped across the back of the couch, and watched Vincent. Even in the artificial light of the loft his golden fall of mane was spectacular, though she preferred him in candlelight. "I remember you commenting on Jessica's leaving. Even then I felt somehow that there was more you would have liked to say. It seems to me that you have accepted Father's well-meant injustice fairly well."

"He is, after all, my father. I am truly sorry things didn't work out with Jessica, but..."

"But what?" Diana nudged.

Vincent smiled a little self-consciously. "I must admit to being relieved, as well, I'm sorry to say. I did not wish to lose him, and our world needs him."

There was a long silence, then Vincent posed his own question. "Diana, you once commented that your parents were gone. Has it been a long time? Were you close?"

Diana drew her knees up under her on the couch and settled in. She smiled. Vincent's interest in her indicated that he was finally beginning to look beyond his own pain, and the self-absorption of grief. It was a relief to see light at the end of the proverbial tunnel...to feel a little hope. "Yeah." She answered him, "At least I was close to my Dad. My Mom and I always kind of clashed."

Vincent's curious look was amused, but his question was not amusing. It made Diana a little uneasy. "Why did you clash?"

Shrugging, Diana just said quietly, "She always wanted me to be something I wasn't...couldn't be. Never could accept that I was *me*." She smiled then. "But Dad did. He was great, Vincent. He was a cop. Never made detective, but he was good. Perceptive. Honest. Used to take me to the station with him. I knew everybody." She looked down at her hands, which were clenched tightly in her lap. She willed them to relax. "Mom hated it. She hated his being a cop...hated him encouraging me. They used to fight about it all the time. I thought she'd flip when she heard I'd

applied to the Academy. Thought I'd really gone over the edge, finally."

"So. You went into law enforcement because of your father?"

"Yeah. Probably. I don't know, Vincent. He just taught me a lot about how the world works...how the justice system works...and doesn't work. Made me want to do what I could to help. Then, when he was killed..."

"Killed?" The surprise in Vincent's gentle tone encouraged her to continue.

"Yeah. One of those stupid things. He made a mistake. Wasn't careful enough, or fast enough. Zigged when he should've zagged." She shifted uneasily and smiled crookedly. "I didn't accept for a long time that it was his own fault...at least on a technical basis. I know now you don't do stupid things if you want to stay alive in this business. You can't afford to get careless. But then...I was just a kid. I was mad at the things I heard said. And I was twice as angry because the killers ended up getting off on a technicality; again, my Dad's fault. I was mad a long time. Sometimes I'm still mad."

Untangling her long legs, she rose abruptly and walked to the window. The lights of New York were out there, but with the loft lights on, she couldn't see them. Vincent switched off the lights as he joined her, and they stared out over the city.

"I look out at those lights, Vincent, and I see things too. I see them and I think of the misery that exists behind so many of them. Sometimes it's hard for me to see past that. I try, though, I really do."

"I know," he said gently. "I can see that struggle in you, though I cannot sense it."

Diana raised her eyes to his and scanned his face curiously. The planes and angles were harsh. His really shouldn't be a gentle face, but it was. Sometimes that amazed her. She sighed. It was good that Vincent was seeing past his own pain, but Diana was unsure if she wanted him seeing her *too* well just yet. "Yeah. Well. We all have our struggles." She looked back out over the city. Wrapping her arms around herself, an unconscious gesture of defense, she changed the subject. "So. Now that you've remembered what happened with Catherine, maybe it'll be easier for you. Just don't let yourself slide back into that 'it's all my fault' syndrome."

When Vincent didn't answer, she looked up and saw that he, too, seemed a little defenseless. He stood there in the dark, his hands hanging loosely at his sides. The moonlight shining through the window touched his face, accenting those same angles and planes she'd just admired so. Standing this close, she noticed how the light made even the hairs on his nose into small glints of silver. She tried squinting and the light became a fuzzy halo around him. *Beautiful*. She was so engrossed in her evaluation, that when he spoke, he startled her.

"I will try not to, Diana. It is difficult not to...take it on myself. That is what I do."

Diana had lost the thread of conversation somewhere, and was confused by this last obscure comment. "I...I don't understand, Vincent. What do you mean, it's what you do...*take it on yourself*?"

His hands raised briefly from his sides, gesturing helplessly. When he turned to her, his eyes held pain. "I feel...always...Diana. What others want. What they expect...of me." His voice broke a little as he continued. "When I cannot fulfill those expectations, desires...it hurts. It is all I can give back for all they do for me...my family, Catherine. But I am *not* what they want, what they need...any of them...nor will I ever be." Face in his hands, he bowed his head. "I am only myself...and often, that *self* is lost to the beast. So how can I be what *anyone* wants?"

Diana grasped his wrists, pulling his hands away from his face, and cradling those hands in hers. She locked eyes with him. "To hell with everyone else, Vincent." At his shocked look, Diana shook her head. "No. Listen. Look at yourself. Listen to yourself. What does *Vincent* want? What do *you* expect? But be careful that the expectations you put on yourself are *yours* and not someone else's. I know that feeling, in a way. I always tried to be what my Mom wanted, expected. I always failed. But after my Dad died, I got stubborn. I decided that I would be what I wanted...who I was. But I always lapsed back. I still do, sometimes. Vincent, Catherine loved you. She wanted you. And damn it...she *had* you. And she knew it. You never failed her. Ever. Fate failed her. Circumstance failed her. Not Vincent. Not you." When Diana could see that she had his attention, she asked very quietly: "What were her last words to you, Vincent?"

He stiffened. "You know the words, Diana."

"Then say them. Now."

Tears started in his eyes. He could barely speak, but the words were forced out. "'Though lovers be lost...'"

"And?" she prompted.

"I answered her... 'love shall not. And death shall have no dominion.'"

"She didn't blame you, Vincent. And she wouldn't want for you to blame yourself. She would want you to remember the joy."

Vincent stood for what seemed like a long time, his gaze locked on hers. Then his mouth lifted in a small smile. He touched her face very delicately, tracing the strong jawline. His voice, washing over her, and the touch, made her shiver. "I have, indeed, had many blessings in my life, Diana."

Vincent put his arm around her once more in a companionable hug, and she snuggled in, closing her eyes blissfully. They stood there in the moonlight for several minutes. When Vincent stepped back, Diana had to force herself back to reality. "I must go, Diana, but I thank you for your never-ending patience with me."

"Wait a minute." Diana walked over to her bookshelf and pulled out one of the poetry books. At his questioning look, Diana handed it to him. "Take it with you. There's a



poem in there I'd like you to read. It's marked."

Taking the book, Vincent nodded. "If you wish for me to read it, I certainly shall. Thank you again, Diana. And goodnight."

Diana wrapped her arms around herself and smiled slowly. "G'night, Vincent. Sleep well."

His slow, peaceful smile made Diana feel very, very pleased with herself.

After he left, Diana forced herself back downstairs. She pattered around the loft, tidying up. Still a little restless, she showered quickly and dried her hair. She was pleasantly tired. She could feel Vincent's contentment, and although she knew it was only temporary, it pleased her, knowing she *had* been able to help.

Once finished with her hair, she wandered into the living room area of the loft and booted up the computer. As she watched the program come up, she settled into the old, worn office chair and sighed. She brought up the word processing program and selected the file with her journal.

*He remembered making love to Catherine, and I'm glad. It upset me more than I can say that he thought the loss of the bond was his fault--and thus, Catherine's death. Dammit! Some things are just natural, in this life. Hiding from pain is a natural reaction; but at some point you've got to face the pain so you can see the joy that lives behind it. I hope he's beginning to see that. Beginning to be able to remember the joy and not be blinded by the pain and the guilt. I've been there before. I know I'll be there again. So will he. Seems we all had a little of the past to put behind us: Gregory, Father, Vincent...and myself. Gregory couldn't let his vision of the past go...he killed...and died...to protect it. Father had to realize that Jessica was only a memory of love...and he had to choose between a memory and the reality of his present. Now that Vincent has regained what he lost in the cave with Catherine, maybe he can hold his memory of love close without letting it keep him from a future. And me? Maybe I'll learn to forget about my failures and be able to begin again.*

Diana saved the file and exited, flipping the power switch on her way out of the room. "And now, maybe I can sleep. Maybe now the nightmares will leave him alone...and in turn, perhaps they'll leave *me* alone. And our lives can get back to something resembling normal."

Vincent had tucked the volume of poetry under his arm for the climb down, but once in the tunnels, he turned it to the light and read the spine. "*Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. Hm." He walked slowly home.

On the way home, Vincent passed Jamie, who was doing sentry on that route, and exchanged a few words. He noted for the first time just how much Jamie had blossomed in the past year and wondered where he had been all this time. She was truly becoming a lovely young woman. He

listened to the short, tapped messages from sentries and the replies from the pipe chamber and realized Pascal was still up, and at work. He stopped by there on his way to his chamber. He leaned against the entry wall and called out gently to his friend, who shifted down some steps toward him. "Pascal, it is late. Why aren't you in bed?"

Pascal shrugged and grinned as he laid his metal pipe-tapper down. The pipes were quiet for now. "Couldn't sleep. Sometimes it helps to come here."

Chuckling, Vincent commented wryly: "Perhaps you need to put your bed in here."

Pascal laughed at Vincent's gentle teasing. "Not a bad idea. I'm here most of the time anyway."

"I suppose so. Knowing you, you'd sleep better here with the pipes around you." Vincent paused briefly, not really feeling in the mood for further conversation. "I'll leave you to your pipes, then." He looked down at the book Diana had given him and juggled it a bit. "I have some reading to do."

Pascal reached out, his eyes asking permission to see the book. Vincent handed it to him, and as Pascal held it and read the title, his eyebrows raised. "New book?"

Vincent shrugged. "Diana's. She loaned it to me to read."

Handing the book back, Pascal's comment was a bit questioning. "Diana's a fine woman, Vincent. I like her."

Oblivious to the undertone in Pascal's voice, and even, for once, to his friend's emotions, Vincent merely answered matter-of-factly: "I'm fond of her as well, Pascal. She has proved to be invaluable to our world, and to me." Nodding briefly, Vincent told Pascal goodnight and headed to the nursery to pick up Jacob.

Vincent leaned over Jacob and lifted the child gently, being careful not to wake him. Nestling the child's head on his shoulder, Vincent carried him back to his chamber and put him in his own bed, smiling as the child's fingers spread, starlike, on the quilt, not at all disturbed by all the moving about. Settling in his leather chair and propping one foot on the bed, Vincent opened the book to the place marked.

The night knows nothing of the chants of night.

It is what it is as I am what I am:

And in perceiving this I best perceive myself

And you. Only we two may interchange

Each in the other what each has to give.

Only we two are one, not you and night,

Nor night and I, but you and I, alone,

So much alone, so deeply by ourselves,

So far beyond the casual solitudes,

That night is only the background of our selves,

Supremely true each to its separate self,

In the pale light that each upon the other throws.



Suddenly attentive, Vincent sat up, carefully re-reading the poem several times. It gave him a very eerie feeling...as though the poet had been speaking directly to him.

Vincent leaned his head back, letting the book fall shut. His eyelids drifted closed as he listened to the subway rumbling past, far overhead, and smiled a little at a sentry's gently tapped "All's well" and Pascal's musical reply.

Vincent felt more at peace than he had since long before he and Catherine had made love in that dark cave. *So long.* He would grieve still, and he knew there would be many more sleepless nights, but he was convinced now that eventually he would heal. He glanced over at his son and thought of the future. He had Catherine's son: a constant reminder of her love and acceptance of him...for the times when he knew he would forget and lose himself to the terror of loneliness and pain. Jacob would live, and through him Catherine's legacy of love.

Vincent placed Diana's book carefully on the bookshelf. He looked around his chamber. Everything was so familiar...yet it seemed different, somehow. Softer. The sharp edges of the shadows were gone. He sighed contentedly and began readying himself for bed.

Just prior to settling in for the night, Vincent sat to make his journal entry. He thought of his life, and Catherine's. And choices.

*We all choose our paths. Catherine. Myself. Father. And none of our choices can be altered once we have traveled those paths. We cannot retreat when we suddenly realize we have chosen poorly. Yet I wonder how much Catherine and I could have changed, even had our choices been different. There were times when Fate could have been altered. I could have allowed her to remain Below after her father died. But I wonder if she could ever have been truly happy,*

*then, or if we could have worked through our problems? It is useless trying to grant possibilities to the past. Only the present and the future present possibilities. As Diana says, I must live with the past as it is and remember the joy. I have our son...and I will remember her love forever.*

His hand reached over to touch the canvas-covered painting that lay against the wall. He didn't uncover it, but only touched it a moment. A lover's touch. "Sleep well, Catherine."

Leaning over, he blew out the single guttering candle and closed his journal. He listened a moment. His world was quiet. It was one of those rare moments when the pipes were silent, no trains moved, and everyone slept. Except him. There was no sound except the sound of his own breathing. He savored the peace. Both the peace surrounding him and the inner peace he'd so recently found. He rejoiced in it. Then the rumble of a late-running train disturbed the silence. Vincent sighed, pushed his chair under the desk and turned to his bed.

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*Two figures walked the city streets. Hunter and huntress. With them the night was, indeed, the background to themselves. Vincent walked his dreams in peace for the first time in many months. He was unaware that the quietness of his soul had been bought at such cost to Diana's peace of mind. Diana paced beside him, merely happy to be with him. To share the feeling with him. Pleased to have been allowed to give, and grateful that he had accepted her gift. The mist closed over them as the two figures moved companionably through the dark streets toward an uncertain future.*

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All that the rest forget in order to make their life possible,  
we are always bent on discovering, on magnifying even;  
It is we who are the real awakeners of our monsters,  
to which we are not hostile enough to become their conquerers;  
for in a certain sense we are at one with them;  
It is they, the monsters, that hold the surplus strength  
which is indispensable to those that must surpass themselves.  
Unless one assigns to the act of victory a mysterious and far  
deeper meaning, it is not for us to consider ourselves the tamers  
of our internal lions. But suddenly we feel ourselves walking beside them,  
as in a Triumph, without being able to remember the exact moment when this  
inconceivable reconciliation took place (bridge barely curved that connects the  
terrible with the tender...)

Rainer Maria Rilke



## POETRY REFERENCES

"Re-Statement of Romance" by Wallace Stevens is reprinted from COLLECTED POEMS by Wallace Stevens; copyright 1936 by Wallace Stevens and renewed 1964 by Holly Stevens.

The quote by Rainer Maria Rilke is from the dedication to the book, Only the Dreamer Can Change the Dream, Selected Poems by John Logan

