

FULL CIRCLE

by Janet Rivenbark

Catherine walked in the front door of her home with a sigh of relief. This had been her haven since they'd purchased it thirty years before.

She put her briefcase on the table, hung the garment bag carrying her judge's robe on the coat closet door, and was unbuttoning her suit jacket when Vincent came out of the library.

"How did your last day go?" he asked as he approached.

"It felt like a day-long party," she told him with a laugh, stepping into his embrace. "I did kind of expect a little something, but it's a good thing I cleared my office earlier in the week. Whenever I got back there, someone else showed up to pull me out for more cake. Even the DAs office got in on it."

"Well, you did start there, after all," he pointed out.

"I'm about 'caked out' after today. I ate so much cake I feel like I gained ten pounds." She reached up and tugged the little bit of a beard (there was as much silver in it and his hair as gold) that he'd allowed to grow lately and pulled him down for a kiss.

They heard footsteps on the stairs behind them but didn't pay attention until they heard their youngest's voice.

"Mom's home, and eww! They're at it again!" she called, as she scampered past into the kitchen.

"Why are teenagers always so easily embarrassed by their parents?" Vincent asked, as they stepped apart and started toward the kitchen hand in hand.

"Maybe because we are always doing things to embarrass them," Catherine offered.

They were both laughing when they entered the kitchen.

"That smells wonderful!" Catherine commented as she went to the cook, Caroline, and hugged her. "What is it?"

"It's a new dish we have on the menu at the restaurant. Our customers seem to like it; I thought you might." She looked around. "Where's Jake? Is he coming?"

"He drove to work today and wanted to take Holly home. He promised he wouldn't be long," Catherine told Carrie.

She turned to hug her younger son and Carrie's twin, Charles and asked how work had gone.

"Same as yesterday," he said with a grin. "A twelve-hour shift in the ER flies by. They keep us Physicians Assistants hopping."

Catherine leaned back against her husband as they surveyed their progeny.

They heard the front door and knew that Jacob had arrived.

Catherine had been pregnant with Jacob when they'd moved into this house 30 years ago. Vincent had declared that he was sure Jacob would be a lawyer from the moment he'd started talking. His first and favorite word had been 'Why?' and he had an argument for everything.

Jacob had been a surprise. Father had been so sure that they would never have children.

They were even more surprised when they found out Catherine was pregnant again, this time with twins.

The only resemblance any of the older three bore to their father was their height and coloring, and they all had Vincent's blue eyes.

Then when Catherine was 48, she found out she was pregnant again. That surprised everyone, especially Father, who predicted dire consequences and quoted statistics during the entire pregnancy. But it was an easy pregnancy, labor, and delivery; when Margaret was born, she was perfect. Catherine referred to her as her little afterthought and was especially thrilled that she finally had a child who looked like her. Maggie could have been a clone of her mother, right down to her petite stature.

Catherine had pictures of all her children hanging on the wall in the hall, and she couldn't resist hanging her 4th-grade picture next to Maggie's 4th-grade picture. They looked like the same child!

"Hi, Dad!" Jacob said, clapping his dad on the shoulder as he entered the kitchen. He'd shed his suitcoat and tie in the hall. "I see you're getting the night off cooking duties. What's our chef got on the menu tonight?" He started peeking in the oven and lifting pot lids, and Carrie batted him off with a wooden spoon.

He held up his hands and backed off, laughing. "What are you going to do with your judges' robe, Mom?" he asked, as he went to the sink to wash his hands.

"Your dad got a dress form and wants me to display the robe on it." She made a face and rolled her eyes. "I guess we could put it next to the window seat in the library."

"Is 'the judge' truly retired?" asked Maggie.

"Well and truly retired!" Catherine told her. "I know many judges stay on the bench well past 65, but I want to quit before I'm too old to enjoy my retirement. It might be fun to stay home and drive your father crazy for a change. You will be off to college next year, and we might get the chance to spend more time up at the lake house in Connecticut.

Maggie had finished setting the table, and Carrie started setting out the serving dishes.

"Come on, everyone. Dinner is served," she announced.

Catherine and Vincent took their seats at either end of the long table, and their children took their seats along the sides.

Even though the three oldest had moved out, they shared meals at this table at least once a week, not to mention every holiday, birthday, and anniversary.

"How many years have you two been together?" asked Charlie, as they started passing the food.

“Well, your dad found me in the park in April 1987, so we’ve known each other for 35 years, last April,” Catherine said with a nostalgic smile.

“But after you went home that April, it was September before I saw you again,” Vincent reminded her.

“I know, but I count everything from that April. We were married in April 1991. We moved into this house in April the next year, and Jacob was born that same month. I like to think of April as ‘our’ month.”

“I kind of like September, myself,” Maggie put in. “Especially since my birthday is in September... like in 3 days.

“As if we could forget... as if you’d let us forget, Bug,” said Charlie, flicking her ear. He’d called her Bug since he’d heard his mom’s friend Jenny say that Maggie was ‘as cute as a bug.’

“We’ve got the year pretty well covered for celebrations,” Carrie, always the peacemaker, pointed out. “Dad’s birthday is in January, Mom and Dad’s anniversary and Jake’s birthday in April, Charlie and me in June, Maggie and Mom in September, Thanksgiving in November, and Christmas and Winterfest in December.”

“Don’t forget Valentine’s Day, the 4th of July, and Halloween,” Charlie reminded her. “That only leaves three months without something to celebrate.”

“We used to have Grandfather’s birthday in May,” Maggie reminded them. “And they still celebrate it Below as ‘Founder’s Day.’”

“We can always use those off months to practice for the next month’s celebration,” Jacob suggested, and they all burst into laughter. This family always did like a good party.

“Are you really going to stay home and bug Dad all the time?” asked Maggie a little while later.

“I doubt it,” Catherine said. “Jenny’s retired too; we’ll probably see each other fairly often. And I do have some volunteer work lined up. I’ll likely be out of the house for at least a few hours a day, two or three days a week.”

“I’ve got some campus visits lined up for next spring,” Maggie reminded her. “Will you be able to go with me?”

“Of course, I will. I went with everyone else for theirs,” Catherine said. “This time, we will be able to take your father using one of those apps on our phones. He’ll get to see firsthand what we do and won’t have to wait for pictures.”

Carrie had wisely anticipated that Catherine might be ‘caked out’ from work, and she’d prepared a simple peach cobbler for dessert. Then she chased her parents off and drafted her siblings to help clean up and put away all the leftovers.

Catherine and Vincent wandered off to their favorite room on the first floor, the library. There was an oversized comfortable couch on one side of the room where they often cuddled.

“It feels odd not to have something from work to read over,” Catherine said, as they got comfortable.

“We could always read this,” he said, holding the old copy of *Great Expectations*. “I brought it back with me a couple of months ago but we never had the time before.”

At her nod, he opened the book and started.

He’d only read a few pages when he stopped, closed the book, and looked down at her.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It just seems that we’ve come full circle. We began with me reading this to you, and now, after all these years, it still seems to be one of our favorite things to do.”

“Well, not *the* favorite thing,” she pointed out. “We do have four children, after all, but definitely one of them.”

Vincent chuckled, opened the book, and when he returned to reading, they were both smiling.

END