

THINGS THAT GO BUMP

Janet Rivenbark

Catherine finished dressing and looked around the large bedroom. Everything was perfect. Not that Vincent was likely to do more than just glance at it, if she even got him up here to look at it. The room was big, and it was a good thing it was. She'd chosen a king-sized bed to replace the queen-sized she used to have. She smiled. Better to be prepared, just in case Vincent ever decided to join her in it.

She did a last walk through of the house to make sure everything was flawless. Vincent had visited a couple times to help her move furniture, but he'd never gone beyond the first floor.

It was after 10 pm. It was late but not as late as Vincent used to have to wait to visit. He'd promised to visit after he finished helping Father with a project.

When she reached the kitchen, she was pleasantly surprised to find him entering the kitchen from the pantry where the door to the basement was. He didn't seem to have the aversion to entering this house, as he once had her apartment. Maybe it was because the house had once belonged to a Helper and he was familiar with it.

"I wish you could have met Aunt Aggie," Vincent said with a smile, after Catherine hugged him. He was referring to the Helper who had owned the house 20 years before. "She was a very independent-minded spinster. She owned and ran a bakery for years. She spoiled all her nieces and nephews, and by extension all of us children Below. I've been here many times." He followed Catherine across the kitchen.

Vincent had told Catherine some of the history of the house. She knew that when Agnes Leon died, she'd left the house and her business to her oldest nephew. But he lived out of state. He'd sold the business, emptied the house of its valuable antiques, then started renting it. That was when the threshold had been closed. The house got a little rundown. When he finally sold it, Catherine's father had bought it.

Charles had renovated it and had planned to live there with his fiancé Kay after they were married. He'd been planning it as a surprise.

Catherine hadn't even realized, at first, how much real estate she had inherited after her dad's death. She'd been going through the estate paperwork and had set aside all the real estate files. She eventually sold several properties, but his notes on this house had caught her attention, so she'd held off on making a decision on it. When she'd finally seen it, she'd fallen in love.

"Do you think Miss Leon would approve of what Daddy did, and the way I decorated, for that matter?" Catherine asked.

"I haven't seen the whole house yet," he reminded her. "Did you leave all the woodwork and paneling the original unpainted oak?"

“Yes, Daddy did. My dad was one of those people who thought it was a sin to paint good wood. From his notes, he had to have all the wood on the second floor stripped, stained and refinished. Would you like to see the rest of the house?”

He laid his cloak over the back of a chair and turned to look around the kitchen. “You could feed an army in there,” he commented, looking at the long breakfast bar that had four chairs pulled up to it. “Except for that.” He indicated the large bare spot at the other end of the room that held only the small table and chairs from her apartment. She’d put the small table next to the window, and it looked like a cozy spot, but seemed out of place in the large, family kitchen. “Aunt Aggie had a large table in here.”

“I ordered a large table, but it was a special order that hasn’t been delivered yet,” she told him.

She quietly gauged his reactions to the rooms as she led him through the first floor then the floors above it.

There were three bedrooms on the second floor and two on the third. One of the bedrooms on the second floor was on the front of the house and had a private bath. It was larger than the other two and Charles had decided to use it as a home office. He’d had a carpenter put floor to ceiling bookshelves on all four walls. Catherine had loved the idea and had put a desk at one end, and a work table at the other with a spot set aside in the center, in front of one of the three windows, as a seating area with two chairs and a small table.

“When Father sees this,” Vincent had commented when they reached the room, “he’s going to be very envious.”

“But, as you can see,” she waved at the almost bare shelves, “I’m going to have to start haunting Mr. Smythe’s bookstore if I have any prayer of filling all these shelves.”

Vincent stopped and sniffed as they were leaving the room.

“That’s strange,” he commented.

“What?” she asked.

“The room still smells like Aunt Aggie.”

Catherine sniffed, and she did detect a slight sweet, floral scent.

“How is that possible?” she asked.

Vincent shrugged. “This was her bedroom. Maybe it just got soaked up by the walls and floor. She always wore the same thing. I think she said it was Lilies of the Valley.”

“But the walls are covered by bookcases and the floor has been refinished,” Catherine told him.

The two bedrooms on the back of the house shared a bath, but all the furniture for them hadn’t been delivered yet. They were rather bare.

The third floor had two bedrooms that shared a bath, and Catherine had decided to make them a master suite. The front bedroom, the smaller of the two, made a cozy little sitting room. All the

furniture had been delivered for that room. There was a padded window seat, a love seat and a couple of chairs and tables.

“You didn’t carpet any of the rooms,” Vincent observed.

“No, after Daddy had all the floors refinished it seemed a sin to cover them. They are beautiful. Large rugs are perfect.

She led him through the bathroom, with its shower that seemed to Catherine to be large enough for three people, large soaking tub, double vanity, toilet in its own separate little room and large linen closet, into the bedroom. Vincent’s gaze homed in on the French doors that led to the small balcony.

“It doesn’t have much of a view, and it’s not large,” she told him as she watched him cross the room and open the doors. “But it was big enough for a couple of wicker chairs and a table.”

“It’s still very pleasant,” he told her as he came back inside. “And you can see the sky. The whole house is very comfortable.”

“What do you think?” she asked when they got back to the kitchen a few minutes later. She’d been right. After checking out the balcony and pronouncing the bedroom “comfortable,” he’d hardly given it another glance.

“It’s all very pleasant. Was this all your father’s plan?”

“Not all of it. He did the renovating. I bought most of the furniture and picked the paint.” She looked up at him.

He didn’t meet her eyes but continued to look around the large, brightly-lit kitchen.

“It’s large,” he commented. “Three floors and a finished attic. What’s the size of your apartment?”

“Not quite 800 square feet.” She was beginning to wonder at all the questions.

“And this place is?”

“4500 square feet not counting the basement or the attic. Why all the questions?”

“You could fit your apartment in about one half of one floor of this house,” he observed. He finally looked at her, and she could see the laughter in his eyes. “You could get lost and need a map.”

She began to laugh as she picked folded piece of paper up from the counter.

“Would a floor plan do?” she asked, handing it to him.

He unfolded it and studied it.

“The office on the second floor is a good idea,” he said approvingly

“That reminds me of something I have to tell you,” she told him. “Sit down, and I’ll make us some tea. Do you want a snack?”

He sat and watched as she moved around the kitchen, putting the kettle on, preparing the teapot and putting cookies on a plate.

When she joined him at the table, she didn't hesitate to tell him her news.

"I told you that I asked to be moved out of Investigations and I sort of got what I asked for." She smiled at him.

"Sort of?" he questioned.

"I'm still in Investigations, but I'm the Deputy DA in charge of the division. I'll likely be bringing home more work, and it will be nice to have a place to work where I can leave it out, instead of having to clear it all up to go to bed or eat a meal."

"Congratulations on the promotion," Vincent told her sincerely. "I thought that was Joe's job."

"It was, but one of the other Deputies retired and John moved Joe into that position. It gives him more of what he wants; time in the courtroom."

"Have you finished moving in here?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Yes. It's official as of last Monday when I sent out all the change of address cards."

"What are you going to do about your apartment?"

"I was thinking about offering it to my friend Jenny. She's always loved it. It's closer to her work than where she lives now. I know she's been saving up for a down payment on a place, and since I own it free and clear, I can give her a deal that she can afford. And it will be a great investment for her."

They talked well into the night. Vincent happened to glance at the clock on the wall and was surprised at the time.

"It's nearly 3 am and we've spent the entire evening..." He looked puzzled and directed his gaze over her shoulder at the doorway to the hall behind her. "Do you have a guest, Catherine?" he asked.

"Of course not. Why?" She glanced over her shoulder at the doorway. She'd gotten a strange feeling just as something had caught Vincent's attention.

"I thought I saw someone in the hall."

They both rose and rushed to investigate. Vincent looked to the right toward the front door then to the left to what he was surprised to see was a solid wall.

"I guess it was a shadow or something. It was moving from the front of the house toward the back, but there is no place for anyone to go," he observed.

"Maybe it was car headlights from the street," Catherine suggested.

"Maybe, but it had the distinct outline of a person." He looked thoughtful for a moment. "I don't want to alarm you, but in Aunt Aggie's time, there was a door here." He pointed to the wall at the

back end of the hall. “The room that is now the pantry was a laundry room that held the doors to the basement and backyard.”

“Why would that alarm me?” she asked as they went back into the kitchen.

“Well. I definitely saw a shape pass the kitchen door, and the profile bore a resemblance to Aunt Aggie. She had a very... ah... distinctive nose.”

“Are you suggesting I have a ghost?” she asked with a grin.

“It’s possible. Aunt Aggie lived in this house most of her life, and she died here.”

Catherine laughed and shook her head.

“Daddy made the change from laundry room to a Butler’s Pantry and had the door walled up. And he moved the back door to the yard into the kitchen. The laundry is now in the hall on the second floor.

“There is something that is called a residual haunting. The theory is that structures can hold a memory, almost like a recording of things that went on inside them; things that created a lot of emotion, or just things that were repeated over and over. Miss Leon probably traveled that route a million times while she lived in this house; maybe you just saw a *recording* of that. That could account for the scent of Lilies of the Valley, upstairs too.”

“That would make sense,” Vincent agreed. “I’ve heard some stories Below about certain chambers that seem to resonate with emotion, or sometimes even sounds.”

“That would be very likely if the walls are limestone or granite since granite contains quartz and quartz is known to store things.”

Vincent looked at her and tilted his head to one side questioningly. “I thought you didn’t believe in ghosts.”

“Well, after Kristopher, I did some reading, and although I’m still skeptical that the man we met was a ghost, I do have a better understanding of the possibilities.” She’d never mentioned seeing her father to anyone, but Vincent. She was sure everyone would think she’d lost her mind.

Vincent glanced at the clock again. “It’s a good thing that you don’t have work tomorrow, but I really should go.”

He went back into the kitchen to pick up his cloak, and she followed him into the pantry to the door to the basement.

“This is so much better than watching you climb to the roof, then worrying about you getting home without being seen,” she said after she’d hugged him.

“And it’s a shorter walk, and bad weather will no longer keep me from visiting.” He dropped a kiss to the top of her head before he stepped back, swung his cloak around him and turned to leave. “Good night, Catherine. Sleep well.”

As Catherine was getting ready for bed, she was still wondering about what Vincent had seen. She’d only been in the house five nights so far; tonight would be the sixth, but she hadn’t seen or

heard anything. She'd been in bed by 11 every night because she had to be up early to go to work.

In the reading she'd done after the Kristopher Gentian incident, she'd learned that the most active hours for *ghoulies and ghosties and things that go bump in the night*... she purposely put the idea of *long-legged beasties* out of her head, because it always conjured visions of spiders... was between midnight and 3 am. A lot of what she'd read said that things often started around midnight and then just intensified or built up to the 3 am hour. It had been almost exactly 3 am when Vincent had seen the shadow.

She finished preparing for bed and was asleep shortly after laying down. If she had any phantom visitors, she didn't know anything about them.



It was almost noon when she woke the next day.

It's amazing what a good night's sleep can do for you, she mused to herself as she descended the stairs and went to the kitchen to start a pot of coffee.

She filled the carafe and poured the water into the reservoir of the pot before she turned to open the cabinet where she kept the coffee. When she opened the cabinet door, something fell out bounced once on the counter then hit the floor and rolled under the refrigerator. She got the coffee started before she went to get the yardstick so she could find out what had fallen out of the cabinet. It was red, but it had taken her by surprise, and she hadn't turned fast enough to see what it was before it disappeared under the refrigerator.

The yardstick was in the broom closet in the hall, and when she returned to the kitchen, she got down on her knees in front of the refrigerator to sweep the object out.



It was a red ball. She picked it up and looked at it. No, it was a red clown nose, like the one her dad used to have.

She had no idea where it had come from. The kitchen cabinets were all new - none of them were left from the time before the renovation. Maybe one of the workmen had left it, but she'd been up on the ladder and had wiped out every one of the cabinets before she'd started putting away her things.

She put the red nose on the counter and stood staring at it for a moment. It was still there when she got back from getting the newspaper off the stoop, not that she thought it would go anywhere.

Catherine kept an eye on the clock as she read the paper and drank her coffee. Jenny had been working out of her publishing company's Toronto office for several months and had just come back home. She'd heard all about the new house and couldn't wait to see it. Catherine was expecting her that afternoon at two. Before she left the kitchen to go upstairs to dress, she dropped the clown nose into the drawer in the small table under the wall phone.

When Catherine opened the front door a few minutes after two, she was immediately enveloped in Jenny's hug.

"I missed you!" Jenny declared, after she let Catherine close the door.

"And I missed you! You've never been gone that long before. Even when you traveled with your Aunt Leah the summer after college, you were only gone a month. Four months is too long! If I hadn't been so busy at work and with the house, I would have flown over to see you. Have you seen your parents yet?" Catherine knew that Jenny has just flown in the day before.

"Not yet. I'm going over there after I leave here. I thought I'd better come here first, or it might be another month before I actually saw you. One of the pains of being an only child... parents don't have anyone else to dote on when I'm away."

Jenny and Catherine had a good laugh as Jenny pulled a smaller bag out of the large tote she was carrying. She left the bag on the hall table while Catherine gave her a tour of the house.

"Your air conditioner is sure kicking," Jenny commented.

"Yeah, it seems kind of unbalanced or something. Some spots are positively frigid while others are just fine. I don't keep it set low, so I don't know why these spots are so chilly. I guess I'll have to get someone in to check it."

They wound up back in the living room, where Jenny set the bag she'd picked up in the hall on the coffee table in front of Catherine.

"Souvenirs," she said. "I started collecting them the day I got there."



Catherine had to laugh as she started pulling things out of the bag: pure maple syrup in a maple leaf-shaped bottle, a large box of assorted maple candies, a stuffed moose in a red RCMP uniform, a postcard with the Toronto skyline in three different eras, a couple bottles of Canadian Whiskey, there was even a vintage copy of *Anne of Green Gables*. There was also a gold maple leaf charm for a charm

bracelet that she hardly ever wore anymore, and a small Canadian flag tack pin.

"Quite a treasure trove," Catherine declared. "I'm really going to enjoy this," she added holding up the bottle of syrup. "I feel a waffle attack coming on."

They were in the kitchen eating pizza they'd had delivered, when Jenny, who was sitting in the same chair Vincent had occupied the night before looked into the hall, back at Catherine then back at the hall again.

"Who's the short elderly lady with the rather impressive nose?" Jenny asked.

Catherine turned around and looked at the door to the hall then back at Jenny.

“That must be Miss Leon... Aunt Aggie to those who knew her well,” she said with a grin.

“You’ve got a ghost?” exclaimed Jenny.

“Why do you assume she’s a ghost?” Catherine asked.

“The fact that I could see through her was a dead giveaway,” Jenny told her.

“OK, maybe I do have a ghost,” Catherine conceded.

“You haven’t seen her?”

Catherine shook her head, “But you’re not the only one who *has* seen her. Just last night a friend was sitting right where you are and saw a dark shadow cross in front of the door. There used to be a door to what was the laundry and is now the pantry at this end of the hall. It’s a solid wall now. I figured it was just a residual haunting.”

“I’ve never heard of a residual haunting stopping to look, making eye contact and smiling before turning and walking on.”

“An active ghost? A real one?” Catherine felt a chill go down her spine. She’d shared the story about Kristopher with Jenny after the art show, so Jenny knew of her skepticism. “Can you tell me what she looked like?”

“She was wearing a cotton house dress. Light colored, but I couldn’t tell what color it was. She had on one of those old-fashioned, flowered bib aprons like my Aunt Leah wears. And she had on cloth house slippers. Her hair was almost all snow white, she had on 50s style cat-eye glasses, and she had a nose that ranks right up there with Jimmy Durante.”

“The nose is consistent with what I’ve heard about Agnes Leon.”

“When did she die?” asked Jenny.

“I think it was about 20 years ago,” Catherine said, musingly. “A nephew inherited the house, but he didn’t live here. He rented it and let it get pretty run down. Daddy bought it as much for the location as anything else.”

“He did a great job with the renovation. Except for those cold spots... you know, I’ve heard that some cold spots can be attributed to the presence of ghosts or even a portal of some sort.”

“A portal? What kind of a portal?”

“Well, ghosts have to come from somewhere. There has to be a spot where the line between the worlds is thin or blurred. Some say that it’s the *tween places*, things like doorways or places where a property meets the next one.”

“I thought *tween places* had more to do with the fairy realm than ghosts,” Catherine pointed out.

“They have to do with anything that is paranormal or magical,” Jenny told her.

“Jenn, please... I have to sleep in this house. I don’t mind hearing about a possible residual haunting, that actually makes a little sense, but a real active ghost... well, it has me wanting to look over my shoulder all the time.”

“Maybe we should talk sometime,” suggested Jenny. “Maybe in a nice sunny spot in the park or something, but to get back to what we were talking about. Who did the renovation on the house?”

Glad to be back on a more mundane subject, Catherine smiled.

“His contractor was a client, but dad did the planning, at least it looks like he did. He had extensive notes. I just love all the space here, the screened porch on the back and the yard. The yard isn’t very big, but I’ve had a little landscaping done. I’ll do some of the work, maybe plant some roses, but I’ve hired someone to do the majority of it.”

“What are you going to do with all of this room?” Jenny asked.

“Spread out... have guests over to stay the night.” Catherine stopped and gave Jenny a look that caught her attention.

“What’s up Cath?” Jenny asked.

“I was just wondering. You’re still living in that tiny studio apartment in Brooklyn. How would you like to move up from 300 square feet to almost 800?”

“What are you talking about?” Jenny asked, suspiciously.

“Well, I know you’ve always loved my apartment, and it’s in a great location for you. I was going to give you first dibs on it before I put it on the market.”

“I could never...” Jenny started.

Catherine named a figure she knew Jenny could afford. It made Jenny’s eyes bug out.

“It’s got to be worth more than that!” Jenny exclaimed.

“Maybe, maybe not. It needs a little work; updating. The building was built a little over 80 years ago, and I think my apartment has only had one reno and that was about 30 years ago. Daddy had it redecorated before I moved in, but that is about all that’s been done.”

“I don’t know, buying a place of my own. That’s a big step,” Jenny hedged.

“And a great investment,” Catherine added. “There’s no hurry. I’m having the place cleaned early in the week and then painters are coming in at the end of the week. Talk it over with your dad. See what he thinks. I’d be willing to rent it to you if you don’t think you want to buy it right now.”

They talked for a little while longer then Jenny left for her parent's house.

“If you don’t hear from me soon, send the cops,” Jenny said. “Maybe that yummy Greg Hughes?”

“He’s married, Jenn,” Catherine told her with a laugh.

“I can still look and appreciate. Hmm, maybe if I move into your old place you could neglect to tell Elliot Burch you moved?”

“Jenn! You’re incorrigible!”

Catherine stood on her stoop and watched Jenny walk down the sidewalk until she reached the cross street that would take her to the subway.

Catherine was due Below at 8pm for story time, and she was going to have to hurry to make it on time. She quickly locked all the doors and headed for the threshold.

Since she wasn’t sure of the route yet, Samantha met her to be her guide.

“Mouse marked your route,” Samantha pointed out as they walked. Catherine could see large arrows painted in white paint on the right-hand wall about every twenty yards and at every intersection.

“It must have taken him all day,” Catherine said with a laugh. “And a lot of paint. Those arrows are hard to miss.”

“He said he *found* some paint Uptop, but I know he *found* it on a wooden pallet, inside a locked yard behind a paint store. Just don’t tell Father; he’d have a fit.”

“How much paint did he bring Below?” Catherine asked, wondering if she was going hear the report of a major paint theft when she went back to work on Monday.

“Only about ten cans. All different colors. I don’t know what he’s planning to do with the rest.”

“Well, at least now I won’t need a guide when I come Below,” Catherine said.

After they’d walked a little farther, Samantha looked up at Catherine and grinned.

“Vincent said you have a ghost in your house.”

“Well, to be truthful, I was a little skeptical, but my friend Jenny saw what they call a ‘full body apparition’ this afternoon. That makes me wonder.”

“Wow, in broad daylight?”

“Well, the place she saw it is on the back end of the house, and that’s the east side, so the light in the hall was kind of dim...”

“Is that the same place that Vincent saw the shadow last night?”

“Same place, only Jenny said that the ghost looked at her and smiled before she turned and walked away.”

“Wait until everyone hears about this,” Samantha exclaimed, as they reached the main tunnel leading to Father’s study. “Can we come up and have a séance on Halloween?”

“I don’t know about that,” Catherine hedged. “I don’t think Father would approve.”

They reached the study and were swept in with the group of children making for the same destination.

“What story have you chosen for tonight?” Father was asking Vincent when Catherine and the children entered.

“I was considering a classic tale by Edgar Allan Poe or Washington Irving, but since I don’t think Mary would appreciate the children waking with nightmares tonight, I’ve decided on *Freckles* by Gene Stratton Porter.” He held up the book. “The book is a little over a hundred pages, so we probably won’t finish it tonight, but we can pick up where we left off next week.”

As everyone was getting comfortable, Vincent leaned toward Catherine, who had taken her place at his side.

“You look as interested in this as the children,” he commented.

“I am. It’s been years since I read that book. I still have my old copy in a box of books in the basement.”

“Then that can be one of the first books to start to fill up all those empty shelves in your office.”

They did finish the story that evening, with Vincent and Catherine taking turns at each chapter.

Catherine had only left a light on over the kitchen sink, and her house looked dark and spooky when she entered and headed into the hall. She laughed it off as Jenny’s power of suggestion, until she turned from the kitchen into the hall and saw the lights in the foyer on; she didn’t remember turning them on. She checked locks and turned off the lights before she went up to her bedroom. She moved a little faster than usual up the stairs and was a little out of breath when she reached the third floor.



She had no plans to see Vincent on Sunday. She’d brought home files from the office, and she planned to work on those and get her office organized that afternoon.

Some of the furniture in the office was from her Dad’s office in his apartment. She had two hand-built wooden file cabinets from there. She organized her personal and household files in one and left the other to use for work.

Once she felt like she had a place to start, she spread her files from work out the work table, then went downstairs to get a pot of tea and a sandwich.

She worked several hours, and it was late afternoon when she thought she heard voices. She couldn’t make out words, but it sounded like male voices.

Thinking that Vincent was there and that he might have brought someone, she dropped her pencil and hurried downstairs. She followed the sound to the kitchen but was surprised that no one was there. The voices were coming from the radio on the kitchen counter.

It was a rather hideous old thing. It was a clock radio that her mother had used. When her mom died, her father had moved it to the kitchen, and he'd listened to baseball games on it on Saturdays and Sundays.



Catherine had taken it from her dad's kitchen and put it in hers, and then had brought it with her when she moved. It just seemed right.

What was on the radio as Catherine walked into the room, was a game between the New York Yankees and the California Angels; the Yankees had just won.

I wonder how that got turned on, Catherine thought as she inspected the radio. *Maybe I accidentally turned on the alarm when I moved it*. But when she looked closely at the face of the clock, she could see that the alarm hand was sitting on the 6, and the button wasn't turned to turn the alarm on. But the knob was definitely in the ON position.

She shrugged and turned it off and went back to her office. She finished up in her office, folded some laundry, and went downstairs to the kitchen to fix some dinner.

As she was working on the salad, she glanced over at the clock radio to check the time and stood in shocked silence for a moment. Sitting on top of the radio, right in front of the large snooze button, was the red clown nose.

She finally made herself go over and pick it up. She carried it back to the table under the phone. She opened the drawer, half expecting to find another red nose in it. When she didn't, she dropped the nose in it and looked around the room.

"Are you trying to tell me something, Dad?" She felt a little foolish asking question and was very relieved when she didn't get an answer.



As Catherine entered the DA's office the next morning, she dropped several handwritten briefs off on the desk belonging to the office typist, Layla. She had the only word processor for the whole DAs office, and she was very overworked. Catherine had seen the budget for the upcoming fiscal year, and included in that budget were desktop computers for every attorney and secretary in the office.

When John had briefed everyone on the new budget, he'd promised that all the computers would have the latest and greatest in word processing and spreadsheet software, it would all run in Windows 2.11, and they would be networked and have a messaging system that would be tied in with the city's system. He had even promised that before a year passed all the attorneys would be able to dial into the city system from their home computers if they had one, and access files and their messages.

As soon as she'd heard the news, Catherine had started shopping for her own computer. She wanted one like what she would be using at work, so she'd had the specifications on hand when she'd started making her calls. She'd ordered it and everything she needed to go with it,

including a printer. All of it had arrived shortly after she'd moved into the house and it was still in boxes in the hall closet.

At first, she'd thought of getting Mouse to help her set it up, but then after seeing how he'd souped up William's stand mixer, she'd decided that Vincent just might be willing to help her. He might even enjoy the challenge.

Layla dropped off the typed notes just after lunch.

"How do you do that?" Catherine asked.

"Do what?" Layla turned as she was leaving the office.

"Get all this typing done, and done accurately in such a short period of time?"

She shrugged and grinned.

"The word processor helps. I can type a whole page, then proof it before I commit it to paper, but I do type about 80 words per minute. Once we get the new computers, I'll be able to type the whole document, then proof it and print it."

"You're not worried that with all of us having our own computers on our desks, that it will put you out of a job?"

"Are you kidding? Can you see guys like Mr. Maxwell doing their own typing? I doubt that any of them can type. Now, most of the women in the office will probably start doing their own typing, but the men will still be helpless without me."

Catherine had to laugh and agree. She'd witnessed some of Joe's hunt-and-peck typing a few times when Layla had been out of the office.

When Catherine entered her house that afternoon after work, she could hear music. The radio in the kitchen had turned itself on again. The alarm was still set for 6, but the alarm was not turned on, and since she'd left the house well after 6 that morning and it wasn't 6 pm yet, she wasn't sure what was going on. Before she left the kitchen to go upstairs to change she unplugged the radio.

Vincent arrived after dinner to help her with the computer.

"Are you sure we can do this ourselves?" he asked, after they had finished removing all the parts from boxes. Vincent had broken down all the boxes and set them outside the room in the hall.

Catherine held up the booklet she'd found at the bottom of one of the boxes.

"We have instructions," she told him. "And everything seems to be plainly marked. We should be able to do this." She pointed at a gray and cream metal box that was about 16 inches square

and about 8 inches deep. “That is the actual computer. The instructions suggest that it sit on the desk or table and that we put the monitor...” she pointed at the piece that looked like a small TV, “... on top of it, then arrange the whole thing so that there is room for the keyboard in front of it on the desk. It’s supposed to look like this.” She held out the booklet.

Vincent studied the picture then arranged the items on the worktable where she indicated.



“What is this?” Vincent asked, picking up gray box.

“That is the printer. Just put it on the table next to the computer.”

Vincent arranged it as Catherine picked up several cables and spread them out on the long table.

“Now all we have to do is figure out where all these go.”

Vincent held out his hand for the instruction booklets, and 30 minutes later all the cables were in use connecting the parts to each other or the wall outlets. He’d even figured out how to connect the little black box that was labeled “modem.”

“Now all we have to do is see if any of it works,” he said with a slight smile. He consulted the booklet again, then started pushing buttons and turning things on. The box under the monitor started to hum, and a minute later, green letters appeared on the monitor. A few lines of text scrolled up, and then it all settled to a muted hum.

“All the programs I ordered are supposed to be installed on it already,” Catherine said.

“Supposedly, all I have to do is this.”

She typed a word, and the screen came to life as they watched. The screen turned to a light turquoise color, and there were small pictures with labels under them: WRITE, LOTUS.

“The salesman promised me that there would be a new, better program to use for writing, word processing, out in a few months. I’ve already bought it, and it will be sent to me with the instructions on how to install it.”

“What is Lotus?” he asked.

“It’s for spreadsheets. It’s the one the city uses. I probably won’t use it much, but I might need it to look at a spreadsheet someone else sends me.”

Vincent held up two white boxes. One was labeled “3.5” and the other “5.25.”

“Those are disks. They are used to store the stuff you do on the computer. That way I can work at home, put it on a disk, and then take it to work to finish it or print it, or just give it to someone else.”

“It’s an ingenious invention,” Vincent told her. “But please don’t tell Mouse anything about it. He’ll be out hunting one to *find*.”

“Maybe once I figure it all out, I’ll get him one to play with. Maybe he’ll learn how to write programs. I’ve read that it’s the next big thing in career choices.”

Catherine could tell that Vincent was dying to get his hands on the computer, so she handed him a book.

“Why don’t you play with it for a while. This has some instructions on how to use it and what the different programs do. I’ll go downstairs and fix us a snack. I’ll call you when it’s ready.”

A few minutes later when she called him there was no answer, so she went back up to her office to find him staring intently at the computer monitor.

“Vincent?”

He looked up and smiled at her.

“There is a computer language called Basic,” he told her. “It can be used to write simple programs.” He beckoned her over so she could see the screen. “I just drew a box.”

He pressed a key, and she watched as a dot moved to draw a box.

“If I change these numbers here,” he showed her by changing them. “The size of the box changes.” He pressed the key again, and this time the dot drew a larger box.

“OK, so maybe it’s you who needs a computer so you can learn to write programs.”

Vincent laughed as he started turning everything off.

“If I had one of these, I’m afraid that I’d never leave my chamber,” he told her as they went down to the kitchen.

“Well, you can always come up and use mine. I’ll see about getting some books on the subject.”

Vincent allowed Catherine to precede him into the kitchen and she stopped short just inside the door, and he almost ran over her.

He reached out to grab her shoulders as she swayed.

“What is it?” he asked in concern.

She just pointed to the table.

He didn’t see anything unusual. There were plates on the table with crackers, cheese, and cookies. The teapot was in the middle, and there were two mugs. He looked closer and saw a red ball stuck on the spout of the teapot.

“Is that a new teapot accessory?” he asked.

“No, it’s that damned rubber clown nose that keeps popping up, but that isn’t the whole thing.” The turned and looked up at him. “I didn’t put everything on the table. I left it on the counter in case you wanted to eat at the bar or take it out on the screened porch.”

Vincent looked back at the table.

“Seems to me that maybe Aunt Aggie wants us to eat at the table.”

“Is it Aunt Aggie?” asked Catherine as she approached the table. “Did the red clown nose have any special meaning to her?”

“No, in fact, I know she hated clowns. Does it have some meaning to you?”

She sat, and he sat down across from her before she answered.

“Remember I told you about my dad having one that he used when he would try to cheer me up?”

“Yes, but where did this one come from?”

“I was taking the coffee canister out of the cabinet when it fell out the other day. I put it in a drawer, and this is the second time its found its way out of it.”

Vincent reached out and took the red ball off the spout of the teapot. He inspected it then put it in his vest pocket.

“If it’s all right with you, I’ll take this with me. Maybe the children will enjoy playing with it.”

They finished their snack then Vincent rose to go.

“You have to be up early for work tomorrow, but if you don’t mind, I’ll be back on Friday evening. One of the children found a large box of movies on VHS tapes. They are all in good shape, but none of them are labeled. One of our Helpers sent down an old TV and a VCR, and I’ve been watching them so I can decide what is suitable for the children. I’ve been labeling them as I go and I’ve found several that you might enjoy. I know you have said that you don’t get to go see movies very often.”

“That sounds like fun. I’ll make popcorn.”

She hugged him, and he left.



The next morning Catherine overslept a little, and she was in a hurry. She went downstairs to start the coffee, then went right back upstairs to shower and dress. Back in the kitchen she quickly made some toast and drank a cup of coffee. She filled her travel mug then opened the dishwasher to put in her cup and plate and was stunned when the red rubber nose rolled out onto the floor. After she put her dishes in, she closed the door and leaned down and picked up the nose. She quickly scribbled a note and secured it around the nose with a rubber band and stuffed it into her bag as she rushed out the door.

She often saw one of the children on the street on her way to work in the morning, or at some point during the day. She spotted Samantha handing Clarence the saxophone player a brown paper bag and called out to her.

“Hi Catherine,” Samantha said, as she skipped up.

“Good morning, Samantha.” She pulled the little bundle out of her bag and handed it to the girl.

“Would you give this to Vincent when you see him.”

“Sure Catherine. Anything else?”

“No, Sweetie, that’s it for now.”

She smiled as she watched Samantha skip off down the sidewalk.

Samantha didn't see Vincent until lunch.

"I saw Catherine this morning," she told him, "and she asked me to give you this." She handed him the bundle, then went to join her friends.

Vincent put down his fork and unwrapped the paper from around the ball. He stared at the ball for a moment then read the note:

It came back!

~C

He quickly dropped the note and the ball and checked all the pockets on his vest. Sure enough, the ball he'd put there the previous night was gone.

Catherine puzzled over the clown nose all day. So much so that at one point Joe made fun of her.

"Earth to Cathy," he said, waving his hand in front of her face, as he stood across her desk from her.

She looked up at him and smiled.

"I'm sorry... just wool-gathering I guess. I didn't forget anything did I?" she added.

"No, I was just on my way out to get some lunch and wanted to know if you'd like to go with me."

She looked down at the files spread across her desk.

"I don't really have the time today, but could you bring something back for me? A chef's salad or maybe a club sandwich. Whatever you can get where you're going." She reached into her bag and pulled out some money and handed it to him.

"That's all?" he asked as he took the bill.

"That's it... and thanks. I figured if I worked through lunch I might make it home on time today."

She was wrong. Something came up at 4:45 that kept her in the office until 7pm.

It was dark when she walked into the house. So dark that she had to grope on the wall for the light switch.

"I'm going to have to do something," she said out loud. "Maybe a lamp plugged into a timer here in the hall and something on the stairs and landings."

She hung up her coat and left her purse on the hall table. She carried her briefcase up to her office, where she dropped it on the desk before going up to her bedroom to change.

A few minutes later she was much more comfortable in sweats and bare feet as she descended the stairs. She noticed a faint light coming from her office and went to investigate. As she got closer, she could hear voices, and when she looked inside the room, she was surprised to see that the TV that her dad had installed in one of the bookshelves was on. It was an old Star Trek rerun. She reached for the remote that was on her desk.

I must have hit the remote when I put my briefcase on the desk, she thought as she turned it off.

In the kitchen, she heated up some leftovers then carried a plate back up to her office. While she ate, she read more of the instructions for the computer.

She was planning to familiarize herself with the computer that evening. She'd also brought home a file she was working on, and if things went well, she might even try using the computer to write her notes.

The manual pretty much covered everything from how to turn it on to opening programs and saving documents.

A few hours later, she yawned and rubbed her eyes. Note taking on the computer was different, she decided, but not at all bad. She certainly could type faster than she could write. As she got tired, her spelling might get wonky, but at least it was all legible for a change.

She saved the file to a disk, closed the word processing program, then turned off the computer.



The first thing the next morning, she decided to take another look at her notes while she drank her coffee, so on her way down to the kitchen she turned on the computer.

When she walked back into the office a few minutes later, the computer was on, and when she sat down in front of it she noticed that there was something typed after the C: prompt... **Hi** and that was it.

Maybe I brushed the keyboard, she thought as she backspaced then typed in the command to open the word processor.

She read through her notes, made a few corrections, then printed them out. Until they got the computers in the office, she'd have to do it that way.

A couple of hours later at work, Joe walked into her office and waved a file at her.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Looks like a file,” she commented, looking up at him then back at the papers on her desk.

“But the notes are all typewritten. You trying to make the rest of us look bad?”

She looked up, and he was grinning at her.

“Well, sorry. Everyone is always complaining about my handwriting, I decided I’d try using a computer.”

“You bought a computer?”

“We’re getting them here in the office in a few months, I just thought I’d get ahead of the game.”

“I like it, but when we do get them here in the office, I’m going to have to learn to type.” He walked out of the office shaking his head.



Catherine stayed busy for the next couple weeks, but not too busy to notice that there were some odd things going on in her home.

With the days getting shorter, it was usually dark by the time she got home most evenings. Every day that she got home after dark, the ceiling light in her foyer was on. She knew she hadn’t left it on that morning.

Several times, she’d walk into the kitchen and find the radio playing, usually an oldies station or classical music, but never on the same station twice. Even after she’d unplugged it she’d found it plugged back in - and the clock was even set on the right time.

With that and the TV turning on a few times when she was out of the room, she began to think she had some kind of an electrical problem in the house.



“But if you had an electrical problem, that wouldn’t cause the radio to plug itself back in and reset the clock to the correct time,” Vincent pointed out when she told him what had been going on.

She set a pot of tea on the table and sat down across from him.

“But what other explanation could there be?”

“You could have a ghost,” he reminded her. “I saw a shadow and your friend Jenny saw a full body apparition.”

“Jenny is always seeing and sensing stuff,” Catherine scoffed.

“Has she ever been wrong?”

“Well... not often,” she conceded. “But I don’t know... a ghost? What Aunt Aggie a prankster?”

“No, not really. She enjoyed a good joke, but she didn’t play practical jokes on people. And there is the clown nose and the radio that both have more to do with your father than with Aunt Aggie.”

“I did think I saw him that time after he died,” she mused.

“How about Kristopher?”

“I definitely haven’t seen him!”

“No, I mean has anything happened that might be attributed to him?”

“Not that I can think of. Even the TV could be more like Daddy. Each time I’ve found it on, the program has been something he used to watch. Things like news programs, and Star Trek reruns. I have yet to turn that TV in the office on, but each time I find it on, it’s on a different channel.”

“Has there been anything else?” Vincent asked. “Things going missing and turning up in unusual places? Or things appearing.”

“What do you mean, things appearing?”

“Odd things. The clown nose could be one.”

Catherine started to shake her head but then remembered something. Since the first day she’d moved in, she’d been finding pennies all over the house. One was even on her pillow one night. She’d honestly thought nothing of it, but she had saved them all. She had them in a coffee mug on the kitchen windowsill over the sink.

She went to the windowsill and got the mug.

“Just these,” she said, sitting then sliding the mug across the table to Vincent.

Vincent tipped the mug and poured at least 50 pennies out on the table in front of him.

He looked closely at several of them, then looked at her.

“Where did you find them?” he asked, as he continued to look at each one.

“All over the house. On furniture, on counters, on the floor, even on my pillow once.”

“Have you noticed anything unusual about them?” he asked.

“No, they’re just pennies.”

“They all look like they are newly-minted,” he pointed out.

“I did notice that,” she agreed.”

“But they aren’t.” He handed her several. “They are all from the same year: 1968. That was the year Aunt Aggie died.”

She handed the pennies back to him. “My mother died the same year,” she told him. “Does it mean something?”

“I read something somewhere,” he began, “that when you come across pennies, often it can be an indication from the spirit world of someone trying to communicate with you. Narcissa says that spiritual signs come in many forms, and sometimes you might not even recognize them as a spiritual message. Sometimes, you may not believe them, as you are not sure of what it means. The pennies just might be someone’s way of letting you know that they are still in your life and are thinking of you.”

“But who?” She questioned. “My mother, Daddy, Kristopher or even your Aunt Aggie?”

“Since the pennies are from the year your mother died, and a lot of the other things that have happened seem to be linked to your father, I’d say that it’s him, or maybe both of them,” Vincent said. He remembered seeing both of them when he’d snatched Catherine from the jaws of death that time at the lake at Stoney Creek.”

Catherine swept the pennies off the table and back into the mug.

“I don’t know, Vincent. Maybe I’m just too practical, but there has to be another explanation... something more tangible.”

“Could someone be getting into your house?” he asked, heading in the most obvious direction.

“Not unless they are coming from Below. There are only two doors, front and back, and both of those doors have locks, and I keep them locked. All the windows are locked,” she pointed out.

“Do you lock the doors to the balcony in your room?”

She nodded. “And there is a lock on the gate from the alley.”

“I don’t know of anyone Below who would want to play tricks on you. And no one there knows the significance of the clown nose, or the year 1968.”

Catherine remembered seeing the word “Hi” typed on the computer. She told Vincent about it.

“Maybe you should leave the computer on and the word processor open to a blank document,” he suggested.

“I don’t think so,” she said with a shaky laugh. “I don’t think I want to know that bad.”

Catherine went to bed that night, and for a change, she had trouble falling asleep. She kept running all the incidents through her mind trying to find a logical explanation for them. When she finally did fall asleep, she woke a little while later swearing that she’d just felt a cat jump on the bed. She’d never owned a cat, but Nancy had one who liked to sleep on the foot of the bed when she visited. She turned on the light and looked, but there as nothing there.



Joe had an important trial starting on Monday. It had taken a week to choose the jurors, and he was happy with those choices. But since the defendant was also a lawyer and his defense attorney

came from his own law firm, one where he was a partner and had his name on the letterhead, Joe knew that he was going to have to work for this one. And he'd recruited Catherine's help.

He'd wanted to work at the office on Saturday, but Catherine was determined to sleep in.

"No, Joe!" she'd told him when he'd asked for her help on Friday afternoon. "I've already put in 60 hours in this office this week, and frankly, I'm sick of it." She gestured at the muddy tan walls around them. "This color is awful, and it's depressing. I've asked John for permission to paint my office, and he's checking to see if it's allowed."

"If you paint your office, everyone will want to paint," Joe pointed out.

"Maybe not. I told John I'd pay for the paint and do the work myself. It's barely 12'x12'. It shouldn't take long."

"OK... maybe I'll do mine. You're right, this color is bad. I swear nothing in this place has been painted since I've been here. If it has, they just used the same color paint. But that is beside the point... I really need your help on this Radcliffe."

"And I didn't say I wouldn't help. I just said I didn't want to come into the office to do it. I want to work at home, where I can sit around in my sweats and be comfortable while I'm working. It will be quieter, and I'll be able to concentrate. I'll take the files home with me tonight and go over everything at my own pace. And I promise I'll have it all broken down and you'll have detailed notes first thing Monday. Are you coming here before you go to court?"

"Yeah, the judge reminded everyone that we start promptly at ten on Monday."

"Good, then you'll have time to read over everything before you have to leave."

"You know I wouldn't ask, but you are the best at this," he said with a grin.

"And you have to work on your opening statement," she said.

She got home a little before 8 pm. She carried all the files into the house and up to her office, laid them out in order before she changed her clothes and went downstairs to eat. She didn't do any work on them but went to bed early, slept ten hours and rose refreshed and ready to get to work.

She carried her coffee and toast up to her office where she got to work.

An hour later she was heading back to the kitchen for another cup of coffee. On her way back she stopped and wrote "*coffee pot*" on her shopping list. It would save trips up and down the stairs.

She made another trip down to the kitchen around noon to make a sandwich. At her last checkup, Peter had admonished her for skipping meals. She was too thin and a little anemic. He'd ordered her to take vitamins and eat three meals a day. She was doing her best to comply.

She was reading through one of the last files. The only sound in the room was the hum of the computer fan and her pencil on the paper, but she could swear she was hearing the sound of a dog walking in the hall. She got up and looked. She knew there was no way a dog could have gotten into the house, but she'd distinctly heard what sounded like a dog's nails on the hardwood

floor. But when she reached the hall, there was nothing. She even went and looked over the rail into the foyer below, but it was empty too.

Shaking her head, she went back to the files on her desk.

A few minutes later she caught a movement out of the corner of her eye and looked up in time to see what looked like a dog's tail disappearing past the door jamb. As if she hadn't looked up in time to catch the whole dog, just the tail with the long blond hair. And she could hear its nails on the hardwood floor again. She jumped up and went to look, but there was nothing there.

I wonder if Aunt Aggie had a dog? she asked herself.

She needed a break and decided that she'd change and go ask Vincent

It was Saturday afternoon, and Catherine figured Vincent was probably with the children. She hated to interrupt his time with them, but it would only take a few minutes to tell him what had happened and ask about a dog.

There wasn't a sentry on the route from her threshold until she was almost to the main part of the tunnels. Since Vincent's illness, more of the women besides Jamie had been taking sentry shifts. Father still had an aversion to giving them night time shifts, or the more distant posts, but many of the younger women were glad to give a few hours of their time.

The sentry post that Catherine approached wasn't even hidden. There was a stool at the intersection of several tunnels, and Judy was sitting on the stool with her staff across her knees. Catherine had to smile. Judy had obviously been spending time with Jamie. She was wearing jeans, a sweater with a utility vest over it and her long black hair was pulled back and hung in a braid down her back.

"Hi Catherine," she said, hopping down from the stool. "You here to see Vincent?"

"Yes, I am. Is he with the children?"

"No, a steam pipe on one of the lower levels cracked and he took a crew down to repair it. They've been at it since about nine this morning."

"Do you think he'd mind if I went down? Can I find him without a guide?"

"I doubt that he'd mind if you showed up," Judy said with a laugh. "And I'm sure you won't have a hard time finding them. They're working right in the main tunnel just past the cut off to the falls. If you're going to go, would you mind stopping in the kitchen and picking up some stuff that William wants to send down to them? He just sent out a message asking for someone, but most of the children are Uptop."

"Of course I'll stop."

"I'll let William know."

Judy turned to tap out the message on a nearby pipe as Catherine headed off to the kitchen.

“You sure you can handle this?” asked William as he helped her with the backpack containing the supplies. “There are a couple gallons of water, snacks, and some tools that Vincent requested. It weighs over 20 pounds.”

“I carry around stacks of files and big law reference books all the time,” she told him with a laugh as she adjusted the pack. “And you’ve never seen the briefcase I bring home almost every night. I got a promotion that was supposed to cut my workload, but I swear I work more hours than I did before. Only now, I do a lot of it from home.”

“Though she be little, she is fierce!” William quoted.

“Not you too!” she exclaimed.

“Me too, what?” he asked.

“Quoting Shakespeare at the drop of a hat.”

William laughed. “Father and Vincent have rubbed off.”

It only took a short time for Catherine to reach the area where the men were working. She stopped to leave the pack in a spot next to a pile of clothing that the workers had shed. The escaping steam had made the tunnel warm and damp. She removed her denim jacket and draped it over the pack.

When she rounded the corner to where they were working, the sight, she beheld made her gasp.

All the men; Cullen, Matthew, Stephen, Silas, Mouse, and Vincent, had taken off their shirts because of the heat. But they were all wearing heavy leather work gloves because the pipes they were working with were hot. It looked a little silly on some of them, but Vincent could have easily graced the pages of Playgirl magazine.

Muscles rippled and glistened with sweat and Catherine almost moaned. Vincent was holding the new pipe level as the others guided the fittings over the ends of the old pipe. She had to laugh internally as Vincent sensed she was close and turned his head. As his eyes met hers, she could tell he was distressed at being caught in his current state of undress.

She just smiled confidently at him.

“William sent down water and some snacks for all of you,” she announced. She fanned herself, as much for the feelings the sight of Vincent had brought on as for the heat in the tunnel. “It’s hot in here. I’ll wait for you back where I left everything.”

She went back and sat on the boulder as she listened to a lot of clanging and banging. Several minutes later everyone joined her.

“Done?” she asked.

“Vincent is,” Cullen told her. “We just need to make sure everything is tight and that the steam is no longer leaking.”

“It’s the source of the heat in the nursery and younger children’s dormitory since Mouse installed the radiators,” Vincent told her, as he crossed in front of her to get his shirt. She picked up a towel and tossed it to him.

“You’d better use that before you put your shirt on. Otherwise, you’ll soak through your shirt and get chilled when you head back.”

He obviously agreed because he toweled off as the others descended on the pack with the water and snacks.

Mouse handed Vincent a bottle of water and a homemade granola bar.

Vincent finished drying off and took the water and snack. He surprised Catherine by sitting next to her without putting on his shirt.

“I’m sure you didn’t come all the way down here just to bring the supplies,” he said, uncapping the water.

She told him about what had happened. The other men finished their snacks and went back to work.

“Aunt Aggie didn’t by any chance have a dog, did she?”

“Several, actually,” Vincent told her. “She always had a medium-sized dog of some kind. No pedigrees, just mutts that she found on the street, or saved from being euthanized at the pound.”

“Do you think that is what I heard?”

“There’s a good chance. It used to be my job to keep the dog’s nails cut. I already had the tools to do it, since I kept my own nails considerably shorter when I was younger. Especially the last dog she had. He died about a year before she did. He was very protective of her. He would patrol the house at night, and she complained that his nails clicking on the hardwood floor would wake her up. She tried to get him to sleep in the bedroom, the room you are using for an office. All her other dogs had a dog bed in the corner and were happy to sleep in there. But Simon felt he had to keep watch at night. And if he did go to sleep, he slept to one side of the door to her bedroom.”

“What kind of dog was he?” she asked.

“A mixed breed, but he was about the size of a Labrador retriever, but his hair was long and a very light blond.”

“Did he have long hair on his tail?”

“Yes.”

“That’s the tail I saw. So, it must have been Simon.

“Must be residual, since that is what Simon would do when he was alive. Aunt Aggie always had a cat too.”

Catherine felt as if a lightbulb went on in her head.

“That explains it!”

“Explains what?” Vincent must have felt that he was sufficiently dried because he reached for his shirt.

“I could have sworn that I’ve felt a cat jump on my bed. My friend Nancy has a big Maine Coon cat who has taken a liking to me. He always sleeps on the end of the bed when I stay with them. It felt just like when Charlie jumps on the bed. What is it about that house that holds everything like that?”

“Like you said, granite has quartz in it, and quartz crystal can store things. But a cat jumping on your bed doesn’t sound like a residual, since there wasn’t a bed like yours in that room when Aunt Aggie was alive. Those were the rooms she allotted to children when they visited. There were bunk beds in the room you use and two twin beds in the other room on that floor. She could put six children on that floor if they stayed over.”

“And there is a lot of granite around here, and there must be a lot of pure crystal too if we can judge by that chamber you found here Below.”

“So that could account for the residual things like Simon, and Aunt Aggie’s perfume,” Vincent added as he stood and put on his shirt.

“But what about the other stuff?” Catherine asked. “You seeing Aunt Aggie passing the door of the kitchen could be residual, but I don’t think a residual haunting would stop, make eye contact with Jenny then smile at her.”

“You are correct. Why don’t you stay and have dinner with us tonight, then I’ll go back up with you, and we will look at this more closely.”

They stopped in the study, then Vincent went to bathe and put on clean clothes. Catherine stayed in the study with Father and was surprised when he brought up *Catherine’s ghost*, as the children had begun to call it.

“Vincent told you about that?” she asked.

“We’ve talked about it. He wanted to know my opinion,” Father said.

“What did you tell him?”

“That I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who hasn’t had some sort of a paranormal incident in their lives. But being a doctor, I can’t completely ignore the psychological explanation for ghosts.”

“And what is that?” she asked, curious.

“That the brain conjures a *ghost* to give itself comfort when a loved one has been lost. Sometimes it’s in the form of dreams, but other times it’s an apparition.”

Catherine thought for a moment.

“I did see my dad a lot right after he died,” she said musingly. “I saw him in traffic or walking down the street. I even started looking for him after seeing him a few times.”

“That’s not unusual,” Father told her.

“But I don’t think it could account for everything that has been happening in my house,” she said.

“Vincent said you were a skeptic, but you sound more like a believer,” Father said with a chuckle.

“I really don’t know what to believe.” She laughed too. “There have been so many little things, but I can’t see how all of them could be called natural or normal. I mean, radios do come on by themselves sometimes, but they don’t plug themselves back in, the same goes for TVs.”

“Do you have someone coming in to clean who might have plugged them back in?”

“No, and no one else has a key. Do you think someone from Below might be going up?”

“I doubt that, although it’s not impossible.”

“But no one knew about the red clown nose except Daddy and Vincent.”

“And Vincent is not a practical joker.”

The discussion went on until Vincent arrived.

“Did you figure it out?” he asked when he walked in and heard the topic of discussion.

“Well, we are pretty sure we know what it isn’t,” Catherine told him as she rose to join him.

“And what isn’t it?”

“It’s not you, or anyone from Below playing a practical joke. It’s not a cleaner I haven’t hired who is plugging the radio and TV back in, and it’s not stray animals or people who have gotten in from either Above or Below.”

“That only leaves paranormal explanations,” Vincent pointed out.

“We will talk about that,” Catherine said as she linked her arms through Vincent’s, then Father’s as he joined them. “Right now, I seem to remember a dinner invitation, and I’m hungry!”

It was several hours before they made it back to Catherine’s kitchen.

“I left here in such a hurry earlier that I didn’t turn off the computer or turn out any of the lights upstairs. Give me a minute to take care of that then I’ll come back down, and we can watch a movie or something,” she told him as she hung her jacket on a hook next to the back door and crossed the kitchen.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll make some tea,” Vincent suggested.

“Go ahead, I’ll be right back. There are cookies in the cookie jar and some pastries in the refrigerator if you want something.”

The first thing Catherine noticed when she stepped into the hall and turned toward the front of the house, was that the foyer light was on. She knew she hadn’t left it on. She shook her head but left it on so she could see her way up and down the stairs.

The upstairs hall light was also on, but everything was as she left it when she walked into her office. She pushed some papers into the file folders that she had spread out then sat down in the chair in front of the computer to save her work and shut it down.

She scanned over the text she'd written and was stunned when she got to the bottom. There were several blank lines then there were the words:

We love you, Cathy.

She stared a good 30 seconds, before she rushed out of the room to the top of the stairs.

"Vincent!" she called. "Could you come up there for a minute?"

It must have been the tone of her voice, or maybe he'd sensed her alarm in the Bond, but he was at her side in seconds.

"What is it?" he asked, taking in her pale face and wide eyes.

"You've got to see this and tell me I'm not hallucinating." She led the way into the office and pointed at the computer monitor.

Vincent looked, read down a few lines then came to the sentence that had alarmed Catherine.

"This was here when you came in?"

"Yes," she sat abruptly in the desk chair. "What the hell is going on?"

"It looks to me as if someone is trying to tell you something," said Vincent.

"I think he's hit the nail on the head!" came a familiar voice from behind them.

They both turned. "Kristopher!" they said in unison.

"How did you get in here?" demanded Catherine.

"Um, the usual way?" he hedged.

"Have you been doing all this?" Catherine asked.

"No!" he said emphatically. "Absolutely not. I've had nothing to do with it."

"Then who has been doing this?" Vincent asked before Catherine could.

Kristopher gave them an enigmatic smile.

"Who do you think?"

"Well, whoever it is it's been made to look like my father, possibly my mother and a woman who used to live here by the name of Agnes Leon."

"And did it ever occur to you that it might actually be them?" Kristopher asked.

"They're all dead, Kristopher," Catherine said.

"And I'm not?"

Catherine gave an unladylike snort, then gestured at the computer monitor.

“Did you do that?” she asked.

Kristopher glanced toward the screen then smiled.

“No, but I think you know who did.”

“Then who?”

Catherine noticed when Vincent sat on the edge of the work table and crossed his arms over his chest. He was obviously going to let her work this one out for herself.

“Who do you think?” Kristopher asked.

“Would you quit answering my questions with another question? If I knew, I wouldn’t be asking you,” she retorted.

“Have you tried talking to them?” Kristopher asked.

“There you go with another question. Talking to who?” She was starting to get exasperated.

“Well, I know that you suspect that the radio, the TV and the clown nose are from your father, but the pennies could have been from either your mother or Miss Leon.”

Catherine nodded slowly. “So, you’re saying that it is them?” She hesitated before continuing. “If they wanted to tell me something, why don’t they just appear like you do... that is if you are a ghost.”

“Well, this...,” he gestured at himself. “This takes a little practice. When I departed this mortal coil... let’s just say that I’ve had a bit more practice.”

“How’s that? Both mom and Miss Leon died in 1968. You didn’t die, if you really did die, until almost 20 years later.”

“Oh, but I’ve done this before, so I already knew,” he said cryptically.

“Vincent?” Catherine turned to him. “What’s going on?”

Vincent raised his hands and smiled at her. “I’ve been equated with the creature that has never been, so if I can exist, surely something as mundane as a ghost isn’t impossible.”

Catherine dropped into her chair again and covered her face with her hands.

“I don’t know what to believe anymore,” she moaned.

“Believe in what you see, Catherine,” Vincent advised. “Don’t worry about what other people might think, just believe in what feels right.”

Catherine looked up at Vincent, then over at Kristopher.

“So, I’m supposed to believe that Kristopher is a ghost and has been dead for several years, and that my parents just left me a note on my computer telling me that they love me, and that Miss Leon is still here in this house looking after me by leaving lights on and setting the table for me.”

“Does it feel right?” asked Kristopher.

“Well, it makes more sense than thinking that someone is getting into the house somehow. There are only two doors, and they both have deadbolts, door locks, and chains. The balcony door has a lock, and I use it. I imagine someone could be getting in through the threshold in the basement, but ... but they’d have to go past at least one sentry, and a stranger would never get past. And I really can’t see anyone Below playing this kind of a practical joke. Maybe the house is haunted,” she finally conceded.

“But only by benevolent spirits,” Vincent put in.

“I certainly hope so,” Catherine agreed. “What do you think...” Catherine looked up to where Kristopher had been standing, and he was gone. “... Kristopher?” Her voice trailed off.

Catherine couldn’t help but feel a little shaky, and she welcomed Vincent’s arms when he moved over to her and hugged her.

“I don’t know if I’m going to like this,” she whispered as she snuggled closer and buried her face in his vest.

“Look at the bright side,” Vincent suggested with a chuckle. “Aunt Aggie never went anywhere in this house without her dust cloth. Maybe she’s still doing that.”

“Come to think of it,” Catherine said, lifting her head from his chest and looking around the room at all the gleaming polished surfaces. “I’ve been in here over a month, and I haven’t found a speck of dust on anything.”



NOTE: most of the thing things that happened to Catherine in this story have happened to me or to someone I know. Don’t ask me if I believe in ghosts. ☐ ☐

END