

# PROMISES

by Sandy P Shelton

( from ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE ONE)

Devin's stay in the tunnel world lasted almost two weeks, but as Catherine mused, it had been an interesting two weeks. An unrestrained smile spread across her face as she thought about the effect his visit had had on Vincent. She was delighted by the relaxed open rapport that had developed between the two mismatched brothers. The two laughed a lot, went off together a lot, and could be found engaged in very private conversations.

The most amazing thing of all, however, was the new air of self-confidence she could sense in Vincent. It was as if he had finally found his rightful place among his peers, or perhaps he was no longer in awe of his brother's worldliness. Whatever it was, she was glad to see this new air about him and to hope perhaps their love had been the cause.

As they gathered in Father's study for Devin's farewell, Catherine surveyed the scene. Father was pacing nervously fighting his emotions, Vincent was silent and thoughtful, and little Jacob had his arms wrapped tightly around Vincent's leg. Devin, on the other hand, was his usual cheerful self as he bent down to say good-bye to his nephew.

"Well Jake, my boy, I'll be seeing you soon. Maybe by the time I come back, you might be a big brother."

Jake nodded vigorously then shyly threw his arms around Devin's neck. "Bye, I love you."

Devin was obviously very moved by the youngster's display of affection. He hugged the little boy with great tenderness and lifted him to place him in Catherine's arms.

"You take care of Mom." When Jacob nodded, he looked at Catherine and placed a kiss on her cheek. "She's a special lady."

He then turned to Vincent. "Well brother, you take care of these two, and treat your lady right." His face grew serious as he fought the sadness welling up inside of him. "Take care of yourself, man." Devin then embraced Vincent in a warm bear hug. "I'll see you soon."

Father had been watching the farewells and now realized it was their turn and he wasn't looking forward to it.

"Devin, I'm glad you visited. I hope you will do so more often." In his eyes, Father could still see the little boy in the man's body.

Devin smiled uneasily. "You never know when I'll darken your door again so keep the lights on." Moving forward, he hugged Father awkwardly.

"You're always welcome here, Devin."

Devin pulled away and gave one last look at the others as he gathered his things and headed for the entrance. But before he walked through the door, Vincent's voice stopped him.

"Devin?"

He turned around. "Yeah?"

Vincent shifted his feet uncomfortably. "In answer to your question." When Devin turned to hear his answer, Vincent suddenly stood straight and with great pride said, "Hot, Devin. Extremely hot." Then to Devin's great surprise, Vincent boldly winked at him.

Devin looked at Catherine, nodded, and then laughed loudly. "Enjoy brother." Still laughing, he turned and walked away leaving Father and Catherine staring at Vincent in confusion.

Father finally scratched his chin and looked at Catherine. "Don't worry my dear, they were always doing that to me as boys."

Catherine stared questioningly at Vincent. "Just what was that all about?"

He put his arm around her waist and whispered in her ear. "I'll tell you later tonight."

Sometime later as quiet prevailed in the tunnels, Vincent lay staring into the most alluring green eyes he'd ever seen. Their hearts were slowing as they slipped into the afterglow of a very satisfying session of loving.

"Tell me," Catherine asked softly.

"Tell you what?"

"What you said to Devin. You promised."

"Oh that." Vincent looked a shade uncomfortable. "He asked me how. . . ." He paused, searching for words. "He asked me how you were in bed." He was surprised that she didn't unleash a tirade of indignation. Instead she smiled warmly.

"Oh, then thank you." His look of confusion caused her to giggle. "That's a compliment, Vincent. Every woman likes to know her man finds her exciting in bed."

He thought about it for a moment. "Catherine, do you find me exciting?"

The innocence and honesty in his question touched her deeply. No man she had ever known Above would have asked, he would have assumed it so.

"Dear Vincent, you are the most sexually exciting man I've ever known. You keep me in an almost constant state of arousal. No one has ever made me feel like that and no one else ever will."

Her reassurances brought a sparkle to his eyes. "I thought I was the one constantly aroused."

Shaking her head no, she leaned forward to rub noses. "With you, my dear, it's just more obvious."

They both laughed then soon fell asleep in each other's arms.

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It was Monday morning and Catherine opened her eyes reluctantly, as her clock/radio came on. She dreaded lifting her head from her pillow, because over the last few mornings, she had begun to feel nauseated. So far it hasn't been that bad, but she reached for the crackers she kept by the bed to help settle her rolling stomach.

Jacob had slept over Below again and she was in no hurry to get out of bed, so she lay there going over her "game" plan for the day. She had decided to tell Joe about her pregnancy as soon as she arrived at the office. She chuckled out loud as she imagined his face when he heard the news.

The D.A.'s office was bustling as always. People hurrying here and there discussing cases and arguing points of law, the usual stuff. Catherine made her way to her office and began to put away her briefcase when the phone rang.

"Catherine Chandler."

"Cathy, it's Joe. I need to see you in my office right away."

"Okay, I needed to talk to you anyway. I'll be there in a minute."

"Right away, Cathy, like right now."

Something was wrong. She could hear it in his voice. "All right, Joe, I'm on my way." Puzzled, she hung up the phone. It had to be the Montgomery real estate development investigation.

"Come in," came the voice on the other side of the closed door. Cautiously she opened it and walked in as Joe sat comfortably in the chair reading a copy of The New York Tattler, a very popular tabloid. "Now I know. Some woman's confessed to being impregnated by an alien and you want us to investigate, right?"

There was no sign of amusement on Joe's face as he lowered the paper. "Apparently you haven't seen today's edition, have you?"

"No, I'm not in the habit of reading this garbage." She was very familiar with the gossip and outrageous stories the paper had become famous for. "I've got better things to do with my time."

Joe tossed it across the desk at her. "According to that article, you certainly do."

"What are you talking about?"

"Just read it, Radcliffe."

Catherine recognized that tone and knew it meant business. "Okay, I could use a good laugh." She picked up the paper and sat down. The article in question had been boldly circled in red.

### **"Lady D.A. Protects Lover From Prosecution."**

With every line, she felt her anger rising. The article was an expose of her personal life. But even worse, the article implied that she was still involved with Elliot Burch, that he was the father of her illegitimate child, and that she was using her office to protect him from involvement in the Montgomery case.

She could stand it no longer. "Damn it! Who the hell does this guy think he is? This is garbage, pure garbage!"

Joe finally spoke. "I know it, you know it, but thousands of people reading this stuff don't know it. Cathy, this seed of doubt could very well prejudice our case against Montgomery."

"Come on, Joe, no one believes this stuff." When his expression didn't change, she had to ask, "You don't believe this, do you? Joe, Elliot Burch is not Jake's father. I haven't been involved with him in years. We've investigated this case by the book and there's no evidence that Elliot's involved."

"I believe you, Cathy, but you've been awfully secretive about all this."

"Joe, I have a right to keep my private life private!"

His expression softened. "Yes, you do. Look Cath, I'm just concerned what all this is going to do to our case as well as what it might do to your career."

She felt her anger subside a bit. "I know, I didn't mean to take it out on you."

"Look, let's just let this ride for awhile. But take my advice, keep a low profile. Maybe it will all die down soon."

"I hope so, but I won't make any promises about lying low. I'll do the best I can, okay?"

"Okay. That's all I ask, Radcliffe."

On her way back to her office, she noticed the stares and whispers that stopped when she passed. The anger was rising again.

All morning long it was the same thing; whispers, strange looks, and a few obscene phone calls. As she hung up on the last one, she made up her mind. Grabbing her coat and purse, she headed for the source of the problem. An action she would come to regret.

The office of the infamous tabloid was deceptively like any other newsroom. Reporters scattered about at various desks typing furiously away at their computer terminals while others talked loudly on the phone while scribbling notes. After a few questions, she was pointed in the direction of the office of Bruce Madison, the author of the article.

On her way over, she had made up her mind to be in control. *Catherine Chandler was not going in there and cause a scene*, she told herself. She walked quietly through the open door and saw a man in his late thirties rummaging through the massive pile of papers on his desk. His dark hair and dark eyes reminded her somewhat of Devin.

"Mr. Madison?"

The man looked up and examined her body carefully with his eyes before speaking. "I'll be damned it ain't Miss D.A. herself. To what do I owe this honor?"

Catherine stepped closer to the desk. "I think you know why I'm here."

He leaned back in his chair as if to relish his conquest. "I'd like to think you were just dying to meet me and wanted to offer me some kind of bribe to keep me quiet." With that comment, he leered at her much like a hungry dog leers at a T-bone.

Catherine could feel her skin crawl under his obvious stare. "No, Mr. Madison, I don't think I could ever get that desperate. This is about the lies you're printing in your so-called paper. I want it stopped and I want it stopped now!" Her voice was getting louder.

Madison leaned forward and stared defiantly into her eyes. "I've got a source for my information, Chandler, and as long as I'm fed the information, it's my right to print it!"

Her eyes grew cold and her expression became hard and determined. "Your source is handing you lies, Madison. You can be sued for printing lies."

"Look Chandler, if you want to tell me your side of all this and tell us who fathered that kid of yours, I'll be glad to print it."

At that crass comment, she lost her temper. "My personal business is just that, personal. I'll see you in hell before I'll let you dictate my life! Do you understand?"

Madison rose, went to the open door, and in a loud voice said, "Is that a threat, Miss Chandler?"

She peered out at the other reporters in the room now staring at them. She walked close by Madison and said under her breath, "No, Mr. Madison, it's a promise."

Giving him the coldest look she could muster, she walked determinedly out of the office.

Once outside, she realized her error. He had witnesses to her outrage and it was for certain he would make full use of them. She began thinking, *'What have I done? What if he decides to dig deeper into her life like that other reporter had done when he discovered Vincent?'* Everything could be at risk.

She ended up taking a long walk to try to clear her head. By the time she arrived back at work, she had calmed down somewhat and was determined to weather the storm no matter what it took. She knew she would do whatever she had to to protect Vincent and Jake. Besides, the baby she carried now could do without all this stress.

That night as she lay next to Vincent in her apartment, she told him about the article. He was angry as she expected and fearful as well. He must have sensed her agitation through the bond and decided she didn't need any more of it.

"Catherine, let's just forget about all this for now. You're too tense. It isn't good for you or the baby. Why don't you roll over and let me rub your back?"

Gratefully, she did as he bid and soon found herself being lulled into a blissful state by the gentleness of his hands. He leaned close and whispered reassuring words of love as his hands kneaded the tension away. Slowly she drifted off to a restful sleep.

Vincent watched her relaxed body as she slept. Even though he would have preferred to relax her in a more mutually satisfying way, he was content feeling her ease through their bond. It was then he gave thought to the seriousness of their situation and damned fate for their ever-present danger. These constant obstacles were the price of their stolen moments of joy. It was those moments, he considered, that made it all worthwhile. He would protect her and what they shared regardless of the cost. Yes, there were some things worth risking everything for.

The rest of the week was blur. Wednesday's edition contained an article that all but accused Catherine of death threats and even more misuse of her office. What's more, the mayor and Internal Affairs had really come down hard on Joe. The Montgomery case had all but stalled while accusations flew, and she found herself going over and over the case looking for weaknesses she knew didn't exist. The stress was getting to her.

Late Thursday, Joe walked into her office with an all too familiar scowl on his face. They talked only briefly about the case, then with a genuine look of concern he asked, "Cathy, are you feeling all right? You look like hell."

"Thanks a lot!"

"Maybe all this is getting to you. Why don't you do us all a favor and take a long weekend? Put some distance between yourself and this mess?"

As much as she hated to back away from a fight, she had someone else to be concerned about.

"You know something, I think that's a great idea. A nice long weekend away would do me a world of good. Thanks, Joe." It only took a few hours to go home, get packed, and find her way to Vincent and Jacob.

Vincent had been surprised but delighted to have her Below for a long weekend. He had been worried about her lately. She looked pale and very tired.

But to Catherine, Vincent didn't look all that well either. It was obvious to her that he had lost some weight and his appetite had diminished quite a bit, not unlike her own. Perhaps they both needed some time off.

Friday morning found Catherine waking up to that now familiar wave of nausea. She didn't want to awaken Vincent, so she quietly reached for her crackers and began to nibble hoping it would go away soon. When she felt Vincent moan softly and roll over, she turned to him. He opened his eyes slowly then suddenly turned deathly white.

"Vincent, what's wrong? Are you all right?"

With his eyes tightly closed again, he answered slowly, "I'll be all right soon. I must have some kind of virus or something. I wake up sick in the mornings, but it goes away eventually."

Catherine studied him for a moment and then began to laugh.

He found her amusement a little uncalled for. "I don't see the humor here, Catherine."

Between her fits of laughter, she replied, "If I didn't know better, I'd swear you were having morning sickness too."

"I don't think that's possible, is it?"

"My dear, with us, anything is possible." She burst out laughing again. "Here, have a cracker, it helps."

"I don't think I could eat a thing right now."

"Try it," Catherine insisted.

After awhile, the nausea subsided and they lay cuddled up together in those precious moments of quiet before Jacob found his way to their chamber and crawled into bed with them. By the end of the day, they were both much more relaxed and were planning to spend Saturday in a private lagoon Vincent had claimed as his own as a child.

She leaned back and contentedly watched the scene before her. Vincent was wading out into the pool carrying Jacob in his arms. She smiled as she watched the two skinny-dippers wade into the water that soon lapped up to Vincent's chest. The two frolicked and splashed around as Vincent tried to teach Jacob how to dog paddle in the water. As usual, Jacob had his own ideas.

They played for quite a while, then Vincent called out for her to join them. She hesitated for a minute, not out of fear, but because the thought of being nude in front of Jacob suddenly bothered her. She never thought about it before, but he was getting old enough to notice things and be affected by them.

'No,' she thought, *'I will not give my child a hang-up about the human body.'* She quickly disrobed and waded out to join them. All her doubts were erased as Jacob gleefully swam back and forth between them then grabbed her around the neck innocently.

Later on shore, she wrapped a towel around herself as she watched Jacob sitting astride his father's chest playfully wrestling with him. *If things could be like this always.* Reading her thoughts, Vincent reached over and patted her stomach and she joined in the wrestling match.

Vincent stood in the doorway of the children's chamber that night, as Catherine softly sang her lullaby to her son. In just a few moments, little Jacob was sleeping soundly and his proud parents looked at him just once more before walking hand in hand out into the tunnel.

Catherine felt more relaxed than she had all week. At times like these, she wondered why she had ever gone back Above. It was here she felt truly at home. Suddenly, Vincent grasped her shoulders and leaned her back against the tunnel wall. He placed one hand against the wall and the other on her waist and looked deeply into her eyes. She could feel his warm breath on her cheeks as he leaned against her and rhythmically moved his hips in a slow sensual movement.

"Why Vincent, what are you doing?"

"I'm trying to seduce my wife." He smiled, tilted his head to one side, then moved his hand up to caress her breast through her pullover sweater.

"Oh! May I say you're doing a wonderful job."

"Thank you," he whispered just before his mouth claimed hers.

She was only aware of the feel of his tongue exploring her mouth, his hands caressing her body, and his persistent hardness sending shivers through her. It was almost painful when he pulled away. With one long look, he swept her into his arms. "Yes, our chamber would be more appropriate."

"No, Catherine, I thought you might enjoy a midnight swim. I know this quiet little cavern just behind the falls. I've dreamed of making love to you there in the mist."

She loved that tone of voice and the sparkle in his eyes when he got playful. "Sounds absolutely divine. Carry me away sir!"

The little cavern could only be found by walking a narrow ledge behind the falls. Vincent held

tightly to Catherine's waist as he guided her along the slippery path. The ledge suddenly widened and they found themselves standing in a misty cavern veiled on one side by a wall of water.

"Vincent, this is wonderful."

He walked up behind and slipped his arms around her as they enjoyed the view. Suddenly, Catherine pulled away and ventured out under the spray. Laughing, she threw her head back in delight as the water washed down over her.

"Oh Vincent!"

He could only stand there and laugh at her joy. His laughter ceased, however, when she began an erotic striptease for him. Slowly, she pulled her sweater up and over her head then tossed it at his feet. Teasingly, she kicked off her shoes and slowly lowered her slacks. With a delighted laugh, she kicked them over to him as if to challenge him.

Standing there in her underwear, she called to him. "Come over here and help me with the rest."

Catherine knew that both of them really needed these few moments of freedom and she played it to the hilt. It seemed their lives had always been a series of tragedies or that they were forever struggling with a crisis. For this particular evening, however, all was forgotten. It was play time.

She could tell her little striptease had had the desired effect on him. He stood there in the dim light shaking his head in disbelief at her. He took his cue from her little act and began to seductively undress for her. She held her breath as she watched him walk into the spray and begin to drop each article of clothing. The sight of the water trailing down his bare chest caused an involuntary shudder. He slid down his pants and tossed them aside then joined her.

Vincent quickly removed the last barriers that hid his beautiful Catherine from him. Then Catherine's hands freed him from his final restraints. And in the sheer joy of the moment and each other, they stood beneath the spray feeling the water rushing over their bodies and revelled in life's simple pleasures. They splashed, chased, and laughed with the deep joy they found in each other.

Soon their play turned to passion, as Vincent's hand slid easily along her wet body. When she arched backward, he tasted her neck and shoulders. Her hands desperately kneaded his back and hips then she suddenly moved away. Turning her back to him, she closed her eyes letting the mist lightly touch her face.

In a moment, she felt him step up behind and slip his arms around her. His searching hands soon found her soft supple breasts and he tenderly caressed each. In the meanwhile, he began to nibble her ear and nip on her neck and shoulders. His soft touches and playful nibbles soon caused Catherine to lean back into him and she felt his erection pressing strongly against her. He let his hand slide down between her legs and started to massage gently. A loud moan escaped her and she turned into his arms.

"Vincent, I want you now. Please Vincent, I need to feel you inside of me now!"

Picking her up, he quickly carried her to a soft level spot on the cavern floor where the water lapped around them playfully. Her hands pulled him to her in desperation, her eyes pleaded with him, and he could not hold back any longer. His mouth met hers with a fierce hunger and she responded in kind. Their loving was fierce and desperate. Hands clutched at flesh, breathing was harsh and hearts pounded. Vincent felt her need and responded by thrusting as deeply and as hard as he could. Her deep moans of pleasure encouraged his efforts.

Catherine totally submitted to his onslaught and responded as fiercely as her desire demanded. The water lapped about her as their lovemaking created waves in the pool. The sound of the rushing falls roaring in the background heightened their fervor and soon Catherine felt one of the most joyous releases she'd ever felt, as her body arched violently and she screamed his name.

Vincent's release was just as dramatic. His hands clenched into fists as every muscle strained with the effort. But instead of the loud groan he usually made, he threw back his head and roared in the throes of his passion.

No one spoke, they could only gasp for breath. Then in shame, Vincent turned away from Catherine, unable to meet her eyes.

She sat up weakly and touched his back. "Vincent, what's wrong?"

He trembled at her touch. "I'm so sorry, Catherine."

"Sorry! Sorry about what?"

He dropped his head in anguish. "What I did."

She couldn't believe his words. "Vincent, I enjoyed what we did."

"I mean the roar, Catherine."

Now she understood. It must have symbolized that other part of himself taking control.

"Vincent, my dear sweet Vincent. I love you completely, every unique thing about you. What you are, all of you, that's what excites me. What just happened between us was one of the most exciting and satisfying encounters we've ever had. Sometimes I need your gently tender loving and at times, like just now, I want the raw excitement of it. Sometimes we both need to completely let go. Vincent, I will treasure the memory of that roar for the rest of my life. That roar told me just how excited you were and that's very flattering."

He turned to her shyly. "How can you still love me?"

She kissed him tenderly. "It's very simple. I just do."

The rest of the evening, they spent simply enjoying each other, until finally they made the long walk back to their chamber in wet clothes.

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Monday morning arrived all too soon for Catherine. As she walked off the elevator, she shook the euphoria of the weekend from her mind. When she stopped by the receptionist's desk for her messages, she was greeted by a very stern look.

"Miss Chandler, Mr. Maxwell wants to see you in his office right away."

"Great. Tell him I'll be there in a minute. I want to stop by my office first."

"I'm sorry, he said immediately."

Something was very wrong. Catherine could feel it in the way the words were spoken and she could see it in that icy stare.

She smiled defensively, "Well, I suppose I'd better get going."

Each face she met in the hallway was absent the usual smile. The eyes that stared back at her were filled with questions and doubts. "*What in the world has happened?*" she wondered. She got quite a jolt when she walked into Joe's office to find Diana and Joe looking very solemn indeed. Deciding her best bet was charm, she smiled her warmest smile.

"Hey kids, why so glum? I know it's Monday morning, but lighten up."

Joe's expression did not change. "Cathy, have a seat."

It was obvious Joe was having a great deal of trouble finding the words. "Cathy, I need you to be completely honest with me. Where were you this weekend?"

Catherine felt her face flush then she glanced quickly at Diana. Once again she met Joe's very



concerned brown eyes. "I was out of town all weekend."

"Where?"

She was really getting upset at the direction of this conversation. "That's my business."

"Not when it involves a homicide."

"What? Homicide? Who?"

Joe picked up a rubber band from his desk and nervously began popping it. "Sunday morning Bruce Madison was found murdered in his office." He let the information sink in and gauged her response. "He checked in about 8:30 Saturday night to finish an article. At 7 a.m. the next morning, the guard making his rounds found him with a pair of scissors in his chest."

Catherine just sat there stunned. "Any suspects?"

Diana and Joe exchanged a frustrated look. Then Diana began, "No prints were found so the killer obviously wore gloves. Only one person was seen entering the building between those times."

Joe finished her thought. "That one person was a woman fitting your description who told the guard she was Catherine Chandler and she had an appointment to see Madison."

Catherine virtually jumped from her chair. "That's ridiculous, Joe. I didn't go there Saturday night. I haven't seen Madison since that day I went to his office right after that first article. Someone's trying to set me up."

"Cathy, I know how upset you were."

"Joe, I didn't kill him!"

In an act of reassurance, Joe put his hands firmly on her shoulders. "I know you didn't. I've known you too long to think you could do such a thing out of anger. But Cathy, I have to have a concrete alibi to keep you out of this."

That was a problem. The only person who could verify her whereabouts was Vincent. They were together that night at the falls. "I was out of town with my family. We didn't stay at a motel or even eat out so no one saw us."

"Great. Then your . . . boyfriend can testify that you were nowhere near Madison."

Catherine gave Joe a determined look. "No Joe, he can't."

"What do you mean, he can't?"

She shifted in the chair uneasily. "He just can't, that's all."

Joe slammed his fist down. "I don't get it. You keep the guy's identity a secret, you don't even tell anyone his name, no one's ever met him. My God, Cathy, you had this guy's kid and he won't even step forward to save your skin."

She did jump up out of the chair then. "Joe, I will not have you talk like this!"

"You'd better get used to it because the mayor's assigned a special team to investigate this whole mess and your connection to it. You're going to get a lot of questions. This guy's paper is really going to have a field day with this."

"Joe, I did not do this."

His expression softened a little. "I know that, Cathy, but unless we can prove it, you could be in deep trouble. Please tell me where you were."

She wanted to, she wanted to so badly. "No, I cannot prove where I was."

Joe's look of disappointment hurt her. "Well, Cathy, I'm sorry, but I've got no choice. You're officially

on suspension until further notice."

In his eyes, she could see his pain. She just shook her head sadly and started to walk away.

"Cathy, wait." It was a plea from Diana. "Let's you and I talk privately."

Just before they walked out the door, Joe turned to her. "Cathy. . .I'm sorry, really sorry."

"I know, Joe, I know."

Diana took Cathy's arm and led her quickly into her office. A few awkward moments passed as Diana let Cathy regain her composure.

"He had no choice, Cathy. They really came down on him, hard."

"I can imagine. I don't blame Joe. He did what he had to do."

Diana studied her for a moment, trying to get a reading of her feelings. "You were Below with Vincent, weren't you?"

Catherine smiled pleasantly as she replayed the evening. "Yes."

"You were there, all weekend?"

"All weekend."

Diana sat back in the chair. "Well, perhaps Father or one of the others could vouch for you."

"I will not ask them to lie for me. I was alone with Vincent at the falls when the murder took place. Only Vincent could attest to that and he can't."

"I understand the problem."

Catherine paced back and forth then stared out the window. "We were celebrating." She smiled sadly.

"Celebrating what?"

"I'm pregnant."

Diana sat straight up in her chair, her look one of mixed emotions. "Really? I'll bet Vincent's thrilled."

Catherine couldn't help the look of sheer joy that crossed her face. "Yes, he's really happy about it."

Diana closed the distance between them and hugged her tightly. "Then I'm glad for both of you."

"Well, if we don't find a way out of this soon, this child could be born in prison."

Diana held her more tightly. "I promise you Cathy, that will not happen. I won't allow that to happen."

Saying it and proving it were two different things, as Diana well knew. She had so little to work with and so much damning evidence to disprove. So after warning Cathy to stay in her apartment and keep out of trouble, because of the private detectives the paper had hired, she set up a meeting with Father and Vincent. Cathy wouldn't approve, but they had to be told.

Vincent met her at the Central Park threshold. Diana couldn't help the catch in her breath as the majestic and powerful male figure approached her.

"Hello Diana. I hope you've been well."

"Yes, and you?" When he nodded in response she continued, "Cathy tells me congratulations are in order."

He tilted his head and smiled. "She told you about the baby?"

"Yes, and she seems ecstatic about it."

"We both are."

"I hate to bring bad news, but something's happened and I need to see you and Father."

"Then we'd best be on our way."

Diana looked across the room at Vincent and Father waiting anxiously for her to begin. "Did Cathy tell you about the newspaper articles that accused her of using her office to protect certain people from indictment?" She had phrased it as delicately as possible.

Vincent replied, "Yes, she mentioned it. Are they continuing?"

"It's worse than that. The reporter was found murdered and someone's going to a lot of trouble to point the finger at Cathy."

Vincent's anger clouded his usual clear blue eyes. "That's ridiculous. Catherine could not commit such a crime."

"Someone checked in with the guard fitting her description and using her name."

"When did this happen?"

"Sometime between 8:30 Saturday night and 7:00 Sunday morning."

"Catherine was with me all that night," Vincent stated with certainty.

"Exactly. She was here in a secret world she doesn't dare acknowledge the existence of with a man who officially doesn't exist."

Father interjected, "Yes, I do see the problem. What has she told them?"

"Only that she was with her lover, but she refuses to reveal his identity or where they spent the weekend."

Vincent winced at the term "lover." He had considered them husband and wife and wasn't really comfortable being referred to in such a way.

"Perhaps one of us could attest to her whereabouts."

"That's too dangerous," replied Diana. "This case is going to be publicly scrutinized. Every witness will be thoroughly checked out. If there is even the slightest cause for suspicion, it could lead to disaster."

"Yes, you're right," Father answered.

Vincent could stand no more. "So do we protect our world at Catherine's expense? No, Catherine has sacrificed so much to protect and to help us. If my exposure will save her, then so be it!"

Father was incredulous, "Don't be ridiculous, Vincent. Do you honestly think she would allow you to sacrifice yourself in such a way? No, Vincent, there has to be another way."

Diana watched the scene with interest. Vincent's devotion and love for Catherine had never been clearer. A man willing to risk everything, including his own life for the woman he loved, was like something out of a fairy tale. A very enviable fairy tale.

"There is another way, but I'll need all the help I can get."

"You have it, of course," came Father's reply.

"All we have to do is find the real killer and the ones who set up this frame."

Vincent stepped forward. "Do you have any ideas?"

"I'm almost certain James Montgomery had something to do with all this. Not directly, mind you,

but I suspect he hired someone to do the dirty work. If we could find Madison's source, maybe, just maybe, we can tie this to Mr. Montgomery himself."

"Why would this man go to such lengths to frame Catherine?" Vincent truly could not understand.

"Money, Vincent, money and greed. Catherine's investigation threatened to bring down his empire and he couldn't allow that. First, he tried to compromise her career and when that failed, he tried to remove her by getting her off the case. But there's got to be a weak link in this chain and we've got to find it. Please trust me. Let me handle it."

Vincent didn't like leaving Catherine's fate in anyone's hands other than his own. This powerful adversary reminded him so much of the evil Gabriel.

*"When will it end," he thought. "Would Catherine ever be safe and their lives serene?"*

"Whatever you need, just let me know."

Diana could read his agony. "Good. I'll start asking questions and I'll let you know what I find out. You can have your people check out the streets. Somebody's gonna talk with the right persuasion." A glance at Vincent expressed her line of thought.

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The darkness of night found Vincent on Catherine's balcony, holding her in his arms as they watched the many lights that twinkled brightly. Jacob slept peacefully in his room and Vincent slid his hand over Catherine's womb to bid their other child goodnight.

"Catherine, Diana came Below today and told us of the trouble. Why didn't you tell me?"

She sighed and turned toward him. "I didn't want you to worry."

"Catherine, please, I would worry less if you told me these things."

"It's all right, Vincent, I'll get out of this."

"But you've been suspended. You could possibly go to prison, all because I can't testify as to where you were. In a way, I would be responsible of the loss of your life Above."

"A small loss, Vincent, compared to what could happen if you were to be found. I could handle anything but losing you."

"Catherine, I worry so. Your life Above is filled with danger, but yet you do so much good. I cannot ask you to give that up. I want our children to have that kind of life as well, but my fear overwhelms me at times."

"Oh Vincent, I know and I don't want to cause you any pain. If you want me to give up my life Above, I would without regret. As I said before, I would sacrifice everything for you."

He walked across the balcony. In his heart, he felt the truth of her words and secretly, he wanted to make it so. But no, he had argued the point before and knew now was not the time.

"No, Catherine, it must be your choice."

She slipped her arms around him to offer what comfort she could. "It'll be over soon and I promise you if the worst happens, I'll come Below. I'll not allow our child to be born in prison. I will give up this life and live Below."

They stood in silence for some time savoring each other's comfort.

"Vincent, I won't be able to come Below as often until this is over. I'm certain they've got somebody watching me, but I'll use the basement entrance when I can."

The thought of not seeing her as often was almost unbearable. "Take care, Catherine."

"I will. Vincent, you remember what I said about needing your tenderness sometimes? Well, right now I need you to hold me and love me slowly and gently. I need to feel your gentleness. Our baby needs to feel your love and protection."

"And I need to feel you safe and warm in my arms."

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The next day seemed endless to Catherine. Jacob was playing on the floor as he watched cartoons on TV and she got caught up on her housework. She tidied up until she couldn't stand it anymore, then thankfully, the doorbell rang.

"Joe!"

"Good morning, Radcliffe. Can I come in?"

"Sure, if you don't mind the mess," she said, indicating Jacob's toys.

Joe stepped over the scattered toys then reached down and patted Jacob's head.

"Hi there kiddo, how's it going?" Jacob smiled back then went back to his play. Joe then glanced uneasily over at Catherine. "I see you've been busy."

"Yes, keeping up with a small child is a full-time job. Don't ever forget that."

"No, I won't." They laughed awkwardly.

"Joe, what is it?"

"You know me too well, Chandler."

"I would hope so after all this time."

"I just wanted you to know how sorry I am about all this. You know I believe you, but my hands are tied."

His voice was so pleading. "I know that, Joe. We've been friends too long. You did what you had to do. I would have done the same thing."

With that, he seemed more at ease. "I don't know, Chandler, this case is a mess."

"How is the Montgomery case going?"

"It's not going. We've had to put it on the back burner for now."

"Oh no. Isn't there anything we can do? He's behind all this, Joe, I know it."

"I think so too, but unless we can prove it by clearing you, we've got no choice." Her silence was her answer. "Please Cathy, talk to me."

As much as she adored her friend, she could not. She did decide, however, to trust him with just a little part of her secret.

"Joe, you just have to trust me on this. I can only tell you I was with Jake's father that night. We were alone." Her look softened. "His name is Vincent and he's a lot like you, he has a good heart. I love him more than my life. He is my life. He has nothing to do with all this, and for reasons I can't explain, he has to be apart from it."

"Why is that?"

"Because I made a promise and it's a promise I just can't break. No matter what the cost."

"Really, Cathy? Is this secret worth destroying everything you've worked so hard for?"

Very calmly she looked directly into his eyes. "Yes, Joe, I would protect Vincent at all costs."

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Vincent stood patiently in Father's study, listening to one of the helpers from the docks tell his story. There had been a man he had known for years, who frequented a particular bar by the docks. This man had always been a vagrant doing whatever he could to earn drink money, but lately, he had been spending a lot of money.

Later that night, instead of his usual journey to Catherine's apartment, Vincent made a detour. Walking softly across the roof, he stopped and peered through the window to the woman working Below. Gently, he tapped on the window.

Diana stood silently beside Vincent on the rooftop as the noises of the street below filled the air. He took a deep breath and tossed back his luxurious mane.

*"How beautiful he is,"* she thought. She forced her thoughts elsewhere. "Does Jacob know he's about to be a big brother?"

Vincent smiled proudly. "Yes. Even as young as he is, he understands and he wants to protect his mother."

Diana quietly watched the glow that seemed to surround his unique features. All the hard planes of his strong face softened with love as he spoke of his pride and joy.

With a catch in her voice, she commented, "Fatherhood suits you."

His eyes sparkled. "It's just a miracle. As a young man, I watched my friends grow up, get married, and become fathers. Part of me rejoiced for them, but a part of me was filled with pain and anger that I would forever be denied those simple joys. Then I found Catherine. She made everything possible.

"Sometimes I look at Jacob and I am amazed by him. He's so perfect, so beautiful. I wonder how I could father such a child. And now, we've created another child, another miracle. There are no words to describe how that makes me feel. To look at Catherine and to know that she bears my child, fills me with incredible joy and humility. Her acceptance of me, her unselfish love gave me the truest freedom I'll ever know. She loves me so completely with all that she is. Instead of being afraid of what our union could produce, she takes great pride and joy in bearing my child and refuses to let me surrender to my fears."

Vincent then noticed Diana had turned away from him and was staring silently into the night. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to carry on so."

"Don't be sorry, Vincent. It's great to see you so happy. You deserve all life can give and so does Catherine. You both have endured so much, it's time you experienced the joy."

"I wish the same for you, Diana, you know that."

"Yes, I do. I just hope I luck up with someone just like you."

An awkward silence fell between them. Finally Vincent spoke. "I came to share some information. A man named Tucker frequents a bar called Kelly's, down by the docks. Lately, he's had a lot of money to spend on drinks, but no job. When he found out about Madison, he got drunk and became angry that his "meal ticket" was gone."

"Um, that sounds like he could have been the paid informant for Montgomery. He would want someone with no apparent connection to him. Vincent, I need to talk to him."

"Diana, that's a very dangerous part of the city. You should not go there alone. I'll go there with you."

"No, you can't take that chance."

"Don't worry. I won't be seen unless it's necessary."

Diana caught his meaning. "Yes, maybe a little extra persuasion wouldn't hurt. What will you tell Catherine?"

"I don't think we should worry her over this. She doesn't need the stress in her condition."

"Agreed. Then I'll meet you tomorrow night?"

"Yes, tomorrow night."

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It was late and the street outside the bar was litter-filled. Diana could sense Vincent's presence moving through the shadows to her left. She stopped for a moment and searched the darkness, but his cloak shielded him from all eyes.

The bar itself was dingy and smoke-filled. Housekeeping was not an important issue here, she concluded, as she seated herself at the bar. The patrons stared at her briefly then went back to minding their own business as usual. She had decided to dress appropriately for her surroundings, so no one really paid her much attention and it seemed to be working. A bemused smile crossed her face as she thought about Catherine with her expensive wardrobe making an appearance here.

The bartender was a burly man who looked like he'd spent years seeing all but minding his own business. He eyed her carefully. "What'll you have, lady?"

"Beer please." He grunted as he filled the mug and sat it before her. She asked, "Has Tucker been in tonight?"

He looked around the room. "What you want with Tucker?"

"I've got a job for him. I hear he's for hire these days."

His cold eyes studied hers. "He's over in the corner. Not that he'll do you much good."

"Thanks." She picked up her mug and headed for the lonely looking man at the corner table.

He didn't seem to notice when she sat down. "Are you Tucker?"

He looked up at her with glazed eyes. "What's it to you?"

"I hear you're in need of some cash now that your former employer is gone."

"I don't know what you're talking about, lady."

"Yes, you do. You remember Mr. Madison, don't you? And what about Mr. Montgomery?"

He looked at her with eyes burning with suspicion. "I don't know nothing, lady."

She slid her hand across the table and revealed a crisp \$50 bill folded beneath her hand. "Are you sure?"

He hungrily eyed the bill.

"Why don't we step around back and discuss this in private?" she suggested.

Reluctantly, he followed her into the alley. Diana could sense that Vincent was near. "Tell me about your arrangement with Mr. Madison."

"Look, lady, I could get very dead by doing that."

She paused as Vincent stepped out of the shadows, his face hidden by his cloak. The man's eyes widened in fear at the imposing figure approaching from the mist.

"What's going on?"

Vincent stepped closer. "This is a friend of mine, Mr. Tucker, and Catherine Chandler is a friend of

ours. You see, Mr. Tucker, my friend here is real upset about the lies Madison published about her. The lies, Mr. Tucker, that you were paid to feed him."

"Wait a minute. . ."

"No, Mr. Tucker, we don't have a minute." Diana nodded toward Vincent and he stepped forward, menacingly snarled at the man, and placed his hand to his throat.

"Wait. . .please!"

"Okay, why don't you tell us everything?"

When he hesitated, Vincent tightened his grip.

"Okay, okay." When he felt Vincent's grip loosen, he continued, "A man came here like you did. He offered me a lot of money to pass these envelopes to Madison. He said not to let him see me and not to answer questions. All I knew was that the information was about the Chandler woman, but I didn't know why."

Diana paced back and forth for a moment. "Who is this man?"

"I don't know. He never told me his name. He was big, you know, like one of those body builders. I guessed he was a bodyguard or something. I just know he made it clear what he could do if I told."

"Okay, Mr. Tucker, I believe you." Vincent looked at her strangely. "Why don't you go back to your friends?"

He looked at her nervously, "You won't tell him I told you."

"No, Mr. Tucker, and I suggest you keep quiet too. If this guy gets word we're looking for him, my friend here will be very upset. Understand?"

Tucker looked fearfully at Vincent. "No problem, lady, no problem."

As the man stumbled out of the alley. Vincent turned to Diana. "Why did you let him go like that?"

She shook her head thoughtfully. "I don't think he knows anything else and besides, he's not the most credible witness. No, what we need is to find this bodyguard and get him to talk. He's the key, the one direct line to Montgomery."

"Do you have a plan?"

Looking up into Vincent's worried eyes, she answered, "I'm working on it. Right now, I think you should get back to Catherine before she gets worried. What are you going to tell her?"

"The truth of course. Will you be all right now?"

"Yes, go on." As he walked away, she thought to herself, *"Yes, you probably don't even know how to lie."*

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Catherine paced the length of the balcony. *"Where is he? He's never this late without letting me know."* She made a couple more trips across the balcony when she heard the familiar thud that told her of his arrival. Without words, they encircled each other in the comfort of their arms.

"Oh Vincent, I've been worried about you."

He nuzzled her hair. "I'm sorry, but Diana needed some protection." He felt Catherine pull away.

"Diana? Does she have any leads?"

"Yes, we've talked to the man paid to hand the information to Madison. Soon we'll find the man who paid him." He could still see the concern in her eyes. "It was a bad part of the city and the man needed a little convincing."



"Oh, I see. Vincent, please be careful. I don't want you to take unnecessary chances. It's not worth it."

He could not except her words. "Catherine, you are innocent. Only I could be your alibi and because of what I am, I cannot speak for you. I will do what is necessary to prove it in any way I can. I could not bear to know that my failure cost you your life Above."

"But, Vincent. . ."

"No more, Catherine. You would do the same."

He was right she knew. She would sacrifice everything to save him and she could expect no less from him. Studying his eyes, she could feel his concern and fear for her. He was blaming himself again.

"Let's forget it for tonight, love." She began to knead his shoulders. "I think we both could use a little relaxation right now, don't you?"

Vincent quickly read her mood. "Yes, Catherine, I want very much to make love to you."

Playfully, she slid her hands down his arms and took his hands in hers. "No, my love, you will do nothing, I will make love to you."

His eyes widened in wonder. "Catherine?"

"Come with me, my dear." She took delight in the eager anticipation in his eyes as she led him into the bedroom. Her hands deftly removed his clothing and he moaned with appreciation as she touched him in those special places.

He obeyed her request to lie quietly on the bed as she seductively undressed for him. How he loved her body. The sight of it and the feel of it was an ecstasy beyond imagining and she gave it to him with total abandon. He watched as she lowered herself to his body and began to touch and kiss his fevered skin. Her hands, her mouth could bring him great pleasure and she delighted in it.

Her hands found their way to his straining erection and her mouth soon followed, but when he reached for her to press her down to the mattress for his entry, she dodged his eager arms.

"No, Vincent, I want to do it all."

He obeyed reluctantly and waited wondering what delights she had in mind. He found out soon as she straddled his hips and began to move erotically up over him but not touching him. She lifted herself over him so that her breasts were just barely touching his face and then she lightly let them trace over his face teasingly.

Without thinking, he whispered in a deep rasping voice, "Soon our baby will be tasting of your sweetness."

She responded by lowering herself into his pleasing mouth and groaned, "Now they're yours, Vincent, all yours."

He let his mouth and tongue love her inviting fullness until she could stand no more. She slid backward and hovered over his painfully awaiting erection until he thought of just grabbing her hips and entering her forcefully. She straightened up and entwined her fingers with his and then slowly lowered herself onto him. He wanted to roar with excitement as she surrounded him and began to move in rhythm with his thrusts.

Over and over she repeated in perfect timing with their rhythm. "I want you, Vincent. All of you." She increased her pace until both of them were straining with effort. He had never known her to be so aggressive, so forceful, so demanding in their lovemaking.

Their mutual release was overwhelming and she kept moving her hips in an effort to sustain his

enjoyment as long as possible. His eyes were closed when he heard her laughing joyfully. He opened his eyes to see her still in position with her hands stroking her belly and she was giggling with pleasure.

"Catherine?"

She opened her eyes and smiled. "I'm not going mad, Vincent, but I just had the most delightful sensation. It's almost like the baby felt what we were doing." She drew his hands to her stomach then laughed again. "I can't explain it, but it felt wonderful." Still holding his hand over her womb, she lifted up and rolled on her back, pulling him with her.

"Did the baby kick, Catherine?"

"No honey, it's too early for that. I don't know what it was, but I hope she does it again."

He rolled over on his side and began to rub her stomach soothingly. When she began to relax, he leaned over and gently kissed her belly. "Catherine, I wish I could feel these things. Sometimes I think men get cheated."

"That depends on your point of view, my darling." Catherine answered as she let her fingers play through his hair.

Vincent raised his head and looked at her contented face with total adoration. His eyes moved down to her breasts and he remembered the sight of her nursing Jacob and the feelings it aroused in him. He was looking forward to experiencing it again. Then his eyes found their way to her still flat belly. Soon, he thought, soon he would be able to see their child growing and feel it move inside her. All the things he had been cheated out of before, now they would share.

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The next afternoon after Catherine returned from the park with Jacob, she found Jamie waiting outside her door.

"Hi there, is something wrong?"

Jamie smiled brightly at Catherine. In the short times since they had met, Catherine had become her role model, her hero. "Vincent asked me to bring you this note."

"Okay, please come in for a minute."

Jamie obediently followed and marveled at the simple but elegant comfort of Catherine's apartment. "*Someday*," she thought.

Meanwhile, Catherine was a little concerned about the brief message:

*Dearest Catherine,  
I will be gone for a few days. There is a  
matter in the outlying tunnels that demands my  
attention. Be well, my love.  
Until then,  
V.*

She looked at Jamie, "Do you know what this is all about?"

"No, he just said to give it to you."

"Okay. Jamie, would you mind staying here awhile with Jake? I want to talk to Father."

"Of course not."

"Thanks, make yourself at home." She kissed Jacob lightly on the head and said, "Mommy will be back in a little while, Jake. Be good."

"Okay, Mommy."

Catherine found Father bent over several maps spread out over his desk. "Father?"

Quickly, a smile spread across his face at the sight of his daughter-in-law. "Hello my dear, how are you?"

She embraced him, "Fine, just fine. Do you have a minute?"

He could see the concern on her face. "Of course. Is something wrong with the baby?"

"No, the baby's just fine. It's Vincent. Do you know where he is?"

"No. I thought you would know."

Catherine shrugged her shoulders.

Father continued, "He got a message from Diana, then said he would be gone for a few days. He packed a few things, then left." When he saw the concern on her face, he asked, "Surely you're not concerned about his involvement with Diana."

The statement brought a smile. "No." Patting her stomach, she answered, "Not in the least. I know Vincent's heart. What concerns me is the risks he's taking to clear me. It's not worth it."

At that moment Father could see the strain this situation was causing her. "Catherine, I just want to tell you that I know what keeping your promise to us has cost you. Our world of secrecy demands a lot from you. Please know that we all have been inspired by your courage and your loyalty to us."

She was truly touched by his words. "It's not courage, Father. I do what I have to, to protect Vincent, my children, and the rest of my family."

"Yes, my dear. Family."

The next three days were torture for Catherine. She had discovered that Diana had disappeared as well, and she knew it had something to do with this case. Joe had tried once again to get her to tell him everything, and as before she kept her promise of secrecy. The worst part was being out of touch with Vincent. Before, she could feel his presence Below and the feeling gave her comfort when they could not be together. Now, she lived moment to moment, feeling he was safe but longing for the comfort their bond could bring.

Just when she thought she could no longer stand it, she received a call from Joe. "Cathy, get down here right away. You've got to hear this in person."

"What, Joe?"

"No, I want you here."

"Okay, but I'll have to bring Jake."

"No problem, just get down here."

Fear and joy flooded her senses. *What had he found out? What would she do if he had discovered Vincent? No, he couldn't have.* "Get a grip, Chandler," she told herself.

It only took a short while to arrive at her office building. Jacob had been there before. He enjoyed all the activity and getting to see where Mommy worked was a treat. She entered Joe's office with Jacob in tow and was greeted by Joe and Diana laughing and smiling broadly at her.

"Radcliffe, glad you could make it and Jake, my man, how are you doing? Come in, come in."

Catherine couldn't help but return the smiles as she sat down while Jacob renewed his

acquaintance with Diana. "Okay you two, what's up?"

Joe looked at Diana who answered, "You tell her."

"You sure?"

Diana nodded and Joe smiled broadly. "Miss Bennett broke the Madison murder case."

Catherine looked at Diana in astonishment. "How?"

Joe continued his story, "By tracking down the guy who fed Madison the info then getting him to cough up the guy who paid him. Get this, one of Montgomery's bodyguards turned state's evidence. He signed a statement confessing that he was told by Montgomery himself to discredit you using Madison, and when that failed, he told him to get rid of you by framing you for Madison's murder. He gave us the name of the hit-woman hired to do the job and implicate you, the dates, and payoffs. He gave us the nails to seal Montgomery's coffin. It's over, Cathy. You're completely cleared and reinstated as of now. Thanks to Diana."

Catherine felt the strain of the last few days flow from her body. "Yes, thank you."

Diana smiled, "We couldn't have this young man's Mommy in prison now, could we?"

After a few minutes of celebration, Catherine left Jacob with his "Uncle Joe" while she pulled Diana out into the hall for a private conversation. "You and Vincent convinced this guy to talk, didn't you?"

Diana whispered softly, "Vincent helped persuade him, you could say."

"Are you sure he won't expose Vincent?"

"I think Vincent convinced him of the foolishness of that. Besides, he'll be in hiding until after Montgomery goes to jail. He's at our mercy, so to speak."

Catherine sighed in relief. "Thanks, Diana, I owe you a lot."

"No, you owe me nothing. Helpers help, that's what you and Vincent have taught me. Just go home and show him your appreciation. He missed you like crazy."

"I missed him too and I will show him as soon as I get home. Thanks again."

Diana watched her go back into Joe's office with a big smile on her face. "*Lucky woman*," Diana sighed as thoughts of Vincent's "*appreciation*" played in her mind.

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That afternoon, Catherine rushed to the Central Park threshold with Jacob in her arms. Waiting for them was Vincent. The moment their eyes met, Catherine could feel the need. As soon as Jacob saw his father, he began shouting, "Daddy, Daddy," and almost leaped from Catherine's arms into his father's. She watched with love as Vincent tenderly embraced his young son.

"I missed you, Jacob."

"I missed you, Daddy."

The lump in Catherine's throat threatened to choke her. Somehow she'd always known what a good father he'd be. Their eyes met again and she patted her stomach.

"We missed you, too."

"Oh Catherine. . ." He didn't finish, he just reached his free arm out to her and she joined the family embrace. "I've missed you so."

After the evening meal, Vincent and Catherine were seated on their chamber floor playing with Jacob.

"That matter in the outer tunnels was an interrogation, I presume."

"Yes. I hope you understand why I didn't tell you about it."

"I have to admit I was a little angry at the two of you for not including me, but I do understand. I suppose I would have done the same thing."

"Probably worse." They shared a mutual laugh. "I hope my spending time with Diana didn't bother you."

"No, not really. I guess this time I really discovered just how much I trust you. I know your heart, Vincent. You would never break your promises to me."

"As you would never break your promise of secrecy to us."

"I would never betray this world or you. I would sacrifice everything to keep all of you safe."

"Yes, I know."

Their eyes met and lingered in a look that spoke of pleasures to come. Catherine let her hand slid sensuously up his inner thigh and Vincent's breath escaped him in a ragged moan.

"Did you really miss me?" she asked coyly, as she noticed the bulge beneath her hand growing firmer.

"You know what they say, Catherine. Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

Leaning closer, she whispered, "At the moment my interest lies below the heart and instead of growing fonder, I'd rather it grow harder."

Vincent blushed furiously as he glanced at Jacob. "Catherine, not in front of Jacob."

She looked away in frustration. "He'll have to go to sleep soon." She turned back to him and gently squeezed her fingers around the protruding bulge. "Just don't lose that. . .thought."

Suddenly Jacob squealed with delight and ran full force into his parents knocking them all to the floor in a pile of tangled arms and legs. Soon the chamber was filled with squeals, as the three wrestled about the floor and the tunnel world once again heard the joyous sounds of Vincent's laughter.

END