

Vincent and Catherine's Excellent Adventure

by Sandy P. Shelton

(from 1993 Great Expectations Conzine)

Catherine opened the door and peeped down the hall. "The coast is clear," she whispered. Reaching around behind her, she found Vincent's hand surprisingly close to her rear. She gripped it tightly to keep him from fleeing into the night.

"Catherine, I don't know about this." His heart was racing.

"Come on, it'll be okay. I promise, they won't even notice you."

"How is that possible?" he asked nervously as she abruptly pulled him into the hallway.

"It's a Beauty and the Beast convention, that's how," she explained.

"I still don't understand."

She looked up and down the hall once again. "I'm not sure I do either, but it seems hundreds of people get together once a year and go into some kind of frenzy. They wear tee shirts with our pictures on them and some even dress up like us."

"This is really strange, Catherine. Don't these people have lives?"

"I'm sure they do. I suppose this is some kind of hobby or something."

"I think I'd rather collect stamps."

Before Catherine could comment, a Vincent look-alike turned the corner and was soon standing face to face with the original. She watched as the two Vincents eyed each other solemnly until the look-alike said, "Great costume, man, but your make-up needs a little work."

As he walked away, Vincent let out a disgruntled umph. "I don't wear make-up."

Catherine smiled and touched his face lightly. "I know. Believe me, Vincent, I much prefer the original."

He blushed. "Perhaps this trip will be interesting after all. I can finally walk among people who understand."

"Yeah, right." She led him down the hall in the direction the lookalike had gone. "This sign says Dealer's Room. Let's see what's in there."

Hand-in-hand, they walked into the big room filled with tables and oddly dressed people.

"What are they doing?" Vincent whispered in her ear.

It took a moment for her to regain her senses. That voice whispering in her ear had a certain disorienting effect on her.

"Let's take a look at what all those people are crowding to see."

They went over to the first table. "Books, Catherine!" Vincent exclaimed in surprise.

When everyone turned to look at them, Catherine leaned close and whispered, "Perhaps we'd better not use our real names. I'll call you...Ron and you call me...Linda."

"Why"

She picked up a book and handed it to him. "It appears our names are on practically everything in the room. We need to be more inconspicuous."

"That will be difficult, since our pictures are plastered everywhere. Where did they get all these?" He began flipping through the pages of the book. Suddenly, he closed it and said, "Oh, my!"

"What is it?" she asked when she saw his embarrassed expression. She took the book from him and began flipping through the pages as well. Her "Oh, my" had a much different tone to it.

"Perhaps we'd better go to the art auction," Vincent nervously suggested.

After leaving that room, they found themselves in another, where a woman on stage was holding up a painting. Catherine led them to two seats on the aisle.

Another painting was held up and Vincent's face turned ghostly white, then crimson. He quickly averted his eyes only to find Catherine staring at the painting with a strange smile on her face.

"Catherine...uh, Linda, those paintings!"

She continued to stare for a moment before turning to him. "What? Oh, the painting. I thought it was very...romantic."

"Someone painted us in the nude, Cath...Linda. Look what they have us doing!"

"Yeah..." she answered, as she continued to smile.

He turned and shyly looked at it a little more closely. He had to admit it was very...moving. Without turning his head, he glanced sideways at Catherine. *'I wonder if she really looks like that?'* he asked himself.

Meanwhile, Catherine was committing the painting to memory and wondering if Vincent really looked like that. Suddenly, jealousy reared its head. How did the artist know what Vincent looked like?

"Vincent...?"

"Let's get out of here!" he answered before she finished her question. He literally pulled her from her chair and out of the room.

"What's wrong? I was just beginning to enjoy myself."

Vincent leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. "I know. So was I."

From there they passed by a room in which someone was instructing a small crowd on the proper way to draw Catherine's full lips and arched eyebrow.

"That's strange. I never noticed all that before," Vincent commented.

"To tell you the truth, I never really thought about it either. My God, Vincent...Ron, is it all that bad?"

"No Cath...Linda, I think your face is beautiful."

"Thank you...uh...love. Let's move on."

Much later, they found themselves at something called a celebrity auction. Vincent's eyes almost popped out of his head when he saw Mouse walk on stage.

"What's Mouse doing here?"

"That isn't Mouse," Catherine explained. "That's David Greenlee."

"Who?"

"The actor who plays Mouse."

He thought it over for a minute. "Who plays us?"

"Ron Perlman and Linda Hamilton according to one of those books I picked up."

"Linda Hamilton. Isn't she the woman in those Terminator movies? The one with the muscles?"

"I think so."

Vincent shook his head. "I don't understand any of this. If we're played by actors, does that mean we're not real?"

"Actually...we aren't. Real, that is. We're only characters created by Ron Koslow."

"Who's Ron Koslow?"

"It's a long story," she finally admitted with a sigh.

"Now I really don't understand," Vincent confessed.

"Maybe if we go to the banquet, we'll get some answers," she suggested. Later that night, they found a corner in the big banquet hall and began watching the people file in and take their seats. It was then that Vincent made a brilliant observation.

"Have you noticed how many women are here?"

"Yes, I have," Catherine answered a little indignantly. "It seems you have quite a few admirers."

"Me?"

"Can't say I blame them though." Taking his hand under the table, she gave him a very intense look.

"Just don't get any ideas, okay?"

"We're not real, remember?"

"I'd say you were very real to most of these ladies. Be careful."

The festivities soon began. They listened to awards being presented and several speakers reading poetry. The candle-lighting ceremony was deeply moving, and they found themselves feeling a bit misty-eyed.

The next day, they sat in the lobby watching people check out. There were tears, hugs, and sad goodbyes as group after group made their departures.

"Catherine...I mean Linda..."

"I think it's okay to call me Catherine now," she interrupted.

"Very well, Catherine. I think I'm beginning to understand all of this."

"Really. Please enlighten me."

"Look at them. Really look at them."

She did as instructed. "Okay."

"Don't you see? Most of these people would never have met had it not been for us. All of them are intelligent, talented people who have found an outlet for that talent. They've reached out to complete strangers and formed bonds which may last a lifetime. If you really think about it, it's something of a miracle."

"Yes... you're right. For something that isn't real, I think that's pretty incredible."

"It's humbling to think how much power we had to affect their lives. Hopefully, we had a positive and uplifting influence on them."

Catherine looked over at him and, with her finger, turned his face to hers. "What do you mean had? This isn't over yet. Not by a long shot."

"You think so?"

"I know so. With the devotion and determination people like these have, our story is long from being over. It's just entering a new phase."

"Do you think they'll do this again next year?" he asked.

"Oh, I have a feeling they will. Would you like to come back?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, my dear Vincent, I think it's time for us to go home now."

Arm-in-arm, they walked toward that magical door that would lead them back to their own realm.

"I almost hate to leave," Catherine said dreamily. "I've had such a good time."

Gently, Vincent put his arm around her and pulled her close. "So have I, but we have to return to our own lives just as they do."

She looked up into his twinkling blue eyes. "And each one of them will take a little piece of our dream back with them to share with others. As long as that happens, we will live on. Our dream will live on."

Standing there on the threshold between the two worlds, Catherine and Vincent paused. As Vincent looked lovingly into her eyes, a thought occurred to him.

"Since we are no longer bound by writers and network executives, do you think we could do something totally unscripted?"

"Oh...just what did you have in mind?"

"This." He leaned over and placed a lingering kiss on her lips.

She stared at him for a moment, stunned. "Since we're ad-libbing, there are a few other things I'd like to talk to you about. For example, that painting?"

"Catherine!"

As the door between the worlds began to close, laughter could be heard...

... and the rest... is silence.

END