

Long Day's Night

by Sheri Green

Catherine paid the cab driver and stood looking up at her building. It had been such a long day. The day's frustrations, delays, and endless depositions had exhausted her and made it a monumental effort just to enter and cross to the waiting elevator. As she stepped inside and the polished doors whooshed closed, the growling in her stomach reminded her that she had long missed another dinner. She moved to the back of the empty elevator and leaned in the corner. She put her cheek against the cool metallic wall thinking that she'd eat tomorrow. She was too drained to worry about it or to attempt to fix it tonight.

The elevator stopped at her floor and the doors slid open. Pushing herself from the corner she walked out and turned to the right to her apartment. As she slipped her key into the dead bolt she could hear soft music coming from inside. "Damn," she whispered, thinking she'd forgotten to turn it off that morning. She pushed open the door and even before she could step inside she was greeted by the heavenly smell of fresh baked bread and by the sight of every candle in her living room glowing softly. She hurriedly scanned the room and could make out Vincent standing in the shadows near the French doors.

"Vincent!" Catherine shut the door, dropped her briefcase and purse onto the couch and walked straight into his waiting arms.

She had not been expecting to see him tonight and realized that it had added to her depressed state. She held him tightly.

"Welcome home." At the sound of his whispered greeting she looked up, her face only inches away from his. Vincent looked away first, unable to acknowledge the emotions he could clearly read in her eyes.

"Come, before your soup gets cold." He led her over to the table where he had set a place for one. "William insisted I bring you some of his vegetable soup and bread. He loves it when his efforts are enjoyed."

He pulled out her chair for her. Catherine sat down in a daze. She placed her napkin in her lap.

"Aren't you having any?" she asked, looking up at him.

"I've already eaten," he replied, sitting down beside her.

Catherine tried a spoonful of soup and a bite of bread. They were just as good as she had remembered.

"Be sure and tell William I'm his number one fan. This is wonderful!"

Vincent smiled at her and reached down to gently lift her leg. He slipped off her heeled shoe and began to massage her foot.

Catherine sighed and closed her eyes. "Oh, that feels good."

Vincent finished and switching feet, gave her other foot the same attention. Finally, setting her foot down, he rose and leaned next to her ear.

"Finish your soup," he told her and he left the room. Catherine did as she was told. She could hear the water running in the bathroom. She took a last bite and followed the sound of the water. The mirrors and the air were both steamy from the hot water. The bathtub itself was almost overflowing

with bubbles. Catherine smiled and thought Vincent must have used half a box. Vincent looked at her sheepishly. "I found your bubble bath.

"So I see," she replied laughingly. He started to leave but Catherine anxiously grabbed his sleeve. He tilted his head and smiled at her, realizing what she was thinking.

"I'll be here." He felt her relax, both physically and mentally, now that she knew he was staying. As soon as he was out of the room, she removed her clothes and tossed them into the corner. She didn't feel like taking the time to put them away, the water looked too inviting. Catherine sank down into the hot water, stretching out and letting the hot water soothe her tired muscles. She called to her saviour.

"Vincent, come sit with me." She heard him walk to the door and stop just outside.

"Catherine, I..."

"Please, tell me about your day."

Hesitantly, he entered. When he saw that Catherine was completely covered by the bubbles he seemed to breathe a little easier. He sat down with his back to her, leaning against the side of the bathtub. He shared with her his day, how the work on the new chambers were progressing. Several of the children would soon be old enough to request their own chambers. He told her about Mouse, who always seemed to have more than his share of misadventures. He soon had her laughing at the antics caused when Arthur had gotten loose in Father's study again and how Mouse had made more of a mess of it in his efforts to catch him. Father was still distressed over a favourite pen which was missing. He was certain the animal had carried it off. Catherine draped a bubble-covered hand over his shoulder. He left it there, allowing the bubbles to melt and disappear on their own. Catherine was struck by how intimate this moment actually was for them, and yet how comfortable and relaxed she felt.

After a while Vincent rose and without looking at her said, "You should get out before the water gets cold. I'll get you something to wear." He left and was back right away, carrying a pair of white satin pajamas.

Catherine smiled at his choice of her nightwear. Of course he'd choose pajamas, never moving beyond the limits he'd always had for their relationship. He again left to wait in the living room.

When Catherine was dry and dressed, she came out to find that Vincent had moved several of the candles in around her bed and had blown out most of the others. Looking at him, she saw the candlelight glow softly upon him. He came to her, took her by the hand and led her over to the bed. He waited for her to crawl between the turned down sheets, then lay down beside her on top of them.

Gathering her gently up in his arms, he said softly. "Tell me."

And she did. Here, safe and warm in his arms, she told him of all the frustrations of her day. The endless meetings, the misplaced files, the hours lost hunting through the vault looking for depositions and testimony transcripts, on trials that had been remanded for a new jury; Joe's bad temper which only added to her own. And finally, the stack of *'loose ends'* that always seemed to find their way to her desk just in time to be taken home for the weekend. Catherine pulled away and looked up at him.

"It all seems so unimportant now that I'm here with you. Thank you, Vincent, for tonight. I guess I really just needed to be taken care of."

"I know. I could feel it."

She smiled and cuddled up against him again with a sigh. Vincent kissed the top of her head.

"Sleep now. I'll stay with you as long as I can."

Catherine fell asleep, listening to the beating of his heart, wrapped in the security of his arms.

Catherine woke the next morning, very glad that it was Saturday and that there was no hurry for her to be anywhere. She was still enjoying the feelings from last evening with Vincent.

As she brushed her teeth, she noticed that he'd neatly folded her discarded clothing.

In the living room, all traces of her meal were gone. In its place was a setting for one. The rest of William's bread sat, covered nearby.

Across the plate was a single red rose and a folded note. She opened it and saw the familiar flowing script. It read;

'Catherine, know that I love you

V'

Catherine felt the tears sting her eyes. Smiling, she whispered. "I know, Vincent. I know."

END