

ALL THINGS NEW

by TESS FREEMAN

(from TAPESTRY TALES)

CHAPTER ONE

DEATH SHALL HAVE NO DOMINION

Fierce pain stabbed into Vincent's abdomen. He jolted upright on his bed. *'Catherine's pain'*. The Bond, it was back. He had sensed her, for a moment, sudden and swift. He leaned sideways on his hands, ready to spring when it happened again! He jerked. Her pain clutched at his insides, physical, overpowering pain. The intensity of it raced through his veins, throbbing through his blood like insanity. She's said the Bond would come back, when it was needed. It had been gone for eight months, the last time he'd seen her. And now he must get to her, find her and bring her back.

He started to run, his sense of her growing stronger as he got closer. He abandoned the safety of the tunnels when they could take him no further. The building loomed up large and menacing in front of him. Catherine was in there somewhere.

There would be danger, there always was, but Vincent didn't hesitate. Driven by his love and the desperation he felt in her, he burst through the building's doors and took the stairs three or four steps at a time. They tried to stop him as usual, but they were no match for his strength and his rage, feeble men who didn't know what was hitting them. They meant nothing to him, mere obstacles which stood between him and Catherine. He slashed them, tore them, threw them down the stairs, whatever was necessary to get through them. He ripped a security camera from the wall. They knew him, that was why they had her, because they knew he would come.

He kicked down a door and stood in a room filled with technical equipment, the workings of which were beyond him. He spun around, dizzy. Her pain came in waves, rising and falling, building to a pitch, swimming over him so that he could not think, could not see, could not feel anything but the sensation of it. She was in great distress. Where was she? He dug his fingers into his head until it was over.

He looked up. There was a momentary calm, and joy, before he sensed her loss and deep sorrow, followed by extreme weakness.

He cried out, **"CATHERINE!"**

There was a deafening noise on the rooftop - helicopter blades. He was almost at the top of the building and by the time he got there it was circling up and away from him.

"CATHERINE!" he roared at it, but the men inside just stared down at him, smug faces gloating in their victory.

He stood on the rooftop, encompassed by the lights of New York City which seemed to mock his aloneness and his destitution. The helicopter had disappeared into the night and she was gone, taken from him once again.

The faint voice speaking his name made him turn. *Catherine*. She stumbled towards him, bedraggled

in some kind of white gown. He reached out to steady her, but she was too weak to stand. he held her as she folded down onto the rooftop. Cradling her head, he knew there was very little life left in her.

"Catherine," he whispered.

She made an attempt to speak. He tried to silence her, to preserve her last few ounces of strength.

"Vincent."

Every breath was an effort. He would not let his tears come, not yet, for her sake. Their final moments together must be ones of love, not sorrow. There would be time for that later.

"Vincent." She was trying to tell him something. "We loved, there was a child."

"*A child?*" He didn't understand, he had no recollection. That day in the cave... He shook his head, hardly believing what she was saying.

She smiled. "He's beautiful."

A son, their child... He lifted his head to the black skies, the distant helicopter. It all made sense now.

Catherine reached up and touched his cheek. "Though lovers be lost."

"Love shall not," he continued hoarsely. They were the lines of the Dylan Thomas poem he had repeated constantly during the time of his psychological breakdown, when Catherine had saved him with her love.

And now - this. Catherine's head fell to one side as her eyes drifted shut and she slipped into that dark place beyond life, where there is no sense of anything, nothing at all.

Vincent knew because her life left him too, ebbing slowly until all that was left was a vast hollow chasm inside of him. He could cry now if he wanted to, but now the tears wouldn't come.

He scooped her up into his arms. Her body hung limply as her golden hair spilled over his elbow, her face turned into his chest as loving as in life.

Hardly knowing where he was going, he carried her through the city, stepping over vagrants who'd lost hope. And what was hope? This? Was this where all their hope and love had led to? Catherine's death? This beautiful woman in his arms had died because he had dared to love her, to hope in what should have remained impossible for him. When she had saved him from his own madness, she had unwittingly sacrificed her own life.

He should have left her alone that night three years ago in the park. Rescued her, and then let her go back to her world. He should never have revealed himself to her, never let her enter his life. And he certainly should have never entered hers.

The tunnels were ahead, he would take her there. He couldn't leave her here to be found by strangers.

Father was waiting. "Vincent, you're back! Catherine! Is she? His voice trembled. "***What is it? What's wrong?***" he demanded.

Vincent tried to shake his head, but all that happened was that his eyelids flickered shut, finally stung by tears which would stay unshed no longer. His throat felt like someone had scraped away at its insides, his voice wouldn't come. He held the woman he loved out to Father, as his tears splashed onto her cheeks. He heard himself speak, words wre barely audible, even to himself.

"I've killed her, Father, my love has killed her."

"No, Vincent."

"***Yes!***" he shouted. "***She's dead because of me.***"

Father didn't reply this time.

"I'm taking her to the guest chamber until...."

Father's face was as cold and silent as stone. He was clearly in shock.

Mouse and Pascal had appeared. Vincent couldn't speak any more.

"Catherine's... dead." He heard the strain in Father's voice, the muffled cries of the others vibrating through his ears as he carried Catherine the final stretch of her journey.

He laid her in the bed, recalling the last time she'd stayed in the tunnels. There had been death there too-- Catherine's father's. And she had come to the tunnels, to Vincent, for healing.

He stood up, ashamed with his memories of that time. Even then, in her hour of utmost need, his thoughts had gone beyond what his love for her should have been. He'd had to battle with himself to give her the love and comfort she craved while stamping out his own unimaginable feelings for her. He was forever destined to be the animal striving to be a man, and she had paid the price.

Sighing, he pulled up the sheet to her neck, but he could not bring himself to cover her face. Even in death she was beautiful, as though she were simply sleeping.

His chamber was cold, familiar yet unfamiliar. There was comfort in the underground train which rattled past his stained glass window, chugging out its near primal beat. He sat on his bed and dug his fingers into his skull. Their dream had been hurtling towards this point from the beginning, but he had always thought that it would end in his death and not hers.

*'There is something within me that longs to awaken
Something unmistakable that makes me who I am
It rests in the silent places of my heart
Waiting impatiently to come alive.'*

Father just stared at her. He still could not believe she was dead, that this was the end of this remarkable woman. The end for Vincent too, because he would have no life without her.

The past eight months had been a nightmare with Vincent pacing the tunnels all day, searching for Catherine all night, unable to regain his telepathy with her which would tell him where she was being held.

And now he was torturing himself with believing he had caused her death. Whatever he meant by that, they could discuss when Vincent was ready to share it, and Father would try to convince him otherwise.

He frowned and reached out his hand to stroke Catherine's ivory cheek. He cupped her jawbone in his palm.

There was a pulse!

He whipped back the sheet and gathered her up, calling out for whoever could hear.

"Quickly! Anyone! Catherine's alive!" he shouted. **"HELP ME!"**

He bundled her across his shoulder and limped from the chamber.

"Jacob!"

"Mary! Help me get her to the Hospital chamber, quickly!"

Mary ran in front, taking the weight of Catherine's feet. They laid her on the hospital bed, Father rolling up his sleeves. "Where are the others?"

Mary shook her head. "Nowhere near."

"We need help. Someone to go Above, someone to keep Vincent out of the guest chamber. No one is to tell him there's hope" He fixed his eyes on Mary's expectant face. "Until we 're sure there is. Can you arrange all this?"

Mary, kind reliable Mary, had not needed to wait for that question. She'd already gone.

Vincent was sleeping. Father backed out of Vincent's chamber and rubbed his forehead where tension was beginning to settle; he was exhausted.

Peter had come down and together they had worked on Catherine, doing tests, carrying out examinations, monitoring her. The night had already passed and he'd not yet slept. He would wait until Vincent awoke, to make sure he was all right, and then he himself would sleep. There was nothing more he could do for Catherine now.

"Where is she?"

Father was aware of being violently shaken, Vincent's gruff voice reverberating through his head.

"What have you done with her?"

The next thing he felt was the creak in his neck. He forced his eyes open, they were inches from his desktop. He must have nodded off, slumped over his desk. Slowly, he straightened his upper body until he was in a sitting position.

"Father! Tell me where Catherine is," Vincent's wet eyes pleaded with him.

"Catherine..." Father looked around him. "What time is it?"

"I don't know," Vincent stated. "Morning. Catherine, Father, where is Catherine? Please?"

Father stood up stiffly and took Vincent by the shoulders. He looked into the blue eye which searched his own.

"I've something to tell you, Vincent, and I want you to promise to stay calm."

Vincent looked ready to explode. "You've had someone take her away," he accused, "While I slept."

"No, just listen to me. Catherine is not dead."

"Not dead? But I saw-- I've no sense of her."

"Vincent," Father was over-tired and angry. **"You place far too much emphasis on your telepathic powers.** Wonderful as they are, they have not been exactly reliable of late. Besides, when it come to Catherine, you're far too - volatile - to think straight."

Vincent's shoulders dropped and he turned his head away.

"Now listen to me," Father repeated. "Catherine didn't die. She was unconscious from being drugged, poisoned. Peter and I have been working through the night, she's in the Hospital chamber now."

Vincent sprang away.

"Wait!"

He turned on the steps. "What?"

"She's still unconscious. She's slipped into a coma."

Vincent's face transformed into an expression of pain. "I need to see her, Father."

Father nodded. "Speak to her, read her some poetry. Your voice is the one thing that may bring her

back." He hoped.

The tubes and the heart monitor were the first thing Vincent saw. They overpowered Catherine, lying dependent on them. She was not really alive then, was she?

He pulled up a chair to her bedside. It scraped across the stone floor. Carefully, he lifted her right arm, gently stroking it. It dropped heavily when he released his hold. Her left arm had a drip attached to it. A thick needle slid visibly under the skin at the back of her wrist, held in place by sticky plaster. It was attached to a one inch length of orange plastic tubing. This in turn was connected to the transparent tubes leading to the balloon-like bag filled with fluid which nourished Catherine. Her heartbeat was portrayed as green zigzags bleeping across a screen. It was all too much for him - the precision of it. But if it worked, it would be another medical miracle, responsible for giving his Catherine back to him.

He let go of her hand and opened the book on his knee. He started to read. The words became meaningless to him after the first couple of pages, but if Father was right and the sound of his voice drifting past her unconscious state into her subconscious would revitalize her, then he would never stop reading until he witnessed that response.

CHAPTER TWO REAWAKENING

Vincent lost all track of time. He didn't know when his vigil had begun, or when it would end. His existence had become as numb as Catherine's unconscious state. Everything outside of the hospital chamber became oblivious.

"Vincent."

He almost walked into Father, barely seeing him.

"You'll wear a hole in the floor."

Vincent sopped pacing. "What else is there to do?"

Father waved an arm. "Oh, eating, sleeping, remembering that the rest of us exist. Things like that."

Vincent started pacing again. "I have to be here."

"All the time? Your bed's hardly been slept in for three weeks."

Vincent paced harder. "What do you want me to do? Give up? Abandon her?"

"Of course not, but there are other things."

"What other things?"

"Something we need to talk about." There was an edge to Father's voice as the older man glanced across at Catherine's immobile frame, covered by a white linen sheet, folded over gray blankets. "But not here, in case she can hear."

Vincent's gaze froze on Father's grim face. It was the most hopeful statement that had been uttered since he'd brought Catherine back almost a month ago. He let his eyes sweep over her frame now. What if she woke when he was gone?

"Vincent." Father's arm was outstretched. "This is important."

Vincent sighed and went with Father. They walked in silence, ending up at the waterfall.

"It's a beautiful spot," Father observed.

"Yes." Vincent sat on a rock. It was a place for quiet contemplation, for shared moments with

Catherine. "What's on your mind, Father?"

Father used his stick for support to lower himself down beside Vincent. "This isn't easy, Vincent, what I have to tell you. But you must know."

"Then tell me."

Father coughed. "Very well." His eyes diverted from Vincent's several times before he managed to keep them there.

"What is it, Father? Something about Catherine?"

Another lowering of the eyes. "Yes." He seemed to gather himself before continuing. "Vincent, when Peter and I were trying to save Catherine's life, we had to - carry out certain examinations. We discovered something."

"Please tell me, Father."

Father stared at the tunnel wall as though it might provide the words for him. When it didn't, he gave a deep sigh.

"Vincent, Catherine had very recently given birth."

Vincent shut his eyes.

Father hurried on. "During the time she was away, she must have..."

"The child is mine."

"What?"

Vincent shook his head slowly and waited for the deluge which would surely come. There was no need to repeat himself. Father had heard. He was mere assorting his thoughts into the best possible antagonistic order.

"Wh-----? How did this happen?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't---" Father stood up and walked around a little.

"Please tell me what you're thinking, Father."

"What I'm thinking!" He leaned heavily on his stick, standing over Vincent. "What I'm thinking is how you could have let this happen."

"Don't you think I haven't asked myself that same question a thousand times since Catherine's return?"

Father raised his eyebrows. "Only since then? And what about before that, Vincent. What about at the time?"

Vincent jumped up. "I told you I don't remember."

Father whipped around in a flash, his features altered by the scoffing, false smile he presented Vincent with. "**Please...** enlighten me."

Vincent shook his head. "I wish I could. That day in the cave, Father, a long time ago, before Catherine's disappearance. I asked you what happened in there."

The colour drained from Father's face as he collapsed onto the rock beside Vincent, his stick clattering onto the stone floor. Vincent stopped it with his foot, to prevent it from rolling away over the edge to the waters far below. He put his arm around Father's shoulder.

"You said you had *'no recollection'*."

"I still don't. All I have to go on is what you told me, that Catherine went in after me and delivered me

from my terrifying insanity."

"In the only way she knew... I should have *'known.'* I missed it, all this time. It was her way of showing you how much she loved you, so that you would never have to doubt again. She brought you back from the edge by proving her love for you."

"Yes. And that is why she is lying back there now."

"The baby..."

"They've got him."

"A son. Catherine told you this? Before she passed out?"

Vincent nodded. "He's out there somewhere, Father, and I don't even know who these men are."

Father's voice and face were gentle now. "We'll find them. We'll get the child back." He took Vincent's hands in his. "I promise you that I will do everything in my power to help you and Catherine and your child."

"Thank you, Father. Now I must get back to Catherine."

The scratching on his palm was what woke him. He raised his head, his eyes focusing on the small generator which powered the heart machine, its steady hum droning through his brain.

Something sharp dug into his hand again. Catherine's hand was moving in his, her head was starting to twist from side to side, she was waking up!"

"Catherine." He brushed the side of her face.

A groan escaped from her throat and he jumped back.

The zigzags on the screen had gone erratic, the bleeps so close together they sounded like a siren. He stood up as her eyes opened. He must get Father!

It was late, the middle of the night. Father would be in his chamber. It meant leaving Catherine, but what if she injured herself while he was away? He hesitated between the bed and the doorway, knowing that if he stayed something much more serious might happen. The high-pitched irregularity of the bleeping decided for him. He dashed from the chamber, his cloak flowing out behind him. Without stopping, he struggled out of it and left it where it fell. The tunnel walls flashed past him as he ran, an unyielding corner jutting painfully into his shoulder as he bolted around it. He snatched at his shoulder with his opposite hand, the pain only serving to increase his speed and his determination to reach Father's chamber.

"Father!" He pulled him upright, this time not giving him the option to wake up slowly. "Come on, get your shoes on! It's Catherine, she's awake!"

Father groaned and rolled his eyes, but hurried. Vincent pulling him along by the right arm. "Not so fast, Vincent."

"We've got to be fast." Vincent shot over his shoulder, to which he heard Father's muttered reply about Catherine taking all this time to wake up and then doing it when everyone else was asleep.

Vincent saw the funny side of it and laughed at Father shuffling behind issuing half-hearted complaints. His excitement at seeing Catherine awake was bubbling up inside him by the time they reached the Hospital chamber.

Father was bent double, his hands above his knees, panting, "I ... want ... you ... to stay outside," he managed in between gasps for breath.

Vincent shook his head. "I don't understand."

Father pulled his mouth into a tight, determined line. "I'll come for you," he promised, "When it's

okay."

Vincent threw up his hands in defeat as Father entered the hospital chamber without him. He fought the urge to pace up and down, standing instead with his head leaning back against the rock wall. The rough surface tugged at his hair and he pushed away from it, turning into the chamber entrance. There he stood on the threshold between the cold darkness of the tunnel corridor behind him and the warm glow of candlelight in the chamber, emptiness behind him and an overflowing of emotions in front of him, *'too much emotion'*.

He took a step back. Could he really have expected to resume things with her, knowing where their love had led to the last time, to Catherine's near death? No, he would not go in there again, to destroy her once more. He reeled backwards and clutched his head in his hands. Father could handle it this time, arrange to have her transported back to her world Above, back to the life she'd had before she'd ever met Vincent.

As for the child... Well, it should never have been...

Vincent ran, faster now than minutes ago when he'd raced for Father, filled with eagerness and fresh hope. The tunnel walls buffeted him on every side, tearing his clothes, bruising him, mocking him by their imprisonment of him. He roared, lashing out with his fists and claws at them, wanting to tear them down, to free himself of their existence, of his dependence on them because they were a constant reminder of what he was, and of what he was not. He stumbled into his chamber, exhausted, and collapsed onto his bed. Catherine was alive, he'd done his duty, now he must let her go.

"Elliot! Elliot!"

Father squeezed his eyes shut at Catherine's call. Her head ceased to twist from side to side, her eyes began to focus on him as he took her hand in his.

"Who are you? Where's Elliot?" She peered about the chamber. "Where am I?"

His voice very nearly didn't come. "You're in a safe place," he whispered, forcing himself to smile through his pain. "It's all right."

But it wasn't all right because Catherine clearly did not remember.

"You must not go in to her, Vincent. She does not remember us, or this place."

Vincent flicked the pages of a poetry volume with his thumb. "That will make it easier, then."

"Will make what easier?"

Vincent sighed and placed the book back on its shelf, keeping his back to Father. "Not seeing her again. What we had is finished."

"You've decided this?"

"Yes." He looked up at the high chamber ceiling and waited for Father's reply.

Father's words came out measured, his voice strained. "You know I would give anything to see you and Catherine happy - together - but as things stand, I think perhaps your decision is the right one, the only one."

Vincent felt his lips tremble, his throat clog. He turned around, defeated. "She must not be told about me, Father. *'NEVER'* It's better that she forget."

The quiver in Father's voice betrayed his anguish. "You're being very strong."

Vincent shook his head and formed the word *'no'*, but it got stuck. His eyes filled with tears at the

same time that Father opened his arms, and Vincent went to him and sobbed like a child.

What an unusual place this was - it must be underground. Catherine tentatively reached out and touched the walls with her fingertips, discovering they were as cold as the rock floor beneath her feet. Her nightdress brushed her ankles as she padded about barefoot. She must ask for her shoes and her clothes. She couldn't walk about like this all the time, and she would need to get washed.

That man, Father, was nice, but what a strange name to call yourself by. He wouldn't be pleased that she was wandering about the place, but she was stronger now, and curious. Who else lived here? She'd only met Father and Mary, but she knew there were others. She'd heard voices and Father had said that everybody called him by that paternal title.

She let the tunnels lead her on, as though she were following a pre-set path, as though somehow she knew where she was going, which was impossible as she'd never been here before.

There was somebody coming! She hoped it was only Father or Mary and then she'd get a reprimand for being out of bed which she could laugh off.

The footsteps and swishing of clothes grew louder as her own panic rose. There was nowhere to hide and she didn't have time to turn and run, so she kept her head down, not wanting to be the stranger in someone else's territory. The swishing stopped and Catherine felt the presence of someone formidable in front of her, which she knew instinctively was neither Father nor Mary.

Slowly she lifted her eyes as the other person spun around, his face out of her view, but revealing a long mane of golden hair down his back.

"I'm... sorry," she faltered. "I must have come the wrong way. I was just taking a walk."

The well-made figure nodded, but did not turn around, apparently more frightened than she was.

This revelation lent her courage. "Could you tell me how to get back to the Hospital chamber? I'm ..."

"I know who you are."

His voice was husky, ringing deep inside her ears, filtering into the deep recesses of her brain as something recognizable. She shook her head vigorously. It was ridiculous to think that she could recognize a voice she had never heard before. She was just confused, that was all, and tired. It was time she got back and lay down.

"I've forgotten the way back," she pressed.

"Just turn around and keep going until....."

Catherine's head began to spin. "There's so many different ways... If you could just take me..."

"Please!" It was an agonized plea. "Don't ask me that."

The tunnel walls became a blur and seemed to close in around her before she fell.

"Catherine!"

She heard his feet as he ran to her, felt his hand, soft and hairy, on her forehead, his arms going around and under her, and she guessed she was being carried, for she felt the pounding of his heart in her ear.

Her head rolled back and her vision swam, but she could hear perfectly well. He was walking very fast with her, almost running, and he was crying and talking

"Don't fall unconscious again, not this time, not again. Wake up, *'please!'* **WAKE UP, CATHERINE!**"

She was being lain on a bed, her own familiar sick bed. A glass of water was at her lips; she drank some and the lightheadedness passed.

Everything came into focus again and as gravity ceased to orbit around her, her gaze settled on the face of her rescuer. He did not try to hide now, but smiled down at her very, very softly, with eyes extremely gentle, unusually so for such blue eyes, and beautiful in a way, so that she was compelled to reach up and touch his cheek. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply when she did so.

"Why am I not afraid?" she asked.

His answer made her more afraid than she thought she could ever be.

"Because you know me, Catherine."

She shook her head slowly, disbelieving, but two parts of her mind were at war with each other, and for some unknown reason she was unable to look away.

CHAPTER THREE THE HEART REMEMBERS

"Vincent! What are you doing?"

The two surprised faces upturned to him were smiling and relaxed. Father rubbed his chin between finger and thumb, confused. It was Catherine who spoke first.

"It's all right, Father. I was going walkabout and Vincent brought me back."

He approached the bed to stand beside them both, his beloved Vincent and Catherine. "I see." He searched their faces for signs which would tell him how to tread. "And Vincent's been keeping you company."

Catherine touched Vincent's arm and laughed. "Yes, he has a wonderful voice for reading poetry."

Father nodded. "I couldn't agree more." So Catherine did not remember Vincent, but she was accepting him again. He directed a beckoning glance at Vincent. "I need to talk to you," he whispered, "in private."

Outside the chamber, he admonished Vincent. "What's going on? I thought you had decided there was to be no contact between the two of you."

"She collapsed in the tunnels, Father, near my chamber. I had to bring her back."

"And then 'stay' with her, laugh with her, read her poetry of all things?"

"She asked me to stay."

"Wasn't she ...?"

"Frightened?" Vincent supplied, walking a little way away. "That is the strangest thing, Father. She knew she should be, but she wasn't and she asked me why."

"What did you tell her?"

Vincent stopped walking. "That she knew me."

"That she knew you." He tried to keep his voice calm. "And what do you think that is going to achieve?"

Vincent threw up his arms. "I don't know. I didn't plan this."

"Yet you've let her see you, fulfilled her wishes, answered her questions, after all you said. Vincent, how could you?"

"It happened, Father, it just happened."

Father lowered his voice. "Like it happened the first time?"

"NO! Not like then." He grew suddenly silent.

"Tell me, Vincent."

Vincent's face was set. "Catherine does not remember me, or anything that we shared. She thinks...." He closed his eyes momentarily, in an attempt to block out the pain. Father guessed. "She thinks she was about to marry Elliot Burch before *'the accident'*. She doesn't even know what happened to her, Father. She's asking all sorts of questions."

"What are you being so secretive about."

"CATHERINE!" Both men jumped.

"Where are you going?" Father demanded.

She held up a jug. "For some water, if that's allowed," she teased.

Father waved her on and, when she was out of earshot, said to Vincent. "Then we'd better start thinking of some answers."

"What happened to me, Vincent?"

They were at the waterfall, Catherine sitting at a distance from him, like they were strangers, not like they used to be when Catherine would lie in the loop of his arm and they would just sit and talk, relishing every moment together.

"You were abducted." He watched for her reaction and saw it as a slow shaking of her head.

"*Why?*"

"Don't you remember your job?" he asked.

"Of course," she laughed, implying that such a major area of her life could not possibly be forgotten. "I'm with the D.A.'s office."

He bowed his head. "So you do remember some things."

She was quiet for a moment, before saying lightheartedly. "I guess I must have been pretty good at my job to be abducted, so what did they... did they do... hit me over the head until I passed out?"

He stared down at his feet, knowing that the time had come when her questions demanded a truthful answer. He placed up at her relaxed face which showed no anxiety whatsoever in its expectancy.

"You really don't remember ... anything of your ordeal?"

She appeared blank. "No, should I?"

Against his better judgment, he got up and crossed to where she sat, kneeling down beside her and cupping her elbow in his large hand. He saw and felt fear in her wide eyes, not of him, but of what he was going to tell her.

Her voice was very soft, barely a whisper. "What is it, Vincent? What happened to me?"

"Catherine." He opened out his hand and, very tentatively, she edged her own hand forwards, never taking her eyes off his, and finally placed her palm in his, allowing him to close his fingers around hers and held onto them tightly.

"Catherine," He repeated. "You were administered a lethal dose of morphine."

Her shock was evident as her mouth opened, quivering, searching for words. "I don't understand, why? I had some information they wanted?"

"Yes, you had something they wanted."

"What?" She was pleading with him to fill in the gaps in her uncooperative brain, but he could not do that until she remembered of her own accord. If she ever did, and if she didn't, then he could never tell her more than half-truths.

"Initially, you did have information they wanted."

"Initially?"

His knees were getting sore on the stone floor, so he sat beside her on her rock, half-turning towards her. She didn't object or even appear uncomfortable with his closeness, but he knew that was because her mind was on what he was telling her, not on him personally, and, as she had no idea that there had ever been anything between them, he posed no threat.

"Things got complicated."

He had let go of both her elbows and her hand. She rubbed at her forehead as if trying to erase the block that was lodged there. "How?"

He dared to make eye contact, and hold it. "When I became involved."

She got up and started walking around. "I don't understand, Vincent. You said before that ... I know you."

"Yes." He wanted to tell her so badly and see her face remember, and smile at him the way she used to, so long ago. He was desperate to hold her in his arms, caress her back, kiss her hair.... He tore his gaze away from her and fixed it instead on the eternal waterfall away to their right, its never-ceasing spillage an added reminder of his insignificance and dispensability. He sighed as he turned back to her. "Catherine, I cannot tell you everything. There are things which may frighten you."

"What sort of things.

Such persistence? Things my heart cries out to tell you, Catherine, but which I know I never shall.

"You must go back to your world, Catherine, and carry on with your life, but know that we are always here for you, *always*," he emphasized. "I speak for all of us."

She smiled and came closer. "You are all such good, kind people. I feel disloyal not being able to remember."

"Don't. Some things are best forgotten. You will go forward now and remember what you need to know."

She stepped closer to him and hugged him. "Thank you for everything, Vincent."

It was like that first time, their very first parting, at the basement of her apartment building, when she had embraced him and he had held his hand away from touching her, knowing that when he did so, his life would change forever, until the pull had become too strong and he had allowed his fingers to close around her waist, drawing her nearer and never wanting to release her.

It was like that now, his arms two stiff rods fastened to his sides, terrified to hold her, to let himself feel her warmth and her softness, this time not only because of the inevitable pain of having to let her go, but for fear of betraying his true feelings, of not being able to prevent his passion from flowing from him into her, of transmitting more than either of them could deal with.

She thought he was just a good friend, no different from Father or any of the others, and she would expect no more in his embrace. And so he brought his hands up to her back and patted in between her shoulder blades with one while he held the other on her lower spine.

It had been so long since he'd held her' that for a moment, when her face was buried in his neck, he closed his eyes and let himself believe that she was his again. He breathed in sharply, too sharply, for she drew back abruptly and would not look directly at him.

She shuffled about nervously, all the time creating more and more distance between them. "I'd...

better go," she murmured, raising her arms a little, walking backwards.

Vincent sensed fear in her, new fear which had not been present before, which had only surfaced with their embrace. "I'll walk you back."

"NO!" she laughed and her voice shook. "I mean, thank you, but I'll be all right. Thank you for everything, Vincent."

She met his eyes for a split second, a darting glance that was laden with uncertainty. "I'm glad to have met you, Vincent ... again," she added.

"And I am glad to have known you, Catherine."

She gave a little smile and was gone, no goodbye, but Vincent knew what was unspoken, that she was going, not just back to her chamber, but to her world Above, to be with Elliot. Elliot, not Vincent, had been the one she'd remembered. He pulled his cloak around him and walked slowly back through the tunnels.

Catherine's hands shook as she straightened out her bedclothes and checked around the chamber. She had to get out of here quickly, before she went delirious. What on earth had happened back there?

Her entire upper body had begun to shake and she was growing hot and cold. She sank onto the just-made bed and peeled off Jamie's cardigan, goose pimples immediately rising up on her bare arms. She rubbed at them with her hands and wrapped the cardigan around her shoulders in a compromise for her fluctuating body temperature.

What had happened to her? She was going crazy, reacting to someone who wasn't even... fully human. She was ashamed to have harboured the thought, because Vincent had been nothing but kind to her since the beginning, but to feel herself respond to his closeness in a physical way was too scary to ponder. She shook her head fiercely. She couldn't ponder it, she just couldn't.

She froze when she heard footsteps. "Mary!"

"You look relieved," Mary's smile was replaced with a concerned frown as she took in the tidied chamber, the canvas bag Catherine was clutching to her side. "You're leaving."

Catherine nodded. "It's time for me to go." She patted her lap. "Thanks for my clothes and stuff."

"They're just things, Catherine. Everybody was more than delighted to donate something. You won't forget where we are, will you?"

Catherine gave a wry laugh as she looked around the chamber. "How could I?"

Mary smiled warmly and opened her arms. "Come here."

Catherine gave her a hug and had her back patted for the second time that afternoon before Mary held her a little way back and fixed her with a soft quizzical expression. "Haven't you said goodbye to anyone else? Has something happened?"

"No!" She pulled away, lowering her eyes. "I don't know. Vincent knows I'm going. I think so, anyway. Mary?"

"Yes, dear?"

Her hesitance stretched into a long drawn out silence deep-rooted emotions battled with her memory to be allowed to resurface and be acknowledged.

"Nothing." She didn't want to ask, didn't want the answer, already semi-consciously fearful of what that might be. She was going Above to be reunited with Elliot and she would never return here again, not because she wished to forsake the tunnel people, but because staying away was the only

assurance she could give herself that she would never have to see Vincent again.

Catherine paused in the vertical column of light which marked the exit from the tunnels before taking that first tentative step forwards into the world Above.

She sidestepped the puddles and the piles of wet leaves at the Central Park exit, instinctively knowing where to put her feet, which route to take across the park to lead her home. She knew she had tramped this route dozens of times, if not more, and yet to remember distinctly, to see it in her mind's eye, would not come to her.

It was as though she did not really exist, as she left the park behind and stood on the sidewalk, observing the jammed lanes of traffic, the Yellow cabs squeezing in and out of spaces as they become available, the almost constant honking of horns, the angry shouts, the suffocating exhaust fumes. And across the street, the traffic of people, shoppers and workers, swinging designer store bags and briefcase. Compared with the tranquility of the tunnels, it was madness. A vision of Vincent and herself sitting in hushed silence on her apartment balcony flashed through her mind, but she shook it off and dodged in between a motorcycle courier and a battered Volvo estate to cross the street.

Where to now?

She had no keys for her apartment, no ID, no credit cards, no cash, none of the essential criteria necessary for life outside the tunnels, normal life in the real world, but was all this real? She was invisible here, unseen among the throngs of other people going about their business. New York had proved her expendable these past ten months, and yet, Below, she knew she had mattered. It would be so easy to run back there now, while no one Above knew she was back ... but there was Vincent. She couldn't bring herself to face him again.

And so she carried on, not conscious of where she was going, until she ended up at her place of work.

"Cathy!" Joe's mouth gaped, his face white. **"I don't believe it!"** He dragged his chair away from his desk and pushed it towards her. "You'd better sit down."

Catherine laughed, relaxed with Joe. "You look like you need it."

"Yeah." He leaned back against the desk, rubbing his forehead. "It really is you, isn't it?"

She flopped down onto the chair. "Here I am."

"What happened to you, Cathy? Where've you been all this time?"

She sighed. "It's too complicated to go into right now."

"Okay, whatever you say."

"I need your help, Joe."

He held out his arms. "Sure, what are friends for?" He laughed as he added, "as long as it's legal."

"Hey," she intoned, "what do you take me for? By the way, who's doing my job around here these days?"

Joe glanced at his feet for a moment before answering her. "You are," he grinned. "Welcome back, Radcliffe."

"Radcliffe.... where I went to college, right?"

"You all right, Cathy. You lost your memory or something?"

She thought she had, but she seemed to remember everything... except the tunnels and Vincent. She stood up quickly and shook her head.

"No," she replied. "I haven't forgotten anything."

She flicked the light on in her apartment. Thankfully it hadn't been re-let, the benefit of paying her rent directly from her bank account, she guessed, if there was anything left in it after almost a year without a paycheck.

There was nothing unfamiliar here. She sank into one of her pair of couches, let her head loll back and closed her eyes. It was good to be home, here in her own place again. She felt herself begin to drift off to sleep and jerked herself up to the edge of her seat, glancing towards the veranda, as though half-expecting to see a shadow move across the glass at any moment.

She rubbed her eyes and went to run the shower. As she laid out her gown on her bed, she tried not to keep looking sideways, but for some reason, she had an overwhelming compulsion to gaze towards the balcony doors.

CHAPTER FOUR THE BINDING

The hot jets of water prickled Catherine's shoulders and neck as she turned her face into the delicious shower spray, sheer luxury after the bowls of water which had to suffice in the tunnels. She tilted back her head and let the water pour past her mouth and her chin before turning to rivulets as it streamed down over her shoulders, back and stomach.

That was when she saw them, the stretch marks. What else could they be, silver-white stripes crossing her breasts, abdomen and thighs? She'd never had anything like them before, As the water continued to dart at her from the overhead rose, she ran her fingers over the wide, opaque-like lines. She had not noticed them in the tunnels, what with the semi-light and only washing a portion of herself at a time.

She twisted off the shower knobs and the pool created at her feet swirled around the plug hole, making rude noises as it gurgled down the drain to the depths of the earth. She shuddered and jumped out, grabbing hold of the shower door for support while water dripped off her naked body onto the carpet and all her thoughts attempted to take precedence in her brain at once.

So she'd had a baby, but what had become of it? *'Whose'* was it? Elliot's - of course. She got dressed in slow motion, the only kind of mobility she seemed capable of at the moment, and lay back on her bed. Where *was* Elliot? How could she get in touch with him? She turned onto her side and pulled her legs up to her chin. She supposed word would soon get around that she was back.

It did, or at least it must have got as far as Elliot, because she opened her door to his knock at eleven the following morning and he was standing there with his longish hair and his rugged beard, eyes beaming as he looked her up and down.

His unabashed delight made her laugh and she threw her arms around his neck, entwining her fingers in the curls at his nape.

"Elliot! It's so good to see you again! Come on in."

She thought he looked surprised by her enthusiastic welcome, but he said nothing. "Can I get you a drink?"

"Sure." He flopped down lengthwise onto one of the couches and she had to smile at his feet dangling over the arm, as though he belonged just there. "So, where have you been all this time, Cathy?"

She handed him a Scotch and sat down on the opposite sofa. "I don't know, Elliot. I can't remember and what I do remember is all muddled. But I am glad to see you again."

"Likewise!" He held his glass out to hers. "To you!"

Clinking his glass with hers, she smiled ruefully. "To us."

"I'll drink to that!"

She watched his eyebrows raise as she took a sip of her own Martini. "Elliot...?"

"Hmmm.....?"

"What do you know of our baby?"

A coughing fit was the last reaction Catherine had expected for a response as the glass erupted from Elliot's hand, sloshing liquid over his lips and beard.

"Sorry, I guess you didn't know."

"Didn't know!" he repeated, wiping at his face with a handkerchief pulled from his jacket pocket.

"Cathy, much as I wish otherwise, our relationship never reached the baby-making stage."

"Oh." Catherine felt her face burn and stood up, turning away, but looked back when she heard him chuckling.

"You were right when you said you were a bit muddled, Cathy. In fact, imagining you - we' - had a baby is a lot of muddling." He laughed again, waving his arm around. "Sorry, but you really should see a doctor about it, get it sorted out."

"Yeah, maybe I will." He thought she had imagined it. Well, there wasn't much point in trying to convince him otherwise now that she'd learned they weren't as close as she had thought. He was idling around her apartment now, studying all her little trinkets. "Elliot, was there ... did I have ...?"

When he turned to await her question, he was holding up a delicate crystal pendant on a length of cord. "What?"

She cleared her throat. "Was I involved with anyone else, Elliot, do you know?"

He threw back his head and laughed. "You don't remember?"

"No."

He walked towards her with arms outstretched. "Then I'm not sure that I should tell you."

"Please, Elliot. I need to know."

He took hold of her shoulders, but held her at arms' length as he raised his eyes to the ceiling and shook his head. "The sacrifices one must make in the name of love."

"Sorry? It's just that I thought you and I ..."

"So did I until you told me there was someone else in your life."

"Who?"

He shrugged. "I really have no idea, Cathy. It was always such a big secret. But ..." he took his hands from her elbows, "maybe this is a clue." In his hand he still had the crystal pendant. "It certainly isn't one I've ever given you. Quite unique, wouldn't you say?"

Catherine felt her horror begin to close in around her as her eyes refused to be taken off the sparkling pendant. There was only one place that could have come from - underground.

She caught Joe just as he was about to go for lunch. "Mind if I join you?"

"Radcliffe, *you* are asking *me* if you may join me for lunch. Well, this *is* a turnaround."

She pushed back her hair. "Joe, I've got some things I need to ask you."

"You want me to help you sort out your head?" He was grinning as he held the office door open for her to pass through in front of him. "Be my guest."

The day was warm and they sat outside at a pizzeria which Joe was familiar with. He picked a balcony table which overlooked Central Park in the distance. Catherine glanced across once and then turned her chair around so that her back was to the cast iron gothic railings. Why couldn't they have gone to MacDonald's? At least there was nothing there which could have stimulated anything from the tunnels.

Joe munched his way through a mega-sized ham, mushroom and pineapple affair while Catherine sipped a mineral water and waited until he was finished.

"You on a diet, Radcliffe? You don't need to be, you know. You look great the way you are."

"I'm not on a diet, Joe. I just don't feel like eating."

"Oh." He wiped the grease from his lips with the back of his hand and propped his elbows on the table. "So, what can I help you with?"

He looked so little-boyish, he really wasn't her type, but she still had to ask. "You're going to think I'm silly..."

"Probably, but spit it out anyway."

If anybody could put her at ease, Joe could. Maybe he had been her type, after all. His expectant look was growing more expectant by the minute.

"Come on, you've just had the privilege to watch me stuff my face. The least you can do is share your secrets with me."

"Secrets! Did I have secrets?"

"Cathy, your whole *'life'* was one big secret."

She nodded sideways and studied the paving stones. "I take it you weren't one of them."

"I beg your pardon?"

It was the politest expression she could remember ever hearing from Joe. She must really have caught him off guard with that one. There was no need to repeat it and embarrass either of them further, but Joe was waiting.

She sighed deeply and fixed her eyes on his. "Did you and I ever ... sleep together?"

He was shocked, she could tell by the way his eyes drew back, by the way his entire body drew back away from her.

"I'm sorry," she apologized.

"Hey." His voice and expression were soft again as he reached across the table for her hand. "Don't be. You're mixed up, that's all. And you're trying to remember who's who in your life."

"Something like that."

"Is there anything you're not telling me, Cathy?"

She hesitated. How much could she trust him with? He must have read her uncertainty because he answered her unspoken question.

"You can trust me, Cathy. We were never any more than friends, but we were pretty good once at that."

"Okay."

He stood up. "Come on, let's take a walk."

They strolled back to the office, thankfully avoiding Central Park. Catherine told him about the baby and he listened without judging her, accepting the news with the seriousness with which it was intended.

"Have you no idea at all who I was involved with, Joe?"

"I may be giving you a wrong lead here, but there was some cultural guy ..."

"Go on."

He rubbed his chin. "Well, he took you to a lot of concerts in the park."

" In the park!"

"That's all I know. But one of your friends may be able to help you."

"My friends..."

"Yeah, Jenny or Nancy ... You do remember them?"

"I'm not sure what I remember any more, Joe. But thanks for today, for everything."

"Any time, and you find out any more information, bring it to me and I'll see what I can do. Don't worry, we'll get this sorted out."

Catherine wandered in the park, backwards and forwards across the tunnel entrance, she lost count of the number of times. It was broad daylight and there were too many people around for her to risk being seen going down there, but she had known that before she came here today. That was why she wouldn't come at night, because there would be nothing to stop her from going in, and she needed that outside force to stop her, because she could not stop herself. It was crazy, but she was being inexorably drawn back to the tunnels, and she was powerless to fight it. The truth was down there, she knew it, but if there was another way to find out the answers to her questions, she would seek that way first.

She headed to the office, having started back at work, and she was glad to be busy, the work occupying much of her thinking time and taking her mind off her dilemma, at least partly.

The meeting with her friends had proven fruitless as she'd expected. They'd merely endorsed what Elliot and Joe had already told her about her relationship being very much a closed book. But one which the media had been increasingly interested in uncovering prior to her disappearance. The other piece of disturbing information they provided her with, she preferred not to dwell on. There *'had'* been a man in her life, and his name, not surprisingly had been Vincent, but none of them had ever met him. So what did that mean? Okay, so Vincent had been an important figure in her life, she already knew that, and her reluctance to speak about him had obviously led her friends to read more into the relationship than there ever had been, nothing more.

Her bag hit the desk with a sliding bang, sending papers flying. She groaned and stooped to pick them up. So where did that leave her? Just under a year ago her life had undergone a major drama. To start with, she'd become pregnant. The fact that none of her colleagues knew anything of her pregnancy indicated that either she'd kept it a secret, or she herself had not known until after her abduction. One thing was certain, if her abductors had not known about the baby at the onset, they definitely would have known as time went on, so why had they kept her for the duration of her pregnancy and then killed her (*or so they thought*) after her delivery? Why not just get rid of her and

the unborn child at an earlier date? *Unless the child was what they had been after...* It was the only explanation that made sense.

She placed the papers in a neat pile on the desk and sat down over them, rubbing her eyes. Sooner or later she was going to have to face the truth, but for now she was back to square one.

Joe burst through the door, startling her, and she grappled for the papers before they scattered again.

"We've located the baby! Your baby!"

"My baby! How?"

"Cathy, you underestimate the power and excellency of this office."

"Yeah, I guess I did. So what do we do now? Are you sure it's mine? How can you be sure?"

"There you go again," he scolded her. "Come on, I'll explain on the way."

"We're going now?"

"When else?" He ushered her out the door. "By the way, Radcliffe, you've already had your *'maternity'* leave!"

The sound on the pipes meant one thing to Vincent - his son had been found! It was the only thing that had kept him going since Catherine had left three weeks ago and never returned, the one hope he had left, a new hope.

He made his way to Father's chamber, as they had arranged should this happen. There was to be a clearly laid out plan to follow, as this was too important to mess up by anyone taking risks. Vincent knew that warning had been intended for him alone, as he was the only one likely to lose control. But he was calm as he walked into Father's chamber. He knew the rules and he would stick to them, there was too much at stake not to.

Father was speaking. "Everybody gather around. The Helpers have done a marvelous job this time. Thanks to them, we know that Vincent's son is being held at a house in Harlem. We do not normally resort to underhanded means, but in this circumstance, we are left with no alternative. So, friends, our object is to kidnap back the child as he was taken from us."

Pascal was wary. "Is this safe?"

"**NOTHING** is safe! We have already discussed this and have decided it is the only way. Our Helpers and as many of ourselves as we can afford will keep the house and the activities of its occupants under surveillance at all times. At the first possible chance and we will only get one chance ... Jamie will snatch the baby and get away in the van which will be waiting. Now," Father wiped his brow and his hand visibly shook. "has everybody got that clear?"

Vincent took the opportunity to speak. "I should be there, Father. The risk is too great for Jamie and the others."

"**NO!**" Father was adamant. "Don't you know that trapping you is what all this is about? You are not to be there, Vincent, under *'any'* circumstances."

Vincent retired to his chamber to wait. It was all he could do, having been delegated a back seat yet again, the price to pay for being different.

"Keep the siren off," Joe instructed the cop who was driving the car. "We don't want to alert them too soon."

Catherine turned to Joe who was sitting beside her in the back seat of the patrol car. "Forgive me, Joe, but I don't get any of this. How have you managed to track down these people, when I still don't

even know who they are?"

He was following the road with his eyes, his left arm resting half on the rear of the seat and half of the way up the window, but he afforded her a quick glance as the car swung around a bend.

"Cathy, you obviously don't recall that it was me who got you into this mess."

"You?"

"Yeah, they were after me in the first place and they would've kept after me too, if I hadn't been stupid enough to let you in on the deal."

Catherine peered out her side window at the rather imposing statue of Alexander Hamilton whose face adorned the ten dollar note.

"So I mucked things up," she surmised.

"No way! But you had the information to expose them. I've been chasing these guys up for the best part of a year, Cathy. There's no doubt about who they are."

The driver pulled up across the road from a row of tightly packed terraced four-story Romanesque-style houses.

"This is it," he said. "We wait five minutes and we'll have backup surrounding the entire property."

Catherine reached for her door handle. She needed air.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Radcliffe? Get your head down before you're seen!"

"I feel sick, Joe!"

"Now? Open the window, man, before she throws up all over us!"

The air helped her nausea, but not her nerves. "So what's going to happen? You've no proof they ever did hold me hostage."

Joe turned to her. "Cathy, we're not here for that. We're here to get that baby of yours back."

"Joe, I don't even feel like I've had a baby. I don't *'remember'* having a baby. I don't even feel maternal."

"No, but you do care what happens to that child, enough to get it out of the hands of kidnapers and murderers?"

"Of course." The backup vehicles were beginning to accumulate in the vicinity. Catherine folded her arms tightly and squeezed them into her stomach. "How do you even know it's my baby, Joe?"

His expression was bland. "We don't," he said. "but a blood test will prove it."

She didn't want to hear any more.

"It may also give us some clue as to who the father is."

The nausea rose in her throat again. As if she didn't know.

"Let me go in," she proposed.

"What are you, crazy? They think you're dead!"

"Exactly! I'll surprise them, catch them off guard. I'll take two cops with me."

"I don't know, Radcliffe."

She smiled. "Thanks, Joe. You're a pushover!"

"Hey!"

But she was already out of the vehicle and crossing the road.

"What about the two cops?" he called after her.

"I forgot!" she shouted back and didn't wait to hear the expletive she knew would follow.

The mahogany door had been neglected. She pushed the bell, the resulting two-tone chime seeming to reverberate through every nerve in her body.

She had expected it would be an unsuspecting maid who would answer the door and not the man she recognized as one of her abductors. Momentarily frozen, she realized too late that she was the one caught off guard as she was pulled inside the house.

"Come to rejoin us, Miss Chandler?"

She yanked her arm free. "You've got something belonging to me, which I suggest you hand over. If you don't, the two dozen cops surrounding this building will be in here in seconds."

"I don't think so, Miss Chandler. If they value your life as much as we don't." He laughed harshly.

"Come inside and make yourself comfortable while we wait for the child's father to appear."

Vincent! It had to be! And they knew. She sank into the leather armchair pointed out to her. How were they so sure he would come? Because this must have happened before, because he must always come when she was in danger. But how did he know where she was? Instinct... telepathy... some sort of extrasensory perception which he shared with only her? Apparently.

She glanced out the window and spotted Jamie in a white parked van. If she had needed any more proof as to Vincent's involvement, then that was it. Dammit, she'd walked straight into a trap, only it wasn't her trap, it was Vincent's. She had to stop him from coming here, somehow... Whatever had happened between them, however close they'd been, was in the past, and it was the only way she could deal with the shock of it, but she still cared enough not to want to see him come to any harm. *Don't show your fear! Don't feel it, then he'll have nothing to follow!* She stood back from the window and stretched. "I want to see my baby."

She was getting used to the mocking laugh by now. "Are you sure? You might not like what you see."

He was bluffing, trying to frighten her, but still the element of doubt crept in as he led her to the nursery. The baby, which lay kicking about in the crib, was perfectly human and perfectly gorgeous. Something moved inside her and she bent to pick him up.

Her abductor's hand darted across her chest. **"Not so fast. You wouldn't want to get too attached ... to him,"** he sneered, **"in case anything should happen to him."**

"No," Catherine pushed him back against the wall and bundled the baby into her arms.

Within seconds, three more men had barged in, blocking her escape. All trace of smugness had vanished from the abductor's face as he picked himself up. **"Finish them off!"** he ordered, tossing one of the men a gun. **"And do it right this time! We don't want any more unanticipated resurrections!"**

Catherine's fear reached Vincent before the message on the pipes did. The subway was the fastest way. He gripped the sides of the train with his nails as he lay prostrate on its roof, his face buried against the fierce wind created by the speeding locomotive.

'He wasn't going to let her down this time!'

They could kill him first or do as they wanted with him because he had no life left since losing Catherine since losing her love from his life.

He crashed through the basement floorboards, knocking over tins of paint. The door at the top of the stairs was flung open as he reached it; all Vincent saw was the gun pointing towards the ceiling as it went off. He swiped it from its owner and smashed it against the door frame. He lunged after the

fleeing felon, ripping the back of his checked shirt as his claws embedded deep into the man's shoulders. He screams of agony barely registered in Vincent's ears as he cast the dying man aside and went in pursuit of the others.

"Vincent!"

It was Catherine's voice! He spun around and she was being held between two men, one with a gun to her head, a third man had a knife to the baby's throat.

"It's *'you'* we want." The smooth, velvet voice crawled under his skin, infiltrating every fibre in his being. The face of the beautiful woman he loved and the helplessness of his son were all he saw clearly. The faces of the three men merged into one hideous blur and he leaped, with no premeditated intention, onto all of them, one part of him totally out of control, slashing and tearing skin and bone, completely removed from the other part which untangled Catherine from the mess and gave her clear instructions.

"Go! Run now. Back to the police before anyone comes in and sees us together."

Her eyes seemed to plead with him, for what he knew not, for a brief moment before she complied with his wishes and made off quickly out the front door.

The baby was crying and wriggling on the floor. Vincent stooped and picked up his son for the first time, holding him close to his chest to reassure him.

"Cathy, what the hell was going on in there? You were ages!"

Joe obviously suspected nothing. "They took some persuading."

"So where's the kid, Radcliffe?"

Jamie had just walked into the house and was now leaving with the baby in her arms! She was about to get into the van that was parked outside.

"What are you staring at? ***Holy shit!***" He dived for the car door.

"No, leave it! It's all right. She's taking the baby to his father."

"His *'father'*! You know who the father is now?"

"Can we just go? I really want to get out of here." Before the police found the savaged bodies and demanded an explanation from her.

Joe was rambling on. "A little boy, eh?"

Catherine only half heard what he said, she had other things on her mind. She addressed the driver. "Officer, can you let me out at East 62nd Street near Central Park?" To Joe, she said, "There's something I've got to do."

The handmade wooden cradle was suffused in the soft dim light of Vincent's chamber. He sat on the edge of his bed and rocked it rhythmically with his foot.

Catherine went and stood in front of him. "You came to that house today to protect me, because you knew I was there."

"Yes," he admitted.

The cradle creaked hypnotically, disturbingly. "I tried to stop you coming," she said quickly. "I didn't want to endanger you."

"Catherine," his voice was low and husky. "You could never have kept me away today. I felt the bond too strongly."

"Your bond with me?"

"Yes." Another admission.

She took a deep breath. "Vincent ... the others ... I saw Jamie they were there because...." She looked down at the baby who was drifting off to sleep. "He's your son, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"And his mother...?"

Vincent removed his foot from the cradle and hung his head. The soft lapping of the candle flame was the only sound in the chamber.

"Vincent, please! I need to know the truth."

He lifted his head and said very quietly. "You already know the truth, Catherine. You just need to remember."

"I CAN'T remember!" she shouted. The baby stirred and she moved away from the cradle. Vincent following. "Why can't I remember?"

"Perhaps you don't want to." His voice was deep and serious and bore into her otherwise inaccessible inner being. "Perhaps your subconscious is trying to tell you that the truth is too much for you to cope with."

She opened her mouth to protest, but then she looked at him, really looked at him, at his long mane of light-coloured hair, at his deep-set blue eyes, so intense they seemed to penetrate her own, at his facial features, strong and attractive, distinctive, not entirely human... at his solid physique, and she was both aroused and repulsed. She was in love with his intellect, with his noble restraint, with his ability to separate from himself, to put her needs first. She knew that his mind could bore into her soul. She looked at him and something stronger than herself was compelling her to go to him, to give into the overpowering desire sweeping through her, to feel him against her, holding her, loving her.

Yet she could not do it.

She walked over to the cradle and fondled her son's fine fair hair. "Tell him ... tell him whatever you think is best."

Then she turned and made herself walk sedately back through the tunnels because if she ran, she might lose herself to emotion.

CHAPTER FIVE NO OTHER WAY

Catherine felt her head was spinning, reeling from all that had happened. She had faced the truth before running away from it. She had acknowledged it, but she could not accept it, and that was what was causing her turmoil. She stalked through her apartment, holding her forehead in both hands, her fingers pushing through her hair as each side of her brain waged war with the other.

It was too much, she had to go - somewhere - get out of here. Barging into the bedroom, she snatched a suitcase from the top shelf in her closet and dumped it on the bed. It snapped open. Tears burst from her eyes. She didn't even know what to take ... where to go ... there was nowhere ... or no one in whom she could confide ... she was alone in this, totally alone.

There was a knock on the door.

'Not now!' Her hands instinctively flew to her eyes, scrubbing at the telltale tears. She jerked a tissue from the flower-patterned box on her bedside cabinet and blew her nose hard into it.

"Just a minute!" she called out. Smoothing down her sweater, she put a neutral look on her face and went to open the door.

The police, two of them, men. Was this a genuine call? If it wasn't, would Vincent sense her fear and come to save her? Or would he ignore it now that she had well and truly left him? No, never Vincent! Unless she had severed the bond with her departing. *What was going through her mind?* She wasn't thinking straight. The officers were waiting outside the door.

"May we come in, Miss Chandler?"

More doubts. She was a woman completely alone now. She raised her head and tried to appear confident.

"What can I do for you?"

One of the men, the younger, spoke. "We're here regarding today's incidents, Miss Chandler. I think it's best we discuss the matter in private."

Suddenly, all she saw were the four savaged men, lying ripped apart and bleeding in that house. Her shock must have shown on her face as she edged back from the door and the two cops stepped inside.

"Maybe you ought to sit down, Miss." The older cop, a thin, gray man, indicated one of the sofas and she sat on it obediently. She wasn't ready for this; she had no answers, but she had to protect Vincent at all costs. If all logic deserted her, her allegiance to Vincent never would.

"There were dogs!" she spat out. **"Dobermans."**

"Dogs?" The younger cop pulled out his notepad and scribbled on it. "There was so sign of any dogs. How many were there?"

Catherine kept her eyes transfixed on those of the cop, trying to make her own appear as honest as possible. Was that how one behaved when lying, or was it a dead giveaway? "At least half a dozen," she replied casually. "They must have run off after."

The cop paused in his writing. "Forgive me for my skepticism, Miss Chandler, but why didn't they tear *'you'* to pieces as well as those poor guys?"

"Easy, Maloney!"

"I don't know," Catherine retaliated. "Maybe because I wasn't waving a gun around and behaving in a threatening manner."

"Or maybe they like women better than their own handlers," the young cop supplied.

Catherine stood, finding new strength within herself, strength and willingness to defend Vincent against this irritating, measly man who was just doing his job, she knew, but who would nevertheless expose that gentlest of persons and destroy him in the process, given half the chance. So she would give him none.

"You don't know that those men even handled the dogs themselves. Didn't it occur to you they might have employed a kennel hand?"

"There weren't any kennels, and I'm not so sure there were dogs either."

The other cop spoke up. "What're you saying, Maloney? What else could have done that sort of damage?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

It was all starting again. This was how it had ended last time, with questions that she had been unable to answer, impossible pressure from the media, insatiable curiosity from all she knew, and a driven desire from the most evil of men to ruin the most intelligible.

"All I know is," the younger cop continued, "That things have been quiet in this city while you were missing, Miss Chandler. You're only back and already four people have been mauled to death. Seems to me there's something you're not telling me."

"Have you come here to question me or accuse me, Mr. Maloney?"

He kept his head in his notepad and started to drum his pen in it. When he looked up he said, "There's the other matter, of the baby - what happened to it?"

Catherine sighed and went to switch on a light. Were they ever going to go away? "He's safe," she retorted.

"I'm sure he is, but how did he come to be safe?"

She sat down again and her eyes strayed to the growing dark outside her balcony window, to the lights being switched on all over the city. This was Vincent's time for roaming the streets. She wished the policemen would just go and leave her in peace.

"What do you mean?" she asked tiredly.

"We mean," Maloney repeated, "that you fled from the house to escape a pack of marauding dogs, but you were happy to abandon your son to them."

"He was never in any danger."

Maloney was quick to jump in, looming over her on the sofa. "**Why not?**" he pursued his point. "Was there someone else in the house to protect him?"

Her stomach lurched and she felt her face drain of blood. She couldn't keep up this pretense for much longer.

"**He was nowhere near the dogs,**" she shouted. Could they tell she was breaking under the strain? "He was safe, upstairs, in his crib."

The policeman leaned over her and she twisted her head away.

"The girl who entered the house and took the child, who was she?"

Catherine placed her hands on either side of her on the couch. "A friend," she stated.

"Of yours?"

"Yes."

"We let her go," he said. "We thought you arranged it."

What now? She studied the backs of her hands. Take the blame, anything to divert them from Vincent.

"I did arrange it. I knew she 'd be there," she lied.

Maloney leaned so close she could smell his aftershave. she wrinkled her nose.

"But you and your boss still went ahead with this farce."

"Joe didn't know anything about the arrangements I'd made. He thought we were collecting the baby."

"As we all did, Miss Chandler." He backed away and walked in a little circle. "So why the change of plan?"

She shook her head and opened out her palms. "I don't know. I wanted to surprise the kidnapers by turning up like that, but I knew the child would be better off with his father, so at the last minute I contacted Jamie." They'd never trace her. "And asked her to take the baby to his father."

"And the father's name?" Maloney stood with pen paused on paper, ready to write, waiting to sign away Vincent's life.

She jumped up and, brushing past him, went straight to the door and opened it. "I don't have to supply you with that information."

"Unless it becomes a police matter," Maloney corrected.

The older cop butted in at last. "C'mon, it's late. Miss Chandler's tired."

Maloney had the gall to tip his cap before leaving.

Catherine ran to the door immediately after they'd gone, snatching at the bolts and chains with trembling fingers. In the bedroom, she stared at the open suitcase on the bed. She had made the right decision cutting Vincent out of her life. This must have been how it had happened before, and she couldn't live like that again, always in fear of being found out. There was no way forward for them together, neither of them would be safe and truly free from prying eyes until they went their separate ways.

Vincent watched as his son's little body began to twitch in his sleep. The chubby hands opened and closed simultanelously while tiny baby sounds issued from his throat. When his eyes opened Vincent wrapped him in his shawl and carried him to Father's chamber.

Father was just getting up from his desk.

"I've come to a decision, Father."

"Oh?"

Vincent smoothed his son's hair. "We've got to go ahead and name him without Catherine."

Father pulled at his chin. "There's no chance she'll come back?"

"She refuses to remember, Father."

"Refuses?"

"Her fear is holding her back."

Father's cane tapped on the stone floor. "Fear of what?"

"Everything that a life with me involves," Vincent sighed.

"But she made all those decisions before."

"And look where they got her."

Father's deep-set eyes poured out from under his dark brows. "So she may never remember?"

Vincent picked up a rook from Father's chess set and turned it over in his fingers. "Not unless ..."

Father's eyes quickly shot to Vincent's face. "What is it? What's on your mind?"

Vincent replaced the rook and gave his full attention to Father. "Not unless I help her to remember."

Father frowned. "Tell her what happened? But you don't even remember everything yourself."

Vincent sat on the edge of the bed and rocked the baby in his arms. "I know what you told me and that knowledge has been my redemption. Without it I couldn't have got through this past year."

The baby stretched and stiffened in his arms, growing restless. Vincent rearranged him until he was holding him upright against his chest, his large hand supporting the back of the baby's head. "I've decided to call him Jacob," he digressed.

The smile which crept into Father's face clearly portrayed his pleasure. Rather awkwardly, Vincent thougth, he made it disappear again.

"What about Catherine? You said she won't return here."

Vincent tilted back his head and tried to see through the jagged ceiling in the world Above. "Then I will go to her."

He awaited Father's disapproval but it never came, so into the silence Vincent spoke again. "She's begged me for the truth from the beginning. It's time I gave it to her."

Catherine's suitcase was fully packed. She snapped it shut and looked around her apartment. It was the second time in a month that she was leaving somewhere she regarded as home.

But this was the only way, to go somewhere where nobody knew her or Vincent and start afresh. Staying out of Vincent's life was the only way she could protect him and live her own life free from constant media intrusion and police inquiries.

Once she reached her destination she would contact her friends and arrange to have her things sent on. Joe would give her a good reference.

She flopped onto the bed and picked up the phone. Everything was ready and she had only to call a cab. She could not get her fingers to press the buttons.

Come on, Cathy! she chided herself. *Now is not the time to have a breakdown!*

She watched as her index finger obeyed her numbed brain and prodded the first three digits.

A shadow passed across her balcony window.

Did she see him? Would she come? He tapped gently on the glass and held his breath. As soon as the curtain moved and he saw her face through the glass, he knew. Even before the doors opened and she stood in front of him, he read her mind through her eyes, as if the blood pumping fast through his heart wasn't enough to tell him what she felt. And yet there was always room for doubt.

He hung his head, suddenly afraid to look at her. She was so beautiful, with her honey-coloured hair billowing back from her face in the cool night breeze, her clear green eyes bright and honest, always so full of trust. And he, what was he? He only had to look down on his ragged clothes, his hair-covered claws instead of hands and compare this with Catherine's loveliness and smart appearance to know in his mind that she could not possibly want or even need to hear anything he could tell her. Why would she even want to be reminded? He turned away.

"No!" she flung herself against him, throwing her arms around his neck. "Don't go! Don't go ever again, not without me!"

He held onto her tightly, smelt her sweetness, her perfume, the shampoo in her hair. Intoxicated, his mouth opened on her hair and he tasted its silkiness on his lips.

She leaned her head back and smiled up at him. There were wet splashes on her cheeks. "You're crying," he said.

"No," she laughed. "It's raining!"

He glanced out across the balcony. A fine drizzle was driving across the distant skyscrapers.

"Remember, Vincent, *'Schubert's Unfinished Symphony'*."

"The concert in the park when it rained. I remember. It was a special night."

She squeezed his upper arms through the thick leather material which covered his shoulders. "And so is this one. I was miserable without you, Vincent. I'd never felt so alone."

"Nor I," he whispered. He turned and planted his hands on the balcony wall and gazed out across the night sky at the flickering haze of lights as New York lived. Catherine came up behind him and massaged between his shoulder blades.

"What is it?" she asked quietly.

He turned slightly sideways. "You still don't remember. I came here to tell you, because you asked and because you have a right to know."

She reached up and covered his lips with her finger. "Sometime," she said, "Sometime you can tell me or I'll remember. Once we're away from here and I don't have to keep my feelings hidden any more for fear of someone finding out."

He held her face gently between his hands. "Was that the reason for your fear? Not me?"

"A little of both, I guess," she admitted, allowing him to draw her close again. "And of myself, my reaction to you, of all that lies ahead."

"And now?"

She studied him once again and caressed his cheek with her palm. "Now I know why I fell in love with you the first time, because I've gone and done it all over again."

He bent his head and sought her lips, closing his eyes when his mouth made contact with hers. He pushed at her mouth gently at first and then more demandingly as she responded. His desire grew and he held her away, smoothing down her now wet hair.

"Take me home, Vincent," she said, "And let's not leave anything else unfinished ."

He extended his hand and she reached for it, but he changed his mind and encircled her waist instead. Close to him was where she wanted to be. He knew it is his heart where there was no room left for doubt because his love filled all of it.

END of part 1 of the trilogy