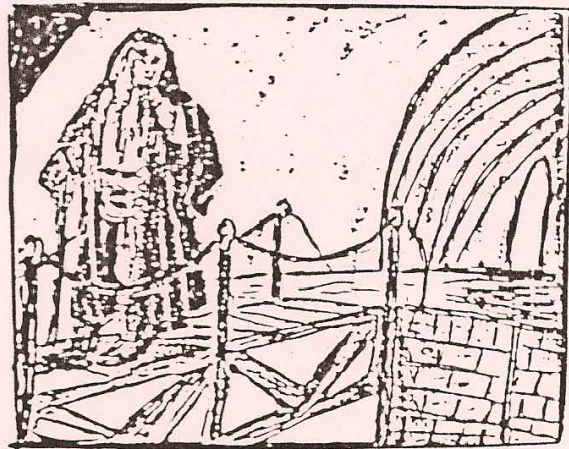


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WORLD

BOOK 1



NEW
FIRM



MONTE



BOOK 1

.....the sidewalks Above.....

.....the tunnels Below.....

V I N C E N T S W O R L D

BOOK NO. 130

P. Kehoe
for

Available from:

VINCENTS WORLD PRESStm
Patricia Anne Kehoe
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Waltham, MA 02154

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VINCENT'S WORLD - BOOK I

Table of Contents

Dedication

Editorial

<u>STORY:</u>	<u>PAGE(s)</u>
To See the Unicorn	1 - 82
Loves Promises Fulfilled - I	86 - 119
Tunnel Life - Ah! Young Love!	122 - 131
Tunnel Life - The Masquerade	134 - 170
Loves Promises Fulfilled - II	172 - 204
Tunnel Life - Things That Go "Bump"	205 - 216
Loves Promises Fulfilled - III	217 - 297
Tunnel Life - Rightful Owner	299 - 308
Tunnel Life-Culinary Challenges	310 - 325

ARTWORK By: Lisa, Sean, and Angel

Prime Artist: Bernadette

POETRY

The Solitary	page 83
Through Catherine's Eyes	84
Calling	85
Forever	120
Something That Has Never Been	121
A Prayer of a Different Kind	132
Ivory Rose	133
Everything ?	171
Where is My Chamber	298
Kiss of Promise	309
Remember ?	326

DEDICATION

- To
- Ron Koslow, who "created" the dream.
 - Ron Perlman, who gave it "life!"
 - Linda Hamilton, "our" Catherine
 - Roy Dotrice, who made us wish he was our "Father".
 - All the other members of the cast and crew who worked so patiently and lovingly, on the series.
 - Raymond, my husband. MY "Vincent"!
 - Rita, my friend. Who shares the dream and the fantasy!
 - Vincent and Catherine, who show us that indeed, love in its "deepest, purest" way does exist: Their reminder is cherished.

For Additional information on artwork.

write:

In care of name and address below listing artists name of outside of envelope. SASE

For Information on - Vincents World

BOOK II

Contact: P. A. Kehoe
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Waltham, MA 02154
SASE, please!

Submissions for Book III now being considered.
Send SASE for guidelines.....

PLEASE NOTE: If your book is NOT signed in red, it is an
UNAUTHORIZED duplicate!!!

EDITORIAL

Hi! Welcome to the first issue of the publication entitled - - Vincents World. I'm very glad to introduce you to characters you have never before met, and enlarge the scope of some you know with much intimacy! This whole enterprise began with a great frustration after watching the Beauty and the Beast episode, "Remember Love"... I WANTED Vincent and his Catherine to HAVE that time in the woods! So, I with the innocence of one new to the world of 'zines, started writing, trying to give them the time denied them by the T.V. --- "people". Foolhardy? Maybe. Impossible? There is no such thing - - remember?

So....here I sat. Twenty-five years had gone SOMEWHERE since I had last written anything! I dove in with both feet, and am happy I did. I have not regretted it; even after all those sleepless nights when a story or new character or idea DEMANDED to be let "loose"; interrupting my sleep as well as dreams. I helped give them their lives; they gave me back a wealth of fantasy as never, ever thought of! Now, they are REAL, will never die. As, for us, the "believers"; Vincent AND Catherine will never die. Each of them dwells in our thoughts and hearts now and forever as you are introduced to them. Some are new to our world, especially of Above.... Be kind, and gentle?

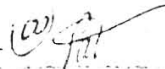
I welcome comments, but please? Remember, things already in print I cannot change. Forgive me the typos I tried to edit out? Book II can only get better as I get smarter!! I am not perfect-- but maybe someday, will be a tad closer. Have the patience of one we ALL love? Vincent! I will reply to all comments and mail, both pro and con, good and bad. Simply enclose a SASE. Vincents World Book II is already in the "Fire". New works are always welcomed; if you don't make Book II, don't fret! Book III is also in a --- "pre-birth" stage.....

I truly hope you will enjoy the contents of this first 'zine! It was sweet agony getting it written, and I'm glad to share it with all of you out there, who still believe in the "Dream". We must all have faith and courage that it WILL continue; in one form or another - FOREVER, as Catherine says.

My new artist and illustrators works are shown in the picture, Free all your Dreams to me tonight; I've come a long way with her help. The pictures will begin to smoulder more and more; I can promise you!!!

Many of you will "accept" Vincents new, freer way of life, and some won't. That is your choice. I wanted him to LAUGH, to JOKE, to LOVE fully and to become...REAL. To make mistakes, to feel the things we ALL feel at times. Jealousy, anger, hurt, pain, and a devilish sense of humor! I think Vincent always had this; do you? Couldn't you just SEE it, lurking behind those beautiful eyes? I did! I hope you will/can accept him this way; as well as changes I've made in Father, Catherine, and Devin. I tried to crawl around inside their brains, as well as their hearts. Only you can tell me how I am doing - so let me know!

Sharing the dream-----



" TO SEE THE UNICORN"

By

Patricia A. Kehoe

It had been an especially unrewarding, wearisome week. Catherine concluded, as she gathered her things to leave the office on Friday. Monday, Joe was "picky" over the working of a writ on the Constantin case, and had been a BEAR all week: Tuesday and Wednesday, EVERYTHING she touched seemed to end in a complete mess. And, on top of the rest of this GRRR week, Thursday her car died, and the mechanic told her it would be "rather expensive" resurrecting it! Now, at last it was Friday. She closed the office door with a loud slam....."I'M OUT OF HERE!" Finally getting the elevator to stop at her floor, Catherine was sure it HAD to be a better weekend than the week had been; Vincent had invited her Below for Jamies' birthday. Catherine was looking forward very much to being Below, with all those she cared so deeply for; especially Vincent. She had stayed away from everyone but him since Tuesday; not wanting to inflict her crazy, BLAH week on others. God, she missed him so. He had been Above Wednesday night and had tried to comfort her as she raved on about the week then half gone. Work shoring up a far tunnel then called him away until tonight. Just thinking of him eased some of the weariness as Catherine got off the elevator, but seeing what awaited her outside brought all her gloominess back fast! What she saw was NOT going to help her damned mood one bit. Lightening was turning the sky almost glaringly white and rain was cascading off the cars and pavements in great, wet sheets. "Dandy", she muttered sarcastically, half aloud, "the perfect ending to a perfect week...UGH!" Finally able to hail a cab, Catherine tried to relax in the back seat for the short ride home; to calm away her frustrations before meeting Vincent. He had seemed a little shocked, perhaps even a bit

surprised at her moodiness on Wednesday night. But, never had he seen the RAVING lunatic she felt like now: Catherine secretly wondered what his reaction would have been!

Below, the tall, muscular man stepped along purposefully. Head down, as though listening to something only he could hear, Vincent was troubled at how this week seemed to have gone for his Catherine. He had sensed deep anger and frustration in her long before meeting her Above Wednesday evening. He had let her talk of it at length before trying gently in his soft voice, to bring whatever comfort he could. Holding her as you would a hurt child, Vincent stroked her hair lightly, sorry he could not do more. He asked what else was on her mind, troubling her so. When her response had been "nothing I'm aware of", he knowingly looked over her head and into the night sky. Vincent knew with those keen senses of his, some of the upset was indeed, NOT related to work, but emotionally tied to him. The upheaval and turmoil their unfulfilled love presented for both of them. Vincent strived to turn his mind away from the thoughts of her nestled against his chest. Forced away the feelings just having her hands on his shoulders brought to his body. Of the urge, the sharp desire to draw her even closer; to kiss her and BE with her in the way he had longed dreamt of. For so long had he feared to do this. Now, it was like a bad habit he could't break, his terror of joining, being completely one with Catherine. Vincent sighed deeply as he continued towards her apartment building. The torture he felt, he knew she shared with him. He was ever aware of her emotions, together or apart. It was the "together" ones that stirred the tempest of his soul the worse! The warmth of her small body against his had been harder and harder to deal with lately. Her eyes, voice, all of her, were constantly in his thoughts, his dreams. He could not shake them off; did not really want to! Vincent clenched his teeth and his fists; his fear of loving Catherine as she deserved to be loved was going to kill him if something wasn't done about it, and soon. He wanted to love her as

Catherine deserved to be, mind AND body. Yet, he did not make the attempt towards joining his physical self to hers. Could not. He even now, didn't fully believe her gentle explanation of how love could be between people if he would only have faith in her...and in HIMSELF! But, after all these years of denying them both the one thing they NEEDED most, and with Fathers' assent that he had chosen the correct path in dealing with the "situation" as he called it, Vincent remained firmly convinced he WAS doing the right thing; the only thing possible. Still muttering to himself, he barely heard Father call out to him now. "Vincent? Could you step in here for a moment? I have something for you to loan to Catherine. Perhaps, it may help lift her spirits a bit. I hope so, in any case!"

*

As Catherine stepped from the cab, the strap of her briefcase became entangled in the door handles and broke with a loud, sudden "SNAP"! This was the FINAL STRAW! With angry tears now mixing with the rain of her face, she looked up, eyes narrowed and cursed in the torrential downpour. She screamed loudly, damn, damn, DAMN!" A passing teenager was startled by her yells of indignant anger, and taking a few quick steps sideways away from the "crazy lady", he struggled to keep his hold on the oversided radio he was trying to keep dry beneath his jacket. As she glanced over at him, and saw the look he shot at her.."WIERD", Catherine was forced to smile, and tried to suppress a giggle. But, as he cast a look back at her over one shoulder, she lost the struggle, and laughed aloud. With this, her tense jawline seemed to relax just a bit as she fumbled for her keys in the vast universe she called her pocketbook: "Where in the hell ARE they?" She groaned and cursed until.... with a cry of "AHA", the keys were in her hand. The honk of the cab reminded her; Catherine hadn't paid him! Damn. Taking her key from the door, she reached into her wallet and made a dash down the stone steps and to his open window. "Hey, lady! This aint no joy ride, ya know: I get paid.." His strongly accented voice trailed off as Catherine handed him his fare and a very good tip. As she went inside, she noted with a grin the rain had stopped and the sun was coming out...

Throwing her briefcase and pocketbook onto the floor to dry, Catherine began stripping away her wet clothing as she ran a bath. She stepped gratefully into the warm, bubble filled water, and started to soak away some of the days annoyances.. Laying there, letting the steam and warm water bring life back to her body, she tried to remember exactly when she had EVER felt this drained before. When no great revelations were forthcoming, she sighed and scrunched down deeper into her bathtub, willing her body and mind to let go and for Christ Sakes, RELAX! When the water had chilled, it woke her from her reverie, and she climbed out quickly and dried herself off. Slipping into a comfortable robe, Catherine wandered into the small kitchen, and turned on the small overhead light. Opening the refrigerator door, she leaned forward; peering in. Waiting for something in there to call out to her: She was hungry, yet not hungry as she tried deciding what would be the easiest thing to prepare for supper. Although nothing really tempted her, Catherine knew she had to eat, so.... But, before she could make any decision, a small sound from the balcony told her Vincent was there, waiting for her to join him. His whisper of her name confirmed this. Second later, Catherine was in his strong arms; his fierce embrace that both comforted and disturbed, both at the same time: As Vincent extended one hand to hers that held a pink rose, he shyly inquired, "are you feeling a bit more yourself this evening, Catherine? I thought you would like this. A Helper that runs a flower stand said to give it to you, with his best wishes." He hugged her close, adding, " and, my best wishes, also." He gazed down at her from beneath his long, silky lashes as she thanked him for his thoughtfulness by standing on tiptoe to give him a light kiss on the cheek. Catherine did not see his face as she lowered her head to sniff the rose. He was glad she did not. For a moment, Vincent was not in control of his visage. Her warm lips on his face so unexpectedly had his brain whirling! He struggled for composure as she lifted her

eyes once again to his. As the soft fragrance of the flower washed over them, her tired spirit and most of the lingering tenseness left her, and the look she gave Vincent assured him she appreciated and loved his small gift. Taking a few quick, deep breaths, he felt his voice almost crack as he began talking. "Father also sent something to you, Catherine. Knowing you would not mind, I had related to him a little of your troubled week. He had seemed quite sad for a moment; then said he wished he could think of a way to help ease your mind. Tonight, as I was coming to meet you, he stopped me. Then, he went to his nightstand, and took out this small book, marked a passage and gave it to me. Father hopes the reading of it will aid bring you some peace, some solace. But, curiously, when I questioned him as to why I had never seen this particular book before, he...he chuckled, Catherine! Actually, fairly grinned at me and said that although I was, indeed, a scholar; I had not read EVERY book there was! I did not know what to respond to that, so I merely thanked him and came to you." As Vincent handed her the small beautifully bound volume, Catherine could sense a natural curiosity was winning over her beloveds usually stoically...accepting patience. He confirmed this when he added, somewhat guiltily, "I must admit I WAS tempted to take a quick look inside, but.....". Then added, "if you would rather wait to read this alone later, I would naturally understand." Her only response was to smile up to him, settle herself down onto the balcony swing beside him and begin to read aloud.....

"To See the Unicorn"

sad and alone, I lay in the high fragrant, spring grass. I watch the sun, counting clouds as they drift by overhead. To my mind's eye, they take the shape of animals! As I watch the lazy, random way in which they flow and gather above me, I am, at least for the moment, removed from all my earthbound care. The scent of the surrounding flowers calls to me; greedily, I inhale their heady scent.

All at once, from the half shadows at the edge of a small clearing, something called wordlessly to me. Asked for me to rise and approach it. With temerity I stand, and with trembling heart, yet with no fear; do I go to see what unknown creature is waiting quietly, patiently for me there. What wondrous thing gazes through early morning mists back to my suddenly startled look? With eyes of cerulean blue, gleaming flank, and flowing mane softly caressed by breezes, the creature nears, fearlessly closer to me. I see the shape of its graceful head, and on that nobility, a horn! A single horn, spiraled, ivory white. There is none such as this! Now with true terror, do I turn to flee this unknown. Crying out, "leave me, stay away! I am afraid of you; what evil magic is this! To make me see what cannot be: Away, dream. Be gone, back to your own world: Please, do not hurt me?" Words heard but to my quaking heart gently parts the terror of my mind, "thee dost see me; I am here. Oh Mortal! See with thy spirit, not just thy eyes. Hear me with trust, be not afraid. Come with me?" The soft way of this creature gives me pause; cautiously I begin nearing. It turns and with a glance to me, glides into the darkened woods. I MUST follow. To lose this Magic Thing, I cannot do: There are questions I must ask it! Are there more wonders yet to be seen? And, why, has it deigned to show itself to ME? Darkness and hushed silence close about me. Smells of damp earth rise to assail my nostrils. The forest odors whirl dizzily about my head. Then...I see it: Pawing at the earth with its oddly shaped hooves, it calls once again to me. "Hurry, I will sing my secrets to none.....but thee:

Awed, I reach to touch the golden mane with shaking hands. To caress the coat of pristine white of this gentle unknown. This is the legend of dreams! Something that has never been! Humbled by its Godly pose, I am diminished. This creature makes MY existence but a trifling thing. All is silent. Yet, I can hear him as he sings his song to me..... "I have come, mortal, to fulfill thy greatest wish, thy secret dream....and longings. Thee is known to me; good, yet troubled. Tender, yet afraid; lest thee be thought NOT a "man". I have heard thy cries from the innermost soul of ALL you are and WHAT you long to BE: As you

pleaded with goodness, I have come to aid thee to find thyself and become good. Trust and trueness of heart hast thee shown. For that truth, for thy trust, and for thy belief, I will tell thee all!" I am astounded! "But, why, Creature? Why have you chosen ME? I am but an ordinary man; no brave Lord am. No great deeds have I done. If you DO truly know me for all I am and am NOT, feel my emptiness. Know I am as.....nothing. I, dearest Creature, know the unkindest truth of all: I know myself!"

With eyes that seem to burn into my deepest soul, this Myth answers softly, sadly, "ah, dearest mortal of earth that you are! Do you not yet SEE? It is because you do NOT think yourself a Lord, that you ARE one! Great deeds thee HAST done: Thee hast seen in truth what others of your world will not. Have listened when they turned away, in doubt and disbelief. To ignore the true beauty of this world - LOVE. Love without hope of regard, nor hope to triumph. Thy heart is generous and just. It trusts without knowing all; yet questions not. Sees with compassion all the pain of this world and strives to right it; crying out, thee searches for guidance when all around you are doubting and forelorn. It is because of this; that you SEE the despair and turn NOT away. See the evil of thine own world and fight to change it to good, pitying instead of hating those of blackest heart, foulest deed; and go forth STILL, with courage to face all terror and unjustness. For all this and more; all that you truly are and will not, cannot believe, is why thee has been chosen.....TO SEE THE UNICORN.

Catherine closed the small book. Tears glistened on her face. "Vincent, it was a lovely story! But, I don't quite understand; why had Father marked this particular passage for me? Do You? Surely, you don't BELIEVE in Unicorns! He smiled back at her, "believe in them? I may. After all, Catherine; if someone had told you two years ago of such as I, would you have believed them? Possibly not. BUT, your believing or disbelieving would not have made me unreal, would it?" Catherine nodded back to him, understanding, or thinking she did, at any rate. To trust is to

believe. To believe is to love. And, with love, there is truly a world where there ARE no impossibilities! Nestling deeply into his arms, she whispered up to Vincent, "thank Father for me, will you? I actually DO feel better! The book was lovely, and when I come Below tomorrow, I will return it with gratitude, to his care." Vincent looked down on her with such love in his eyes, Catherine shivered and drew closer to his breast.

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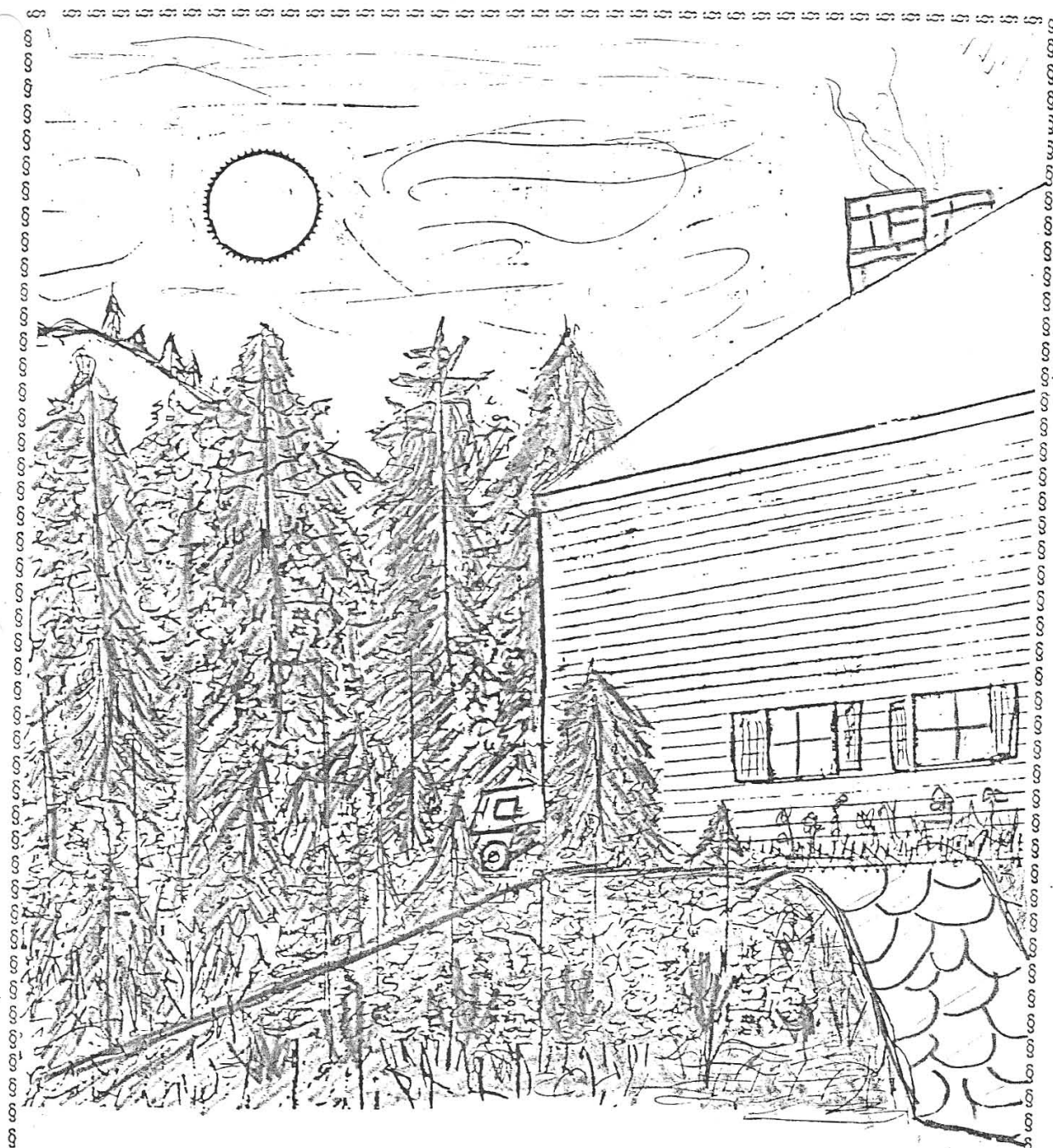
Daybreak came too quickly; it always did. Vincent had to leave. With his love and reluctance to part from her all shining through to Catherine from his blue eyes, he looked at her one last time before beginning his journey Below. Gently he said, "Rest peacefully now? You have come through a difficult week. I will be waiting for you Below. For now, goodbye Catherine." He thought she had turned from his gaze to the doors, but she was still looking at him when he cast a final glance at her. Vincent felt the breath leave his body; so did Catherine. The look now on his face was one unknown to her: Before he could lower his eyes, she had seen, truly seen for the first time, his innermost thoughts, His desires for her he kept carefully hidden...until now. As she lost sight of him, Catherine reached for the doorknob, and was not startled or surprised when her fingers seemed unable to operate the simplicity of the knob:

*

After tossing fitfully for a few moments, she finally settled down into her dreams. Vincent was running with her.

But not in fear. In joy: The sun was hot^{ON} her face. The scent of wildflowers was all about them in the quiet summer air. He was dressed in a light cotton tunic and denim jeans, not his usual heavy cloak and breeches. She was barefoot, and wore a flowing blue dress. Vincent had an unguarded look on his face, seeming to be free of all care for the first time...here in the sun! Almost childlike in his joy of this freedom, he whirled and laughed; clasping her close to himself. They were in a beautiful meadow; all about them was quiet. Except for small birds chirping softly, they seemed to be alone in the world! Tall, graceful trees stood majestically at the meadows edge, soaring as though trying to reach Heaven itself. As she and Vincent collapsed breathless from their highspiritedness to rest beside a small stream, the look of joy in his eyes made Catherine's heart sing with gladness. She silently thanked whatever or whomever had made such a day as this possible: Vincent's long, flowing hair seemed aflame from the sunlight. Flashes of gold and red were washing over and through it as she reached up to smooth it back from his face. Vincent took her hand to his mouth, turned it palm up and nuzzled at her fingertips. Quickly gathering her into his strong arms, Vincent kissed her mouth first with great tenderness; then with greater, deeper force. A desire began building between them that was undeniable. He lay her gently into the fragrant grass and bent over her with a question in his husky voice, "Catherine, my love. Is this finally our time to have our dream fulfilled? AT LAST? Come to me. Come to me, my love. My Catherine. It is time to....."

RRRing!.... The alarm jolted Catherine straight up into a sitting position in the center of her bed! Her heart was beating so loudly she could hear the echo in her ears. Catherine struggled to bring herself fully awake and back to reality..damn it! Reaching for her robe, she rose and stepped into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. She thought to herself, what a day THAT would have been! As the coldness of the water hit her, she suddenly stood frozen; standing straight up and staring at her reflection in the mirror with her eyes wide open! Why NOT a day like that? WHY NOT? If planned VERY carefully, it COULD be done, she was sure it could be! Life Below had been very peaceful for many months now; she knew Vincent was fully recovered from his struggles of two months ago. He surely could be spared for at least a day or even two. He had been so terribly ill as he fought and won his battle for "himself" back from the thing he called his "beast". The change in atmosphere would do him good; would do BOTH of them good: Catherine knew the perfect place; a remote mountain cabin she had spent many happy summers at with her parents. A caretaker kept it in good order, waiting for her to return and claim it someday. It still belonged to her. She had not been able to find the strength to sell it, even after her dad died. Ten private acres deep in the woods. Many trees, glorious flowers, mountains, meadows, and a small deep lake: Wouldn't Vincent love it there! Catherine longed, yearned to show this place to him; he lived with so much left out of his life. As he had to, until the world could change and grow up a lot more. To keep something as beautiful as Vincent hidden seemed almost a sin to Catherine.



THE - CHANDLER RETREAT

Hell, it was a sin. All he had to share; to give to the world:
The love and grace he displayed always; the patience and understanding
that was so much a part of him. He had EARNED a change: BUT....
would Father ever permit; ever agree to this request? It would
be made safe, she would make dead certain of it. Catherine could
explain to him how remote it was. Almost twenty miles to the nearest
town, it was truly almost desolate. That very desolation might,
MIGHT help her. Only six hours away. But, a new world for Vincent.
To have him actually see, instead of just read about mountains. Or a
field of flowers, think of his joy! The more Catherine thought of
his face, the more excited she became. Too excited to even eat:
SHe threw her clothes on, grabbed a fast glass of juice, and
hurried to make her way Below. She knew Vincent would have sensed
her emotion by now and would be waiting for her; he always was.

He leaned against the tunnel wall, listening for her footfall
on the iron ladder. Vincents' keen senses did, indeed, tell him
that Catherine was tremendously excited, happily excited over
SOMETHING this morning. He was a bit; just a bit, impatient
to find out from her what had caused this joy he felt rising, filling
him with joy. Turning to greet her, she almost knocked him over
with the unexpected urgency of her greeting and her strangling
hug! "Oh, the most wonderful dream: Vincent! I have to tell you;
oh, we can do it. WE CAN. It will be safe. Oh, Vincent!" He was
a little surprised, yet charmed by the way Catherine was talking.
Breathless, hurrying through her sentences, almost stuttering
in her excitement: "Catherine, I can barely understand you:
Cabin, woods, trees? What are you trying to tell me? Slow down!"

As he gazed at her with both love and questions on his dear face, Catherine made a supreme effort and took several breaths and calmed down somewhat. She began to tell him of her dream; the idea of a time away from the city. Of a place, her "special" place, just for the two of them. The peace she always found there; the contentment. Listening intently Vincent seemed suddenly remote from her; almost afraid of what she was going to say next. He felt the longing in Catherine's voice, the desperate need to get away. She now asked the question he knew she would. "Will you speak to Father of this, get him to see that we would be so very careful? Please, Vincent? Will you try to talk to him; do you want to try? He responded vaguely, "I will promise to THINK of it Catherine. But, to be so far from home. In the open like that. And in the DAYLIGHT, It seems perhaps, a little dangerous...". As his voice trailed off, the deep disappointment Catherine was trying to keep to herself crept into her voice. "Yes, I understand. The idea was selfish of me, wasn't it? I must have been crazy to even think of it. To even consider for a moment of putting you into a dangerous situation. I'm sorry, Vincent. Very sorry I asked this of you. I just wanted so much, so very much, to show the magic of that place to you. Of all people, you would have understood at once, how I feel about it. I didn't stop to think; you might not want to go. Please forget it and forgive my seeming lack of concern for your safety. I meant well....I really did!" He grabbed her arms and held her to his

breast, "not WANT to go, Catherine! The very thought of going to such a place has my heart pounding. I never dared even dream of something like this. To see that place: The meadows, the lake: To actually feel the SUN on my skin! Never apologize for something thought of with love, Catherine: It was not selfish to want to share this with me; I am grateful you already share so much. It was that you simply caught me at a total loss with the surprise; the pleasant surprise of your request." As he spoke, Vincent seemed to catch her enthusiasm. He also began talking faster and faster. "Think of it! A place just for US. Away from the city and the dangers. To simply wander in the woods, smell the flowers, to see the sun. Think of it: I WILL speak to Father of this: I WILL! We shall go, I promise it. I want to see this place with you, Catherine. To be THERE with you, I..." Catherine knew deep within herself why Vincent abruptly stopped talking. He was thinking, mirroring her own thoughts. She felt and knew this as his body tensed and he drew slightly away from her in shy embarrassment: They would be TRULY alone for the first time. Had he also thought of what this might mean? Knowing Vincent as well as she did, Catherine knew his deepest, most dreaded fears. She also was aware of the longings he THOUGHT hidden from her for so many years. She knew he wanted her; though he had never, ever, said this, in words to her. He didn't have to. She knew her man. As she shivered slightly in his arms, a kalidescope of emotions burst upon Vincents' brain; to have Catherine that close. He had never allowed himself true aloneness with her. He didn't trust his own strengths to do that; not with her. He loved her too much to even for a moment forget WHAT and WHO he was; and the power

of his need of her if ever alone, might have made him forget. Forget just long enough to hurt her. This was unthinkable; this was not to be done. To be alone with her went beyond his most secret thoughts, yearnings. He had never dared even dream of it; yet now dream of it, he was: And the depth of the yearning this called forth nearly consumed him. Trembling, he stepped slightly back, away from Catherine and looked deeply into her eyes. How trusting she looked standing there, smiling back at him. Yet, did she know his thoughts? She had a look he did not understand on her face; a knowledge of...what? Vincent gasped and put his hand on the wall to steady his quaking knees. She knew. Catherine knew his thoughts, his secret darkest yearnings. As he learned this, Vincent wondered that there was no fear on her face, no doubt. She was not afraid of being alone with him in that remote place. Vincent felt this as she returned his look quietly, silently. And, forcing his body to stay calm, he gathered her to himself and held her gently. They stood thus, each lost in separate thoughts, for how long? Minutes? Eternity? The corridor behind them was filled with the sounds of Fathers' and Mouses' voices, raised in a very heated debate: Mouse was insisting: "Can do it. Will! Why not?" Fathers' voice reverberated throughout the tunnels: "You CANNOT fly a model plane down HERE, Mouse! Someone could be injured, most likely yourself: It would probably explode, or something equally as terrible to think on! Will you please listen to reason?" Mouse stormed off: Not acknowledging Vincent, or even Catherine: He was as mad as Vincent or Father had ever seen him: Oh, dear:

As Father approached closer, Vincent tried to hide the smile in his voice as he questioned, "this would be a new project, yes?" Father was stunned: Vincent? Yes! Vincent was teasing HIM. HIM! This was not a funny situation, Whatever was wrong with his son? Usually, he would have instantly agreed on the folly of something like this. Sighing and shaking his grey head in consternation, Father greeted both of them. "Hello, Catherine. I trust you are feeling better this morning? Yes? Good! Vincent, you seem to be rather anxious to tell me something; not bad news?" As he began to tell Father of Catherine's wonderful dream and the idea it had given them both, Vincent sensed a fast approaching storm. And the storm's name was Father! He drew slightly back at the anger that exploded when Father spoke, indeed YELLED, "WHAT...What are you telling me? A day WHERE? In the woods? In a cabin? Are you both losing your minds? What can you be thinking of Vincent? Have you completely lost your reason? Is there no end to this..this.FOOLISHNESS: First, Mouse and now you two. The folly, the rashness of you young people never ceases to amaze me. Must we older, wiser, more cautious adults always make you see the danger you leave yourselves open to? Will you both just stop and think for a minute. Just think! What if you're seen up there Vincent? Catherine, could YOU protect him? Alone up there...could you? I think not: What if someone with a gun SAW you, what would you DO? Who could help you? NO ONE. I will speak of this subject NO MORE. This matter is closed; I absolutely FORBID it. Do you both hear? I FORBID IT!" As Father strode away mumbling to himself in his anger, Vincent turned to Catherine, stunned and embarrassed. "He spoke to me, to us, as though we are

small children. How could he! Father seemed so hard, so unyielding just now. Does he assume there was no recourse open once HE had said NO? How dare he speak that way; he hasn't that right. I am a grown man, you are a grown woman. How dare he:" Catherine was silent at the extreme, and mighty anger in Vincents' usually gentle voice that now rang in her ears: When Father said NO to anything, that was usually that: But, Vincent seemed absolutely furious! She tried to reason with him, "Father is probably right in this, Vincent. We were dreaming; don't think of it anymore, please. Don't argue with him over this. It may be too dangerous a journey from his point of view. It was a hope, a dream." As they walked to the mirror pool, both he and Catherine were lost in thought. Vincent stopped suddenly dead still in his tracks. "NO! I will NOT give in to him this time, Catherine. We all say no to so many things just to appease and please Fathers ideas or right or wrong, safety or danger. This is very important to you...to US, I feel I have to challenge him for the right to do as I please, for ALL our sakes. Don't you grow tired of always being told there is danger all around us? Even when there is none! Father is overly cautious, he always has been so. There MUST be a time to renew ones self, to rest away from peril. We WILL have this time for us! This one time, we will be a bit selfish. We shall do as WE decide. What we believe right, and not just bend to Fathers' will to keep the peace. We must choose for ourselves, finally, how to live our lives, NOT Father. I respect and love him, with all my heart. But he can sometimes be WRONG. He must be made

to see, that THIS time, HE IS WRONG!" He hugged her close, then spun on the ball of his foot, away from her and towards Fathers' Chamber, "so, make the necessary arrangements, Catherine! We shall have our weekend." As he strode from view, she called after him, "But, what if he's right. Are you sure we can do this? If you should get hurt....." He stopped and smiled back to her, "it is time for the "fledglings" to leave the nest, my love. Have faith. I will see you tonight, on the balcony. If I SURVIVE this coming confrontation, that is!" . After speaking to Pascal and Mary for a minute or two, Catherine hurriedly left the world Below. So many plans to make: As she went about this, she thought of Father. As much as she also loved him and respected his judgements as a rule, he could be too cautious, too concerned for those he loved and cared for, at times. Surely Vincent would be able to make him understand that they needed to be treated as adults. They were capable of making decision for themselves, even if they were NOT the same as Fathers. Vincent was a man grown; she knew he expected to be treated thus by everyone: Even Father. As she sat later and made lists for supplies and things needed for the trip, Catherine sighed. She was thinking of what must be happening Below: She tried to picture Vincent and Father in a real "row". An honest to goodness argument. Both standing there; jaws "set". Toe to toe, and eyes to CHIN, neither willing to give an inch! What a scenario: Then, she felt guilt; whatever was going on was mostly, her fault! Suddenly, Catherine couldn't bear to have

this argument on her conscious. Couldn't bear the idea of Vincent and Father fighting; especially when she felt responsible. Catherine had grabbed a jacket and was headed out the front door to stop them before it went too far and words were said that could never be forgiven. She would cancel this outing before damage to the two people she loved most was beyond repair. A loud rap on the balcony window made her turn just as she opened the front door. In the dusk, Vincent stood outlined against the shadowy sky, waiting for her to let him in, or join him. "Catherine, open the door, we must talk." She ran to the door, positive that the news would NOT be good. Catherine vowed to show no disappointment if her fears realized; WHEN her fears were realized. Taking a deep breath, she opened the doors and stepped out to greet the man she loved. He had a very, very strange look on his face; sad and secretive. Catherine felt her heart pounding in her mouth, "We can't go, can we? It's okay. I understand; really, I DO." Vincent grabbed her up and into his arms and began to spin her and whirl her about the balcony! "YES. We ARE going. We truly are! Father put all his objections before me, and I set our feelings before him. My final argument I believe; won him to reluctant agreement. I merely stated that with or WITHOUT his blessings, we WERE GOING! He realized my mind was made up on this and he nodded his head, saying he would pray all went well. So, for right or wrong, this weekend at dusk we begin. What a time we shall have Catherine!" As he collapsed finally breathless into a chair, Catherine's mind now whirled as her body had a moment ago. Never had she felt so happy before, and so scared at the same time; In

first suggesting this trip, had she done the right thing? Only time would tell. Only time.....

The following week was a jumble. So many plans had to be made. Calls to the caretaker, to Joe at work for some much needed vacation time. Trips back and forth for supplies. She was exhausted by Thursday, but excited, too: Catherine had rented a plain brown van; with no back windows and green shades that could be pulled down on the passenger and drivers side windows. When the van was finally packed to capacity, she felt a sense of accomplishment and relief. Then, just as she was beginning to catch her breath and rest in a chair, another item was called to mind; she had missed the maps: And, where were the damned flashlights: The lights weren't very reliable up there, at times: Had she packed enough food? Or, maybe too much for the small refrigerator to hold: Catherine started her running around all over again; she had forgotten to pick up some fishing gear, and pack the damn portable radio: Vincent wanted to learn a few of the newest dance steps: This request had both surprised and thoroughly delighted her, That would be something. She tried to imagine his doing some of the newer steps and giggled into her hands. Oh my..the pictures her mind was weaving were too much. She of course, had nodded very seriously to his request for dance lessons. But, he had seen beyond her face and into her thoughts, "Catherine, are you laughing at me?" She shook her head back and forth vigorously, not yet trusting her voice. Finally, she managed a strangled reply, "of course not! Just that well, you

never before seemed very interested in THAT sort of music, that's all. I didn't even know you listened to it." He frowned as he waited for Catherine to finish speaking; did she think he was, oh what was the expression the teenagers used....? Oh yes, unchilled, he believed it to be, or something like that, at least: "I may be fond of other types of music more, Catherine, but, all music facinates me. I have always wished I had the talent to play an instrument. I have tried many, but don't seem to have a true "gift" as many are blessed with. I love all kinds of music, really Catherine;" She just smiled, thinking, oh, yah? Wait until you hear a bit of the station I'm gonna play to dance to: HA! As she relaxed and had a cup of tea, the look of Vincents face when she started playing "that" station was almost visible already: Then, she cursed - the batteries! Where are the radio batteries, GRRRR. She'd never be ready on time - NEVER:

Friday, between dusk and dawn, she sat in the van at the entrance to the tunnel, impatiently waiting for Vincent to appear and get in and get going. The side door opened with a loud "BANG"; startling her from any further daydreaming, "Father! What are you doing here? Have you decided to come with us after all? Vincent said he would ask you to. You'd be welcome." He smiled, "no, but thank you for the words, even if they are ummm, half-truths, yes?" She blushed at this and realized Father was very close to her thoughts exactly: He continued, "Even a "DAMNED STONEHEAD", as my son called me last week, has learned when to let young people be on their own, even if I do NOT happen to agree with where they go!

My official capacity today is BAGGAGE handler: I do believe Vincent has tried to pack the ENTIRE tunnel." Breathless and struggling with a heavy valise, Vincent now appeared at the entrance, looked around carefully, and then joined them quickly. As he hopped into the rear of the van, he was muttering half to himself, half to them, " I almost forgot my hairbrush, and still cannot find my favorite sweater, so...so to ..oh, to HELL with it!" Catherine and Father exchanged a quick look - Vincent? Swearing? Father nudged her gently, "see, And he isn't even out of my sight yet, Already using profanity!" She giggled and turned and hugged Vincent hello as he spoke his goodbyes to his concerned parent. "Look for us late Sunday night, or early Monday. Please, TRY not worry?" Embracing him in a fierce, quick hug, Vincent then slid the van doors shut. as Catherine looked to the left and right for people that might be passing and saw none. She gunned the motor as Vincent settled onto the pile of cushions she had provided. Once safely outside the city, he would sit up front with her. Father patted her arm from the side window as she nodded at him and spoke softly, "I'll take good care of him, I promise: Remember, Father, I love him too: Goodbye:" Slowly, Catherine pulled the van out onto the narrow park road. Father wiped at his eyes, looked upwards as though in prayer, and turned back to his home, shaking his head slowly.

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Once they left the city, Vincent seemed much more at ease. Traffic was extremely, surprisingly light. And everyone drove so fast, why; no one would have TIME to see him. He had fastened his uncomfortable seatbelt at Catherine's insistence, but he was slowly

trying to remove it now. It was digging into his massive shoulders and although he knew the purpose was a good one, he was too chafed to keep it buckled. Catherine saw him slid it down from the corner of her eye, "I saw that! Vincent really, you should stay buckled up. If there was an accident or something, well...". He looked solemnly over to her, "if there is an accident, my love, a seatbelt would not help me if I were discovered." Catherine shivered, "don't remind me, I feel more than a bit responsible for you, out here. Father has trusted me to look after you, he..". The look on his face stilled her words. He narrowed his eyes and retorted, "look after me? I'm not a child to be...looked after. Catherine please! I can take care of myself very well." With that, he leaned forward to turn on the radio; waited. Nothing happened. She tried hard to fight off the laugh valiantly; no use. "Vincent, do you smoke? No? Then why have you pushed in the cigarette lighter." He tried to maintain his dignity, damn! Those buttons all looked alike. Changing the subject, he remarked on the lovely countryside that was now before him. But she would not be swayed. yet. "Would you like me to get some music on the radio for you? It's that first button, there on your right." He grinned at her as he leaned forward again, and this time, was rewarded with music; good music. The first hours passed quickly and easily. They talked of all they would do at the cabin. She told him of her mother. She had gone with her and dad twice, then decided she was a CITY girl; that place was just a bit too rugged and remote for her taste! And, she HATED FISHING! After that, Catherine and her father had gone alone; to truly "rough" it. Without Mom along, her father somehow lost the need

to shave, and she found she had a lot more freedom to wander and explore where her Mother would probably not allowed her to. Oh, dad loved her; but his fishing usually distracted him a bit. This left Catherine to roam meadows, catch minnows in the lake, and invent glorious stories of Knights in shining armor, ladies in distress and adventure of all kinds. As he listened in delight to her remembrances, Vincent could see her there as she must have looked as a child. How lucky she was having parents that loved her so. As he looked over to her glowing face as she spoke with longing of those days, he knew he would never forget the happiness of Catherines' voice or her words. Then, she began to tell him of "dad and the terrible fish". He went after that same fish every year, it seemed and every year "just missed it", in his words. Well finally, at last, he caught the thing. As he fried it for their supper, he was regaling her with the tale of how much fight it had put up with great pride. Dad had gotten so wrapped up in his story, he had forgotten the fish and burned it beyond redemption; as well as stinking up the entire cabin! Whew, what a night THAT was. She finally had to sleep out on the porch, Poor dad. As they laughed together over this, Catherine turned the van to a rest area and shut off the engine. As she poured them tea from a thermos, Catherine HAD to ask. "Vincent, did you REALLY call Father a "damned stonehead", really?" He looked at her, tilting his head in that way she loved so, "Yes, I think I did. I was in such a...a state, trying to explain how we felt, I truly forget all that was said. I remember, to my shame, being extremely loud:

And also, not a bit respectful. Poor Father, I imagine he would have much rather I had just wanted to fly a plane in the tunnel of the winds, as Mouse wanted to do." As he turned to grin at her, oncoming strong lights framed his face for a second before he managed to duck from sight. Shielding his face from the high glare, he whispered urgently over to Catherine. "I hope this is not trouble. Be careful; stay in the van!" She nodded as a man stepped from his car and approached her side of the van. "Scuze me, ma'am, but would you'all know the way to the Henderson House? Ya know? That famous eattin and drinkin place me and the missus heard tell of somewhere round here? We seemed to have missed it." We're from Georgia; we musta took a wrong turn along here, or a gosh darn wrong exit. Can you'all help us out?" As she breathed a sigh of relief, Catherine smiled at the gentlemen, "Oh it's only about ten more miles down the pike; exit 33A. You can't miss it. I've heard it's a wonderful place." As the man thanked her and climbed back into his car, Catherine felt herself still shaking. What a scare he had given them unwittingly, WHEW! Vincent reached up and held her arm gently, "are you all right? All is well, Catherine; why you're shaking all over." As she took one last deep breath, she gave him a look of calm, "I'm okay now, but for a moment there I thought it was the State Police and the butterflies in my stomach had BABIES! I'm fine now, Vincent. Really." As she started the engine, he climbed back alongside her and sighed. "I wish I could share the driving with you. But somehow, I never DID

get a chance to learn how." That made her laugh and finally relax.

"Oh, Vincent. I can just see you in a sportscar, whizzing down to Central Park. Oh- you!" Catherine reached out and poked him playfully in the ribs; then turned the radio on again with a sly glance at him. "Have you ever heard this station before?" The blare of a hard rock station filled the van with high pitched wails and screams. And cursing! A trifle taken aback at such words and such NOISE, an amused look came over Vincents face.

"Is it SUPPOSED to sound like that? Fathers' yelling at us last week was less hurtful to my ears. Why, Catherine, I never KNEW you liked that sort of.....music," Yelling to make herself heard over the blast of the radio, Catherine fairly screamed her answer. "Oh, I don't; I just thought YOU might like it." As Vincent changed the station to one a bit less deafening, he chuckled deep in his throat. Then did something so completely out of character, Catherine almost drove off the road. He yelled, "I think I understand now. When the singer forgets the words, he just screams and curses. I can do that; listen." As he began to expertly mimic the song and the singing, he added a bit of the lost Georgians' southern drawl along with the yells. It was so funny to hear this sound coming from HIM, Catherine nearly choked on tears of laughter. This was a Vincent she did not know, at all! She knew he had a quick, sharp wit; albeit a rather droll one. But. this...this man beside her now was a natural born COMEDIAN! Catherine gleefully thought she must get him to joke like this more often in the future. He was soooooo funny! Her ribs ached before he

finished his first "solo". As she drove, she could see from the corner of her eye, Vincent seemed to be fighting falling asleep. But, the quiet hum of the engine, the slight rocking motion of the van, and the concert station overwhelmed him finally; and he was fast asleep with his arms folded over his breast and his head leaning slightly towards the door of the van. His poor long, large, legs looked quite cramped. Catherine shook her head; she had forgotten to show him how to adjust the damn seat! Some help she was. She knew the week had been as exhausting for him as it had been for her; Mary had told of seeing him prowling about Below night after night. He complained of being too excited to sleep. This trip was so special, he couldn't get his mind to "turn off". So, now he had lost the battle with the sandman at last. He was cuddled up like a child in the seat beside her, with a grin on his face. Catherine looked over to again and again. It was a rare opportunity indeed, to watch him unawares. He always caught her trying to get an unguarded peek at him. He looked so handsome curled up like that; he looked downright adorable! At least to her eyes. And so peaceful, finally. As much as she was enjoying this time together, Catherine was sure he was truly loving the idea of being so FREE. Having a new world laid out before him to explore and learn about..AT LAST. As she drove, she wondered if he had any second thoughts about being alone with her as they were now. Vincent was so damned adept at maddeningly keeping his thoughts from her when he wanted to. She on more than one occasion, had wished for this same ability: Had he sensed her inner turmoil this past week? Happy one moment,

guilty the next, over drawing the man she loved into a potentially dangerous situation: Dangerous in more ways than one. Catherine shivered slightly. Her body and mind were both betraying how much she wanted, needed this man now beside her. She ached from it; the desire was becoming harder and harder to bear lately. Could she ever tell him how much pleasure just LOOKING at him gave her? Or how his arms REALLY felt around her? She frowned to herself. Had she unconsciously planned this trip with his seduction on her mind? No: She had not. But still..... There were so many unsettled, unspoken emotions between them; would this trip change that finally? As often as she had tried to get Vincent to talk of his fears and let himself truly love her, he hadn't been able to do this yet. He held her with more confidence than he had in the past, but hold her was all he did. He was so terrified of hurting her, and quite adamant that their love could not be consummated, ever. That would require a total release of himself to her in trust; complete trust. There would be no turning back then. He would not take that one step, that one final step beyond his own imagined furies and savageness to love her physically. To lose control as he had been taught by books, in that way; was to him to unleash his beast, his dark side towards her. This he would not do. To hurt her would mean losing her and himself, forever. He never spoke of this to her; Vincent didn't have to. Catherine knew his feelings on this subject; and knew he would not ever speak of it more than that one time he had tried explaining his fear

to her almost two years ago. She tried to picture what would happen if, here, alone with him, she managed to convince him, FINALLY, that he could love her as he wanted to. Images of him making love to her were driving her crazy. Catherine cursed silently and forced her attention back to the road with a deep sigh. Her sigh awakened him, "do you need to rest? I have been poor company, these last miles, haven't I? I'm sorry, my eyes just would not obey me. Where are we; near our destination?" She smiled gently at him, "I'm okay, just a bit stiff. We should be there in about an hour. What do you want to see first? The lake? Or maybe, the meadows. Can you decide? Oh. Vincent! Imagine; three whole days; well almost three, to show my world to you. To show you everything. I have waited so long for this." She was beaming at him now, truly glowing from the happiness this trip had caused. He answered her quietly, as was he way generally. "The first thing I want to do? Get you to rest, Catherine. All the driving you have done must have worn you completely out. After you rest, really rest, we'll do whatever you want. I put myself into your hands: Who knows, I may even try fishing. Maybe even catch something." SHE grinned over at him retorting, "all you'll probably CATCH is a cold!" He knew when he was being teased: He replied in mock anger, "I may be as accomplished a fisherman as your father was." She giggled, "OH NO, MORE BURNT FISH!" Trying to imagine himself in the long rubber wading boots of a "true" fisherman, Vincents' mind formed an image that had him nearly rocking the van with laughter. When Catherine

looked at him; quite startled, and asked just what was SO funny, it did him in entirely: The harder he tried to explain, the louder he laughed. After a moment of this, she caught his contagious giggle fit, and was swept along not even knowing what she was really laughing AT: Vincent grasped the dashboard in front of him and fought for his self control. Taking deep gasps he finally turned to her and in a soft voice said, "if for some reason, Catherine, we had to turn around right now and go back to the city, this ride alone for me, would have been worth the trouble and arguments with Father. I thank you for this day; this time with you as we are now. What would be an ordinary happening to another man, you have made into a magic journey. A remarkable journey, for me. I would not have missed this for anything...anything!" He was looking at her in a way he rarely did; completely unguarded and natural. His eyes had grown dark as he studied the outline of Catherine's face, almost brooding as feelings began to rise in him that were known, familiar, yet unacknowledged before this: As she glanced over, Vincent looked away; towards the window. She had not seen the look, he thought gratefully. It would only have scared her. He pushed the emotions at war with his mind back and away from the surface and turned as she began to also thank him for his courage in taking this trip in the first place: Catherine suddenly saw a cluster of trees and rocks that were familiar; then a worn sign a few yards in front of them. "Vincent, we're almost there!" As both of them looked carefully for the dirt road that had no markings, but would be where they turned in, time seemed to drag. Where was

that road. Then, she saw it at last, "we're here!"

After he cautiously listened to sounds and looked about him carefully for any signs of people and saw none, Vincent relaxed and sat back in the seat beside Catherine, "smell that air! It is almost like perfume. Look at those trees, they go upwards forever." Finally just past the tall pines, he could see a small rise. Behind that rise was the location of the cabin. Catherine had said behind the cabin, was the lake. He craned his neck for a better look...he saw it. Nestled back among high trees, the cabin seemed to be waiting for them. The sun was rising behind it, mirroring the windows with a soft, golden glow. Vincent saw a profusion of wildflowers. Cornflowers, daffodils wild lilac, roses, and many others he didn't have names for. So many kinds. As he looked and listened to the new sounds around him, he could hear somewhere in the distance, birds chirping "hello, hello" as if welcoming them. Vincent was nearly at the point of tears. This was not a dream, a fantasy. HE WAS HERE and he was with Catherine. He saw no danger here, felt only peace and tranquility all about him as she turned off the engine of the van and stretched widely to ease the stiffness of her back muscles, and smiled over at him.

After getting some of the kinks out of her spine, Catherine asked him to stay in the van and wait until she could have a proper look around; just to be sure all was as it should be. He nodded in compliance. "I have waited a lifetime for this moment. Surely, I can wait a few minutes more....I HOPE!" It seemed like hours to Vincent before she returned breathlessly exclaiming, "it looks okay! The chimney is hidden by the trees; no one will see our fires. The tall shrubs and grass have already closed over the back of the

van; you can't even see it from back here. The cabin looks the same; just a bit smaller. Hurry, Vincent. Come on! You must see the cabin and the lake." She almost pulled him bodily from the van as he took her hand and reminded her gently of her promise to rest first. Pushing him along in front of her, she exclaimed, "I will, I will! But you must see the lake, come ON." Laughing, he took her arm through his and let her lead him down the small slope to the clear, glistening water below him. He was stunned. "Oh, Catherine, the colors. Look at all the colors the sun has turned the water. Never have I seen such blues, such green: And, the mountains! I could never have imagined anything so beautiful, so majestic, in all my reading of books. It's lovely, lovely!" He turned his face toward the waning sun; letting it sink into his skin, his soul. Without realizing he was doing it, he had tightened his grasp on Catherine's waist. He curled his fingernails softly into her flesh, trembling with the excitement of being at this place at last. Catherine said nothing, simply looked at the lake with him and hugged him back. She was certain he would become aware any moment of how he held her and pull back. She could wait. But Vincent had been aware of how closely he held her. Her small body felt warmer than any mere sun under his touch. Why couldn't he let go of her? He couldn't seem to make his hands obey him. With a small tremor, he finally loosened his grip, and shyly asked her, "have I hurt you? Did I.....?" She tried to ease the mounting tension. "Of course you didn't hurt me, Come on, let's get that van unloaded. Move your bones mister!" As

Catherine ordered him sternly up the hill, Vincent began to run. He laughed and called back to her, "the faster I get that unpacking done, the sooner I can come back here: I'll race you to see who gets their share put away first!" His long, muscular legs soon outdistanced hers, and Catherine gave up her brave struggle to keep abreast of him. She collapsed into the tall grass with a pout on her face and yelled to him, "that's not fair. Your legs are longer than mine. No fair, Vincent!" He walked back swiftly to encourage her to her feet; she reached out suddenly and pulled him off balance with a quick tug to his arms. Vincent tumbled down beside her yelling loudly at the indignity of this new position, "We'll never get the van unloaded this way, Catherine." His mock anger faded quickly as she smiled at him and ruffled his hair. "SO? Talk to me Vincent. How do you feel right now; this moment?" He shook his golden head at her, "there are no words. I feel so much, too much to speak of it." Catherine turned his face gently until he was looking directly at her; "pick a feeling?" Vincent put one hand to her cheek and said softly....."grateful".

Groaning and declaring that the last load was IN, Vincent collapsed into a chair in the living room exhausted. "Catherine? How ever did you manage to get so MUCH into one small van? There is so much food; we can never eat it all in just three days. She smiled, "wellllll, maybe we'll just have to STAY here until it's gone, huh?" Arching one eyebrow at her, Vincent surprised her by agreeing, "yes, from now on we will only eat one meal a day; the food will last longer that way." She knew he was teasing...or was he? With HIM, you were never, ever quite SURE. Sometimes he could be so, so -

inscrutable: GRRR!

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After all the food was put away and the gear was stowed along with the spare blankets, Catherine showed Vincent how to work the tricky shower and where everything was in the small kitchen. He understood how the water was pumped, but the dials and knobs of the shower looked.."imposing", to say the least. He hoped he wouldn't burn his whatever attempting to use this "thing"! He took her firmly by the shoulders and led her to her bedroom, reminding her ONCE AGAIN of her promise to rest: Catherine doubted she would sleep, but she dozed off almost at once anyway: Vincent looked in once and covered her with the blanket she had shoved onto the floor with her foot. Then he began to take a closer look at his new surroundings. He decided he liked this cabin very much from the first moment he had stepped through the doorway. Had admired the rough , clean look of the place. the Flagstone fireplace had logs set in it ready to burn if a cool night should warrant it. The living room was furnished in knotty pine with large lamps to read by, and plump comfortable chairs near the fireplace. A long wide couch graced one far wall, and beyond that, lay the small neat kitchen. Almost filling one wall of the kitchen was a large,black stove that looked even older than the one in the tunnels: As he sat down, he admired the ceilings. Whoever had designed this cabin had been a very good architect. It was a compact house, but invitingly and carefully build and laid out. It was restful. He noted gratefully, the two bedrooms. He had been wondering about the sleeping facilities, but had not asked

Catherine of this. He knew she would take care not to make anything "awkward" for either of them. Why he had been anxious about the bedrooms he knew, but... He growled to himself, stop thinking! You will drive yourself MAD with this thinking. Ordering himself to relax and just enjoy his surroundings, Vincent thought of all Catherine had done to make this weekend possible for him, for them. How she shared her life with him so completely. And her love. What else did he want, he asked himself almost with anger. Or hope for? What else did he DARE to dream of having? This was enough, wasn't it? His mind screamed this over and over, WASN'T IT? Vincent went outside and sat in a wicker chair on the porch, and reflected on the days events. He was the luckiest of men; this he knew. But as he thought again of Catherine sleeping so near, so close, his body began to betray him once again. To torture him as a desire rose unbidden and filled his chest. Making him burn from within, his blood beginning to run hot in his veins. He jumped to his feet almost in panic and made his way to the lake. A cold splash of water may do some good here and now. He must, MUST keep his wits about him at all times this weekend. He MUST. After a drink of the cool water and a splash to the back of his neck, Vincent stripped off his warm tunic and high boots. Clad now only in his denim pants, he settled back into the high, fragrant grass and looked towards the dusky blue sky above him. It was so quiet here; no pipes clanking messages. No children nosily, happily playing all about him. No Mouse innocently driving him near to distraction with talks of endless inventions and ideas for even more! Watching

the birds as they dove and seemed to play tag in the sky, the stillness of his surroundings washed over him like a soothing ebb and flow of a warm ocean tide. He remained like this for what he thought was mere minutes, but was in reality nearly two hours. He sensed her presence before he saw her. Catherine came up behind him, saying softly, "you looked so peaceful, I debated whether to disturb you or not." She settled herself down next to him in the grass as he smiled up at her. The sun was weaving fingers of gold and red through his hair; and the slight breeze was catching it and tossing it gently about his neck. She reached out and touched his mane lightly. Sifting it through her fingers; letting it fall then lifting it again. "Vincent. You are so beautiful." His shy eyes and quick shake of his head denied her statement. She repeated it. "You ARE beautiful." Before his mind could react, his body did. Vincent embraced her replying, "if, IF, what you say is true, only through your eyes am I so. Catherine. Only to you." He lowered his head and nuzzled her gently on the neck as she held her breath in the surprise of this movement, the newness of it. Catherine heard a sound unknown to her. It was coming from Vincent; almost a purring sensation was in his throat as he continued to nuzzle her neck, then her shoulders with his lips. As he began to move his hands on her, a crow cawed loudly overhead, jerking him to instant awareness of what he had been doing. No. NO! He must not do this, He would not hurt Catherine. An icy coldness came over him. He moved slightly away from her and started to speak, "I'm sorry. I did not mean to presume to, to".

Oh, God. Words were failing him, now of all times, when he needed them the most. These past years with Catherine, Vincent had succeeded through great strength of will and fear, to keep his dark side from her. This side was now lurking just at the edges of his mind. A passion he had never felt was rising, engulfing him. Overpowering him as it flamed up, hot and insistent. Vincent leapt to his feet, shaking as if he would never stop. He must put some distance between himself and Catherine, now. He dared not even acknowledge the desires that were stirring in him. To do that would mean facing them. To face them....was impossible. Terrifying. Using every ounce of his strong sense of decency, he sat down again, but a few feet away from Catherine, and tried to sort out his thoughts, reason all of this AWAY from his body. He knew Catherine had these same feelings for him, the one time he had allowed a discussion of this, she had told him of how much she loved him, wanted him. Yet he had never allowed the final closeness they both longed for, yearned for. When Catherine had tried to gently explain that to lose one's self in love was not the same as losing to fury. There was a vast difference. Fury released in protecting loved ones was not the same as furies of passion. She tried so hard, to get him to see this, to believe this. To TRUST this to be true. But, he could not forget Lisa and what had happened all those years ago with her. She had danced for him, and he had reached out to hold her; to embrace her with the awkwardness of a teenage boy. And, he had frightened her. She had pulled back from his touch as he struggled to hold her. He had wounded her. Wounded Lisa. Vincent's long, sharp nails had embedded themselves into her skin. Had drawn blood. Vincent as well as Lisa had been terrified as he looked down

and saw her blood on his hands. If Father had not intervened, Vincent could only imagine what would have happened next. Never could he forget her cry of pain. That had shamed him as he buried his head in Fathers' lap, crying in frustration of the unknown and new emotions he had felt aroused by her slim body. Self loathing had filled him. He vowed never again would he touch a woman, any woman, with those terrible hands. At least, not in desire or love. This he would never have; never know. Long ago, Vincent had settled this one fact in his mind and it had never wavered. Until Catherine. Vincent knew the beast in him wanted her, would take her if he let it. He fought the battle almost constantly, daily these last two years and won. Now here, when he needed his strengths the most, they were deserting him. To have all he desired so close, so close was beyond his endurance. Beyond his power. If he hurt Catherine, he would die. Knowing she would forgive him would not have made a difference; not to Vincents' mind. He would be forced to leave her...forever. And, he would die. That was what he knew, that is what was true to him. My God, to never see Catherine again! He could bear ANYTHING, anything but THAT. So, he would continue to browbeat his body to his will. Hold his passions behind a wall of his own making and therefore, quite impenetrable. As much as he wanted Catherine with every drop of blood, every nerve and fiber in his body, he would not consummate their love. Could not. This journey had been unwise. In a way Father had been correct; there were dangers here. But, not the ones Father had seen. Dangers of the flesh being too weak to support his will. Could he endure three days of THIS? He knew the

answer, NO, he could not. If he failed to control these feelings, he would have to leave this place and Catherine; and somehow get back to the safety of his tunnels. But, HOW?

Laying beside him quietly as she saw a struggle going on within himself, Catherine knew, or thought she knew, what the turmoil was about. She had no words that would comfort him, not right now. The way Vincent looked now, he would not even have heard her. He had drawn inward, away from her reach. As she thought of what to do; how to help, a fact made itself known: She was stunned as the fact hit her; the city was their "stopgap". The distractions of working, of everyday life; helped fill the emptiness within both of them. Vincent lost himself in books or working on the tunnels; she buried her feelings in Writs, the Law and the perils she faced in a constant struggle to bring some humanity to her world Above. But here...now, the "stopgap" was gone. There were no distractions.....except each other. Now she felt his pain, the torment he was almost lost in. How could she reach him? HOW? As she was trying to find words, Vincent seemed to come to terms with his raging emotions. As he started rising to his feet, the sun went behind a cloud; it felt suddenly chilly. "Catherine, we should go in, yes? It is getting quite damp. I am used to it, but you..! Well, shall we go inside?" She tried to lighten the mood that was hovering over them. "Yes, we should go in. If I brought you home to Father with a cold.....I don't even want to think of it, AND, I'm hungry. Come on lazybones!" He managed a small smile at this and took her hand as she brushed the grass from her clothes. Vincent was

aware of what she was trying to do, and silently thanked her for helping him right now. But as they walked slowly towards the cabin, her mind touched his just for a second. Her real emotions began to flood through his heart and capture his soul. Vincent took deep breaths as he fought for control. His mind was reeling from the depth of what Catherine was thinking, the passion that had reached him before she could shut it away from him burned into his chest, into his flesh as it attempted to consume him. Vincent dropped her hand and ran for the house, calling out to her, "I too am suddenly hungry!" By the time she got to the cabin, he had set the table, and was just sitting down with a book in a chair. Not on the couch, where she could sit near him, but on a chair. Catherine understood. "Hey! I'm expecting great things of you tomorrow, fishing-wise, you know. I'll cook tonight, but you cook your own fish tomorrow. Agreed?" Barely looking up, he nodded his head silently in agreement to this arrangement. His voice at the moment was not to be trusted:

As she prepared a simple meal of cheese, bread, soup and fruit, Vincent got up from his chair and began sweeping up the sand and dirt both had tracked into the cabin. Catherine glanced at him as she put the meal on the table, not surprised to see him doing with no conscious thought of it, a task most "so-called" REAL MEN would have run from. He did what needed doing; never seeming to think if the action was "manly" or not. Didn't need to think of this. Had never BEEN TAUGHT to think of it. He was so dear to her. All his gentle kindness made up for so much, so very much. Vincent was everything that made sense in her world.....EVERYTHING:

After their meal, the plates barely needed washing, but Vincent heated water, washed and stacked them neatly in the drainer on the sink. This seemed fair to him. Catherine had cooked, he would do the dishes. She giggled as she watched him go about these domestic duties. He was unconsciously humming a bit of the rock song they had heard on the radio coming here. A song by Guns N Roses, called "Welcome to the Jungle". She decided to tease him, just a little. "That's a nice song; where have I heard it before?" Realizing just what exactly he had been humming, Vincent smiled; a real smile! "I would have sung it aloud, but some of the words still make me CRINGE:" That was better. He seemed to be coming out of his "funk", finally.

Although it had been a long day, neither seemed ready to say goodnight just yet. As Catherine lit a fire, she was unaware that Vincent had quietly left the cabin. He had seen a profusion of flowers earlier down by the lake. He decided to pick her a bouquet as a "thank you" for his supper. As he picked far too many, he buried his nose into the fragrance. The scent almost made him giddy: "Catherine will love these", he thought as he bent down to the lake and rinsed the stems free of dirt. The water felt cool, but not uncomfortably so. He would bathe here tonight. The dust of the trip was sticking to his fur and making him itchy: And this was so much easier than trying to run that shower! A swim here would be just fine. Almost like home. Not wanting to set himself off again, Vincent decided not to invite Catherine to swim with him. That would be pouring gasoline on a fire. His fire.

But, yet he wondered what she would look like in a bathing suit. How she would be reflected in the silvered moon now hanging at an angle over the lake. Stop! Grunting this to himself, he rose from his knees and went back to the cabin with his arms filled with flowers. Catherine was still kneeling by the fire lost in her own thoughts when he laid the soft scented bouquet at her feet. "Why, thank you, Vincent! These are lovely, and so many; they smell wonderful." As she put the flowers into a vase from the cabinet, Catherine glanced down at her hands and exclaimed aloud, "do I need a bath or what? Look at the soot from the fireplace; it's all over me. Stuck like glue, ugh! Vincent? Would you like to go for a swim? There's a sheltered spot a bit downstream where the water was always a bit warmer. It's about five or six feet deep, and as I've said, very private. There's many shrubs and rocks. Some of the rocks look as if age had carved them into a tunnel of sorts. You'll like it there; do you want to go with me?" Blushing fiercely, she knew she was babbling like an idiot, but couldn't stop her dumb mouth! Catherine waited, biting down hard on her lip attempting to shut herself up. Vincent looked away from her for a long, long minute; then went into his bedroom and brought out large towels, soap, shampoo, and a lantern. As scared as he was; how could he refuse her something as simple as a swim? He loved her. He could do this. HE COULD.

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With Catherine leading the way they reached the lake quickly. As she had promised, the area was very remote; with a small, sandy beach covered with small rocks. With the ledge formed as it was, it did look similar to the place where he swam at home;

While Catherine changed into her bathing suit behind some rocks, Vincent went behind a clump of shrubs and began to undress. He didn't wear a bathing suit. He never had. DAMN! His hands were shaking badly. He could barely undo the laces of his shirt. As he finally accomplished this; he lowered his hands to the buttons of his denims. His mind was splitting itself into two directions at once. One thought came back to haunt him, thudding against his fiercely beating heart. Catherine in a swimsuit: Never before had he seen her in this. What was her body like? Vincent shook his head until his hair almost hung in his eyes. Just swim. Or take a bath. Or soak your head! Quit thinking, damn it, If you lose control now.... Willing his body to reluctant obedience, he stepped from behind the shrubs and into the water. With long, sure strokes, Vincent was quickly into the middle of the lake. Standing, he saw with relief that the water reached well over his thickly haired chest. Good: His body could decide to embarrass him again at any time: At least whatever happened, he was covered. He had just begun to feel easier when from the corner of his eye he saw Catherine moving toward the shallower part of the lake. She stopped about twenty feet away, looked towards him; waved and began to wade into the water. Vincent was finding it very difficult to breath properly; this woman before him took all breath from his body in one enormous gasp of delight. Vincent was certain that everyone thought there were more beautiful things in the world than ANY woman, but they were mistaken. His Catherine was the most lovely,

the most truly beautiful thing or woman he had ever seen. Yes, Vincent would admit to being biased; still Catherine was beautiful, Her two piece suit was deep blue, scalloped at the edges with a fringe of golden chains. The soft roundness of her small breasts filled the top of the small suit perfectly, and the short curved pants of the bottom called attention to her long muscled legs. Almost as one hypnotized, Vincent stared at her until she ducked under the water, and came up gasping "it's colder than I remember!" After soaping and rinsing her hair, Catherine floated silently; momentarily lost in deep longings. Quite frankly, she had looked right at him as he entered the water. She made no effort to even pretend not to. Catherine wanted to see Vincents' body as any woman in love wished to see the man she felt the affection for. There was an elegance, an air of grace about Vincent that shook her to her toes. He had almost an aura of majesty as he walked down to the beach. He was so tall! And the way he moved, catlike, muscles rippling made her tremble inside. His hard golden body took her senses away and Catherine felt rise a passion for this man as she never had before; it consumed her. She wanted him; wanted him to take her totally. A small moan escaped her lips; she needed Vincent and uncaring now her eyes traveled downward, to the core of all he was. She thought her heart had stopped beating; the size of him was overwhelming. And, he was fairly relaxed at the moment. Oh, my God. She wanted him so badly, a sob rose in her throat. Looking up at the brightness of the moon overhead, Catherine suspected Vincent would see her stares and be very ashamed of his nakedness in her eyes. She knew he would not want to be THAT visible.

Not wanting to upset him, or cause a situation that would make him uneasy, she started to swim further upstream; away from him. Catherine hadn't gotten very far when her toes banged hard against hidden rocks below the lakes surface. With a sharp, loud cry of "OUCH", she stopped swimming; treading water as she examined her injuries and rubbed the pain away. Assuring herself that no great damage had been done, she started to raise her arms again; to continue putting distance between herself and Vincent before he could feel or sense the emotions now at war within her. Without turning she knew he was almost directly behind her. Silently Catherine begged him to STAY AWAY. But he had heard her cry out. Reaching Catherine, he took hold of her half-raised arm and held it between his fingers. "I heard your cry; felt the pain. Are you all right, Catherine? What happened?" Bending her head to shield her face from his, she answered softly, "oh, I'm fine, really. Just a small encounter with a few hidden rocks that scraped my foot a little, that's all. Really Vincent, I'm fine!" But he knew she was not being totally truthful with him and was shocked at discovering deceit in Catherine. He felt her begin to tremble from his touch and his mind opened to hers, as the turmoil she was lost in curled around his brain and burst into points of light in the deepest part of all he was. Vincent had to see her face; to truly KNOW what she was thinking totally. All at once it was the MOST important thing...to KNOW her thoughts. He HAD to know... Slowly he tilted her face up to his until their eyes met and locked; "are you sure all is well? Why are you struggling so to keep your mind from me, Catherine? Why are you not being honest with me? Tell me?" Vincent continued to hold her arm as he waited for her to say

something, ANYTHING to him. She remained silent. Then with a gasp, he felt all her emotions burst forth into his soul. The anguish, the longing and DEAR GOD, the passion he felt flowing from her to him. All the feelings he had never allowed himself to acknowledge within her before this night now filled his body and heart to overflowing. Struck out and seized him hot and unyielding. The power of it shook him, numbed him. Then possessed Vincent totally. As Catherine continued to struggle uselessly to free her arm from his firm grasp; to get away from the touch that was now tormenting her, the top of her suit became loose. One firm breast brushed against the hair on Vincents' arm. As she heard his throat open in a growl, she prayed he would now LET HER GO. He was too close, she couldn't bear this a moment longer. She had to get away before.... before.. Too late; it was too late. Vincents eyes narrowed as he pulled Catherine to his body. Held her pinned firmly against him. She had never before seen this look Vincent now had on his face. One of acceptance. Of being past caution. Beyond caring. Beyond thought and beyond his fear. As he pulled her hips harder to him, Vincents mind darkened with her touch. He couldn't get close enough, near enough. Wanted more, desired more. Needed... everything - everything. As his body arched against hers, he cried out for a release only Catherine could give him. There was no past, no tomorrow. Just this moment here with Catherine in his arms. He gentled his hold as he sensed then saw tears on her small face. "I tried to get away before you could learn my thoughts. I TRIED! WHY didn't you let me GO? Oh Vincent, I'm sorry. So sorry. Please, let me go? I can't bear this." As he put her arms up and around his neck, Catherine was confused. A strange muskiness now filled her nostrils;

Free ALL your dreams
to ME tonight !



was this his scent when aroused? Oh it was warm. It was wonderful and it was Vincent. Then he spoke and she looked fully up into his face; the voice was gravelly, huskier than she had ever heard it. "Catherine, it is all right my love. My dearest love." Gently he placed one hand under her chin, tilted her head back and looked so far into her eyes, she thought she would surely drown in his gaze: "All will be as it should be, now". He began to touch her face with hesitant fingers, sheathing his claws as he did. Bending his noble head, he kissed her softly in the hollow at her throat. Vincent became aware of her pleasure as he did this. He moved his mouth to hers; they rested lips together breathing in the moist warmth from the others' mouth. Rested lightly together as though in a promise. "I want to kiss you, Catherine. I must:" He paused as he heard her voice catch, "yes, I love you so much, Vincent. Kiss me, really kiss me." Vincent knew if he did as they both wanted, there would be no turning back, ever. Then he looked once more into her eyes, held her gaze to his and lowered his mouth fully against Catherine's. She kept her eyes open as he did, savoring the taste of him, as he took the sweetness that was her. Vincent was quivering down into the abyss of his soul. How sweet her taste was. How willingly, fearlessly, Catherine returned the pressure of his mouth with her own. His tongue probed between her lips as she parted them under his urging. As he felt her acceptance of this, he began sucking her bottom lip into his mouth, nipping at it until he knew he would go mad soon from wanting more. Catherine captured his lip as he had done to her. He moaned from somewhere within himself he did not recognize. Wrapping his hands completely in her hair, he

felt her hands beginning to move on his body. One to his stomach, where she rubbed her palm against the mass of golden fur. The other hand...AH! Her other hand now captured the hardness of him; stroked it, caressed it with her fingers as he swayed under this touch. Catherine clung to him, curling her nails lightly into his flesh as he panted, gasped at what her hand was doing to him. Vincent began to lick her with his raspy tongue; probed deep, deeper into her mouth until he felt her body surrender completely to his. All old fears, all cautions started washing away. Began dissolving into total nothingness. Vincent had claimed what belonged only to him at last. He would give all of himself now up to Catherine; trusting her to help him fulfill this passion that now closed over and surrounded them fully. This was the reality - Catherine. This was the dream; this was the woman he must possess. Vincent was not compelled to try and turn away from what was finally happening. With no experience and with his shyness, he may not be able to completely fulfill all of her desires, but he had to try. HE MUST TRY: He would not hurt her; knowing this released him to slowly try and tell her of what he needed from her. "Yes Catherine, yes. I must do this. I must have you for my own. All of you. This pain is too deep to bear. Help me? Please, help me? I want to love you as I've denied to you for so long. Can you help me, I want to please you. Catherine!" With this cry, he thrust up against her with his hips. again; then again. She gasped from the force, the strength of the man, "Yes, my love. I know, I know, I can't stop touching you, wanting you. It will be all right now. Hold me tight....tighter!" He was lost in passion now. His

face had darkened to bronze, his eyes to glittering slits of ebony as he asked one last desperate time the question he must, "Are you afraid, my love? I can try to stop now; only for a moment more hold onto some reason, some thread of awareness. Are you sure? Catherine, you MUST be sure...of THIS," Her answer was soft moans... "yes; we've denied the dream for so long. I trust you. I love you. Don't stop now, Vincent. Trust what you feel at this moment. Trust your instincts completely and make love to me;" Her words freed him, His blood surged hot, white-hot in his veins. Vincent was lost in a sea of passion, and Catherine was his only life-line now. Lifting her small body into his massive arms, he kissed her again, murmuring to her ear, "the waiting is near an end, my Catherine. Have patience with me?" Carrying her to shore, he lay her tenderly down on the blanket and knelt beside her, head down. As he looked at her from beneath his long lashes and golden mane of hair that cascaded now onto his face, he stammered, "I do not know... Teach me? Show me how to..what to do to please you?" She could feel him shaking as he asked for her help, then added in a whisper, "I know so little, I know...nothing, nothing." Hours passed as they patiently, wonderingly, discovered how to share their love fully. Vincent was stunned at the warmth of Catherine's body now beneath his fingers. The textures of her skin. Her round breasts. The way her hips curved outwards, then sloped to long lovely legs. As he learned how to touch and where to caress, Catherine heard his gasp of pleasure as she began to move her hands more urgently over his body. The state of his arousal did not shame him now. He trusted her to understand it, to accept it. To accept all of what he was, and disregard all he was not. She spoke words to him of how his body felt to her hands. Marveled at the

muscles of his thighs as they tensed beneath her touch. Told him how proud she was that he had chosen her. She whispered words of love Vincent thought never to hear spoken...to him. As Catherine slid her palms down his broad shoulders and onto his chest, she was delighted in the way the hair curled there. Then began to darken in color as it continued down to the center of his thighs. All this and more, Catherine spoke of to her Vincent. She knew his quiet acceptance of all she said. How it warmed him and gave him a proud, newfound confidence that amazed her. He now knew, was completely sure of her love; she loved all of him. His heart, his soul and his body. Nothing of him repulsed her. He found the strength to accept all she said - Catherine found him beautiful. Therefore, in her eyes, he would be beautiful always...always! Laying facing each other, they continued for a time to explore and delight in each others body. Her quiet beauty left Vincent stammering; lost for words for the first but probably not the last time in his life. He tried to tell her of his emotions, his feelings, "to know you are mine. That we can be as we are now. I cannot tell you...cannot express to you...". She smiled, "I know, my love. I have always known. From the first time you spoke my name, I knew you loved me. You had to learn to trust; to come to a place beyond knowledge for yourself, Vincent. Oh love: You took so long to find that place, I almost despaired you ever would. I'm so glad, so happy at this moment." As he finally found his voice fully, he asked one question, just one. The desires were enveloping him now, there was not time for more. "Do all lovers feel as we do now? I read of this in books, believing authors wrote what they wanted to BE instead of what WAS. Now with you, I have the truth Catherine. I have you," She opened

her arms to him, "come love. Share that truth with me. We'll fulfill it and make it real together." Strong, long buried instinct now came to Vincent; he came forth to show him the way to make love as a man, which is what he was. He brought his body slowly up and over Catherine's; restrained the urge to swiftly join with her at once. He knew he must hold back until she was ready to accept the weight of him on her, the length of him in her. He was losing this battle when she called out to him in a timbre of voice he had never heard before, "Vincent? Yes," As she urged his body to enter hers, Vincent prayed he could be gentle. That he would know how to be. Did not yet know that he could never be anything else...with Catherine. For she loved; how could he ever hurt her? He would learn this in time. (All things worth knowing take time, yes? Dear readers? Yes, I agree with you;) But, how could Vincent have known? Like the fragile blossoms on a spring rose, this was his birth. His virginal giving of himself to a woman. Entering her body, he whimpered softly as the warm moistness there took away his senses, then his breath. And he hoped for gentility. He began to move with a rhythm to his hips that seemed entirely natural. Spiraling downwards to the point of friction he had learned Catherine needed; then bringing his hips up and hers with his. His mind strove in vain to grasp onto some shred of reason, some spark of thought. This could not be. The passions that now flooded through him caused a roar of ecstasy from his lips as he began rising and lowering harder now, quicker to and from her body. He entwined his legs with hers as they rose and fell as one spirit now, Hovering just at the brink that drove

them onward harder and harder. When he felt her climax once, then again he drove deeply into her body, thrusting forward with greater speed, an urgency.....forced him down, down, down. With all the hunger of a starving man, a fierceness rose up and tensed his muscles towards one goal now. He was beyond thought, a rage to finish was consuming him. He lifted her hips to him to bind her more tightly against him. He was ready. He waited for it. Welcomed it. Needed it. With a sob that came from the depths of all he was and that brought a roar to his lips, he felt it flowing as he thrust one last time down into the body of the woman he loved. She cried out his name as he snarled in passion and orgasmed, flowed into her. Claimed for his own, for all his life. His world. His Catherine. Finally and FOREVER.....

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As he slowly regained his sense of self back, Vincent eased his body from her and curled away from Catherine's questioning look. A sob of despair escaped his lips before he could stifle it. Vincent was desolate, could not block from his mind her cry as they had finished making love. He knew when he had so fiercely thrust into Catherine near the end, he most certainly hurt her. He HAD, HAD hurt Catherine. Now his passions, his body totally revulsed him, shamed him. She now would surely hate him for the fury he had unleashed in her, the pain he must have caused as he lost all control in her arms. He thought he WAS a beast; it must be so. THIS made him want to flee from her eyes; the eyes that would now hold no love for the beast that had hurt her. Sobbing openly now Vincent somehow managed to get to his knees, trembling in his shame. Hiding his face in his hands, he tried to get to his feet; to get away before Catherine's words could confirm what he now felt was truth. Their

making love HAD freed the thing he most feared - the BEAST; She grabbed and managed to hold his arms as he struggled to rise, "Vincent? What is it? What's wrong? Please, WHat have I done?" He shook his head; he couldn't speak of it. Catherine was nearly frantic now, "talk to me, you must talk to me Vincent." She began shaking him now, trying to get his hands down from his face. He sagged and let his hands fall to his sides, still not looking at her, "what have YOU done. Nothing; you've done nor said anything but words of love I thought never, ever to hear in my life. It's what I have done to you. I heard you cry out, I hurt you. I always knew this would happen. Oh. God. How can I bear it? You must hate me now. I have become what has always terrified me the most. I AM the animal many said I was..I AM. And now I will surely lose you. This I cannot endure. Cannot live with the hurt I have caused with my....my LUST." He rocked back and forth crying in rage at himself. His heart felt as though it would shatter and explode from his chest to lay bleeding between them on the blanket. Catherine tried to soothe the tormented man kneeling before her. She held him close and finally forced his eyes to meet hers, "Look at me Vincent? You WILL LOOK AT ME! Am I repulsed by you now? Or afraid? Please look; See for yourself! Feel my thoughts, hear me, please HEAR ME. Is the bond broken? Or is it stronger now than ever before? Stronger than EVER." She screamed this at him, and shook him hard...harder as she fought for him to learn the truth of her words. But he would not be comforted, "I heard you cry out. Do not try to comfort me; leave me to my shame. Please, Catherine. LEAVE ME;" She rubbed her

face softly against his tensed arm, "yes, it's true I cried out. But in pleasure, not in pain! Not in revulsion, How could loving YOU ever hurt ME? Ever cause me anything but the greatest joy I will ever know in my life?" She pounded her small fists against his body, begging him to hear her, "Vincent, you cried out, Did I hurt you? Or did I return the pleasure you gave me? Tell me I'm lying; look at me and tell me I AM LYING," Slowly, he clenched his fists and forced his eyes to meet hers. He looked deeply into them for many moments, hard and unblinking. What he saw reflected back through her tears shook him to the honesty of her words at last. His mind reeled with all he saw reflected there; all the love. The joy that shone from her eyes to his. Could this be? Catherine was not trying to spare him anything. She had spoken as always, the truth. She still loved and wanted him. The beauty of all he saw in her eyes washed away all Vincents pain and fear. Cleansed him forever of the torment of his existence. He had NOT betrayed their love; their dream. He knew this now. He could see the dream serenely, openly shining back to him. Renewed and whole in Catherine's eyes. As her love rebuilt his torn heart, he knew. The dream was fulfilled, not broken. The bond was complete at last. He realized with great happiness never would he doubt it again, Never again. "How could I have known, Catherine? I had no knowledge that THIS is how love truly feels. I am so sorry for the love I denied us both, all these long years. There are no furies now my love, are there? Nothing can destroy or diminish what we have sought and found this night," All the darkness of his years lifted and drifted from him as he held his Catherine to his breast and whispered her name over and over again. "Catherine, my lovely

Catherine. Thank you...THANK GOD FOR YOU: Your patience and trust gives me all I sought or ever dreamt of having, or being in this world," Vincent enfolded her to his chest and kissed her lovingly all about the face as tears of joy ran down his face now instead of the tears of pain of a few minutes ago. He whispered to her, "with your love, Catherine, I am a man. A MAN!" She held him tightly and took her first deep breath in many long anxious minutes. He had really frightened her. She thought she had somehow displeased HIM. As she smiled back to him, Catherine repeated his words, "yes, my love. You are a man, you always were Vincent," Then she relaxed in his embrace and added, " and you're MINE!" She was newly strengthened with her woman's knowledge of knowing they are cherished and loved totally. Vincent was hers finally and forever. And free of his fears, thank God: The circle of their bond remained intact, fully completed now. It shone and surrounded them as they exchanged a kiss of promise, wrapped themselves in the blanket and started back to the cabin. If there are Gods or God, surely such as that was smiling down, giving blessings to Catherine and her Vincent this night. Surely, they had a right to that blessing?

The calling of early morning birds and the rustle of the trees awakened her. It was only six o'clock; it had been quite a night indeed. As Catherine's eyes became accustomed to the shadowy half light in the cabin, she leaned up on one elbow and studied the man sleeping so peacefully at her side. He was curled towards her as a child might have been; trusting and still. She stretched and smiled a secret smile, gloriously happy at the oneness she now had with Vincent. She marvelled at what had finally happened between them. Looking down at the innocence of the man she loved, Catherine

felt a new protectiveness rise in her for Vincent. She had always tried to keep him from harm, but this was a different depth of caring; more fulfilling than anything she had ever imagined could happen to her. Shivering, she curved her body to his and looked down on him. And was more that a little startled to find his gaze on her, "Vincent, you have the most incredible eyes! The way you look at me," Catherine lowered her head to his chest and listened to the calm, even beating of his heart. She wondered if Vincent was having any misgivings about the total closeness they now had. She blushed all at once, remembering the words of passion she spoke to him last night. Was it only last night! What would he think of her language? Had she embarrassed him? Had she pleased him in all the ways a woman usually seeks to please the man she loves? He could be so hesitant at times to share his feelings. WHAT was he thinking now, laying next for her in bed this first morning of their new life? Vincent smiled to himself; she was concerned about something. He thought he knew what it might be. Waking up with him in her bed must be something of a shock. He hoped she became accustomed to it quickly. He planned to be there as often as possible! His new confidence stunned him a bit as he sensed a shyness rising from her he had expected to be feeling himself and did not. They were lovers now and he was wondering the same things she must be. Had he pleased her? Was she content to be with him as they were now; cuddled together like this in bed? He knew HIS feelings: joy, awe, love, contentment, peace. These and many other emotions overwhelmed him by the strength of what he was feeling for Catherine, the depth of this love was astounding;

Moving his body down in the bed until they were eye to eye, Vincent reached out and gently rubbed Catherines flushed face; then began stroking her with a true lovers caress lightly all over. "Art thou real? I thought I had but dreamt thee. But if I am dreaming, let me NEVER awake. IF awake, let me then NEVER sleep." The way he spoke, his lack of hesitation as he touched her; overcame the last of Catherines' unspoken questions of how he was feeling towards her. She completely relaxed and let herself enjoy the feel of his furred hands on her breasts, then her buttocks. She gasped as Vincent began stroking her inner thighs with his thumbs. She reached out and tenderly pushed the hair back from his face, "without reservations, without questions. Forever, I will love you Vincent." They talked quietly together for a long while as lovers do. Then Catherine smiled and sat up. A sudden impulse overtook her and she began braiding Vincents' long hair; finally fastening it at the back with an elastic to the nape of his neck saying, "there!" He reached one hand up to his head, "what have you done to me: This is more a suitable hairstyle for a woman, no?" She giggled, "no, not really. Think back. In the hundreds of books you've read; haven't dashing pirates and other bold adventurous men always worn their hair this way?" Vincent thought a moment, then nodded his agreement to this fact. Catherine continued, "well to ME, you are a bold adventurous man, and most certainly dashing. And I think you look quite SEXY! Look for yourself," She handed him a small mirror and crossed her arms and waited for either his frown or smile, whichever; Looking at this

strange new hairdo, Vincent shyly approved of it. It WAS cooler, and perhaps the wind would not raise such utter havoc with it fixed in this way. "I consent to leaving it thus. You worked so hard getting it to braid. But if I see you looking around for an old inkwell to dip it into - it goes!" With a quick pat to her hip Vincent rose and began dressing. He had a sly purpose in doing this. He could then watch her dress, wanting to admire her body fully in the daylight. There were many womanly ablutions he had never yet seen. He was a trifle curious. Vincents eyes narrowed into almost a leer. He thought (I especially want to see THIS woman do these things. I don't think Catherine will mind...now. And I most certainly won't!) Catherine wrapped herself in a sheet and went into the bathroom. After washing, she came back into the room brushing her hair to find Vincent still sitting in the same chair in the same position. Why he was almost leering at her. Well! He asked if he could watch her dress, etc. and Catherine merely arched an eyebrow at him, called him a "peeping tom" and agreed. As she teasingly...agonizingly...slowly..began to put on lingerie, blouse, pants and lastly shoes, Vincent looked at the beauty of her skin, the flush pinked tone of her body, and was sorry he had suggested this whole idea. Grinning widely, he got up and went over to Catherine. Putting his arms around her and with an apologetic lilt to his voice, he nuzzled her quite hard and asked, "how angry would you be at the suggestion of undressing again, my love?"

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Two hours later, finally both dressed, they were impatient to be outside now on this lovely summer day. Wanting to begin the enjoyment of this, their first whole day here together, Vincent and Catherine behaved almost like two children set free from school for the summer! Urging each other to HURRY, they made a race of breakfast and ran outside hand in hand. The special place Catherine wanted Vincent to see was to be kept for their last day; a "treat". It had been agreed to first do all the other things they had planned so carefully back in Vincents' Chamber. She showed Vincent the other side of the lake. He was delighted when chipmunks, rabbits and other small animals allowed them to sneak rather close before scampering away. As they walked hand in hand Vincent turned his face to the sun; luxuriating in its feel. The almost biting heat on his skin was wonderful and so new to him. He secretly thought never again could he be entirely content to only travel the park by night. He would find some way to feel this sun again. They stopped deeper into the woods, and Catherine turned on the small portable radio, and began trying to teach Vincent the newer dance steps. First easy rock and roll moves; these he picked up quickly. With his natural grace, she knew he would. But, then a song came on that caused Catherine to giggle. This dance and song may be his undoing! It was called "Pump up the Jam", and the steps were very intricate, very lively and somewhat sensual. Well she thought - here goes! His body did not seem as eager to learn this as he was. His usually agile feet were beginning to trip him instead of help. These steps were impossible!

With a growl of impatience and almost a pout on his face, Vincent plunked himself down on a rock muttering, "Never will I be able to move like THAT, unless someone donates a new pair of legs to me! I did want to learn so badly; to surprise the tunnel teenagers at the next dance. They are firmly convinced that ONLY their generation can move; perhaps they are right. This is hopeless--HOPELESS. WHY can't I move as you are, Catherine?" Trying to make light of his look of frustration, she responded teasingly, "well, maybe you just washed your feet and can't do a thing with them." Vincent shot her a look that said he was NOT amused, Catherine decided on a slighter less dangerous tactic! Reaching down, she picked up a small branch, bent over and began drawing on the ground. When she stood up and put her hands on her hips and looked over to him, he smiled back. She had sketched a diagram, footsteps of the dance that had just now defeated him. Ah, this might work, this Vincent perhaps could follow; He sighed and pushed himself up from the rock and gingerly placed his feet onto the outlines in the earth beneath him. He remembered her advice to pick up the beat first with his ears and THEN his feet and body. He started slowly and after ten minutes that left him again cursing under his breath; it all seemed to "come together". He was dancing this strange dance like the best of them. He moved faster and faster to the beat of the music and wished that "Jam" song would be played again, Ha! He could do it now, he wagered. Almost as though someone heard his bet, Catherine changed the channel and there it was; "Pump up the Jam" rolled loudly off the speakers of the radio, and Vincent glared at it and then smiled.

Here goes nothing! Catherine watched mouth agape as Vincent spun, jumped and whirled like an old hand with these steps instead of as a novice. He was sweating profusely with his exertions, but the look on his face was delightful to see. As the song ended, he said a silent prayer of thanks and dropped to the grass, gulping air back into his lungs. "How was that Catherine? I may expire at any moment, but I DID the crazy steps as best I could. What do you think; will I pass the teenagers muster at our next celebration in the tunnels?" She was stunned; he was doing to move like THAT in front of people! NO WAY! He..he wouldn't! As if he had read her thoughts, Vincent smiled slyly, "to get the youngsters away from teasing me, I will show them one time and one time only, it doesn't take someone THEIR age to move to a few steps of music. However, if requested to sustain it for more than a few minutes, I will decline naturally. Father would have fainted by then and would require my assistance!" He laughed aloud as he said this; so did she. "Vincent, you are a wonder! You'll try just about anything, won't you? And the things you make up your mind to do, you seem to learn very quickly!" He was well aware Catherine's words had a double meaning and responded in kind. "Ah, but I have had the best teacher my love." They had been walking back to the cabin as they joked and were now standing by the lake. She smiled, unable to resist one last comment. "Welllll, you have some fancy moves, all right," Vincent had an inscrutable look on his face, "Oh I do, do I? Well, how about a fancy move into the water?" Catherine started to back

away from him slowly..."Vincent! You wouldn't dare. Don't you even THINK of it. I'll, I'll..... " The remainder of her threat was lost; merely blubbers as he scooped Catherine up, planted a kiss on her nose, and very gently dropped her into the water. She came up sputtering. and she came up mad! She turned as though looking down into the water, He couldn't see her eyes. Then she screamed, "Help! Something has my foot, Vincent! Oh, it's pulling me." As Vincent half splashed, half slipped to aid her, she suddenly stood and called out to him, "how is the water where YOU are, it's fine here!" Then Catherine held her arms across her chest and doubled over with giggles; he had been tricked! And now, Vincent was thoroughly soaked as well, He began to chastise her with a scowl as he bit back the grin on his face and tried to wring out his shirt; "THAT was NOT KIND or FAIR, Catherine, And I fell, quite literally, for every word! Ah, the deceit of woman," This was said with dancing lights in his eyes and a half hidden grin on his face. She responded quite seriously, though and with the tone & the innocence of a newborn child to her voice, "But, Vincent, SOMETHING DID have my foot, I.. I..think it was a a ...MINNOW!" With this, she batted her eyes at him, waited for what he would do or say next. He burst into a gale of roaring laughter as he looked over to her, "there is the LOVLIEST snake crawling up your left shoulder, my love. Be careful." Oh, No, Catherine wasn't about to fall for THAT old trick! She retorted, "there's no snake", then she looked to her shoulder, "UGH! DAMN, there IS a snake on me." She closed her eyes and begged, "please,pleeeeee, get if off! I don't like snakes, Vincent!" As he removed the snake s l o w l y, he turned it over and over;

admiring the colors and texture to the small creature. "it's quite extraordinary how nature blends things to hide in their natural surroundings, isn't it, Catherine? If it had been a frog, you perhaps could have kissed it and turned it to a handsome prince, As in the fairytales of old, yes?" He lowered his head, hiding his face from her and continued in a murmur she could barely hear, "since the first time you kissed ME, I have felt somewhat um,ah, transformed myself. Not a prince, but....." He got no further as Catherine tugged on his half undone braid and said purposefully, "I didn't transform you, my love. Merely gave you the strength...to face something you always had from the beginning but denied. Your own beauty. And courage. You are my prince; and don't you dare transform into anything else. I love you as you are." Then she began wading towards shore and called back over her shoulder, "just so long as you never get fat: You'd squash me!" As Vincent caught up to her, he didn't respond at first. Even though her words had been spoken lightly, Vincent could tell that they were meant; she wanted him as he was. Loved him as he was. This mere fact still amazed him! "Catherine, you never cease to astound me; the courage you have, the conviction you adhere to unwaveringly. You are the one with courage; not I," She looked over to him and just smiled. He was ignoring her statement of being a prince, was he? "Vincent? What would you do if I said I was beyond ugly, or if someone else said this to you?" He shook his golden head, "they would be either blind, or totally without taste!" Then she whispered, "am I without taste when I say you are a prince?" He said shyly, "no, but..". Catherine grabbed him suddenly by the shoulders, kissed him quite hard on the mouth, beamed

up to the surprised look on his face and proceeded to put COLD hands up under the back of his shirt, "Yow! Your hands are FROZEN, let me warm you!" With that Vincent began nibbling on her fingers, running his tongue up her palms than down over her nails, murmuring words of love as he did, "Your hands are so small, they taste so good under my tongue". He continued this until she was in torment; this newest sensation was going to drive her insane if he didn't....if he didn't..... stop it! Feeling her body tremble, Vincent knew it was not from the coolness of the water; or her clothes that were still clinging to her damp skin. He knew what he was doing to her, and he was enjoying it; the student was slowly becoming the teacher. And this learning to be the agressor was totally fascinating! Wrapping one arm about her shoulder, they left the lake and started back to the cabin. Drying one another off should prove interesting:

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After a good filling noon meal, Vincent wanted to lay outside in the sun for a while. Between the meal, the busy morning, and their latest act of loving, he felt completely done in. Leaving him in the grass, staring peacefully towards the sky, she promised him a surprise, no tricks and went off into the woods with a small pail. He gazed after her contentedly; this was the way to live ones life. No battles to be fought; no worries, just the warm sun, good food, shared laughter, and.....to love Catherine. But sadly dismissed his daydream

almost guiltily; they had responsibilities awaiting them back in the City. He, people who depended on him for their safety. She, her work and those she helped fight to live a decent life. But, dreams could be fun; maybe someday....? HOW did that old saying go in the movie he had once seen from a store window? He had the stars(in Catherine), better not to ask for the MOON. Swiftly covering his eyes from behind, Catherine exclaimed, "Close your eyes and open your mouth, I found the surprise I was hunting for! No snakes or frogs, tho' you almost deserve one after my bath in the lake. Come on, close your eyes, don't you trust me?" As he let her feed him some sort of unknown morsel of food, Vincent seemed half afraid to swallow it. Summoning courage, he bit down into wild blackberries, juicy and sweet! "These are really wonderful, what are they?" Letting him see the "treasure" in the pail, he looked at her and was grinning as he asked her how MANY of the berries she had eaten on the way back here? "A few, how did you know?" Putting one finger to her mouth, Vincent gently wiped and showed her what betrayed her. "Your mouth is quite purple, my love. Like a child caught at the jam jar! It is very becoming; I have never kissed purple lips, come here". After tasting fully the mouth he delighted in, he breathed into her hair, "your lips are the nicest, sweetest fruit of all." With that he began to explore more deeply, the mysteries of Catherine's mouth. Just to hold her slim body to his; to move his hands over it was enough. For the moment. After finally straightening their dishelvement,

they discussed at some length how to spend the rest of the afternoon. "Well", suggested Vincent, "I have promised to catch you some fish for our supper. You have the poles at the cabin, so, show me how to begin?" Back at the house, Catherine explained some of the intricacies of fishing to Vincent. He said it seemed to be easy, and decided to try his hand at it. But, refused to wear both his pants and the heavy chest high waders, one or the other, not both. Finally clad in waders, and the hat with funny looking hooks that Catherine had supplied, he took the fishing tackle and slinging the pole over one broad shoulder, was off to try "mans favorite sport". She had decided to let him do this alone and would watch from the bank. This way, she could encourage him if he actually CAUGHT anything, tho; she doubted he would; and be able to hide her face better should he do as her dad had done once; fall in. She was a bit amazed at the ease in which he seemed to pick up the "way" of a true fisherman. Playing out the line correctly, and then easing it slowly back to himself. He was trying to lure a rather large fish that swam nearby. She had explained how quiet one must be and held her breath until he roared in delight; and hooked the thing! Catherine put her hands tightly together over her mouth to keep from screaming advice as Vincent fought for the "prize" at the end of his pole. He yelled back to her, "Now what do I do? I've got it hooked, but HELP! I've forgotten how to get him into the basket without losing him. What do I do? Don't just sit there!

Help me BEFORE HE GETS AWAY, CATHERINE, HELP!" She cried back, "use the net...use the net. Vincent! Use the DAMNED net! Covering her mouth at her use of profanity, she had nearly reached him when, with a YOWL of surprise, he lost his precarious footing and tumbled backwards into the lake, just as her father had many years ago. He was stubbornly still gripping the fishing pole as he fell. "This fish is trying to drown me, and the waders are filling with water. Don't laugh, this isn't funny. I will hold onto this damned fish even if he tries to take me to CHINA!" Finally getting him to his feet, Catherine had to bite her lips HARD to keep from shrieking at how Vincent looked: The hat flopped dripping wet almost over his eyes and he had the look of a half-drowned kitten. Shaking his long hair, pulled free from its braid fully now by the battle, he sprayed them both completely with water as he shook his head back and forth to get his hair out of his eyes and the hat from out of them. "Catherine, you REALLY could have helped sooner, you....." Suddenly, he realized how desperately she was fighting to keep back the fit of laughing and he could picture how he must look at this minute. Vincent completely broke down, bursting into peals of loud raucous laughter that seemed to shake the trees nearby. "Oh WHAT a mess I am! Did you SEE the size of that fish? I almost had him, I was so close....." His voice began tapering off.....

and a strange look came over his face. He slowly looked down and into the waders, then with a wink, back to her. I DO HAVE THAT DAMNEDABLE FISH, LOOK!" As he pointed into the waders, Catherine stood on tiptoe and peered in to get a look at what was causing him so much amusement. There, staring up at her with a face only a FISH could make, was the "foe". "Vincent! This is a NEW way to catch fish, What unique BAIT you have used!" This brought more laughing, and as she helped him back to shore and out of the water-logged waders, made sure the fish was in the creel and they went to cook their supper. She promised him on the way to tell Father he had indeed caught the fish, But swore she would NEVER tell him exactly HOW! As she showed him how to gut the fish, and he had looked at it in disgust and began to do the gruesome job, she settled back into a chair not REALLY reading as he prepared their supper. After cleaning their plates, she complimented him on the meal adding, "Do you plan on any more fishing in THAT way, or shall we try to use the more, ummmm, reliable bait next time?" "Oh, that was funny, yes? I will show you what's funny; wait til I get you.....we will see who laughs last!" With that he lunged at her and started chasing her about the room with mock growls. From the kitchen, into the living room and finally, into the bedroom where they collapsed gasping for breath onto the bed. This day had been so much fun, Wet, but fun!

There would be so many wonderful and funny memories to share for years into the future; some with those they loved and SOME only between themselves. After recouping from their wild chase, they settled together on the sofa in front of the fireplace and Vincent began reading some lovely new poetry to Catherine. He had composed one himself; and shyly wondered how she would react to his prose. "I have written something for you, would you like to hear it?" "Of course." "I call it "through Catherines Eyes"(she smiled warmly at him when he told her the name of his poem.) He read and as he did, was so intent on not messing up, didn't notice the look on her face. He got to the last lines: "Upon my fevered brow, whispers "hush Beloved", Ah! New dear repose! Gazing down in disbelief, "this cannot BE", I cry!.. see the "beast" transformed, shining. Mirrored...golden! Reflected... beautiful! If but seen through Catherines eyes." Catherine asked quietly, "when did you write that?" "As you slept. After that first time we made love and came back here to the cabin, I could NOT sleep; thought of how to tell you the emotions that were running and tumbled together in my brain. I.....I..still could not believe you loved ME....ME! I went to the kitchen table and this is what I wrote; you liked it?" "Do you have to ask that? How could I not like it? I loved it Vincent; is this how I seem to you?" "Yes"."But THAT woman sounds like a....a "Catherine" that could brave anything. I'm not like her, am I?" Holding her face

between his strong hands, responded firmly, "yes, you are THAT Catherine: You did brave everything; you chose to love ME!" With that he lifted her into his arms and strode purposefully towards the bedroom. Ah dear readers, this was a night that cannot be written of; this was a time of passions one must feel, or have known to fully comprehend: This was the night they, unbeknownst to themselves, sowed the seeds that created the beginnings of their first child.....

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As she slowly regained some of her inner balance back, Catherine turned to look at Vincent in wonder: "What HAVE I created", she giggled to him. "Ah I have so many, many years to make up to you!" Well, if you say so, but must it be all in one night! Vincent really," "Have I truly pleased you, have I shown any.....any.....progress? Be gentle; THIS is still very new to me, you know," "Progress, PROGRESS! If you get any more accomplished; when we are back in the city, I will have to lock you in your Chamber during the day. I wouldn't want some WOMAN to get her hands on you; you... you.....Don Juan!" Now, I will ask you the same; am I all you thought you wanted? Be truthful, Vincent, I must know this," "All I dreamt of and more....much more:" He began nuzzling her neck gently, "as hard as this is to ADMIT, I am exhausted. I have learned so many new things these last two days." Grinning at her like a Cheshire cat repeated, "so MANY new things!" "OH, you"! She poked him in the ribs.

His "YOW" of surprise startled her; then she began to tickle him unmercifully as he pleaded, "I hoped you would NEVER find out how ticklish I AM. Stop, you will kill me! I cannot breathe! Can't stand anymore, HELP! STOP," "Do you give up?" "YES., YES! Oh. my poor ribs." Vincent twisted his body and Catherine found herself trapped. He had bound her head to foot, in the sheets, Had her wrapped; strussed up like a mummy. "My turn," he growled and began nibbling at her. First her ears, then her chin, her nose, all the while curling his long fingers into her side. "Vincent, I surrender. Stop, I can't move! No fair! You're bigger than me; pick on someone your own size, you.....you BULLY!" Finally ceasing to torment her, Vincent hugged her close as she tried dragging air back into her lungs, gasping, "I'll get you for that." Well, you started it, my love. You must remember with me, never start something you can't finish!" He grinned this to her and she sighed and curled into his embrace, tired and happy. He sensed she was drifting off to sleep. as contented as a kitten. He had worn her out. Holding her, he contemplated how peaceful, how natural holding her was. WHY had he ever been afraid? No matter, He would not be again. Plumping his pillow behind him, Vincent too drifted off to sleep, held fast in Catherine's arms.

As dawn, then 8 a.m. came and went, she still lay in bed, still dreaming. Something was wiggling her toes,

demanding her attention: "Sleepyhead, don't you want to get dressed, have breakfast and go for our walk to that special spot you have told me about? I have made breakfast: Come and eat!" "Okay! I'm up, I'm up!" Still yawning, she ate the meal he had prepared and dressed quickly. This was the day she had waited for. Catherine had agreed to wait until this, their last day to show Vincent this place. But deep in her heart, the impatience to show him was almost too much to bear.

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They had walked silently enjoying the beauty of the surrounding woods for about 20 minutes, when Catherine put her hand in front of him and halted his steps. "Look, shhhh!" Following her nod to the left with his eyes, spotted two tiny gray rabbits enjoying some sort of vegetation; their morning meal. Then he caught a movement from nearer them and saw a very large rabbit, probably their mother, guarding as a sentinel would, her small children as they ate. With his keen sense of sight, he noticed two small red animals quietly in greatest stealth, approaching from the back side of the tree nearby. He whispered to Catherine, "here comes trouble. They seem to be thieves!" "I think they are chipmunks, let's sit and see what happens?" "YES!" One chipmunk caught the attention of the mother and the other went around the side of the tree towards the smaller ones, reached out and snatched the food out from

under their very noses! "Aha", thought Vincent, "one distracts and the other plays the thief!" Taking the stolen treasure up the tree and out of the reach of the furious bigger rabbit, the chipmunks sat down, and begin triumphantly to enjoy their robbed meal smugly. As they stood to continue walking, he said dismayed, "well, that hardly seemed fair to me. Poor little things. But weren't they cute? Like a scene out of a Beatrix Potter book; so tiny," She didn't respond. Her attention had been drawn upwards, to the sky above them. "Vincent! an eagle, Isn't it beautiful?" As he gazed in awe at the bird swooping and soaring above him, he agreed, "Yes, very lovely, majestic! Look at how it dives and seems to be searching for something." The eagle banked its wings to the right and Vincent saw what it was searching for. In front of him, were the two small rabbits they had just seen, innocently cleaning themselves, unaware of their doomed fate. He abruptly started running, scaring the wits out of Catherine, "WHAT are you doing, where are you going?" Waving his long arms like a man possessed, he shouted towards the eagle, "Go away! Shoo, leave them alone, they are too small to make a meal for YOU!" Go away!" Out of breath from trying to keep up with him, she gasped, "You know better then to interfere with nature; what did you do that for? I loved the rabbits.....but Vincent, the eagle must be hungry too." "Well, he will just have to look elsewhere for his meal. He won't get THEM while I am

watching him, I just cannot let him. I know it is silly,
But those poor things lost one meal today, they will NOT
BE a meal for that eagle." One of the rabbits was almost
frozen at Vincents feet, seeming unable to move in his fright.
First that flying thing almost got him; now WHAT was THIS huge
creature kneeling down so quietly before him? He trembled even
more at the size of Vincent as he reached out one hand,
picked him up and held him gently to his breast. "Do not be
frightened, little friend. I will not let that bird eat you;
at least not today!" He began stroking it softly. As he did,
it stopped quaking and seemed to go almost limp in his hand.
"Catherine, it is so small, Feel its fur, almost like velvet:
I did the right thing saving it; it is so helpless." She
agreed and reached out to scratch the bunny behind its ear and
startled, it leapt from Vincents hand and onto the ground,
trying to get its bearings. "Oh, damn, I've scared it," "No,
look; its mother is waiting for it. I am sure it would prefer
getting his comfort from her, instead of us." As they started
towards Catherine special meadow again, Vincent asked her a
question: "This was a very long distance to travel by yourself
as a child. How did you talk you poor father into permitting you
to go alone? Wasn't he angry when he found out you had gone so
far from the cabin?" "No, never really angry. I simply told
him the truth; that I had gone exploring and lost track of
the time. For my birthday that year, he gave me a beautiful watch

with a small note attached that read, "For Catherine/As you wander 'neath tree and bower, BEHAVE yourself and watch the HOUR! THAT was his idea of being MAD! I never went into the woods without it again. He was such a dear man, I don't think he ever told Mom of all of my excursions, partly to save me from being "grounded" and partly I think, to save himself from her wrath at his neglect of me. Poor Dad!" "He must have been a great man indeed, to love you so much, yet still give to you the freedom he knew you needed to grow and search for new experiences. Hold his concern to himself and trust you enough not to make too many mistakes in your searching, I wonder what he would have thought now, of us?" "Vincent, I truly believe he simply would have watched us, smiled, loved us and approved of my choice. He always wanted along with Mom, for me to have a happy life. She put her head on Vincents shoulder. Hugging him she said simply, "I'm happy."

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They had gone another two miles, when Catherine said excitedly, "we're almost there! Stay here a second while I take a quick look around? There could be changes...people...." She returned and took his hand, "It's as I remembered, come and see!" Following her through the thickening brush, he drew the bushes apart and was astounded. A small meadow was before them, filled with flowers, trees, and a small brook tumbled and tripped over rocks nearby. He saw a slight movement

to the left and focused on it. What was there? It was three magnificent deer, grazing and quiet. A doe, a small wobbly fawn, and off to one side guarding them, a buck of such size, Vincents' eyes opened wider and wider as he looked on him. "Look at those antlers! They look strong enough to pierce armor! Catherine, look at the fawn and the mother." As she watched the baby stooped to nurse at his mother and she licked him and cleaned him gracefully, tenderly with her tongue. The magnificent male came towards his family and touched noses with the doe in a gesture of love. A natural scene, familiar to those knowing the ways of animals, But all new and so very beautiful to Vincents eyes. "There must be a God, Catherine. To have made such as those regal animals, there surely must be:" Tho' he spoke very low, the deer seemed to hear or catch the strange scent of the intruders and with a startled leap, all three disappeared at great speed. into the surrounding woods. He and Catherine decided to sit for a while; to see if anything else wandered into view. Settling down beside him, she posed a question, "do you see why I always loved this place? It's so undisturbed by man; natural as it must have been so many hundreds of years ago. Was it worth the walk?" He didn't answer right away, then when he did, it was with excitement in his tone. "LOOK!" Hundreds of butterflies. Over there, to the left: Hundreds of them, look at the colors Catherine! The purple ones, look at the purple ones!" She did, and remembered. These had always been her favorites. These butterflies had wings tipped with yellow, and each wing had a heart-shaped center. How

perfect of them to appear at this moment, on this special day. She turned to share these thoughts with him when a flashing, blinding white "something" made them jump, frightened, to their feet. "What was that!" She was shaking, it had scared her so badly. "I don't.....know. It moved so fast, I.....I did not hear it approach! Catherine...I did not hear it or sense it. This cannot be!" "YOU didn't sense it?" Vincent wasn't able to speak....his whole body had tensed as he searched with his eyes into the meadow; looking for a glimpse of what had terrified both of them. He shook his head as if trying to clear it and then replied to her question, " NO, I did not hear or feel it near us. But Catherine, I always know.....always!" Vincent spun around and then he froze, ready to spring if the unknown thing threatened or moved toward them. But what he saw dazzled him instead of causing fury. He blinked his eyes several times rapidly. "I saw it, but the sun must have been in my eyes; I saw.....something.....strange. No, NOT strange, wonderful, not real! Did you see it, Catherine? Did you SEE anything?" Thinking that the shadows, the sun, SOMETHING had played a trick on her mind, Catherine stammered an answer to his urgent question. "I.....I think I did. It...it reared up and then was gone so.....fast. Vincent, did I see.....a horn? Did I SEE THAT?" then in a quivering voice answered her own question. "NO, I didn't see a horn. Vincent, DID I?" Catherine felt as though she was losing her mind, she had

started to shake as she never had before and talking to herself, "I did NOT see anything, I did not see that...that horn. I couldn't have." Then repeated in a broken voice, "I.....couldn't....have!" She turned to face Vincent. He was so quiet, it frightened her even more, "Vincent, WHAT did we see, please, I'm afraid." Regaining his voice, he said almost in a whisper, "We saw.....a.....Unicorn, we saw a.....Unicorn." He grabbed her tightly to his chest, and she felt he too was shaken as he repeated it once more, "WE SAW A UNICORN!" " Vincent, that can't be. They don't exist, they NEVER existed, Vincent, I'm so scared!" Taking many deep breaths, he seemed to regain his lost composure. "Catherine, in the reality of our world, such as that creature does not exist, is not supposed to be. Man has always been able to negate mysteries..... with fact, magic with truth, but this, I can't explain it away, I can not deny my own eyes, I what I know I saw! Catherine, neither can you, you must know this to be true. You have not lost your mind, you saw exactly what I did." She nodded her head in agreement slowly. "Yes, I know what I saw." Vincent continued, "I simply know I did not sense it, did not see it until it let me, until it was right in front of us. That anything, any creature could get THAT close, is quite impossible to believe. Yet I must believe it; it happened; I can't explain it AWAY, I do not want to try, do you? Do you really want to deny what we saw here just now, really?" She raised her eyes to meet his.

"No, I don't. I won't deny that beautiful creature. Someone, something, wanted us to share this together. Who am I to say no to this? We had a glimpse of something magic, that's all I know, that's all I need to know. It just WAS." He stooped to pick a small red flower and handing it to her, Vincent had tears in his eyes. "It WAS what we used to be; an impossibility that.....became.....REAL!" With a look of anguish on her face, she cried out a question, "How can we go back to the dirty, petty peopled city? How can I take you back to that dark tunnel that is your home after this; after all that has happened to us in this place? Allow you to go back into that.....that.. world, the cruelty of a world that would kill YOU, YOU! If it found you Above. It's too unfair, I can't bear to go back there, Vincent. To know you must live in the secrecy of the tunnels. As much as you are at home there, you deserve more, you deserve everything. How can I endure the fact of knowing the gentlest man on this earth must hide his true nature, all of what he is, in.....SHADOWS !" She sobbed bitterly on his shoulder, as though her heart were broken and torn from her. Overwhelmed at her vehemence, he tried to console her, to explain to her how he felt at this moment, "Listen to me, please Catherine? I know it IS hard to go back. But we must. Many depend on us for their very survival, you realize that. But think...think of all we have had in three days, just three

short happy days! We can remember and share this now forever:
Nothing can hurt or part us ever again, not even death. We are
one, my love. One heart, one body.....one soul. We have
endured much. it is true. Will continue to. But people cannot
hurt us, life itself cannot hurt us. Apart we were strong -
Catherine, but together! Why together, we can never be truly
vanquished! This is now our bond, our truth. Do you not yet
understand? Even though my world be forever dark, forever
have no sun, I need no sun, no ordinary light to ever guide
me or make me forget my way of having to live. It is true that
yes at times, the world Below CAN be made to seem dark,
when threatened by the world Above. But even then, even THEN,
in that darkness; I HAVE light, I have you... I have EVERYTHING.
With your smile all darkness fades; your thoughts as you walk
Above are my thoughts. I feel the warmth you feel, see what
you see! I draw my light from you Catherine; this light never
dims. I am where you are and feel what you feel. We are never
truly parted, you know this to be truth." As Catherine listened
to his gentle words, her tears dried and she was at peace as
she held her head to his chest and listened to his strong, sure
heartbeat. "You are my world; you will always be all I ever
need, ever want in it." "I gladly accept the responsibility
of that commitment. But then, are you not also my world?
My world and my spirit, are YOU. Not people, not places, even
one as glorious as this. But you, The future holds no terrors
for me at last, my love. Given a choice of remaining here

in the sun, in this place alone; or being in darkness, in tunnels Below with you; there is no real choice. I WILL BE WHERE YOU ARE always, always. In you lies my destiny, our destiny. My choice will always be you and in that fact is my peace, my true FREEDOM. I am content my Catherine. We are something that has never BEEN. This is a great honor, also a great trust someone, something has given us. We have had the courage to see beyond the seeming differences of what we are, to overcome what others deem we should be. Leaning down to his love, he kissed her with a tenderness indescribable, with gratitude and joy. "Dearest Catherine, the dream continues as we continue. WE were blessed, WE were chosen.....to see the Unicorn."

P.O.V. Father

As I welcomed Vincent and Catherine home Below with a silent prayer of thanks, I became aware of a new ease in their way with one another, as well as those around them. Of how secret smiles dart about their lips, the sureness in their voices when they speak to each other and to me. A new confidence in my sons' way as he had just now talked with me. It is not as before. It is as though I am the child, he the man! Ah I know the reason; almost expected this would happen, I have seen that look before. I had it with

my own true love, my Margaret long ago, so long ago, I am glad for both of them, But yet saddened for myself. Being honest, I now know to whom he will turn first; not to me as he always did before, But to Catherine. This is as it should be....now. I feel his growing away from me; this tears at my heart, yet I know he must do this, He is truly a man now. I must continue to remind myself of that. Must never allow myself to address him, speak to him, as a child ever again. I am no longer his teacher, the wiser one. No longer will I show him the way. Catherine must do this now, she must be his new strength, his world and he, hers. Ah, I envy them what the future now holds for them, Cherish it, my beloved son, my dearest Catherine, Cherish it, shine and keep it bright; the hope! My son is a man now, in all the meaning of what that word represents. With new strengths to help ease his way in his world here Below, and who can foretell, who can foresee? Maybe, MAYBE, dare I even think the thought? Maybe someday Above, in Catherine's world ALSO. As I went to explain the story I had loaned to Catherine; to tell her and Vincent it was an analogy really, written by one so long ago, to one he loved, Yes, by me, to my Margaret. Perhaps they have found in the verse all the truth I hoped for them to. That love can open many doors, to endless unexpected new wonders; if we but remain faithful to the wait, But as I explain the story, they listen, nod as though they TOTALLY understand, and then smile quietly one to the other. More secrets?

Watching as they go hand in hand, to Vincents Chamber,
and a late supper, I am content for the moment, at least,
to let them dream the dream so long denied them. To revel
in each other as lovers should. But they must be made to
see, there are still dangers, still limits that they must
learn to live within. Shadows are there, unknown terrors
of the future await them. Like a trap made of silk, light
but so, so, strong, to entangle them: They must be made
aware.....NO. I shall leave them in peace, the worries
of today are enough for me at the moment. They are grown,
and must be free to chose their own path. Dear GOD? Let the
path be gentle with them, soft beneath their feet? Not let
them stumble? But if they should stumble, don't let them
fall? Catch them in YOUR hands? For me? And if YOU chose,
someday.....dare I even think it.....someday, perhaps
a child, my grandchild; to help teach, to show our ways?
NO, that is a dangerous and impossible daydream, and yet?

Ah- well. I look upward toward the highest point of the
cave of the winds and smile. Whirling and buzzing, a small
model plane soars and swoops! Mouse also has had his dream fulfilled!

Yes, Vincent and Catherine, with your now total sharing
of your love, new hope shines down on all of us. You have
given new dreams, new daring to imagine to all of us. Love
is the key, as you have learned. And with love such as YOURS!
There are truly.....no impossibilities. NONE WHATEVER.

The Solitary

By

Patricia Anne Kehoe

It has grown very cold now as I walk swiftly
towards my home in the tunnels Below. I draw
my hood up to shield and protect me from the
chill night air.

I should not have ventured out this night;
why did I feel the need, the call to go?
Grass rustles a protest beneath my heavy boots.
Is each blade as solitary as I? Ever alone this
and every night?

The dark sky is quiet - the stars themselves
hide their soft light from my expectant gaze.
And I continue to walk - quite resigned to my fate.
How accustomed to this solitary life I have become:
Had to become, sadly knowing it would ever be thus -
for me.

As my feet slip on the mist-dampened hillock,
my eyes are drawn upwards to the other bank;
something is there. A black shadow of ...what?
Cautiously, fearfully, I approach the stillness
of what even my eyes cannot decipher yet.

A sickening, sweet scent of blood assails my
nostrils. But with it; the scent of a being. An
injured soul, left to die here - as unwanted as I
am - Above. So sad - discarded as tho' nothing.

Hurriedly, I pick up and cradle the shadow in my
arms; it is a woman. As I carry her to my home, I
feel a glow - a warmth.....how strange.
Why does my heart beat faster with her in my arms?
What makes me no longer cold? Or Afraid?
Or alone?



Through Catherine's' Eyes

By
Michele

As she holds in exquisite tenderness, the tortured
soul of ALL I am; seems in truth...so unafraid.
With woman's grace and rapturous form, loves this
beast. "Oh," I weep, "what poor bargain hast thee
made?"

Dares negate with trust the cruel emptiness called
'me'. In shining spirit moves forth to share the
dream.
With fierce and bravest heart sweeps into the black
abyss all terrors. Once lost, I am with her reborn...
serene.

Til now abject and in despair, no hope had I to abide.
Simply continue, as a man.
Gives life's promises, her world for...me. Claims I am
not grotesque, as I bitterly avow, "see in truth all
and what I am!"

How courageously defeats all furies; my inner beasts
to rest. Vanquished. Fought no more.
Clasps me close to lead, as blessedly released;
long-banked passions freed, we love, we soar!

Cleaves close to hold so innocent. Soothes this
saddened heart and heaving breast. As I, when unknown
hungers rise plead, "hold me. Help me. Blood surges,
courses. Gives no rest!"

Upon my fevered brow whispers, "hush beloved". Ah
new dear repose. Gazing down in disbelief, "this cannot
BE", I cry.
See the beast transformed. Shining, mirrored golden.
Reflected.....beautiful!

If but seen through Catherine's' eyes.



Free All Your Dreams to Me Tonight

By - P. A. Kehoe

The amber moon is awash with stars silvered lights,
beaming softly onto our bodies from a sky of ebony
satin - blue velvet hued.

Free all your dreams to me tonight.

I must touch you! Kiss your body - clasp yours
close to mine. There is no fear as the abyss of
my passions rise, urging yours to join in sweet
release.....

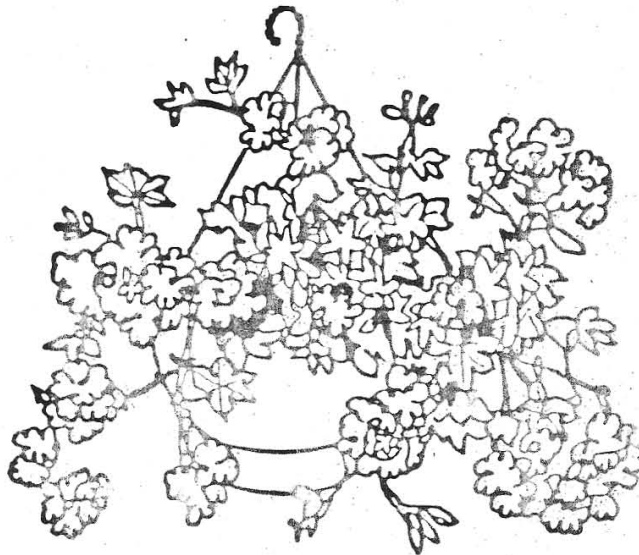
Free all your dreams to me tonight.

You and me - drifting, floating. Our bodies moist
from sated desires.... Renewed to begin the dance
of love again. Deftly I capture your tongue to mine;
we mesh as one.

Free all your dreams to me tonight.

Hovering, joining flesh to flesh, sobbing as my
darkest passions gasp for yours to meld to our
bond. Soft as a candles glow, I feel all of what
you are, as we fall, flow...beyond..beyond.

Free ALL your dreams to ME tonight!



"Calling"

By

P. A. Kehoe

Misty shadows of night hover. Fall softly
on those below.
Calling for remembrance; calling hushed
'neath moons soft amber glow.

Haunting memories, veiled in mystery
now called forth do rise. Phantom
melody plays tenderly. Summons tears to
now sad eyes.

In the world where all abide, life is here;
then so quickly gone! Still, somewhere in the
afterglow, loves lives. On and on!

Calling dreams of long ago to meet in
rendevous. Shadows mists of deepest night,
calling me to you.

Calling me.....to you!

**

Loves Promises Fulfilled - Part 1

The Invitation

Patricia Anne Kehoe



Even here Below in the tunnel, the stifling July heat was oppressive as Vincent paced his Chamber in extreme agitation. He felt as though he were in a cage; unable to will himself to calm down or cool off. Writing in his journals proved useless; with a snarl of impatience he flung the book opened and forgotten to the floor, away from him. With a roar of disgust, he threw himself Face down on the bed and attempted to gather his thoughts together. WHAT was the problem with him these last weeks? He didn't know, didn't care. YES he DID know. He forced his mind to acknowledge that fact finally. Catherine, His lack of her was the problem. His need for her to be with him was slowly driving him to the brink of madness. Tossing and turning on the bed, sleep was denied him almost teasingly. His very body taunted him; let him begin to fall asleep, then would startle him awake with new urges, deep longing. With a cry of anguish Vincent sat up, cursing and muttering to himself quite loudly. As he did this, Father entered the Chamber. "Vincent! Are you well? You seem to be so restless, Half the population is awake thanks to your yells and snarls. It can be heard quite a distance down the tunnels; what is it? What is troubling you so?" Vincent rubbed at his temples in a vain attempt to ease his throbbing head and tried to explain the turmoil that was unendingly torturing him. "You KNOW Catherine is unwell; nothing too terribly serious, a rather nasty cold. A slight fever. But Father, she won't see me! Will not let me near to help or comfort

or be with her, I cannot understand her reasoning in this.

The logic she is using, She knows well of my immunity to those kinds of germs, yet insists new and mysterious viruses are being discovered all the time. And she will NOT take the chance the germs she has would hurt me. Catherine is Above...ALONE.

How can I be at peace or rest, while she suffers ? While she is ill and alone up there?" Vincent turned for Fathers counsel with a look of complete desolation. "But if as she says, it's not that serious, why do you insist on worrying so? You've barely slept or eaten in almost two weeks; that won't help either of you, now will it? Well, will it?" As his son just glared at him, Father realized to try and talk, reason to him now would be useless. In his state of mind, Vincent would not be listening, really. He also perhaps knew a thing his son did not, or at least would not let himself acknowledge yet.

Not just Catherine's cold had caused all THIS, Father knew his son not only missed her with all his heart, he also now needed a release only she could give. With the total love they now shared, the bonding finally complete since the trip to the cabin and woods of Catherine's childhood, Vincent now not only missed her terribly, he desired her as well. His body now sent signals his son was not used to having, or would not be honest about having. Father sighed. How could he make Vincent face a fact

he perhaps, wasn't ready to? He now had a true mans passions and having them, his physical needs demanded a release of these desires with the woman he loved; would not rest or let him rest until the passions were released. He must be shown how to deal with all these new emotions now tearing at him. Before he lost himself up to them. Taking a deep breath. Father began, with temerity, to attempt to reason with his son. "I know you miss Catherine, but....." He got no further. "Of COURSE I miss her, must you state the OBVIOUS? Father, please!" Almost instantly contrite at the shocked look on Fathers face, Vincent tried to say he was sorry, "I'm.....sorry. I just.....just cannot talk about this right now." "Would a game of Chess perhaps help you to relax a little?" "Maybe later, but right now, Father, do you mind? I have to be alone, to THINK." Nodding assent, Father started to leave. "We can talk whenever you feel like it. Maybe later, in my Chamber?" "Yes, later". He looked back at his son, shook his head sadly, and left. Vincent saw the pronounced limp, the slow and awkward way his Father climbed the few steps, The effort even the short walk from his Chamber to his sons must have cost him. His Father in pain and trying to help: And THIS is how he had thanked him, with angry words? Vincent put his chin down into his clasped hands, and continued brooding over his troubles. A small boy appeared at the Chamber entrance. "Vincent, this is for you." "John, what is it? A note.....from Catherine? Here, give it to me please!" Barely thanking the boy, Vincent sat back down and began to read impatiently.

In his own Chamber, Father also attempted to do the same; it was entirely to warm to try much of anything else. A sudden loud voice startled him from his book. Looking up over the rims of his glasses, he saw Mary standing there looking back at him quite distressed. "WHAT is the matter with Vincent? I tried a while ago, to offer him a glass of cold lemonade and he almost ORDERED me to leave him alone; This is NOT like him. WHATEVER has made his so.....so...thoroughly disagreeable? Can I help in some way? He...seems terribly upset," "No Mary, none of us can really aid at this time. He misses Catherine, is worried for her recovery. You know how he is where Catherine is concerned, We all have felt his terseness these past weeks. Better we leave him to his own company for now, yes?" "Well, all right, But, REALLY!" As she stormed out indignantly, Mouse and Pascal were nearly bowled over by her sudden appearance in front of them as they were entering to also talk to Father. Mouse looked so very sad, "Father! Vincent angry, Vincent mad....at US?" Pascal joined in, "Yes, why was Vincent so "short" with us when we tried inviting him to play a game of darts this morning? Even the children sense something is not right. Has he been this MISERABLE with everyone, even Catherine?" Father started to talk, stopped, tried again to find the proper words; then said, "No, not with Catherine; Vincent hasn't seen her for almost two weeks. She's a bit ill and won't expose him to the germs, so.....he has not seen her.....at all." Pascal looked puzzled as he said, "oh, I see"; then looked as though a bolt of "truth" had hit him! "OH, I DO see!" Smiling just a bit, he began to

push Mouse ahead of him out of the Chamber. This was going to take quite a bit of "delicacy" to explain to Mouse! He whispered quietly to him as they left.

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After reading and then rereading Catherine's short note, Vincent tucked it into his belt and seemed to relax a bit. Just to see her delicate handwriting gave him a small kind of comfort! His eyes looked far off; daydreaming, thinking back to the cabin, the lake, thinking back to the first time they..... Sighing deeply, Vincent reopened the note and began to read it again.

Vincent, the poetry, notes and flowers were beautiful. I could feel the love expressed flowing over me like your touch itself. I have missed you too. Yes, I am most definitely feeling better today; in fact, I am going to do a bit of shopping tomorrow. I have this urge for spaghetti, of all things! Will you come for supper tomorrow and share it with me? Do you like spaghetti? I hope so, I always tend to make so much. Could you stay a few days, that would be fun. You have never REALLY seen my apartment, you know. Come and read to me while I cook? Thank you again for the kindness of the poems...for everything; while I fought off this miserable cold. Just knowing you were waiting for me hastened my recovery, I'm sure.

See you tomorrow?

Forever, Catherine [☺]

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With a good deal lighter step and voice, Vincent spoke gently as he entered Father's Chamber. "Catherine has invited

me Above for supper tomorrow night. I may stay a few days, depending on well she really feels. If you have need of me - send word. Do not worry, I'll be safe with her. I do apologize for my behavior of these last weeks. I don't really know what got into me. I will make it up to you and the others, I promise! See you in a few days, perhaps." With those short, terse sentences, he hugged Father hard, and was gone, humming a tune to himself. As he watched his son leave, Father looked resigned; try not to worry, indeed! He may as well have asked me to sprout wings and fly! He always worried for his sons' safety, even with Catherine; lately especially with her. He grinned at this last thought, and realized his son had not asked to go, merely told him he was going. Ah, these young people, they were so impatient, so.....passionate! Stifling a chuckle over his choice of words, Father turned to straighten out the books Vincents' haste had knocked about and down from the shelves; now laying in a tumble on the floor.

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As he made his way Above, to Catherine, Vincents heart was pounding so hard, it echoed in his ears. He had missed her so. Even the realization she was not well had not stopped entirely his longing for her presence, her touch. He would need to ask her if this "emotional" turmoil was, to her knowledge, common to all lovers? Had to ask if all felt this depth of desolation when parted as they had been, for TWO WHOLE WEEKS. But knew, deep in his heart, he would

not ask her this. Such a shameful display of selfishness. His mind on desire for her as she suffered so, was so ill. Using a natural stealth, he secretly had gone to the balcony just one time in these last weeks. Just to look at her, see that she was all right. He had not made his presence known. Had just watched her for a few moments while she coughed and sneezed.....and swore to herself. He had left then, the urge to enter and be with her had almost overwhelmed him. He had to leave quickly. He had felt himself to be suddenly a SPY! Peeking into windows like that. Thinking of desires, instead of concern; the shallowness of his own thoughts shamed him. No, he could not ask her if the way he was feeling was a commonplace thing; it was too....too embarrassing! As sure as he was that she had missed him, Vincent was also positive she would NOT have been so surly or dramatic about the being apart. There was no time to berate himself further. He had barely cleared her balcony wall, when the doors were flung open and Catherine was in his arms, clinging tightly to him. "OH, I have missed you so much! This absence has been unbearable, hold me, just hold me!" As Vincent pressed her small body to his and kissed the top of her head, he was tremblingly filled with wonder, with amazement, She HAD been as desolate as he; as sick as she had been, had still felt the separation unbearable. Silencing her cry of "No, don't kiss me, the germs.....", with a deep, almost desperate kiss, he was not quite as ashamed of his "selfish" feeling as he had been. He now

had Catherine's confirmation that it WAS normal to feel as he had, quite normal. As her arms went about his neck, and she returned his kiss. Vincent knew, with a deep sigh, all was well at last; His Catherine was BACK where she belonged, in his arms.... After a moment Vincent drew back to get a better look at her, "You are so pale, Are you certain you feel well enough for my company? All Below hope you are recovered. Father sends his best....." Vincent got no further. "Can we continue talking inside? It's too humid out here, Don't you want to hold me, really hold me?" Catherine seemed aware suddenly, at the boldness of this statement, But continued, "we could sit and talk...it IS cooler, I have the air conditioning on.." The rest of her words were muffled by Vincent's mouth pressing down on hers demandingly. Sweeping her up and into his strong arms, he nuzzled her neck and caressed her shoulders. Crossing over the threshold in one long stride, he murmured huskily, "HOW I HAVE LONGED FOR YOU, NEEDED YOU, CATHERINE!"

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They stood and whispered endearments for a few moments, then Catherine took his hands and led him into her bedroom. The lights were dim, candles flickered softly here and there about the lovely room. Setting her feet on the floor, Vincent barely noticed the beauty of his surroundings, His mind had focused on something much, much lovelier. As she stood before him, the moon's light shone through the thin, silken fabric of the purple nightgown she wore; bringing her body into full view through the thin gauze of the material, the

curves of her limbs shook him; tenderly he reached for her with eyes burning as hot blue coals into hers. "You are so beautiful, come here to me, my love", As he nipped her lips gently!.....the headiness of her perfume aroused him even further; if that were possible, Slipping one long, curved nail under the slender strap of her gown, Vincent slid it down her shoulder; removing the other strap, Catherine shrugged and the gown lay in gathers at her feet. Standing before him, she was not at all ill at ease, not shy. She proudly knew her body was firm. Not as endowed as she would have liked, but Vincent loved it, that was enough for her. Her skin began to glow, warming with the penetrating looks from the man she loved so deeply. Catherine knew he was fighting to control the urge to take her to the bed quickly. Knew Vincent was a passionate lover that still had not reached entirely the true depths of that passion yet. She smiled, maybe he would tonight. Moving towards him tantalizingly slowly, she reached out and loosened the laces of his thin, linen tunic, and began to touch his massive chest with delicate, teasing fingers. "your body is so strong. It could crush me so easily if you wanted it to; yet you are so gentle. How you hold back that strength is a wonder to me. Can you always do this?" Saying that, Catherine curled her fingers into the hairs of his chest that now lay exposed with his loosened shirt and pulled them gently. "Can you always hold back, Vincent?" Catherine was amazed at the build of the man as he stood looking to see what she would do next. The length of Vincents' arousal throbbed against her thigh...

He gasped in surprise and pleasure as she reached down and began to slowly undo the laces of his tightly fitting denim pants; finally stopping at the three laces that were lowest down, at the center of his legs and began to tenderly; slowly, with feather light touches, move her fingers along the hardness that was there. "Ah - YES! Your hands on me..... I cannot endure.....this....much longer...without, without.....", As he lay her gently backwards to the bed, Vincent vainly fought one last time to regain some sort of control of his desires; wanting to simply hold her for a moment, tell her how he loved her, touch her, But the way he was now made this impossible. Forcing the passion back, he prayed silently for some semblance of calm to reach out to his mind. But, not ALL prayers are answered; and IF answered, sometimes the answer is NO! As Catherine reached down and undid the last of the lacings of his pants and slid them down over his hips and onto the floor, she traced a path over his stomach with her lips.....down his tensed legs and nipped at his thighs with her small white teeth. This act drove all thought of rationality from his head in one blinding melange of colors, "You will surely drive me completely mad....." Taking her mouth hard to his, their tongues touched; the sweet taste of her did as she wanted, drove him over the edge of reason. He roared her name. She knew he was now in torment, trying desperately to hold himself in check until she was at the same height of desires as he now was losing himself in. Startled by her sudden movement, Vincent

realized she had climbed on top of him; now had him trapped as she tightened her legs into his hips, Catherine knew he needed to have her now, But resisted a moment longer, taunting him by moving almost to meet his rising hips, then away again. With almost a snarl Vincent reached out and held her forcefully; pinned her so she would not escape again. Raising her by the hips he lowered her demandingly down and onto him completely, gasping at the feel of having her cover him. She began rising and lowering with confidence; in tune with his known rhythm now; continued to duplicate each move he made, until she was at the same level of passions

he now was lost in entirely. Releasing herself to the feel of him inside her, she clenched her body tightly around his maleness, crying out in the pleasure of this, " Now, I need you.....now!" He blindly reached up and held her tightly by her hair. As he neared a climax to this act of love, snarled deeply from somewhere down in his soul and opened himself entirely to her bodys demands..... and surpassed them; with demands of his own. "I must do this now, Catherine, I cannot hold back, cannot cease.. ..", "yes, my love, don't hold anything back from me, don't. Let it FREE!" Vincent heard but could not acknowledge her words. With the last effort of patience...now gone, he tightened his grip on her body.

With Catherine's buttocks firmly in his large hands, he thrust upwards once...then quickly again as ravenous lust washed over their now trembling bodies. Their mutual cries of pleasure were

stifled finally in a hungered kiss as they soared together....

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Catherine held him until he slowly came back to her as though from a long journey. He entwined their legs together and looked at her flushed face with wonder. "I thought at the cabin, we had experienced all the passions there were in this world, I realize I have much to learn, don't I? What have you done to me: The hungers you release in me are so.....deep...so fierce. Yes, I have much to learn." Placing a hand on each side of Catherine's face, Vincent repeated, "don't I?" Looking into his sparkling blue eyes she smiled at him, answering, "there are many, many excitements still awaiting us BOTH..... When people love as we do, there is no shame, no restrictions on the ways of expressing that love. We'll learn the touch of arousal. How to bring the deepest pleasure; learn all there is to be known, one of the other. Like explorers in unknown, uncharted lands, we'll do this together. Are you afraid?" Turning her small hand palm up, Vincent kissed it, nuzzled it tenderly and replied, "no - not afraid, not anymore, not with you to guide me. Just rather anxious to begin our explorations."

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They whispered and lay close together for about an hour then Catherine rose, dressed, and went to begin the finishing touches of their first real dinner in her world. Vincent stretched his body to the full length of the bed,

enjoying the feeling of his limbs entirely free from clothing.

The soft scent of Catherine's perfume lingered and blended quite fragrantly with his naturally musky one in the sheets beneath him. The mixture of smells delighted him, something else to file away in memory. Just her scent began to arouse him again. He sat up all at once, sniffing the air. Delicious different aromas wafted in from the kitchen, reminding him all of a sudden of just how hungry he really was! All this new exercise left one rather drained, rising to refresh himself with a quick splash of cool water from the bathroom sink, Vincent chuckled softly over his choice of words. He then pulled on his trousers and walked into the kitchen, "may I help in some way, Catherine? There must be something I can do?" She stood at the stove, stirring a large pot..... one hand on her hip. "NO! Stay where you are, this is a surprise. I'll call you when everything is ready." Needing no further encouragement to lounge for a bit longer on the bed, he plumped the pillows behind his head and lay back smiling. He was enjoying this new domestic situation immensely. From his position on the bed, Vincent could look to his left and see the mirror that curved over Catherine's dressing table. His keen sight made out something on his throat. Rising to take a closer look, he amusingly discovered that Catherine's teeth had raised some rather nasty looking, but painless welts on him there. Holding his hand over the spot, he joined her in the kitchen as she called out to him, "Okay! Come on in." Grinning and baring his lovely, sharp white teeth to her he exclaimed, "I was afraid I would hurt you"! Turning from the stove, she saw what he was pointing at, Catherine blushed deeply and stammeringly tried to tell him what the welts were called.

Giving up the explaining at the amused look on Vincents face, she glared at him: "Please! Sit down, eat your salad and STOP being so.....so funny!"

The table was beautifully set; crystal glasses, bone china plates, solid silver utensils and linen napkins in fancy rings in the shapes of.....of.....Unicorns? Vincent had never seen such a magnificently set table. "Catherine, wherever did you get the Unicorn napkins rings, and when?" "Oh, when I was shopping earlier today, I had been browsing in the window of an antique shop and there they were! Aren't they lovely?" "Yes. Reminds me of a certain day....." "I knew they would". She beamed this at him and sat down opposite him and began to serve him his salad. As he started to dig in, he was enjoying this new, albeit strange food quite a bit. It was filled with a lettuce she called "Bib", mandarin oranges; tart to the tongue, walnuts, and other exotic vegetables he could not recognize. This was delicately seasoned with herbs and covered with a very good homemade dressing. Below food was plentiful, filling, but not fancy. There eating was just a thing one did; a necessity. Good food, but plain; not a pleasure to the eyes as well as the taste as this salad was proving to be. Vincent told her of this, and Catherine smiled saying, "thank you I'm glad you like it." (especially the dressing: This had taken her nine tries before getting it right!).^{as} they continued this first course, his eyes were drawn to the pot of spaghetti sauce that simmered and bubbled slowly on the stove. Vincent was remembering the time Pascal and Mouse had offered this "spaghetti" to him and not wanting to hurt their feelings, he had taken a rather large bite of the

sauce covered "stuff" and very nearly gagged. It had been very bitter, with an AWFUL flavor he could almost still taste on his tongue. Terrible, simply terrible! He steeled himself as she put a large plate of the pasta before him and ladled sauce onto it generously. He gritted his teeth inwardly. He WOULD eat this or die in the attempt. To hurt or disappoint her, after all the work she had done in preparing this meal, Vincent would NEVER do! He took up his knife and fork and began clumsily cutting the pasta up. Her gasp of sudden horror stayed his movement. "WHAT do you think you are DOING! Please, Vincent. That is not the way to eat spaghetti. Let me show you". Taking a large spoon, she began curling the pasta up and around a fork she held in her other hand to demonstrate proper spaghetti "etiquette". "I know it seems messier this way, but is much more fun! Try, you can do it." Unconvinced, Vincent attempted to duplicate Catherine's deft moves. The damned food kept slipping off the fork and slithering back onto his plate; if he could just....just! As he howled in dismay... the plate slid from the force he was using and landed upside down in his lap. Jumping up to aid him, Catherine fought off a scream of laughter. "I did the very same thing the first time I tried that move, don't worry about it; there's plenty more." Helping him pick the pasta up off his lap, Catherine bit the inside of her jaw to keep back the giggles converging there. Vincent was covered waist high with the pasta and sauce had splattered over his bared chest. As he looked quite embarrassed and appalled at the mess he had made, he began roaring in gales of laughter, "look at me! I am sorry to have made

a disaster of your meal, my love. I may need a bib before continuing!"

As she placed a fresh dish in front of him, she replied, "a bib? No, you won't, you'll need a tablecloth!" With a chuckle, Vincent attacked again the foe with his fork and spoon. To his delight, discovered that it was....good! Not at all like the bitter tasting "mess" Pascal and Mouse had created. Below, Vincent wiped up the last of his meal from the plate with the large pieces of Italian bread she had provided; sat back and sighed, comfortably full, Satisfied he wouldn't starve to death at her hands, Catherine went to the refrigerator, reached in and brought forth the surprise ending of the meal. As she carried it to the counter she kept it hidden from his eyes, lit it with matches and turned to him holding the now blazing dish before her. "TA DA!" Vincent pulled his face back from the fire in front of him, "WHAT is that? It's...it is... on fire Catherine. Be careful!" "Oh, Vincent, it's supposed to BE! It's called "Cherries Jubilee"; wait until you taste it," "TASTE IT! How am I supposed to do that without burning my mouth?" "The fire will go out, see?" It did....to Vincents silent thanks. As he finished the dessert.... and complemented her on the sweet taste of it, he held forth his dish and requested seconds, "please?" Glad her meal was being found satisfactory, Catherine obliged him and set a second dish before him, commenting, "I hope all these new foods tonight won't upset YOUR digestion," "I am sure this meal won't do that; it has been too good. Everything was delicious, even what I...wore!" Giggling at this statement, Catherine reached up into the cabinet, and unthinking, brought down a bottle of sherry and set it on the table with two rather large glasses:

This was the "usual" finish to a meal; she didn't seem to remember

WHO was eating it with her. He had started to question the wisdom of him to be drinking alcohol; she knew of his intolerance.

But he just shrugged and poured himself a very full glass. At first, Vincent sipped it hesitatingly, the aroma and sweetness of the tangy flavor assailed his nostrils; this was delicious. He then gulped it down and started to refill his empty goblet. Catherine heard the "clink" as the bottle hit against the glass, this brought her sharply back to reality. She had been clearing the table, going back and forth from sink... to cabinets; she whirled around to try and grab the bottle from Vincent's hand...

"WHAT are you DOING? Oh God, I'm sorry.. I..I didn't think, Don't, don't drink that!" It was too late, the glass was emptied as he exclaimed, "this was excellent, was it a wine? I have never seen a crystal bottle like this one before." "Vincent. THAT was Malaga Sherry, and very strong! WHY did you drink it?" As he gave her a slightly lop-sided grin, responded, "cuz it was there. Is it getting warmer in here...is the stove turned on?" His words were VERY slurred; He repeated, "is the stove turned on?" and began wiping at his sweating face. "NO, the only thing TURNED ON in here is you! Are you all right; do you feel....feel "funny", or anything?" As he saw through a kind of "mist". her worried look, Vincent began to rise unsteadily to his feet. "don' worry, I'm just fine, but my...my legs are not being cooperative.....WHOOOPS!" Reaching out to steady him, Catherine was aghast; he was...NO....YES! He was drunk! What had she done, stupid, stupid, giving him Sherry, of all things, God, Father would absolutely KILL her when he found out; He would never trust her again. DAMN, D a m n! Leading him to the

couch, he was weaving on his feet and had begun to lean very heavily on her; as she begged him to forgive her thoughtlessness, her damn unthinking forgetfulness in putting the Sherry before him without remembering what it may do to him!"there's nothin' to forgive, you didn't force me to drink it! But Catherine, can you PLEASE stop this damned room from spinning!" As he chuckled over his loss of equilibrium, Vincent collapsed gratefully onto the couch at his feet, sighed and closed his eyes, mumbling to himself, "gotta rest, so tired, night' Cathy!" He had called her Cathy; now she KNEW he was really "out of it"! As she looked at him in utter anguish, he fell fast asleep, and began to giggle and snore ! What was she going to DO with him? Oh, Christ! What had she done TO him, she shook him, "Vincent?" No response.. "VINCENT" - nothing still,

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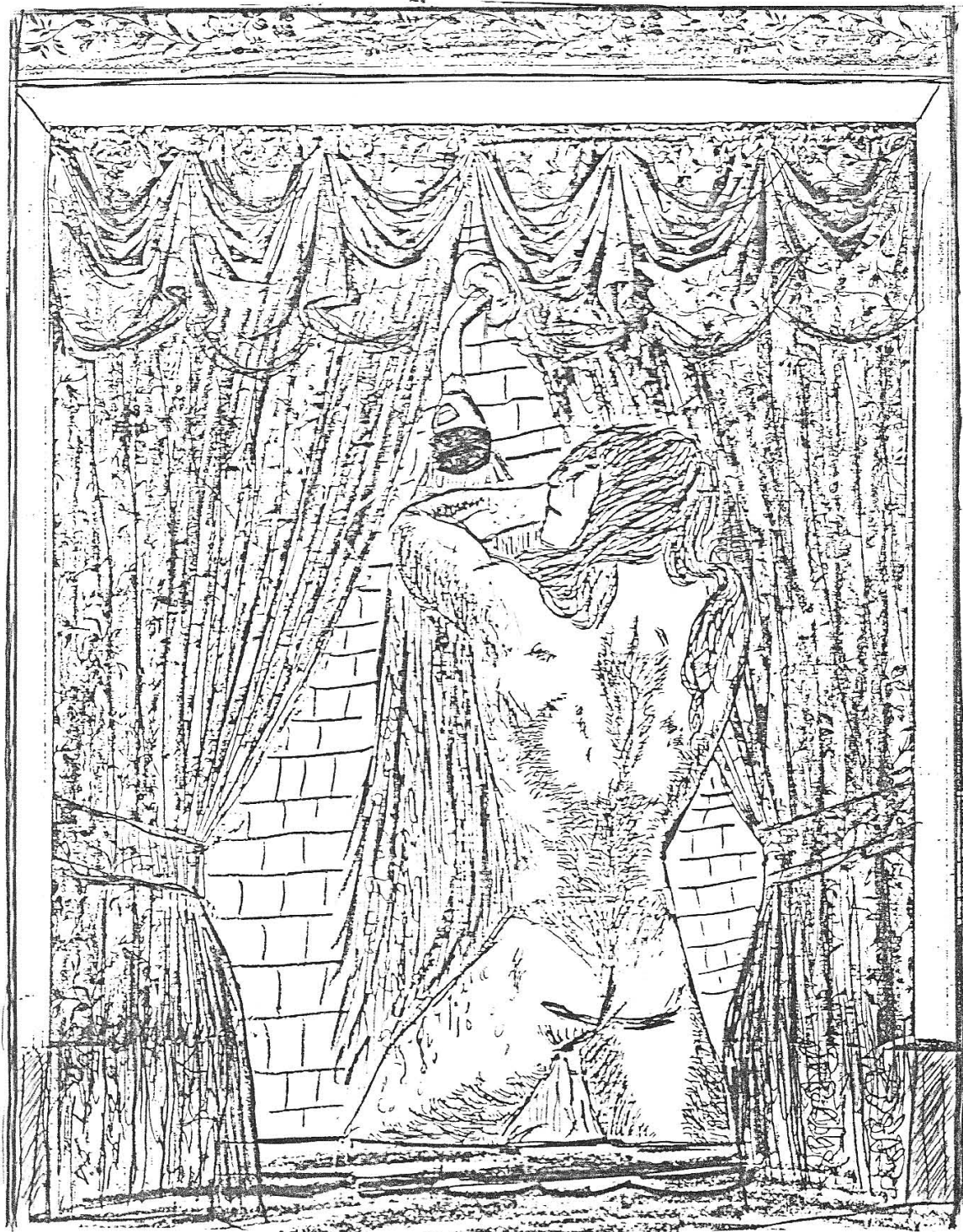
Feeling a coolness at his forehead, Vincent reached up to pat at the hand, gratefully, that was trying to ease this pain' in his throbbing head! Opening his eyes a crack, he blinked twice in the dimly lit room to try and get his bearings...where the hell WAS he? Oh, yes. Catherine! He opened his eyes fully and winced from the ache even this slight movement brought forth. "Ohhhh, my head, Ohhhh!" Looking up, he saw Catherine approaching with a fresh, cold facecloth filled with ice. Ah, good; maybe that would help to remove these...these DEMONS clawing at his brain. It did, just a little. Then as the ice did its job, he was with a great force of will, able to sit up. This brought a totally new meaning to the word. p...a...i...n! "Ouch! What is this horrible thing in my head!..... wailed this towards Catherine and held his

hands up to his eyes, then rubbed at his temples in a vain attempt to drive the hammers, the devils, OUT, "is this a "hangover"? It is terrible, terrible! Owww, my ears are ringing, stop this ringing, please Catherine? Help!" AS the ice started doing its job more thoroughly, Vincent looked up into Catherines frightened eyes that were filled with tears at not being able to help ease his discomfort more. "Are you...are you okay? Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry, please Vincent, forgive me?" "I'm all right now. I feel better, really, Catherine. See? It just took me a few moments to....." "A FEW MOMENTS! You have been on that couch for two whole hours, I was just going to get Father. I didn't know WHAT to DO. I thought you'd NEVER wake up! Are you really all right, really?" Tears were running down her face as she asked this of him. Tears for her shame of hurting him, him of all people in this world. He trusted her, and this is how she betrayed him, getting him drunk! She repeated aloud her earlier thought, "Father will Kill me when he finds out!" He smiled (this itself hurt, but he kept smiling!) "Well, I did want new experiences. Do not worry, Father will not ever hear of this from ME. You would have to deal with his anger, but I would have to listen to ENDLESS "I-told-you-sos". No Catherine, I promise. He will never learn of this from me. NEVER!" The pain seemed ^{to be} easing out..... He grinned up to her and asked for a cup of tea to toast its leaving, added, "just tea? PLAIN!" This was spoken lightly. He was striving to ease the look of total despair in Catherines eyes. As she made the tea and brought

a cup to him, she set it carefully down on the coffeetable in front of him, "it's hot". Settling herself down beside him, she sighed; this was NOT the evening she had planned, not at all! Catherine didn't realize she was mumbling half aloud, "stupid, senseless thing to do." He finished his tea and started to put the cup on the table in front of him; to hold her and assure her he was now feeling much better, when he paused, looked down at his bare feet and laughed so hard, his teeth glistened beneath the lamps light. "Does spaghetti stick forever? It certainly likes me. Look!" Following his pointing finger with her eyes, she joined in his laughing, holding her sides and burying her face on his shoulder. Somehow, the pasta had wrapped itself around his toes and clung like "sticky burrs" to the curling hair of his legs. It looked glued to him. She bent over and tried prying it loose; it was no use; it was dried on, caked to him. "Ouch, that hurt! You are taking the hair with it! This is not going to work. I need a shower, it is the only way to remove THIS. Would you show me how to use it?" Nodding in agreement and smiling at him, Catherine led him to the bathroom, explained the knobs and after showing Vincent where the towels and soap were located, turned to leave him to shower. "No, don't go. Will you....will you soap up my back for me? Even better, Join me?" A trifle startled at this last request, she decided he must still be feeling a glow from the Sherry! Well, if that's what he wanted.....okay with her. As she began to remove her robe, Vincent reached out, "Let

me?" Fumbling at the tiny buttons, he succeeded finally, in removing the robe and the nightgown beneath it. He saw that her flesh was goose-bumped; she was cold, "Come in here, the water is nice and hot," She giggled at him, "well, don't get under the water yet, Vincent; you still have your pants on!" She reached down and began to tug at his jeans, trembling at the hardness that was starting to respond to her fingers down there. She marvelled at how, since their time together at the lake, he now held nothing back from her; trusted her totally to understand and accept all of him and his desires he could fully let her know of. He now stood before her quite nude. And totally

aroused.... "See what you do to me?" "Yes. Let's get that pasta OFF of you!" She pushed him towards the shower, let him duck himself under the water and began to soap up his back as he had requested. Massaging the shoulders on this man, she loved how his flesh felt to her fingers. How it rippled and warmed to her touch. "Ah, that feels wonderful; the time I have wasted using a backbrush when I could have had you do this," Rinsing himself off, ^{he tried} vainly to untangle the matted mane of his hair, saw Catherine reach out of the shower to the sink, and come back with a large, wide-toothed comb. "Stand still! I've always wanted to comb that hair," Gently but thoroughly, she began slowly combing through the tangled snarls. Giving himself into her gentle hands, he relaxed completely and leaned back towards her gratefully. This felt so good, Usually, Vincent allowed



no one to pamper him; even when ill, Father had more than once felt his anger when he tried to rub his head or ease his sons pain. But this, Catherine did this out of love; just to have her touch on him in this innocent way was to him in itself an act of loving. How could it not be so? With Catherine, everything done for him was with love. She finished with a word, "THERE!" Vincent turned and teased her... "WHAT, no braid?" "If I braid it now while it's still damp, you'll NEVER get the "waves" out. But if you insist".... "NO! Come here and turn around. I will now reciprocate". As he turned her away from him, he softly began to rub her back with his large, strong hands, swirling the soap onto her shoulders, then moved down towards her hips. He kept his hands there and began rubbing just his thumbs back and forth over them in a tender caress. Catherine sighed. That felt so good. His hands were strong but gentle on her. They could maim with such fury when he or those he cared for were threatened. But now, with her, he moved those hands in a way that was driving her crazy. Leaning back against his chest to enjoy the feelings rising in her, she felt him reach around and lay one hand softly on her breast. "Why can I never get close enough to you Catherine.....near enough? Ah, the feelings that you cause to rise in me.....the sweet torment your body arouses in my own; welcome and warm." Turning her to face him, Vincent held her fast to himself and repeated, "warm...and mine!" Just before his mouth closed on hers, she whispered, "and yours, mine!" Taking a breath, he helped her from the shower and

they began drying each other off. But this act was taking too long, far too long for Vincent. He quickly pulled her towards him and putting his hands on her legs, lifted her completely off the floor. She wrapped her legs around his hips, knowing this was exactly what he wanted her to do. She knew her weight was but as a feather to his strength; knew the power of this body that now moved and thrust demandingly towards hers. Walking with her still trapped against him, he collapsed with her onto the bed laughing. "I think all that spaghetti has made you gain weight; your body is fuller somehow; more rounded then before. I am glad; this means you are getting stronger after that long siege of illness you have just had." Almost with a leer on his leonine face added, "more for me to love" and started to laugh again in delight. As her fingers began to caress and taunt him, the laugh died in his throat; turned to moans of passion as she reached down; began rubbing his thighs, then moved her fingers further down, to the very maleness of him. "Ah, do not....you know what that does to me....please..please. I can not control my actions if you...do..not...stop...NOW," As Catherine ceased this torment of his body, she moved and was quickly on top of him; straddling his hips with her legs she held him pinned beneath her. What was this? Something else new? "what...is..THIS? Ah, my love, what are you doing?" Catherine said only one word in reply, "teaching". Moving her

hips back and forth on him, she bent down and began to worry his nipples with her teeth, then began tracing a path upwards; along his neck, the hollow at the base of his throat and finally began tracing small moist circles around the lobes of his ears. As he gasped from the new sensations this brought, Vincent knew he could not take much more of THIS. He wanted to join fully with her, he needed this as never before, needed it now, right now. She had been aware of this fact and his snarl that turned into a groan confirmed it. She was ready for him, But wanted, needed, him to make the move first. He had to begin to learn to take command from her at times. The first time would be now. He did this..... Lifting her slightly off his body, he then lowered her fully onto him. When he was fully inside, she clenched her inner muscles around him and held him fast. This made him fierce; this made him almost completely wild. His head began to toss from left to right on the pillow as he gripped her shoulders and began to thrust upwards to meet her body; then lowered his hands to her hips and pulled her hard, harder, to him as he became aware of a softness rising from her that signaled a readiness he now knew fully. As Catherine unconsciously dug her nails into his shoulders, she cried out from the pleasure of releasing herself fully to him, "Like...that..yes, yes! You won't hurt me. Harder, don't...stop..don't stop...VINCENT!" Those words freed him. He gave himself up to his needs and desires just as she did and screamed in pleasure as he melted

and met her; melded to her as they merged together as one body, in total oblivion to another level of existence

Barely regaining her senses as he did, Catherine held him as he gasped and sobbed her name over and over again; unable to say more for the moment. As their hearts rhythms started to slow and match steadier beats, they held each other in silence and simply looked towards the new day threading its way softly into the room to greet them. She knew now Vincent would take command of loving her; was no longer the student. This is what she knew was necessary. Had to be. He was a man, had to know that totally after this last loving. She smiled a secret smile...yes, Vincent was most assuredly a man all right.

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The next days passed all too quickly; they did things all lovers, all people do in the privacy of their homes. They talked, teased, kissed, loved, slept, shared secrets. All the ordinary things that lovers....were want to do.....(Remember? Ah, dear readers.....do you remember loving like this? I pray you do!)

Vincent taught her Canasta; astounded when she beat him by mere points the very first game! He was a good loser. He thought he was anyway. But she had seen his face when she had bested him. A good loser, maybe; but he certainly did not ENJOY it. Catherine taught him how to play "Blackjack" and scoffed at his "beginners luck" when he won all the pennies they were playing for. Deciding to "get him", she then explained the

finer points of a new game to Vincent. POKER! (HER game) It was a delight to watch his face trying to remain non-committal when he held the winning hand and KNEW it! Even meals were great fun: She waited until he had put whipped cream onto the pie she had made and quickly took some of the cream, "plopped" it onto his nose and ran screaming from the room yelling, "FOOD FIGHT!" back to him. He knew this game: Had seen the teenagers do it Below. Dipping two fingers into the gooey pie, he roared in mock fury and lunged for her and waved the "goop" threateningly under her nose. As he "smooshed" the stuff onto her cheeks and lips, she cried out with indignation, "what a mess you've made of me. Now, you'll have to clean it up!" "First, YOU clean up my poor nose." Catherine giggled and agreed to this; reaching up wiped the cream from his nose with one finger, "there!" He then showed her how to properly clean oneself; began licking at her face with his tongue, nibbled at her until all the cream was gone. AS he finished this delightful chore, his next words made his incredible blue eyes glitter in delight. "NOW I will have my real dessert...you." With this he pulled her to him, and said huskily, "I like this rug!"..... So passed their days, with laughter and love; as they deserved for all their years of not having such as this. The second night they just lay together; a previous fierce pillow fight had worn them out for the time being. Feathers were everywhere! They slept, too tired

at the moment, to even attempt cleaning up the mess; agreed the feathers would most certainly still be there in the morning. Where were "elves" when one needed them?

The following day; the last day of this first week-end at Catherine's apartment, began with Vincent insisting on making breakfast, "I CAN cook, you realize." She sat and read to him as he went about the kitchen asking where did she keep the pots, how did Catherine like her eggs, watched in silent horror when he made coffee strong enough to grow hair on a rock! After breakfast, they each took a copy of the same crossword puzzle and made a race out of doing it; to see who could finish theirs first. Vincent put in the last words with a flourish, "I am done!" She glared at him, "only because YOU would know what zymurgy meant. You would!" At this she got up, walked over to her desk and reached inside. Catherine had kept a final surprise from him until now. Taking a small box from her desk drawer, she said slyly, "I have a tape I'd like you to watch," turned on her VCR and sat back beside him on the couch. As Vincent put his arm about her shoulder and waited for the tape to begin, he wondered to himself what it was; as a rule Vincent did not care for television. The news depressed and usually horrified him at what people could DO to each other, and the programs; especially THOSE on "Columbus" channels, were exceedingly ridiculous. But, to please Catherine he would sit and watch anything; would sit and.....: He gasped aloud at the

colors that leapt forth from the screen to his startled eyes, Catherine had found a tape entitled "Welcome to Hawaii". The island magic came to his sight in a blur of bright hues; the ocean green, gold, and many varied shades of blue and white. Numbed into now total silence; Vincent leaned forward and rested his chin on his hands. As he watched the tape, she watched him. For the first time since knowing him, Vincent seemed unaware of her staring at him. He seemed in the past, always alert to her presence. To try and catch him unawares was nearly impossible; he always caught her trying to get a secret "peek" at him. This had maddened her as he smiled and his lovely eyes looked into hers, when he would arch an eyebrow; as tho' saying, "caught you"! But here, now, he seemed to be totally engrossed in the tape of Hawaii. Catherine was delighted; she noticed how his chest moved when he took deep breaths. How his lashes curled upwards to meet his red/gold eyebrows; the way he was sucking at his lower lip in concentration; absorbed fully in the panorama before him. Oblivious to being so thoroughly scanned by her. Vincent was lost on the island; could feel the surf, hear the palm trees, swaying and rustling in the gentle breezes. He could smell the ocean as it foamed and churned at the foot of the dormant volcano called "Diamondhead". He laughed loudly at the antics of the dolphins at "Seaworld"; marvelled to himself at the plumage of the many unknown species of birds at the "Honolulu Zoo". The hula dancers and firewalkers surprised him! Moving their hips and hands in tune to the music, the

gestures of bodies and hands "spoke" to him, told Vincent many stories: As the beautiful strains of Hawaiian ukelele music and violins mixed, blended, and became a music he had never before heard, he watched the dancing silently, then uttered, "OH" as the people of Polynesia burst forth in the wilder, more explicit dance of their own land! With yells of delight, the women moved their hips in a way he would not have believed possible if he wasn't seeing it with his own eyes. When the men joined the dancing, they moved in a way that was almost an act of making love, thrusting their hips to and away from the women as if in the act itself. Catherine saw small beads of perspiration forming on Vincent's forehead, "Oh, my; this could make for a very INTERESTING reaction later", she thought mischievously to herself. Then firewalkers were on the screen. Dressed only in long grass skirts, men lowered themselves onto flames and did NOT get burned; this caused Vincent to finally turn and pose a question, "HOW do they DO THAT? It looks dangerous, yet they seem so unafraid of being harmed. As if they know a magic that keeps them safe; this is wonderful...wonderful!" Then he turned back to the screen before she could even answer him. The end of the tape took Vincent aboard a sightseeing tour of Pearl Harbor. He was saddened by the loss of life, the horror of all he saw. The sunken ships, the damage and loss of life was terrible to him. The senseless death of brave young men; the disregard one people show another, deeply disturbed him. He found no honor here; no way to explain the actions to his

saddened heart; a tear slowly dropped from his eyes onto his shirt. Brushing it away unconsciously, was glad when the tour of that tragic place was over. Then another ship was taking him looking for whales off the island called Maui. Vincent seemed able to feel the ships movements beneath his very feet. He saw the first whale raise a dorsal fin as if in greeting; could smell the salt in the air and feel the ocean water hit his face when the mammal splashed its tail, 'sounded'; then seemed to stand on the crests of the waves with a body that was nearly forty feet long! The sun began sinking into the water to melodic strains of music that said silently, "goodbye, goodbye, we will meet again!" The tape was over. With a small quiver, he turned to Catherine, "thanks to you, my love, I have BEEN to Hawaii. I felt the sun, the ocean spray, the sand grinding into my toes actually tickled: I was THERE, Catherine. How can I tell you of the joy..... You have unwittingly taken all my words from me, in showing me this place. I have BEEN to paradise. Thank you, Catherine, thank you so much." She had also been moved deeply at what she had seen. His words brought tears to her eyes anew. "I'm so glad you enjoyed it, I hoped you would. I wanted to show you what another part of the world is like as totally as I could, without actually being there. Someday, maybe we can GO see more." "Just don't let me get a sunburn; that sun seems very strong! May I watch it again?" "Certainly. Let me show you how to rewind the tape; watch as many times as you want. I'll do a few things I've been neglecting lately while you do." "Do you need any help?" Catherine laughed. "NO! These are 'womens' things that need doing; don't even ask what." "OH!" Well, maybe by the time

you return, I will be tanned! If I'm not here, I have gone wind surfing." He grinned this at her, turned and began to journey again back to "his" islands: As she cast a final loving glance at him, was startled by his husky voice chastising her, "Haven't you seen enough yet?" DAMN HIS EYES! He HAD been aware earlier of her stares. Oh, Vincent, you are learning to "flirt" after all! With this last thought, Catherine went into the bedroom, shaking her head and grinning, mumbling half aloud, "caught again!"

*

Laying beside Vincent on this last night; Catherine couldn't really sleep. THAT would mean closing her eyes; and with her eyes shut couldn't watch the man she loved beside her. He had one arm stretched out across her breasts..the other bent behind his head as he slept peacefully. God - she thought - he is so incredibly beautiful! How innocent he looks sleeping here with me. But now because of me, is no longer an innocent ; Oh, my love, what have I done to you? What have we done to each other? Will there someday be a price, a ransom we will have to pay for the love we share now? Making deals with God, or the Devil, whoever was listening, Catherine prayed silently. IF one of us HAS to pay some sort of price for what this man and I have now; let it be me, deal? LET it be me? (Somewhere, dear readers, WAS the Devil smiling an agreement to this plea? I believe he was),

Her last thoughts before sleep finally claimed her was of the last three days, the fun, the shared jokes. Vincent seemed now able to totally poke fun at her and with her. His usual dignified way seemed gone at last as he freely told her

"off-color" jokes he had heard Below without hesitation: Tho' he always would be a gentleman; now felt, now knew that she would laugh as much as he had in the hearing of them: He was learning, had LEARNED to hold nothing of his mind or body, as well as his heart, back from Catherine now: He now could "flirt" openly with her for the first time. Had learned how to do this, enjoyed it at times when he moved a certain way and knew it was driving her crazy.....and did it again: Believed finally, what she told him, that his eyes were, well.....in her words, "incredible"...and learned how to use both voice and eyes to make Catherine start to tremble. This he discovered, was not always quite fair. But as the saying went.."in love and war....." And the passions in the man astounded her time and again. The WAY he loved her could not be described even to herself. The feel of ^{his} manliness in her body left her no strength of will at all. Catherine smiled, knew he felt the same about her. Sighing, she curled herself tightly to his chest and prayed for the stamina to keep up with him! There were so many years to make up. But she could only bend so many ways, as every muscle in her tired bones now reminded her:

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As dawn crept over them Vincent held her so tightly, she could hardly breathe: "I am loathe to leave thee my love; yet know I must. Get some real rest now, you never have had quite enough this week-end, I will wager. Thank you...thank you for everything; for every moment: I love you more than I will ever be able to convey . I will see you tonight? Below?" Catherine

clasped her arms behind his neck and agreed, "I'll be there, with bells on!" Kissing her lightly, Vincent looked to the edge of the balcony; then back at her. Arching one eyebrow at Catherine questioned, "Bells on, that is all? Father will surely faint." A huskiness to his voice betrayed his small attempt at a joke. He was picturing in his mind Catherine before him, clad only in small tinkling bells; and decided he had BETTER get away now, while he still could manage it.

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Below, Father was deep into the budgets and accounts. "Mathmetics" he muttered, "is a decided BORE. At least, is to me! Where is Vincent; why isn't HE doing this? He actually LIKES it!" With a "BAH" of disgust and a grimace at the figures before him, he rubbed his eyes wearily and sighed, trying his best to ignore the sums calling his name. A small "ahem" made him turn around in the chair.. "Vincent! you have returned safely. Thank God! All is well above? How is Catherine? You look as though your days were, were,....pleasant?" Vincent fairly beamed at him. Catherine is fine, Father." His son embraced him in a fierce hug, and started to whirl him round and about the room, saying, "in fact, she is TERRIFIC! I will talk later and do the budgets I see you are striving to ignore. But right now, I must find Pascal." As his son quickly ran from the Chamber, Father shook his head and reached out to steady his rocking body by clutching at his desk. Vincents enthusiastic greeting had left him dizzy. Smiling as his head stopped spinning, he thought to himself, Ah, young love is grand. Looking at a picture of Margaret, added, it always was.

Vincent strode purposefully along the tunnel corridors; looking in vain for his friend. Where was Pascal, now that he needed him? His roar shook the tunnel walls..."Pascal, Where the devil are you? PASCAL!" A hand on his shoulder startled him as he turned around and looked into Pascals smiling face, "why I'm right here behind you, Vincent. Caught you unawares, have I...AHA, there's a first! What can I do for you, my friend?" After whispering urgently together for many moments, Pascal gave a quick assenting nod and was off on his errand, still not entirely sure he approved. But, no matter. Not his business anyway. But.....REALLY. He hoped Vincent was sure of what he was planning to do. He was not usually so.... so.....rash! The design he requested seemed a bit "odd".....

But that dear readers, is another story!



Forever *

By
Patricia A. Kehoe

Why is there in this world no place for us?
Or in time no understanding or a space for us?
What is this need that fills our dreams,
yet slips away from us?

Who wants to live forever?
Who seeks to love forever?

I vow love can never truly die for us.
It lives on in the one sweet moment time had
set aside for us.

Who DARES to love forever?
We will share our dream forever.

I shall love you through infinity, forever.
I am your strength, you are my soul.
You are my light; I am your destiny.

Forever.

* Variation on song from
The Highlander, by Rock Group "Queen"



Something That Has Never Been

By
Patricia Anne Kehoe

You say to me, "we are something that has never been!

Are you so positive, my love? So SURE you never,
through mists of another life, held me close?
Or walked with me in brilliant sun? Or kissed
my lips -trembled with passion on my breast?

You caution me, "our journey is one that none
have ever taken."

Really? It must be glorious to KNOW; to be so
certain, we'd NEVER met before! Or loved before.
How can YOU see the distant past so clearly? I cannot:

You remind me, "we are just now setting out."

Ah! Dearest man, yes we are. But, the path I
see is straight, strong and true. Your path
seems trecherous, dangerous, and endless!
Why must I walk your path? Come, walk mine.

You avow, "we must go with courage."

I have no fear of you! It is you who keeps the
faded wisps of old terrors so dear, so close.
I cannot fight my way through it to take you from
the anguish of your aloneness. Why can't you
trust me and your heart, instead of your memories?
Where is YOUR courage? Where?

You plead, "we must go with care."

Yes! I agree; years I have treaded carefully
around the edges of our desires - neither
demanding or refusing the need we have of each
other...waiting! But you have never asked.
Not said the words, the one truth BEYOND knowledge.
That you want me. That you must have me, for always.

Say it now? Take my hand; lead me to your Chamber
bed? Let something that has never been.....

Be?

TUNNEL LIFE/ Ah! Young Love!

By - Patricia Anne Kehoe

The boy sat leaning on a tunnel wall; poking a stick at the dirt floor at his feet. This was the third time this week his brother, Devin, had been late for a prearranged meeting, and Vincent was getting madder and madder as the minutes dragged by. Where was Devin! They were supposed to go swimming at the small, new secret water falls they had discovered over the week-end. Somehow, even knowing the tunnels as well as they did, they had taken a few wrong turns while kidding with each other and heading back home to eat lunch. Vincent had run ahead of Devin and when Devin looked for him; he was gone! Vin had seemed to disappear into solid rock, "Vin, HEY! Where in hell did you go? Vincent?" Dev was stunned at finding himself alone in the passageway. Suddenly, from behind him, Vincent reached ^{out} and poked him in the ribs, "I'm here!" Spinning to face his younger brother, Dev was mad, Vincent had really scared him. "Don't EVER do that again! It's eerie enough around here. Where are we? I don't recognize any of this, do you?" Ignoring his brothers questions, the younger boy exclaimed, "come, look what I've found! Come on, it's a tight squeeze; Bend your head." Too late, He heard the "thunk" as his brother hit his head and cursed, "damn! Yes, nice time to warn me. Thanks a lot, bro'." Rubbing his sore temple, he crawled up alongside Vincent. "Well? Where Now?" Vin pointed to the right, "take a look in there!" As he crawled along, Devin found the space was becoming large enough to stand in. Scrambling gratefully off of his knees, he dusted the dirt off himself as he looked around. Sunlight was streaming into the water from high above the tunnel floor; the pattern the light made on the water below looked like it came through a grating of some sort to end up here to light his way as he gasped at the sight in front of him. Twenty feet away was a small waterfall bouncing over rocks into a small clear pool of blue water that glistened and sparkled in the natural light of the cave.

Devin made his way down to the waters edge about fifteen feet below; he stared into the pool. Why, it looked deep enough to dive into, great; "Hey, Vincent, let's us go for a swim, huh? I like this place, our own private bathtub! I'll bet no one else in the tunnels knows about this place!" Climbing down, Vincent stood beside his brother and nodded in agreement, "Yeh, it's like a hidden place just for us! No small kids or girls will be able to bother us here, or "hog" all the best part of the pool we usually swim in for themselves!" He put one arm on his brothers shoulder as he said this. Although Vincent was only eleven, he was almost a foot taller and many pounds heavier than his older brother Devin was, at almost fourteen. He was also a good deal stronger, with a natural instinctive quickness of movement Devin envied him. He used this quickness now with a dare - "bet I'm in that water before you can even get undressed." Stripping off his boots, loose shirt and pants, Vincent dove in with an expertise that belied his tender years. He laughed and yelled back up at Devin, who was still struggling to get out of his boots, and was cursing from the effort, "Come on Pokey!" Finally free of his clothes, Devin held his nose and dove in feet first. "Wow! This water is warm; so much nicer than where we always used to swim! This is neat; let's keep this to ourselves, okay Vin? Promise you won't tell anyone, even Father?" Vincent made a small cross over his heart, "Promise!", then Devin did the same thing. For an hour or so they fooled around the pool, splashing each other, diving and ducking each others heads. Vin called out to Devin from his end of the pool, to where Devin lay on some rocks, resting and drying off a bit as best he could with no towel. "Hey! I wonder how late we are for supper!" Devin jumped up, "jez, I didn't even think of that! Come ON! Before they send out a search party for us, then we'll have to tell Father! Come on, Vin!" The boys threw on their clothes on still damp bodies and raced to the eating Chamber, praying that someone would be there; they were suddenly starving. Making their way finally to the Chamber, they

looked at each other with sighs of relief. Some people were still eating; they weren't too late. Sitting down beside some of their friends, they ignored questions as to where they had been all afternoon and concentrated on eating. As he reached for a piece of bread, Vincent felt Father's eyes on him. When he looked up, Father nodded to him and arched his eyebrows in a questioning pose. He smiled back at Father and ducked his head towards his plate. He hoped Father would not question him as to where they had been all afternoon: If he asked him, Vincent would be forced to tell the truth. Vow or no vow, he had never actually lied to Father. On occasion, withheld some details of an escapade maybe, but never lied outright. It just wasn't done. With the agreement of the children's parents or guardians, Father had one rule for all the children - tell the truth - perhaps you would get punished, but then again, maybe not: BUT lie - you die! It was the worst sin a child could do, lie to a parent, this was Father's teaching, this is what was considered "written in the rock" by all Below. Well, Vin had "bent" that rule once or twice, so had Devin. But he prayed again, "please Father? Don't ask me for details!"

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As he had sat and eaten his supper, Father had wondered where his two "tardy" boys had been. But, seeing their damp clothes and wet hair, he concluded they had simply been at the waterfall pool and, as usual, forgotten the time. Father watched as Allegra, one of their best friends among the girls, poked Dev in the ribs and whispered something to him, and then to his brother.

"Hey, Dev? Vincent? Where were you guys all day? I was looking all over for you! Where did you disappear to?" Dev glanced at his brother before responding, "oh, we just went for a swim and hung around. You know, just hung around!" She looked at Dev hard, "for a swim, WHERE? I looked for you both at the falls, you weren't there: Come on, what did you guys really do, really go? AND why didn't you ask me to come with you, like usual?" The younger boy suddenly burst



out, "we can't tell you! We made a pact; it's a secret!" She looked at Vincent as he said that and was mad: Slyly, she turned her gaze on Devin, She was near his age, but as a young woman, already knew how to get information when she wanted to: "Oh, Dev, it's been really lonesome here without you and Vin!" She put one hand on his shoulder and looked up at him with a smile that lit up her dark eyes as well as her pretty mouth. "Tell me, please? Where were you today? I won't tell anyone, I promise: PLEASE?" Stealing a sideways look at his brother, Dev asked with his eyes, "shall I tell her?" Vincent's frown told him, "NO!" He took his empty plate and put it into the stack waiting to be washed, and talked to a friend for a minute or so; then turned to join his brother and Allegra again....they were gone: He ran out into the corridor, but there was no sign of them. Now he was mad; why did they leave without him, and where did they go? He walked towards the room he shared with Dev; if he told her about their "secret" pool, he'd....he'd... As he entered the Chamber, Dev and Allegra were sitting on the bed, whispering and holding hands. They jumped apart as he entered the room, startled by the tone of his young voice, "why didn't you wait for me? I'd never do that to YOU! What are you talking about? Dev, you're not telling....." Dev shook his head, "no, I didn't say nothin'. We were just talking about stuff. Jez, don't get your tush in an uproar, bro!" Vincent sat down in the chair facing them, "what are you guys going to do tonight, any special plans?" Allegra answered, "oh, I've invited Devin to come and read with me; we're going to help each other with our homework. You know how Fathers' poetry class is: I can never memorize all that "junk" without help!" Vincent looked at Devin and was silent; she never needed help; she was what was known as a "brain"; and had the best marks of all the other kids in schooling! She also knew that as far as poetry concerned, Devin was worse at it than anyone! Why did she want his help of all people? "Well, I'll come too. Maybe I can help?" Dev looked first to her, then at his brother, "no it's okay, Vin. WE...we can get along by ourselves. You understand.....huh?" He frowned, NO, he

did not understand; why wasn't he invited this time? She had always asked them both before, not just Devin, when she wanted company. They many times, had played games, or cards; sometimes just joked and talked in Allegras' room. She was the only girl that had a room all to herself; her Father had died last year, and this had been their Chamber. Father had left her there alone; she wanted it this way, at least for now, and he had respected her wishes. It was her home; he would not force her to share it until she felt ready too, if ever. Well, Vincent certainly knew when he wasn't wanted. See if he cared: "Go study then, I've got plenty to do here anyway. Joe got a new game, and Alice and Janet are going to have him teach us how to play it later. Bye". They gathered up Devin's schoolbooks and left Vincent alone in the Chamber. He hadn't lied, Well, not really! One of the boys did have a new game, and he had been invited to play. But, he had already said no, he was going to stay with Devin! Now what would he do the rest of the night? Sighing, he sat and thought. Father, he'd visit him, see if he had time to teach him a little more of the Chess he had been showing him lately. Vincent amazed him at his quickness in picking the intricacies of the game so fast! Why there was a moment last week, when he had ALMOST beaten him!

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Father was reading one of his favorite books when he heard the sound of footsteps behind him. Turning, he saw Vincent halfway down the stairs. This was not like him; he usually asked permission before entering. What was the matter, NOW! Father made a silent bet with himself and KNEW whatever was bothering his youngest son would, of course, have SOMETHING to do with Devin. And he was right: "Father, Devin is acting "wierd". He went off with 'Legra and they didn't ask me to go with them. They seemed to want to be ALONE. They never wanted to be ALONE before. I don't understand. Do you?" The older man sighed, yes, he think he understood. Devin and Allegra were of an "age" when they wouldn't want younger brothers hanging around them. Now, how was he going to explain this to Vincent? "Well, what did they say to make you feel "unwanted", Vincent?" "That they had to study. Allegra wanted help with her poetry." Help, from Devin? Oh lord!"

What was that girl thinking of. Devin knew less about poetry than... than...a flea. His help was the LAST thing she truly needed. Father frowned, making a mental note to talk to Devin; there must be no more visits to Allegras' room. As innocent as he was sure it was, they were teenagers now, decorum and rules of the tunnels must be obeyed. To be left to ones own "devices" at this age, could sometimes lead to temptations that were entirely to be avoided at all costs. He would have to have Mary explain this to Allegra, HE certainly was not about to do it. No, thank you. Now, he turned to answer Vincents' query, "well, there will be a time, when you too, will not want the younger ones around. my son. When you are thirteen, fourteen; you want to be alone with...with..girls, to talk without anyone else listening that could tease you about it later. Girls are very, very ahem, different from us; they have their own ways of doing things, they grow up more quickly then we do at times. I'm afraid, Vincent, that this is one of those times. You may notice that more and more, Devin will turn to Allegra for company instead of you. You must NOT be hurt when he does this, it's just how...how things are. Do you understand?" The boy shook his head, "no, I don't. How come he all of a sudden would pick HER over ME! I'm his brother, she's just a, a girl!" Frowning, he responded to his sons' questioning look, "never say "just a girl", Vincent! That is not proper! We are all equal in this world, girls and boys, men and women. Never underestimate a girl, or a woman, my boy. Worlds have been lost forever, by men who did this!" "Yeh, but she's funny looking, and she's...she's getting all "bumpy" in her chest; it looks like she's swelling up!" Clearing his throat loudly, Father sighed, NOW WHAT? "well, girls are built differently than us, you know of this? We discussed it a bit before?" "Yes, I remember! One day a month ago, I slapped Allegra on her behind. and she...belted me on the arm, and I didn't know why. I remember you said girls didn't like us to do that. How come, guys don't mind it?" "well, you will learn soon enough, Vincent; that many things you can do with other guys you cannot do with or TO girls.

They like to be treated a bit more gently as they grow older. No longer are willing to "roughhouse" as they once were as younger children. Vincent, someday you will understand more of what I am saying for now, just trust me? And give your brother a bit of "room", yes?" Nodding agreement; even though he really didn't understand all of what Father had said, Vincent left to think about it; sort it out in his mind. He felt as though he had lost his best friend: Devin was choosing Allegra over him! This hurt, in a way he did not yet fathom. When he had thought this over, he had gone to see the other children and had been invited to play a game of "blind mans' bluff" and had stayed with them until time for bed. Coming into his room, he saw Devin already in bed, reading. "Hi! When did you get back; did you help with her studying?" "Ha, that poetry stuff is for the birds Vin! And, do you know what she did when I was leaving; she, promise not to tell? She kissed me right on my mouth! No kidding: She did!" Vincent made a face, "YUK", that must have been "gross", huh?" Dev didn't answer for a minute, as though he was remembering her lips on his. Then said, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be; in fact, it almost felt okay," Vin looked stunned, "okay? How could that be okay; right on the MOUTH, BLAH!" Changing the subject that was now beginning to embarrass him, Dev asked his brother if they would be going swimming in the new spot tomorrow? "Sure, what time do you want to go?" Oh, let's leave about noon. I'll meet you near the footbridge; I have to return this book to Allegra, first. He held out the book, "when knighthood was in flower", "Boy, is this some mushy book. I can't figure out why she wanted me to read it. It's all about kissing and LOVE STUFF!" Night, Vin. See you tomorrow, at noon?" "Yeh, night, Dev."

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So the week had gone. Devin was late the first time, later the second time, always with some dumb excuse! Allegra wanted him to move a table for her, Allegra wanted him to hang a picture for her, Allegra this, Allegra that. That's all Vincent had heard all week:

Suddenly, the boy made up his mind; well, no more waiting around. If his brother couldn't be on time, he'd just go swimming without him, so there. Let Dev look for him for a change! As he approached the entrance to the secret falls, Vincent looked around; and seeing no one in sight, quickly took the turn that lead into the cave. As he crawled along, suddenly he heard voice in front of him: Why, someone was down here already! But who? Peeking out into the main chamber, he lay on his stomach and looked around; spied Devin splashing and laughing back to...OH, NO! Allegra was there with him. He had told! He decided to watch a while; maybe he could learn something to help him understand this girl a bit more. He thought he knew his friend, But this girl was now almost a stranger, she didn't act like a friend, anymore. At least, not to him! The other day, she had been walking with a girlfriend and he had been behind them walking with Devin. As the boys had passed her and her friend, Dev had said quietly, "Hello, "legs", Hi, Janet"....Vincent had just said "hi" and kept walking then froze in his tracks and looked at Devin's face. He was blushing! And, what had he called 'Llegra? "LEGS". Why LEGS? "Devin, why did you call her that?" "What"? "You know what.."LEGS:" "Oh. I don't know; she has got nice legs, look for yourself!" He looked back at her, and shrugged, she had legs, so what, so did he! "So, she has legs, big deal!" "Yeh but Vin, WHAT legs!" She had heard this comment and just smiled at Dev as they approached the boys. Suddenly, Vincent laughed, couldn't seem to stop: "Hey. Dev! Why don't you call her "bumps", she's got those, too!" Devin gasped as she spun around to face Vincent, "you nasty little boy, I'll tell Father what you said!" She bent over and picked up a rock and flung it at him HARD. Instinctively ducking the stone, it whizzed by his head and smacked Devin on the nose! "OUCH!" She ran to comfort him, "Oh, Dev! I'm so sorry, THAT was meant for your brother, what a ..a..pest he's becoming! Oh, dear, you're bleeding! Let me see." Allegra took a small hankie from her pocket and wiped away the blood. Vincent went to look; it didn't look so bad. Just a tiny cut. SHE turned on him,

positively furious! "You go away, Vincent. This is your fault. Go! Play with the children your own age, and leave us alone!" He looked to his brother; Dev was silent; would not look up at him. He just sat and held the hankie to his nose. And now, Devin had told her about their secret swimming place! How could he do that, he had promised! As he watched he was getting madder and madder. Then, Allegra screamed, "Devin, something just floated by my leg! Oh, get it away, ugh! What was it?" Dev captured the flotsam on a stick. "oh, it's just a bunch of weeds, that's all. She had already climbed out of the pool and sat down on the rocks nearby; "I thought it was a snake. Thank you for getting it away from me, Devin:" Vincent almost laughed out loud: She was the one who usually LIKED snakes, and all other sorts of things girls weren't supposed to like: What was she doing, acting like that over a dumb weed? He watched a bit longer and was sorry he did: As Devin went and sat beside her, she reached up and put her arms on his shoulders. When he turned to face her, she kissed him. AGAIN! Vincent grinned, now Dev would give it to her: Kissing was disgusting, Dev had said so only a few days ago! But his brother said NOTHING! Vincent almost fell from the ledge he was perched on as Devin put his arms around her waist and kissed her back! That was enough for him! Vincent ran. THIS, he would tell Father! Oh, boy, Dev and her would "get it" now.

*

When Vincent burst into his Chamber, Father had been deeply absorbed in a medical manual; Vincent had scared the wits out of him! "Father, guess what! Devin and Allegra, oh! OH!" Father lowered the book to the table and gave his attention to the young boy now squirming in front of him, bursting to tell him something: "Yes, son, what is it?" Vincent shouted it, "Devin and Allegra...they're..... they're....KISSING each other!" The man frowned, "they were what?" "They were kissing! Is Dev gonna get punished, huh? IS HE?" Father shook his head, "No I don't think so. I will speak to them both at a later time of this incident. But Vincent, you must hear me now;

someday, when you're Devins' or Allegras' age, you too, may want to kiss a girl! He saw the look on Vincent's face..... "right now I am sure you think I must be crazy to even suggest this, yes?" The small boy looked quite thoughtful for a moment, "Father, will I really someday feel and act like Devin and "Llegra are now? REALLY?" "Yes, I'm sure you will, Vincent. It's called growing up, son. We all have to do it, mores the pity!" "You mean, there's nothing I can do about it; no medicine or...or...anything I can take to stay small?" Father smiled and hugged his little son. "No I'm afraid not! This is how it is for everyone, Vincent. For everyone!" But Vincent was gathering up his forces for one last argument; his best one! "But, you've told me I'm, well, 'different.' That some things others do, I may never do and some places they go, I can't. Maybe, if I try real hard I can force myself to stay small, huh, Father?" The man smiled, thinking, "God only knows, my dear son, only God...and time will tell what future, what destiny, finally awaits.....YOU!" Holding him in a fierce embrace, Father felt tears in his eyes; what fate indeed, will my boy face eventually? Is he to be forever doomed to a life of "aloneness", "separateness", never to 'know' a womans love? What kind of life would that be, for any man; unless the man chose it for himself? Looking up into Fathers' face, Vincent smiled, then saw the tears, "Father! What is it? You look.....sad." He sighed, and looked down with love at his son, trying to scan his face to see his future; to no avail. "Vincent your life may be quite different than the one you would have chosen as another man. But trust me when I say, I have an idea that somewhere out there a future of brightness and hope does await you! My son, it does!" Well readers, it does, yes? And the brightness is called Catherine:

A Prayer of a Different Kind

By

Patricia Anne Kehoe

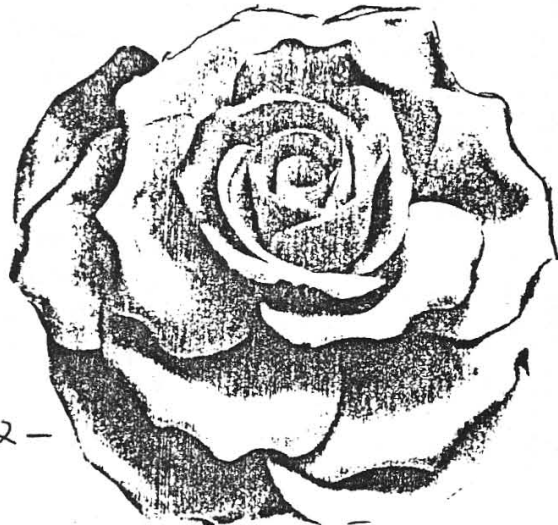
Each of us that admits to a soul has their own way in which to pray. Some kneel supplicative. Others cry out in fear to ask mercy. Some disavow their lot. I simply accept.

I walked this world a solitary thing or man; depending on who describes such as I. Accepted this my life - as others sadly accept theirs. I prayed in my way for release; even for death in the depth of my aloneness. But Gods would not grant this prayer. I live.

One day, a miracle! These same Gods must take a greater pity on the solitary of this world than I had believed. They answered my acceptance with a prayer of their OWN choosing - my prayer now. Merely a name that holds my soul - my life..... my aloneness.....

That which the Gods gave me in their great pity; seeing my despair of what I was..neither man nor thing:

A prayer of a different kind.....Catherine!



Ivory Rose

By

P. A. Kehoe



To these cursed hands that have known blood; to
protect those loved; have slain, she tenderly
enfolds an Ivory Rose. Green-grey eyes hold
promises, sun bright, they shine. As my beloved
trusts to these fierce palms to cherish, keep
as mine in sweet repose. A gift she does most
treasure - her ancestral Ivory Rose.

Presses these ivoried petals to my grasp. Whispers
"in betrothal, to our "bond", softly up to me.
Tis sentiment of time past times antiquity. Of
loved ones gone, yet ever dear. As I with all
man's instincts deny on dampened breast, these,
mine own grateful tears.

Hands lovingly to me, the fragile souvenir. Oh
precious, dearest gift! A pledge to her give as
I do in stillness take. This Ivory Rose, her trust,
nor heart of innocence; vow not shall I e'er break.

TUNNEL LIFE
The Masquerade

By
Patricia Anne Kehoe

The night sky was purple-blue and clear. It seemed as though one could reach up and touch each star in greeting. It was May and a beautiful night for looking both to the past and the present. A night for dreaming of what could be; what had been. Vincent stood between Father and Catherine with an arm lovingly placed about each of them as he admired the night before him. "Ah Father, look. There is Andromedea, see the configuration?" Father looked up and smiled. "I think you're wrong, Vincent; It looks more like Cassopaeia, see her chair?" Catherine watched this exchange with some amusement; Vincent was so seldom wrong, especially about the stars. He saw and studied them for so many years, for so many nights of his life. Fathers' next words made her shake with laughter as she attempted to hide her giggles from Vincent and naturally failed miserably: "Well Vincent! It must be you are distracted tonight, hummmm?" And he looked from Vincent to Catherine and back again to his son with an ever widening grin on his lips. Father knew when Catherine was nearby, his son was occupied solely with thinking of her as a rule. This was accepted by the general tunnel population, as a fact, and a foregone conclusion for some years now. Every one of his friends knew if they wanted to see him, or ask something of him, they must do it during the week and during the day. For the nights and the week-ends belonged to Catherine. This was Friday and even Father had been both surprised and pleased when Vincent and Catherine had met him in the tunnel corridor as they were heading for this entrance; and had invited him to walk along with them to admire the stars. Father knew how precious, how cherished their time together was. He felt somehow honored. they included him in their talks tonight. He felt a tug at his arm, Catherine was touching the material of his new cloak that had been a gift from Mary on his birthday. This was the first time he had worn it. It was a deep maroon velvet and wool. Lined with flannel and many, many pockets for storage had been sewn into the deep grey lining. "Father, this is a beautiful cape: It

reminds me of pictures I've seen of the court of Henry the Eighth; the England of the early sixteen hundreds when all men dressed in a more decorative style than they do now. Except, of course, the people of your world, and Vincent, in particular." She smiled this last towards him and he beamed back at her, "thank you, Catherine. It is most gratifying to know you approve of my attire; if you did not, well....I would have to begin wearing a suit, I imagine..." Father chuckled loudly over this as Catherine snorted quite unladylike at the thoughts her mind was weaving. Vincent in a grey flannel suit. Oh God! That would have been one time that the man certainly would have outshone the clothes! She tried in her minds-eyes to see him actually wearing a three piece suit and a tie. She convulsed with laughter, "Oh, no! Every woman in town would be chasing you. I don't need the competition!" He looked down at her, a small shy smile darting about his lips, "you shall never have any competition, my love." Catherine looked away for a moment, thoroughly surprised that he had said this out loud, and in front of Father! Her quick glance to Father told her he was thinking the same thing; he was staring at his son, mouth slightly agape! Slowly, she cleared her throat and changed the subject back towards her previous ideas. "Yes, Father. Your new cloak is lovely. Oh I wish I could have lived in those times! The manners of the lords and ladies, the clothes they wore, the jewels! When knighthood was in flower, huh?" The older man smiled back. "I will tell Mary how much you admire her handiwork, it will please her immensely. I'm sure." He noticed a strange, unknown look come over Catherine's face for a moment. "my dear, are you all right?" Vincent now also looked down at her, Catherine seemed to be a million miles away, lost in thought. "Have you left us, Catherine? Where are you?" She looked at both of them, and grinned slyly. She had an idea; one that Father would, perhaps go along with, but Vincent? "I have a great idea! Why don't we have a ball, a masquerade ball! Everyone could come as his or her favorite character from history, or someone they admire. Oh, think of it! To be all dressed up as a lady or gentlemen of "Court", or a movie character. Oh, it would be such fun. Father? Vincent? Well, what do you think? I could provide any costumes anyone needed, or people

could make their own: Please? If I can get enough people to agree, could we do it? It would be fun!" Vincent looked first at her then to Father, an enigmatic look on his face, and waited for Father to respond. He secretly hoped Catherine could be talked out of this idea: Dressing up like a....a..dandy was all right for Halloween, but now in the middle of May, for just a party! Catherine could sense Vincent was less than enthusiastic about her plans, but she also decided that Father would, of course, have the last word: If he agreed, Vincent would go along: Perhaps grudgingly at first; she remembered times before when an idea had bothered him at first then not at all, as he let himself relax and be caught up in the change in lifestyle for a few hours! A party or a dance was seldom done in his world just for "no reason at all"! But a costume? This he was not sure of, not at all! Father was looking up to the Heavens as though for guidance; thinking of how quiet these last months had been. Maybe a change would be good for everyone. He surprised Catherine, and stunned his son with a nod of agreement. "Yes, Catherine! Your idea sounds truly quite interesting..... I know the ladies would welcome the change in routine; if not the men! Well, Vincent? You have nothing to say; this is most unusual:" He narrowed his eyes, glaring at his Father, then almost growled a retort "it was not I that Catherine asked an opinion of, Father. But, you!" He turned and looked at her hoping she would understand his reluctance of costumes. He was different enough as he was: She knew most of his thoughts already. They were like a finely tuned violin; one string well aware of the other, they blended together as one sound usually, one heart, one mind. This was not one of those times. "Oh, Vincent! You don't have to wear a costume, if you'd rather not. It was just an idea, for Heavens sake: Get that LOOK off your face; as though I were leading you to your doom!" Then Catherine hugged him hard and whispered in his ear so only he could hear her, "wear what you like. WEAR NOTHING! Just be there, to dance with me," The man stood silent, at a loss for words at what she had whispered to him. Wear nothing? Really! He almost choked trying to reply to her teasing. "I will be happy to dance with you, Catherine. If the other men are not so charmed by your presence they take all your dances away from me." She giggled and buried her head deeply into his cloak as a flush came over her face. This was a side one

rarely saw of Vincent. A teasing, sharp-witted man that could match "tone" with the best of them, if he so choose; He now chose to do just that: "And naturally, Father you will be coming as King Henry? You already have a..ummm, bit of the paunch he was reputed to have had. Why it will require little padding for the role at all, yes?" Father was instantly furious, then indignant, finally realizing he was being taunted. Well, this would not do! Where was his sons' respect for his parent: "Please, show a bit of respect, Vincent! I do not have a "paunch", just a bit of a...a... Oh, never mind: I'm going to bed! Catherine, your idea is fine with me, and I'm sure others in our world will be very excited to hear there will be a party. Unlike the grouch you love, some of us like a different atmosphere now and again! Vincent, good night, I will see you tomorrow, if my huge stomach lets me get up!" With that sarcasm on his tongue, Father winked at Catherine, and went Below to bed. She turned to Vincent, "you were quite unkind, you realize? Telling Father he's fat!" He shook his magnificent head in protest, "I never said he was fat, maybe a bit portly, perhaps....." She giggled, "some day you too may have "love handles"! Remind me to tease YOU then!" He looked a question at her, "love handles, Catherine? What....?" She grabbed lightly at the flesh at either side of his strong, lean hips and pinched what little extra skin there was, "these are love handles; something a person...ummm, hangs onto when loving.. Understand?" Vincent of course understood. He looked to her with hooded eyes, the blueness of them and the glint belieing his next words, "let's see if YOU have these "handles"! He reached out and gripped her firmly around the waist, tickling her with his thumbs as he held on to her graceful form. "Stop that: I'm ticklish, you know that. Vincent!" As she stepped tightly into his arms, he stopped the torture of his hands. Suddenly his hands began to move on her as never before. He slowly raised one to her face and let the other trace over her hips, to her ribs, up her arm, where it joined the other hand to hold her face to his gaze fully. Catherine felt her knees begin to shake from the intensity of his blue eyes staring into hers. He was looking at her in a way he never had. Searching, for what? Seeking, what? Learning, what? Whatever he had been

probing her face for, he seemed to have found. He enfolded her even tighter to his heart, sighing deeply. Vincent saw the love in her eyes as he pulled his gaze from hers; saw also the haunting passion they never talked of, the taboo subject that was the private hell they shared only between themselves for these last three years. He knew this situation must be resolved soon. He could deny her nothing, except what she had wanted most from him - himself. He loved her more than his own life, his soul, yet denied to her the one act that would unite them fully forever. The simple act of love. He had flirted around the edges of it; the passion, many times as he had held her in the past. She bade a hunger rise in him that at times had nearly consumed him. He had to leave her quickly then, before she sensed these feelings and could react to them. Vincent knew, in the deepest part of all he was, that she loved him. As fully if not more than he loved her. Yet his own body repulsed HIM - how could he share this body with her? It would surely not please her to look on his physical form; it was so different from her own. So he held his longings to himself, and dreamed his passions away as best he could, for as long as he had been able. The dreams were not helping lately. They only made things harder to endure when he saw her, touched her; lately even just talking to Catherine now was becoming difficult. At times, she read to him and if Vincent had been pressed, he could not have told what the words she spoke were. He was lost in looking at her. When she at times, absent-mindedly, licked one finger to turn a page, he envied that finger, wanted to be that page! Catherine held him and rested her head on his chest as she listened to the quickening beat of his heart beneath her ear. She knew how difficult it was becoming to hold her. Vincent did not need to say the words. Her own mind said them for him, to herself. She wanted him fully. As any woman wanted the man she loved. Catherine yearned for his touch, his body on hers; his lips on hers. Everything, she wanted everything. And it was becoming very, very difficult - to accept less.

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When Father put the word out on the tunnel pipelines about the party, people were on a whole really happy about the event. A few of the men didn't want to dress up just as Vincent had not wanted to, But their wives "changed their minds for them ! It was a party, everyone better be in the "spirit" of the moment or else! None of the men wanted to find out what exactly "or else" meant. When all the children discovered that they too, were invited, the shouting and yelling in excitement nearly drove Father over the edge. "Yeh, we get to go too! Hey, Father, what'll you be dressed as?" Will a frown over the top of his glasses towards the exuberient children he responded, "I haven't really decided yet, I may go as a scary ghost..booooo!" The children ran screaming in mock fright from Father. He grinned after them. Well, this was one way to get a bit of peace and quiet. He pondered their question however: what would he go as; then he had an idea that made him chuckle. He would go as a Magician -"Jacobi the Great". Yes! As a youngster, he had been quite good, well fair anyway, at magic. He had almost forgotten how much fun it had been to perform tricks others could not begin to figure out. Well he better get practicing! With that thought he started skimming through his books. "Let's see..magic.-..magic. AHA!"

Vincent was reading and trying to ignore the hubbub outside of his Chamber, but Pascal brought the noise in with him. "Vincent, I need your help! Do you have anything old and green that you could give me? I need to make a jacket. Something you don't want back?" Vincent thought a moment, "yes, Pascal. As a matter of fact, I have an old green shirt that really is beyond mending. Would that do? What do you have to have green specifically, for? Oh, let me guess. THE PARTY: UGH: COSTUMES!" Vincent raised his eyes to the ceiling;

expecting Pascal to laugh and agree. But Pascal looked angry instead:
"I'm a bit surprised at your attitude, my friend. To hurt Catherine
so; well, your business I suppose! Thanks for the shirt." But, before
he could leave, Vincent reached out and grabbed him by the back of his
coat, "what did you mean, hurt Catherine? She understands I will not
be in costume; she didn't appear to be upset by that fact. Have you
heard something I have not? TELL ME!" Pascal grinned. "Well, Mary said
that Rita said that Trisha said, that Catherine really wished you would
get a bit more into the spirit of the party, that's all. Why even
Winslow is getting a costume! He's going to be Othello. And, I'm going
to be Robin Hood. Has Father told you - he's going as a magician! I
hope he doesn't pull any "sawing someone in half". I'm not going near
him all night!" After Pascal had gone, Vincent sat for a very long
time on his bed, thinking,...then slyly smiling.

*

Catherine, Mary and the other women were giggling together in the
kitchen; one of the women had told everyone how she had "enticed" her
husband to wear a costume! "I just told him that if he DIDN'T wear
a costume, he may as well stay home and watch the children. They had
chicken pox and can't attend. And, they are VERY cranky! Well, he is
going to dress, I thought he would!" Catherine asked Mary, "What will
you be wearing, or is it a deep dark secret?" Mary stopped making
bread long enough to respond, "it's no secret, my dear. I will be
Florence Nightingale! What are you wearing?" Catherine motioned the
other women closer, then whispered to them.....

*

Winslow was carrying chairs and boxes of decorations towards the

Great Hall, when a half-familiar voice called out loudly, "Hi! How have you been, Winslow?" He turned and looked back. It was Allegra! Allegra was an old friend, a former tunnel inhabitant for many years. She now lived Above and worked for Dr. Alcott. She specialized in head trauma and was a very good doctor. He was so happy to see her; "Hi, "Al", gosh, it's been nearly a year! How are you? I heard you had been down to see us, But I was away, visiting friends Above and missed you the last time. Are you coming to the party?" She looked puzzled, "what party? I just came by to say hello to Father, and a few others, including you! What's the party for?" They walked together towards the Great Hall, Winslow explaining about Catherines' idea. How all the "family" was "gung ho" except Vincent. He refused to dress up for the affair. "He's being very stubborn about it. Al. Maybe.. Hey! Yeh! He'll listen to you, you're old friends! Why, you, he and Devin practically grew up together!" Allegra shook her head, "I don't think so, Winslow! If he won't do it for Catherine, well..he won't do it for anyone. Boy, he can sure be stubborn! Some things never change, huh?" A while later, walking towards Fathers' Chamber, Al heard the laughter coming from the kitchen and peeked in. "Hi, ladies! What's going on?" The woman almost fell over themselves trying to hug Al. Mary finally pushed the others aside, "ladies, please, give her room to breathe! Now sit down, my dear, and tell us all the news: How is Dr. Peter? We haven't seen you for quite a while! He's not working you too hard is he?" Allegra laughed, "oh, no, he's a teddy bear! But,

to change the subject for just a moment - what's this I hear about a Masquerade party? Am I invited, too?" Catherine reached over and hugged Al, "of course you're invited! We have a lot to catch up on, right ladies? For instance, how's your.....ummm, love life?" Catherine teased her friend. She had gotten to know Allegra very well during her stay in the tunnels when her Father had died. Allegra had been very kind to her, Catherine never forgot kindness. And besides, Al was fun! She teased Father and Vincent unmercifully and managed to get away with it most of the time! She had a quick tongue and a keen mind. All packaged in a tiny little frame of five feet tall and about one hundred pounds; she was a dynamo when she wanted to be. Catherine secretly almost envied her the ease in which she could joke with Vincent. They had shared childhood, and had many memories and good times to talk of; sometimes she had felt quite left out. Why, she had been almost jealous of her. But, as Catherine got to know Allegra better, she liked her very much, and now she treated her as a long absent sister. "Hey, you haven't called me in months: To busy for old friends huh?" The women continued to talk amongst themselves as they readied the food for the party. This was Wednesday, the party was Saturday, and there was so much to do:

Allegra tiptoed into Fathers' Chamber, ^{*}He and Vincent were having a rather heated discussion over a Chess move. "Vincent, you know I would never make that move! Why, my hand must have brushed against it accidentally. Really!" His son looked at him HARD, then shook his head, "yes, I can see you did not mean to move the King. You may proceed Father, I.r....." Vincent looked up and saw Allegra in the doorway holding a finger to her lips as she made her way quietly to

Fathers' chair, reached up and put her hands over his eyes, "guess who" she squeaked in a falsetto voice so Father would not recognize her right away. He twisted this way and that, but she held on. "No, you must guess! Father. think....who always gave you the worst time as a youngster? I mean, of course, BESIDES DEVIN!" Father shook his head, he still didn't know. She winked at Vincent, "all right, who hid the frog in your bed that scared the hell out of you one rainy night?" Father clasped her hands and turned in his chair, "Allegra! My dear, come around here! Let me look at you! Why, you're still as lovely as ever, isn't she, Vincent?" His son smiled up to her and nodded his agreement with that statement. Al felt herself blush, damn! She always had a schoolgirls crush on Vincent, Hell, all the girls had! But over the years, the crush had turned to deep friendship; one she would always treasure. Allegra was a very 'private' person; no one really knew what she was thinking most of the time. And no one knew she had transferred her love to Devin long ago. She loved him still. She guessed she always would, damn it. She had been thinking these thoughts to herself. Vincent suddenly said, "he's not been in touch for months now, Al. We hoped he'd be home for Christmas but..". She looked at Vincent, stunned. She had nearly forgotten his empathic abilities! He had always known what she was feeling and still did. This maddened her. It wasn't fair. She said this aloud, "hey! that's not fair! You always know what I'm feeling., What everyone is feeling!. And no one knows what's going on in the golden head of yours! By the way. Vin...how's Catherine, huh?" The question brought a "look" at her from underneath his curved eyebrows, "Catherine is well. Why do you

ask? Wasn't she in the kitchen when you passed by just now?" Allegra reached over and tugged lightly on his hair, "Oh you! Well, I hear that there's going to be a party soon, And yes, I did see Catherine, smarty and I am invited to come. What will you be wearing Father? You, Vin?" Father looked a bit uncomfortable, He knew Vincent was not going to wear a costume. He waited for him to tell this to Al, Oh brother, this should prove quite interesting! She'd never let him get away with not wearing some kind of outfit: Vincent looked a bit uncomfortable himself as he replied, "well I had thought I would just come as I am: Allegra you of all people, know how I am about parties!" Al looked at him smiling, "yeh! They scare the hell out of you! Or so you've always said anyway! I think it's just your way of getting out of dancing with all the girls, Mr. Bashful: HA!" Just as Al uttered this taunt, Catherine entered the Chamber. She saw that Al and Father were chuckling, and that Vincent was the butt of some sort of teasing: He smiled and went to meet her as she reached the bottom of the stairs. "Hello Catherine. We were just, ummm, discussing the party. Al, it appears, is rather put out that I am not dressing, I told her you understood. Now she's being her usual self - a pest. Ah, this brings back many old memories: Allegra remember the time you decided you wanted to go swimming, and didn't have a suit, why....." Her screech of embarrassment ended the "let's tease" game, for now: Catherine smiled, "I just stopped by to say good night. I'm exhausted! I've never cooked or seen so much food in a long time. I may never eat again! Goodnight Father. Al, see you tomorrow? How about lunch? Sal's, at one? Can you make it?" The girl nodded back, "sure: I'll see you then. We can have a real old gab fest, and talk about these guys, huh?"

Just as Vincent and Catherine turned to leave, Al shouted out a final retort to her "brother". "And we can discuss tomorrow, what to do about HIS refusal to dress as everyone else is. Hey! I know what I'm going to be - a witch! I have a long black dress, and I can get a mask tomorrow." She didn't hear Vincents' remark under his breath as he took Catherines' arm and led her from the room. "Appropriate!" He was teasing, but still. It irked him, why was EVERYONE so intent on getting him into a damnedable costume? He wanted to scream, LET ME ALONE; but held his tongue. Father had once said he had the patience of Job in the Bible, Well this patience was WEARING thin! Catherine glanced at him as they walked along in silence to the basement of her apartment. He looked a little angry. Oh! Oh! This caused her to stop and turn to face him, "Vincent, please. I'm sorry your friends are pushing you so about the, well, you know. Don't let it upset you? Please?" Vincent sighed, sometimes Catherine seemed quite able to read his thoughts! How could he explain, make her understand? At times, he hid some of his feelings even from her. He felt out of place enough at times, even here among his family. He hated being the center of attention. Yet he knew a costume, any costume would naturally, be discussed and looked over by all there. He was too shy to face this. Vincent would much rather just blend into the background; this is the way he enjoyed parties most. He could watch the fun from a distance, and enjoy the giety quite well. How could he explain this to Catherine? "I must tell you my reasons for not wanting a costume, Catherine. You will not agree of course, but I look different enough already. Surely, I don't need a costume too!" She looked pained by his words, "don't say things like that. Vincent, or I will surely cry. You are different, yes. But, I think you're the handsomest man I've ever seen or known, you know this to be true. And you don't owe me an explanation, anyway!"

Vincent looked a bit puzzled. "But, I was told you were upset..... Catherine snorted a protest, "that's gossip. Of course I was not upset:" But as the saying went, Vincent thought "she doth protest too much", and knew Catherine was telling him what she in her head thought was true, but in her heart, well..... They now stood face to face at the entrance to her basement. Vincent smiled and held out his arms, and Catherine went very willingly into them. She was immediately aware of how comforting and warm this place was; his arms. Nothing could ever hurt her from this place of safety, she knew this and sighed, deeply grateful for whatever fates had sent this man to her. If she must wait for him forever to complete her unspoken wish, so be it. He was worth it; worth everything to her. Vincent sensed the peace she was feeling as it washed over him, echoed from her heart and into his. He kissed her gently, then released her with regret on his face, and watched until she was out of sight before turning for home. He had much to do before the party. He had decided days ago to wear a costume. But the constant "nagging" from his friends had made him silent on even admitting this to them. They would just have to wait and see. And perhaps be a trifle ashamed at their taunting? He smiled a sly smile as he turned for home. He did not know what exactly Catherine would be wearing, but he did know of her penchant for England and the days of the Tudors. He hoped she would like his attire! It was being worn for her sake alone! Ah, love, what thee can make me do, without a word. I would never knowingly disappoint you, surely you know this? He said this to himself as he ducked his handsome head beneath his bed, searching for the box that held his surprise.

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Finally, it was Saturday and six o'clock. Catherine was in Marys' Chamber, with Allegra and Jamie. They were helping each other dress, admiring the clothes as they did. First Jamie looked at herself in the mirror; she hardly recognized herself. Instead of her usual "non-gender" clothing, she was dressed quite beautifully as Cinderella. Catherine had loaned her a ball gown from years ago that had been too beautiful to discard. It had hung in her closet many years; she was thankful now that someone would again wear it. Jamie looked so pretty in it. "Oh, Jamie, that dress fits you like

a glove. Why, all you need is a tiara..." Allegra jumped up, "I know

who had one:" She ran from the room as fast as her long, black tight gown would let her. Finally, in disgust as being "hobbled", she pulled the gown up to her knees and as the others laughed continued on her errand. Next, Mary and Jamie helped Catherine dress, exclaiming over and over again at her gown. She was dressed as Elizabeth the First, Queen of England. Her gown was royal blue velvet, sewn over with satin. Small pearls and crystals were scattered here and there on the skirt. She was wearing three hoops and was a bit ungainly and not yet used to them. Her high, starched white collar rose behind her neck imperiously, as it should. Her hair was curled into the tight ringlets she had seen in so many of the Queens' pictures. As she put on layers of jewelry, Catherine suddenly giggled. "Mary look at this stuff! Why, if these were real gems, we could buy New York:" Mary smiled replying, "yes...but would we want to own it?" This made both Catherine and Jamie laugh as they agreed! No, they did not want to own New York; it was a dirty city! Maybe, Hawaii? They all nodded agreeing. Hawaii, it would be! Allegra came flying into the room as though being chased, "those little dickens. The children were actually chasing me! Trying to see if I could fly on a broom, like a real witch! For heavens' sake, I'm glad Father or Vincent didn't see that, I'd never hear the end of it. Look what I found!" She held out one hand and a small pearl tiara towards Jamie. Although Al now lived Above, she had many trunks stored down here in her old room. Father had promised he would always keep that room vacant for her and he kept promises. Well, she remembered her mother had worn a tiara once, long ago to a party, almost like this one tonight! She was happy Jamie could use it, it looked quite right with her gown. Then, Als' mouth flew open, but no words came out. Catherine looked positively regal! But something was not right..... "Your gown is great, Cath. But, I don't think you can fit through the doorway! Have you tried yet?" Catherine looked at her, horrified, "no! I never even thought of it. Damn! Well, let me try: But if I fit, I'll wait there. I'm not going to try it twice!" With that, a look of determination came over her face as she hoisted up the voluminous stiff petticoats

and started up the few steps. She got stuck the first two times; the damned skirts were too wide! The other women watched with interest as they saw Catherine's face redden with determination. She looked out into the corridor and yelled, "hello, is anyone there? Can anybody hear me?" Silence, good! She then lifted the skirts over her head and showing the long, white pantaloons to all present, whisked out into the corridor and dropped her skirt into place with a smug look back at the doorway. "Ha, dumb door, thought you had me, huh?" The others were hysterical! Catherine very rarely swore. And to lift her skirts like that; to take a chance on someone being out there to see her. Well! As she smoothed her skirts the others joined her in the corridor, still giggling. She turned to them using a quite "imperious" tone of voice, "WE find nothing amusing. Pray tell, what had struck thee as so funny?" Her tone now matched her attire, as she fell screaming with giggles into Allegras' arms. Al gulped and tried to regain her composure, "Oh God. Cath. You're so funny. You sounded like a Queen just then. Vincent would have truly been at a loss for words. Do it again when you see him, okay? Please, I'm dying to see his reaction. MY QUEEN!" With that, Al bowed deeply to her friend, then gave her a whack on the fanny! "Come on, your highness!" The four walked towards the Great Hall, meeting many others on their way there. The women had all planned to get there early; to be sure the refreshments were as they were supposed to be, check on the music that the teenagers were providing (God help us all) and make sure the husbands and boyfriends were not already dipping too deeply into the punchbowl: Allegra had made the punch from a girlfriends recipe. It was fruit juice, pineapple and rum; chilled with great blocks of frozen vodka! The younger children had been warned, this was NOT for them. The youngsters, of course, had their own drinks and juices, they weren't too unhappy at not being allowed to taste the adults. But still, maybe a quick cup when no one was looking? Catherine looked around her, well satisfied. The decorations were appropriate, festoons of flowers and crepe paper covered most of the walls, and paper rose petals were scattered about the floor. What a mess to clean later! But, the men would be conscripted into helping! Or coericed, whichever worked! She heard many people suddenly gasp, and turned to see..... Oh Lord, it was Father! He looked like Merlin, from King Arthurs' court. A magician, how wonderful! She jumped. as

did everyone else in the room, when he reached into his sleeve and pulled out ^{paper} flowers, then a rabbit and finally a dove: These he set into a large bowl Winslow carried in from the corridor. Covering it with a cloth, Father waved his hand over it and mumbled something that sounded a lot like "presto changeo", tapped the cloth twice and whisked it away. The rabbit and dove were gone. And the flowers were now real! Mary gasped, "how did you do that?" Father announced. "the Great Jacobi" never tells his secrets! Ah, Catherine, excuse me,... Majesty...why is there money in your hair?" She reached towards her head puzzled, "what money? Where?" The Great Jacobi put one hand out and plucked many quarters from her head and tossed them to the children, who shouted with glee: "Yeh Father! Ooops, Jacobi, thanks!" Winslow laughingly joined the others around Father. Mary noticed for the first time how he was dressed. "Winslow! You must be... Oh, what's the name I'm searching for? Catherine?" Catherine suggested, "I think maybe Winslow is Othello. Am I right?" Winslow nodded, then spoke in the deep tones of a "stage actor", yes my dear, you are correct!" Now more of the men were entering the room. Some were dressed as pirates, some as cowboys, and Pascal was a very presentable Robin Hood. Catherine and Allegra turned to each other with the same question, "where is Vincent?" The words were barely out of their mouths when a tall figure dressed in purple stood in the doorway. A black plumed hat sat forward on his head, almost over one eye, and this figure leaned on a sword as he brushed aside a black cape and slowly, haughtily, entered the gathering that were now to a man, staring up at him in awe. It was Vincent! He walked silently over to Elizabeth, the Queen, and with a flourish, bowed deeply and touched his hat to the floor at her feet, "Your majesty. Your humble servant the Earl of Essex, awaits your command." Catherine smiled, as did many of the others that knew their history. The Earl of Essex it was rumored, was the only true love of Elizabeth I. She had almost given up the throne for love of him. How wonderful for Vincent to dress like this tonight, for Catherine! How fitting, and how noble. He had put aside his feelings of shyness ENTIRELY, for her sake. He tonight, WAS the Earl of Essex and he would act the part. She curtsied — to him as the music started. "My lord, shall we?" He held

out his arm stiffly; "as you wish, milady". Trying not to be too obvious, everyone watched as he and Catherine danced slowly, regally up and down the room before they too, joined the couple on the dance floor. Father spun Mary about the room quite lightly, even his bad hip didn't seem to be bothering him, for the moment, anyway. One of the younger "pirates" was leading a blushing Jamie onto the floor, and Allegra was dancing with Pascal, laughing over some remark he made as he looked toward Father. What no one seemed to notice was the figure all in black that now stood silent; watching all below from the stairway. The tall man wore black silk, all black silk clothing, Black gloves, boots, and a "half" mask. He was carrying a whip in his left hand and his right hand cradled the gun tied loosely at his waist. In his belt was a single red rose. Vincent saw the figure first and frowned slightly. He did not seem to recognize him yet; this was curious. Who was he? The thin black mustache was not painted on, it looked REAL. He knew no one with a mustache like this. He glanced over to Father, then back to the stairway as the man slowly came down the stairs and pushed his way gently through the people dancing until he stood before Catherine! Vincent tensed; every muscle waiting for whatever move the man made next. Those closest to him could hear a low rumble rising from his chest into a deep growl as the man reached out and took her hand from Vincents', bowed, and handed her the rose as he waltzed her off into the crowd. Vincent stood where he was, but his eyes were on the man constantly. He would not start trouble, this was not his way. But he was never going to take his eyes off of that stranger, not for a moment! Then Vincent gasped as Catherine stood still in the middle of the room, eyes wide. Then threw herself into the mans' arms. WHAT WAS THIS? He started towards them as he felt fury rising in his blood. How dare... He froze shock still in mid-step as his senses finally came to his aid. Then Father, who had been walking just behind him- IN CASE, questioned in a whisper, "Vincent, who...?" His son smiled back and simply pointed, "Father, surely you recognize him! A disguise should not fool a parent!" He looked over as the man in black grinned at him, and rushed up to hug him fiercely, Father yelled in surprise, "YOW,

it's Devin! Oh, I should have known! Devin, come here and hug your Father: Come here to me, son. It's good to see you!" Devin walked quickly to his Father, then stopped just out of reach. "My name, Senor is not Deveen, but ZORRO! Come' sta', Padre?" Then he threw himself into Father's waiting arms with a yell, "Hello!" Reaching out his hand to his brother, Vincent tried to keep the joy from his voice, but couldn't. "Devin, I've...we've missed you! How did you know? Where.....What...?" Devin slapped his "BRO" on the back, hard! I was in town yesterday and heading here when I bumped into Winslow coming out of a hardware store. Seems Mary wanted more thumbtacks for the decorations. Well, he told me of this "gathering": I asked him not to tell of seeing me, I can see he kept his word! Thanks Winslow; the surprise went well. Except for a moment there, I thought Vin was going to have my head, as well as the rest of me! Thank God Almighty for his "sixth" sense, huh? Hi, everyone. It's good to see you...all of you!" Devin started to say something else when his voice seemed to desert him. Standing in front of him, hands on hips, was a face he knew. A girl he quite admittedly, was surprised to see here. Allegra, his "Llegs". The nickname he had given to her when first old enough to be aware of her long lovely legs, still stuck. "Llegs, Hi! This is a treat: Come here and hug your old pal!" Father grimaced, Oh, he hated that nickname. He always had and Devin, naturally knew this, and ignored it! She walked slowly towards him until they stood head to chin, "hi, yourself!" With that, Dev picked her up from the ground and whirled her around until they were both quite dizzy. God, she felt good in his arms. He was stunned that a bit of the old feeling for this woman still tormented him as he let regain her breath, and stood her on the floor, still holding her around the waist with one muscled arm. He led her over to the stacks of records the teens had provided and dropped one onto the spindle of the old phonograph Mouse had somehow wired to "borrowed" electricity! Suddenly the sounds of fast, loud, rock and roll filled the Chamber as Dev called out to everyone, "this is a party, let's get down!" Father tried to pull his magicians' hat down over his ears as he prayed to the heavens for strength and patience, either or both, but hurry!

While the hard rock song continued, Vincent asked Catherine if she would care to sit this one out? She knew this was not a dance he would do; especially in front of anyone. She took his arm, and they left the Chamber for a breath of air and some peace and quiet! He turned to her outside the Great Hall smiling, "it seems your party has been a great success, Catherine. I knew it would be! Everything you do seems to turn out well in one form or another. Are you as pleased with the party as you look, my love?" She nodded, "yes, I think everyone is enjoying it! And your outfit left me in shock. When I saw you standing there...I... You looked magnificent. Thank you for wearing what you did. How did you know I would be dressed as I am?" He shrugged, "Truthfully, I didn't know exactly what you would be wearing. But I knew you loved "old English" times, and it was either this costume or Shakespeare!" They walked along the tunnels whispering happily together. The Queen and her courtier; the lord and his lady fair.

Inside, the faster songs had been temporarily brought to a protested halt by Father. His poor ears! "The older people may like something a little less, ummm, energetic. We will play more of THAT later, I promise!" Devin was waltzing Allegra slowly around the room. They stopped and talked to people as they danced, with arms wrapped around each others' waists. Neither seemed able to let go of the other: It had been a long time since they had seen each other - years! She glanced slyly up at Devin. He seemed about the same. A bit grayer at the temples, a few small lines about the eyes. Other than that, it was the same face she had loved for almost all of her life. He was talking to Pascal and laughing about some remembered prank of childhood as she studied him. His laugh and smile still tore at her. God, she loved him still. Foolish! It was the same as loving air. Air and he were the same. Mostly invisible, breezing in and out of ones life as they wanted to! She looked away from him now, trying to regain her composure. Devin sensed her hand shaking as she rested it around his waist. He knew her feelings. For he felt the same way, funny, finally to admit that to himself after all these years! Why had he chosen now he wondered? Old age? Habit? Or was there something in this woman that called to him? Had always done so and he never before, had truly listened? Devin smiled down at her, "how are you?"

Really? Your work goes well? Say hello to Dr. Alcott for me, okay? I thought maybe he'd be here tonight." Inside he was cursing, stop yammering, make sense for Christs' sakes! He was talking nonsense when what he wanted to do most was just pick her up and take her somewhere quiet. Just the two of them, to talk. To... Al lifted her face to his, "I thought Peter was coming, too. Maybe an emergency at the hospital, you know how it is." He wanted polite conversation? Well, fine with her. *

As Vincent and Catherine rejoined the party from the left staircase, he narrowed his eyes and looked to the stairs at the other end of the large hall. Catherine's glance followed his; a woman dressed all in white was standing there as though waiting to be acknowledged, waiting to be ushered in. Catherine thought to herself, she's beautiful. And her clothes! Even though she knew the white outfit wasn't a costume, the woman looked like the "Snow Queen" in a fairytale read long ago. As Catherine felt his grip on her arm tighten until it was painful, she looked back to him, then once again to the woman and gasped as she finally recognized who it was! Lisa, the Lisa that had brought so much pain into Vincent's world. The Lisa that had danced for him, taunted him. Until he reached for her with the abruptness of youth, and she had been repulsed, frightened by his touch and pulled away. His hands had tried to hold her. Vincent had clawed her. This fact and this fact alone, tormented him since then. This was the reason he was so afraid to fully love Catherine. He was terrified he would hurt her as he had Lisa. Catherine looked over again as the woman finally caught Father's eye, and he went to the stairway to meet her. She gripped Vincent's arm hard, "We can leave. You don't have to go down there if you don't want to, Vincent. You don't have to go!" He turned and looked at her, fear on his face. "Yes Catherine, I do have to go. The wounds we gave each other have long healed for her. Maybe now, I can begin to heal my own. Come." She was stunned at this admission; he had said heal. Could that mean once healed, he would be FREE to finally love her totally? She shivered a bit as they descended the staircase. And Catherine prayed to herself all the way down, until they crossed the room and stood before Lisa and Father.

Devin saw Lisa a moment before Allegra did; he was amused, then he remembered the story. Vincent, the screams from Lisa, Fathers' anger at both of them as he said she must leave the tunnels, for her own good, and Vincents'! He also struggled to remind himself of one other thing, it escaped him until he felt Allegras' long nails digging into his flesh. Oh. My God! Allegra had told Lisa never to come Below again. If she did, Al would kill her for the hurt she had caused here. Devin tried to for once in his life, play peacemaker. "Now, Llegs, play it cool. For Vincents sake. okay? PLEASE?" She just bit her bottom lip and nodded at him, never taking her eyes from Lisa who was clinging to Fathers' arm as she looked about the room. Her eyes passed over Devin and Allegra, then she shifted back to their stares. Seemingly unaware or uncaring, of how much her presence was not wanted, Lisa floated over to Dev, gushing, "Oh Dev, it's been so long. How are you? Is this your wife?" Then Dev smiled as he saw Lisa go quite pale, almost the color of her clothes, as she looked closer at Allegra and recognized her. Devin grinned, this would prove interesting. He stepped back a few paces and stood beside Vincent, Father and Catherine; Allegra and Lisa just stood and eyed each other warily, like two combatants, two enemies that were finally face to face. Allegras' voice was very low, dangerously low, "What do you want here? You are not welcome. Don't you know that? Don't you care about feelings? Vincents' feelings? Didn't I warn you NEVER to come back here again? DIDN'T I, you bitch!" With that, Lisa struck Allegra across the face, "I don't have to stand here and be insulted by the likes of YOU, my dear! Father has not told me to leave, who do you think you are, to tell me? You're nobody, you never were. You never will be. Guinea trash!" That's all it took. That was enough. Before Vincent or anyone could stop her, Allegra made a small fist and punched Lisa "dead in the mouth". "I may be as you say, a nobody; but I'm also a human being, something you never were. You warped, twisted excuse for a woman!" With that she lunged at Lisa and they both toppled to the floor, screaming at each other, pulling hair, and trying to bite the others arms. Vincent made a move as though to stop the fight, Catherine put her hand gently on his arm, and said softly, menacingly, "if you interfere, I will never forgive you. Stay

out of this. At least until Al punches her one more time - FOR ME!" He turned and looked at Catherine. stunned, then began to grin as he returned and stood beside her and Father, who had his eyes closed and was wincing with each blow he heard make its way home! Lisa had strong legs being a ballerina, but Allegra was smaller, quicker, and was slowly gaining the upper hand in this melee. Dev went quietly over and stood behind his brother and Father, "Well, the entertainment has begun, I see!" Vincent shot him a look of anger, then tried but failed to hide the grin that spread over his golden face to bury itself in the downward corners of his mouth. His own attitude was troubling him as he watched this turmoil at his feet with interest. He should break this up. Why wasn't he? He must do something. So he did! He broke into a fit of laughing that took everyone by surprise. Even the two ladies gasping and ranting on the floor stopped mid-punch to look over at him: Catherine was nearly in shock. "Vincent? Are you all right?" He turned and took her arm, "yes, I think I am...finally...all right. I really am!" Then a yell from Pascal forced their attention back to the "main event". Allegra had maneuvered Lisa over near the punchbowl. She stood, grabbed the bowl and dumped the red juice and wine completely over Lisas' head. Lisa screamed and jumped to her feet, "Father! Look what she has done! Can't you stop her? Have you no control over this..this..cat?" Father answered slowly, "it seems not, Lisa. But I really haven't tried to control her, now have I?" Lisa reached out as though she was going to slap Father, Vincent grabbed her hand and held it tightly as he looked into her face for what he hoped was the last time in his life. "You won't do that; not to him. EVER! Now, leave, Lisa, please? Leave. You are not wanted here, you never will be again. Do you understand this? DO YOU?" He had yelled this last at her; she shrank back, away from his words and his tight grip of her hand, trying to maintain her lost dignity as the red punch dripped and dribbled down her hair and onto her lovely white dress and fur coat. "Well, never let it be said that I stayed where I wasn't welcomed, Goodbye, all my friends, you'll not see me again." Dev winked at Catherine, "I don't see you now, my dear." Fighting back the tears, Lisa turned

and stiffly walked to the stairway and was quickly gone. Pascal spoke for all of them gathered there, "good riddance, I say!" Devin put his arm on his brothers, "You okay?" Vincent looked at him and just shrugged and nodded his head. Even after all that Lisa had done to him, and the lies she told on Allegra years ago, Vincent still felt a bit sorry for her. She would become a lonely, bitter woman soon enough. This was his thought; this was his gentleness that shone through even now. Even for Lisa. As he walked slowly up to Allegra; who was now sitting down as Catherine helped her clean up a little, he started to smile. Then he broke out into a grin from the look on both women's faces. Allegra started to laugh, whether from nerves or something else none were sure. She couldn't seem to stop. Then, Catherine joined in; also holding her sides and roaring until tears were streaming down both of their faces. Al stood with a motion as though she were washing her hands, "Well, that takes care of that shrew. Now I need a bath to rid myself of the smell of her cheap perfume, PHEW! Christ, talk about smelling like a..... whorehouse!" Devin went to Al and held her around the waist and winked at her, "A bath sounds good to me too! Shall we?" Catching Catherine's eye, Al then raised her eyes to Heaven as if to say to Catherine, "here he goes again!" Cath knew how Allegra felt about Devin. She always had since first seeing them together. You would have to be blind not to see it; sparks flew between them all the time. Funny, Vincent never mentioned it, nor Father. But they were men! And, she supposed like most men, didn't always see what was right under their noses! She and Vincent watched them leave. Catherine yelled out to Al, "Hey! Don't forget! Lunch tomorrow." Allegra acknowledged this with a thumbs up, and she and Devin were gone. Father looked weary as he

held onto Marys arm, "Mary and I will also say our goodnights. It has been a most interesting party, Catherine. Most!" He smiled this at her, then looked at Vincent hard. "I will see you in the morning? Have a good nights sleep, Vincent." He reached over and hugged both Catherine and Vincent, then Mary did the same. Just as they were leaving, Pascal called out, "wait, I must go too, This costume is starting to itch: I forgot, I'm allergic to wool. Vincent, thanks a lot for the woolen shirt, my FRIEND!" Catherine giggled as she looked at Pascal itching and digging at his arms, "Vincent, did you know he was allergic to wool?" Vincent truly had forgotten: Poor Pascal! Now finally, just he and Catherine were alone in the Great Hall. The others had decided to let the cleaning go until the morning, it was very late or early. Depending on how one wished to look at it. It was three a.m. She tried to stifle a yawn that seemed to be coming from her toes. "It's been quite an evening, I agree with Father on that! Are you certain you are going to be all right Vincent? You look...I don't how to describe it. Do you want to talk for a while?" He looked down at her and gently shook his head, "No, we can discuss everything tomorrow, or at least later today. If that is all right?" She agreed; she knew how tired she felt. Catherine could only guess what this evening had done to Vincent. A thousand questions ran through her brain, but she truly was too tired to sort them out right now. They walked along silently until at the basement entrance to her apartment. Catherine turned and started to hug Vincent goodnight, but found herself instead in a forceful embrace and being quite thoroughly kissed. Gasping for air, she took a step backwards, almost tripping

over either her own feet, or the gown. She was too stunned to know which at the moment. That kiss HAD been different, very different. She trembled as she stood not knowing how to react. Momentarily confused; Catherine looked up into Vincents eyes, they were dark; almost black with passion, desire as he reached out and held her to his body hard, fast.....as if he would never again let her go. "I heard something tonight I never thought to hear, Catherine. Did you hear what Lisa said when she and Allegra were screaming at each other? No? Shall I tell you?" He felt rather than saw her nod; she was pressed so tightly to his chest, she could barely move. Not that she wanted to. He spoke slowly, as if savoring each word. "Allegra accused her of some terrible things; most true I imagine. But when Al yelled that the most harm had been done by her to ME, Lisa shouted back she didn't know what Allegra was talking about! She had to be reminded, BE REMINDED, that I had scratched her. Wounded her, I thought, all those years ago. She had to be reminded Catherine! As though it had been nothing.....NOTHING! I saw her shoulder when Al grabbed her dress; there were no scars. At first, I didn't understand; then I knew. She had had plastic surgery, the scars were gone from her." He gently wrapped his strong, furred hands into Catherines hair and drew her lips up as he whispered against them, "the scars are also gone; from me." He then kissed her fully, nudging between her teeth with his tongue until she groaned and opened her mouth to his insistant pressure. The feel of his warm breath in her mouth began to pull waves of need from her body as she fully responded to his kiss. She dug her nails into his arms as Vincent lowered her body across his left arm and

began to caress her with his other hand. She felt him lift her almost completely off the floor with the strength, the passion of this embrace. Catherine gave herself up to him willingly with a cry of pleasure, "so much time! So long, so long to have waited for this. I love you so much, I need you, all of you Vincent. Vincent!" His mouth was on her shoulders, then as he began to push her dress aside at her breasts, she lightly stopped his hand, whispering, "not like this, not here. Please? I want you in my bed. Naked with me, in bed." She lowered her fingers to gently caress his obvious arousal; Vincent growled from somewhere new, somewhere never traveled before. From the depths of his soul sounds now filled his body, his mouth, his brain with hunger. As though a man starved; he was being offered a banquet that would take a lifetime to get his fill of. He needed at least one lifetime, for Catherine. At least that long to get enough of the taste of her, the warmth of her body, the feelings that now consumed him that were emanating from her through the "bond" to his heart, filling it. Flooding it, with the depth of love he felt rising from his Catherine. Vincent took many deep breaths, fighting for some semblance of rationality to come back to his brain. Finally, he won the struggle. "I think perhaps you need some rest. You look as though you will collapse any moment. Shall I come to you later today? Catherine, you know what I want? What we both want; what we will have....soon now. Rest, my love." He grinned down at her flushed face adding, "if you can!" She smiled back as he stood her still shaking to her feet. Catherine understood; it was nearly four a.m.; dawn would be in a few hours. He would have to leave her then. Silently she agreed to wait. She could wait; she was quite an expert at it now! Catherine reached up and lightly stroked his

face with her fingers, "come and have supper with me at seven?" He grinned and shook his glorious head in agreement, "you might never be rid of me once I'm in your apartment. You know this?" Catherine hugged him hard, then turned to leave; calling back over her shoulder, "I know. I'm counting on it!" *

Below, in the Falls Chamber, Al was floating lazily along, almost trancelike in the blue warm water. Her body ached all over! Damn Lisa! She could see bruise^sbeginning to rise on her legs and arms where the bitch had kicked her, Allegra cursed Lisa again, loudly! Just then, she felt a hand on her shoulder from behind. Devin was in the water too! She sank down deeper into the water, mad as hell. "What do you think you're doing? Are you crazy? I don't have a bathing suit on, do you? No? I didn't think so, get away, smartass! This is NOT funny!" Dev just grinned at her embarrassment. "But, Llegs, we always used to swim like this. What's the big deal!" She splashed him as though she were trying to drown him. She nearly succeeded. "What's the big deal!" "You have to ask! Sure we used to swim naked, that was almost twenty years ago you fool" Now one of us is leaving this pool, NOW, and it better be you! I mean it, Devin. What makes you think you can just.. Her voice trailed off as she saw the look in his eyes. Devin wasn't making jokes now. He wanted her. One look at his face and Allegra knew this. She spoke softer, "Dev, please? I can't deal with this right now, okay? Can we talk later?" Devin grinned finally. She hadn't said no! She hadn't said yes, either but..... Well, he intended to stay around for a while until she did. She knew he would. Allegra could see through him like a windowpane. She always had been able to. With a small tight smile, Devin winked at her and started swimming for the edge of the pool, for his clothes. Al was going to shut her eyes, but thought better about it, and just watched as he stood and dried himself. He was aware of her eyes; it didn't bother him. It didn't bother her either!

✱

She and Devin sat and talked well past dawn; they had a lot to catch up on. Nearly a lifetime! But as they talked and kidded each other mercilessly, Allegra wondered why she felt as though they had never really been apart for more than a few days. They picked up as though they had been together all these years; strange. And wonderful! Devin watched her as she trailed one hand lazily in the water, humming a snatch of some "wierd" song he didn't recognize. "What in hell are you singing? It sounds like a dirge!" She giggled. "Well, it's YOUR dirge, remember? You WROTE IT! HA!" Then he remembered; in those days of youth Dev had wanted very much to be a singer, or a rock star. He had written one and only one song and dedicated it to her. How could he have forgotten? She nudged him in the ribs asking the same thing - "how could you forget OUR song: Shame on you! I thought you..\"loved\" me; you said that you did when you sang the song for me all those years ago: Fickle, you are fickle!" Dev reached out his arms and gently urged her to a gentle embrace, "and I suppose you are going to tell me YOU have been FAITHFUL to me ALL THIS TIME, HUH?" She glanced up and him, blushed and said in a small voice, "yes, as a matter of fact I have. Damn you, now WHY did I ever TELL YOU THAT!" Al couldn't look at him, she was too embarrassed at what she had told him without really thinking about it: Oh, boy, would he sure tease her over this. But..he said nothing. For a moment Devin was stunned. Was she telling him the truth; she must be. He knew her; she was not a person that lied. Not then, not now. Weaving his fingers into

her dark hair, he drew her face up and close to his. As he searched her eyes, then narrowed his from what was reflected back from her, Devin lowered his mouth to Allegras and kissed her tenderly, softly. With a moan of pleasure he deepened the kiss, drunk with her taste. Devin couldn't get deep enough into her mouth, wanted to capture all of her as he pressed her back across his lap and lowered his body to hers. He lay alongside her and slowly came back to this world from where she had taken him. As much as he wanted her and was aware Allegra felt the same way for him, Devin was raised an honorable man. Thank God some of Fathers teachings had stayed with him; he used them, needed them....now. For once in his life, he wasn't going to rush. He wanted to savor every moment with this woman, treasure it. Keep it to warm himself on in the long, cold years ahead of him. He was going to stay around home this time; for as long as he was able. Tunnel life stifled him, it always had. Allegra knew this. But she had asked for nothing from him. Which is exactly why Devin would give her everything he had and that included something no one had taken before like this....his love. He had been with many women; too many. But not like this; never had he felt like this before. Devin wanted to protect Allegra from all hurt, all harm. And he wanted to do it for the rest of his life. This fact scared the total HELL out of him! He knew Al would never ask for a commitment from him. She was and had always been a proud, independent woman. Any move, any declaration would have to come from him first. He whispered into her small ear as he kissed the edges of it, "shall I hang around for a while? I'd like to get to know you all over again "Llegs". Then as she nodded her head, Devin pulled her into his arms tightly, "Allegra, my Allegra. Am I going to fall in love with you all over again?" She smiled as she gently smoothed back his unruly hair, "why, Dev. When did you ever

stop loving me?" She felt him tremble at her words and from her touch. Al buried her face to his chest and smiled; she knew. Devin Wells, you are a goner this time my man. Gothcha. And I'm gonna keep ya, this time!

Vincent was early arriving at Catherine's ; she was dressing when he tapped on the balcony door, then stepped inside without being asked: "Catherine? Is it all right to come in? Catherine?" She wiggled into her dress and came flying out of the bedroom and into his arms. "I can't believe you're actually here. Finally, here in my home, your home, for as long as you want it to be. At any time. Come, sit down...." She led him to a small flowered couch near her fireplace. As Vincent removed his cape, he looked around. For a very long time he had wanted to be here with Catherine. His eyes took in everything, the soft pastel colors of the furniture, her small decorations, painting. This was a warm room, a comfortable room. He sighed as he sat down on the couch and held out his arms for her. As Catherine snuggled against him, he grinned. "Catherine, the entire back of your dress is unzipped, do you know this?" She turned her head towards him. "you were early: I don't mind but I'm a bit...frazzled by you being here at all! Oh Vincent. I have wanted you here for so long, so long." Catherine motioned for him to help zip her up, then turned to question Vincent when he didn't. "Vincent, what....?" The look in his eyes was new to her; fierce, hungry. Passion now was turning his face almost bronze as Vincent looked back to her. "No, I will not zip the dress. But I will help you take it off later. Or.....NOW?" Catherine got to her feet pulling Vincent along with her. She said only one word. They didn't need words. Not then, they never had. She led him towards the bedroom. "NOW".

Father was playing a game of Chess with Dr. Peter Alcott when Devin and Vincent entered the Chamber. Peter saw them first, "Hello, Dev. Vincent. How are you? I haven't seen either of you for weeks; not since the party Catherine gave! What have you two been doing with yourselves if I may ask?" Devin tried and failed to stifle a small chuckle as Vincent poked him in the ribs, HARD. Devin knew what Vincent had been doing! One look at his face two weeks ago and it was like he was broadcasting it. He and Catherine had finally, taken the "jump", the fear was gone. Thank God. Devin just let the smile tug at his mouth as Vincent lowered himself to a chair at Father's side to watch the chess match. He was silent, keeping a huge grin from his face with a most concerted effort! "I have been spending time Above with Catherine. We've had a lot to talk about, many plans....." His voice trailed off as he heard his older brother guffaw out loud at his poor excuse for the look he now had on his face. He looked "love-jumbled" and he was! He glared back to Devin and knit his fierce slanted eyebrows together. Devin shut up and sat down next to Dr. Alcott and just looked around the room as if he were searching for something. He didn't dare look at Vin! Devin had learned long ago when he could "push his luck" with his baby brother....and when he could not. Right now, he could NOT! He suddenly got to his feet, "I'm sorry to have to run so soon, but I have a date with Allegra. See you later!" With that Devin took the steps in one leap and was gone. Vincent stood and saying almost the same things; EXCEPT the name Catherine instead of Allegra, he was off too. Father looked a bit worried as he caught Peter's eye. "I hope they know what they're....doing. The dangers..." Peter smiled as he replied, "Jacob leave them be; all of them! They're not small anymore, you know: They're adults; they'll make the right decisions."

He looked at Jacob as he let his words sink in; it was hard being a parent. Just as hard learning to "let go". Peter knew in time, Jacob would come to terms with all the changes of these last weeks. Catherine and Vincent now totally sharing a love that lit the room when they were in it. And Devin and Allegra; now that was something! Devin still here, after over two weeks. The man MUST be in love! Both men sat over their game, thinking their own thoughts. Peter smiled as Jacob made a move.....a very wrong one!

Above, Allegra and Devin sat in a corner booth at Sals' Italian Restaurant, sharing a huge plate of ravioli and fighting over the last meatball. "Come on, Dev. You had five already! I've had two!" He shook his head, "you my dear, have had SIX! I CAN count!" Finally, poor Sal could stand it no more. He walked quickly over to the table, took Devins' knife and cut the meatball deftly in half. "Cutta this out-you two, always you fight! You should be happy, no fighting at each other like children! Stop, come on, please? For Sal?" Al giggled. "Oh, Sal. We're only teasing each other! We never fight anymore. Do we, Dev?" With a straight face, Devin shook his head no, then warned Al, "But...if you dare touch that meatball....." Sal left them, shaking his head. These young ones would drive you nuts! Much later over coffee, Dev looked slyly to the pretty woman across from him, a question on his lips, "so, were you telling me the truth, Al? You said you've been faithful. It's been a very long time. Why were you?" She looked over and gave him an enigmatic smile, "I have been faithful, Devin,.....in my fashion!" He wouldn't touch that sentence with a fork, or a knife either! He merely smiled back. As they rose to leave, Sal was at their elbow, "you come back soon, yes? Tella Father hello for me, and Vincent! Hey, you come by next Friday. I'll have pizza and chianti for you and your friends. Howsa dat?" Nodding in agreement, Devin and Allegra stepped out into the crisp night air. He asked noncommittally, "where to now?" Al just shrugged, "up to you". He headed for the park...and her apartment Below, that was always there for her.

Walking along silently in the tunnel corridor, Allegra's heart was beating so hard, she was sure Devin could hear it! She felt like a schoolgirl, with her first crush for Christ sakes! Why was she being so jumpy? It was only Devin. Al smiled secretly to herself. That was it. It was DEVIN! And, she knew where he was leading her, and why. Without words, he was telling her it was time, finally, for them to make love. They had been nibbling around the edges of it for weeks now; long enough! As she lit the few small candles in her Chamber, Al shivered. The room was chilly. Or was it just her nerves? She didn't know and further thought of it was driven quickly from her mind as Devin reached out and pulled her to his body fiercely with a deep groan, "Al, my dear "Llegs", I want you, need you so much. These weeks have been torture. I wanted to give you time, give both of us time. I had to be sure. of this, of us. These feelings that rise in me from just touching you. I don't know how to handle this. I.....I love you. Allegra. I love you." She looked at him stunned for a moment.....an eternity to him. Then sighed and led him slowly over to the large bed in her room, and pulled down the quilt. Devin reached out for her again. He wanted to lose himself in the feel of her body, the taste of her mouth as it softened under his, returning the passion that now was rising and filling them with liquid flame. Allegra felt herself falling, falling, lost in the depths of his eyes that blazed down on her and darkened more with each passing second as Devin began to caress her, touch her and kiss her as she had never been before, And never would again. Allegra was not a woman to say aloud her true feelings; she had been hurt much in the past. She had closed a part of herself, of her heart off from ever being so hurt again. Now locked in Devin's arms, the hidden tender, secret places of her heart, her spirit were opening to this man she had known so long. Loved so long. Allegra was trembling as she whispered to him, "I love you, Devin. I always have. I always will. Forever." Devin was a bit stunned. He had never

expected to hear these words from her. But, to hear the words! To know deep in the hidden parts of all he was, that she meant every one: He felt tears rise in his eyes; Devin struggled to hold them back, but a few trickled down his face, unnoticed. Al put her lips to his face and licked the salty tears away with her tongue. The feel of that was more than he could endure. Devin said her name; just that, no more. It was a prayer, a question, and a vow. That one word was his future. Allegra. They undressed each other slowly, tenderly, and climbed into the big bed and under the covers quickly. It was not any warmer in the room. It soon would be: Urging her back to the pillows, Devin spread her hair out lovingly with his fingers to the pillows edges. Then, never taking his eyes from hers, he began letting his fingers wander, trace a path from her lips to her shoulders. From shoulders to breasts, and downward, to her center, to all she was. She moaned and arched her back from his touch. As he softly began stroking her at the point of friction that hardened to his fingers, Devin was lost. Gave himself up entirely to the warm moistness that now covered his hand. He lowered himself until he was kissing and licking slowly, painfully slowly, along her inner thighs as she wrapped her hands in his hair, and writhed under his touch, his mouth on her there. He could feel her release almost at the same moment she felt it rising, throbbing towards him. Devin began licking deeper and harder into her. The taste of her was driving him towards madness. Passion now controlled them completely as he moaned and grasped her tightly by the hips as she filled his mouth with her orgasm of sweetness, of nectar..... When Allegra finally stopped shaking, he pulled himself up to the pillow and looked into her eyes. There were tears there. She smiled and he knew the tears were from happiness. Al could feel the hardness of him pushing at her leg, insistent, raging for its own release. She kissed him here and there about the face, then took his tongue into her mouth; sucking and licking until he thought he would go quite mad. "Ah, yes Al, yes: Please? Let me...I must do this now. Now". She opened her legs as he knelt over her. Her breath was hot on his shoulder, "do it. Take it. Take me. Fill me, DEVIN:" He thrust his hips forward, joining his body fully to hers as she wrapped her legs around his back. The penetration was deep, fierce and forever. He wanted to stay here forever. Devin began to move now, pulling her with him. He kept the pressure where she needed it as he began to thrust towards and away

from her harder now. Quicker. Deeper. He felt it rising to fill him, needing it, welcoming it. With a cry of unrelenting lust, with a roar that was known yet not his own, Devin filled her with the seed of his love, as Allegra accepted it and gave her own in return...to him. Gasping finally at the ending, the temporary ending of their first mating, he lowered himself until he lay half on her body and half on the bed. Devin couldn't get enough of her warmth. He began licking her breasts, drawing each tip into his mouth and running his tongue over them, then nibbling at her with his teeth. They made love many times that night, in many ways; each more pleasurable than the one before. Finally totally exhausted, they slept wrapped tightly together, as though they were bonded, joined forever. As they surely were.

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Father heard the laughing first, then turned as his children entered the Chamber. First Vincent and Catherine, arms wrapped about each other, whispering with their heads together of some private joke. Then Devin and Allegra ran down the steps taunting and teasing each other, as lovers do. Behind them....Father was surprised. "Sal! How wonderful to see you! I've been meaning to visit, but you know how it is...." Sal just smiled at his friend and shook his head. He knew his friend had many responsibilities. Everyone depended on him, for everything. "wella Father, tonight you get to rest: I brought you your favorite Pizza and Chianti! For all of you. Now sita down and eat, eat!" Everybody come on, before itsa all cold! Andiamo!" An hour later, the large boxes of pizza were gone, only scraps of crust were left. Devin poked through as though looking for more to eat, then shook his head. He was full! He sat back in his chair and patted his belly, "ah, that was great. Almost better than sex. Whoops, excuse me, Father!" Father just looked over and leaned his head a bit to one side, "why excuse you? It was almost better than sex." Devin was glad his mouth was not full. Those words made him sputter out the wine he had just swallowed ^{of food:} Vincent turned and looked somberly at his brother, "what is the matter with you?" He had been engrossed in counting the freckles on Catherine's nose and had not overheard the previous exchange between Dev and Father. Allegra leaned over and whispered to he and Cath, telling them what Dev had said and Fathers' reply! Now, Catherine began laughing. Vincent too, His long canine teeth glistening under the candles light. He was shocked! "Father,

I do believe you have had too much wine!" Before answering his son, Jacob looked at him carefully. "How much wine have YOU had? Now, you know better; you can't....." Dev poked his brother in the arm, "Oh, let him be! He's only had about six...or eight glasses, anyway!" Father stared at Vincent now. Six or EIGHT glasses! He should have had only one, and a small one at that! His chemistry didn't allow for getting drunk! He would most certainly not be a pleasant companion tomorrow! Even, even for Catherine!. Oh, God! Before he could chastise him, Vincent rose, holding himself stiffly with great dignity, "I must use the "facilities"; excuse me, everyone," Devin brought the house down with his next words, "Yeh! That's the trouble with drinking, you can't keep it, only RENT it!" The laughing and partying continued until way past two a.m.

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Father walked agonizingly, painfully slowly towards the kitchen at nine the next morning. He held his head, his poor throbbing head in one hand, and leaned on the wall with the other. OHHH, that wine! He had forgotten how Salvatores' homemade wine affected him! It was very strong! Now, he remembered the last time he had been this..... hungover; it was the last time he had been drinking Sals' wine. OHHHH! Entering the kitchen, Father heard low mumbles coming from one of the larger tables in the corner. It was Allegra, Dev, Vincent and Catherine! He mustered forth a look of sobriety as he joined them in the room. "Well! Good morning, everyone! How did you sleep? Isn't it a delightful morning?" Catherine looked up to him with slightly bloodshot eyes, "Father! Must you shout?" Vincent joined this statement with one of his own, "yes, please! It's already noisy in here! Father, will you restrain your speech, please!" Father looked around the room, noisy? "Vincent, what is noisy?" His son lowered his head to the table, as though praying for the strength to speak. "Father, can't you hear it? That HAM ! It's frying so....so....loud!" He turned to Devin at the stove. He and Allegra were cooking something that smelled vile: Ugh! Ham and eggs. On a normal morning, this would have been a very good breakfast, but this morning...even the smell was too much! He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down opposite Vincent. He stifled a chuckle as he noticed Vincent was wearing a rather strange

"hat". Catherine had plunked an icepack on his head, "here, next time don't drink so much. You know better!" Vincent turned his head (even

blinking hurt!) and looked at her, "I....I KNOW BETTER! Well, my love: SO DO YOU:" Catherine smiled at him then lowered her head and rested on his shoulder, "touche, and shut up." Devin approached the table with plates of food. For some unknown reason, he and Allegra weren't QUITE as bad off as those that sat there. Maybe, it was their OWN chemistry that had allowed them to drink and yet wake up FAIRLY HUMAN this morning. Dev looked over to Al, motioned with his head to Vincent, "watch this:" He softly put the plate just under Vincent's nose, and stepped back. Way back! With a snarl, Vincent pushed the plate from him, as far as he could. "I'm not hungry. Leave me be I say." Dev and Al sat down to eat, feeling a bit sorry for the others that were so miserable this morning. To her surprise, Devin pushed his plate away from him with a moan. She looked and saw to her dismay...he was turning quite a lovely shade of green! A delayed reaction? WHATEVER! Vincent looked over and noticed this at the same moment she did...and he smiled, and narrowed his lovely eyes. "Here you are, Devin. Take this plate." He waved it back and forth under his brother's protesting lips. Devin had had it! He ran from the room holding his mouth. Al ran after him, trying not to laugh. Catherine turned her eyes to his, "Vincent, that was not kind. You surprise me sometimes! Your own brother! How could you be so uncaring?" He scowled at her, a low growl on his lips. A growl of love, but still a definite growl: "Who said I have to always be kind? Dev waved that. that...FOOD under my nose first! Fair is fair!" Father laughed aloud agreeing. "Devin has gotten just what he deserved! Why he..." Father said no more. He wasn't able to! As one voice, Catherine and Vincent yelled together, "BE QUIET!" He was silent as Catherine took the icepack from Vincent and placed it gently on her own head.

Everything?

By

Michele

Alone in shadows I curse with despair of soul. Plead
with unknown Gods, "comfort the beast", they cruelly
had created; so uncaringly.
Rage with clenched fists unto Heavens doors. Find
naught to cherish, so unjust! Gods do not care, nor
understand. Or, do not choose to see!

Wherein lies MY light to flee from this tragic thing
I am? Is there none to love, to enfold to my embrace?
A single crystal tear falls to my breast. Not mine!
From whose tenderness does it flow? To lay serenely
on my tormented face?

Breath held; searching upwards, I gaze into her eyes
of purest love. Arms envelope, hold me close with
innocence. Can she know not "what" she bears?
On her trusting softness, the "beast"s form rests.
Yet cries taut with anguished fear, "to comfort ME!
Ease my pain, how do you DARE?"

Dare hold to your heart, the savagery of all I am?
Furies that I, the "beast" to you, may bring?" She
strokes my hair, kisses sweet my ravaged brow. Can
this BE?
Murmurs low, "you are NOT beast, but just a man.
My world, my life. You are.....EVERYTHING!"

Loves Promises Fulfilled - Part II

Jealous Shadows, Happy Secrets

Patricia Anne Kehoe

After Vincent had regretfully gone with mornings first light, Catherine came in from the balcony and saw with dismay he had left his cloak behind. Pulling it up from behind the chair where it had lain unthought of for the week-end, she smiled and remembered how it had gotten there in the first place. When Vincent had breeched the balcony wall Friday evening, they had not seen each other for two weeks. Catherine's bad cold and unknown type of virus had made her insist he not come near. With all the new and different viruses being discovered all the time; she would take no chances where his health was concerned; no one really knew what the hell he actually WAS immune from, and what he wasn't. After they had made an attempt at conversation; when he.... finally could not stand being apart from her touch a moment longer, gathered her up into his arms impatiently, sweeping aside the cloak as he did. It was suddenly to him, an impediment to holding her body more tightly to his own. Vincent had tossed it towards a chair, where it had missed and landed behind it on the floor, forgotten till just this moment. As Catherine picked up the cape, she gathered it into folds, sat down..... and looked at it closely for a few minutes; stroking and petting it as tho' it were a living thing. The poor cloak was indeed, a bit "shabby", much worn. The material was strained almost to bursting at the seams of the shoulders. With Vincent's muscles this didn't really surprise her: But, the edges and collar were frayed terribly, and the hood was almost in tatters. She had a brainstorm; a new cloak! There wasn't much he needed living Below, but a decent cloak was necessary; he went about so much in the cold, especially to see her. He hated the chill weather of winter thoroughly; had since being abandoned in the cold

as a baby. Catherine sat, planning how to go about this surprise for the man she loved; a thought came to her.....how about a new cloak, and a party to go along with it! It had been a long, quiet summer, a little excitement was in order! Turning her attention to the cape in her lap, started planning how to accomplish getting a new one made without arousing Vincents suspicion; he was so easily able, damnedably able, to read her very thoughts at times. She knew, she would go to Father. There was almost two months before Autumn chill would be in the air, Vincent could wear the old one until then. The party would be planned deliberately with "short notice" to those invited; would coincide with the readiness of the new cape, at whatever time that would prove to be! What a surprise to be able to give a gift to him, and a party, too! He never asked for anything, a present seemed to almost embarrass him, as tho' he had no right to accept one! The smallest gift caused such delight, she tried to imagine his face when he received a cape and party to go with it; she hugged herself in glee at the thought! Certain Father would know of a "helper" that was a tailor, and the exact measurements needed; she also was sure Father would know what materials Vincent liked best for this type of outerwear. She wanted this cloak to be magnificent! Catherine yawned, & seemed to remember Vincents' parting words that she should get some "proper" rest; it had been a rather strenuous week-end! Before moving to the bed, she lay the cloak in the chair of the room, then hesitated, turned around and brought it to the bed with her. As she curled up against it, she could smell Vincents' strong musky scent lingering in it. Enjoying this, Catherine enfolded the top of the cape into her arms, and was instantly fast asleep.

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Below, after greeting friends along the way to his Chamber, Vincent glanced about his neglected room with a sigh of resignation; in his haste to be with Catherine Above on Friday, he had left his room a shambles! Bed unmade, books scattered about, half-done projects

lay everywhere: "What a mess, I have left myself!" Well, this must be taken care of now, before Mary "helped" him, cleaned the room, and it would take days before he could then find anything again! Mary was kind, very caring. But she put things where they were supposed to BE, how tiresome trying to find them again when she did! Finally getting his room into a semblance of order, Vincent was tired, He, like Catherine, was feeling the week-ends lack of rest. To have slept would have meant closing his eyes. And with eyes closed, how could he have looked at the woman he adored laying beside him? He couldn't do both, sleep was the loser in this struggle in the end. Now he pushed aside the covers; and after taking off his heavy boots, sank down gratefully; giving himself up to sleep with a beginning of dreams: ...Vincent felt Catherine's presence even now. His last conscious thought was of her as he drifted off.

Vincent's senses had been right; Catherine was already below talking to Father in his Chamber. She had explained what she hoped to do. Father seemed willing to go along with both the party and the gift. "A new cloak, yes, Vincent will love this Catherine: A practical idea also. And a party? Just the thing to bring some life back in the middle of a hot summer. The man to see for the cape would be Calvin, a wonderful tailor. He has Vincent's measurements having made some garments for him before. He would be able to also obtain any materials for it that you have in mind at reasonable price. He's a good man, generous of both his time and energies to all of us here. What kind of fabric did you have in mind in particular? She seemed thoughtful a moment before replying, "well actually, I hadn't made any final choice yet; I wanted to find out exactly what he would like the best. Hadn't decided to stay entirely practical, or

maybe, go a little "wild". Father looked at her over the top of his glasses questioningly, "wild? What do you mean, "wild?" He seemed to be afraid of her answer. She was usually a pragmatist, but she WAS a woman in love and..... "Well I had thought of a suede or something close to it, lined with heavy wool. or sheepskin. With a deep, warm hood to guard him against chill when he went on some of his night excursions Above, does that seem okay? Of course, Velvet would also be rather a change!" Catherine said this teasingly, knew velvet would never do, never be warm enough. But she rarely had the opportunity to 'tease' Father; could not deny it as he looked at her with almost a glint of horror in his eyes and said slowly, "Velvet, well...if that is what you have decided....." Catherine laughed, "I was only joking! Get that "look" of just eating a sour lemon off your face. You know me better than that Father! Would I give your son a coat that with his energies and pursuits, wouldn't even last through one winter? He's so active! But maybe if we lined it with red flannel and fur.....?" The man smiled back at her and tried to picture Vincent dressed in something such as what she had just described, then laughed out loud saying, "Ah, you know how to get me "going", don't you, Catherine?" "Yes, I do. But, seriously, it will be suede, I think, lined with sheepskin. Wool would be too heavy if it got wet, agreed?" Father could 'tease' with the best of them as he now proceeded to do, "Wool? Yes, it would be extremely heavy when wet. And the way he goes out in that weather...Above...to visit this woman he loves....well...!" Father and Catherine looked at each other grinning then burst into laughing, holding on to each other to steady themselves. This is the exact moment Vincent chose to enter his Fathers Chamber. "Catherine! Father! What is so funny?" Sliding one arm around each of their still shaking shoulders, & waited for a reply to his question. and got..silence. Vincent asked again, "what HAS amused you so?" Catherine shot Father a "look" of DON'T

175

SPOIL MY SURPRISE, and Father nodded agreement back to her. As he saw this exchange of looks, Vincent's eyes suddenly, surprisingly, narrowed; what was going on here? Couldn't they answer a simple question.....?As he looked first at Father, then Catherine, his irritation was edging into his usually calm voice, "will neither of you answer me? What is...this, Catherine, secrets? From me? Father, I know you are hiding something! What is it? Bad news, tell ME! WHAT IS IT?" Father cleared his throat loudly, bent to look at a book that was laying on his desk. "No, not secrets Vincent: We were just.....just talking about...things.Did you sleep well? Did you find Pascal before you went to your room?" Now Vincent was actually beginning to lose his temper, "do not attempt to change the subject, I was NOT talking of Pascal, but of...of this..". Words failing him, Vincent swept his arm before him, then pointed a finger in their directions. He was getting more and more frustrated with each passing minute. He wanted the truth and he wanted it now! THIS was infuriating. "WELL"? No one spoke in reply. With a snarl of disgust, his sarcastic tone of voice startled both Catherine and Father,"if it's to remain YOUR secret, forgive my asking it be shared with ME. Excuse my intrusion into your...your.. privacy." Catherine repeated Father's earlier response, "Vincent! We were just talking, catching up on...news..on...ordinary things...". He stared at the woman he loved, stunned at her response. She was lying...to HIM! How could she do this, they never lied to each other. Catherine knew he would always sense when she was trying to conceal something, anything, from him. Why was she even attempting to do this now, why.....WHY? "So? Is this to be part of our new life Catherine? Secrets, dishonesty...lies? This is not like you, either of you! Father started to say something to him but his son cut off his words.... "NO, I want no more of

2176~

this conversation!" Just before leaving the Chamber, Vincent turned, and looked back at them both stonily. She decided NO surprise was worth the look he had now on his face, and in his eyes: She decided this had gone quite far enough: "We were...Father and I were discussing...clothes...". She got no further.... "Clothes! That is a ludicrous answer, Catherine: Why would you be keeping such a mundane thing such a secret?" Vincent had actually yelled: this at her, his anger hot in his voice. Well now she also was angry: This was not a courtroom, and she was NOT on trial! "I have told you the truth, how DARE you question me in that tone of voice? I don't deserve this from you. Vincent: I won't be interrogated as though..as though I were a child. If you won't hear the truth when it is told...." Vincent turned on his heels and simply walked away growling and muttering under his breath to himself: Father called after him, but to no avail. He turned to Catherine..she was in tears. "How could he do that? Be so angered at...nothing!He never acts like this, with anyone here: What has changed him so suddenly into a man I don't know, or want to know? Vincent has never talked, spoken to me like that before. Or I to him. I...I don't understand this." Father realized he was still holding onto the book from his desk, almost clenching at it from nervousness. As he relaxed his grip and rubbed his arm to allow blood to flow back into it and his tense hand, replied, "there are many emotions he has not yet learned to handle, jealousy among them, jealousy the greatest of them: Catherine, Vincent loves you. To him, with his limited knowledge learnt from books, love is sharing everything fully, NO secrets. This is what he believes, this is all he can comprehend!" Father reached out and took her hands into his own and continued, "I have not yet been able to fully explain to him all the unknown things he must now learn to deal with, Catherine. All the emotions he will discover he has, and try to deny from the shame of having them; possessiveness, jealousy, a desire

to keep you all to himself. These feelings will shame him. His mind will have to learn to accept then dismiss those things many men feel, when they allow themselves to love for the first time: Understand and be patient, will you?"Hearing the truth of Fathers words, she was truly embarrassed at her outburst at Vincent; she had been so "short" with him, truly had had no patience at all. "I yelled back at him. Like a...a..fishwife! Oh, Father: We've had our first quarrel. That damned cloak: I wish I had never had the idea of a new one. All this over a cloak; how I wish I had never seen the thing." Catherine buried her head on Fathers shoulder and he patted her gently as she sobbed.

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Striding through the tunnels, Vincent didn't seem to know exactly where he was heading,didn't care. Absorbed in trying to calm himself down and be rational at what had just occurred in Fathers' Chamber, he was trying to gather his thoughts together, and force out the anger that still lingered in his mind with deep, gasping intakes of air into his lungs. Why had he been so distrubed at the innocence of Father and Catherine simply talking together, why had he been so angered at seeing them laughing together; why? This would not have "bothered" him a month ago: All people have a right to private conversation, didn't they? He turned and slammed his palm fiercely against the tunnel wall, repeating aloud in a roar, "DIDN'T THEY?"(Ah, dear readers, jealousy answered,) "People have rights, but not where HIS Catherine was concerned: When HIS Catherine was involved...." He held his hands to his throbbing head, and slid to sit leaning against the tunnel wall. STOP! HIS Catherine? That is what he had been thinking...HIS Catherine: What was the matter with him? Now she couldn't talk to anyone without his knowledge, his permission? Would he now be jealous over.....over...shadows! Vincent snarled, and hit the wall again, harder than before. He tried to rid his mind of rage at what he had done to those he loved earlier by turning the pain inward, on his own body. Rising to his feet, he stumbled

onwards blindly, tears of shame streaming down his golden face. Somehow, he reached his Chamber, sank into a chair, and put his head in his hands in despair. He had spoken in anger to the two people he loved, & loved him; most in this world. How could he ever face them again, either of them? As this thought whirled about his brain, he clasped his hands more closely over his face and tried to blot it out. His tears were making small dots of wetness on his pants as they slipped from between his fingers and dropped, one by one, to his knees. This is how Catherine found him.

"Are you...are you all right? Can we talk, Vincent?" He didn't even acknowledge her presence at first, he was too ashamed to even answer her. He felt like a petulant spoiled child who now sat waiting for the adult to chastise him, "I am all right, it will pass, it must pass! Please, will you leave me? I cannot look at you, cannot talk right now. I simply...cannot". Laying one hand on his shoulder, she pleaded, "we should talk of what's happened, I'm....." "We cannot speak of anything now, please! Just...just go!" To her, the "command" to go was the final straw. Her anger returned with a vengeance! "Well, when you feel more able to make sense, when you can talk TO me not AT me, I'll be Above, MAYBE:" With a stiffened spine and unnatural lift to her head, she stubbornly knew she would not beg and left the Chamber, then as her resolve of remaining proud ^{deserted} her, ran sobbing to her way Above, nearing knocking Father over in surprise on his way in to see his son. As Catherine rushed by, ignoring his outstretched hand, he was deeply saddened, very troubled by the events of these last hours. He had heard the angry exchange of words just now between Catherine and his son. Had heard the shame in Vincents' voice and the impatience in Catherine's as they quarreled. For one of the few times he could remember, Father was at a loss for words. How could he help this....impasse between his son and the woman he loved? Pulling a chair towards Vincent, he sank down gratefully into it. He

sadly looked towards his son, and whispered, "Vincent?" Just that, no more as he put his hand on his sons, repeated, "Vincent, son?" Raising his eyes to meet Fathers, the older man held his arms open, embracing Vincent as he collapsed into them sobbing as tho' his heart had broken. "I cannot endure the pain of what I've done to you...to Catherine, of all people. I...I screamed at you both, in anger that was unnecessary and caused deep hurt to the two people in this world I love the most. Please, help me understand how I could have done such a thing, Father? What is happening to me?" Before Father could respond, his sons words tumbled out in a rush, "I thought the beast was gone from me forever. My self control is..is deserting me, again; I was filled with such rage when I saw you and Catherine together. You and Catherine: I am shamed, humiliated by the feelings going through my head, then; and when you wouldn't tell me what you had been discussing, I lost all sense of what I was saying. Forgive me for what I cannot understand. Help me, show me how to make....make sense of all I am feeling; the torment is destroying me. I cannot continue if the dark side of me rises again. I will not cause anyone else to ever go through it with me, for me, AGAIN: EVER." Father rocked his son as he would have rocked a small child, tenderly and slowly to his breast for many moments; searching for the words... "How can I tell you? You have to accept new feelings, Vincent, acknowledge them, deal with them, and FIGHT the dark ones with all the strength you possess: Yes, I know it is easy to say, "deal with it". Some of us never fully are able to deal with any of it: When you love someone, it's very hard, at times almost impossible to let them live any part of their lives away from you. In all of us, my son, lay the bitter seed of things we despise, Doubt, possessiveness, distrust, and the worst, the terrible jealousy that can "eat" away everything, if we give in to it. You must learn, as all man have learned..to protect and cherish those we love,

2/80

Jealousy



yet at the same time, give them the trust they give us, and FREEDOM!. Also learn that we must never smother them with the loving! I know, from experience what you are FEELING, don't you think I ever had the same depth of love for Margaret as you now have with Catherine? Do you imagine that you are the only man that has ever doubted that love we had for our women? All men doubt! All of us of both sexes have the same weaknesses inside us, it is learning to deal with them rationally that in the end defeats the dark side of loving. Refuse to let the seed of jealousy take root in your heart, Vincent. Temper your jealousy, let the goodness of all you are drive the rages out, away from you. Let fall away spite, greed, covetousness, and the hardest to fight....the jealousy. Cast these away as you would a demon; the devil himself! This will take time, nothing worth having is ever always easy, is it?

There is time..you are young! You love Catherine, she loves you. This is all new to her as well, yes?" "Oh my God, Catherine! How can I ever speak to her of all...all...this? How small I would seem, how petty to try and tell her I feel this "jealousy" when she has never given me cause to! I could not endure her knowing that these dark thoughts infest me, like...like a disease, eating at my trust. To speak of this ... to her, would shame me beyond anything, beyond living with:" Father took Vincents face hard, tight between his two hands. This forced his son to look at him, startled at the force he felt in those two hands now holding him so confined. "You can discuss ANYTHING with one you love, ANYTHING. With love, Vincent, you can do it! And, in most cases, all is understood finally, with the speaking of 3 words....just three simple words...I AM SORRY ", Try? You must try, Vincent; only three words!" With that, he kissed his son gently on the forehead, and left him alone to try and come to terms with all he had tried desperately, to explain:

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Vincent sat alone in his Chamber three day^S, not eating, or sleeping. He

mulled over all that had been said by Father; agonized over how to talk of all THIS to Catherine, if and when she would see him! The anguish he was going through at being apart from her was destroying him an inch at a time. He could sense her Above, felt first her anger, then deep sorrow flowing from her. This had made him dig his nails into his palms unconsciously, until both palms were bleeding unnoticed.

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While Vincent was Below, in torment, she was Above, going through almost the same kind of feelings. She had been hurt at his anger, then shamed she had not stayed and helped him to deal with it. She should have insisted he talk it out, but had not! Damn, damn, DAMN! Why had she thrown angry words back at him like that? She felt a loathing for herself; a bitter self-hate was almost overwhelming her. She had not helped him, not at all. If anything, had made matters worse; by just leaving him...just walking away and leaving him to try and sort out all the new, strange emotions alone! Great, wonderful! Oh, yes, she felt SO "proud" of herself. That's why she was crying so much these last three days! To try and get her mind off herself for a while, Catherine had gotten in touch with Calvin, the tailor, described what she wanted to do. He had stopped by with large books filled with samples of materials, and they had reached a decision on how the cloak was to be made, he sketched while she described what she wanted. But, even that had not really helped; she missed Vincent so badly, the ache never left her alone. It tormented her night and day, yet she could not go to him; she was too embarrassed, too "proud". And, if the truth be told..felt that this time, he would HAVE to make the first move back to her. If he couldn't love her openly, with trust, could they continue to love at all? This thought brought sobbing anew, and she threw herself into a chair, crying until every bone in her body hurt from the moans of anguish coming from her lips.

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As he looked into the window of the apartment Thursday evening, Vincent was stricken at the scene before him. Catherine was curled up tightly into a chair, blowing her nose, crying so hard she was shaking all over, using a box of tissues with a vengeance, and cursing and mumbling half aloud. As he rapped hesitatingly on the window, Vincent was still searching for what to say to her, IF she answered his knock at all. Inside, she thought she had heard a sound from the balcony, decided it was just "wishful thinking", but rose anyway to go and make sure. It was Vincent. Oh, God! Whatever could she say to him, she prayed for the words as she opened the balcony doors and stood before him, head held so he couldn't see her eyes; they were a frightful mess from all the crying. Plus, she was too shamed to look into his eyes, too hurt to see the pain that must be in them. She bit her lip hard, took a long breath, and looked up to his face. He looked very tired, very pale to her, as tho' he hadn't slept as she had not, these last days. "Catherine, may I come in?" She stepped to one side and just nodded, she didn't trust her voice not to break at how tortured his face looked, and how sad, how lost he sounded. Tears welled up in her eyes, and ran down her face unheeded; he had not reached out to her, didn't seem as tho' he wanted to touch her. Suddenly, she was terrified! Had he come to say....goodbye. Oh, God, NO, please, NO! She held out her hand, saying softly, "pick a feeling?" He clutched at her hand, squeezed it so hard, he unwittingly hurt her and responded, "ignorance". Then Vincent broke a vow he had made, had ^{silently} pleaded he could keep. He collapsed with such a cry of torment it frightened her, into her lap, burying his face in her robe. Gripping her by the arms, he tried ^{chokeing} back the sobs that were engulfing him, he could not. With a voice that turned a knife in her soul he said, "I have hurt you, wounded you so...I cannot think

of how much you must hate me for it. Catherine couldn't answer, her own voice had left her from the terror of thinking he was saying Good-bye!

"I'm so ashamed, Catherine: You and Father tried to tell me the truth, I could not hear, you reached out to me, I sent you away. I SENT YOU AWAY, in anger. Madness was running through me like flames, can you understand, can you forgive me? I....I...am sorry. In loving you, I have smothered you. I have ruined all we had, haven't I?" He rose to leave, she would not answer him: He was forced to think she did not want to answer him, could not forgive him. He felt, suddenly, very very alone. As he turned to leave, she finally found her voice, "VINCENT: NO: NO!" She grabbed at his hand and held on as hard as she could! "Catherine I cannot! I cannot hear you say the words I know you will say: You do not have to speak to me, if you don't want to, I will leave, I won't bother you.....again". He turned and managed to reach the threshold before his tears blinded him, and he stumbled and fell ^{down to} one knee. She enfolded him into her arms. Crossing her hands behind his neck, Catherine held on for her very life; to her very life. "don't leave me! Don't ever leave me! How can I face a world that I cannot share with you? I'm sorry, too: I love you and ran away instead of seeing, or trying to understand what you would be experienceing. I will forgive you, Vincent; I have already forgiven you. How can I not forgive what you could not have known ? All these....."things", these emotions are new to you: I forgot this, just for that moment, I forgot that books can't teach you HOW to love. I must show this to you, if you want me to. Do you? And will you forgive ME, when I am not patient with you? Help me to be?"

As she spoke to him, Vincent realized what Catherine was saying, she did not hate him: She still loved him; Oh, God, God, thank you! He looked at her eyes, the truth was always reflected there. It was now: With a need

2/84

that turned into a groan of his husky voice, Vincent wrapped his massive
her and held her so tightly breath left her body completely, "I love you,
need you, so much!It is physically painful and yet such a
glorious ache, both at the same time; help me understand and deal with
all of it, Catherine? The fear of losing you, the jealousy you'll turn
to someone else, the terrible things the mind makes one do, please,
help me?" With this Vincent reached out to wipe the tears from her face.
Catherine did the same to his, but she kissed them away. She couldn't
let him go long enough to use her hands! "You still fear I would ever
leave you? I will never leave you. We'll sort everything out, Vincent.
We WILL. And as for me turning to anyone, ANYONE else for love! That is
not possible, my heart is here. How can I live without my heart and seek
anyone else, ever?" As she said this, she laid both hands against his
breast. Felt his breathing slow, even out, finally when she did this.
He softly lay one hand on her breast and looked as deeply into her eyes
as one person could look into another's, saying "there are no more shadows,
Catherine. Without reservations, without question, I will love only you
until I am dead. Beyond even death itself, will I love thee. You complete
me. I know you are mine, yet understand you do not "belong" to me. Now
comprehend the difference at last: The demons are gone, the shadows with
them." With those words, he lowered his head to hers. Just before kissing
her added, "I have my light back, I'll not lose it again!" The first, and
hopefully, LAST "lovers quarrel" was at an end. They settled much this
night. Explanations were given to troubled questions, quiet love was
triumphant over jealousy, trust and truth vanquished, defeated forever,
"beasts"(You have "been" there, readers? It is worth the struggles, yes?)

A time later, laying beside her in bed, Vincent was finally able to

breath normally again. It had been three days he never wanted, ever, to endure again! Well, this part, yes, the rest, never! This "making up" took too much out of one: Their first joining this night had been almost a desperation born of urgency and need. As tho' they had been parted for a very long time, they took one another with a passion indescribable: Never had they loved like this before, as though the physical act could wipe away forever the last days of anguish. It did, as they were both left shaken, in wonder... at the new passions from achieving climax together. The second time had begun with an innocent gesture from Catherine. She had risen, gone to the bedroom chair, and turned to face him with his old cloak held out to him, "you forgot this, last week. "I had wondered where that thing had gotten to! Where did I leave it? Catherine smiled at him, "you tossed it towards a chair it never reached. I found it in the morning, after you had gone". She put the cape over her shoulders, and turned to face the mirror, "sure doesn't fit me, huh?" He grinned at her, She seemed unaware of how...how...she looked standing there like a little girl dressing up in adult clothes: "No, it does not fit you, my love. But if you knew how you look wrapped in it." She put one hand on her hip, "What makes you think I don't know?" She seemed in a "mood" unknown to him: She moved slowly towards him, taunting and teasing him with body and eyes both: When he reached out for her, she laughed and darted away. Beckoning, standing just out of reach, she began to sway to a tune only she seemed to hear: He smiled and rose to join this silent dance, held her to him fiercely beneath the cloak and began moving his body in rhythm with hers, rubbing her back and hips with his hands as he did, "see now the cloak fits both of us!" She was still acting extremely bold! "Yes, the way you fit me!" Ahhh, he thought; well, two could play this game now! He had learned to sense all her moods,

2/86

with a confidence that at times, amazed them both. This was one of those times, my dear readers. Such a time, was this! Vincent began sliding one hand down her small stomach until he reached his goal, "yes, it is true. I fit you here....and here". He continued moving that hand, "and HERE!" She moaned, "yes, there!" He began brushing the furred side of his free hand back and forth on her breast, knowing the soft hair on that hand made her go weak; it always had. Now fully in command of this new "situation", he lowered his lips to her other breast and gently wove a path around the center of the nipple until it hardened to his teasing.

This man was very aware of what his mouth and body did to the woman he loved, was in his own way, proud he could be like this finally, with Catherine. Nothing was kept back as he held her now; harder against him than he ever had. He began rubbing his legs along hers, moving his hips to and away from her teasingly as he lowered her to the bed. She was quivering in his arms now, knew what he was about to do, she thought: But, when he did not lower himself on top of her, a look of question came into her eyes. As he began tracing a path torturingly, lightly down her thighs with his mouth, Catherine instantly knew where his journey was taking him, and stammered, "what...wh..what are you going to...do?" The light from the small bedside table flashed against his gleaming teeth as he replied simply, "...learn a thing I have wondered about, read about". "No, you.....must not....". "YES, I must:" With that, he continued to move his lips and mouth in a downwards direction until he reached the sought after goal. Although a man new to the many forms of how to make love, Vincent was a passionate man. Had always been so. Now free to be a man... he held nothing back of what he was with Catherine this night. Totally in control of her body, he was going to have his way...this time, needing to know if all the things read in books were,

~187~

"actualities" or only wishes of them. He gripped her hips tightly and began to learn..... Lost totally to his control of her body, Catherine reached behind her and held fast to the brass headboard of the bed as wave after wave of pleasure began flowing over her like oceans surfs. Her head began to toss from one side to the other on the pillow, and she caught a glimpse of them both in the mirror of her dressing table. This image sent her beyond the reach of anything, except his mouth on her..there. She cried out his name loudly and gave herself up to passion completely as she arched her back and taught him what he wanted to learn; she the teacher was now, this time, the student:

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As she lay in his arms later, still shaking a bit, Vincent kissed the top of her head, sighed and looked up at the ceiling, lost to his thoughts. How far he had come, "learning-wise" these last months was amazing. He grinned to himself...amazing! Leaning up on one elbow he gazed down at the lovely woman at his side, "was it...pleasing? Have I in any way....offended you?" "No, you didn't offend me. Surprised me, yes, offended.....no! Did you learn what you wanted to know? You did things I can't.....". Catherine blushed to the roots of her hair and stammered, "I..can't believe..you...you did..that. Don't tell me you learned that from books!" "Ah, Catherine, not all things must be taught, some are instinctive, at least with me. And some...curiosity!" This was said with a directness that startled her: She looked into his eyes that were velvet black with passion and knew what in his own way, he was asking of her. She firmly pushed him fully onto his back, "I, too, am curious.....". Catherine began pulling at the hair on his legs with her small white teeth, began nipping and biting him lightly, as she worked her way down to the very soul of the man. He heard her mumble "put a pillow under your hips, love". He did as he was told, puzzled, and saw

with his "minds-eye" how he must look, and started to laugh. The laugh was driven away by her hands gripping him at the hips and her mouth closing entirely over him.... He was being held fast as she began rising and lowering her mouth on him, started torturing him in agony, in ecstasy, from what her mouth and tongue were starting to make him feel. Vincent knew he was near the "edge" now, felt it as flame hot passions rose him up to meet her thrusting mouth, "Now, ah, yes, yes...NOW!" She heard his groans of pleasure as he released to her, knew he was now beyond responding to anything she would say or anything of this world entirely. AS a man possessed, Vincent held her tightly by her hair; so hard he pulled out long strands that clung to his fingers, and were tickling him as he came back to her. As his heart finally steadied and stopped pounding into his ears, he saw the hair on his hands, and was stunned, "what did I do? I pulled..I...have your hair, Catherine! Look, it's wound into my fingers. How did I do this? When did I?" She rubbed the back of her head, "don't you remember?" He thought a moment, "No, I do not:" Smiling, she whispered to him, "in the throes of passion, my love. When you lost yourself up to me, and grabbed a handful OF me to keep from falling off the face of the earth:" Vincent was deeply embarrassed that he had hurt her, "why didn't you stop me? It must have hurt. I am so sorry, Catherine." She continued to rub at the spot he had "thinned" on her head, "stop you? Why should I do that, I STARTED you in the first place: And, yes, damn it, it does hurt!" He reached out and began to gently help her ^{try} and ease the pain from her head, "It will never happen again." She smiled at him and trying to ease the sorrowful look on his face, replied lightly, "it sure won't, Next time, I'm wearing a crash helmet!" She cuddled close to him and giggled, then said half aloud, "ME, stop HIM! There isn't enough strength in my whole body to halt one of his little fingers from doing as it wants. Even if I had wanted to stop him, which I did not!" He, naturally, had heard her mumbled words, "thank you, Catherine." "For what, my love?"

He held out the hand that still held her tresses of hair. "For understanding this!" His blue eyes narrowed at a thought, "do you have a locket? One you don't wear. It must be one that will open!" Catherine frowned and then smiled - "as a matter of fact, I do. It's too big for me, why do you want it?" As Vincent wound the hair into a tighter ball, he responded "I will need something to keep this in." "But...but, it's just hair!" Vincent's head shook vigorously, "NO - it is YOUR hair, and I took it from you. Now may I keep it, Catherine?" Without another word, Catherine rose from the bed, dug into her bureau drawer and rummaged around for a minute or two. Finding the locket, she handed it to him and sat beside him on the bed - watching. Vincent wound the hair as tightly as he could and laid it with great care into the locket and snapped it shut. Looking into her eyes, he smiled so gently, Catherine shivered. Then, she hugged him hard and teased him a bit. "I suppose I am just going to have to get a supply of lockets and keep them on hand...huh?" A bit flushed, Vincent hung the locket around his neck.

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Parting had never seemed more difficult. They clung to each other until his leaving was a rather dangerous expedition. It was nearly full daylight as Vincent made his way cautiously back to his world Below. The first thing he did was to look for Pascal. Vincent wanted news of the "errand" he had sent Pascal on earlier.... Finally finding him down - as was usual - listening at the pipes on his time off, Vincent said hello quickly and then asked the most important question. "Well, were you able to do it? Were you successful? Has he agreed to make it for me? Tell ME!" Pascal laughed and thumped Vincent on the back. "WHOA! Easy, my friend! All is well. He looked at the drawings you gave me, listened to my explanation, and said he would have it ready Saturday. For someone to pick it up then. Okay? HEY!" Pascal laughed and shook his head as Vincent ran. Seven days to go! Just seven!

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Above, in her apartment, Catherine picked up the cape and giggled. He'd forgotten it again! She stood in front of the mirror and swung it to and fro before her like a toreador...then stopped, stared at herself long and hard in the mirror and began silently counting, thinking back... All at once, she put both hands to her mouth, and sank dizzily down into a chair. Still trembling she reached out blindly towards the phone on her nightstand. "Hello, may I please speak to Dr. Peter Alcott? Thank you. Hello, Peter. This is Catherine Chandler, I must see you today....now. Okay? Good? I'll be there in about twenty minutes. Goodbye!" She threw on her clothes..

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The next 7 days passed agonizingly slowly. Catherine tried to work...tried to keep her mind occupied before she went completely crazy. Holding this secret to herself was going to drive her over the edge! There were more damn tests Dr. Alcott wanted to complete before she would be free to tell Vincent..he was going to be a FATHER! She realized she couldn't keep this to herself much longer! Vincent commented only last week on how rounded she was getting; that it looked good to his eyes! How she had wanted to blurt out, "OF COURSE I'm "round", I'M PREGNANT!" But, she had held her tongue, and would hold it; until Peter said all was as it should be! Catherine grinned to herself, it must be soon, she badgered him at least once a day, poor man! She had worried at first what Vincent's reaction would be to this unexpected news. But, knowing how he felt, how fully confident he was in their new life as friends and lovers, was almost positive he would be as thrilled as she was now. She hoped! Catherine had no "misgivings about this expected child, none at all. But, Vincent had lived with

so long the looks strangers gave to him as they came to the tunnels at first and saw him: Before knowing him more fully, he frightened them. They sometimes even....even..ran from him. From him, the gentlest of men: Often, she had seen tears well up in those beautiful eyes as he had attempted to soothe their fears. Why, even she herself had thrown a mirror at him when her back was to him and she had seen his sudden reflection in it: But, as they talked and grew to know one another, she wondered how she had EVER feared this man she now loved so completely. As he had learned to return that love, all sadness of the past had left those cobalt blue eyes. He had always been handsome, beautiful to her and was now a little more confidently starting to believe her when she told him this, over and over again. But, would the sadness return to those dear eyes; could he love, fully accept a child that might look exactly like himself? This was the thing she would have to wait and find out, and the waiting was going to absolutely kill her. She, naturally, did not want their child to go through what Vincent had gone through, still went through, with strangers. But, if their child looked like its father, Catherine would teach it to be proud of that, not shamed by it: Would teach it, with great tenderness, how "special" it was, why, there would be no other child like it in the world! Damn, she hated saying "it"; What would the baby look like and what was it to be, boy or girl? Either would be loved, equally. Catherine thought of Father; he would be a grandfather. She wondered how he would react to this! Picking up one of Vincents habits, Catherine almost growled in disgust at the silent phone, "ring, damn you, ring!" She jiggled it, and it did; and startled the hell out of her! "Hello? Oh...hi Calvin? What? The cloak is ready, this soon? Wonderful: I'll stop by around six, all right? Good, see you then." She went to the refrigerator and started to get herself a glass of wine to calm her nerves, stopped looked down and patted her growing

tummy, and talked out loud to "it", "yes, I know...Okay! Milk it will be!" Drinking the "ugh" milk, she paced back and forth about the house, thinking to herself. Peter had done an amniocentesis test. This would determine if everything was going, developing as it should be. But, in most cases, this test also revealed the sex of the baby! Catherine had extracted a solemn promise from Peter Alcott that he NOT tell her if it did show what she and Vincent were having. She wanted him to tell them together, wanting him to hear the news exactly when she did! Oh, damn...this endless waiting.....! Catherine began gathering up wrapping paper, ribbon, the box and card for the cloak. The phone rang and she almost vaulted over the couch to reach it on the second ring! "HELLO! Oh, thank God, Peter! Yes, okay, I understand; all is fine...GOOD. I can tell Vincent? I know you didn't mean it, but do you have ANY idea what this waiting has put me through? Yes, I know all expectant mothers are "SUPPOSED" to be moody, don't be so...so..SMART!" Will you be at the party? YES:~ Good, I'll see you then. But, promise.. not one word...even to Father, okay? See you around eight? Bye!"

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Catherine began writing hasty notes; to Father, Pascal, Mary, Mouse and a few of Vincents' closer friends. A larger party would have really terrified him. Their friends had promised to be ready on short notice. Well, the party was tomorrow, Saturday! And Vincent, poor, dear man! As if "springing" this party and present wasn't going to be enough: She prayed the surprise she had NOW wouldn't scare the wits out of him entirely!

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As he read the note from Catherine, Pascal chuckled, HA! She thought the only surprise anyone was getting tomorrow was Vincent, huh? Oh, boy, tomorrow would be quite a night, yes indeed! Mary rushed in, quite in a "dither! "Did you..oh, I see you got your note, too! Do you think the party will upset Vincent? You know how he GETS when we try to "fuss" over him! Remember his birthday party three years ago? He RAN AWAY!"

Let us be clear, NO ONE AT ALL Below knew of Catherine's other surprise.

of the expected baby yet, no one! All thought it was just a small party for Vincent....a "cloak" party, just because Catherine wanted to give him a "treat", a surprise gathering of his closer friends he had not seen a while, as he had been rather "occupied" lately, Above! Yes, this did promise to be QUITE an evening, yes, it most certainly did:

At seven Saturday evening, Vincent hurried to meet Pascal. Not daring to go Above, even on this special occasion, he had sent Pascal to retrieve the present Henry was finishing at his jewelry shop, and the waiting was driving him.....there was Pascal, finally! "Hello, it was ready? Let me see!" Opening the small, white velvet box, Vincent was delighted as he anxiously looked inside it; with Pascal peering over his shoulder. "It is perfect! Just as I first imagined it; just as my drawing! Thank you, my friend, thank you very much for getting this to me:" Pascal grinned at him, "well, as long as you're pleased..."pleased, look at this! See how it sparkles: Did Henry have any trouble melting down the gold coins and putting in the stone?" "No, he said all went rather well, the hardest part was following your terrible drawing! THAT nearly drove him to distraction: Has it come out as you wanted it?" "Yes, exactly!" Pascal couldn't stand it; he had to ask one question, "but why did you design it to look almost like a....a...?" "Because". Vincent said no more. Maybe he would tell his friend someday why the ring was spiraled to look like a "horn", but not now! He was looking at the box so intently, he had not heard Mouse approach from behind, the footsteps startled him as he snapped the box closed, and spun to face him. "Hello Mouse: How are you today? Any new inventions in the works?" But, Mouse had seen Vincent putting something into his pocket! "Lo, Vincent, What's that? Mouse can see it?" "Yes, later Mouse, I promise, really!" Pascal patted Vincent on the shoulder and said as goodbye, "surely hope all goes well, my friend: Good luck! And, oh, before I forget, Henry worried about the size and told me to let him know if it needs adjusting and sends his

congratulations, along with his wives!" Vincent thanked his friend once again. Then still looking into the small velvet box and poking at what lay gleaming even in the darkness of the tunnel, went quickly to show Father.

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As Vincent made his way to Fathers Chamber, he hadn't even seen Catherine, hiding in a passageway. "Whew! THAT was close, He must have really been lost in thought, He didn't even sense my presence, good!" She was on her way to Marys' Chamber. This was where all had agreed the party would be held. Vincent knew Marys' love of privacy, and rarely went to see her without receiving her permission first. The perfect place to plan a surprise party for him! As Catherine entered, she called out, "Mary, are you here?" Yes. Come in, my dear! I was just starting to arrange the food and the tableware. How does it look so far?" Everything looked perfect to Catherine, the table was set with a deep green tablecloth, matching embroidered linen napkins, crystal stemware, and the best silver service Mary had been able to lay hands on. Catherine was delighted as she looked around, "Mary, everything is...perfect! Wherever did you get that lovely cloth and napkins?" Blushing a little at the compliment, Mary responded, "well, actually, I made them myself long ago. You really think they'll do?" "Of course, Oh; everything is just lovely, you really should have waited for me, I'm sorry to be so late, but I had to wrap the cloak, and.....". "Don't apologize, Catherine, you can finish setting the food out while I change, that will make all even. Then, giggled and added, "BUT, the men will do the cleaning up!...

How's that?" Nodding in agreement, Catherine rolled up her sleeves and started arranging the various foodstuffs on the table. Everybody had been generous, there were many varieties of sandwiches, a long tray of pickles, homemade potato chips, a "dip" of onion or something, cookies and the CAKE! What a cake it was; a chocolate triple layered one, decorated in Vincents favorite icing, also chocolate! One of the Helpers, John was a baker and had done himself proud, indeed! On the top of the cake inscribed in creamy white icing, were simply the words, "Surprise, Vincent!" "Mouse said the cake is filled with almond paste, and MORE chocolate!" Mary smiled as she spoke. "Mouse has "tried" it, I'm sure! He's a bigger chocoholic than our Vincent is!" "Yes, I know!" Catherine looked at her watch, it was now 7:40, the party was supposed to start at eight! As she started to feel a little anxious, Pascal and Mouse entered the room, "Hi, Catherine, lo' Mary, Mouse is here, Pascal, too!" Pascal just looked at the two women and slyly winked. He dared not open his mouth, if he slipped and mentioned what else was going to happen tonight besides the "Cloak party", Vincent would never forgive him; he had not told anyone of the small velvet box, or its contents. As he and Mouse set chairs around the room, others had started arriving. John the baker with his wife and two children, Key Ho, the grocer, his family, and others Catherine welcomed as they entered. But, where was Father? And Peter! Father had promised faithfully to have Vincent there at exactly 8:00. It was now Eight o'clock! Catherine couldn't stand the suspense, and silently cursed, "Damn it, Father, you promised! EIGHT o'clock!" This was NOT a time in her life when Catherine needed to be more nervous!

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In his Chamber, Father had glanced at the clock and suddenly realized how late it was. God, Catherine would positively kill him if he didn't get Vincent there soon! But, his son was going on so..raving about the gift he was giving Catherine. He had to get Vincent moving! SOMEHOW! But, how? A solution hit him like a stroke of absolute genius. "Vincent, the gift is extremely lovely. I approve totally of this, as you knew I would. Why don't we go and get a....um, a womans' opinion?" When his son agreed this was a good idea, Father went on, "Well, let's see....., I know! How about Mary. She has such a wonderful sense of the "rightness" of gifts. You know the beautiful things she makes us for Christmas and birthdays. Yes, Vincent. She would be the one to see for how another woman would like the present you have for Catherine. Shall we go now?" Father thanked unseen Gods for his sons agreement, and hastily escorted him from the Chamber, Vincent exclaiming as he almost pulled him up the few stairs, "Father, why are you rushing me so?" When the teenager that had been posted as a "lookout" saw Vincent and Father starting, FINALLY for Marys', he took a short cut that only smaller children could fit through, and beat them there by five minutes. "They're coming, they're coming!" Saying, "SHHHHH", Catherine hid the large box containing the cloak under Marys' bed as Pascal blew out the candles. Suddenly the room was in total darkness. Mouse giggled nervously in the dusky room, and was startled when many voices at the same time told him to "BE QUIET!" "Okay, fine. Okay, sorry." He put his hand over his mouth, holding

back the giggles that threatened to escape him again! All at once, Vincents voice could be heard, "I do not think Mary is here, Father, or maybe she has retired earlier tonight than usual. Shall we try later?" Father urged him to the entrance. "No, she's here, maybe in the back." Vincent turned to say something in response, but found himself entirely alone in the doorway. The wits were almost startled out of him when lights came on quickly and many voices yelled as one, "SURPRISE, Vincent!" WHAT was THIS? He saw Mary, Pascal, a giggling Mouse, Father beaming at him, and many friends all gathering around him, hugging and patting him about the shoulders and back, exclaiming, "Welcome to your party, Vincent! We thought Father would never get you here. Vincent looked at Catherine through glittered, narrowed eyes, and said "You!.....is this your doing? Well, is it?" When she just nodded assent, he shook his head, and said to her, "ah! deceitful, so tricky, aren't we?" Catherine's eyes were shining brightly back to his startled ones as she said gleefully...."GOTCHA!" "But..why, it is not my birthday, not a holiday, or anything. Why, a....a..party for ME?" Catherine hugged him, saying softly, "just because we love you, that's why!" Vincent looked very embarrassed, he didn't know quite what to say to these friends that now were gathered around him, "I don't know what to say to thank you for...for". Pascal patted him on the back, "well, when a person doesn't know what to say, Vincent, why not just enjoy this, and.....let's eat!" Everyone laughed at his remark, including Vincent. They gathered around the table that was so nicely decorated, and began sharing the meal prepared for the party. As Vincent ate and talked with friends he hadn't seen for a while, Catherine slipped away and went to the bed, and reached under to get the present; hoping he would like how she had the tailor design it. As she retrieved it, walked over to Vincent and stretched out

her hands; "this is for you." "What is....what have you done!" As stated before, accepting gifts of any kind was rather difficult for him, he felt very shy suddenly, as everyone's eyes were on him as they waited for him to open the huge package! His fingers were shaking as he read the small card. It said simply, "When I can't keep you warm, this hopefully will. Love, Catherine" Finally tearing back the outer and inner wrappings, he looked stunned at what was in the box. "Catherine, how....when...Oh, this is wonderful..wonderful!" He swung the cloak out of the box, and all his friends began oohing and aahing...the cloak was grey and black suede, lined with black dyed sheepskin. The hood was magnificent! Trimmied in leather; lush and deep enough to keep him very warm on excursions Above during the cold months of the year. It had deep, grey flannel pockets, and was tied in front with braided leather thongs. With everyone urging, Vincent slipped it on, it fit him perfectly! Father commented, "just like it was made for you" everyone groaned at this "joke"! As he adjusted the cloak around his shoulders, Vincent looked over to Catherine, and from the delight on his face, she knew he was extremely pleased, because she saw his eyes, saw what was reflected from them to hers..gratitude, and love of what she had done and for all she was..to him. "Thank you, everyone, for this party. I cannot tell you how surprised, how pleased,....". He stopped talking suddenly, and walked over to Catherine. To the astonishment of all there, Vincent did something he had never done before; he reached over & took her face between his hands, lowered his lips towards her, said quietly but loudly enough that all could hear, "Thank you, my love", and kissed her long and hard on the mouth, there, in front of everyone! Father was simply astonished! His quiet, shy son kissing Catherine in PUBLIC like this amazed him! He silently thanked God, and Catherine, for the confidence Vincent now had to do something like this! And, so WELL!

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The party broke up around 11 o'clock. With waves, hugs of good-bye, and thank yous, each went their separate ways, except Father, Vincent and Catherine. Against Marys' wishes, they all stayed and helped set her room in order, putting away dishes, straightening chairs, etc. When the last of Marys' possessions were where they should be, Vincent whispered to Catherine..... "I would like to talk with you privately, may we go to your apartment?" With a look of question in her eyes, she nodded yes to this request, wondering why he was being so, so... solemn! He opened the cloak and drew her inside, nearer him, and

they started leaving, saying goodbye to Father and Mary as they did.

Catherine could sense a tenseness in Vincent that she didn't understand. She knew he had been very happy at the unexpected party. He seemed to love his gift, he looked down at it again and again as they walked through the tunnel, smiling first at it, then stroking the material, then glancing down at her from under his long, golden lashes. When they had reached her apartment, Catherine went to change into something less "formal", leaving Vincent to his thoughts.. As he sat on the balcony for some fresh air to clear his head, help him think what he wanted to say, and exactly how to begin, he was trembling, suddenly terrified! How could he ask her to give up all of this! Her home, her "life", to come live with him Below! He hoped to be able to do this correctly. He only planned on EVER doing it once! Then, time to gather his courage was at an end. Catherine was coming out onto the balcony. She had changed into a lovely flowered gown with a matching robe of pink and blue silk that clung slightly to the curves of her body and took Vincents breath away. She was so beautiful, he sat stunned and just stared at her at she snuggled beside him on the wrought iron loveseat. "Did you enjoy your party, and your present?" "Yes, very much. However did you manage to keep it from me? I never sensed your thoughts, the excitement and planning this must have taken never reached me; how did you do it?" "Oh, I had a lot of other things on my mind at the same time". Her voice trailed off; then she questioned, "you wanted to see me alone about something, well, we're alone." Folding her hands into her lap, she smiled up and him and waited. Vincent closed his eyes for a moment, said a silent prayer for HELP, and began to speak, slowly. "My love, I have watched as you have become more and more at ease in the world in which I live. Everyone, to a man, excepts you totally as one of us; everyone Below loves and admires.....your courage in loving me, and for all you do because of that love, have done to nurture that love to finally, being fulfilled between us. I am so proud of you, Catherine, and so grateful to have you in my life. The best part of my life is you, you must know this to be true? " As she just nodded, and urged him on with her eyes, Vincent took a very deep breath, "Catherine, I love you very much, I always have and always will. You are my first thought when I wake up and my last thought going to bed. I not only love you; I am so very proud of you, for all you've done for others, of both our worlds." Vincent took the small white, velvet box from his pants pocket, and opened it slowly. Reaching out, he took her hand in his, kissed the back of it gently, then reached up

200

to hold her tenderly. for a moment.... released her and let her see what he was holding out to her in the box, saying, "will you do me the honor, the greatest gift you can ever give me? Will you marry me, Catherine?" She gasped as she looked at the ring that sparkled from the box; it was gold, plain but spiraled and curved delicately. It caught the light from the moon, and Catherine saw at the center of it a small outline of a heart. At the center of that was a small deep red ruby. "Vincent, it's beautiful! It reminds me of ALL the magic we saw... there, at the cabin, as I know you meant it should." Looking up to him with tears of joy in her eyes, she answered him, "Yes, I will marry you, and it is I who am honored that you ask me to do this. I love you more with every day that passes. So much, my heart is filled with it. Yes, my dearest Vincent, YES!" He quietly took the ring from the box and placed it on the second finger of her left hand, kissed that hand, and gathered her into his arms with a great sigh of relief! They sat and talked for about an hour, Vincent explaining how he had designed the ring, and who had made it for him, "of course, if you had not liked it.....". Her "look" cut off the rest of that sentence: "Not liked it! No woman ever, ever had a lovelier marriage ring than this one now on my finger! I'll never take it off!" "Yes, my love, you will. Just once, for a moment, now please: In my nervousness, I forgot; there is an inscription inside! Slipping the ring off, she read the words, "to a life with you, and no impossibilities love Vincent"..... Putting it back where it belonged, Catherine wrapped her arms around his neck, and kissed him all about his dear face; his eyes, his nose, his chin, and finally, saving the best for last, his lovely mouth: "We must tell Father!", Vincent said as he pulled her to her feet with a small laugh of delight. "I'll go change....". "NO." Just wear my new cloak; it's very warm, and will take care of modesty, I cannot wait to tell him...you've said YES!" "No, you wear the new cloak, I can wear the old one, it's still here, you know." Vincent looked down at her with a lop-sided grin, "Catherine, I will, at least most of the time, wear the pants in this family: YOU will wear the new one.....!" "Please?" "All right, "BOSS!" Laughing at her words, he hugged her tightly and wrapped her thoroughly into the cloak as they turned to go Below.

As Vincent and Catherine entered Father's Chamber arm-in-arm, Peter was sitting with Father, talking and sharing a glass of wine and some of the food left over from the party. "Catherine, Vincent! I'm so sorry I missed the party! There was an emergency at the hospital that could not wait. I apologize again, how did everything go?"

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He said this last with a quick glance at Catherine. Had she told Vincent yet of the baby? Her shake of ^{her} ~~head~~ said, NO! He smiled, and kept quiet. Vincent went to Father and hugged him, "Catherine has accepted me, we're to be married!" Father had tears in his eyes as he replied, "see, my son, I told you she would, didn't I? And you were so unsure. Shame on you. Now, ahem, excuse me." With that, he went to Catherine, put his arms about her and simply said, "welcome, my dear; my daughter." Leaving Father and Peter deeply in discussion over the wisdom... of a chess move Peter had made, Vincent and Catherine went to sit for a while at the cave of Waterfalls. Each seemed lost in thoughts that were connected yet separate. Vincent, dreaming of a life with his future wife; Catherine, well..... Suddenly, he could not stand it, he HAD to yell it to whomever could hear him in the tunnels echoes. He stood, threw his arms in the air, and roared, "Catherine said YES, YES! I'm going to have her as my wife! Does everyone hear? MY WIFE!" "SHHH, you'll wake everyone in the tunnels! I have to talk to you without interruption, Vincent. Come, sit beside me." Patting the rock next to her, Catherine began, "do you remember, back at the cabin, we discussed possibly having children someday; that you would not be afraid of having them?" Vincent merely nodded, then said, "yes, I remember that night very well indeed. How could I ever forget that time, or any spent with you." "Do you still feel unafraid, my love?" "I have no fear of anything now. I have a new life because of your love and trust, how could I be afraid?" "Well, I may still be able to frighten you, maybe.... just a bit." "Oh, how?" "By telling you, that in about, Oh, six months, you will be a father." Taking his head between her two small hands, Catherine looked very deeply into those cobalt blue eyes and continued, "we are going to have a baby, Vincent". "A...baby? We...we are having a baby. How long have you known...how...why...you never said anything until now, why did you keep it a secret? HOW did you? Oh, my love, a baby: ME, a father, ME! And you! The lucky child to have you for its mother! He held her tightly, then as tho' suddenly remembering, loosened his hold a bit, " I must learn not to be so...so...forceful with you, mustn't I? I will have quite a bit to learn before our child, Oh, love, OUR CHILD, arrives!" Catherine giggled, "I'm not made of glass, you may hold me as you like, as long as you can still get your arms to FIT around me!" Vincent took her in his arms, and started carrying her out of the Waterfall cave, questioned, "does anyone know? Father?" "No, only Peter, that's why I had to wait! He wanted to run some tests; to make certain all was as it should be before letting me tell you. This

has been my secret almost three whole months, it nearly drove me crazy! Your telling me how "round" I was getting certainly did NOT help my sanity any...the times I had to bite my tongue!" As he set her very gently to her feet outside of Fathers Chamber, she took his hand and put it carefully on her slightly protruding tummy, "Vincent, meet your child. Child, meet your father, you are lucky, to have him for your daddy." Feeling her stomach, he was all at once overcome by all of it. The cloak, the party, the coming marriage, and now....a child of their very own. Vincent put his head down to her shoulder and searched for words as he held her about the waist, "your love humbled me, your trust and truth set me free of fears, your acceptance of marriage put before me a world I never thought to have. Catherine, this child you carry inside your body, our child; with this, you have truly given me immortality. All I will ever be or hope to become, I owe to your love." "As I do to yours, Vincent, my soon-to-be-husband, my dearest, kindest man!"

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Father looked up from the game of Chess he and Peter had been playing, almost ^{glee}fully grateful to see them standing there; he was losing this game! The interruption was very welcome. "Peter, I do not concede defeat, but.....we have company". "Of course, Jacob, I understand." Arching one eyebrow at Father, he repeated, "I DO indeed, understand!" They held hands and approached Father and Peter together. Vincent could not wait, couldn't stand it one more minute. He had to TELL someone, "Father! Catherine and I...we're pregnant, I mean to say, I'm...we're having..." He took a deep breath and began again.. "Father, Catherine and I are having a child!" Peter was extremely glad he was close enough to Jacob to slide a chair under him as Father started to sit down, mouth agape, on nothing but air! "A child, you are sure? A child! Father sprang to his feet as though he were twenty years old again and practically ran to his two "children" that stood smiling at him. Wrapping one to each arm, he turned to Peter, "I'm going to be a grandfather, ME, a grandfather!" Peter looked at his friend; why, he was almost jumping up and down with sheer joy. Well, THIS next thing HE was about to say might really do him "in"! "Well, Jacob, Catherine, Vincent, I have a "thing" to tell all of you! Jacob, you are having grand-children! Catherine, Vincent, you are having twins!" For a moment nobody said a word. There was complete silence as they all stared at each other. Vincents' eyes went from Catherine, to Father, to Peter and back to Catherine's stomach. He couldn't speak. Neither could Catherine! Finally Peter broke the silence with a chuckle,

"well, Vincent, when you decide to "do" something, you certainly seem to do it...ahem....up grand, I see! That's what kept me at the hospital, I had to be sure of this before coming and springing it on all of you! Am I forgiven for my lateness - NOW?" As this seemed to free everyones voices, they all began to speak at once, Vincent to Catherine, Peter to both of them, and nobody really heard anyone! No one had seen Father turn to a message "pipe" that he had never used before, and begin tapping out an urgent message! Within minutes, the Chamber was filled with people. They stood, half asleep, some dressed, some stillwearing robes and pajamas. The message Father had sent to Pascal had traveled very quickly, very loudly to all Below! The hubbub was indescribable! Some shouted congratulations all around, others wept openly. The message of the coming marriage was, in a way, expected, But, children, too! Again, not seeming to care who was present, Vincent took Catherine into his strong arms, and kissed her soundly, as everyone cheered him on! Pascal suddenly shouted, "here's to our dearest friends, Catherine and Vincent. To their new life as newlyweds to be, and the newer lives yet to be! Hip, Hip, Hurrah!" Peter turned to Jacob and started to extend a handshake; then alarmed by the look on Jacobs' face, turned instead to his satchel. He was glad he had it with him, for.....Father had fainted dead away on the floor at his feet! Waving a bottle of smelling salts under his nose to bring him "around", Peter grinned at him as he helped him pale and shaken, to a seat. AHA..... "Come on, grandpaw, you've got too much to do to faint - you can do that later. Right now, you have plans to make...for TWO more children: Your grandchildren. Oh, brother, this should be an interesting six months: Can I stand the strain! Can you, Jacob?" Father grinned fully up at him, "naturally!" Vincent and Catherine were relieved to hear Father joking, he was all right, As they went and stood beside him, Father reached up and took their hands in his and questioned, "will I be allowed to help with the babies?" Vincent responded, "Only help. We were depending on you to show us what to do!" Catherine simply smiled at Vincent.... Her heart was full, she had come home to her new life.... a happy life, at last! AT LAST!

The Beginning....



Things That Go "Bump" In The Night

Above, it was Halloween night. Here, Below, the children called it, "scare the adults and get come candy" night! Vincent waited eagerly, impatiently for the other children to return from Above. On this one night of the year, Father allowed, with their parents consent, all children to go Above to "trick or treat". But, first extracted a promise that they go ONLY to "Helpers" to do this: But, as "mean" as it made Father feel, he could not allow Vincent to accompany them; it was far too dangerous for him to take a chance on being truly "seen". He still considered everything Above a threat to his younger sons safety. Nothing could persuade him to change his mind, even Devins pleas and promises to watch over him, or the other childrens cries of, "Awww, come ON, Father, please let Vincent come with us? Just this ONCE?" Vincent had remained quiet at the exchange of talk between the boys and Father. He wanted very badly to go, to be "one of the boys", but even at the tender age of 7, knew his Father, and with the knowing, realized the finality of an "absolutely not!" when he heard it. This was the end of the discussion! Vincent wanted to beg to be allowed to go, but would never do this; it was not his nature, would never be, had never been. He was the "quiet one", the follower", his older brother Devin, the "instigator", as Father sometimes called him, somewhat unfairly, but USUALLY right on target! Devin and Vincent were as night and day. Dev the unruly one; the one who jumped into

"adventures" with both feet; never seeming to care about the consequences! Vincent was the careful one. The one who usually watched, mulled things over first, and then decided if a prank was really worth Fathers wrath should he hear of it! Of course, Vincent wasn't perfect yet! Many, many times he and Dev both had been banished to their room for a stunt or dangerous escapade that incurred their Fathers anger if or when he found them out ; Vincent grinned. What he and Dev had planned for later on tonight would have sent Father into apoplexy. This night had been very carefully worked on for a month, very carefully thought through for a boy of 7 and one of 9. But, the waiting to DO IT was making Vincent fidget with excitement. WHERE in heck was Dev? He had promised to be back by 9:30 and it was already almost 10 o'clock! Finally, he heard the jumbled talk of his friends voices approaching the Chamber he shared with his brother. They all ran in clutching sacks of loot from the "raid" Above. Devin ran to Vincent and dumped a bag of the "treasure" onto the bed, "Look what we got, Vin! We can really stuff our faces tonight!" All the "Helpers" had been indeed very generous! The other children joined the conversation, "wish you coulda' come with us, Vincent; it's not fair! We got some stuff for you, too!" And with this, added to the pile of candy and things already on the bed. Poking one long fingernail through the pile, Vincent smiled. There was lots of candy, some fruit, and even a few nickles and dimes. What a haul! He sighed deeply, it still didn't make up for not being allowed to go, but it WAS

nice of his friends to share what they had with him. All the children here shared what they had with each other, it was the unspoken law here Below. If one had two toys, one was given to a boy or girl that had none. This wasn't questioned; as all of them had been on either the giving or receiving end of this arrangement at one time or another. Father was very pleased that his children all got along as a rule. Oh, there were times... but for the most part, he was very proud of how they behaved. The children, as well as the adults, called Jacob Wells "Father". They used it as a title of love and deep respect for this man who helped "found" the home of safety they all lived in, here Below.

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Devin had begun to encourage the others to leave, he HAD to talk to Vincent alone; there were final plans to be made for tonight's adventure Above! As they ate the candy, the boys spoke in whispers and went over their secret plans for the midnight "excursion".

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The whole idea had come about at dinner a week ago. One of the "Helpers" named Louis was talking to Father of an old, abandoned house. He and his brothers had found some cast off furniture and dishes, etc. there. Could they be useful to him? Father exclaimed, "Yes! Of course! We find a use for everything down here; can you use any help getting things down? We have many who will be glad to give you a hand." "No, my brothers and I can do it. But, not TONIGHT! THAT place is really "spooky". I have heard rumors someone was actually killed in there years

ago; some say the place is "haunted!" Father scoffed at this statement, "Ha! Haunted indeed! What utter nonsense. Aren't you a bit old to believe in ghosts, Louis?" Well;.....I thought I was until one night last month. Walking by that old place, I KNOW I saw a light in the attic, and heard some REALLY weird sounds coming out of that place! I'm not gonna push my luck up there this close to Halloween, no way! Besides, I can see better what's there in the daylight." Father smiled at his friends last statement, "SURE you can, Louis. Of course."

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Devin and Vincent had been sitting very near the adults, and had overheard the entire conversation. They began poking each other in the ribs. They both had the same idea in the same instant! Dev whispered to Vincent, "A haunted house and real close : Wanna go? "YES: shhhh, Father will hear us, meet me later, in our room." "Yeh, okay." So began the plans that tonight, would find Devin and Vincent Above at midnight; on their way to what unknown.....? They planned on taking two flashlights borrowed from other boys, with them. Although Vincent saw like a "cat" in the dark, Devin didn't; he wanted light. Devin thought himself really too "old" to believe in ghosts; but Vin seemed really excited at the idea of the going Above, and to give his younger brother a change in his "routine", Dev would have done just about anything! Vin was his brother, and tho' Devin would died before admitting it aloud, he loved Vincent; felt a protectiveness and responsibility towards him

that, even with all his young years, knew would never change. Oh, sure they had fights as all brothers did, but not truly fair ones! Although Devin was older and had quite a "mouth", Vincent was just as tall, much stronger, and could usually shut it for him, when necessary.

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11:30 came & finally, was gone. "Pssst, Vincent, you ready? Where's ya flashlight?" "Shhh, right here. Quiet, you'll wake someone up." With great stealth, he and Vincent began the trek Above. Taking care to avoid the posted sentries, they carried their shoes slung over their shoulders, wincing when a sharp rock on the tunnel floor reminded them how foolish this was! Finally, they reached the steel ladder that lead them directly up and across the street from the house. The "Helper" Louis had told Father the 34th street exit was how to "go out"....this was it! Not nearly as adept as Vincent in climbing, Dev led the way slowly up the rungs with Vincent poking at him now and then to "MOVE FASTER." "You poke me one more time, Vincent, and you're gonna EAT this damn flashlight...I'm doing the best I can. We all can't move like you, ya know." "Sorry, Devin". "Yeh, Sure!" With combined effort, the boys finally succeeded in lifting the heavy grate that separated them from the street Above. Slipping through the opening they had created, they then knelt and pushed the heavy grate back into place with a loud "clank". Devin looked around, "it sure is dark, look:

Across the street, that must be it!" Vincent followed Devins pointing finger with his eyes and was suddenly a little scared. The place really DID look eerie; the bare, dark windows seemed like a face, with giant black eyes, the large door looked like a mouth, and the curved stone steps, like an evil grin! He wondered to himself if he REALLY wanted to do this? "Vincent, you ready?" Vincent gulped out, "I guess so", and they crossed the street and looked for the easiest way to get inside. And the quickest; it was getting cold, and their plans had NOT included jackets: Finding no way in at the front, they crept quietly around to the back of the house, looking for a window to climb into. Trying several as they tiptoed along, suddenly Devins foot struck the lid of a trashcan; sending it sliding along in front of them clanging and scraping along the ground as it did. Hissing and meowing, a cat jumped from the can straight into Devins startled face. He jumped, yelled, and almost landed on Vincents shoulders in fright, "Jez....WHAT was that!" "Just a stupid cat. Let go of my neck, Devin, you're choking me! What's the matter, SCARED?" Devin was indignant: Him. Scared...NEVER! "Nah, it just....just surprised me, that's all!" Seeing Vincents' grin at this statement, he repeated, "I wasn't scared, Vin!" "Then how come you're still shaking?" "Cuz I'm cold!" "Sure!" Changing the subject, Devin pulled his brother towards a window, "I think this one is open, let's try it." Prying and pushing, they finally succeeded in getting the window open enough to see

down into the cellar. A musty smell came up from the gloom, dank and laden with dust. Devin seemed oblivious to the odors, but Vincents more sensitive nostrils weren't! "PHEW, what a smell." He held his nostrils shut tightly against the offending odor. This gave his voice a funny "twangy " sound as he spoke, "Who's gonna go first?" Dev replied, "me, I guess, I'm the oldest". He was a bit disheartened at Vincents agreement to this fact, "yes, so you tell me all the time! Well, GO AHEAD!" As he slowly lowered himself down through the open window, Dev said a little shakey, "here goes nothing." Feeling underneath him a box, Devin lowered one foot, found the box sturdy beneath it, and dropped to it with a small sigh of relief. He had not wanted to let go of the window frame until he KNEW what he was going to be landing ON. "Okay, Vincent; there's a box to stand on, come down. Vincent? Come ON." Mirroring his older brothers movements, Vincent lowered himself quickly, and landed with a "thud" at Devins side. His added weight made the crate creak in complaint, and it collapsed beneath them. With a yowl of surprise and fright, the two boys found themselves flat on the cellar floor. Devin began searching with one hand for the light he had dropped from the falling through the crate. "Where the hell is it." Just as his hand closed around it, Vincents flashlight lit up what the boys were sitting on: Two inches from Devins face, an evil toothy grimace of a bear grinned menacingly back at him. With a cry of "YIPES" Devin was on his feet even

quicker than his younger, more agile brother. They stood huddled closely and just stared.....As Devin wiped the dirt from his face, he scoffed, "it's just an old bearskin rug, that's all. Vincent, it's just an old rug." When he still had no reply, he turned to look at his young brother. Vincents face was fierce; he looked ready to attack the "thing" that had frightened them so! One hand was raised and curved in defense, the look on Vincents face was something to behold. A low growl was rising from his throat as Devin started to shake him by the shoulder, "VINCENT., It's okay, it's just a stupid old rug. Relax, will ya?" Seeing the tension leave his body, Devin shook his head in wonder. Vin was only 7, but ready to defend his brother from harm at any cost to his own safety. "Thanks, Vincent." "Huh?, For what?" Oh, nothing, just thanks." Putting one arm around Vincents shoulder, Devin started leading him towards the stairway his flashlight brought into focus. Old and wooden, it creaked under them as they began slowly going up towards the first floor of the house. As the creak turned almost to a groaning sound, Devin stopped still in his tracks, "Hey, this time, YOU go first!" Shooting him a look of braveness he did NOT feel, Vincent took over the lead, grudgingly; praying silently that, "please, let that door be locked!" He was swiftly losing the thrill of any further exploration of this place fast! When the door opened readily at his touch, he muttered, "Oh, damn" under his breath, and at Devins nudge, started inside the house.

As Devin peered over his shoulder, his light touched over the gloomy living room before them. Old furniture covered with sheets looked to their eyes like sitting ghouls, waiting to clasp them if they got too close. A chandelier hung directly in the center of the room; to the left an old piano stood as though forgotten; holding to itself memories of the music from happier times. Cobwebs were everywhere. Vincent suddenly sneezed, and Devin nearly jumped out of his skin at the loud sound in the quiet, spooky room. Turning to face his brother, he said "thanks a lot, you scared the hell out of me. Come on!" Almost dragging Vincent at his side, they now stood directly in the center of the room beneath the chandelier, which suddenly quivered and tinkled above their heads! The sound made Vincents skin goose-bump, "what made that thing MOVE? I don't like the feelings I'm starting to get from this room, Devin. Not one bit! Let's leave, huh? Before something else.....". The words froze unspoken, in his throat, and they looked with gaping mouths towards the staircase directly in front of them! A high pitched faraway voice called out slowly, "whoooo are....you....? What.....do.....you...want...HERE? Get.....away....while you still.....can!" Without realizing it, Vin and Dev were clinging to each other in absolute terror, face to face, totally now; as the wits were frightened from them. They felt unable to move; their legs felt like they were encased in cement. "Vincent? Did you HEAR....."? "YES. And I'm getting out of here, NOW!" Dev

didn't answer his plea to "RUN!" Vincent shone his light into his brothers face; it was quickly draining stark white and his eyes were almost popping out of his head in complete panic! Dev whispered in a quivering voice, "look.....over...there! Oh, hell!" Turning, Vincent followed Devs pointing finger with a sideways look and yelled, "Devin, it's a ghost!" A misty, gray form was floating down the stairway towards them..right AT them. Now totally beyond sensible thought, they ran to escape the spectre as it reached the bottom of the stairs: Vincent ran around to the left and behind a high couch, and covered his eyes, praying this was all just a nightmare; praying to wake up....fast. Devin ran to the right end of the same couch, and fell sprawling over his brothers huddled body with a scream of fright, "Yow! Vincent, is that you? It better be you; you've scared the.....the crap out of me!" All he got in response was the sound of Vincents teeth, chattering in terror. Slowly they peeked up over the top of the high velvet couch; they saw the stairway was now empty...where had the "thing" gone to? As they rested their chins on the top of the couch, across from them one of the sheets covering a large chair began to rise...slowly..outlined high at its sides could be seen the shadowy arm of.... something...pointing one finger towards the front door. In the same voice he and Dev had heard earlier, "it" spoke: Get....out!" Suddenly the front door creaked open and they ran...they ran so fast dust rose from the floor, and cobwebs, unseen, unnoticed,

clung to their faces. Trying to squeeze through the door together, they were aware of nothing but a need to get the Hell out of this place.....and fast! Finally tumbling in a heap together at the bottom of the stairs, they jumped up, held hands, and ran for home, and safety, for their lives, as if all the hounds of Hell were chasing them every step of the way, and snapping at their heels!

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Inside the house, Father and Louis held on to each other and roared in paroxysms of laughter! "Well, Father, I don't think they'll be sneaking out again real soon. Your idea of giving them a "special Halloween" was an....an inspiration!" "Yes", Father agreed. "It did "seem" to make up to Vincent especially, not being allowed to go Above with the others, did it not? I must compliment you on that voice, Louis. If I hadn't known it was you talking, I would have probably had cardiac arrest myself." "Ah, but you, Father. When you rose up out of that chair, I had to stuff my fist into my mouth to keep from roaring at the look on those boys faces as they saw the "ghost": What will you say to them when you see them Below tomorrow morning at breakfast?" "Say? Why, nothing: Why should I have anything "special" to say? I was sleeping when they arrived back, weren't you at your home, doing the same?" "Yeah, right. Will you ever tell them what we did to them, those poor kids! Did we overdo it, do you suppose?" "No, I don't think we did; but still, I'll probably NEVER dare to tell them, the waiting for them to "get me" will drive me crazy! Oh, Louis, don't forget to return that bearskin

rug to your brother, will you? And thank him for making sure only that ONE WINDOW would open, and rigging that crate to collapse as he did! That was a stroke of genius! And, I cannot get over how you got that "thing" to float down the stairway as you did. It was truly eerie watching it through the small slits I had cut into the sheet. I congratulate you on that one, my man!" Louis looked puzzled. "The stairway? What about the stairway? Wasn't that you with a rigged wire or something; pulling that gray thing along?" Father stared at Louis, mouth agape as he shook his head back and forth; speechless for a moment. Then looking to the left, the right, and behind him, Father managed a strangled sentence. "THAT wasn't ME! I assumed you had thought of it at the last moment. You did, didn't you?" Louis was as white as the sheet Father was holding. "No, Father, I had nothing to do with it. LET'S GET THE H E L L OUT of here - FAST!" And they did, extremely fast!

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Peering in at the boys a while later, Father knew they were not really sleeping but only pretending to be. The fake snore from Devin and Vincents' quaking covers gave them away. He smiled, then turned and sighed. This adventure had been quite an ordeal, all in all. He wondered a trifle guiltily, if the boys would sleep at ALL tonight. For that matter, if they would ever sleep again! He whispered to himself as he turned to go to bed, "goodnight, my sons. I love you both. Devin? Will you perhaps be staying a bit closer to home nights for a while, hummmm. Vincent? My small, brave, little boy. HAPPY HALLOWEEN!"

Loves Promises Fulfilled - Part III

WITH THIS RING

Patricia Anne Kehoe

She lay absolutely still in the bed this October morning and waited. This "morning sickness" was nearly at the end as Catherine gratefully was reaching the middle of her fourth month of pregnancy. She would be damned glad when it was completely over! UGH! As she tried to ignore the wave of nausea now starting again, Catherine remembered questioning Dr. Alcott as to WHY she hadn't been sick the first three months as was "usual"; but only now, in her fourth month. His reply was rather amusing, "my dear Catherine, the only thing that is "usual" about this pregnancy is the the childrens' father, YOUR Vincent, is beginning to drive me entirely crazy: He is becoming a lunatic; constantly questioning me as to your health, the babies health, the pain, etc, and on and on. If he asks me ONE more time about things even "I" can't know YET, I will throttle him, or attempt to at least!". She smiled and then looked thoughtful, these last months, Catherine had wavered between joy and exhilaration one moment and anxiety and fear the next; wondered how good a mother she would be, how much pain would she feel in labor, etc. All the things woman all over the world reflected on as they awaited the birth of their first child, or in this case, children! She and Vincent had discussed hair and eye colors, who each hoped the babies would look like, and the things newly expectant parents talked of while awaiting "firstborns". And, as every couple, didn't really hope for one gender over another; the tests performed by Dr. Alcott had not been conclusive. They weren't concerned a great deal about physical possible appearances; just "fingers and toes", and good health! Especially good health!

But, now as Catherine thought of Peters' words, she amusingly agreed yes, Vincent was becoming rather "wierd". He read constantly all the child care and birth books he could lay his hands on; was always coming to her with some new fact from this or that book that he was actually committing to memory. Now, he was "into" Lamaze. They had already agreed to try for "natural" childbirth. With the approval of both doctors, Dr. Alcott and Father, she and Vincent would begin right after the wedding the practicing of breathing exercises, "focal points", and the rest of the techniques explained in the books Peter have given them. Catherine's heart suddenly began to match her flip-flopping stomach, the Wedding! Only two more weeks, and on October the 28th, she would be married to Vincent. The anticipation and excitement of the new life awaiting them as man and wife now combined disfavorably with the "morning sickness" for the lives WITHIN her, and the stomachs newest rounds of "butterflies" won over her hard fought for calm as she ran for the bathroom. Wiping her face with a wet cloth as the last of the nausea left, Catherine breathed a sigh of relief; now she could eat breakfast, and begin the latest rounds of plans for the new life, Below. Everything for the wedding, gown, shoes, etc. were stored....in Mary's Chamber Below. Vincent had tried to sneak a quick look at the dress, and had been fiercely "banished" by Mary until the wedding day, with scoldings of "bad luck to see the dress before the wedding, shoo, go away"; he had fled from her wrath, Mary could wield a MEAN broom when so disposed! The dress was being made by Catherine and six of the kind women that lived in the tunnels, at their insistance! She had not wanted to cause such a fuss, Catherine had been prepared to buy a dress at one store or another. But, Mary, Janet, Jamie and the others would not hear of it; they would make the dress, a gift for her. She had thanked them all and agreed to this arrangement. Sketches had

been drawn by all, and the final design was a combined effort of the best ideas from each persons' drawing. Catherine knew the dress would turn out beautifully; the ladies Below were excellent seamstresses! She just hoped that they allowed her plenty of growing room! Catherine stood and looked sideways in the bedroom and chuckled, then frowned just a bit. Even though her skin "glowed" and she felt positively wonderful, except for the "morning" thing, she was now paying for the teasing she had given her friends when they had been in this state through the years. When they had complained of feeling like a "blimp", she hadn't quite understood, they all had looked so happy, so radiant to her, and she had teased them about that. But, NOW, she looked towards her OWN reflection and suddenly knew how they felt. She exclaimed, "where is my damned waist. Are those really MY breasts; I look like aa COW!" She grinned, a happy contented cow, but a cow nonetheless, grrrr! She was very glad Vincent was Below, with Father and the others adding two rooms to his "bachelor" Chamber for his new family; otherwise he would have tried to tell her how LOVELY she looked to his eyes, and she might have thrown a hairbrush at him! Catherine grinned and rubbed her taut belly.....this was ALL his doing! Well,...not ALL. And he, he was almost "swaggering" over "his" accomplishment; twins on the first try! She smiled a sly look to herself in the mirror, "just you wait, my love. Three a.m. feedings can be a bit tiresome, even for one with your patience. Let's see how much energy you have left to "swagger" after a few weeks of that! Or energy for anything ELSE." Guiltily amused at picturing the dear man reeling out of bed night after night, morning after morning, Catherine knew she would also be up. But, she could go back to bed after feeding the children, he would be expected to go about his "duties" of the tunnels. She knew what to expect; one of her girlfriends had twins. Poor Vincent.

Catherine dressed to go Below and see how all the plans were progressing for the wedding and the new home. All had refused to let her help; thinking she shouldn't strain herself. Even Dr. Alcott had urged her to relax, this was also a "first" for him; he didn't know what to expect any more than she did, and wanted her well rested just in case. And Vincent treated her as though she was made of glass, Father watched every move she made! Even Mary shooed her away to rest with endless "there-theres". She felt so...so useless; Vincent had seen this, sensed her frustrations. He asked her if there was anything needing to be done Above. What of her apartment, her job? Would she take a leave of absence. Had she told; would she tell Joe Maxwell? "All of us are just trying to protect you, Catherine! You never know when a rock could slip, a tunnel we are digging might cave in. I would really feel better about everything if you were out of harms way; if anything should happen to you....." Going along, at least for now with his pleas, Catherine had set her teeth, and began listing the things still undone here, in this world. She had first spoken to Joe Maxwell; that had been the worst! He had been absolutely livid! "What do you mean you're leaving the D.A.'s office! We're short handed already, Cathy. You expect me to give you a six month or longer leave of absence! And, then accept you back on a part time basis even then! That's unheard of! Where are you going? You...you're not sick or anything like that are you? You sure don't look sick. Can you please tell me what the HELL is going on here?" Asking him to sit down, she began trying to tell him as much as she COULD. He was still mumbling under his breath, "six months, at least." Catherine took a deep breath and began, "Joe, I know all this is quite a shock to you. Let me try and explain, okay? Just hear me out? Well, first, I.....I'm getting married!" He threw a "look" at her and started to speak. "Joe, be quiet and let me finish! You can then say whatever is it you want to say, I promise." When he just nodded, she continued. "I'm to be married the end of October, the 28th. I really can't go into that in great detail. You know I've always kept my private life strictly private, and will continue to do

so. And, naturally, I will be moving to be with my new husband. Now bear with me, Joe; I can leave a phone number you can leave messages at, but that's all I can leave, no address. It's not possible to do that, you must trust me when I say it is NOT possible. And, Joe, the hardest thing I have to tell you is I can't even ask you to the wedding. It will be a very private ceremony, only his family will be there; my closest friends will not be able to attend. That's how it had to be arranged for reasons I will NOT go into now, can't go into. I'm sorry it has to be this way, Joe. I really am. Someday, maybe, I can tell you EVERYTHING; be able to explain it all to you. But for now, as you've always said "trust me? And, if you want me to come back to work under the conditions I have just told you of, okay. And, if you can't see your way "clear" to this, I will understand your reasons." He had sat almost stunned as Cathy had told him all of this without even pausing to take a breath, as though she had to get it all out or lose her courage. Joe got to his feet and began to pace about his small office, trying to think, trying to understand all she had said to him. He stood looking out the window a long time while Catherine just sat with folded hands and awaited his decision. She knew how hard it was for him not to ask endless questions, respected him for not doing it. He mumbled something she couldn't hear, and turned to face her slowly. "Okay! Let's get it all straight. You WILL be coming back to work? I'll need you five days a week, but you can decide the hours, between eight or whatever starting and at least four hours a day, all right? You knew you had me, huh? You're too damn good to let go! You know how much I...we all depend on you; that's in your favor. As to your getting married, the details of the wedding are really none of my business, but you have all my blessings, Cath. I'll have a phone number to reach you at? Okay, that will be fine when I can't read that "scribbly" handwriting of yours!. But, I must ask this one question, I can't stand it. Why SIX months, at least? Most new brides intending to come back to work at all take, oh maybe a month off, but six? Why, six, "AT LEAST"?" Catherine stood up and went to stand near him at

the window, opening her loose jacket as she went. "Because Joe, I'm having twins in five months, twins!" She patted her stomach and Joe just looked down at it aghast. "Is this the reason you're getting married! Cathy, you don't have to MARRY him, you know! Single mothers.. there are all sorts of options open to you!" She put her hands on his arms. "Joe! I'm getting married because I WANT to. I love the father of my babies; I've been with him for over three years now. He's.... my life, do you understand? He and these babies are my life now! You know me well enough to understand what I am about to say. I CHOSE to have these children, Joe. And, not one person in this world could FORCE me to ever marry a man I didn't love!" Joe sighed, looked hard at Cathy a moment mulling over all she had just said. "Okay, OKAY. You knew I'd agree to this "wierd" arrangement, didn't you? So, okay, I'll see you in when? April, May at the latest? FOR SURE? She hugged him tightly, "yes, by May for sure." As he returned her hug, she noticed he, as well as she, had tears in their eyes as they said their "so longs". "Joe, I promise to keep in touch. Let you know when the babies are here and what they are! My caseload is pretty much cleaned up. The new person you hire shouldn't have too much trouble taking my place, for now." With this, Catherine picked up her briefcase and purse and went towards the door. Joe called out, "HEY! Radcliffe! Take it easy, huh? Tell your new husband he's one hell of a lucky man; tell him for me, okay?" Catherine smiled back at him, nodded quickly and closed the door before she started to cry. Blowing her nose, she stepped onto the elevator and began dreading the next chore ahead of her. She was to join her best friend, Jenny Aronson for lunch. She had to go through most of all THIS again, with Jen. How would she make her understand about the wedding, not being invited. Jenny had always expected to be if not the maid of honor, at least a member of the wedding party! Now to be told she wouldn't even be invited to attend the wedding! Cathy looked towards the sky, "help?" As she opened the door of the fancy restaurant where they had agreed to meet, Catherine prayed silently,

for strength! Jenny looked up and grinned as Catherine approached their table. "Hi! Am I early, or are you, AS USUAL, late?" Cathy slid down into the booth beside her, "No, I'm late! Sue me!" "oh, sure, sue a lawyer. You are too funny! So, why the sudden lunch invite? I haven't seen too much of you for quite a while, you know! Boyfriend keeping you pretty busy, is he?" Cathy took a deep breath, "Not boyfriend", she held out her hand with the lovely engagement ring from Vincent sparkling there. "Future husband." As Jen took the hand extended out to her, she gasped, "Oh, Cathy, it's beautiful. What a unique design; I've never seen another even close to it in "looks". Wait don't tell me; Vincent had this MADE just for you, didn't he? Yes, he must have! From the little you've told me about him, this sounds like the sort of thing he would do. He sounds so special. Oh, I'll finally get to meet him! How much help will you need for the wedding, I'm kinda good at that sort of "stuff" you know. Even though I'm not married myself." "The wedding is in two weeks, Jenny, the 28th of October. Catherine then slowly began telling Jenny some of what she had told to Joe earlier. This was hard to tell her dear friend, really hard. But, Catherine was amazed at how calmly, how accepting Jenny seemed of her explanations. She had just looked, listened and then seemed faraway for a moment. Then she reached over and hugged Catherine and didn't ask ANY questions! Cathy thought well, maybe we're close enough that when no explanations are offered, no questions need be asked. But, now, she was going to spring the best surprise of all, the twins. Sure that THIS would now trigger lots of questions, Catherine almost winced as she finished telling Jen the rest of her news. Jenny just smiled, then said, "Oh, I knew you were pregnant, Cathy!" "How!" Jen looked away for second, then back. "A woman can just tell these things, I guess. Do me a favor though? I want to get you a wedding present, and something for the twins, too. Can you stop by my place on Wednesday night? Around nine o'clock? I realize you must be super busy, but could you do this for me?"

Catherine mentally went over her list of things that all needed to be done between now and Wednesday; "I'll be glad to come over, but you really needn't get any gifts....". Jen grinned, "I will do, as you know, as I damned please! Just be there, okay?" With that all settled, the women ordered lunch; Jen complaining when Cathy ordered dessert. "Oh, SURE. You can AFFORD to eat that, you're not trying to stay "svelte" right now, HAH!". After finishing the meal with laughing and teasing as part of the menu, they parted outside the restaurant with hugs, kisses, and Jennys' parting reminder, "remember, Wednesday at nine: Cath, please? TRY to be on time? Bye!"

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No longer wanting to trust his beloved pregnant Catherine to navigate the ladder from her basement to Below on her own, Vincent was waiting for her at the tunnel entrance near a "helpers" store at seven that night. "Hello, love, how was your day? What did you get accomplished?" Then, bending his magnificent head to her tummy, he whispered softly, "Hello, my children! I love you!" She grinned down at him and teased, "Oh, sure, say hello to them before even giving ME a kiss. That's how it is to be NOW, huh?" He knew she was only joking with him, and Vincent responded in kind. "WELL, they ARE my gems. Ah, but you my dearest, are the crown." Taking Catherine into his arms with exaggerated attention to her tummy, he kissed her gently, then deepened the kiss as her arms went tightly around his neck. "Vincent, I'm not made of cotton: Kiss me!" And therefore, he did: Quite thoroughly. Holding her arm linked in his, he escorted her Below; there was much to see since she had last been there even if that was only two days ago. Thanks to twenty or so friends helping in their free time of the week-end, the Chambers' new rooms were nearly ready: She and Vincent had, together with Father, supplied the men with many very precise drawings of how the rooms were to be laid out. The workers had promised to stay as close to the plans as they could; one never

knew when they would strike a boulder they would be forced to dig around, etc.. Well, she had kept her promise and stayed away as Vincent had begged her to; he was so afraid a stone might slip and hit her, or the dust and dirt they would be working in would make her ill. She secretly thought he was acting like a "mother hen", but to keep the peace and to free him from worry (he was already a nervous wreck) she had conceded to remain at her apartment. Now, she was really excited to see how much the men had accomplished, to see for herself how changed everything would be! Vincents' old Chamber was to now be a sitting room, the room for "company". One of the new rooms was to be their bedroom, some of her most cherished possessions were already packed and in Fathers' rooms Below waiting for her to arrange them as she pleased in their new home. The other room was to be the nursery. She, Mary and Jamie had quite a time picking up blankets, a crib, dressing table, a bureau and the rest of the things new babies need. They had gone through stores like whirlwinds! Mary was amazed at what new things were now available to make a baby comfortable; wind-up swings, fancy highchairs, and the cribs! Oh, such lovely cribs were in this store. All had agonized long and hard, finally decided on a double wide crib in burnished brass. Catherine had requested it be coated at least three times with lacquer, to prevent it getting rusty from the dampness Below. And Catherine thought to herself, "hang the cost.", then hoped her extravagance wasn't making Mary and Jamie uncomfortable. Money was scarce most of the time for the people Below, and Catherine suddenly felt she was spending far too much, almost with guilt. But, the other women understood silently. Catherine had never been one to show off her money, her wealth; had never gone overboard on gifts even on holidays, she brought each a gift, but never too 'showy'. Even with Vincent she had always been "conservative", not wanting to embarrass him, she'd like to buy him whole stores of items, but knew

he would have been uncomfortable receiving so much from even her. But, all Below knew Catherine's "secret". When anyone needed money for schooling, for college, or anything, the money had simply "appeared". None questioned it, they knew it was from Catherine. She never mentioned any of the money, and in respect to her feelings, neither had those involved! This, they were aware, was her shy quiet way of putting her money to good use; on those she loved, considered her family and it was of course, well appreciated. And all loved her for the way she did these things for them; without questions, and with no expected acknowledgement of the deed. Mary and Jamie both knew she was not one to show off; knew she was just simply wildly excited about the arrival of the twins, and wanted to give them the best that she could. They let Catherine enjoy herself, she certainly had earned the right! Besides, it was not their business how she spent her cash, anyway. Mary and Jamie, as well as others of the tunnel world had more than once been the recipient of her generosity. Sometimes, Catherine would bring armsful of lovely dresses, or coats, exclaiming she had outgrown them, or some other attempt to excuse giving the clothing away. These were proud people, Catherine knew this, but good used clothes would never be refused, especially from her, one of the "family". She thought her explanations of why the clothing was being given was accepted. But, sometimes, she "slipped" up and left tags on some of the garments. All were aware most of the things were brand new. Things she had purchased just for them; new coats, warm for the winter cold, school clothes for those that attended classes Above, shoes she never could have worn; they were not all the same size as her foot. But, her small "fib" was overlooked as the women with joy distributed the items where needed most. The boxes of men's clothing that at times had been found in the tunnels entrances were taken as gifts from 'helpers' of Above. Some of the time, these indeed, were from them. But, the people knew most of it came from Catherine, the clothes in some boxes were new; hardly a thing the most generous of ordinary friends from Above could afford to give away. So, to all Below, Catherine

was no longer just a helper. Over the years, all had grown to love her deeper every day. She was now "family"; they would never hurt her feelings on telling her they knew her "secret" way of giving much to them. Of the medicines she provided against illness to Fathers' pitifully small supplies, the beds for the children, the toys; all gifts were accepted without question and with deep, loving gratitude by all. SHE was Catherine, she loved them. And THAT was all anyone needed to know about anything! Loaded down with all their new purchases, the three women struggled towards home with a bit of trepidation. WHERE would they put everything? Fathers' poor rooms were already filled to crushing capacity. Where would these newest items be put until needed? Conspiring together, Jamie had come up with a great idea. There was a large empty Chamber right near Marys. A family had had the good fortune to gather enough money together (more of Catherine's work, all thought) to move out west, the man of the family suffered terribly from asthma. This room would be the perfect place to store all this they now tried not to drop as they entered the tunnel. Catherine had already, with Vincents' grinning consent, decided to bring her bedroom down here. It was comfortable, and, Vincent had teased, many wonderful moments had been spent in that bed, by both of them, Many.....!

As she entered her future home, she gasped at all the changes that had taken place in two short days! The walls had all been scrubbed clean of candle smoke, the floors had been laid with a lovely array of carpets, and Vincents' "bachelor" bed had been laden with many plump looking pillows of all colors and was now a wonderfully comfortable looking sofa. Three chairs were now placed about the room, a small coffee table, and some lovely crocheted cloths lay on wide tables... at each end of the sofa. Catherine was sure the crocheted cloths were Marys' work; no one could do such lovely things as her nimble fingers! Vincents' vast array of books now lined one entire wall in a new bookcase, and his many "eclectic" possessions were displayed there and on many new shelves that had been built directly into the rock walls. It was a really good job the men had done here. Catherine's soft look to Vincent told him

all he wanted to know; she was pleased: Good! He was delighted with her liking of these new rooms, he and the others had indeed worked hard to get them as close to her designs as they could: "Catherine, if you want anything changed, just let us know. The men and I....". She turned halfway towards him, pointing at something on one of the new shelves as she did. "Change ONE thing, please?" Frowning, Vincent followed her pointing finger with his eyes; Oh, Oh! What didn't she like? She continued as she crossed the room and picked up the shiny object, "will you get rid of this thing." She had picked up the small reflecting mirror from an old car. She had once thrown this disc at him on purpose, when.. she looked into it and had seen his reflection for the first time: Vincent just grinned, "you don't want that?" He understood that this "particular" memory of the past was, indeed, something not necessary: "No, I don't want this!" He nodded, and took the disc from her, "consider it gone my love." One of the men helping..... said with a teasing tone of voice, "yeh, Vincent, if you have a fight, that's one less weapon she can use on ya!" Catherine put an arm about Vincents' waist, smiled up at him as she spoke to the man, retorting, "Oh, we'll NEVER fight! Discuss loudly perhaps, but, not fight!" Right?, Vincent?" He smiled down on her and just nodded, then replied teasingly, "it would do no good to try and fight with you: How does one win against a lawyer? Besides, are not women always right anyway?" As he spoke this to Catherine, all the other men working in the room, started shouting, "Vin, look out" "Yeh, she'll get you for that one!" She looked around, thought for a moment and then demanded to know, "NOW, where IS that mirror?" Leaving the others laughing and calling some rather rude remarks out to Vincent, he and Catherine went into the next new room, the nursery. Here, the men had indeed outdone themselves! The room had been painstakingly dug from almost solid rock. With the help from all the friends above and Mouses' borrowing abilities, power had been temporarily rigged here, she could see a sign here and there of how truly difficult it had been to get this room done in so short a time. The noise of the drilling must have

driven everyone crazy; especially Father. With his Chamber the closest, and the men working between ten and fifteen hours a day, the disruption to his routine must have been quite something. He, above all, loathed noise in the quiet world he had created. When youngsters; especially teen-agers had blasted him with the sounds of small Walkman radioes; Christmas presents from her; he has been extremely verbose, had told the children, "either turn that noise down, or preferably off altogether!" The poor man must be surely wearing earplugs for these last two days at all THIS commotion. Catherine giggled at the image this brought forth, and thought, "maybe he's wearing earmuffs, too." Vincent questioned as to what was so amusing and when she told him what had struck her so funny, he gulped and choked back a chuckle and told her that Father had, indeed, been wearing earplugs! He then broke down into gales of laughing along with her. At this precise moment, Father himself entered the room. Turning to look as he questioned WHAT was causing such hysterics, Vincent and Catherine saw his idea of earplugs. He had his glasses perched at the very tip of his nose, and was looking down at them with huge wads of twisted chunks of cotton sticking out of his ears. It looked like a duo of small rabbits or hunks of cauliflower were growing out of his ears, about three inches long, white and fuzzy. Vincent and Catherine now completely lost control; collapsed into chairs in the room and held their sides, totally unable to answer Fathers' demanding tone, "well, can you both be going totally mad! Vincent? Come to your senses and tell me what...?" Father knew better then to ask Catherine anything at the moment. She was holding her tummy and rocking back and forth; tears were streaming down her face as she tried and lost the battle for control! As he finally regained a bit of his lost dignity, Vincent responded, "well, you DO look a bit "strange", Father. With that...that cotton..." This set him off again. Father decided it was really no use at all to try to make any sense of out them now; they were beyond reason. With a look of complete disfavor, Father turned and went into the other

Chamber, shaking his head as he left, which made the wads in his ears sway to and fro like small stalks of flowers waving in the breeze. In the other room, no one dared look as he passed. They had heard the exchange of conversation in the nursery, had also seen what Father looked like, and didn't dare to face him or they would have probably fallen from the ladders most were now perched on working! As Vincent wiped tears from his eyes and took deep breaths to regain a sense of calm, he turned to Catherine trying to be stern, "that was truly unkind of us, my love: Poor Father; shall I go and attempt to tell him why we were laughing at him, and also apologize to him at our lack of courtesy just now?" She held her aching ribs and simply warned, "yes, you'd better tell him we're both sorry. But! Don't look at him directly, if you begin laughing again, he may just throw something at you." He kissed the top of her head, and stood up. As he went to the doorway, Vincent looked back to where she was sitting, "do you want to come with me?" She shook her head, "NO: You must be joking. Coward." He grinned, showing his larger canine shaped front teeth and stiffened his back as he went and prepared to "beard the lion in his den". When he had gone, Catherine began to look more closely at the room for the children. It had been made about fifteen feet square, a large room that would do for smaller children as well as grown up ones. Here also, shelves had been built for clothing and toys. Yes, she decided she liked this room, very much. Now Catherine let her imagination free as she tried to see the new bed and all the other things she, Mary and Jamie had purchased arranged in here. Unbeknowst to her, the women had planned on giving her a shower for the wedding and intended to combine it with gifts for the twins later this week, on Thursday night. For many weeks, the women along with working on the wedding dress, had also been making a lovely wedding quilt for the newlyweds bedroom and gifts for the babies, too! Small sweaters, booties, blankets and sleepwear were taking shape in many different Chambers as fingers flew; knitting, crocheting, and

sewing. Combining the two parties would save a good deal of money, and they were sure that "usually" conservative Catherine would understand at the early baby shower.

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"You look so faraway, are you all right?" She turned and saw Vincent standing once more in the doorway to the nursery. She smiled. God, he was so handsome. "Yes, I'm fine. Just getting this room arranged in my "minds-eye". How did things go with Father? Has he forgiven us our giggle fits?" Vincent nodded, "yes, after I took a small mirror, held it in front of him, and let him fully appreciate how "charming" he looked. Have you gone to see our room yet, Catherine?" She stuttered like a schoolgirl: "N..no, I..was..was waiting for you to return." She took his outstretched hand. Nearing the other room, she noted with surprise a very large, magnificent oak door had been installed at the entrance to their new bedroom! "Why, Vincent, this is a beautiful door. Look at the carvings: The birds, the angels! Was this your idea? Why such a "fortress"? A folding door or a curtain as on the nursery entrance would have been fine with me. It's a lovely door, but why?" He squirmed a bit at her question, embarrassed, before answering softly, "well, I thought for privacy, at times a curtain did not seem quite "feasible"....". As his voice trailed off, Catherine quickly understood. He was trying to delicately explain how "noises" can travel here Below. And, indeed, they, especially HIM tended to be extremely loud! Catherine swung the large door closed behind them and took his arm through hers, looking about the large bedroom Chamber. Her gaze took in a closet, a bench built of stone in one corner to be used for her "ablutions", small niches here and there to store "treasures", and a small window of stained glass had been painstakingly put up on one wall to draw light from the sitting room beyond the door. Then finally, her glance took in a very large mirror that had been fitted perfectly into one stone wall near where her bureau would be ensconced. "Did you do this, Vincent?" She knew, from past experience, that the man she loved had always disliked seeing himself in mirrors of any sort: She took

one of his soft furred hands into hers and repeated, "did you ^{DO} this? For me?" His slight nod told her he had. "But, why? I didn't need THIS: You don't like...mirrors. You needn't have put one in our bedroom just for me." Vincent turned away and looked at the mirror from where he was standing, then back at her, "I no longer hide my face from anyone, even myself. No longer feel the need to deny my own reflection; why should I, my love? I believe what you have told me time and again. Can see for myself at last that when bathed in your light and love, through your eyes, I am not as fearsome to look upon as I once thought I was! In total acceptance of this fact, I also have learned to accept all of what I am, ALL of it. My form, my face, my...my hands, everything. You have chosen to love me...ME, as I have been made. By whatever made me thus, whoever made me this way. Your love and trust have done more that you will ever truly know, Catherine. Your love set me free to look upon myself with reality. And, in the harshness of even the reflection of that mirror, I see no "beast" return my glance, not anymore. And never will again! Besides, your eyes and that of our children will be the only "mirror" I shall ever really need." She put her arms about his waist and stood with him in front of the mirror silently. What image looked back at them was one of love, acceptance, and truly, beauty. For both of them, each in their own way, saw beyond their mere reflection and into the others heart and soul. As Vincent lowered his mouth to hers and took her tenderly into his strong arms with sureness, with total committment and trust; if a simple mirror could have shown feeling, dear readers, it would have smiled, I am sure!

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At lunchtime, the men ceased the clamor of building and hammering, and broke for their noon meal. Father took his earplugs out with a silent THANK GOD and a deep sigh of relief. At last! He could hear himself think again: Father had a very important letter to write. He was trying to contact his other son; his natural son, Devin. Having thought long and hard of exactly what he was going

to say, going to explain and how much to explain to his "estranged" son, Father began to write the letter. He wanted Devin here for the wedding, simply that. Father wrote this and then added he thought his son had the right to be here; to be included in this happiest of days for Vincent. He would be welcome; Father would not be the one to deny him knowledge of what was happening in two short weeks. But, would Devin come? One of the "helpers" Above did a lot of long distance produce hauling as his living; he would be within ten miles on Friday of where Devin and Charles were last known to be living, and would try and deliver this letter to them. Devin had rescued Charles from a circus, a sideshow where he had been on display as a freak! He had been born greatly deformed of outer beauty, of feature, but had the kindest soul of any man, excluding Vincent, Father had yet to meet. There was an old saying..."what God took from us with one hand, He gave back doubled with the other". Charles was most certainly misformed; but never had God created a gentler, more loving inner spirit in anyone. As Father had looked on, Devin had brought this poor creature beyond his fear, and with the help of all Below; especially Vincent, Charles had learned to trust and love them as his family. But not wanting to inflict himself on the world Above he did NOT trust, had chosen to live in the mountains, wanted to live there for the rest of his life. Father had been deeply saddened when Charles had said this. As a doctor he knew how short that life would prove to be. The disease that ravaged Charles' poor face and body also shortened ones lifespan nearly by half. He ended his letter with a short simple paragraph, "so, if you would like to come and Charles also, you are both most welcome. Vincent would, of course be overjoyed to see you both. He loves and misses you, Devin. As do we all. Father."

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Catherine said a silent prayer of thanks; the wedding gown was finished, tried on, and FIT perfectly, at last. The women had done a wonderful job on her dress. It fit closely enough to show off a bit of bosom, but draped over her growing tummy softly in gentle gathers. The color of the gown was creamy Ivory white. Catherine

turned this way and that for a better look at the back; it did fit well; even there. With a discreet neckline that exposed just a bit of skin, a hint of curves and long loose sleeves trimmed in Marys' handmade lace, the dress was beautiful. The women had also made a cape of the same material to go over the dress, and what a cape it was! Trimmed at the hem and arms with velvet, it had crystals and a few pearls sewn at the shoulders and was held closed at the bodice by one small crystal button; then flowed out at the sides and trailed just a bit behind Catherine to the floor. Glancing back at her reflection, she suddenly knew where she had once seen a dress such as this. As a small child, her father had taken her to see the play "Camelot"; this was like the dress the Queen wore when she married Arthur, the king of Camelot. She shyly felt almost a bit like a queen and her King had a WORLD of his own! Looking to the women that had been waiting anxiously for her judgement of the dress, she exclaimed in total delight, "this is the most beautiful gown I have ever seen. I'm glad I agreed to let you make it instead of buying one. No where could I ever have found anything as lovely. Thank you; all of you. It's simply perfect. Vincent will be stunned, huh?" Jamie snorted and responded, "well, if he isn't, he's got to taste at all. I think it's gorgeous on you, Cath. If someday, I get married, can I borrow it? It sure turned out great." One of the women named Janet shyly came forward from the rear of the room. She had worked on this dress along with the others, but as a "newer" tunnel dweller, felt still a bit shy in the presence of people she had only known a few months. "Could you use this? It was my daughters' when she was married.....". As her voice trailed off... the woman fought back tears, the others looked at one another in sadness. Janet had last year lost her husband, daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild in a terrible car crash. One of the friends Above had found her wandering desolate in the streets and brought her Below. With the help of Fathers' medicine, Marys' tender nursing and the loving care of all, Janet had come slowly out of her deep despair and had now begun life again down here with her new family. Catherine was greatly touched

by the womans gesture. The item must have great value to her personally, a memory of happier times. Catherine took the small tiara of pearls tenderly, carefully into her hands, and turned tear-filled eyes to Janet, "are you sure you want me to borrow this? It's so, so delicate. I would take very good care of it, I promise; are you sure it's all right?" Janet smiled, touched Catherine's face lightly with her hand, and nodded. "Oh, Janet! It does go with this dress, doesn't it. Thank you, I will be very careful with it, VERY!". The older woman hugged Catherine a moment, then whispered to her ear, "you remind me of my Susie; she was beautiful like you. Wear it with all my love and best wishes, child". To ease the soft sadness now laying about the room as a cloud, Mary rose and exclaimed loudly, "well, ladies, I think we have all earned our cup of tea, yes?" As all agreed, the tension of the last moments passed as they sat around the table laughing and talking, sharing their personal wedding stories and even a few slightly risque jokes:

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As she went to Jennys' elevator, Cathy glanced down at her watch. Jenny would be shocked. She was actually 15 minutes early! Ringing the bell, she sensed a small commotion inside, then Jen was smiling at her, beckoning her to come in. "Hi, Jez! You're early. Is this a new Catherine before me? Good on you!" As Cathy sat down, Jenny excused herself and went into the kitchen to get them something to drink. As she sat and looked about her friends small apartment, Cathy noticed how dim the lights were, "Hey! What are you doing, conserving energy? It's so dark in here." Coming from the kitchen with two tall glasses full of juice, Jen retorted, "Oh, shut up! I didn't dust; that's all. And knowing how NEAT you always were.....". Catherine giggled, her...neat! HA! She used to be a real slob, but WAS getting better! There wasn't as much room in the tunnel apartment for "stuff"; she had to become neater to conserve space; simple as that! She turned her attention to Jen as she sat in the chair across from hers, "So, Cath, how goes the wedding plans? Decided on a maid of honor yet?" Catherine

gasped! How could she ask THIS: Didn't she realize how embarrassed Catherine felt at not being able to ask Jen to even be AT the wedding, let alone participate in it: "Well....no, I really haven't. Oh, Jen, I wish I could tell, explain why, I cannot ask you to be my maid of honor, wish I could say something to ease the pain, the hurt you must feel at my seeming to ignore you as I go about planning this wedding. But, I...I can't say anything to help you, I wish I could.....". Jenny was looking past Cathy to the small fire escape where a window was now beginning to open. "Cathy, you don't have to explain anything to me, not ever again! Hello, Vincent." As she spun around and saw him standing there, Catherine felt as if she was going to faint. "Vincent, what? NO! What are you DOING?" She looked at Jenny, then back to him again and suddenly did start to turn pale and grabbed on tightly to the arms of the chair to steady herself. This couldn't be happening, she was dreaming. Wake up: Wake UP! Seeing the color blanch from Catherine's face, Vincent went quickly toward her and put his hands on her shoulders, shaking her slightly to bring her "around", "Catherine, all is well: I am sorry to have surprised you so. I had hoped to be here already when you arrived: You would be early for once in your life: I contacted Jenny a week ago through a "friend" that runs the newsstand that she buys her daily papers at." Jenny exclaimed, "that's how I already knew you were pregnant, Cathy: Vincent had just the day before that told me!" He continued, grinning as Jen put her hand to her mouth, shamed at interrupting him. "the man gave her a note from me that explained who I was, a bit of how I "looked" and why she had not been asked to your wedding. I arranged for her to meet with me that night on the roof of this building, if she wanted to do this". Jen shot a look of wonder at him, "as though I wouldn't want to, with my nosy nature. To get a chance to meet

my best friends. "secret" bridegroom!" She looked a bit ashamed as she continued, "at first, Cathy, I must admit, he scared the shit out of me! Oops, sorry: Even with the hood I could see that long hair, those eyes gleaming back at me and almost ran the hell away: But, then he spoke my name and well; I don't know how to say it....everything was suddenly, okay. His voice was so..so, well, YOU KNOW: We sat up there for almost an hour talking. Then he lowered the hood. Suddenly Cathy, I understood everything: All the questions I had asked that you never "really" answered. All the secrecy that you had held to yourself all these years. You're something, you know that? Really something, kiddo. You are special and I think you're getting a hell of a gorgeous guy for a husband!" Vincent looked down, shy all at once of being spoken of like that, by this stranger: He had seen the fear, felt the fear when he had joined Jenny on the roof and his heart had lurched in dismay. Could she be made to see beyond his outward appearance, would she WANT to try? Would Jenny give him a chance to speak to her? When she had come forward and sat beside him, this had not surprised Vincent as much as it would have if he had not known she was Catherine's friend. Anyone she loved must be a truly good person, one they could BOTH trust completely. After he had finally, grudgingly gotten Father's permission, it had taken him a very long time to gather the courage to write the note to Jen. He had agonized over every word, every line. But, now seeing the look on his beloved's face, everything was worthwhile: Again Vincent started to tell Catherine how sorry he was to have startled her so. "I am sorry; I wanted to do this for you, for us both. I hoped I could get to meet one of your friends, someday; I simply used the wedding as an 'excuse'. Knowing you should have someone of your own world to share EVERYTHING with; I decided that this meeting would be my wedding gift to you. Have I done right, Catherine?" Silence. "Have I, please? Catherine?" As she rose from the chair, she couldn't find her voice, couldn't answer his query. Catherine

looked first at him, back to Jenny; who was almost jumping up and down in her excitement, then back to him again. Her eyes told Vincent all he needed to know. He enfolded her into his arms, and smiled over the top of her head towards Jenny, and winked at her. "Well, you guys, I like a good hug, too, you know." With that, Jen attempted to wrap her arms around both Vincent and Catherine as she began to giggle in delight. "I'm gonna be in the wedding. I'm gonna be the maid of honor, YEH." The three sat and talked well into the early morning hours. It was almost five a.m. when they said their goodbyes. Jen was trying to stifle a yawn; "now I know why there were times you looked to tired. These late hours you were keeping:" Looking at Vincent she added, "he seems to have been worth it though:" Lowering her mouth to Cathys ear, she added, "I think he's cute as hell!" Vincent of course heard this; his sensitive ears picked up most conversations. Even those thought to be secret. Smiling down at the two woman at either side of him, he responded, "thank you, Jennifer." "Oh, Christ, does he hear EVERYTHING Cathy!" Catherine just nodded saying, "yes and even at times seems to know your every thought, too. Be careful my friend; be on your guard, or he'll learn more about you than you could possibly want him to!" As she hugged Jen goodnight, Cathy whispered back to her, "I think he's cute as hell myself. See you soon: We have to pick out your gown. When we have it, I'll guide you Below, to meet all of my family, bye!"

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She slept very late the next day. It was nearly noon when Catherine finally rose, and set about packing the last of her possessions. Some would be going with her to the new home, some to friends Below, some to "Helpers" Above. After each box was sealed marked and stacked in a corner, she was tired again; suddenly felt every single month of her pregnancy as she sat down into a chair to rest her poor back! Glad there were no appointments to be kept today, Catherine settled down to a cup of coffee and put on a record. This is one things she would miss, the music. There was electricity Below, Mouse had "borrowed" some from time to time, from here and there. But with Fathers' severe reminder to not drain

so much it would somewhere Above, become "obvious", Catherine knew her stereo would not be played in her new home. Oh, well. If that had to be given up, fine. Look at what she was gaining in its place. Instead of music, she would soon enough hear the voices of her own children calling out, "Mommy? Daddy?" That would be the prettiest music of all! After puttering around her apartment a while longer, she slept again for about three hours. There was a meeting of some kind at eight tonight, Below. As she set her clock for five, and before drifting off to sleep, Catherine wondered what the meeting was to be about, exactly? Vincent had invited her to meet him at six, the Symphony was playing Vivaldi tonight; one of her favorites. They planned on listening to this before the meeting.

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Mary and Jamie were putting the final touches to Catherine's Wedding/Babies shower down in the tunnels. This was to be held in the Great hall, and everyone, male and female had been invited by Mary to attend. Knowing the men would be somewhat reluctant to join in something usually reserved for "females" only, Mary had been quite explicit; the men would be there, or else! Some were a bit taken aback at the new Mary that now ordered them about. Father, especially. He mentioned this teasingly to Mary. "Well, it seems I had BETTER be there, hummm. Your orders were quite succinct. I would rather not find out what the "or else" might entail!" She sat down in a chair with a thump, "Oh, my! I have been acting like a...a... General, haven't I? To order everyone about so, even you! I am sorry. I seem to be coming rather too excited by all this commotion, and Catherine did seem to need my help. I'm sorry if I have seemed overbearing!" He patted Mary's shoulder and then sat down opposite her. The twinkle in his eyes told her she was being taunted. "Oh YOU. You made me think I was truly being a tyrant." Father smiled, "No, Mary. Not so! You are acting like a mother of the bride, we all think it's marvelous;

especially Catherine. The things you have accomplished in such a short time! The party of Vincents' "Cloak", now the wedding and baby shower, Catherine's gown; you have indeed done wonders these last weeks. All this was laid before you as a gauntlet. And my dear, you certainly picked it up and rose to the challenge. I had been meaning to say thank you earlier, well, I say it now: thank you for all you have done with such joy, with such love, for all of us, dear Mary. I really do not know what we would have done without you!" Looking down shyly at her hands for many moments, Mary then looked up into Father's eyes, beaming down into hers. "Thank you,.....Jacob." She spied the time suddenly. "Dear me, it's nearly seven! The party begins in an hour. Will you PLEASE get ready Jacob." She nearly ran from the Chamber; there was so much still left undone! Father grinned after her; she had called him Jacob. Well now, if he was no longer "Father", but Jacob, was she now possibly open to not being only "daughter", but something more, maybe someday? A thought to ponder on, indeed:

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As six o'clock, Vincent went to meet Catherine at the tunnel entrance; to escort her to the music Chamber for the concert, thinking along his way whether he, Father and Peter were making the correct decision in not telling her before hand of the coming surprise tonight? He had, with Jenny, given her quite a shock already this week. He debated this with Father and Peter earlier this evening. They had calmed him somewhat when they agreed she was a strong young woman, a few surprises wouldn't damage her unduly.

Women in her condition were able to deal with quite a bit, both had assured him, indeed with a lot more than Vincent was giving his Catherine credit for. Peter had reassured Vincent all would be well, but just in case, he would have smelling salts on hand! Dr. Alcott turned to Jacob, "Remember, they came in handy for you not too long ago!" Chagrined at being reminded how he had fainted dead away at the news of the expected twins, Jacob was bristling at his friends chiding remark, "it was just the..the suddenness of it, that was all! Thank you so MUCH for reminding me of that embarrassing moment, Peter, my FRIEND. HA!"

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As Vincent had been thinking on this and smiling, he had not heard Catherine approach...softly from behind,"hello, have you been waiting for me long?" She put her arms around his huge shoulders and kissed him on the mouth, hard. Vincent was still amazed that a single kiss from her could cause such need, such passion to rise in him. Peter had explained that, with no prior experience to guide him, this pregnancy was "one of a kind"; Vincent must take great care not to be too "forceful" with her right now, must take great care to be gentle with her at all times; as this was a first indeed, in the annals of history, Peter was taking no chances on something going wrong. He had explained all this to Vincent; had also told him that usually, making love was fine up to the eighth month, if so desired. But in these 'special circumstances...Vincent had nodded and understood.

But the knowing did not now stop his body if not his brain from beginning to respond, unwillingly albeit, to Catherine's nearness. For this last month he had simply, tenderly held her as close as possible and forced back from his loins the desires that now were reaching up like flames to consume, to torment him. He ended his kiss to her, sighing heavily. "What's wrong, Vincent? You look so, so distressed. Troubled, what is it?" He grew almost ashamed as he tried to stammer out a response, "I...I...miss you, my love. At times feelings rise unbidden, even at this time, now unwelcome; causing emotions in me that may harm you at this stage of your pregnancy, Peter had cautioned me that.....that..". She put her fingers gently to his lips, "hush, love, I understand. I've felt some of what you are describing too, didn't you know this? Didn't you feel me reaching out to you with my mind at all, this last month. Not even a little?" He shook his head, "no, I had thought it was just my own selfishness reflecting back to shame me." Catherine took his face into her two small hands, "dearest man, your children grow in my body. I am loved as no other woman of this or any time has ever been loved. I am at peace with myself, my life at last, now with you. Let me bring some of that calm, that peace I am experiencing to you? Would you like me to try, now? Although Peter is a very good doctor, I know my own body better than he: Vincent, trust me? Let me love you?" He couldn't speak, simply nodded his assent, still half unsure of what she was suggesting. He took her proffered hand as she lead him back Above, to her

apartment. For the last time, to make love there. Finally freeing his passions; allowing them free rein, Vincent found walking was taking far too long. He swept her up into his arms and continued Above quickly.

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As she drew the blinds that now had no curtains hung in front of them, Catherine turned on a small lamp at the side of the bed. He stood as though suddenly not knowing what he should do, how he should act. The flames were searing him; he would not allow himself to hurt her. How could he love her as he wanted to as this moment, and not hurt her? His mind was tormented still, when he was lost in Catherine's body, Vincent knew he was also lost to himself, completely now with total trust of her and their love. The huskiness in his voice revealed to her just how badly he wanted her. "Catherine, perhaps we had better not attempt...this. If I should cause you harm, I.....". His words were swallowed in gulps as she seemed to ignore him and began to undress slowly. Her somewhat "encumbered" body did not make for speed at this time. "Come help me off with this damned dress, I'm stuck!" As he went quickly to her aid and easily pulled the dress over her head, she reached up and began undoing the laces of his tunic, unconsciously wondering why he was wearing one of his 'good' shirts tonight. Now, as his hands began to respond to her caress

and move on her body, thoughts of everything but him began to drift away; turned into nothingness by this man now reaching out to enfold her in his massive arms. Reaching up under his shirt, she pulled it up and off of him completely, then began to rub her hands over the soft furry flesh of his muscled chest. As she rested her fingers against his rapidly beating heart, she lowered her other hand to touch and gently caress him through the denim pants he was still wearing. Catherine heard his sharp intake of breath, "Ah, yes, yes", Undoing the stubborn buttons, Catherine had to struggle at the ones "stuck" from the growing size of him down there. Finally he stood before her completely nude and totally aroused. Reaching behind her, Vincent undid her bra and it fell forgotten to the floor at his feet. He had not let his mind dwell on her breasts this past month, it had only increased his torture. Now he looked fully towards her and gasped. The pregnancy had almost doubled them in size to a firmness, a fullness he could never have imagined. The nipples were almost scarlet and slightly puckered; he knew milk was beginning to gather there to feed their children. For reasons not known fully to him this fact aroused him beyond control. He lowered his head to taste the warmth of Catherine's growing breast with his mouth and cupped it softly in his shaky hand, kneading it gently between his fingers. When Catherine began to moan from his touch, he met her eyes with his and stepped back for a moment, trying to turn aside the urge that was now instinctively forcing him forward; wanting, needing.

a release only she could now give. Removing her slip and panties she was now feeling a passion that matched, in fact, almost surpassed his own. He held her now soft, nude body gently to his, "tell me what to do. I don't want to hurt you, Catherine. But, this pain..I cannot endure it much longer. I need to hold you, have you. Can we do this, please? Show me how, my love? This month of denial has made me want you even more that ever before, if that is possible." Catherine smiled up at him; he was not the only one that had been reading books lately. She had known this time would come; she knew the man she loved. He was a passionate lover, now free and fully able to return to her all the emotions held deeply inside himself for those long years. She was feeling a bit guilty; he had almost been pushed aside by the womens plans lately. The gown, the wedding, babies, all took time from him; time that would now be made up to him, as best she could. Taking his hands into hers, Catherine led him to the bed and lay down on it on her left side, "it will be all right, my love. Come to me." Curving his body to hers as best he could with his children in the "way", Vincent questioned a look at her; what was she going to do? He couldn't get close enough to..to.... Wrapping her arms around his waist she put one leg up and over his hips. Now aware of closeness he had not felt until she did this, Vincent at once understood this movement. Cautiously he slid closer and began to enter her warm body with his own. The penetration was not as deep as usual, he didn't want to force himself onward, still unsure of this new

position . Then, as Catherine tightened her muscles around him there, all thoughts were driven from his brain but the feeling of this new sensation, "yes, ah, my dearest, yes!" Vincent began to slowly move forward then away from her body; he was already nearing his peak from the celibacy of this last month. "I do not think I can hold back long, do you understand, my love? Ah, I must do this now." Arching her back slightly to meet the force of his sensual thrusts, she was already lost in the feel of his body in her. Almost beyond words, she bit her lip as waves of desire swept up & washed over her, "I'm ready, don't stop. Do it, now, now!" Digging her nails deeply into his back as Vincent began to growl low in his throat, the ecstasy of his movements brought forth a moan from her own lips as she released herself fully up to the pleasure of this joining. Gazing back into her eyes that now glittered darkly with passion; he held her eyes with his, "I..am going to fill you, are you ready for me? Catherine, are you? AH." Feeling his back arch and the start of his release, she could only gasp, "yes, I'm ready, give me all of you, all:" Then gave her body up to him with a cry of his name, "VINCENT." When she cried out and dug her nails even deeper into his back, he also was swept up towards one goal, to give all of himself to her. Pinning her legs with his and with one long final forward thrust of his hips, with snarls of need Vincent gave to his woman all of what he was as a man, and she gave herself in response.

His climax seemed unending. Eternities passed as his body arched and released again, then again as he sobbed in the pleasure of that release, the giving of himself to the woman he loved beyond anything in this world.

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Holding him tenderly to her breast she waited. Vincent seldom could speak after making love; as though the act itself mentally numbed his powerful voice into temporary silence. Catherine slowly moved her mind over her body, testing, feeling; all seemed to be well with her and the children, thank God. The books had said when done this way, things usually worked out for lovers, although the actual penetration was not SUPPOSED to be as deep, the act as satisfactory. HA! If she could write a letter to those authors and tell them a thing or two about how wrong they seemed to be, at least in this case. But of course, THEY did not know Vincent! She giggled half aloud at this last thought. Finding at last his powers of speech, Vincent smiled down at her, "what are you laughing at? Something has tickled your umm, "fancy", yes?" Shaking her head, she responded in delight, "yes, you tickle my "fancy" and my plain, too!" Then told him of the books, the authors ideas of how much pleasure could be achieved, and what would be lost in loving as they had just done. Her teasing tone made him start to laugh along with her, but the laugh turned to a grimace of pain as his back reminded him that Catherine had embedded her nails into it. "Ow, my back!" Trying to reach behind

himself and rub the pain away, Vincent repeated, "OW!" Catherine urged him onto his stomach and with horror, saw three, long, deep scratches in his beautiful golden skin. "Vincent, I've done a terrible thing! I..I dug my nails into your skin! Oh, I'm sorry; it must hurt. I've never done that before....." Her voice trailed away in embarrassment. "You are forgiven, but do you have anything to ease my poor skin in the medicine cabinet? OWWWW!" Going quickly into the bathroom, she looked over her shamefully small supply of medicines. As she rarely even needed so much as an aspirin, there was not much in the cabinet to help the poor man, not with his chemistry; what would help most people in pain could possibly put Vincent into a coma. What could she use, WHAT? Rummaging around, Catherine finally located some Iodine, this would have to do, but it would sting! Taking a cloth she ran cold water on it, wrung it out and with a glance at herself in the mirror of "how could you!", Catherine went to try and soothe his pain. "Lie still, this cloth should help." Softly, she began rubbing it over the abrasions and he agreed that it was indeed, helping drive the pain away. But then, the Iodine hit his wounds with a vengeance! "Catherine! That HURTS, No., Stop! Whatever you are using is worse than the scratches, OUCH:" Patting his hand, she said as though explaining to a child, "Shhhhh, Iodine is supposed to sting, didn't you know that?" Vincent half turned to face her, hoping this would end her torture of his skin. "How could I know this? I have never been in this "position" before. My love, you

must trim those, those CLAWS!" As he saw the look of shame on her face turn to a glare, her next movement caught Vincent totally off guard! Catherine reached down and slapped him hard on his rear end, "you better not have ever felt scratched like this before." Then grinned and added. "I truly am sorry." He looked as though he was sorry too: "I will live, I'll not be able to carry much on my back for a day or two though. I just hope no one needs anything lifted, especially Father!" "Oh, damn" she gasped out a threat, "Vincent, I am warning you, if you tell anyone of this, I'll, I'll... I will try not to ever do it again. Try, not promise." Vincent amused, now looked towards her small bedside clock, Oh, my God., The time! The party for Catherine! "We must hurry. Catherine please, the meeting will have begun without us and I promised Father we would be there. Hurry, get dressed please!" As he saw the time was now quarter to eight, he urged her again, "Please hurry!" As they threw their clothes on quickly, Vincent thought to himself, how would he explain "this" lateness, Mary would kill him, for sure. He decided the quickest course of descent was through her basement and carried her down the ladder swiftly but surely. He had about five minutes left to get Catherine there on time. He prayed for the clock to move slower as he held her tightly and walked purposefully onward, further and further down into the tunnels.

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The Great hall was in total darkness. She could not hear or sense any movement within. "Are you certain Vincent, that the

meeting was to be tonight? At eight? Maybe Father cancelled it, or changed the time.....". Suddenly, dozens of candles glowed in the shadows of the room and many happy voices called out to her, "Surprise Catherine, Surprise! Welcome to your wedding and baby shower. Two parties in one. Come in, come on!" Escorting her to the place of honor, Vincent took her elbow and gently lowered her down to the chair, whispering in her ear, "this gets us even for the "cloak" party a bit, yes? GOTCHA BACK!" Catherine sat stunned at all the people now coming forward to say hello, give her and Vincent their good wishes, etc. etc. She didn't know what to say to all of this: "Mary, did you plan this and you too, Jamie? All of you? I see your fine hand in this too, Janet: Do you mean, all the time we were shopping, all the time we were trying on dresses, you all knew about THIS! My own friends:" Looking around at all the happy faces grinning down at her Catherine added "my own family, doing this to me, such deceit:" She grinned up to Father as he bent down and kissed her cheek. "No, my dear daughter, not TO you, FOR you, and for Vincent, too." Mouses plaintiff voice suddenly called to her, "open presents quick? Food looks good over there: Hurry? Okay, fine." As she and Vincent opened first the wedding presents, Catherine noticed her hands were shaking still from Vincents recent "Loving" in her apartment Above. Hoping all would think she was shaking and this flushed simply from surprise, she expressed her delight as each present was opened, the card was read, some by her,

and some by Vincent. He looked across from his chair towards her red face. Finally catching her glance, he nodded slightly at her, then winked! He knew what she had been thinking, naturally. She narrowed her eyes and thought to herself, OKAY - funny man. "Oh, how IS your back, Vincent? Does it still hurt? Huh?" Father began to advance towards him, "what happened to your back, let me see? How did you hurt yourself son?" Throwing her a look that said clearly he would "get" her for THIS, Vincent clutched the arms of his chair and leaned back into it firmly. "It is nothing; really Father I am fine. I have just scratched it a bit a while ago. Really, Catherine has seen to the wound. Thank you anyway." The look in his sons eyes told Father to back off for the moment, but eventually he WOULD find out how his son had been injured! A quilt, the last gift lay opened, a large box lay half in Vincents lap and half in Catherines, "Oh this is beautiful, simply lovely! This is a wedding ring pattern, isn't it? I remember, my grandmother had one almost exactly like this one. And it's my favorite shades of blue. Thank you, thank all of you!" Mary was greatly relieved to see Catherines approval of the gift from herself and the other ladies; she had not been sure of her tastes in such things as this. "We all worked on it dear. All the women each took squares with them after fitting your gown and worked on them in any free time they could find. It was fun to see who could get their squares done first, wasn't it, ladies?" Jamie burst out, "Yeh, and I won!" Mary retorted along with a few of the other women, "Only because your younger fingers are a bit faster than ours, show-off!" Mouse

stepped shyly forward, wading his way through the people gathered around Vincent and Catherine until he stood before them. His "borrowing" of electricity to finish their new Chamber rooms had been his wedding gift to Vincent, all understood this, But what was he going to give now to Catherine? Father raised his eyes towards Heaven, praying whatever it was would NOT EXPLODE! Mouse slowly extended his hand which held a tiny white box, "for you, good?Fine? From me with.....with love, okay?" Opening the box, she looked quickly over to Vincent and showed him what it contained: Crystal earrings to match the necklace she always wore; the gift from Vincent that first showed the depth of his feeling for her, sparkled from the box; catching the lights daintily, as the earrings twinkled up to her face. Mouse had made the necklace for Vincent, now made these earrings for her. Catherine stood and gently kissed Mouse on the cheek, "thank you, these are the very best earrings I will ever own: They will be the "something new" I will wear at the wedding. Thank you Mouse". Vincent rose and put one hand gently on Mouses' shoulder, saying nothing he let his eyes do his talking for him. Mouse looked up at him and smiled a shy grin and understood. Vincent was pleased at the gift. He didn't mind Mouse giving "his" Catherine such a personal kind of present at all. Okay, wonderful! Then, in a voice of authority, Pascal waved everyone aside, "Look out. Make room: Baby presents! Watch your feet, coming through!" At long last, all the baby things now lay opened on the table beside Catherine; two of everything!

Tiny pajamas, lovely woolen sweaters with blue and pink ribbons, cute pairs of booties, blankets in all colors, rattles and much more! Father called out sternly for everyone's attention: "I also have a present for the expecting couple. Can everyone come here for a moment please? I cannot lift this!" Making their way to his side, Vincent, Catherine and all the others watched as he pulled aside a large blanket exposing a twin carriage as they oohed and aahed. "This is for MY grandchildren? Do you like it? Vincent? Catherine?" She and Vincent exchanged a look: how had he ever afforded something as grand as this. Such utter extravagance was unknown here, especially by Father. The carriage was a lovely shade of grey leather, padded thickly with cotton and covered in a swirled yellow, pink and blue pattern of satin material. The long handles and trim were silver toned and caught the Chamber light as it shone back at them in all its newness. All were stunned at this present, some knew the cost of such a gift as this; most were surprised at Father's seeming lack of conservatism all of a sudden. To have him spend money on a thing HE would have considered "non-essential". Seeming to guess their thoughts, Father said "this is a very practical gift. How can I show off my grandchildren to all Below; or take them for strolls without a proper vehicle? I can't carry them about. No, I can't. This will be useful, and look. It turns into a stroller, too!" Catherine hugged him and whispered, "thank you, Father. For this carriage, my new family and especially for the son you raised that I love so much." Vincent held his Father by one arm and said in a VERY loud tone of voice, but teasingly, "this will make it that much easier to "kidnap" my children at will and take them about, yes? Do not deny it! Remember who taught me to think. To practice trickery where necessary: you!" As Father and he held each other for a quick squeeze of love, a plaintive voice was heard from over by the food. Mouse called out to all, "now we can eat. Okay, PLEASE?" Laughing, all agreed and gathered around the large table

that was laden with so much good food it creaked beneath the sheer weight. Taking their plates and waiting in line for a chance to eat, Catherine and Vincent were looking back at Father. He seemed lost in thought, standing there grinning with a plate in his hand. Well, he was thinking. Ah, he would miss that first edition of poetry. But poetry be damned! His grandchildren would have this gift from HIM. And what was a mere book, compared to grandchildren of his very own? *

Friday, and then the weekend whizzed by. Catherine closed her apartment, hand lunch again with Jenny and they found the perfect dress for the wedding for her. Jen was so excited at the idea of be allowed to go Below; the chance to meet the rest of Cathys family; it was being difficult to remain still for the fitting of her dress to be completed. Cathy had finally had to threaten to take over the pinning herself! Jen stood like a statue; no way was Cathy going to stick pins into her. Saturday afternoon, they gathered together all the things Jen would be needing for the wedding and brought them Below. As they walked she threw a zillion questions at Cathy, "will there by many people? How long have they BEEN down there? It's wierd, you know? A whole other world and right here. In the middle of New York! Does your Vincent have any brothers or sisters?" As Jennys voice started to get higher and higher, Cathy realized her friend was starting to feel a case of "nerves" coming on; well who wouldn't have? She smiled at her, "Jen, please! I can only answer one thing at a time. There are well over a hundred people living Below and a lot a friends called helpers that live Above. We all get along as best we can, try to live quietly, decently and honorably. Sometimes that has been the most difficult thing to do; to live honorably. It has been extremely hard on Vincent, at times. He has had to protect me from some very dangerous people I've encountered from time to time when I worked for the District Attorneys' office." Cathy stopped and turned to look deeply into her friends eyes,

"He has even had to.....to kill, Jenny. To protect me and his world: can you understand that? Can you deal with, forgive an admission such as that?" Looking away for a moment, Jen thought of what Cathy had just told her. He had actually killed people. He had killed to protect her and others that he loved. A man as gentle as he was; killing anyone. That must have been the hardest thing he ever would have done. She knew Vincent, she was sure of him; his tenderness with Catherine, his love all shone through those magnificent eyes of his. He was a good man, in her very soul Jenny KNEW this to be truth. Would she have done the same for those she loved? Yes, she probably would have. In a crisis situation, desperate measures were sometimes needed; who could tell how another person would truly react until they themselves were IN that situation? And who was SHE to judge him, of all people! She would not judge Vincent for what he had been forced into to protect those he loved. "Cathy, I think I understand; I won't judge what Vincent had to do to protect you, or anyone else. I think he truly hates violence of ANY kind; it must have sickened him to have to fight in THAT way, yes?" Cathy nodded as tears ran down her face, in agreement to Jens statement. She continued, "Well, as far as I'm concerned, people protect their own; that's as is should be. And he protects his own! I'm proud to have met him, proud he would let me share a small part of his world. Me, a stranger; he trusted me because of you. AND the "way" he looks at you girl! No wonder you seem so at peace when he's near; his love almost covers you like a warm blanket; I could almost see it, and I think I'm...just a bit...jealous. I didn't think I'd ever meet a REAL honest-to-goodness knight in shining armor." She gave Jen a quick hug and smiled at her, "thank you for what you've said; I knew as did Vincent, that you would understand. Now, for your other questions, Vincent has, well, a stepbrother named Devin; the man we all call Fathers' natural

son. Oh Devin is something: A real will-o-the-wisp! His itchy foot takes him all over the world looking for adventures and he usually finds them, or they find him! He rarely visits; oh maybe a postcard once a year or so, but that's about all. He was staying in the mountains out west somewhere with a friend named Charles: I'll tell you about that sometime. Later. But Jen, Devins' a really very nice man, a decent man. He can be silly, he loves to tease, especially me! But he and Father...well, they just don't get along very well. They tolerate each other, but don't act as father and son; we all wish they could. I'm sure, deep in my heart, they do really love each other. But both are very stubborn! Neither will make that one damned gesture to bring final peace between them. It used to be so...so irritating to watch as they played "cat and mouse" games and argue over EVERYTHING. And Vincent caught right in the middle of the whole mess: He loves both of them, you know? He has refused to chose sides against either of them, but sometimes when they have yelled at each other I've seen the look in Vincents eyes and it almost tears me apart. If only there was something I could do to help....." Trying to turn Cathy away from the sadness that had crept into her voice, and to lighten the "mood" hanging over them, Jen questioned, "yes, but what does he LOOK like? Handsome, short, bald, fat, young, what?" Cathy thought, "oh, he's rather nice looking. Dark hair and eyes, about six feet tall, slender and a wicked sense of humor! Dev is one of those men who hides his feelings, his true nature behind a barrage of jokes. I wish he would find someone to love, and settle down to a normal life. HEY! Maybe you'd be interested in taking him on?" She had only been kidding and was a bit startled when Jenny just smiled, then said softly, "maybe I would". Before Catherine could respond to that, Jen called out, "Hello, Vincent! Well, we made it. If we're late, it's Cathys' fault!"

As she hugged her future husband, Catherine retorted, "that's a laugh, my fault: SHE would not stand still and have her dress fitted, it took hours!" When Vincent smiled over at her then bent his golden head down to kiss Cathy, Jenny felt goosebumps run up and down her arms. The more she saw of him the handsomer he became in her eyes. That long, golden hair, his build, his height and those blue eyes! He was really gorgeous; especially his eyes, sometimes they incredibly seemed to look right through her; know her every thought. Boy, what she wouldn't give to have someone look at her the way Vincent was now looking at Cathy, Oh, brother. Jen was brought out of her reverie by Cathys tug on her sleeve, "where were you; a thousand miles away? Come one, you've got a lot of people waiting to meet you, my friend! Brace yourself, for Father in particular; he still doesn't like the idea of having strangers about down here." She then took Jennys hand, put her other arm through Vincents and they walked towards Fathers Chamber talking happily about many things. When they entered, Father rose to welcome them, "Ah! Finally! Hello, son, Catherine. You look quite well today. Did you ladies finish your shopping Above?" He then turned his attention to the woman hanging back near the entrance, "come in. Jenny is it? I have been told much about you and am glad to meet one of Catherines friends. I trust all will go well for you here. Vincent has explained our "situation" I believe? You understand nothing of what you see here can be spoken of, Above? Good! Welcome, I hope you will be comfortable here with us." Father reached out and shook hands with her gently; peering at her closely over the rims of his glasses. Searching her face, her eyes. He seemed satisfied; she looked back at him quite frankly, honestly. Yes, she seemed like a person one could trust. A trifle skinny, but all in all, a pretty woman. When his son had first approached him with the idea of a stranger coming Below for the wedding, he had been absolutely set against it; he could not believe his son was even asking him to break a most important

rule! He had argued vigorously against the idea; but Vincent was almost as stubborn as Devin. If not more; Father was finding out! He listened as Vincent explained the number of years Catherine had known this Jenny, the trust she had in her. How Catherine loved her almost as a sister. He promised that if Father would allow her to attend the wedding; she would learn nothing of where she was staying, would not be left to her own "devices" even for a moment. She would not learn things she need not know. If she would agree to these conditions; indeed, if she would meet with him at all, and not show fear, Jenny must be allowed to come for the wedding. His final argument forced Fathers grudging permission of this one time, bending of his strictest rule: "Catherine gives so much to all of us and asks so little in return. How can you say no to my request for her sake? Yes she now considers us her family, but Father, she should have someone of her "own" world she can talk to, can tell things to. A person to trust never to betray her or us. Jenny IS that person. To allow her Below for this one time will show Catherine how much YOU truly trust her. How much you love her. Please Father; let me do this for Catherine. Please?" He had been stunned at the pleading in his sons voice; Vincent never begged for ANYTHING, ever! He was almost doing this now. Damn it, how could he now be the "villain" and say no. "As soon as the wedding is over, she goes back to her own world. Do we agree on this, Vincent? A careful watch must be kept on her at all times. Yes, she may come!" Vincent had spun Father about the room in delight, thanked him and gone to begin writing the note to Jenny. Well, now she was here. Father decided that he...he liked her! He watched and saw they way Catherine and she looked at each other as they sat down and began whispering and giggling like...like schoolgirls! He had seen for himself Jenny seemed to have absolutely no fear of his son, this alone had amazed him the most! If there were more people like this girl Above, maybe there was some hope for the world yet! As Father watched and seemed satisfied, Vincent offered tea all around, and a large plate of cookies. They then sat and talked together for

quite a long time in Fathers Chamber. Some talk quite serious, some almost jokingly. Yes, he did like this young woman Father had decided; he truly did and was very glad of this fact. As Jen and Catherine sat and chatted, he had joined his son at the other end of the room; Vincent sat watching the women with a smile on his face, "What's so amusing?" Father asked this innocently but really wanted to know what was making Vincent look as though he was going to burst into laughter. Vincent turned to Father, "look at them. Have you ever seen two people so happy Father. Look at Catherine! You have done something especially for her, and she knows this. I thank you again. In making her happy, you have made me happy, so happy, I want to cry out with the feeling!" As they had sat talking, Jamie had come in, asked to stay and meet Jenny. As this was agreed to, along behind her came about ten more women; all had wanted to meet Catherines best friend. "Father, may we stay?" "Of course, come in. Come in!" After he had made introductions all around, the women were still a bit ill at ease with the new person in their midst. Then Jenny began talking of the wedding and the dress she had just purchased. It was as if a floodgate had been opened! All of the ladies began talking at once, laughing, telling of their part in making Catherines dress, of their children, their families, boyfriends, husbands and the noise of all the voices was deafening to Fathers ears. He was glad to be sitting as far away from the noise as he could without being rude. He nudged his son, "I did agree to this, did I not?" Vincent smiled back at him. "Yes, you most certainly did!" Father pleaded with a small sigh, "remind me of this, will you for these next days from time to time?" Glancing over, he saw a sad look on his sons face, "what is it? you seem suddenly, so troubled. Vincent?" "oh, really, nothing, Father. I was just thinking, wishing. Thinking of how Devin would have loved to be here, with all these lovely women. Wouldn't they have loved him, with that sharp wit of his? Ah, the conquests he could have made tonight!" Vincent said this lightly,

but his tone of voice betrayed his true feelings, He missed his brother very much. Father didn't answer, he turned to a book on the desk next to him to hide his eyes. This was Saturday. Thursday afternoon, the trucker had called one of the helpers . He had contacted Devin. Charles would not come, but Devin would be here Monday night! Or said he would at least; one never could quite be sure, with him. Father felt a surprising wistfullness fill him; he wanted to see his son. This somehow startled him. They always ended up fighting, arguing. Why did he feel so....well, damn it, actually happy that Devin would soon be here. Pushing the thoughts away, he turned and asked this son a few questions, "How are we set on quantities of food? Have you spoken to Mary or the grocers yet? How many do you think, can comfortably be seated in the Great hall? What are you planning to wear for a wedding outfit; do I have to dress up? Has the music been arranged? You know how sensitive Joseph is about his music. Will he play what Catherine had requested? Smiling over to him, Vincent stretched to ease some of the soreness of his shoulders from all the moving and hauling of furniture and cartons he and the others had been doing these last days. "Why you are beginning to sound as bad as Mary! Questions, questions! Well, let's see: the food is all set, Catherine and the other ladies have seen to that. What a feast they have planned for all of us! I may have gained five pounds from trying and sampling all the things they had me taste these last days; plus what I managed to steal from under their noses: From the responses on the "pipes" and all the cards and notes; I think we can expect about two hundred people. But, please. Do not wear those earplugs, Father! My outfit is ready, do not concern yourself with that! I have planned it well, but I won't tell you what I'm actually wearing. It's to be a surprise. No, you don't have to dress up, as you put it. Come in your...your pajamas if you like, just be there! Joseph had talked all the music over with Catherine and I have left the actual choices

in her hands; she loves the same pieces of music I do. I am sure all will go well. Are you worried; shall I have Peter bring along the smelling salts for you just in case?" His Father looked at him astonished at the joking tone in his sons voice. This was something new indeed! Vincent had great wit, but as a rule, had not turned it against him, his own Father! This was a time for change! First Vincent had been almost strutting, speaking of having twins as though he had done it all by himself, now this new cocky attitude of his. Well, well! Father responded in kind, "well, I will of course NOT wear my pajamas; thank you very much for the suggestion just the same! And don't mention smelling salts to ME! YOU may be the one needing those! Am I still to walk Catherine down the stairs to join you on the platform? I am sorry to be asking these questions, but it's not everyday ones own son gets married. Wear my pajamas, really! And keep your outfit a big secret if you wish. If you think I'm going to ask again....." Grinning towards him, Vincent replied, "I am relieved you will not be wearing that raggy old pajamas set you seem to treasure so! And, yes, you are expected to bring Catherine to me. It seemed 'appropriate' when she asked this of you, it still does, Yes?" Father just nodded in agreement as his son continued, "well if you are excited by all of THIS, can you even begin to imagine how I feel. Please keep this to yourself? The other morning I was down the corridors talking to people for an hour before I discovered MY shoes were on the wrong feet, and my shirt was inside out! YOU, nervous: You a wreck!. Look at me Father!" As he chuckled at the picture of his son dressed in this manner, he suddenly began to laugh rather loudly, then seemed to have a giggle fit of his own. "Oh dear, I can just see you striding along the tunnels like THAT: Didn't anyone tell you your shirt what inside out? Did no one say anything at all about how you were....ahem..dressed?" "No, they

said Good Morning and looked quite amused when I passed them!" Looking over towards Father and Vincent laughing together; hanging on to each other as they roared on and on over "whatever", Catherine was so very happy. Her dearest friend seemed to be getting on very well with the women now gathered around her. Jen was regaling them with stories of her and Catherine's college days, damn her. Some of THAT was rather embarrassing. Vincent caught her look of happiness and then continued to gaze on her until Catherine's eyes met his startingly blue ones across the room. Her eyes locked to his, said "hello my love" and then they turned back to their company, her to Jen and the ladies, he to father and to Pascal that had now joined the merriment. Other men of the tunnel world had followed close behind him, about ten or 12 men now sat with Vincent and Father, talking of things men will talk of when together! Pascal asked teasingly, "hey, Vincent: Have you learned your vows by heart yet? The words you read to me were quite a mouthful, even for you. I bet you forget some! Don't "flub" your lines huh?" Vincent narrowed his eyes as he looked at Pascal, "thank you for reminding me of what I had hoped NOT to do, at all costs, my "friend". The other men started joking and tried to get Vincent nervous by asking him if he was SURE of his lines. Then, Mary stood in the doorway, hands on hips; appalled to see all the ladies in one corner of the Chamber, and the men in the other. She would soon fix this situation! "Hello, Catherine, ladies", As she was introduced to Jenny, Mary turned and called out, "will you men like to meet Jenny? Come, join us, here, please!" This last was not an invitation but a command! The men rose silently and went to stand near the ladies in the center of the room, looking a bit ashamed of themselves for their lack of attention to the women til now. By one o'clock Sunday morning, everyone had been in and out of Fathers' Chamber to talk, meet Jenny, have a refreshment, and tease the almost "newlyweds" about honeymoons, nerves, etc. Jenny was almost in awe of these people. They all seemed to care so much for each

other. In all these past hours, she had not heard one harsh word, nor any argument exchanged between any of them. Glancing around the room from where she stood talking to Mary and Jamie, she noticed when one person talked, others listened, really listened respectfully. She felt much joy in this gathering. Yes this was a "family". Jen wished she could belong to it as Cathy did. As Cathy, Jen also had no real family left. A cousin or two, that was all. She felt very alone at times. But not now, here Below. Here, she felt almost as if she was home; truly home. At two a.m., when Cathy and Vincent escorted her safely to her apartment, She turned to the both of them and hugged each in turn. "I can never tell you how much this evening has meant to me. I've seen things I'd thought were really lost in todays society. Respect for older people, open true honesty, polite and extremely well mannered young children and so much more! How can I ever thank you for this; especially you Vincent?" He looked down at Jen aware of her feeling, knew how open and honestly she was speaking her real emotions. His sense had at the beginning picked up on how she really felt towards his extended family. He had seen and felt her heart open to all his people as they had laughed and talked earlier in the evening. Why, she had even seemed to win Father over completely! To bring Catherines friend to his world had been right, he now knew this to be truth; very happy he had made this gesture for the woman he loved. And for her friend. He extended his large furred hand to her. "Father said to tell you anytime you wish to visit again, let one of the 'helpers' know. Here are some of their names and phone numbers. We will come and get you, all right?" Jenny was speechless. She had thought after the wedding never to be allowed Below again. Now Vincent seemed to be telling her she would ALWAYS be welcome, ALWAYS! With a joy she couldn't keep to herself a moment longer, she threw her arms around Vincents' neck, winked at Cathy and kissed him on the cheek with a loud "smack". "I understand and thank you. Thank you both and Father. I'll see you Wednesday night then?" Cathy hugged her, "yes, we'll have a real gab-fest and invite all the other ladies. A real pajama party, how about that!" You and I will be staying with Mary until the

wedding; You can keep me from falling apart with "jitters", okay? I'll be here to pick you up around nine, be ready and packed!" Jen bid them good morning and went into her apartment as she stifled a wide yawn. It had been quite a Saturday evening and Sunday morning! She was exhausted, but too excited to sleep yet! As she changed into her night clothes, Jen felt something in her dress pocket. Reaching in, she pulled out a small folded piece of paper; it was a note from Cathy. "Dear Jen, I'm so happy you will be able to join me here for the wedding. Thank you for understanding, for excepting all of what you have seen tonight. We all knew we could trust you, I knew from the beginning. Even Father has said he likes you. From him, that is the HIGHEST praise anyone gets! As time passes, I hope you get to know all of my family better and find the joy here I have found in Vincents' world. It will surely change your outlook on life; it has mine. I love you as a sister and am so glad I will have you to share my life with now. I'll need you, Jen, more than you know! You're my "connection" to the old life, the only one I'll ever need. Forever, Cathy." As she put the note into her "special" treasure drawer of the bureau, she was deep in thought; feeling for the first time in her life a sense of real "belonging". Jen had few friends, always had been something of a loner through choice. Most of the people she knew were shallow, she didn't feel comfortable with many of them. Now she felt a promise of a brighter future ahead! Jenny drifted off to sleep content, reliving each moment of these last days.....

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Sunday was like a "calm after the storm". Everyone was a bit tired by the "welcome for Jen" gathering. Some slept well past nine; a real luxury for them! Catherine sat curled up on the new, floral cushions of Vincents' old bed and was reading the papers to him, even the funnies. Some made him laugh out loud, especially "Garfield" and "Kathy", "now there is a woman who truly needs help, Catherine! What a disorganized life the poor lady had; a mother who seems to drive her to distraction, a boyfriend that does not

understand her, and a job she sounds like she hates!" As he looked at the picture of "Kathy" in the paper, he teased Catherine, "why, she is not that fat. Just a bit plump, like you." Throwing a pillow at him he managed to duck, she laughed, "she's not carrying TWINS as I am, you.....It's all your fault I'm plump. Wait a few MORE months, HA! I'll be more then just plump; even your long arms won't be able to get around me, then." Rising, Vincent joined her on the sofa, "Well, I had better hold you now while I still can, yes?" With that he hugged her close and kissed her and nuzzled her until she was entirely breathless. When they were finally able to release their holds on each other, Catherine and Vincent tried to do a crossword puzzle. But found to the delight of both, that this they were not able to do. They rose and went into the bedroom of their new apartment and closed the heavy oak door. The concert they wanted to listen to was hours away yet....hours.

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The music filled the Chamber as they listened to some of their favorites; Chopin, Mozart and especially, Grieg. As they lay on cushions and let the music wash over them, Vincent silently prayed it could always be like this; peaceful and content. He was a bit startled when Catherine seemed to repeat his very thoughts out loud. "Oh, don't you wish it could always be like this? It's so peaceful, I never want to leave this place. No stress, no unhappiness, just the contentment we have here....in this moment is all I'll ever want". As he held her and pushed a hair back from her forehead, he asked gently, "pick a feeling?" Catherine buried her face to his chest and said to him in a hushed voice, "cherished"..... So passed this lovely Sunday. But dear readers, remember? Tomorrow is Monday, Devin would be here! Let's leave Catherine and Vincent to enjoy this peace, shall we? When Devin arrives, that may be the last for many people for a long time. His visits rarely brought peace, yes?

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Monday evening, Father had sent a note. He would like to see them both in his Chamber if they could spare him a few moments

from what he knew was a busy schedule. Around nine? As he read the short request, Vincent looked over to Catherine and frowned a bit, "I wonder why Father sent such a "formal" request, instead of just sending one of the children to ask us?" She took the paper, folded it and smiled, "Oh, he knows something I haven't told you yet. I'm sure Mary told him I intend to start a sort of 'scrapbook'. Every note, card or piece of paper; anything written to us from any of our family, is to be kept there. In years to come our children can read this book, see all the notes and we can tell them a bit about all the family, of each dear friend as we turn the pages. So, my love, be careful what you write to me! Your children will have ammunition to use against you later in life!" Vincent looked at her and was delighted at this idea of hers. "That warning goes for you as well, Catherine. You know how you have worded some of your notes to me!" As they walked hand in hand to Fathers, he was waiting almost beside himself in anticipation. One of the friends Above had sent word; Devin would be here in about thirty minutes, around ten. He had stopped Above to tidy up a bit from his journey; but would be here by ten, for certain. Father made a vow, a promise he intended to keep at all costs: There would be no arguments.. no raised voices, no fighting to spoil this meeting for ANY of them. If he had to bite his tongue to keep from being angered at ANYTHING Devin did or said, he would do it. This wedding would not be ruined by fights between him and his estranged son; he would not allow it to be. Hearing Catherine's laughter, Father turned to the entrance as they came in. "Ah, at last. There you are! Sit down? There are a few, ahem, things I would like to discuss about the wedding, if you don't mind?" This last had been directed towards his son, who now teased a bit, "What! There is something you have not asked me yet! I had thought you covered just about everything. Father. Do you have a.....hummm, list?" He tried to look severe, but as he saw Catherine's half suppressed grin, Father found he could only smile back at them both.

As Vincent and Catherine sat and awaited whatever he had to ask, Father went to his bookcase and brought forth four glasses and a very small bottle of port. Vincent watched with surprise. Liquor? Four glasses? What was he up to now? Setting the glasses and decanter to one side, Father posed a few questions to his son. "Still keeping your wedding outfit a deep, dark secret, Vincent? Have you told, um, Catherine what you will be wearing at least!" Vincent shook his head, "no and SHE hasn't asked me about it". Do you intend to ply ME with drink to find out?" She looked at the grin on Vincents' face and tried to remain serious. Everyone knew of the chemical differences in his blood that denied him the enjoying of much drinking of any kind of alcohol: Surely Father is not going to break his own rule and give him a drink! Oh, she knew one drink would be all right, But Father never offered him even one! She looked sideways at him, what exactly was Father up to? He now answered his sons' question, retorting "no, the liquor is not just an attempt to pull information from you. I just thought, maybe a bit later, a small glass, a toast to your new life, yes?" Vincent looked stunned, as well as she. Father WAS offering him a drink, actually offering. This was unheard of; something indeed was going on, But WHAT? Now, Father went into the "act" that would have won him an Oscar in Hollywood. He asked the one thing that would drive any other questions from his sons' mind. "Have you picked your best man yet? You know both Mouse and Pascal, as well as others, have asked me of this. Each wants to stand up with you. What are you going to do? Who will it be, Vincent? You must decide soon, you know!" Now, Catherine was getting upset. Surely Father knew how Vincent had agonized over this selection; not wanting to hurt one persons feelings by choosing another. How could he ask this, knowing Vincent would feel very uneasy over the question. He was uneasy. "I cannot..truly

decide who to ask, Father. I have thought long on this and I really cannot come to any decision; can you help me?" Neither he or Catherine had seen Fathers glance up to the entrance of his Chamber and then his quick look away again. He repeated his question, "No, I cannot decide this for you. Who is it to be, Vincent? You must have someone..." A voice boomed out from behind them, "Yeh! You better choose someone and it had better be me, brother! Hello, Catherine, hi Father. Hey: Vin, hanging in there bro'? No wedding jitters yet, huh?" Vincent jumped to his feet, "Devin? My GOD, is it really you?" He ran to embrace his brother and almost squeezed the life out of him as he did. "Hey, take it easy on my bones, Vin! JEEZ - you always over-react to things!" Rubbing his ribs and stepping back a few steps, Dev looked at his brother with a huge grin on his tanned face, He looked like a married man already, But he still looked happy to be one. Dev knew this man that now greeted him was due mostly to the love of one person, Catherine. He had never seen Vincent so open before, so sure of himself or demonstrative. His face was so serene, GOOD. It was about time! Reaching up, Devin returned his brothers hug, then shook his hand. "Well, my baby brother. Getting married, huh? And who is this lucky girl, as if I didn't know." Catherine had also risen, now gave Dev a quick hug as tears filled her eyes, "Oh, I'm so happy to see you! You haven't written in so long. How are you? And Charles? Devin, Father didn't tell us you were coming. What a wedding present!" Dev was looking at her, completely off guard; Cathy was pregnant. AHA! THIS was something Father had NOT mentioned in his letter. Here was a situation he would enjoy taking advantage of: "Well, sis, if I may now call you that, you look so....so..ahem, round! Did my brother do THIS to you. Well, at least he's about to make an honest' woman of you, HUH?" Catherine blushed right down to her toes. "Are you starting on me already! Don't you know you shouldn't pick on women in MY condition, you...you..." With a laugh, she threw herself into Devins' outstretched arms and whispered - "I've missed you, you devil!"

With his brother and Catherine each holding one arm, Dev went down the few steps, smiling a tentative greeting to the older man who now leaned on the desk as though waiting to be acknowledged. Father didn't know quite how to welcome his oldest son. Seemed a bit at a loss for words as Devin approached him. He pleaded silently, "God, give me the right words, let me do this correctly, please!" He offered his hand to Father and said with extreme politeness, "hello, how are you? Thank you for writing and inviting me here for the wedding". He was also a bit bewildered too, as he saw how frail his father looked, how much older. Why did he now feel as though he had helped at times bring this condition about in the way he had acted towards him in the past? Devin had never before felt remorse; not for this stubborn, stern man. WHY was he having such feelings now? Dismissing it as stupid sentiment, he asked again, "how are you?" His father simply shrugged, "I'm well and you? How is Charles? He would not come with you?" Dev looked sad, "no. He preferred to stay in the mountains. He has a few friends there now, he isn't alone. He sends all of you his best wishes, and knows you will understand how large gatherings make him..... ill at ease even here". Vincent stood with Catherine and listened to this exchange; they spoke as strangers. This was not a good beginning. Neither seemed willing to betray any real feeling towards the other. This was not good, at all! As Vincent started towards them, her tug on his sleeve stopped him. "Wait, give them a little more time. Come and sit with me. We'll let them talk a while; try to work this out, shall we?" With a last hopeful, hard look towards the two men now standing face to face Vincent went and sat next to Catherine, to wait for something to happen, hoped that whatever happened, would not end in angry words, AGAIN! Please? Not this time, not right before the wedding when all were so happy, please, GOD? As he listened to Devin, Father could sense a change in his attitude, He was not longer abrasive as he

had always been, especially when talking to him. He looked calmer, had a gentler tone to his voice. Charles doing? Perhaps. As he held his sons hand, he was overcome by a new strange rush of emotion for this man standing passively before him; as though he too was waiting for.....something to happen. This was his son; his true blood son. An unseen hand clutched at his heart and many memories filled his head as he realized just how much he truly loved and had missed seeing Devins' face and hearing the sound of his voice. He saw as though never before Devs resemblance to Grace, his mother, Fathers "wife". Dear Grace; how she would have greeted this son! As these deep emotions and love warmed... him, Father dropped Devins hand. Vincent was half out of his chair, but the next words he heard made him sit back down with a "thump"! "This is no way to greet me, your father. This is not acceptable. You greet your father like this!" He reached out his arms and enfolded Devin, his dear Devin into a fierce embrace and rocked him as he held him to his heart. He choked back the tears that were filling his throat as he held Devin and whispered, "my son". He took Devins face between his hands and looked long and hard into his startled eyes, then hugged him again harder than before. At first, Devin had stood as though made of stone; he did not return the embrace, did not answer his father for many long moments. Then with a sob, wrapped both arms around the old mans neck and leaned on him as a child would have; and let himself be held in love. Welcomed the feel of it, as his body began to tremble from the force of his fathers words and arms about him began to sink in. "My oldest son is home. Devin, I have missed you; and I LOVE YOU, my son." Burying his face into his fathers shoulder, Dev shook with sobs, "thank you, Father". Then, almost in the voice of a small boy added, "thanks, pop. I love you, too. So much!" As they wiped tears from their faces, Vincent and Catherine joined this scene that had so amazed & thrilled them both. Hoping that what had been said here would be remembered, would last forever.

Devin and Father were reconciled at last, thanks be to God, at last! Father slowly released his son and turned to his desk and blew his nose loudly in a handkerchief, murmuring something about a "cold". Devin was almost being held up by his brother and Catherine; still quite shaken by this welcome! Father turned and held up four glasses filled to the brim with the port wine. "A toast. To Vincent and Catherine, a long and happy life. Filled with only the greatest joy, the brightest of futures. And to Devin my son; who has come truly home to us; to ME, at last! I love all of you, my children:"

Quite a bit later, in Vincents temporary bedroom, Dev undressed for bed, still amazed by the events of this night. "Well, that was SOME homecoming, huh Vin? Do you think he meant it? I mean REALLY meant it?" Vincent reached up to put out the candle and smiled across to his brother in the next cot; love shining from his eyes and on his golden face. "Has Father ever been known to recant or change his mind on anything he has ever said, especially to you? Good or bad?" Dev shook his head, "no, not that I remember". "Well, why would he not mean what he has said tonight then?" Dev shrugged, "maybe age is catching up with him, mellowing him. Who knows; maybe father is feeling his own mortality, mending his bridges and one of those bridges is ME!" He really got to me tonight; Vin, really shook me up, you know?" Seeing still a look of disbelief on Devins face, Vincent spoke deadly serious, "Devin, look at me? He meant every word; you know I can always tell; sense truth and lies when I hear them spoken or unspoken. He did mean what he has said, believe it, trust it. Devin, just....love him? He's not perfect, but he tries so hard to be; knows he never will be all that he wanted to be. Just "go" with that for now and love him? Okay?" Vincent saw Dev nod in agreement as he put out the last candle. "Devin?".. "Yeh, Vin?" "I am glad you are home, it has been a long time. I have missed you. Welcome home, brother; I love you. Goodnight". "Night Vin, same to you, HEY!"

When is your bachelor party?" Vincent frowned a bit, "what is a bachelor party? I have heard this term before, but have never been to one down here". "Oh, so none is planned yet huh? I'll fix that!" Smiling into his pillow, Vincent shook his head, here we go again! Devins back! Thank you, God. But one thing more? GIVE ME STRENGTH!"

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The next two days were full. Devin went about and greeted old friends, played Chess with his father and actually lost (accidentally?) He picked out a black tux with white shirt for the wedding, this was the easiest color choice and he was comfortable with this. He listened as Vin explained what would be expected of him at the ceremony. Then he began to arrange "the" Bachelor Party of all time! He enlisted the aid of Pascal and a few of the other men and the plans were going along very well. Wednesday morning, he was introduced to Jenny. She was to stay from now until the wedding to help her friend and the others in any way she could. They had both been a bit wary when introduced. Cathy had warned Jen of Devins wit, and Vincent had told Dev all he had learned about Jenny from Catherine. She would prove to be a worthy "adversary"; more than a match for Devins "mouth" when the occasion warranted it. She was NOT a woman that was taken in easily; was very strong willed and could be very charming when she wanted to be, but try and treat her as "just" a woman, and look out. She'd hand you your head! Devin thought of all Vincent had told him of Jenny; she sparked an interest to rise in him. An interest he had not felt towards any woman, for quite a while!

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Late Friday night, as they walked to the Chamber falls for a break from the flurry of activity, both were silent. Over these last two days, Devin and Jenny had talked quite a bit and seemed to be completely at ease with each other. But, each was thinking the other was not to be trusted, not yet! He had invited her to join him here with a nod from his father, in approval. Dev was a bit amazed at how quickly she had seemed to win the old mans' affection, the way he seemed to trust her to go about here with no "helper" along.

She must really be "something" and he intended to find out exactly what that "something" was. Walking beside him, she was thinking almost along the same lines as Devin. She had liked him from the first moment she saw him; had almost expected she would. His lop-sided grin was charming. And Cathys' description had NOT done him justice! This was a really handsome man. Jenny had caught him one time looking at her, and his eyes almost burned into her heart. He had the deepest brown, almost black eyes she had ever seen. And he did love Vincent; she saw through the kidding and knew this as fact. Even when Dev had teased him about being an old married man, the tone of his voice was full of love for his brother. Even his sharp tongue and wit did not hide entirely from her. at least, the depth of his feeling for his family, which now included Catherine. He had teased her almost mercilessly about the coming babies, amongst other things. "Twins, huh Cathy. Well, my little brother is really..doing okay in SOME departments anyway. HA! I hope you know what you're doing; he can be a real "hard head"! He's as stubborn as you are, almost. Of course, it is a BIT too late to change your mind NOW. You and Vin have come a long way since my last visit, a real long way, yessir!" When Catherine had blushed and tried to stammer out a response, Jen jumped into the conversation with both feet. "Just what we needed, huh Cath? A court Jester!" Devin shot her a "look", well....okay, girl, let's just see what ya got. "And you Jenny, I'm told you're single, huh? How come? You're not too hard on the eyes when your mouth is shut!" She retorted, "well, you're single too. Why? You're not too hard on the ears when my eyes are shut! Why do you want to know if I'm married or not; not that it's any of your business?" "Oh I was just....curious". Jen grinned, "well, you know what they say about curiosity killing the cat, Devin? " "Yeh, I do! And I'll be very careful not to get scratched!" With that Jen laughed, "Or worse!" He raised one eyebrow at her, but said nothing. He liked this

woman, he did indeed! When they had reached the falls, Dev said as though the thought had just struck him, "hey, you know what? We'll be expected to dance at this wedding; do you dance?" Smiling up at him, she answered, "I can dance YOU under the table, I'll bet. And I'm sure my feet can move as fast as that mouth of yours can. Now, both sat temporarily in a "truce" at the falls, seeming lost in thoughts. She was wondering if he really liked her as much as he was claiming, or if it was part of his "act"? He was thinking pretty much along the same lines about her. He hadn't found Jennys' "weak spot" yet. She matched him at every joke, sometimes even bested him! Yet there was something "guarded" about her; he had seen a few times a very sad look in her eyes. He looked straight ahead now, but was secretly looking at her. She was pretty, with her long dark hair and deep grey eyes. She was slender, just his "type" of lady and that mouth! Deep red, with no lipstick; her lips were full and looked inviting to him. He wanted to kiss her suddenly, then pushed the desire away. He was curious to find out many things, about the sadness in her eyes. But, especially to find out if her lips tasted as good as they looked. He had an idea, "Jen, maybe we should practice dancing a bit now, we wouldn't want to look foolish at the wedding with everyone watching us, agreed? I should have brought along my radio!" She stood up and pulled a small Walkman from her back pocket, laughing at the look of surprise on his face. "Yes we should practice!" Rising and standing beside her, Devin stretched out his arms, "shall we?" Jen looked back at him for a second, then silently stepped forward and into his arms. The music from the Walkman was soft, almost sad. A song called "A time for us" (A love theme from Romeo and Juliet) was playing. Moving together tentatively at first, they soon were lost in the music; neither seemed aware as he drew her closer to him. She rested her head on Devs shoulder and closed her eyes; letting his movements carry her along. He was a very good dancer! Near the end of the song, Jenny was aware of his hand pressing into the small

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of her back. Urging her as close as she could get to him gently, easily. She could feel the muscles of his legs against hers and grew tense. What was he doing; seeing how far he could go with her out of...curiosity or did he really feel drawn to her? Feeling almost mesmerized by his arms about her, Jenny pulled away fiercely as the song ended: "well, we'll do okay at the wedding. At least you can move you feet without walking all over mine." She waited for a "smart" reponse from Devin. None was forthcoming. He just looked at her as she stood with her hands on her hips in front of him. Her hair was streaked with gold lights from the natural light of the caves. Her deep grey eyes and red mouth started to rise feelings in him that were unfamiliar, unsettling. He wanted to hold her again, as close as he could, for as long as she would let him: Suddenly, he had to hold her again. He went to the Walkman and turned the tape over to the other side; still saying nothing as he waited for the music to begin. What came on jolted his ears! The song that blared forth was "Nasty Boys" by Janet Jackson: Jenny laughed out loud at the look on Devins face as he stared down at the tapedeck with a frown. "Someone wrote a song about you, huh? Don't worry; if you can't dance to that.....". His eyes and smile made her pause. Walking slowly up to her, he pulled her to him and showed her how well he could move to this sort of music. The rock song was fast and fierce, with a hard steady beat. As it ended, he spun her away from him, then back against his chest with one of her arms pinned behind her. Fighting for breath Devin gasped, "how did I do?" Rising her perspiring face to his, her attempt at a retort was lost under his sudden movement as he kissed her lightly on the mouth. Devin moved back a step and looked at her, tensed to whatever action she would take at what he had just done; he was sure she would belt him or run from him. He hoped she would do neither. He had surprised himself when he had kissed her; it was not a move he intended to make, at least not yet. Jen just stared at Devin long and hard for a moment. Then she went to him and put a hand at each side of his head and

asked softly, "was that the best you could do Devin?" With a sob he pulled her against him, hard and buried his face in her hair. She smelled so good; whatever perfume she was wearing was driving him crazy. Moving his head, he cupped one hand gently under her chin and tilted her face up to his; quietly shaken from her touch, as she began to trace her fingers tenderly over the scars on his face from his argument with Vincent long ago. She touched him with a gentleness he was unused to. She knew how he had gotten these scars; Cathy had told her of the fight and how Vincent had taken years to forgive himself for hurting his brother as he had by accident. The tenseness on Devin's face began to soften under her fingers as she continued to touch him. She put one hand at his rapidly beating heart and the other hand went to his shoulder. Jenny waited; the next move would have to be his. Devin put his hand softly to her throat, felt her pulse beneath his fingers start to race, growing stronger, beginning to pulsate against his hand. For once in his life, there were no quick witted words to save him from the feeling that had now begun to flow from him to her in the stillness of this moment. He felt like a schoolboy, afraid to go on yet wanting more from her. Needing to feel her in his arms, wanting her lips, wanting.....everything. Three days. That's all they had known each other; three short days. That could be a lifetime with the right person, yes, dear readers? Yes, it could. Devin slowly lowered his lips to hers, feeling her mouth move beneath his from the almost shy way he was kissing her. Her lips parted under his mouth as he deepened the kiss and held her tightly bound to his body with his hands. Jenny felt herself begin to shake from head to foot; what was she doing! This man was a...a stranger. Why was she so drawn to him? No. This was wrong! As she started to pull away from the man, he loosened his arms a little but held her still in a softer embrace, "no, please, Jenny. Trust me? I won't hurt you, I'd never hurt you. Stay? Please, stay with me? I don't want to

lose you, not now." His soft words and quiet smile seemed to call out to something unknown in her; as though he had touched her soul. Jenny put one hand at the back of Devins head and drew his mouth to hers once again. This time, his kiss was not as gentle; it stirred feelings, desires she had never felt so strongly before. Jen felt his body tense as she moved closer and began to return the insistent pressure of his mouth with her own. Devin released her from the kiss and lowered his lips to her neck and shoulders, became lost in the feel of the softness he found there. Jen clung to him as she heard the moan escape from his throat; and her small cry of "yes" started to release a passion in him she had never felt in her life from any man, not ever before. He was kissing her all over her neck and throat, calling her name as he did; "Jenny, ah, you're so sweet. You taste so good. I want you so badly, I cannot let you go. Jenny. Help me." The groan that now rose from his throat released and dissolved into nothingness all her fears as she gave herself fully, completely to his caress and command of her body, "yes, hold me Devin. I trust you. Know you more than you would believe possible. Devin.. kiss me again?" Devin was losing the last of his command of the passion now filling him with such wanting it confused and almost frightened him by the intensity of the desires. So long he had searched for these feelings, with many women. Had not known until this moment what those feelings could do. He knew this now with her. With a sob of a man starved so long for this sharing, Devin enfolded her small body into his arms and kissed her as though he would never stop. Probing gently between her lips with his tongue, he felt her response immediately as she accepted this touch from him and returned it. Jenny collapsed against him fully as waves of need rose from her towards him. Locked in this kiss, both were unaware of time, of anything but this moment, this passion now between them. He slid one hand down her shoulders and held her breast with his palm, caressing the nipple through the sheer blouse. As it hardened to this touch, she was lost; gave herself fully up to whatever this man would now do next. From somewhere deep in his mind, Devin was

fully aware of this fact; knew he could have her; take her now if that was his wish. This at once brought a beginning of reality back to him; as though he had been hit with a cold cup of water in the face. With all his teasing, all his brashness and "seeming" confidence, Devin was a man of honor. He had been raised to be such. This was neither the correct time OR place to continue this now. As badly as he wanted Jenny totally, Devin forced himself to step back from her a bit. Still holding her arms he tried to explain, "Jenny, this cannot happen like this; not here, not now. For the way I want to hold you, this is not the right place. Please, do you understand? Tell me you understand what I'm trying to say." At First Jenny simply nodded her agreement, then said softly, thank you Devin." He smiled down into her glowing face, "for what?" She put one hand gently on his cheek, "for letting me know you, see that with you chivalry is indeed, still alive and kicking. Damn it!" She smiled this at him and hand in hand they left the waterfall, each fully aware that the right time and place would happen soon enough. Leaving him with a soft kiss at the entrance to Marys room, Jenny went in trying to be quiet. It was very late, she didn't want to wake Cathy or Mary. Creeping about the dark, unfamiliar room, Jen banged her knee against the end of the bed she was sharing with Cathy, and cursed softly, "Christ, Ouch!" Cathys low voice in the darkness scared the hell out of her! "Finally back huh? How was your walk with Devin? I was beginning to think one of his remarks had caused you to strangle him! It's so late Jen. What have you and he been talking about, all this time? If I may ask?" Jen climbed into the bed beside her friend and pulled the coverlet up around her chin, sighing, "Oh, we just talked a bit, danced a little, that's about it". Cathy nudged her in the ribs, "you're not going to tell me a thing, are you?" Jen whispered back, "well, he did kiss me.....". "He did! And he's alive to talk about it! That's really interesting; what else happened?" "Oh let's talk about it tomorrow, okay? I'm really beat!" Cathy laughed, "yeh; all that dancing can sure tire you out, huh?" They

both giggled over this remark, and rolled over and tried to sleep. Or at least Catherine did; Jen was having a difficult time shutting Devins face out of her mind, among "other" things!

Saturday dawned clear and bright. All Below were in a dither of last minute wedding preparations. The women had coerced the men into helping decorate the Great hall with festoons of streamers, flowers and pretty flowing ribbons. They had grumbled at first, but when the women threatened to join them later for the "bachelor party", the men did the work as quickly as they could, ceasing to complain. The party was to begin at nine; all the men wanted to be there on time. Even though the entire plan for the party was known only to Devin, the others were dying with curiosity to see what he had planned to "pull" out of his bag of tricks on poor Vincent. When finally the ladies were satisfied at the job they had done in the hall, the men sighed a collective "thank God" of relief and went to change into clean clothes for the party. The women were throwing rather rude comments after them as they left. Mary first called out a reminder.... "now, I realize that drinking will naturally be involved tonight. You men just take care, I will tolerate no "fuzzy heads" here tomorrow. Not one!" Other voices of wives and girlfriends chimed in on this admonition, promising dire results of "comeuppance" if anyone even looked hung over at the ceremony. Catherine reached for Devins arms as he climbed down from the ladder he had been perched on hanging decorations. "Dev, will you promise me one thing, just one?" He waited for the question with a small smile on his lips. She arched her eyebrows at him, poked him in the chest with one finger and said slowly, "if you get Vincent drunk, hide where I will NEVER find you!" He patted her arm, "you know me better than that, don't you?" She narrowed her eyes and retorted, "dear brother-in-law, I know you ALL too well, only too well! I'm just warning you....." Trying to look shocked, Dev replied, "you don't trust me to watch over my own brother?" "In this case? NO, I don't: I seem to recall a few times

you were "watching" over Vincent and you both almost ended up in deep trouble with Father. Imagine what he'd do if you OR Vincent look "wierd" tomorrow!" This picture wiped the smile from Devins' face, "I promise. He'll only have one drink, okay?" "Okay". "But, I'm not saying the size of the glass he'll drink it from!" Spinning away from her lunge as him with a ruler she had been measuring with, Dev escaped to his Chamber with her threats ringing in his ears.

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Vincent had been excused by Mary from helping to decorate; he was putting last minute touches to the new home soon to be shared with a new wife. He had finished his tasks early, and was now writing in his journals as the men entered. Looking up in greeting, he was stunned at the amounts of food and different types of alcohol the men were lugging in with them into the room! He saw Pascal and Devin attempting to hide two small packages behind their backs; what was this? Mouse then struggled in laden with many glasses and plates, "Lo Vincent, happy party!" "Thank you, Mouse. Devin, what are you and Pascal hiding? Let me see.....?" "Oh no, this is for later!" The party started out safely enough; glasses of wine were poured and consumed along with large quantites of food. The men laughed and taunted Vincent over whether he was SURE he knew what he was doing getting "hitched"! Marriage was a big step, a lot of responsibility. Devin had just remarked, "well Vincent, if you should want to change your mind, we'll try and hide you somewhere for the rest of your life. How about it, bro'?" Before Vincent could growl a response to this, Father entered the room. He too, had been invited. He knew the men would be more at ease to enjoy the ribaldry if he did not stay too long. He was aware that out of respect many things would not be said in front of him. He had planned on having one drink and then bidding everyone a goodnight. But surprisingly, the men did not seem uncomfortable with him there, not in the least! They continued taunting his son as though they knew Father would understand that this was PART of the "bachelor ceremony". He, in turn stunned all by

joining in on the spirit of the evening. With a glass of wine in hand, Father rose from his chair to propose a toast. Devin groaned inwardly; knowing his fathers' toasts could be rather long-winded. Father began, "Vincent my son; by all means marry. If you get a good wife, you will be happy. If you get a bad one, you will become a philosopher!"*All the men roared at this statement from Father. Then he added, "I have one more thought to share before I bid you goodnight". He tilted the glass of wine back and drained it dry, then cleared his throat and began speaking, "there once was a young fellow named Crassus. Whose gal was the finest of lasses. Once he kissed her goodnight and her legs closed so tight; that she fractured the frames of his glasses!" Leaving the men holding their sides with this limerick from HIM, he bade them a "happy party" and was gone. Wiping his eyes, Dev fought for breath. His father quoting something like that had wiped him out. Vincent too! He looked as though he was going to collapse as he held his ribs and roared along with the men. Then Pascal gulped back the last of a drink and rose to speak. "I have a joke to share with all here!" The men urged him to continue. "Well, there was a man who was built somewhat along the same lines as our Vincent here, very muscular. But he also had a dark lovely tan; everywhere except down "THERE". AS the man liked to swim on the nude beach, he decided he wanted to be tanned ALL OVER. Enlisting the aid of a few friends, he devised a way to breathe under the sand, and had his friends bury him fully, except for his, "manhood" which he left exposed to the suns ray! He instructed his friends to return in about twenty minutes. "IT" should be tanned by then. As he lay there with just THAT sticking out of the sand, two elderly ladies came walking past and spied "IT" in the sand! One lady poked the other, "look at THAT, Martha! When I was twenty, I didn't know what THAT was! By forty oh, I KNEW! By fifty, I was beginning to forget. Now that I'm eighty, why they're growing them wild!" As far away as Marys Chamber, sudden hysterical laughter could be heard. "Well, I wonder what has been so funny; shall I go and ask?" Jen put up one hand, "no, Mary! I don't think that would be such a good idea, really!" Then she reached behind her and pulled up a small case of wine from behind the couch. "How about doing a bit of partying ourselves, ladies?" All laughed and agreed with delight.

*apologies to Socrates!

As she and Catherine filled and then refilled glasses, the ladies seemed to be getting a bit tipsy. None of them drank much as a rule, even Jen, but as this was a special occasion..... Jamie asked for another, "Hit me again!" When most of the wine had been consumed, they heard more raucous laughter coming from the mens party. Not to be outdone, Jen asked the women if they would like to hear a poem or two? She warned them these were not like the poetry quoted by such as Vincent or Father! All the ladies urged her to begin. She had WARNED them! "There was a young Scotsman named Keith; who said to his girl on the heath. What I'd like Miss McLouth, is a bust in my mouth; but she gave him a crack in the teeth!" When she finished, there was at first only silence in the room. All at once the women roared, they got it! All except Mary. Then she blushed and exclaimed, "Oh MY, I get it, too!". She laughed so hard she spilled her drink and rose to get a refill still shaking with giggles. The others were astonished, Mary had laughed at that joke. Not to be outdone by her friend, Cathy now called for attention. I also have a poem that a man should really recite but well, here goes. "My spending days are over. My pilot light is out. What used to be my "sex appeal" is now a water spout. It used to give me quite a time, to make that thing behave. For every single morning IT would stand and watch me shave. Alas, now that I am older, it sure gives me the blues; to see that THING hand down my leg and watch me shine my shoes!" This was too much. Ladies grabbed pillows to stuff into their mouths to try and stifle the loud giggles and hide their red faces. Mary had to refill her glass again as she doubled over from the picture in her mind from Cathys' poem. The ladies party broke up around eleven, all were still laughing as they bid each other goodnight; tomorrow would be here soon enough. But the mens' party continued..... Vincent was now opening a gift from Pascal and the others. He grinned as he saw a book entitled "How to Make Love 100 Different Ways" emerge from the box, with illustrations! As he flipped through the pages Vincent smiled and looked up; Dev noticed his eyes were a bit 'off' focus!

OH! OH! How much wine HAD Vincent drank? As Dev watched his brother, Vincent began to cause quite an uproar when he pointed at first one picture, then another and commented, "Yes, I know this one. Yes, that one's okay, too!" and so on! Shaking his head as he handed Vincent his gift, Devin was astounded. He couldn't believe that his brother was behaving as he was now. Truly was a man, with all that that entailed. Even a sense of humor when off-color jokes were told, He went along as though he had indeed written every one of them himself! Handing Vin his gift, Devin thought to himself, "let's see his reaction to this!" and put the small box into his brothers lap. He backed away and let Vincent open the box with clumsy half drunk fingers. Trying to focus his numbed brain on what now lay exposed in the box, he poked at it and exclaimed, "what is..?" Then he knew. It was a prophylactic, but an extremely strange looking one indeed. It looked more like a sea worm, a centiped with "legs" standing out from the side of it. He knew what it was called, a "french...something". As he poked at it again, he grinned up to Devin who was standing just out of reach just in case his gift was not well-received! "Thanks, Dev. It's a bit late this time, but....." Mouse came over and peered into the the box that Vincent now held up for all to see. "Dev? how come you gave a dead caterpillar to Vincent for his present." THIS sent the men into spasms of laughs all over again! As they rose and agreed that this present was a fitting end of the party, all said their so longs and headed off in different directions, to their homes. It was nearly two a.m. Their wives would have their heads if they stayed out any later! Pascal called back, "Night, Vincent. See you later. Dun-da-da-DUN!" After the last of the guests had gone, Dev took a closer look at his brother who now was... struggling to get to his feet. "Vin, how much of that May wine did you DRINK anyway?" Vincent mumbled back, "oh, four, five glasses I guess. Why?" "WHY! because, you're bombed, that's why! Cathy will kill me!" Holding on to the arm of the chair, Vincent retorted, "Well, I'm not as think as you drunk I am!" Then realizing what he'd just said, he looked at Devin and winked. "Dev, I think you're right. I am bombed!"

Cursing his fate if Cathy or Father found out about THIS, Devin helped his brother to his feet. God, he weighed a positive ton! Vincent was just now beginning to realize how much wine he HAD consumed. His aching head was reminding him! "ohhh, my head! What have I done, Dev. I think I'm going to die. Ohhh!" Devin grinned at him, "if Catherine sees you like this, we BOTH may die. Let's go for a dip in the cool water of the falls huh? It may help clear our heads some. How about it, Vin?" Vincent nodded in agreement; even that hurt. Helping each other along the tunnels, they tried to be very quiet. And of course, the harder they tried, the noisier they were: As they neared a spot where no people lived, Dev suddenly began to quote poetry, "oh, where is my Chamber. Moaning to those who walk 'side me, with pleading voice I cry; where is my Chamber?"

They had now reached the Waterfalls. Each hoped the other wouldn't drown and fully clothed, they half fell, half dove into the cool, clear water of the pool so inviting below them!

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The wedding ceremony was to be at seven; a candle light theme had been agreed on by the soon-to-be-newlyweds. Vincent this Sunday morning was glad of this, he looked into the mirror and did NOT like what grinned lop-sided back at him. His head was throbbing. He looked like hell! He had as Dev had said, about 5 hours to "clean up his act" and pull himself together. He looked over to Dev, it was already late afternoon and he still slept, snoring away. Well, thought Vincent, misery loves company. He poked at him to wake up. Devin cursed him and tried to hide under the covers, but

Vincent would not let him sleep! Rising to sit on the side of the bed, Dev held his head between his hands, "what did I drink last night, dynamite?" Vincent frowned, "why dynamite?" "Cuz my head is going to explode, that's why, Christ!" Forcing back a grin, Vincent straightened himself to his full height in the chair, blinked his eyes to try and open them wider and exclaimed, "I feel fine, myself!" Dev glared at him, then laughed, "sure you do! Tell me bro'? Do you always read your books upside down?" Vincent looked down at the notebook he was holding, trying to complete the memorizing of the vows he was to speak to Catherine. The book was upside down, DAMN. They exchanged a look of a shared silent secret pact. Catherine would never get them to admit to how much wine they had drunk! Vincent found he suddenly was starved. "Hey, Devin, how about some breakfast or lunch as the case may be?" His brother groaned, "How can you think of FOOD, yuk. Just lead me to coffee.....COFFEE!" They dressed and went to the communal kitchen to scrounge whatever the cooks would let them have this late in the day.

Jen and Cathy sat in Marys' Chamber, trying to remain calm. Three hours to go! Jen finished the final stitches in her headpiece of silk ribbons, as Catherine, like Vincent, tried to memorize her vows. She was a wreck, her nerves were simply last minute "jitters", she knew this without Jens reassuring her. But it hadn't helped much. She nibbled at the toast Mary had brought to her, had insisted she try and eat SOMETHING! It tasted like cardboard, ugh! Trying to take her mind off her nerves, Jen asked to see Vincents' marriage ring, "does he know about it. yet?" Cathy smiled, "no I don't think so: I had it made Above; the jeweler was aghast at the size I requested. A thirteen was rather a large size for any man. Do you like the one I chose?" Jen looked at it closely, held it up to the light, "Oh, yeh! He'll love it. He better, we hit just about every jewelers store in the city trying to find this one, Cathy!" As she retrieved the ring, Cathy turned it over and over in her hand; it was made of gold. Massive and strongly constructed in a nugget design. It gleamed as the light bounced off of it, catching the small red ruby ensconced in the center. It was as close to her

ring in design that she could get and she hoped Vincent would like it. He'd be wearing it for quite a long time! They continued to talk for a while of anything; everything just to keep their minds off the ceremony now drawing nearer and nearer. Cathy seemed to be calming down a bit as she turned back to her vows, closed her eyes and seemed to sleep for a while. Jen knew she was going over the words in her head. When in college, Cathy had often closed her eyes and looked like she was sleeping. What she was doing in reality was studying in her own way all she could of an upcoming test, going over each part in her mind; she concentrated better this way and it always worked. Well, Catherine was about to face one of the greatest "tests" ever. Jen let her alone for now and gave herself up to her own thoughts, which naturally, included Devin. He and Jen were supposed to drive Vincent and Cathy to the lake on Monday morning and pick them up Wednesday afternoon. The lake would be completely deserted at this time of year. Cathy had been excited when she learned from weather reports, that it had snowed up there. Wouldn't Vincent love the snow! They would have stayed at the cabin longer, but Dr. Alcott was adamant; had insisted she not stay away too long from any possible medical assistance. Father had agreed! He had not wanted them to go at all! Well, at least they would have almost 3 days... to themselves, that was something anyway. It was everything!

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At about five-thirty, Mary and Jamie came in, chattering away. They had to dress! Time was growing short. They helped Jamie dress first. Her gown was simple in design, deep lilac, tied at the waist with a satin sash and trimmed in the same satin at the neck and sleeves. She had a small velvet bow in her dark hair and was to carry a small bouquet of silk flowers of purple, lilac and yellow. She looked at herself in the mirror, "is that me!" This was her very first gown and she never wanted to take it off. Let's see if any of the boys she knew would call her a tomboy today! Ha!

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Mary was dressed in a deep green velvet gown that was left over from a concert she had attended quite recently as a guest of Dr. Alcott and his friend, Dr. Allegra Bellini, another helper'. The dress was cut simply and showed her coloring off to good advantage. Her hair was drawn up into a soft bun at the nape of her neck and Jen styled it with soft curls at the ears and put a bit of baby's breath around the bun in back. Her jewelry was a pearl necklace that had been Catherine's mother's, with matching earrings. Her flowers were fashioned as Jamie's except the colors she had were pink, green and ivory trimmed with silver lace. Cathy and the others complimented on how lovely she looked. Mary blushed and chided, "Catherine, my dear. You must dress!" Catherine asked the others if they would give her some time alone. They understood and left the Chamber with rustles from their dresses echoing and following them up the steps. They would be at Fathers. All except Catherine, Jen, Devin and Vincent would be meeting there before proceeding to the Great hall and the ceremony. Finally dressed, Catherine looked at herself in the large mirror; she was pleased at the dress. The women had done a lovely job. The gown was dazzling. She had pulled her hair back from her small face into loose curls and gathered them at the top of her head with ivory ribbon and a bit of greenery. Then she carefully set the pearl tiara Janet had loaned her over this and pulled a few curls through to lay softly over the edge of the crown. Her flowers were roses of red and white silk and satin. Lace hung in large bows from the bouquet; nestled here and there were smaller roses of the same colors and sprigs of green ivy, which all cascaded down nearly to her knees. Now, Catherine knew she was not an ugly woman, neither was she vain about her appearance. But as she looked at her reflection in the mirror, she knew she looked well, very beautiful. What happy bride did not? She hoped Vincent would be pleased, then laughed. Of course he would! She knew he would see the dress and be pleased; also knew he would be focused on her face most

of the time anyway! As she would be on his. But she couldn't wait to see what reaction he would give her from how she looked now. Jen now reentered the Chamber; it was quarter of seven and time to go. Father was waiting outside to escort them there. His nerves had been quite "jangled", but he now was reaching a stage of calm, helped along by a quick nip of brandy from Peter. Looking down at her friend, Jenny exclaimed, "oh god Cath, you're beautiful! I've seen lots of brides, but you're the prettiest my girl." Catherine turned and smiled her thanks as Jen embraced her carefully, trying not to "muss" her. "Vincent will faint when he sees you; he'll simply keel over!" "Oh, I hope he doesn't faint! An unconscious bridegroom isn't legal, I don't think!" They giggled and went up the step to join Father, who was nervously pacing outside. "Catherine, my dear child, you look splendid, my son is a lucky man indeed. Shall we go...daughter? Jenny?" As she took Father's arm, Catherine glanced down at her feet; the entire length of the tunnels floors had been covered in thick white paper. "Father, what's this!" He grinned, "Mouses idea and contribution to this day. He insisted you and the other ladies would not want to dirty your lovely dresses and has covered the tunnel floors all the way to the Great hall." None of the women had thought of this. "I will thank him for all this later. Where did he get so much white paper." Father shook his head and sighed, "Let's not even think of it!"

✱

While his bride and the others had been dressing, Vincent and Devin had also been struggling into these new, unfamiliar clothes. Devin was staring down in complete disgust at the bed: cummerbund, suspenders, tie, button covers; God, which goes on first! Vin was dressing in his new bedroom. Dev yelled in to him, "only for you would I go through all THIS, you know! And, who in hell picked out

peach colored accesories for me! I had picked out plain white and black; who changed this on me? Vin, peach! Of all colors: I'll look like aa damned fairy! If you did this, I'll,...I'll..." From behind the door his brother answered, "if you do not like the color changes, you had best go and tell Catherine; it was her idea! Well go ahead!" As Devin reached down and began to put on all the paraphenalia, he retorted, "what! Do you think I'm completely crazy Bro'. She'd hand me my head on a plate. No thanks! I'll just wear this "lovely" ccolor and shut my mouth. But really, Vin, PEACH?" He opened the door and stepped out to join his brother, "I'm sure she had her reasons. What is wrong now? Why are you staring at me?" Devin stood looking at his baby brother with his mouth agape. Wait until Catherine got a look at him: Vincents coat was velvet in royal blue. It was trimmed in satin of the same shade at the collar and cuffs. Beneath that, he was wearing a shirt of silk, ruffled from neck to waist of ivory white. Around his waist was a heavy black cummerbund which matched the heavy corded satin trousers he wore. He had on suede charcoal boots that reached almost to his knees and added another two inches to his height. His hair had been brushed with a vengeance until it shone; gleaming in all its varied tones of red and gold. Dev was almost dazzled as he looked at his brother and let out a long slow whistle." Cathys' favorite color, huh? Wait until she gets a look at you my man!" They stared at each other with grins of their faces. Dev looked quite the roue' in his black tuxedo, peach vest and matching accesories. He wore a small peach rose in his buttonhole and his untidy hair had been slicked back. But that one curl that always hung over his forehead now did just that and refused to go back to its proper place. "I think you look fine Dev, even if you don't like the color; I think it suits you very well. You look....nice." Devin snorted, "I look nice? Hell, I look terrific! But. you! You'll take away the ladies breath; outdone by my own brother. Ah well, so be it!" Then Devin reached out and took his brothers large hand into his, seemed to be

at a loss for words as he looked into his brothers shining eyes. "You know Vincent, I've always considered you my little brother huh? Well for this day, that word little is not part of my vocabulary. I've watched you grow from a pain in the neck kid into a man. Shy, quiet, but always there when I needed you to be there. I thank you for being here for me, always. That was one thing in my life I could always count on...you! I'm just sorry I haven't always been able to be here for you, Vincent. Today, you have it ALL. Catherine, babies on the way; you've got a family to care for you and for you to take care of. I envy you that." As he hugged Vincent to him tightly, Dev had tears in his eyes as he added softly, "I love you and always will. You're my touchstone Vin, as well as my brother. I hope you will always remain both. I love you." Vincent appeared a bit stunned. Dev talking to him man to man, no jokes, no sharp witted remarks. He could feel the love his brother was expressing flow to him and wrap around his heart, warm him by the depth of it. As he stepped back and looked at Devin for a long moment, there were tears on his face, "I'm sorry at times Devin, to have come between you and Father. All the times he took sides against you on my behalf. I sensed the jealousy you felt even though you would never have acknowledged it being there. I knew...I always knew. As I look into your eyes now, for the first time since we were children none of that jealousy looks back at me and I am so glad it's gone, at long last. My friend, my true brother. I love you in some ways, even more than I love Father. It is true. Even more than Father! For as kind as he is, as much as he loves me; he sought to show me a life of just here, Below. You tried to show me LIFE, totally of both worlds. And got very little thanks for your troubles. Well, I thank you now, Devin. My big brother. For all you've done and all you've missed because of me, thank you." They shook hands, then Devin grabbed him in a surprisingly strong bearhug and released him. He too, now had tears on his face, "Well! Enough of mush! Where's the ring I'm

supposed to hold for you? AND, where is your flower for your buttonhole? Oh boy, do I still have to do EVERYTHING around here!" As Dev pinned the small white rose to his brothers lapel, Vincent handed him a small white box, "will she like it do you think?" As he opened the tiny box, the ring shimmered and gleamed up to Devins eyes. It was plain gold, but spiraled to match the engagement ring Catherine now wore on her finger, simple but lovely. "Yeh, she'll like this, Vin! Hell, if YOU gave it to her she'd wear a cigar band. Think of the money you could have saved!" With a grin, Vincent took a last look around the room to see if they had everything. Then they pushed each other up the stairs.. almost as two small boys would have, each demanding the other go first! "Dev, you go first, you're the oldest, remember?" "Yeh, but you're the groom! Move. Your fate awaits.....MOVE!"

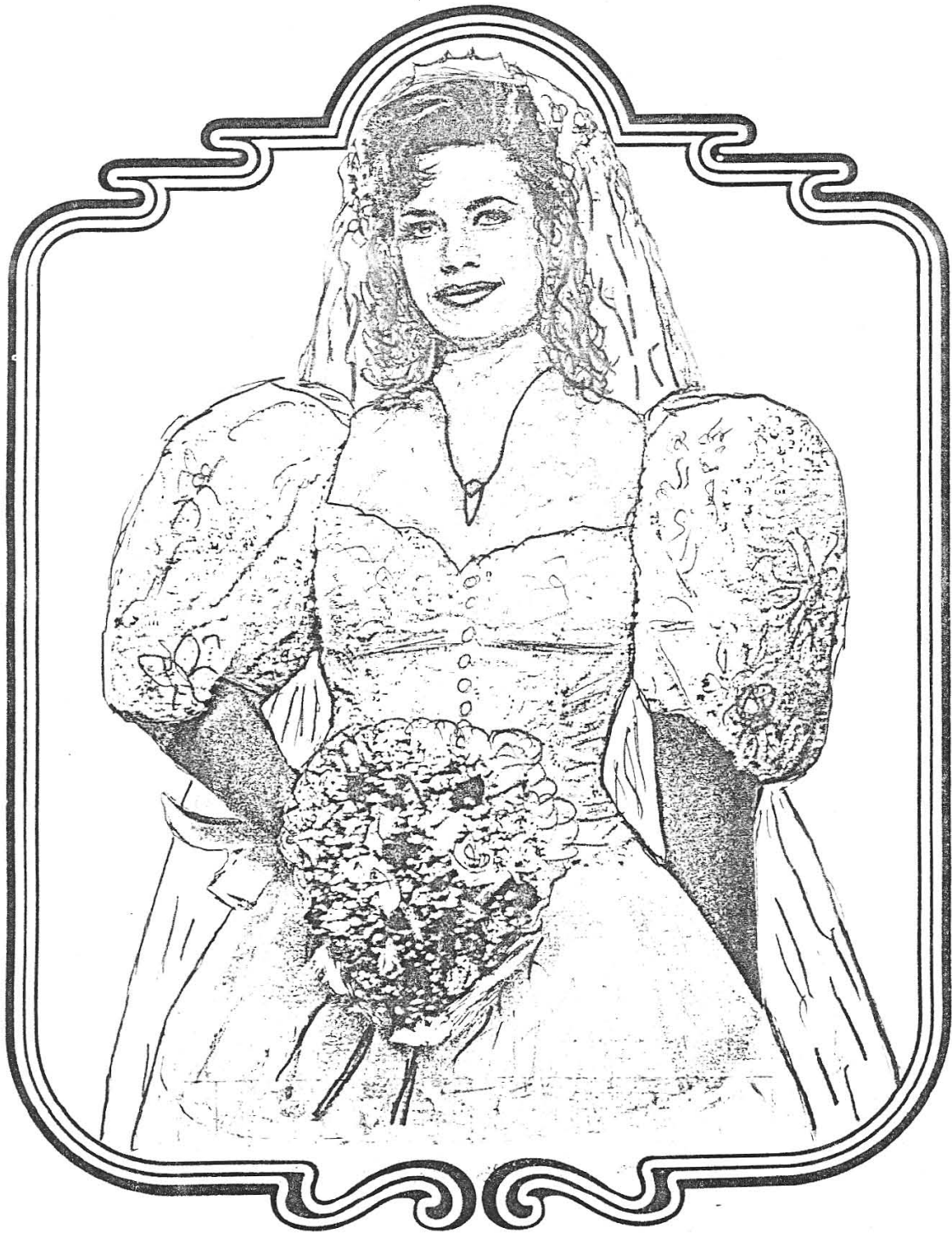
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The Great hall was filled to capacity, yet it was surprisingly cool. More of Mouses work. He had rigged "borrowed" fans and electricity high up in the beams of the ceiling. It was working to keep all below extremely cool. Father looked up at all the fans, he must remember to thank Mouse for this idea. This time he would not chastise him for his "borrowing" abilities. He began to tug at his bowtie, but Pascal stopped him with a sharp nudge to the ribs. "Stop fidgeting! Honestly, you'd think it was YOU getting married, stop that: I promised Mary that you would behave!" Pascal looked over to Father with a satisfied look; he was quite handsome in his dark grey suit and pleated white shirt and black bowtie. As Father reached up to straighten his handkerchief and buttonaire, he saw the "look"Pascal gave him and turned to a statue,unmoving under his friends grim stare. Suddenly there was much whispering, then shouts as Vincent and Devin joined their Father and stood at each side of him. He hugged first Devin, then Vincent and looked them over carefully, "well done, my sons, very well done, indeed! You are both quite handsome today!" Devin leaned and whispered to his brother,

"What, just today: Vincent, I think we have been insulted!"

His brothers response was lost in the beginning of the music from off to the right of where they were standing. First there were strains of a Chopin etude...then Grieg. Finally the hushed sounds of Strauss wafted quietly over the large room. Then silence from all gathered as the soft strains of Brahms drifted over the room. All eyes turned to the stairway as Father went forward and waited. First came Jamie, blushing and looking quite the young lady in her lilac gown. Some of the younger boys her own age gasped and wondered if this was the same girl they saw running up and down the tunnels usually dressed like a boy most of the time. They whistled softly under their breath. Then came Mary, resplendent in her Emerald green gown. Ah thought Father, she is lovely; almost like a bride herself. He whispered this thought to her as she passed slowly by him on the stairs; saw her blush and the look of "thank you" in her eyes. Next came Jenny. There arose many ooohs and aahs as she stood there a moment before starting down the steps. Her gown was deep peach, trimmed in white lace. The front was cut in a sweetheart neckline and the bottom was cut almost to the knee and then draped to the floor behind her. Her mass of curls were held back from her small face with peach colored silk ribbon. Her flowers matched exactly the ones in Devins buttonhole, peach with ivy, white lace and a few small yellow tearoses. "AHA!", thought Devin suddenly knowing why he was in peach accessories. NOW, he didn't mind, not at all. Then came the song we all knew would be played, yes? The first notes of "The First Time I Loved Forever" came softly forth to fill the hall as Catherine stepped into the Chamber doorway, and looked down to Father for a moment before starting down the stairs to take his arm. A hushed silence had fallen over the room. She looked like a queen from a fairytale, lovely and pale. As she reached out to take Fathers' arm, he could feel her trembling, "almost there, my dear. Hold on; Vincent is waiting for you!" Catherine took one or two deep breaths, closed her eyes for a moment, and then looked

CATHERINE WELLS



down the aisle for Vincent. Her glance at him took in the glory of his outfit; he was so handsome standing there with his eyes shining back to her flushed face as she neared him. The lights of the room were dancing and circling his head almost as a crown, bouncing off the shine of his golden mane as he waited for his love to come to his side on the slightly raised platform (that had been installed so all in back could get a better look at the goings-on.) She also caught a quick wink from Devin as she approached and a thumbs up. She smiled back and mouthed silently, "like peach?" He grinned from ear to ear and nodded "yes!" Finally taking his eyes from her face, Vincent was now really noticing her gown and it took his breath away. She was like something he had dreamt of long ago. He still had to mentally pinch himself from time to time; this vision was to be his wife...HIS. He was the most fortunate of men. With her he had everything, everything he thought he would never have in this world. That "everything" that seemed beyond his grasp for so long now reached up and took his arm. First she turned to Father and kissed him softly on the cheek, then took her place at Vincents side. All were now ready. Jamie stood beside Jen, Devin beside his brother (in case he fainted), Father stood by Mary and Vincent and Catherine were encircled by all of them as they stood looking into each others eyes. Vincent was to speak first. He took a deep breath and began, "I Vincent, take thee Catherine, as my wife, pledging to love only you for as long as we live. Without reservation, without fear, I shall cherish and honor you always. Do not love me as I am now, for with years this form shall truly change. Do not love me for what I hope to be, for that dream may never come true. Only love my heart which shall never change, never turn from you in all lifes marking of eternity. All I am, all I hope to be, with trust I vow to fully share with you. With this ring I, Vincent, take you Catherine, to be my wedded wife. To love and care for until I am but memory". He slipped the narrow

gold wedding band on Catherine's slender finger, then bent gently his golden head and softly kissed her hand; all the while looking into her shining eyes, letting his courage, his love flow to her as she began to speak, "I Catherine, take thee Vincent as my husband, in trust and with truth. To love only you until I die and even beyond that death, will I cleave only onto you. How shall I hold my soul, that it not be touching yours? How shall I lift it to where other things are waiting beyond you? You and me; all that lights upon us brings us together as one heart, one soul. Across what time have we been spanned and what Gods hold us in their hands, my dearest love?" She took the ring from Jenny and saw the look of surprise and delight in Vincent's blue eyes. As she slipped the massive gold ring onto his finger, Catherine continued, "I Catherine, take you, Vincent, to be my wedded husband. To love and care for until I too, am but memory. With this ring, I pledge my love through eternity." They stood and looked at one another for a breath of God, then shared a kiss that stirred every heart, shook every remembrance and brought promises to all gathered in this room for this time. This truly, was a marriage made in Heaven. For who, but God, could have allowed it to come true? The room was filled suddenly with hundreds of voices, shouting all different kinds of congratulations and blessings, some tender, some amusing. "Yehs, Hip, Hip, Hurrahs, good on you, FINALLY!" All this and more was raised in a roar that filled the room and echoed down on Vincent and his wife. Father was almost deafened by it as he stepped forward, along with Dev, Jenny, Jamie and Mary to hug the bride and groom that were standing so happily before them with hands joined and raised up to all in the room. Then, everyone began kissing everyone! Mary was stunned as she turned her cheek to Father and he planted a loud, smacking kiss right on her lips. Devin grinned at Jenny, then kissed her the same way, turned to Father, "following your example; you always said I should, yes?" Then he kissed Jamie, too and she turned red from head to toes and hid behind her bouquet and giggled at him. Catherine threw her bouquet and in delight,

saw Jenny make a flying leap and catch them. Catherine also saw Devins sly smile to her as she turned and showed him the flowers. What was brewing here. The banquet that now began was truly one never to be forgotten; never had Father seen so much food. Why, there was surely enoughto feed an army. Maybe two armies! Six long tables stretched out before the guests. On two were eight different kinds of meat or fowl, Two others held salad, many kinds of vegetables, at least five different kinds of potatoe and rice dishes, and three or four Italian dishes as well. The other tables held many desserts: cakes, cookies, pies, sherberts and at the center, a gigantic wedding cake. While some began to eat, others decided to dance first as the music started again. Vincent danced first with his bride, then with Mary, Jamie, and Jenny. Devin laughed aloud and demanded a turn also. He yelped in surprise when Vincent took him in a bearhug, and lifted him off his feet and danced him about the room to the delight of all who watched! Father danced with Catherine and whispered so not even Vincents keen ears would hear, "I never dreamed to have a day such as this for my youngest son. I will cherish it and you all the days of my life. Thank you my dear, for all of this. For what you have given to Vincent, I most humbly thank you." She reached up and tenderly patted his face. "May that life be a long one. We'll need you with any children we may be blessed with, including these now on the way. Your son is the dearest and kindest man I will ever know. You did this; be proud of that always." Ignoring the "look" from his father, Devin now cut in and asked for his dance with the bride. "Well sis, it all went off okay, huh? Here's to a happy future, dear sister, for all of us!" She looked over to Jenny who was dancing with Vincent, Devins eyes followed hers. Jen beamed back at them. Catherine again looked from Devin to Jen, grinned and replied, "yes, brother. Here's to the future." When people began rubbing at sore feet from dancing and all the food was gone, Father clinked his glass for attention. Dev and his brother winced, HERE COMES THE SPEECH. "To Vincent and Catherine. Your love had given us all a renewed hope for the future. Rejuvenates us all

as we bathe in the warmth and courage of that love. A long and happy life my dears. May you have many years together and many children!" All breathed a sigh of relief, that hadn't been too long at all. Father must be tired or something! After opening mounds of gifts and many envelopes that contained money, Vincent and his wife said their thank yous and their goodnights. This first night of married life would be spent in their new Chamber. They were ushered out with ladies throwing roses petals all about them and many voices calling out good wishes, winks from the men, some tears from both sexes and a whisper from Devin, "now sis; don't get him pregnant. He'll want child support!" Just in front of their new home, they almost bumped into Pascal and Mouse coming out of it. "Pascal, Mouse? What is going on?" Vincent asked this sternly..., had they been up to some "joke"? They better not have been. Pascal looked slyly up to his friends frown, "don't worry, we were just getting things in order, that's all! Mouse joined in, "just lighting stuff, okay good?" Pascal and Mouse then ran off leaving he and Catherine slightly afraid to even enter the Chamber. Peeking in, they were a bit ashamed of what they had been thinking; there were no "traps", no "jokes" here. Pascal had lit many candles about the room, set out a small bottle of champagne and two lovely crystal glasses and picked up the disarray Vincent had left there earlier. Mouse had "borrowed" some electricity with Fathers blessings, and music filled the room from Catherine's stereo. As she stood still on the threshold of her new home, Vincent swept her up and into his arms, touched her face with one long furred finger and carried her across the threshold into their new home with a kiss on her mouth, saying "my wife". She reached up and brushed a hair back from his forehead, then put a hand to his face, "my husband!"

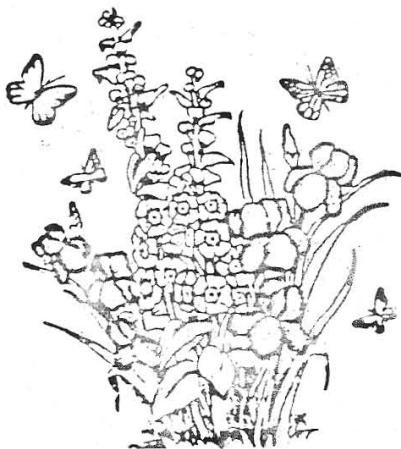
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Later, laying together in bed in their new home, he leaned up on one elbow and simply stared at his wife that was smiling back.

LOVES PROMISES FULFILLED - THE NEWLYWEDS



He seemed at a loss for words as he reached out and began to touch her softly, letting his hands linger at her throat then her shoulder. "Art thou real? Art thou mine? Truly mine? At last?" "Yes, I'm real and yours. I always will be, my love. Everything was so beautiful, wasn't it? Such a wedding. So many memories to cherish, so much happiness." He held her tightly to his breast, "ah, Catherine. How can I tell you of all that is in my heart? I may burst with the pride your loves gives me. That you chose me, ME." Vincent lowered his golden head to rest on Catherine's growing tummy. She softly let his beautiful hair run through her fingers. She didn't speak; he knew her thoughts were a reflection of his own. Suddenly she felt a slight "thump" from her stomach. Vincent raised his head startled, "what was that?" She gently put his head back to where it had lain, "just our children, giving me a kick for luck!" He looked up at her grinning, then back down to her tummy. "Stop kicking your mother my little ones. It has been a long day. Let her rest. Stop it, I say!" The kicking ceased almost at once. "See, already they mind their father beautifully." She narrowed her eyes and retorted, "sure they have to, for now, entrapped as they are: But wait until you must chase them up and down the tunnels, my love. Just you wait!" As he turned and put out the single candle that was beside the bed, he chuckled at her remark. Then turning those incredible blue eyes towards Catherine, he gathered her into his arms and buried his face on her shoulder saying softly, "the dream, this night.....becomes the reality".





TO:
VINCENT +
CATHERINE

LOVE: SAMANTHA



Where is My Chamber?

By
Michele

Moaning to those who walk 'side me,
pray with pleading voice; "where is
my Chamber? Thus, to it I may depart.
There to pillow ease my storm-tost
brain.

To imbibe May wine! Such foolishness,
I vow, will seek NOT my lips again.

Know when I e'er find this place, my
bed shall toss, churn, spin me at will
about. As I reel to clutch at coverlets;
hold fast and beg with Gods, "drive these
accursed demons out?"

Beseech, "leave me sleep? Grant this
wish?", I in desperation cry; and hold
in palms my throbbing head.

WHERE is my Chamber? Where can I lay?
To curse May wine: That has killed me,
dead!

Rightful Owner

Patricia Anne Kehoe

Cleaning out the old chest that had lain long forgotten in Fathers Chamber, Vincent was sitting on the floor, going slowly, over the contents of the old trunk that held so many memories. When Father had first brought this to his Chamber, Vincent was not amused at the idea of this task. "Son, I have to make room for my books! I had quite forgotten the old trunk was even behind some of them. Only God knows what's in it, but it is yours! Perhaps there will be something in there you would like to keep. Do as you please with it; just do not try and give it back to me!"

Now as he sifted through the contents, Vincent was glad Father had given this trunk to him. All the memories, some sad, most happy he was finding here! The remains of a kite he and Devin had made; had tried to fly high into the cave of the winds. A small book of childrens poems that had been a long ago gift from Mary. Then, finally down near the bottom of the old trunk, Vincents hand struck something hard and he pulled out an old small cardboard box and opened it, saw what it contained, unfolded a small piece of paper and began to read.

*

The small boy walked along the tunnel dragging a stick behind him with one hand, holding a small toy horse with the other. Every now and then he poked at the wall with the stick; then would weild it like a golfclub to send a stone whizzing down the corridor ahead of him. He could still hear the voices of his Father and his friends ringing in his ears as he walked. All of them, even Father, had been angry at him, the fight was over now, but still he could hear the words from Dev, "we won't ever play with you again, Vincent, ever!" He had stiffened his lip at this outrage, "okay, don't! Who wants to play your dumb games, anyway!" He had left them with his head thrown back, spine stiff, showing no tears as they all called after him, "Go ahead, tell Father, we don't care!" He had decided at first not to go to Father, this would only bring his wrath down on the others, and make everything worse! But Vincent felt miserable at being treated

so unfairly by his friends. Some friends, he thought, "HA" Another rock was sent whooshing along the tunnel. "I didn't mean to break the horse, I just wanted to hold it and play with it first. Devin always goes to go first!" He had shouted this at the tunnel walls, for he was alone here, now. Vincent stopped and looked down at the broken toy in his grasp; deciding he would have to go to Father after all! Only he could fix what he now held. *

Devin had found the small horse near the entrance of the tunnel in the park Above. It had a shiny silvery colored saddle and reins. The animal itself was brown and white and looked almost brand new! All the children wanted to play with it, all demanded a turn! Devin said loudly, "as the oldest, I'll play with it first. Then you can, Joe, then the next day you Tricia, then you Rita" Devin went down the list of friends by age, the oldest to the youngest, thinking this was the only fair way to settle this matter. Well, Vincent was the youngest, and he was not happy at this arrangement! "Devin, that's not fair! I...I could be dead before I get a turn! I want to play with it now!" Vincent was only six, but extremely strong for one so young. He exclaimed 'I don't want to wait forever! Let me play with it first! With that, he snatched it from his brothers hand, and held it to his chest, growling as he saw anger rise in Devins' eyes as he tried to grab it back, away from him. "Give me that, now! You'll have to wait your turn, just like everyone else. Vincent! Give it back, NOW!" But his younger brother held on tightly to the legs of the toy as he protested, "How come you always decide the oldest gets to go first? ALL the time, and you're the oldest, so it's always you! It's not fair! No, you can't have it!" Devin had reached out again, managing to wrap two fingers around the saddle on the toy before Vincent used his natural agility & leapt backwards away from him; and out of reach. With a loud "snap" the saddle now lay broken in Devins' fingers, the horse in Vincents hands. All the childrens yelled in dismay, "Vincent, now you've broken it! The small boy looked ashamed, "no, I didn't, Devin did." Rita yelled at Vincent, "no he didn't, you did! I don't want to play with you anymore Go away!" Suddenly all the others joined in, "Yeh, Vincent, go away!" Devin let the saddle drop to the dusty dirt floor of the tunnel and walked back towards his friends, They all left Vincent standing there, alone.....

As he bent and picked up the broken saddle, he heard Devin call back to him, "we'll never play with you again, ever!" Vincent hid the tears in his eyes by examining the saddle more closely. One part of chain that had held it to the horse was completely snapped off, the other hung loosely, almost in the same condition. Maybe..maybe Father could fix it! Why, he could fix almost anything! *

Father sat huddled over papers that completely covered the top of his desk and grunted in disgust. It was very hard making one dollar do the work of four! His budget was even tighter this month than ever. So many people, so many items needed, where would he ever get all the money? He put his hand to his eyes and began rubbing them, trying to think! "Father, can I talk to you a minute, please?" He turned towards the small boy at the Chamber entrance. "Vincent? Are you all right? What's that in your hands, oh, I see; a horse. Where did it come from?" As he saw his sons' efforts of fighting back tears, he asked no more questions, but rose and put one hand on his shoulder; waiting patiently for Vincent to talk. Father had rarely seen Vincent in such a state! He looked quite grim standing there holding the toy, as sobs began to shake his small frame. He held it out to Father, and began to explain what had happened with his friends. Father frowned as the boy spoke, Devin again! He should know better, why did he always have to hurt his brothers feelings so? Would that boy never learn! "I'll speak to Devin and the others.....". Vincent shook his head, "No!, DON'T! Father was a bit shocked at the tone in his small sons' voice, "why not? You didn't do this damage alone. If Devin had thought for once of your feelings, instead of being selfish, this would not have happened in the first place!" Vincent looked down at his hands, then up at Father with a tear-stained face. "It was MY fault. Not Devs' fault! I..I didn't want to wait my turn like everyone else. I should have given the horse back. Now, it's broken and no one will forgive me! Father, can you fix it, can you? PLEASE!" Taking the horse and saddle from his son, the man looked it over carefully, then rummaged around in his desk and brought forth a small pair of pliers and a piece of an old broken necklace of almost the same size link in the saddle.

He began to try and repair the damage as Vincent looked on, with complete trust in his abilities to do this. Gently Father parted the broken links of the saddle, held them with the tweezers, and inserted a piece of the old chain between them, then clamped it all together slowly, carefully back into place. "There! That seems to have done the trick, look!" Vincent took the horse, now again with saddle where it belonged and turned it over and over; why, it was as good as new! He hugged his Father and started to go, he must show the others! Maybe they'd forgive him and play with him again, now. Just as he bounded up the steps to leave, Father called out to him, "Vincent?" "Yes?" "it is hard, being always the youngest, yes?" His son looked back at him, then suddenly smiled and remembered his manners. "Thank you for fixing this. Now maybe, they'll let me play with it.. WHEN it's my turn!" Father smiled after him, then returned to his budgets. Ah, if only ALL his problems could be solved as simply!

In the room he shared with Vincent, Devin and the others were playing a game called "Simon Sez". When his brother appeared in the doorway, they stopped and turned to him, with silence and looks as his only greeting. "I have the horse, Father fixed it. Look! I'm sorry I...I broke it." He handed it to Devin, "here, you first, okay?" But, his brother was still mad at him; sure Vincent had told Father all about their argument, also sure he, in some way, would be held fully responsible! Father usually found him at fault, anyway! Devin threw the horse back at him as Vincent ducked and it hit the bed with a "thud". "I don't want it now, keep it! Come on, guys, let's go play somewhere else, away from the babies. Where we can play, ALONE!" The smaller boy quite understood, he was not invited, not forgiven. He felt very sad as he watched the others leave him standing by himself in the center of the large room.

At supper that evening, Father had watched silently as the boys & girls talked and ate beside Devin off to the left. He noted Vincent sat near the end of the same table, but alone. He was not eating...just moving the food around on his plate with his fork back and forth in small circles. As the adults finished their dinner and began to clear the tables, the childrens took their plates and also went to help. "Children, when your chores are done, please come back in here for a

moment, will you?" They looked from one to the other, and nodded in response to Fathers' request, Oh! Oh! When their small chores were completed, they all returned to the dining hall. Just before entering, Devin took a deep breath. Well, here it comes. He sat down and stared at Father; once again waiting to be blamed for something he felt was not really, his fault! Father began to speak, "Children, I have heard from Vincent, his side of this story of the broken horse; would anyone care to comment further on this matter? Silence. "Anyone?" Dev sighed and said, "Okay, I'll tell you what happened, but you probably won't believe me, anyway!" The older man caught the tone of defiance in his sons voice, saw the look in his eyes. Why, the boy was already expecting to be punished, at though it were somehow a foregone conclusion! This brought a frown of bewilderment to Fathers face. Indeed, he HAD been about to chastise Devin the worst. As the oldest, he could have shown a bit more understanding. Vincent was so small, why hadn't he been allowed to play first? Then, a "truth" made itself known to the man; at one time or another, ALL of the children had been the youngest, all had had the same experience of being last, even Devin, as he remembered. And, the truth of what Devin was now saying was also reaching him, along with the backup cries of the other children, "Yeh, Dev. That's what happened. Really, Father, it did happen that way!" The man knew what he now must do, what must be done. "Devin, come here to me." Slowly the boy did as he was asked; approached the man with a stiff lift of his chin, and waited for what he was sure would be next..a scolding! But, what was said by Father caused Devins' jaw to drop as he stood and stared at him! "My boy, you were right to be angry. You found the toy, and tried to find a fair way to share it; to give each, in their own time, a turn to play with the horse. It's all right, I understand." Devin nearly fell back into his chair in shock as Father finished saying this to him! He wasn't going to be punished, this time anyway. He HAD been heard out fairly, and treated the same way. All Right!!! Now the man called Vincent to come and talk to him. Putting one hand on each of the small boys' shoulders, he spoke, "I realize it must be quite hard at times, very difficult to be the youngest. But, Vincent, you must

learn to take your own turn, share with others as they share with you. Sometimes, this will not seem fair, but no one ever told you life would ALWAYS be fair, yes? I will not punish you this time; I think your friends have already done that, in their own way. But, do learn patience, if you can? I realize you are young, but Vincent, learn now! Sometimes things we don't learn when young are NEVER learned! Will you try and do this, for me? For yourself?" The boy nodded, "yes, I will, I promise!" He went and sat down next to his brother, leaned over and whispered, "I'm sorry, Devin" and held out his furred hand. Dev looked at him for a second, then smiled, took the proffered hand and said, "Yeh, me too!" As all the children felt the tension of the last moments leave the room, everyone started talking at once, some to Dev, some to Vincent, all the while patting them both on the back. The room suddenly echoed the turmoil of all the noise deep in Fathers' besieged ears! "Children, please!" They all stopped talking and just looked at him as he continued, "Did any of you stop and think somewhere Above, some child may be at this very moment, searching in tears for this toy that has today caused us all such upset? Maybe that child treasures it, misses it terribly. It may have been a gift. Think of how that child must be feeling at the loss of that horse; may even now be crying, looking around Above for it. Shall we give it back? Shall we return it, to it's rightful owner? This is your decision." Boys and girls looked from one to the other almost shamefully. At the delight in finding the horse, no one, not even Devin or Vincent, had thought of someone missing it! That it indeed, did belong to someone else! Dev spoke up, "I found it. I should put it back where I found it, huh guys?" All agreed readily, except Vincent! "Can I do it? It's almost dark, I could just leave it and come right back. I won't go outside, I promise. Can I return it?" This last was said as he looked at Father. Vincent knew he was NEVER allowed Above, it was far too dangerous for him. Father stared down at his hands as though the answer to the boys' question may lay there! Vincent was asking him to trust him. Was asking to be allowed to go where he never had been allowed before, at least

to his knowledge. Father smiled down at him, "do you know the way?" The boy nodded in honesty, "Yes". Father didn't question HOW . he knew! Devin sighed with relief! Did Father know their secret! Did he know the others had sometimes let Vin come along with them after dark; had let him play while some stood guard over him up there! Devin caught Fathers' eye as the older man winked at him and he grinned from ear to ear back at the man! Vincent wanted to do this for him; he knew Devin hated walking, especially at night up there. And, it was a LONG walk! Father finally answered Vincents' plea, "Yes, all right. You may go, but straight there and straight back. Is this understood? Is it, my son?" Devin stood up, "Vin, I'll go with you, if you want me to." "No, it's okay, Dev. I'm not afraid to go alone. See you in a while."

So Vincent now walked along the tunnels; the horse tucked under one arm, the stick for fun; well, really for protection from "whatever" awaited him up there! His short sturdy body began to ache all over. It WAS a long walk, even for his strong little legs. He marched stoically along and finally reached the great metal door and gate that served as a barrier to the world of Above. Pushing it open, he stepped through and went to the edge of the tunnel entrance. As he dropped the horse, he looked up. Vincent saw the early night stars twinkling down on him, and the moon was so BIG! His sharp sense of hearing caught a not to faraway noise. He froze! A childs' voice called out, "stay there, Daddy, Okay? I think I know where Geronimo is! I remember, I was playing right over here. I'll be right back!" Trying to melt into the shadows of the tunnel walls, Vincent was suddenly terrified! If he made a dash for the door to get Below, the child would see him. He peeked out and saw a man standing patiently, with arms folded on a ridge, and a young girl running down the hill. She was heading straight towards him! As she came a few steps into the tunnel, Vincent scarcely dared to even breathe. He watched and waited as his heart beat so loudly he was sure the girl would hear it! She reached down and exclaimed in delight, "Oh, here you are! Did you miss me? I'm sorry I left you alone so long!" She was

speaking to the small horse and hugging it tightly to her breast as she turned to leave. Then, without warning, Vincent sneezed! She turned around, but seemed more curious than frightened: "What was that? Where are you? Who's there?" She turned to the right and then to the left, searching the tunnel with her eyes. Her father's voice called out, "Princess, are you all right?" "Yes, daddy, I'm fine. I'll be right there!" She turned her attention to the tunnel shadows once again; her eyes seemed to pass right over him as Vincent stood like a statue in the darkness. Then, her eyes darted back! She had spotted his outline! "Hello, who are you? Did you find my horse?" Her voice was shy and had a happy ring to it. "Hello. Will you answer me?" She didn't come forward, simply called out to the figure in the shadows, again. "Did you find Geronimo? If you did, thank you!" And she started to take a step forward, towards him! Knowing he had to do or say something, anything to get her to stop, Vincent called out softly, "No! Stay there! Yes, I found the horse. I broke the saddle, but my Father fixed it for you. I was just bringing him back. It's yours?" The girl stood where she was and answered, "Yes, he's mine. Isn't he beautiful! Daddy gave him to me for my birthday. I love horse don't you! Thank you for taking care of him for me. Well... Bye." Just before she exited the tunnel, the girl called back, "Hey, what's your name?" "Vincent. What's yours?" She spoke back embarrassed, wellllll... daddy calls me Princess, but my name is Catherine. Thanks again, Vincent, Bye!" She ran to show her father her returned treasure as the small boy looked after her and called out softly, "Bye Catherine, you're welcome!"

The next afternoon Devin came into their room with a package tied in string held in his arms. "Vin, this was left Above near the tunnel entrance for you. Look! Your name is on it." The younger boy looked startled; he had told no one of meeting the girl, thought that if Father found out, he'd never be allowed Above again: Only she would have known his name and would have left anything in that place for him: Tearing aside the brown string and heavy paper, he gasped. There was:

a beautiful black toy stallion in the box, along with a piece of folded paper. As Dev examined the horse, Vincent read the note that was written in a child's scribbled hand.

"To Vincent. Thank you for returning Geronimo to me. He's my favorite. I thought you would like this one. A gift from me to say thank you. His name is Midnight, and he's my second bestest favorite. I know you'll take care of him. From Catherine."

*

The man glanced down at the faded handwriting and gently took the small black horse from its battered box, and looked at it as though someone had struck him with a bolt of lightning: Vincent closed his eyes, trying to remember more of that night. He saw the outline of that young girl still standing before him in the tunnel, he could hear her soft voice calling out to him.....CATHERINE! It had been Catherine! His Catherine; the woman he now loved so completely was, had to be, that same young child from long ago: Oh, my God! Why hadn't he remembered this! Smiling down at the small, now not new horse, Vincent realized how long ago it had been given to him; over twenty years, nearer twenty-five! A lot had happened to him since then; in his teens a terrible illness had wiped out some parts of old memory forever. Like a clean slate, he had had to build most memories anew. With the help of all he loved, all that loved him, this had been done. But, NO ONE but himself knew of Catherine then! No one could return to him a memory only he had known of: Vincent sat on the edge of his bed, and began to stroke the horse, "hello, old friend. Hello, Midnight." As she stood in the doorway looking down at him, Catherine smiled. Vincent seemed to be deeply lost in thought. He didn't seem to know she was even there! "Hey, you were supposed to meet me an hour ago; the concert Chamber; remember." As he looked up to her, there were tears on his face. This frightened Catherine, "what is it, Vincent? What's wrong? Tell me! She went quickly to his side then reached up gently to wipe the tears away. "Vincent! What is it?" He held his hands out towards her, and put the small black horse tenderly into her lap and said nothing. He still couldn't speak.

Catherine smiled down at the worn little toy, stroked it and seemed to go back into the past; as if searching, looking for a thought, a remembrance that was hiding there. "Right before my mother died; on my birthday my father gave me a horse. In fact, I had two. One called Geronimo, the other.....". Vincent finished her sentence, "was called Midnight", and handed her the short faded note with shaking fingers. A thought hit him, Of Course! Catherine had lost her mother soon after she had given him the horse. Her child's memory of ANYTHING around that terrible, sad time would have been impaired! As she read, Catherine's eyes grew wide and her mouth dropped open in complete bewilderment. She read the note, and now, she remembered! "That child in the tunnel was you.. YOU! Oh my God!" She reached out and held his face between her small hands and repeated, "Vincent! Oh, my God, it was you I heard that night!" Vincent took her hands into his own, kissed her palms and held the cherished toy up to her; returned it to her. "Thank you, my love; for giving me "Midnight". I did, and still do, love that horse! I'm so glad to be able to give it now back to you, its rightful owner, at last! As she reached out her arms to him, Vincent put his head on Catherine's shoulder and held her tightly to his heart. "Thank you, "Princess". Then held her even harder to his soul and added, "Catherine",



Kiss of Promise

By

Patricia Anne Kehoe

His noble head of glistening auburn gold
lowers to me. Eyes dark with evening sky blaze;
call "surrender" all to his embrace.
Passionate yet innocent, he searches my soul
with his. Will I spurn his touch?
Silently, I give thanks to Gods for shadowed
darkness - that hides the yearning upon my face.

As I raise parted lips to his, those fierce
yet gentle hands surround, burning in crescendo
through my soul, to all I am.
We capture the others breath, taking the moist,
dark hunger there. Our mouths touch...he clasps
my flesh with trembling hand.

"Patience shall be its own reward", I somewhere
once read. Yet scorned with disbelief, the faith of
this!
Find confirmed this patience as he claims my passion
for his own, eternal. His strength consumes, pledges
"now".....with this promise of a kiss.

TUNNEL LIFE

Culinary Challenges

By

Patricia Anne Kehoe

As the tall, slim dark man walked towards the communal kitchen, the first thing he heard was a woman's voice - Devin knew that voice. It was Catherine, his brother's beloved wife. Married almost a year now, already! Jeez, where did time go? Dev heard a deep, raspy voice answer her, Vincent! He smiled as he let that voice wash over him; it was good to be home again! Vincent was discussing, quite loudly with Father, something about Williams menu tonight; something about spices and soup! Devin stood outside the kitchen a moment; listening and smiling. He heard Father's impatient tone as he continued the argument.

"I tell you, the soup must have saffron to be made correctly, Vincent! It is a most important ingredient!"

Isn't that so, William?" He turned to look at the heavyset man near the stove, awaiting his agreement. William was the best cook in the Tunnels, he would tell Vincent a thing or two! Father waited almost smugly with his arms folded over his chest and stared at Vincent.

William didn't seem to want to reply; that would mean choosing "sides" in this matter; he hated being in the middle. And, now this is exactly where Father had put him! He frowned, then turned to answer, "well, it really depends on WHERE you're from; the region and the country. In India, all chicken must be served with saffron, for example. In Italy, I rarely ever saw it used! To each his own, I suppose!"

Just as Father started to speak, Devin stuck his head through the doorway. "I agree with Father. The soup should have saffron!"

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After being greeted very warmly by all; especially Vincent, Dev was invited to sit and eat with them. Starving as usual, he agreed willingly; and waited licking his lips as William sat a steaming bowl of chicken soup and thick homemade bread before him on the table. "Here, this will fill you up! It's good to see ya, my man! Eat it while it's hot!"

Devin didn't need a second invitation. He took the spoon and ladled himself a heaping portion, blowing on it to cool it before putting it in his mouth. As Catherine, Vincent, Father and William patiently waited for him to eat, they spoke among themselves, but it was directed to Devin. Catherine smiled over at him. She had changed quite a bit in this last year. There was a look of peace in her eyes and on her face; a look of contentment. As there was on Vincent's face too, when Dev looked over... winked at him and then looked at Catherine. They were so much in love, it warmed him as he sat eating his soup and bread. Their love seemed to be growing all the time, filling each nook and cranny of the rooms here Below with light and happiness. Catherine held her hand out

towards her brother-in-law.

"So, what great adventures have you been into this past year? You could at least send a postcard now and then you know! Let a person know you're alive!"

She said this teasingly. She and Dev had a running joke about his lack of writing to his family; he hated writing. Even a postcard; he never knew what to say on the stupid things!

"Well, let's see...I was in Berlin when the Wall finally came down. I had a newspaper assignment near there, and when I heard the rumors, I hightailed it to Berlin. It was really something seeing that damned wall drop! Total strangers hugged and kissed; tears streaming down their faces without shame. Everybody was kissing everybody! I..I think I'm engaged to a blonde woman there! She kissed me twice! Ha!"

Vincent grinned as he listened to the conversation; his brother could always be counted on to make any gathering lively!

"So, Devin, what had brought you home after ONLY a year! Watch out, Father! I'll bet he needs clothes, or something!" Vincent turned to Father and seemed entirely serious. Those that knew him had more than once been the receiver of his dry wit. He said things at times with the innocence of a lamb. But, the words had the "bite" of a lion!

Father just nodded; agreeing with his youngest son with a twinkle in his eyes. Devin finished his soup, patted his stomach, and leaned forward on his elbow and pointed one finger in his brother's direction.

"That will be enough of that! I can always leave, again you know! Huh! Picking on his older brother, How's that for a welcome home present!" The words weren't out of his mouth a second when he stood and met his brother's arms reaching out across the table towards him. They hugged hard, looked at each other with great affection, then hugged again. Then Catherine also demanded a hug, then Father; finally William. Mary entered the room just as everyone was sitting down again.

"Devin! How good to see you! Why, it's almost a year, isn't it? Where have you been? What have you been up to? You should write.....!" Her voice trailed off and she looked to Jacob as Catherine yelled gleefully,

"See! I told you! You'd gatta write them letters, Dev!"

As Mary helped herself to a bowl of Williams' good soup, Pascal and Mouse entered the kitchen. They were, as usual, in heated debate over some project of Mouses'. When they saw Devin sitting there smiling up at them, both men went and with hugs and handshakes, also welcomed him home.

Pascal slapped him on the back heartily; very glad and surprised to see his friend again.

"How long have you been here? I didn't hear your return announced on the pipes, how did you manage that?"

Dev chuckled, "I bribed John not to ring me down". Wanted to surprise everyone. How are you, Pascal? And Callie?" Devin knew Pascal was in love for the first and only time in his life! Her name was Callie and she was from Above. They seemed very happy together, and always WERE together. Devin looked for her now.

"Where's Callie? Minding the pipes for you? Slave driver! Making a woman do that job isn't nice! Seriously, Pas', is she sick?"

Pascal just shook his head, "no-she's visiting Above. One of Helpers wives is expecting a baby soon; she's gone to help. You know how Callie is about kids!"

Mouse had hoped from one foot to the other as he waited for a break in the conversation to also say hi to Devin. He found an opening and barged in.

"Hello, Devin! Long time, no word. You okay? We are!"

Devin reached over and hugged Mouse; he never seemed to get any older, no matter how long it had been since Devin saw him. He never seemed to age. Maybe it had something to do with his mind, or his attitude. Whatever it was, Mouse seemed to be eternally young; Devin almost envied him.

"Oh, Lord! Look what the hell the cat dragged in now! We need a new cat, definately! Hi, you reprobate! Who's after you this time; cops or husbands?" It was Allegra, or "Llegs" as Devin called her; a friend from childhood. She was a doctor, but still spent her free time here in the tunnels with the only family she had ever known. She and Devin were good friends. With Vincent, they made up what Father had referred to the "the terrible trio" when young. They always got into one mess after another, even Vincent could not say no to "Llegs"! If she suggested a new game or a trip to "forbidden" areas, he usually went along. Vincent had insisted he went to protect she and Dev. Father hadn't pushed the point too much. Vincent had friends that loved him; that had been enough. But, there had been times.....!

Devin smiled as he took with a grimace the shot in the arm she aimed at him. "Ouch! Fatherrrrr, "Llegs" is hitting me, again!" He said this as he had many times years ago, dragging the words out until his voice, to Father, was nails on a black-board. Even now, Jacob could feel the hair raising on the back of his neck. Oh, No! He wasn't getting involved in this one! Father

looked at both of them over the rim of his coffee mug, sighed and shook his head at them. Devin insisted on calling Allegra that disconcerting name - "Llegs"; he knew Father cringed when he said it which is probably why, for over twenty years, he still used it!

"Allegra! Devin! Do you want to be sent to your rooms?"

Using his best Groucho Marx imitation, Devin cuddled her closer, retorting. "the same bedroom would be a lot better...yeh!"

Father gave up. Putting his cup into the sink, he smiled back to all the "children" looking over to him. Al and Dev stood arm in arm, Catherine sat across from her husband, holding his furred hands with her own. William, Pascal and Mouse stood near Mary waiting for some soup.

"William, the soup was extremely good; but I still say saffron would have added to the flavor! Devin, you have cooked in some of those, foreign, "fancy" hotels, what's your opinion?"

Vincent caught his brothers eye and grinned as only he could; Father was setting up some kind of trap for his oldest son. Vincent silently warned Dev - look out!

Devin answered slowly, knowing what Father was doing. "Well, I will have to agree with you, Father. Chicken soup and broth is tastier with saffron, but....".

He didn't get a chance to even finish his sentence before William verbally "jumped" all over him. "What do you mean.. "TASTIER"! My soup is legendary throughout the tunnels, and Above too! The expert here! Think he knows EVERYTHING! Mr. "Gourmet"! Why, I'll stack my cooking up against yours, ANYDAY and twice on Sundays."

Devin raised an eyebrow at him, "gee, home twenty minutes and already in trouble. I'm sorry, William; you're a good cook. You don't need me to tell you that." William seemed mollified until Devin added, JUST loud enough to be heard, "it's just that I happen to be a BETTER one!"

*

Vincent and Catherine had been watching and listening with amusement at this exchange and saw William's face grow very RED! OH, OH. Trouble! He stood and gently pulled Catherine with him; Vincent wanted no part of this! "We will say goodnight now. It's rather late; Catherine has to work tomorrow and I myself am getting sleepy. Goodnight. William, Devin? Please try not to KILL each other before I can have breakfast with you? Goodnight, all." Catherine added her voice to his, took his hand and leaned into his gentle embrace as they left for their Chamber. As they walked slowly down the corridor she smiled up at him. "It's good to have him home, isn't it, my love? Father would never admit it, but I think he sometimes misses Devin more than he acknowledges aloud, don't you?"

Her husband shook his head vigorously, "yes, I'm sure of it. It's almost as though Father is trying to make up to Devin all the pain of childhood each time he sees him again. It is good to see them getting along at last! He pulled her tighter into his arms. "Maybe now that I'M finally off Fathers' mind constantly, he has more time to think of those days, and perhaps feel a bit of guilt. And, just between you and I, I think he should be a little contrite at how merciless he was at times when dealing with Devin. Almost overcompensating; being harsher with him, because he was his blood son. It hurt to watch, Catherine; and hurts still to remember some of those days."

She poked his great chest teasingly, "yeh, Father has lots more time; now that you're OCCUPIED with...other things!"

Just at the entrance to their Chamber, Vincent gathered his wife into his massive arms, "occupied? Or drugged? I will get enough of you someday, Catherine. In about a thousand years!" With that he lowered his mouth to his loves' and carried her across the threshold, and to bed.

Well, breakfast was unusual, to say the least! As Vincent, Catherine, and Father entered, William and Devin were again or was it STILL in debate! Devin had thrown down the gauntlet, was now waiting for William to pick it up.

"Well, William? What do you say? A contest! Just you and me. We'll put two bowls on the table. Everyone can put a piece of paper with their favorite dish on it there and we'll have someone, ummm..Mouse pick one from the main dish bowl and one from the dessert bowl. Sound fair to you?"

"Maybe. Who'll judge this cooking contest? I want this fair, now. Not one of the girls who still go all MOONY when you're around! Maybe, Father for the Main dish and Vincent for the dessert; he loves sweets! How's that?"

"Agreed".

Vincent had tried to make himself ^{HEARD} over their voices; he lost. Catherine hugged him, "so, Mr. Judge. you get to pick the dessert winner, huh? And I get to let out the seams on your clothes when you get fat from all that sugar! Oh, stop scowling! You're not scaring anybody...you teddybear! You know they picked you because you are ALWAYS impartial and don't really lie well at all!"

He lowered his mouth to his wifes ear', "I'm thinking of running away from home, Catherine. At my age! They've put me right in the middle of all this after all! GAAHHH!"

By noontime the next day, all the ballots were in and it was time for Mouse to pick the main dish and dessert. Dev, Allegra, Catherine, Vincent and Father watched as Mouse put in his hand and pulled out one folded square of paper from the first bowl and handed it to William as Devin peeked over his shoulder. Devin was delighted! The main dish was to be one of his favorite dishes to prepare - Chili. Then he remembered, Father despised chili. Oh. Shit! Trouble! He watched Father and Vincent closely as the main course was announced to all present by Pascal.

"The main course had been chosen. It will be a cook-off on the best chili maker."

Father said nothing, but his jaw seemed about to drop to his knees, CHILI! Oh, nooooo! If it had not been so important to maintain his decorum in front of his "family", Jacob could have cried from disappointment. He had hoped for a dish to tease his palate; perhaps a ragout or seafood melange. But, chili? The one dish that did not ever agree with him! He just looked over to Vincent, and shrugged. Vincent whispered to Catherine when she asked why Father looked so miserable all of a sudden.

"Catherine, Father loathes Chili; he always had ..um... problems eating it". Vincent was trying to say it as delicately as possible; Catherine didn't seem to understand yet. He sighed and added,

"Chili...gives...Father...what...is known topside as the runs.....".

Catherine held her hand to her mouth as she widened her eyes and whispered back.

"Can't he just refuse and had someone else be judge of this part of the contest? Maybe you could switch; you take the main dish and give Father the dessert. Would that be okay?"

Before Vincent could offer her idea to Father, the dessert choice was announced.

"The pick for dessert has been chocolate cake with chocolate frosting".

Everyone smiled over to where Vincent sat knowing this would be great! His favorite ANYTHING was chocolate! Vincent even when quite young, could be coaxed into doing many things he did NOT want to do with a piece of chocolate! He still could!

Catherine saw her husband start to whisper to Father just before the dessert was announced; then sit back down when he heard the word "chocolate". She poked him in the ribs,

"Well? Go ahead; offer to trade with him. Your poor

Father can't eat something that will make him ill. Do it, Vincent! Offer to trade."

Catherine knew he was reluctant to give up the idea of a chocolate orgy! She never before had seen such a turmoil of VALUES clicking in and out of her husbands' mind as he fought off the urge to be selfish and keep the dessert!! He was rescued when Father leaned over to HIM and said,

"I know you will want to trade with me, Vincent; just out of kindness. But, I will do as I promised and judge what they have picked. It could have easily gone the other way. I could have gotten something I loved and you something you despised. No, we will each keep our bargains, my son. I will eat the... chili. Just be sure to have a bed ready for me in the hospital chamber afterwards, all right?"

Vincent swallowed whatever he had been ABOUT to say and merely nodded to Father. Catherine was looking at her husband.. HARD! HAD he been going to offer an exchange? She probably would never find out, now! As she looked over and caught her husbands eye, she KNEW. Vincent had not been going to offer to trade; he was going to let his poor Father eat Chili and keep the chocolate for himself. She was stunned, and giggled to him.

"Now, wasn't that nice of Father? And you just about to offer the exchange! Well, now".

He looked at her and knew her thoughts. Vincent couldn't quite meet her eyes; he felt like a boy who had been caught stealing from the cookie jar. He felt and looked guilty as hell as he tugged lightly on Fathers' sleeve.

"Perhaps we should trade; you know your aversion to chili, Father. Is it wise....."?

Father patted his sons' hand and smiled at him. Vincent was always generous as a child and still had the same nature.

"No, I will stick to the agreement and eat what they give me. Now, let's change the subject before I change my mind!"

So, the battle lines were drawn. William would have the kitchen from 8 a.m. until noon. Devin from one til five. The meals preparation would be supervised by impartial judges. William would have Mary looking over his shoulder, Dev would Catherine looking over his. As people left the kitchen still talking amongst themselves of the meal, Devin joined his family and sat down with a thud.

"Well, we're all set, huh? Now, if I can just find the recipe I used for chili in Texas, I'll be sure to win! As

good a cook as William is, the Texas chili can't be topped! See you later, I've got lots of shopping to do..."

As he left, Catherine commented to Father and Vincent,

"Dev has a big surprise coming to him when he comes in later to cook; I can't be his supervisor! If Vincent is a judge, it's not fair for me to also be in this contest, don't you think I'm right, Father?"

Allegra had joined them just at the end of that statement. She grinned to Cathy as though knowing what would be suggested next. Cathy didn't disappoint her!

"I think, if it's okay with Al and everyone, she could take over the job of keeping Dev honest. How about it?"

Father got up from the table and went over to William; who was sitting and making up a food list. Most of the ingredients he would be needing were well stocked in this kitchen. But, he did need Vanilla andtabasco sauce.

"William.....".

At one fifteen, Dev rushed through the corridors; he was late! That chili had to be cooked at LEAST three hours and he had to start the cake so it would be cool enough to frost later. He dropped his packages to the table and turned to what he thought was Catherine sitting against the far wall with a cup of coffee in her hand. He looked again and did a double-take. It wasn't Cathy, it was Allegra! How had this happened? Al would drive him nuts; he couldn't cook with her here! She smiled prettily at him.

"Hi, Dev. Weren't expecting me, huh? WELL, here I am, anyway. SURPRISE."

She explained that Catherine didn't feel it fair for BOTH she and Vincent to be in this "food fight", and had offered Allegra as her fill-in. With Al's agreement!

Dev frowned and answered with a snort...

"Looks like I have no choice. What happened to my vote? I wanted Catherine; she doesn't TALK all the time like you!" Promise you'll let me get this done without constant harrassing, will you, PLEEEZZZZE?"

Allegra got up to put her cup in the sink and turned to Dev with her hand over her heart.

"My solemn oath. Not one word while you're getting things set. Okay, brat?"

As he tied on his apron and dug into the cabinets for bowls, his muffled voice could be heard calling out to her,

"Brat yourself! Just stay the hell out of the way, woman!"

Allegra just lifted one eyebrow and said nothing. She knew something Dev did not. Well, now she wouldn't TELL him, so there! As he found all the pots and pans he was digging for, he started in.... He cut up the meat and other ingredients for the chili; real Texas chili had NO beans in it. He wondered if William knew that! After all the meat was ready, he put a lid on the pot and turned for the stove. Putting out his hand he leaned forward to put the chili on the larger rear burner.

"Aw, shit! This damn stove is HOT! I burnt my fingers on the front burner. Damn! "Llegs, why didn't you tell me?"

She repeated her earlier remark as Dev danced around the room, blowing on his fingers and running them under cold water.

"You asked me not to HARRASS you. I promised to keep my WOMANS' mouth shut, didn't I? Well....it's your own fault. And, NEVER FOR AS LONG AS YOU DRAW BREATH, use that tone of voice and call me WOMAN again, or the next chili you make will be for Lucifer himself! Come here, MACHO MAN; let me see how badly you've burned you wittle pingers."

He held out his hand grinning; he knew Al wasn't really mad at him. They had always fought, much to Fathers' distress and had been rather a trial on his patience for quite a few years. He had finally told them that those who fought the hardest usually LOVED each other the most! This and this alone STOPPED all fighting for quite a while.

*

In their Chamber, Catherine and Vincent were sitting together on the couch trying to finish the last of a Sunday Times crossword puzzle. She was sitting yoga fashion and chomping on the end of her pencil as she tried to think of a six letter word for gentle breeze that started with "z" and ended in "r"; she was stumped! Vincent looked across to her; she looked so comfortable in that position, and completely adorable. Her hair was drawn up in a ponytail, her face was sans all makeup and her forehead was all wrinkled as she tried to think. He wondered if that yoga position was as comfortable as it looked? There wasn't enough room on the couch to try it, so Vincent lowered himself to the floor and began bending his long, muscular legs first one way, then another. His grunts of exertion finally caught his wives' attention. She looked up from the puzzle.

"May I ask what the heck you're trying to do? Why are you on the floor, for Petes' sakes? Vincent?"

He was contorting his face and trying his best to get his legs folded like hers.

"I wanted to try that position you're in; but I.....can't seem...to...". He growled with impatience as he looked up at her with pleading in his eyes. "Help?"

With a laugh, Catherine lowered herself beside him and tried to show him how to cross his legs properly.

"Now. Start with the left. Yeh, Like that. Now, bring this foot over that leg, and ...". Vincent!"

He had the position! But, Catherine looked in pain as she cried out his name again louder than before.

"What is it, my love? Look! I've done it!"

Yeh! You've DONE IT all right! My hand is caught between your legs...you're breaking my fingersssssss. OWWWWW!"

With that, Catherine pushed her husband to the left; he found to his horror, his legs would not unlock! Catherine had noticed his predicament and was now pushing him and pulling him back and forth like a childs' roly-poly toy and screaming with delight.

"Wheeee. Look at you go. I should get the kids in here to play with you! WHEEEEE!"

Vincent was not PLEASED. He looked to his wife, and narrowed his eyes as he glared at her. Oh, so she thought this was funny, did she?

"If you don't get me out of this, I'll tell Father who mixed his favorite maroon shirt in with whites and bleached it out last week. YOU!"

"But, I didn't do it; I wasn't even in the laundry room then!"

"I know that...but HE doesn't! I mean it, I'll tell him it was you, not Mouse and Jamie as he had thought. I WILL!"

Throwing herself into his lap and unlocking his legs, she giggled at the picture he had been; a great big roly-poly toy!

"You looked so cute! When we have children will you do that position again? Such a BIG TOY!"

Saying this, she rested her hand on his inner thigh and looked

up into his face with all the innocence of an angel. He leered at her, teeth glittering in the candle light of their Chamber as he sought her mouth with his, whispering,

"If it's a big toy you seek, come here wife!"

Catherine went quite willingly into his arms; this husband of hers had sure come a long way in a year! Yes, indeed!

At 8 p.m., the guests were seated in the kitchen, awaiting their judges. At last, Father and Vincent entered the room, accompanied by Mary and Catherine. Devin and William walked over to them nudging and teasing each other like small children.

"You touched me first!"

"Did not; you touched me!"

"Did not either."

"Did! I'M TELLING!"

Father yelled.....out of patience with these two now, and not looking forward to this meal.

"If you two don't stop, and I mean right now, the contest is off! Now, let's get to it!"

William explained how, in fairness, they had worked out how to serve one helping of each and yet keep the meals separated as to which was which.

"Father, Dev will put one bowl in front of you at a time. They are identical, but the pots the food is from has been marked with tape on the bottom; one with my name and the other with Devs'. Do you understand? Taste both, then you declare the winner.

Father was impatient to get this over with.

"OF COURSE I UNDERSTAND! What do you take me for, a ninny? Let's get on with this; everyone else is waiting to eat, you .. realize?"

As the first bowl was proffered, Jacob looked as though it would bite him as he took it, placed it gingerly onto the table and picked his spoon; it DID SMELL good, anyway! Then he tasted it; this would be a great dish if only it agreed with his stomach. The flavor was perfect, the sauce just spicy enough. Entirely, a good dish of Chili! Then, Devin placed the second dish before him. He tasted; the same reaction. Delicious! How was he going to choose between these!

Mary now joined the people surrounding the table and watched with interest as Jacob took second and then thirds from each bowl pondering and smacking his lips as though reaching a decision. He started to speak,

"I declare the winner is.....,mmmph!"

Devin had placed his hand completely over his Fathers' mouth;

"No! Not yet! First, let Vincent judge the cake; then you and he can announce both winners together! Okay? OUCH!"

Father had bitten Devins' fingers; the burnt ones!

"Never do that again! You startled the wits out of me, grabbing my face like that from behind me. REALLY!"

As Father got up and desperately poured himself a gigantic glass of milk in hopes of soothing his stomach before it could REACT; Vincent took his place at the table and waited with eyes gleaming for his chocolate cake. Devin brought one dish to him. Vincent gasped, the frosting looked about four inches thick - YEH! He dug in and tried to talk as he chewed. This was almost impossible as the frosting was sticking to the roof of his mouth.

"thith is goodth! Will thumbody get me thum wawer, please?"

Catherine interpreted this mumble correctly and handed him a large glass of water as he looked at her thankfully. This was delicious, but the frosting was too thick! He proceeded to the final piece. Ah, this was better! The frosting looked just about right, and there were fresh strawberries on top - yum! He dug his fork into this with a vengeance, chewed thoughtfully, and finished, or rather demolished the piece of cake quickly. He had chosen. He turned to Father with a question:

"Are you ready to announce the winning chef? Yes? Okay, you first."

Father cleared his throat; he wanted to get this over with so he could GO DIE for the rest of the night; the chili was already burning a hole from his stomach to his knees; he could FEEL it!

"The winning chili was very hard to chose, very hard. I want this fact made very clear before I proceed. The second bowl was just a bit, A BIT, more savory than the first. JUST A BIT, mind you!"

Now, Vincent took his turn.

"The winning piece of cake was also the second one. The choosing, was as Father says, very difficult. Well, get the pans, let's see who won!"

Mary tapped Vincent on the shoulder; a look of puzzlement on her gentle face.

"Why do you need the pans, Vincent?"

He turned and explained how the judging and choosing had been done, and saw a look of astonishment, then embarrassment on her face as she exclaimed,

"But, I...I washed all the pans while people were waiting for you to judge! I felt the tape on the bottom and removed it. I thought someone had just...just...left it there! Oh, my! What have I done? I'm so sorry! William, Devin? I'm sorry!"

William and Devin looked at each other frowning. Then wrapped their arms around each other and then screamed with laughter til their ribs-ached. Now, the greatest CHEF would remain a mystery! Both were secretly glad of this! They were friends and neither wanted the other to be the loser, if the truth were told!

Father nudged Vincent in the side, whispering,

"Do you mean to tell me I went through this TORTURE for nothing! I'm...I'm.....appalled!"

His son couldn't answer; his mouth was full of the last of his cake. Finally wiping his face with a napkin, he turned his attention to his Father, and said in a teasing voice,

"I could tell them to redo this match tomorrow night, if you wish me to?"

Jacob looked at his son with daggers for eyes - go through this AGAIN! NO!

"No! Be quiet! If you say one word, you'll...you'll EAT that napkin in your hand. I promise this!"

Catherine and Allegra had been standing behind Father listening to all of this. Al turned to Cathy.

"Wanna know a secret, Cath?"

"What?"

"Even IF Mary hadn't taken the tape off the pans, we still wouldn't know the winner! I switched the tapes! SHHH!"

Catherine bit her lip to keep from roaring. Allegra had switched the tapes; if Devin or William ever found out! Especially, DEVIN! She leaned over and whispered in Allegra's ear,

"I'll take your secret to the grave! And, if I EVER DO have a need to blackmail you, well!"

They held hands and giggled as they sat to eat their supper.

*

At ten o'clock, the four of them sat drinking a glass of wine in Vin and Cath's Chamber. Allegra patted Devin on the arm and said with GREAT sympathy,

"Imagine, after all your hard work cooking. Now, we'll never know who IS the greatest chef here, will we? I've saved the last of the two cakes for you and Vincent. Want it now?"

Devin nodded.

"Yes, thanks. I never did get to have any! The children over-ran me like a pack of wild Indians. I thought all the dessert was gone! Gee, you were good to save this much. Vin, want yours now?"

His brother just moaned. Catherine answered for him.

"I think Vincent has had enough cake for one night. Yes, my love?"

He looked over at her with distress written all over his leonine face. He was stuffed!

"I may never eat cake again; at least til tomorrow!"

He didn't seem aware that Dev had quietly gotten behind his little brother with two fingers full of frosting!

"Hey, bro!"

"Yes?"

Devin swiped at Vincent with the frosting, smushing some of it on his nose,

"Here! For the chocolate connoisseur!"

Vincent jumped to his feet reaching for Devin and the other piece of cake in one quick movement. Grabbing his brother in almost a bearhug, he rubbed the cake on his face, thoroughly!

"Join, me, BRO!"

It was at this moment that Father called from the entranceway.

"You can hear the racket you people are making all the way down to the pipe Chamber! What is going on in here! Devin, Vincent; why are you all cake? NEVER MIND! I don't want to know!"

As he sat, Catherine offered him a glass^{of} wine. He took it gratefully, his stomach could probably use a bit of soothing. He wondered how the wine would mix with the bottle of Pepto he had taken!

"Ah, it's good to relax at last. Vincent, Devin. For pity's sake - go wash your faces!. Really, they'll never grow up!"

As Dev and Vincent went to do as they were ORDERED, Dev was saying something only his brother could hear. When they came back into the room, they had the same innocent look they always wore as children; just before getting into some devilement or another. They sat down by the ladies and nonchalantly began gathering up all the feather pillows on the couch and chairs. Devin stood suddenly and swung a thick, stuffed pillow at "Llegs."

"PILLOWFIGHT !"

He clouted her quite fiercely just before she could duck; she jumped up yelling,

"Cathy, come on! Help me, this is WAR!"

Before CathMerine could move, Vincent, her quiet, calm, courteous husband bounced a pillow off her head, and backed up smiling as she got to her feet and glared at him as she reached out for the pillow.

"OKAY! Let's see who gets who!"

With that she began chasing her husband round and round the small table in the middle of the room. Al had tripped Devin. She now sat straddled across him, thumping him again and again as she yelled triumphantly.

"Hah! That'll show you who to hit! Take that, and that!"

By now Catherine had backed Vincent into a corner of the room and was approaching him menacingly, slowly with the largest of the pillows. He realized suddenly it was his FAVORITE pillow!

"Catherine, not that one! No! That's the one I like the most; it's nice and firm. Not that one, please?"

The last word he said, "please" was muffled as the pillow whacked him in the mouth - thump. He reached up quickly and tried to grab it tightly to his chest; protecting it as a small child would protect a "wovey" blanket. He growled as Catherine yelled for Allegra, then Devin to HELP HER! The last thing Devin did before going to his BROTHERS' aid was throw a pillow at "Llegs". She ducked this one; Father didn't. It caught him square in the nose.

"Stop this, instantly! Will you four never grow up? This is too much, too much. The entire day has been one disaster after another. Stop it, I say!"

Al and Cathy were pulling the pillow from Vincent; as Devin helped him hang onto it. Vincent was only using half of his strength in fairness to the others. They all knew if he REALLY wanted to keep the pillow; he would. Just as Father walked towards them to demand again that they DESIST; the ripping could

be heard even over the yelling. The pillow burst; showering everyone with goosefeathers. Father got the brunt of it! The four just looked at each other and began slowly, backing away from him.... He was so mad, he was stuttering and sputtering the feathers from his mouth and nose both at the same time.

"This...I...You...Never. GOD DAMN IT!"

Vincent looked at Catherine, mouth gaping. Dev did the same to Allegra; Father had used profanity! They were in deep shit!

Jacob said very softly....too softly,

"all of you...sit down and be still, now...."

They obeyed like they knew they better had! They huddled closely together on the couch as he walked towards them. He spun around suddenly, grabbed the torn pillow and began beating them over the heads with it,

"Hit me with feathers, will you! Two can play at this game!"

Minutes later, he collapsed laughing into a chair and looked at his children. They were still in shock. Jacob smiled. HE WON!

★

The next morning Father sat in his Chamber reading. He looked up from his book and listened thankfully to the silence of the tunnels. Al and Dev had gone to the movies. Vincent and Catherine had taken a trip "spelunking; going down to the furthest corners of the crystal caves exploring. All was quiet finally; he sipped his tea and sighed. A yell from the doorway tipped his arm and the tea landed in his lap. It was hot! Jacob had burned something he wished he had't as he jumped to his feet, ready to chastise severely whomever had made him to this! It was William; he looked positively indignant.

"Father, where is your son Devin? I'm gonna break his bones! Do you know what he left on my pillow? I HATE little notes on my pillow and he left me one. HIS CHICKEN SOUP RECIPE!" Jacob sat back down and shook his head.....

Remember?

By

Patricia Anne Kehoe

Remember? When life was new, still virgin universe?
Strange yet loving creatures roamed the land of
our forgotten dreams.

We, the human, drove them out, remember? Used
furies, bigotry, killed all we found. They
did not fit our world, our schemes.

Faraway, in the depth of their despair, some clung
to life tenaciously, til there were only three.
Male, female, and the child they bore through
courage, innocent.

Now.....only child survives; strives to deal with
human frailties, cries "remember?" Carries his love
and honor alone now.
We call him Vincent.

SAINT VINCENTS HOSPITAL

