

A Dark and Stormy Night

by Angie

*“But, it was a little different tonight.
There was a feeling of autumn coming to last a million years.”*

Ray Bradbury (Long After Midnight)



Vincent looked out at the park from the scanty protection of the culvert. The wind was blowing a gale and snow was swirling so thickly that the city – in fact anything more than 30 feet away - was invisible. Even though it was still daylight, it was grey and dull. It was a Monday, but Catherine wasn't at work because the roads were impassable. She could not really hate any weather that resulted in a 'snow day' and let her spend time in the tunnels.

He could not remember a Halloween, ever, like this. He sighed deeply.

He wondered how he would tell the children that this Halloween they would not be able to go above. The storm, even if it stopped immediately, would effectively shut down virtually all events in the Park.

Catherine, standing beside him, bundled up and trying to stay out of the wind, guessed at his thoughts. Then she had an inspiration. She had a lot of candy stocked up, along with apples, oranges and peanuts in the shell, which she had been planning to bring down to the tunnels anyhow. She touched his arm and he looked at her, his face sad. Then she told him her idea and he nodded and looked happier.

“Why didn't I think of that?” he berated himself.

“Because you aren't a child at heart, perhaps?” Catherine suggested. “Or at least you don't like treats as much as I do.”

“That would be impossible,” Vincent agreed, grinning down at her.

Catherine hit him playfully on the arm and they turned back to the relative warmth of the tunnels.

The plan was put to Father, who had Pascal announce the weather report and then the new

plan for the evening. There were whoops of joy from the children, who had heard of the weather above and been somewhat downcast all day. Before long, hours before the sun – such as it was - set, there were children running around the tunnels in their costumes, unable to wait until the official witching hour. Father, however, was adamant that the festivities wouldn't start until 7 pm, when supper was over.

Catherine, returning to Vincent's chamber after the meal, helped him prepare. Pascal announced the time, and within seconds, someone used the knocker on Vincent chamber doorway, and a high voice yelled "Trick or Treat". He looked at Catherine and smiled.

"And what is your 'trick'?", Vincent asked his visitor, curious. Just who was supposed to 'trick' had always been an open question. Vincent was ready with some riddles, if anyone asked.

Samantha, though, liked to show off and did a tap dance, whirling around the white streamers that comprised her 'ragged ghost' costume until she resembled the wild wind in the world above. When she stopped, out of breath, Vincent smiled at her.

"Impressive," he chuckled. "Our very own whirling dervish." He handed her a candy bar and some peanuts from their bowl.

They had many visitors that night, as did every chamber in the tunnel community. Tricks and treats were received and given, making the tunnels, for a while, a very noisy place. By the time 9 pm rolled around, both the treaters and their patrons had had enough and were more than willing to join the traditional story-telling in Father's chamber.

The atmosphere was perfect, as the many candles flickered in the errant – and chilly draughts blowing through the tunnels. Everyone was bundled up in blankets because the brazier was inadequate. Nevertheless, with so many people in even the vast library, were enough to give some sense of warmth, if only because of the company.

They were all feeling mellow as Father paused at the end of a story to take a few well-earned sips of his tea, when a tromping outside the chamber made everyone look up.

Devin walked in, red-faced from the cold and obviously soaked to the skin.

"Now I remember why I dislike living in a hole in the ground," he grouched, throwing his coat onto the nearest rack, then sitting down on the top step to try and pull off a couple of very wet leather construction boots. Vincent got up to help him when it became obvious his footwear was reluctant. Cullen moved quickly to anchor Devin while Vincent pulled one after the other off with a wet squelch. The socks followed and Vincent found a towel and put it to use trying to warm his brother's feet. Devin grimaced as the circulation returned.



"Chandler wasn't home, and the phones don't seem to be working, and most of the street

lights are out as well," he continued.

"Well, Devin, it is Halloween, and the middle of a snowstorm," Father remarked. "What did you expect?"

Devin looked around, apparently taking in the costumes for the first time.

"Is it? I lost track of the days someplace between France and New York. There were delays, re-routings, hours on the tarmac, and when we finally landed, I had to pay three times the going rate for a taxi. And he refused to drive into Chinatown or Central Park, so I had to walk overland from Fifth Avenue in the dark. Didn't see a soul!"

"Ah, so you didn't come to see us then?" Father queried.

"Well, of course I did. But I thought I'd be here long before now."

"You could have sent a message, you know," Father chided him.

"You'd better sit by the brazier, Devin," Mary told him, handing him a blanket before he could phrase retort to the implied rebuke. He was beginning to shiver.

"I suggest you have a hot bath too," Vincent added.

"Now that is a suggestion I could agree to," Father stated. "Would you mind if I joined you, Devin?"

"If you'll bring that bottle of brandy I know you have and something warm to put it in, I'd even welcome the resident spook," Devin declared.

Father's eyebrows shot up. "Spook, Devin? I wasn't aware we had any."

Devin looked around. "There seems to be a few of them in this room, but I suspect a bath is not among their plans."

"NO!" came a chorus of children's voices.

Father stood up. "I think I will depart with Devin now. I believe William has collected the leftover treats, if you go to the dining hall. I wish everyone a very good night."

There was a chorus of goodbyes and good wishes as the tunnel folk departed. Father rooted around in his wardrobe and produced a small bottle. He tapped out a request for a pot of tea and two cups to be brought to the hot pool, aware that there would be no problem finding a courier for this small deed, especially if the reward was a treat. Then he and Devin left the library arm-in-arm.

Vincent and Catherine, who had remained behind to make sure all the candles were out but the one sturdy one lit for Father's return, left in their turn.

"Wonders will never cease," Catherine commented softly. "Father and Devin agreeing to do something together."

"It's an ill snowstorm on Halloween that brings no one any good," Vincent misquoted outrageously.

Catherine groaned. "I think I prefer to snuggle under about a foot of blankets. Think we can manage that?"

"I'm sure I have almost enough," Vincent chuckled.

The tunnels quieted quickly as everyone headed for the warmth of their own chambers and braziers.

The 'resident ghost', however, was annoyed. The one night of the year when he could roam

abroad in the city he loved, and play a few tricks, and there had to be a snowstorm! And the tunnels seemed even more boring than the world above. Everyone would be sound asleep before midnight! How could he hope to have any fun with no observers?

He petulantly took a piece of chalk out of his pocket and drew caricatures on what smooth surfaces existed on the walls. Warming to the task, he kept his chalk busy for several hours. He didn't neglect a nice patch of smooth wall next to the hot pool and drew both Father and Devin 'in their cups', dressed in nothing but towels.

Let them wonder who had done these, Kristopher chuckled, as dawn approached and he would have to make himself invisible again. That would show them!



With a final flourish, he wrote 'Happy Halloween' outside Vincent's chamber, along with a cheeky representation of the couple now snuggled in the big be. He drew their feet sticking out of a mountain of blankets, and two lumps which left little doubt about what they were doing.

Not such a bad night after all, he decided, before being carried away by a particularly wild draught. He allowed himself a bit of demented laughter as he left.

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