

A Thinking Man

by Angie

(for Rebecca Board)

There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

- William Shakespeare

Author's note: This story was written in March 2010, but my editors felt that the premise was too improbable, so it was never posted online. I gave the story to Becca, but asked her not to reveal the author. I am now letting readers decide.

This story is written strictly for the free enjoyment of fans of the "Beauty and the Beast" television series (1987-1991) No copyright infringement is intended.

Elliot sat at the big desk in his office with the blinds closed, his hands steepled in front of his face. This was where his dreams had grown into reality. All but one – and that one required some thought.

He had always been able to dream big, and did not hesitate to cross the line into grey legal areas where necessary. No one in his position could avoid it, but a personal element had been introduced into his biggest project, and both that and his project had failed spectacularly. He wanted to know why.

Despite his ability to see details within the big picture, he had missed something critical in his relationship with Catherine Chandler. He had underestimated her completely. It bothered him. From that first glance across the art gallery, he had known she was special. Not much later, he had realized he was experiencing something he'd never expected in his position – love. He had not misread the signs – of that he was sure. The attraction had been mutual. She shared his passion for New York – and she had returned his kisses with interest.

Then it had started to go wrong – and had become worse. Someone had come between her and himself – another man, undoubtedly. Why then had she seemed to return his love in those early days? Had she met this man already, but was uncommitted? He knew what had ultimately opened her eyes – his own folly, at letting his lawyer work without oversight to accomplish what he wanted. He couldn't deny he wanted those old people moved and the building demolished – and he had not asked how that would be done. His dream had been the most important thing to him then.

Catherine Chandler had a secret – that much was certain. He decided he had to know what that secret was. He was not prone to analyzing his failures, but he couldn't let the mystery continue. He figured he had all the clues – he just had to put them together. Tonight he was going to go over their relationship in his mind.

Somehow Cathy had discovered that thugs on his payroll had been trying to strong-arm the elderly tenants in that building he wanted demolished. How would she have found out about that? The DA's office did not deal in such trivia, as a rule. Had someone in the building complained to the DA? No, that was unlikely. They were all poor and elderly and that generation did not look to authority for help. There was only one way she could have been made aware of the fact – someone had seen something and reported to Cathy directly. That someone must either patrol the alleys at night or know people who did.

Somehow, someone always knew the dirt. That was a lesson he knew well. This mystery man was undoubtedly the one who had told her, however he came by the information. He must also have been someone special to her – someone she would help, even on her own time. That explained her dedication – and her anger at what she discovered.

Elliot thought over what he knew of that distasteful episode. Once he had realized Cathy was on to him – even though he had not been aware of the details - he had called in his lawyer and the hired thug and grilled them. As a result, he'd been able to pinpoint the beginning of his woes with Cathy. The trouble had apparently started after two punks had tried to firebomb a basement where an old guy had been playing a piano. Not very subtle and not something he would have condoned had he been consulted. Her hero was perhaps a music lover – or a relative of someone in that building. The fire had been put out by some mysterious means – and now that he thought about it, Cathy's friend might have had a hand in that too.

He had found out that Cathy had been talking to two people in particular there, a couple who had survived the Holocaust – the ones who most vocally refused to accept his offer to move them. That old man was probably the piano player.

Then there had been the final attempt by the hired thugs to oust the tenants once and for all, beginning with the troublemakers. That had been an abject failure. Not only had they not discouraged anyone, they had met hard resistance and been unexpectedly routed - and all had died. That had rid him of the trouble of doing it himself, but the way they had died was interesting. The henchman had fallen - or been pushed - out a second storey window and the other two had been violently assaulted. These were all big men, so the guy who attacked them had to have been immensely strong – and apparently used no weapons but his hands. The coroner's report said nothing about knife or gunshot wounds. The thugs had simply been thrown against the walls at high velocity.

So he had lost that battle, and Cathy, because he was not the benevolent patron of the arts she had assumed. She would never trust him fully again. He had let her down badly.

He had not expected to see her again after that episode – but he had.

That circumstance was even odder than the first. She had asked for his help, for a list of supplies, and then refused to give him an explanation. The equipment she wanted, as he had quipped at the time, was primarily used for hard rock excavations. She had been frantic – that was plain. Someone she cared about was in grave danger and she needed the stuff to help them. That implied there were other people involved, somehow. At any rate, she had picked up what she wanted - he had checked later - and given no explanation to him, then or ever.

At the time, he had known every construction site in New York – and there was no way they could be the cause of her crisis. Yet, she had come in a hurry from somewhere nearby. He had not thought much about it at the time, but there was only one place in New York where such materials might be needed – below ground.

There were tunnels dug into the hard bedrock of New York. Everyone in construction knew about them, discovered them on occasion as the footings and foundations for new buildings were excavated. Their extent was not generally discussed, and probably something of a mystery, except to retired public works crews. Elliot knew the tunnels were very old – from the last century - and that they had been used to maintain the geothermal steam pipes that had once heated New York. Maintenance had become just too expensive. The city had closed off the tunnels and switched to more modern means of heat and power generation decades ago.

Perhaps there were some social misfits living in those old tunnels – and one had collapsed. It wasn't unlikely. There had been hints, over the years, that some of the tunnels had been sealed off to prevent curiosity-seekers from getting injured. Anyone living in that network would probably encourage the closures – might even do it themselves and spread rumours about danger. That's what he would do, in their position.

Ok, so there were people living down there – and Cathy's friend was one of them. That man they had caught at the Burch Tower building site, the one that had asked for her by name – he must be one of the people she was protecting! Not her boyfriend, he was pretty sure - but someone important to him, perhaps. Now he wished he had gone with Cathy to release the man, to see for himself who they had captured. Hadn't he been carrying plastic explosives? Was this the man who had made up Cathy's shopping list? Were those plastic explosives part of the supplies he himself had authorized to Cathy?

Looks could be deceiving. The man obviously knew what he was about, although his motives were murky. His security had not doubted his ability to carry out the sabotage.

His security had been sure the man was working alone. So how had Cathy arrived in his office just as he was being told of the intruder? Someone must have witnessed the arrest - someone so careful his security had not seen him. Elliot guessed it had been Cathy's friend again. No one else seemed to get such instant action. He suspected the man they caught had known a great deal that would be dangerous to her friend. Cathy had been verging on the frantic – she had begged him to release the man and promised there would be no more trouble from him. Obviously, she knew she could make that promise. Indeed, there had been no more unexplained intrusions.

Where had she taken the man? How did one get to where these misfits were living? The entrances must be well hidden, perhaps inside buildings. A lot of old New York buildings had deep basements.

His next meeting with Cathy had been in the DA's office, regarding the sabotage on his Burch Tower project site. She had not seemed upset at that time, so she had not realized the implications of his project until after that meeting. His tower needed deep roots, so the preliminary blasting must have been causing havoc in the tunnels below it - but Cathy only learned this after their initial meeting. So, she didn't visit that place often, or her boyfriend had not wanted to tell her.

Whoever lived under New York was so important to Cathy that she would have married him to get his project to stop. He had seen her face when she accepted his offer, but it had not registered at the time. He had been too happy to notice that she was not, that their hug was not that of lovers. Not very flattering to his ego, that.

She had known the chances of him stopping his project were remote. It could only have been a last resort, when her lawyer friend's little group was investigated and made impotent. She must have been truly desperate when he told her he couldn't stop the construction. Well, he could have, but it would have meant the end of his dream. He couldn't do it, not even for Cathy.

Then, just like magic, she had discovered his connection to the acts of sabotage and linked the ringers in the activist group to him as well. His lofty plans had collapsed around his ears. He had known, then, it would be a long time before he could get financing for anything of the sort again – maybe never. He'd had to leave the

country for awhile.

All because someone Cathy loved was being threatened. If that had not been the case, he was sure she would not have become involved. She had not wanted to deal with him, ever again, after that first time.

So, what else could he piece together about this mysterious man?

There was that horrifying contretemps on the docks, when his father had been blown up in a helicopter and he and Cathy had had to run for their lives. When they had found each other, after their midnight swim in the harbour to escape the gunment, he had kissed her in gratitude and relief. He had felt her slight aversion then – another blow to his ego. He knew it was not him she was thinking of as she accepted his kiss. That was when he realized that he had lost her forever – to that other man.

Then, unexpectedly, they had been spotted by one of killers and saved in a very timely fashion. Cathy had run for a manhole and the two of them had slipped into it waited. Terrible sounds had filtered down from a fight above them.

Cathy had expected that! She looked only mildly frightened, but not for themselves, he guessed. She was concerned for whomever their champion was. The sounds were like those of an animal. This must be the same powerful man who had dispatched the thugs in the old apartment building! The old folk had pretended deafness, when he had enquired later, and had given the full credit to Cathy for their rescue. They must have seen the man – but had been told to protect his identity too.

After the fight on the waterfront ended, Cathy had seem relieved and led him through a maze of tunnels, with unerring accuracy, right to an exit in Central Park. She knew those old tunnels well, then! She had asked him to forget what he had seen, and although that was not possible, he had kept the secret and would continue to do so. She had saved his life, after all.

The tunnels again - where her big hero lived. Cathy hinted that there were a number of others, whose lives were in danger should their existence below the city become known. So he lived in a community, this friend of hers. That implied some social organization and cooperation with the world above ground. Cathy was obviously deeply involved with them. How many others were there?

Finally, there was that incident with Spreko. Elliot had learned that Sperko thought he himself was behind that crude blackmail attempt on Cathy. The reason for the charade was undoubtedly exposure of Cathy's friend. Whomever had masterminded that – and caught the curiosity of Sperko – knew both Cathy and her champion, but obviously had reasons to hate the latter.

Why? Elliot wondered. The blackmailer must have lived in that underground community, then, perhaps was an outcast or a disaffected member. Why pick on Cathy's friend? Had he been responsible for exiling the blackmailer – or did the man want to exact revenge on someone else by targeting this fellow, whom everyone seemed to want to protect? There must be something special about him, then, besides his size and strength. Sperko would not have followed the lead if he had not found something extraordinary – or been convinced that it existed. Nothing had appeared in the papers – until Sperko was found dead – almost bisected, apparently by a stiletto-like blade. Not the work of Cathy's boyfriend, Elliot was sure. He did not seem to need such weapons.

So the murder was undoubtedly the work of Sperko's main contact. That man had been a master of impersonation, so good that the next time Elliot had seen Cathy, she had been angry to the point of tears and accused him of betraying her out of revenge. That had hurt. Shortly afterwards, the man had disappeared without a trace. Elliot suspected he would never know what became of him. Undoubtedly, he had come to an unfortunate end. He would have had to, in the interest of the underground community and Cathy's friend.

That mysterious man of hers made her protective and emotional. She undoubtedly loved him deeply. Did he love her in return? Elliot suspected so. Cathy would not stick with a man who didn't fill that deep need within her. Were they lovers too? he wondered. That was outside his ability to discern, except by inference. She certainly acted like a woman deeply in love.

So who was this man? What did he look like, more to the point? He was large and powerful – but if that was all, he would not have had to live underground. Cathy hinted that the people in the tunnel community were not welcome in the normal world. Outcasts then.

Her friend must be deformed in some way, Elliot concluded. Cathy was never seen with any man. Her place in society was such that any male companion would have been noticed by the vanity press. Perhaps he had been

in a terrible accident and his face was ... damaged. Or had he been born unusual? So much so that he kept his face hidden – maybe more than his face. Those sounds on the dock were not human – although they could be made by someone who wanted to frighten, whose face reinforced the impression of a beast. Perhaps this man was ... and here Elliot had to pause and shake his head ... a wolf-man. There were very hairy people in the world - he'd seen pictures. Was this friend of Cathy's one of them perhaps – or was he something entirely different?

If he was simply hairy, he would not have to remain hidden, as he so obviously did. So there was something fearsome, not-quite-human about him – but something also very attractive.

Could he speak, Elliot wondered? Could Cathy love someone who was mute, or could only make bestial sounds? He suspected not. This man had changed her. There was more to him than just an unusual face and a roar. They were very close. He would bet they met regularly, perhaps even on her balcony. The man must be a romantic, her knight in shining armour. That was a role Elliot could never imagine for himself. His fantasies were of buildings, things he could do to mold New York, make it his.

How had Cathy's lover known she was in danger on the waterfront? Had he followed her somehow? Had she told him where she was going? No, not possible. It had been a spur of the moment request from himself, and Cathy had reluctantly agreed to accompany him after she and her friend had extracted his father from the hospital. He would bet her friend had been watching. But still, the man would have had to find them, somehow, in that vast dock area. Didn't seem possible – but then not much did where Cathy was concerned.

Unless one took into account the impossible – ESP, man-beasts, a fairy-tale world, and a beautiful woman somehow wrapped up in it all.

Elliot sighed. He was reasonably certain he had all the information he was ever going to get, short of convincing Cathy that he should meet this lover of hers. That, he knew, would never happen. She wouldn't trust him – and perhaps she was right. When his dreams were threatened, personal considerations went out the window. Cathy, on the other hand, was all heart. She would not endanger the man she loved, any more than she could murder in cold blood.

So what could he do now? Even if he couldn't have Cathy – and he was now resigned to that - Elliot wanted her to be happy. That, in itself, was an unusual thought for him. She had changed him – and perhaps the change to both of them could be laid at the feet of this mysterious man, the one who could not show his face, but who loved Cathy and was there when she needed him.

What would his life be like, living underground? How long had this man been doing so – and the others? Elliot suspected there was a great deal more to that story, but decided he didn't need to know.

However, there was something he could do – and it made him feel good to think about it. That was an emotion which had been in short supply lately.

Would she guess he was at the bottom of it? Perhaps. Normally, he would have told her, proudly, hoping to win her back. But he knew now that they would never be able to return to those heady first days of their friendship. She had moved far beyond him – beyond any man but the one she loved. And that, he decided, was all there was to that story. All he could hope was that she would not distance herself from him any more than she had already.

A month later, Catherine was surprised to learn that the massive hole that was to have been the site of the Burch Tower was now going to be redeveloped into mixed, low-rise housing and small shops – tentatively called The Burch Mews. One day she got a letter in the mail from a legal firm she had never heard of. Inside was a thick, shiny silver card with an address, an artist's conception of the new development embossed in black, and a gold plastic key.

“Bring this key to the sales office of The Burch Mews and receive a complimentary suite,” the card said on the reverse side. There was a date, some months hence, and an indecipherable signature. That was all.

She took the card down to Vincent the next night. He turned it over in his big hands and looked thoughtful.

“Elliot?” he asked, quietly.

“I think so,” she replied.

Vincent was silent for a long moment.

“Catherine, it has been very quiet here below since construction was halted on the tower. But odd things have been happening.”

“What kinds of things? Are you in danger?”

“No, not danger. Almost the reverse. Work crews from above have been fixing some of the near ground level tunnels, walling off dangerous ones, closing some entrances where we used to have trouble with intruders. The one the outsider gang used was one. We could not work on it without raising suspicions above, but we watched it.”

Catherine took a deep breath. “Elliot! I led him to safety down them. He must have done some research into anything where my name appeared, or underground tunnels were mentioned.”

“I suspect it is he. But why?”

“I think it’s a peace offering, Vincent – like this key. He is letting us know that he has figured us out, perhaps has surmised the existence of your world, and he is helping – the only way he can. He knows I will never betray you.”

“Why would he go to such lengths?”

“To make a point, a grand gesture. That’s Elliot. He knows I’ll know, just as he knows I’ll never love him. I think he’s also telling us that we can trust him to keep this secret.”

“Yes. What will you do?”

“Nothing with Elliot, Vincent. I don’t want this suite, but there’s no indication it will be in my name. I think anyone can claim it. They probably hand these out to a few city politicians too. Let’s think of someone who really needs it and give it to them.”

“Yes. Perhaps one of our messengers – they are our eyes and ears. It could become their place. They would be discreet.”

“Wonderful idea! You tell me who, and I’ll put it in their name when the sales office opens.”

“Thank you, Catherine.”

“Don’t thank me - thank Elliot.”

“No, it is you, Catherine. You have changed him.”

“Only because you changed me first, Vincent.”

“We have changed each other.”

“Yes ... and we have the rest of our lives to grow together.”

“Yes.”

He took her in his arms and for a long while they stood oblivious to everything but each other. Their bond hummed with love.

Catherine silently thanked Elliot for the precious gift he had given – some peace of mind for the man she loved above all others.

Vincent, just as silently, hoped that Elliot would find someone else he could love. He seemed to be moving in a new direction – and new directions, as Vincent himself knew, could lead to extraordinary things.

END