

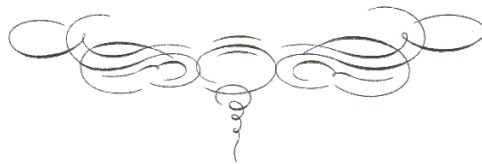
All Our Haunts and Hallows

By Cindy Rae



For Halloween, 2017

On a night when the walls between the worlds grow thin, some secrets are revealed.



“It’s your fault, you know.” The voice was familiar, and deep, and there was little trace of the grave about it. - Yet. Narcissa knew that the low, gravelly sound would fade to nothing more than a whisper, in time. But for now it was fairly strong.

John Pater had been dead less than a year, and Narcissa had been all but expecting him; especially on All Hallows Eve - the night when the walls between the worlds grew thin.

Those walls were even thinner down in her chamber, where Narcissa's own gifts increased the chances that some of her visitors would be... less than corporeal.

Most tunnel folk worried that Narcissa lived alone. Truth to tell, it was a rare week that found her completely in her own company. Narcissa was accustomed to having uninvited guests – and having some of those be both contentious and deceased.

It was all the same to a woman who saw the unseen world with greater clarity than most.

“It be just like you to blame others for you own plight, Evil One,” Narcissa replied. She ground holly roots into powder with a mortar and a pestle, deciding it was probably better to speak to her visitor than it was to ignore him. He was the ghost she expected him to be; and she knew he had no real power to harm her. Not anymore.

Not that in life he hadn't done just that. He had harmed her. Severely, and with fire, as a matter of fact.

The burns he'd caused on her old body were fairly healed, but she knew that like the cataracts that clouded her vision, she'd carry scars. Surprisingly, she didn't resent him for the disfigurement, or even for the pain he'd caused her.

Which was a testament to the fact that there were so many *other* things to resent John Pater for. Her misery seemed almost... inconsequential compared to the other evil things he'd done.

The Alchemist's reply was accusatory, still. “Be that as it may, it doesn't ... relieve you of any responsibility,” Paracelsus stated, eyeing what she was mixing up in the bowl. It was white, and for him, unidentifiable. He had no sense of smell. No ghost did. It was a fact that bothered him, now.

The black, turbaned head shook in the negative at the charge, and the arthritic hands continued with their chore. “Lou come to visit me. Set right there,” she

indicated an old stool with a nod, “and talked wit’ me about de Father.” She clucked her tongue at her uninvited guest’s impudence. Her comment was not an idle one. Lou, like Paracelsus, had died in the tunnels, though he’d done so more than a year ago. More than a year ago, and thanks to John.

“I’m surprised he didn’t mention me,” the restless spirit said, ever vain.

Narcissa snorted. “The dead be having better t’ings to do than worry about you, old schemer. Anna *never* mentioned yo’ name. Not once.”

“That’s a lie!” John’s low voice raised high, both in pitch and in volume, and Narcissa knew he’d have struck her, if he could have. She hid a secret smile, and had to admit a certain self-satisfied pleasure in being able to rile him. She knew John Pater to be a cold, calculating man. Even when he’d burned her, he’d been... practical about it. There was just a touch of revenge in being able to infuriate him, now.

“Not once,” she insisted, not even looking up from her task, as if she had better things to do than to parlay with him. To her way of thinking, she certainly did.

“We sat. Visited.” She set aside the stone pestle. “I made ginger tea and she remembered she once had a liking for it. We talked about the chil’ren, mostly.”

She poured the finely ground powder into a small wooden bowl, content that it was fine enough to be used as it was intended. “We talk about how big de boys be growin’. Devin. Pascal, who still was so small, at de time. Abraham. Ike.”

She turned to set a kettle on the fire, as if the mention of tea had caused her to want some. Habit. She knew she wouldn’t pour a cup, not with John in the room. Eating or drinking near a ghost was as invitation for them to stay, and she knew she didn’t want to see John Pater, ever again. Drinking ginger tea with Anna in the room was one thing. With John, it was something else, again.

“There’s a name you’re leaving out of your list, old witch,” he stated. “One name. The most *important* one,” John charged.

Narcissa knew that was true, and felt the sting of the accusation. “And Vincent,” she admitted. “We talk about Vincent, too,” Narcissa acknowledged. *Ghosts could annoy a body something fierce*, she thought.

She spared this one a glance, knowing she saw him with both her inner and outer eyes. He was regally slim, as he'd been in life, and dressed in the high-collared shirt he'd favored, the one they'd likely buried him in, if they could find one. His face bore burn marks, just as her arm did, and she could see through parts of him to the cave wall, behind.

Like most ghosts, she knew this one would continue to fade. That though he was fairly corporeal-looking now, that his left sleeve was almost transparent, and that that would only become more pronounced, in time.

Stronger personalities could haunt those with second sight for a year or two, if you took no measures to banish them, and John was surely that, Narcissa knew. But time was the force that neither the dead nor the living could overcome. If he chose to wander in the tunnels, she knew he'd eventually become no more than a whisper of sound, or the wind's keening sigh. It was the fate of everything that refused to move on. It's why so many ghosts did, after a short time.

At least the ones who were moving on to someplace pleasant.

Narcissa had visited with many such spirits, from the malevolent to the chaste. Ellie had come to her chambers, once, as had a very distinguished Charles Chandler. Winslow had spent nearly a week in her company, before he'd told her it was time to go. A Russian sailor she'd never met had stopped by for just a moment or two, and Margaret Chase had said almost nothing to her, but her soft presence had been known. Spirits often interacted with those who were sensitive to them. Such was Narcissa's lot, as a seer. It always had been. She often welcomed them, and visited for as long as they liked.

She had little but disdain, for this one.

"Lou was a good man." She kept the focus of the conversation where she wanted it. "Better than you. He was a friend to de Father. And to his woman," she said, indicating Margaret.

Paracelsus met her assertion with customary disparagement. "Jacob has few friends and less lovers. He has followers. There is a difference." His scorn was palpable.

“Followers.” The old black prophetess all but repeated the word. “The t’ing *you* wanted. The only t’ing,” Narcissa shot back, knowing that while it was fairly futile to argue with a phantom, that there was little other choice, considering.

The brown eyes gave her a measuring look. “Not... the *only* thing,” John’s emphasis was clear; and they both knew to whom he referred. John’s obsession with Vincent had been as legendary as it was tragic, for almost everyone involved.

“He was *never* goin’ to be yours,” Narcissa replied.

“He was every inch mine.”

“He was your end,” she shot back, removing the kettle from the fire. It had begun to whistle.

“And never more mine, than then.” The voice was oil and rusting springs. The severe mouth almost smiled, and Narcissa knew it was an ugly sight. Nothing was quite as chilling as John, when he looked pleased about something.

Narcissa knew she could – and probably should -- simply ignore the phantasm before her. That if she did, he’d spend some little energy taunting her, but then move on. Spirits were used to being ignored, thanks to the fact that most people couldn’t hear them. Being pointedly ignored was no more satisfying than being accidentally ignored, and there was no point in staying for very long, either way.

At best, a ghost could sometimes make a normal person’s head lift, and look around, as that person suddenly (and correctly) felt that they were being watched. But the veil between the worlds was too thick to allow for much real contact. Narcissa knew it was the Halloween night and her sensitivity to the Unseen World that was allowing the conversation they were having. She also knew she had the power to stop it, if she chose to.

Auntie would be a-chidin’ me. ‘What for you talking wid a ghost for, Cissy?’ Narcissa thought. *And one that done you nothin’ but harm?* But for some reason, Narcissa knew she didn’t feel like ignoring John as much as she felt like correcting him. So she did.

“That chile need to be full of hate to be yours, and he never was. You din’t bring out the evil in that boy, old man. There be no evil to find.”

Paracelsus pounced on the claim, verbally. “Considering the... outcome of our last encounter, I can *assure you* that’s not true,” he replied, moving to stand near her table. Narcissa knew he could open his shirt and show her the wounds to his abdomen, if he wanted to. One of the few powers ghosts actually had was to show you the manner of their passing, if they knew it. It was why the ghosts of hanging victims often appeared with the noose still around their necks, or the guillotined marched with severed heads.

Still, Narcissa waved a be-ringed hand at his statement, unafraid of anything he might want to show her. She knew full well how he’d died. “You let loose de part of him dat be wid’out reason; not de part of him dat be wid’out de good.”

John’s retort was severe, as he reached for the buttons. “I have a disemboweled abdomen to prove you wro-“

“You have exactly what you deserved in dis life, old man!” She rounded on him, and was through playing hostess to his ego. Enough misery had happened because of people who had. “Anna don’t speak o’ you. But you t’ink dat means she don’t hold her sorrow? You t’ink Anna never come to show me a sad face? You t’ink never... Grace?”

The pale phantom before her actually lost just a touch of what little color he still possessed. Not at the first name, but at the second one.

His hand dropped from the middle buttons on his shirt. “I did nothing to Grace.” He moved away. It was part of how she knew her verbal arrow had hit a nerve.

The nearly blind eyes tracked him, and pinned him. “You lie from your grave.” She spat to the left as she said it, knowing that ghosts were every bit as capable of falsehoods as their human counterparts were. “Only t’ing I don’ know is if she was your first.”

Paracelsus continued to deny the charge – almost. “You were not there. And Grace was... in and out of consciousness,” he replied, knowing that Grace’s ghost could have told the black woman nothing. He drew himself fully erect, and smoothed a nearly opaque hand down his long tunic.

Narcissa suspected that while he might occasionally have thought of Anna, that he'd probably not thought about Devin's mother in a long time.

"She was strong," Narcissa charged. "Strong like her boy. Dere be three men knowin' about medicine in de room wid' her when she bring her baby into de world. Father, Doctor Peter... and you." The milky eyes followed his form, as he began to pace the cluttered room. Had she made her uninvited guest nervous? *Good*, she thought with satisfaction.

"Grace died in childbirth," he replied.

Narcissa snorted, again. "Grace died because she had de wisdom to know what you were. She was weak from de baby. You knew it was your chance."

He raised a burn-scarred eyebrow. "Knew? Knew what? That...Father's bastard would mean she stayed *here*, forever? That she had Jacob's ear, when it came to who *she* wanted filling those tunnels? The destitute? The weak?"

He put a hand on his chest, the way a woman might hold one to her bosom, as she spoke. "*We need to help those who need it, Jacob. It's not about what use they are to us,*" he mimicked Grace's higher voice. "*It's about what they need, and how we can help them see a better way.*"

Narcissa defended her one-time friend. "She found him, up Above. Alone. Broken. Showed him de way down. Helped him. Dey was learnin' each other. Dey was learnin' de right way to live, for ever'one. Not for just him, or just her; for ever'body. De *right way*. De *good way*."

Narcissa had been present for very few of the conversations where the newly forming tunnel community was finding its identity. But she knew well that there had been a struggle between Jacob and John. And that ultimately, Jacob's vision for the tunnels had won out. She also knew that much of what Jacob had ultimately created, for the tunnels, came from many of the long talks he'd had with Grace.

John's disdain for Devin's mother was palpable, even in death. "Grace wanted to take in every motherless child and ignorant refugee. Every homeless tramp and starving waif. I wanted something a bit more... effective. Less... egalitarian. Every new member was a mouth to feed. They had to contribute. They had to

offer something I needed.” John’s tone was severe, even as the words damned him into revealing why he’d hated Grace. And Narcissa hadn’t missed his use of the word “I,” rather than “we.”

“You wanted strong men to do de work and women for mending. Dat’s all,” Narcissa countered.

“Perhaps.” John eyed the blind prophet warily. “That does not mean I killed Grace.”

Narcissa wasn’t giving an inch. “Who else would have put de poison in her?” It was a shot in the dark. But Narcissa had reason to believe it was a good one.

John looked away, and down, the gesture condemning him as much as what was about to happen could. A memory was coming clear to him of a very, very distant day. One he really hadn’t thought about in many years. One Narcissa had wanted to see. One she had goaded him into remembering.

For the living, memories happened inside the mind, invisible to anyone but them. For the dead, it was the opposite. Strong emotions and memories could often reveal what had happened to them. It was how they often showed others their plight. It was a simple fact of life – and death, in the spirit world.

A hazy image swam into the cluttered room, then coalesced into clarity. It was of rough-hewn cavern which would one day become Jacob’s hospital chamber. Ghostly John’s look was a studied one, as he stared at the scene, just as he remembered it. He was in the room where Grace had delivered her child, a thing that must have just happened. She was sweat-soaked, and tired. She’d had a long labor, her middle-aged body not accustomed to, or familiar with, the rigors of childbirth. Devin was squalling on a side table, while Jacob and Peter were examining the newborn babe. John had been standing near Grace, with his hand in his pocket. The intravenous tube they’d rigged to keep her hydrated was right there, and the syringe was in his pocket – until it wasn’t.

The act had literally taken seconds to perform. It had been almost deceptively easy. John knew that as he saw the memory of Grace’s assassination, Narcissa did, as well.

“Murderer,” she charged. Narcissa herself had been unsure of her own accusation, originally. Now, she wasn’t.

John was unaffected by the claim, and shrugged the word away. Perhaps he couldn’t hurt the old black woman before him. But it was also true she couldn’t hurt him. “She was hardly my first,” was all he said, with chilling nonchalance.

“Nor de last. You a cold man, John Pater.”

“That is not my name. I am Para-“

“John Pater!” She shouted. “Husband to Anna! Poor t’ing and *you* to blame!” She pointed an arthritic finger in his direction, and rose from the table. Narcissa had dealt with contentious ghosts before, and was in no mood to be corrected by one, even one as evil as the one before her.

“I am? I am to blame?” The low voice turned silky, like a man setting a trap. “Or you are, Narcissa?”

Narcissa froze, not liking anything about the wily look in his eyes, or his tone.

“Who is it that made sure Jacob had not just one son, but two of them?” John asked, already knowing the answer. “Who is it who stopped Vincent from his wailing, when he was first brought down? Who mumbled an incantation for him, after three straight days of howling? Who?” He pinned her with dark eyes the color of old stones, and Narcissa knew she was caught. No, he hadn’t seen her do it, any more than she’d originally seen him kill Grace. He hadn’t needed to. He was intelligent enough to know that something had saved Vincent, after crying for three straight days. He was right. Something had.

Something that had ultimately led directly to Anna’s murder.

“De magic work or de magic don’t work.” She gave a Gallic shrug. “It be for fate to say.”

“Fate.” He all but spat the word, knowing better than to believe her. “Oh, how I’d loved to have seen you. What did you do? Offer up a chicken bone, and chant, while you said a little prayer? Did you visit his dreams, his infant dreams, and tell him it would all be all right? Show him the ghost of whatever mother it was that bore him? What?”

John clearly didn't know, and Narcissa wasn't about to tell him which scenario was the closest one to right, or if any of them were. Her silence was as damning as Paracelsus' confession had been.

"He should have died. You intervened. He lived because you *bid* him to," John charged.

Narcissa shook her head again, sending her blue turban to shaking. "He live because de spirit inside him be a good one. A strong one. He knows stren'th. He draws it to 'im. Helps de others to find they own."

"He was a misbegotten monster. One who should have died in a midwinter frost."

Narcissa drew in a breath and turned away from him. This was a useless exchange, and she knew better than to spar over whether it was right to tamper with fate, with one such as the Alchemist.

"I be havin' work to do." She picked up a copper bowl and began humming an island tune, knowing that even if he spoke to her, she didn't have to listen.

"Such a cold night," John said, from behind her, not wanting to be ignored.

"There was ice on the ground. The twelfth of January. Dark. Frozen. Why would *anyone* go out on such a night to scavenge, do you think?"

The question hung in the air for a long moment, between them, and Narcissa gripped the bowl hard. *He knows. All of it.*

"It was your fault," he repeated the charge he'd entered the room with. "His fate was already set, his die cast. But you *changed* that fate. You intervened. You interfered. You didn't just save him after Jacob tended him. You saved him... before."

Silence. There was silence in the cluttered room. Narcissa stopped humming, having forgotten the tune, lost in her own memories.

"But you couldn't do it yourself," Paracelsus kept driving points home. "You couldn't go Above, no matter what you thought you knew. So you sent Anna up."

He was right. She had.

“You used my wife. And you used her against me.”

Narcissa set the copper bowl down, carefully. Her voice was quiet, but it still sounded loud, in the newly silent room. “Mayhap. Mayhap I did.” She didn’t turn, as she said it. And if there was sorrow in her voice, it was not for John. But it was for Anna.

She knew she had done as John had charged. She knew she’d told Anna that on this particular night, no matter how cold it was, she *must* go Above. That she must search until she found something so special, she’d have to come back down. That she must *stay* Above, in her thin coat and shoes, and endure the cold, until ... something miraculous happened.

She also knew that Anna’s finding of Vincent had been the one event that linked her to her own doom.

“Did you tell her to search near the hospital? Or did you simply make her wander the streets until her fingers were numb, inside her thin gloves?” he asked.

Narcissa sat down on the wobbly three-legged stool, hard, trying to remember the vision she’d had that predicted a special child’s birth, and just how much she’d known, at the time, to tell Anna Pater. She truly hadn’t seen many details of that night. She only knew that in the Topside world, a world she could not navigate, a Bright Light was coming into existence. A Light that could banish almost any Darkness, even as it carried Darkness inside itself. She knew that the tunnel world would need that light. And that they would need it largely because of John.

She had no way to know then, that Vincent would be a huge part of why John would one day kill Anna. But she did know that meddling with Fate always had a price. She just didn’t know which of them would have to pay it.

But she did know she was using one Pater to thwart the other, in some way. *I be guilty as charged*, she thought, knowing her old black Auntie would agree.

"I knew dey... needed him," she said, feeling her age, whatever that was. "Needed him for de Father. Needed him... against you," Narcissa whispered, glad that her memories, unlike John's, were not so easily visible. Anna had originally wanted to stay Below, where it was warmer. It took Narcissa's urging, and a request that she not mention her involvement, to get Anna to go Above. "*Someone needs you, I t'ink,*" she remembered saying.

Knowing what she knew now, it was a hard memory to bear. She knew John was wholly to blame for poisoning his wife. But she also knew that she had a hand in the sequence of events that led up to it.

She owned that she had bid Anna, gentle, kind, Anna, to go Above, not knowing or understanding what that would mean, for the poor, beautiful, barren woman. Not knowing what it would all mean for any of them.

John's words were unforgiving. "Grace may be dead because of me; but Anna... Anna is dead because of you. As am I."

"No. You kill your own wife. You kill yourself." Narcissa denied his charges.

"If you hadn't changed Fate. If you hadn't meddled. If you hadn't told her to go Above, to save Vincent, she would still be alive... probably," he qualified. "And I would be ruling the home I was meant t-"

Narcissa knew she'd had enough. "Begone, Evil Thing!" She all but wailed it, as she rose and scooped up a small handful of the white powder and blew it in the Alchemist's general direction.

Holly tree root was for protection from evil, and strength for the spiritual warrior. Narcissa knew Paracelsus couldn't withstand its influence. And she regretted not using it earlier, when he'd first come in.

John howled, then vanished, the moment the fine powder first touched him. Which was to say that he did just as Narcissa knew he would. Whether it was the actual powder that caused the effect or simply her belief that it would, she had no clue, and didn't need any. It worked, and he was gone. That was all she needed to understand.

She sat back down, hard, her weight sending the stool to wobbling. What a night it had been. What a trying, terrible night.

She scooped up the remaining powder and poured it into a bottle she kept just for this purpose. Placing the stopper in, she set the nearly half-full bottle on the shelf where she kept many of her more necessary ingredients. She'd have to ask Vincent for more holly root, as the season progressed. You couldn't be too careful.

Melancholy gripped her old heart, as she cast milky-visioned eyes around her chamber. Her home and her refuge, it was where many things happened. Where prophetic dreams sometimes came to her. Where Auntie's voice always told her to be careful of the path she chose, for the changing of Fate was no small matter.

There were so many things she hadn't known, then. And so many she did know, now. *If knowin' is a sad thing, what be de purpose of knowin' at all?* She wondered, collecting herself.

She wasn't positive that Vincent was destined to die, that night. The dreams had been unclear. She wasn't even certain if it was a baby she was sending Anna Above for, since who could tell, when the symbolism was so vague? There were some things that only time would tell. The dream had come to her for three nights running, before she'd climbed her stairs to join the people in the tunnels. In her night visions, an acorn had grown into a mighty tree, right there in Jacob's tunnels. Huge and spreading, it grew in spite of all the reasons it shouldn't have; it thrived even without sunlight, or all the other things great oaks needed.

She'd dreamed it once more, as she'd stayed with them, and this time, the great oak was both below the ground and above it, standing in the sun. The branches were so large that some of them dragged the ground, and the trunk looked impossibly huge. Narcissa had bid Anna to go Above, and find a miracle. When Anna had gone, she'd forced herself to sleep again. She'd dreamed again of the special oak. A powerful one, whose spreading branches sheltered all it contacted. It reached down, even as it reached up. It reached everywhere. It seemed to know almost no limits.

Narcissa had learned the symbolism of trees a long time ago. The oak was the tree of strength; also the tree of marital fidelity. The tunnel community was struggling, at the time. She knew they needed strength more than any other thing, if they were to survive. She'd simply took the dream as an omen, and proceeded from there.



She knew, somehow, that the person represented by the oak would be the one to thwart John, and his attempt to make over the tunnels in his own image. She'd thought, then, that perhaps Anna would find a grown man, perhaps even an older one. She hadn't considered that she'd sent Anna up into the January night to find an infant. And that once Anna had brought him down, there was no mistaking the intention of the strange dream that Narcissa had come to accept as prophecy.

Anna had found the baby. And the miracle that was Vincent had changed the course of the lives of the people in the tunnels, forever. Though it had cost Anna much, she had done great good. Great good. There was no denying that.

Strength and fidelity. Two powerful forces, in the world.

Narcissa had known Vincent to always represent the former; both to her, and to everyone else. She'd been very focused on that aspect of his; they all had.

Narcissa eyed the contents of her shelf, aware that roots, leaves, and oil were in many of the jars. The holly tree root essence was often used for protection, while elms were for inner strength, and intuition. Birch stood for new beginnings, and cleansing away the past. Narcissa wondered if she might need a little of that, right now.

But the oak... well. The oak was the king of them all. From the tiny acorn, a spreading oak owned the land around it. It was hallowed, in many lands. In almost every culture, the oak tree symbolized strength and power, and was synonymous with the word 'mighty.' It was the tree of wisdom-through-experience, and strong constancy. As such, it was the tree of the unbroken vow, and of the faithful mate.

She knew that for a long time, Vincent had embodied many of the former things to his tunnel community.

She wondered if perhaps it wasn't time for him to embody the latter, as well.

Standing on the stool, she took down a small, special jar. It contained just one thing. An acorn. One she'd held in her hand and chanted over, the first days the infant Vincent had been brought to the tunnels. The days the sickly infant had cried, and Jacob had been afraid he would not live. They days she'd breathed a desperate incantation, over and over, as she'd held onto the tiny seed.

"Mayhap it be time to give you to someone," she said to the hard brown thing. She knew that most acorns this old would never grow into a tree. But she also knew that this was no ordinary seed, and that Vincent was no ordinary being.

"Mayhap it time for you to be wid' Vincent. To grow, and maybe finish servin' yo' purpose. Help him to serve his."

The thought elevated her spirits. Perhaps her oak tree dream wasn't fully realized, just yet. Perhaps it had a bit more to go.

It cheered her that the little offering would make a fine betrothal present, though she had no idea if Vincent was intending to propose marriage to his Catherine. If he was, he was. If he wasn't... well. Fate often had a way of taking care of such things. She chuckled a little to herself, as she thought that.

She pocketed the small vial and its precious contents, and collected her walking stick. She hadn't always used such a sturdy one. But since her injury, she found the thick staff helped to steady her, when she climbed either up or down.

Paracelsus' injuring of her gave her more in common with Jacob than she'd had, previously. And that made her smile just a little bit more. It was good to have something in common with someone who disagreed with you. And it was good, after all these months far Below, to have a reason to climb, again.

It was Halloween. Perhaps one of the tunnel dwellers would meet her on the stairs, wondering what Old Narcissa would be up to, on such a fine Fall evening. Perhaps a friendly spirit might join her for part of her trek. Someone like Kristopher Gentian, who never seemed to change, or her old Auntie, who'd taught her the ways of scrying. You could never tell, with some folks. After all, it was a night for unexpected things to happen.

She knew for certain that one person would not be searching for her, right now. She knew for certain that Vincent was with his lady love, and that on this special night, he was walking through the streets of New York as if he belonged there; walking like he was one of them. And like they were all "one with him."

It was a kinship he craved, and Narcissa knew that Catherine would make sure he experienced it. He would, for a time, be a part of everything around him: A part of Catherine, of the man who patrolled her door, of the ice cream vendors and the theater people, of the crowds on the street, and of the audience at any given performance. He would spread himself around the city he called "home," and be a part of it all. He would revel, in his way, and feel as if everyone, everywhere was part of the enchantment on this one, very unique, very peculiar night.

He wouldn't want to miss it; not while he had the chance to be a part of it.

Narcissa smiled another small smile, and resisted the urge to peek at what he and Catherine might be doing, right now. After all, they might be kissing somewhere, inside some leather-upholstered carriage, or tucked beneath a shadowy lintel, someplace. She didn't want to intrude; such a thing would be considered rude.

She wondered if she could talk one of the children into hunting them down before sunrise, and convince them that this very special acorn needed planting. That it might look perfect near the entrance to the drainage culvert Vincent and Catherine favored, or better still, near the low spot where he'd first found her, several years ago.

"Time for you to see de sunlight again," she told the tiny companion in her left pocket. "Time for you to go home."

She hoped that the little acorn would grow, and spread its branches; that one day, perhaps Vincent's children, or even Vincent himself would relax beneath the wide, shady limbs. Perhaps he'd have fine sons, like himself. Or perhaps adventurous daughters: ones who loved to climb trees. One who loved to spread themselves across the city, low and high.

Perhaps the tree would become a hallowed thing to Vincent and Catherine, and their descendants. For who could say what magic would be brought forth, on a night when anything was possible?

Only time would tell.



No matter where you are in your own Halloween fairy tale, I wish you love. ~

Cindy

