



Graphic by Rusty "Red Night Bird"

"Mr Fix-It"

by Wayne R. Kelley

Catherine Chandler, Assistant District Attorney for the city of New York, was not having a good day. She'd awakened from a fitful night's sleep, thanks to a dripping faucet in her apartment's bathroom, only to discover that the handle on one of her folding closet doors was loose enough to pop off in her hand when she grabbed it. The bagel she attempted to toast for her traveling breakfast nearly caught fire before she unplugged the toaster. The last straw was when one of the locks on her apartment's front door jammed, requiring her to beat on it with the handle of a hastily-grabbed butter knife in order to open it. 'When it rains, it pours,' she thought disgustedly as she closed the door behind her, leaving the obstinate deadbolt unlocked, so as not to get locked out upon her return.

She called the building management office on her way to work, and the response was less than encouraging. Maintenance was working on air conditioning problems all over the building, and problems like door locks and closet handles would be dealt with in due time. "Grrr," was the only coherent thing she could say as she disconnected the call. In the back of the cab on the way to work, she took a few deep, calming breaths, and tried to put the problems at home out of her head for a while.

Joe Maxwell caught her as she was arriving for work, and called her into his office. It was still a little odd to follow him into the office Moreno had occupied for years before scandal had ousted him from the DA's job. Both she and Joe had been promoted as a result, and life had become exponentially more complicated for both of them ever since.

Joe turned to her as soon as the door closed. "Radcliffe, I got a call in already about the DeAngelo case. Public Defender got the evidence from the house thrown out," he informed her bitterly.

Catherine shook her head. "Joe, that was clean...we had a warrant, everything was done according to procedure...", she moaned.

"...and the officers dropped off evidence they collected downtown while the lab techs were at lunch." he explained. "They moved for failure to maintain chain-of-possession."

She actually stomped her foot in frustration. “Damn it, Joe, we can’t go back to square one on this,” she railed. “The trial’s in two weeks! They’ll get the case dismissed in pre-trial if we can’t link him to the human trafficking cartel.”

“I know, I know,” he assured her. “We’re just going to have to put some more legs on the streets to get what we need, so drop whatever else you’re working on and round up the people you need to get it done.”

Catherine let out a long, exhausted sigh. “Joe, this is crazy. I’ve got four other cases that need my personal attention, and now this. Do you know, my apartment is falling apart because I’m never home anymore, except to sleep.”

Joe allowed himself a short, mirthless laugh. “I know the feeling, Cathy. I have no life since I moved into this office. I’ve got ten times the responsibility, plus all the city political BS...I don’t even know what a day off looks like anymore. But,” he spread his hands and shrugged, “somebody’s gotta put the bad guys away.” His expression softened slightly. “Just...do the best you can with it. I promise I’ll try not to bug you over the weekend, and maybe you can get a handyman in over at the apartment.”

“Gee, thanks,” she shot back sarcastically. “Like I’ve got time to look up a handyman.”

“You’re welcome,” he replied, mustering a grin. “Now get to work.”

“Slave-driver,” she called over her shoulder as she walked out.

Vincent sucked in a deep breath, then lifted the large oaken door a fraction, carefully positioning it against the door frame to which Cullen was re-attaching it. The smaller man carefully set the hinge-pins into the rusty metal door hinges, tapping them down with a hammer to re-hang the door.

“Thanks for your help, Vincent”, Cullen said. “I couldn’t have done this without you.”

“You’re welcome,” Vincent replied, not quite clenching his teeth.

“When the door fell off of that rotted post, poor Mary had to jump out of the way to keep from getting crushed,” Cullen continued, almost conversationally.

“That would have been...unfortunate,” the larger man rejoined, waiting for the hammer taps to stop.

“These older doors down here must weigh a ton,” Cullen added wonderingly.

Vincent sucked in another deep breath. “No, Cullen...they just feel as if they do,” he replied, a little pointedly.

The tapping stopped. “There,” Cullen pronounced, “good as new.”

Vincent released the door, and was pleased to see it swing freely on the repaired hinges. He pushed the door closed, noting that it squared with the frame perfectly. But then he frowned, for the sound of the latch was absent. “Not quite,” he corrected his co-worker.

“Hmmp,” Cullen grunted. “Was the latch sticking before?”

Vincent brushed aside his cloak and reached for a screwdriver from the battered leather tool belt buckled around his waist. “Not to worry,” he assured his partner, “I’ll have it working in a few minutes. Why don’t you go get some lunch?”

Cullen’s brow furrowed. “You sure you don’t need me to stay?”

Vincent re-positioned the lantern they were using for light. “I think I can manage.”

“Okay,” the other man answered, “I’ll tell Father it’s all sorted.”

“Thank you,” Vincent called after the retreating back as he headed for the common areas once again. He returned his attention to the doorknob, deftly removing screws to reveal the antique hardware’s inner mechanism. ‘It probably only needed lubrication,’ he thought to himself, ‘but something may have been damaged in the fall.’

A few moments later, his ears detected the familiar scuffling of a footfall in the corridor behind him. "Vincent?" came Mouse's familiar, halting voice.

"Yes, Mouse?" he replied, eyes and hands still focused on the disassembled doorknob.

"Busy?" his friend asked.

"Yes, Mouse," he answered, patient and undistracted from years of dealing with the young man. "Is there something you need my help with?"

He could hear the nodding behind him. "Water pipe in William's kitchen leaking. Fix it?"

Vincent suppressed a chuckle. Mouse had been coming to him for years, since his adoption by the Tunnel community, with requests like this. Broken toys, haywire 'projects', and problems on which he was not permitted to work - all came to Vincent, with the same two-word plea. Others who had heard the exchanges *ad nauseum*, along with all the other repair work he normally did, had jokingly begun to call him "Mr. Fix-it".

"Tell William I'll be along to look at it, as soon as I finish with this door," he instructed.

"Okay, good," Mouse affirmed, scuffling away without delay.

Vincent went back to re-assembling the door latch, while mentally rescheduling other repair jobs he'd planned for the remainder of the day.

Catherine made it back to the apartment just after 6 pm and dropped her attache case on the couch in the living room unceremoniously. Kickstarting a completely new investigation on the DeAngelo case had wrecked her day, and she wasn't even sure she could muster the brainpower to call for delivery food. She dragged herself into the bedroom, kicking her shoes off just inside the door.

Just then, a figure landed on her balcony with an uncharacteristic jangling noise. She felt a brief surge of adrenalin, which dissolved into relief when she realized whom her visitor was.

She reached the balcony doors just as Vincent did. She opened the door and immediately pressed herself against him in a ferocious hug. "I'm so glad to see you," she murmured.

"And I, you," he whispered back.

Despite the desperation in the exchange, tonight's rendezvous had not been unexpected. Rather the contrary, as Vincent had been spending weekend days and overnights with Catherine Above for some time now. The crisis they'd weathered during Paracelsus' last attempt to drive Vincent into madness had brought them closer together, even strengthened the bond they shared. Catherine was now almost as attuned to Vincent's thoughts and emotions as he was to hers. In response to that, they'd begun spending every possible minute together, Above and Below. They'd even bridged that final gap that Vincent had feared in their relationship, and become intimate, with appropriate precautions and discretion.

After a moment's embrace, Catherine became aware that something in the vicinity of Vincent's waist was prodding her in an unusual and uncomfortable fashion. She stepped back to arm's length, and looked down. "Vincent," she asked, hesitantly, "what on Earth are you wearing?"

Vincent ducked his head, his hood and hair obscuring the embarrassment in his expression. "I'm sorry, Catherine. I was playing 'Mr. Fix-it' Below all day, and didn't wish to take time away from our weekend by returning my tools." He spread the front of his cloak open, displaying the belt still strapped about his hips.

"Mr. Fix-it?" she queried, not bothering to hide her mirth.

A tilt of the head, and a shrug, was the only explanation he offered.

"Well, in that case," Catherine continued, "let's figure out what we're going to do for dinner, and then I may have a few little things around here that could use some fixing." She pulled him into the bedroom

and shut the balcony door.

Vincent swept off his cloak, then unbuckled the tool belt, laying the first across a chair in the bedroom, and leaving the other on the floor nearby. Catherine, her cares of the day lifted by the presence of her lover, padded back out to the living room in her stocking feet, picked up the phone, and ordered a delivery from the cafe down the block.

Dinner was delivered, with Catherine accepting and paying while Vincent secreted himself in the bedroom. Over the meal, both discussed the things that had transpired for them since the prior weekend. Catherine ended her tale with the laundry list of broken items that had plagued her in the morning.

"Then it is fortunate for you that my tools made the trip here with me tonight," Vincent opined. "I believe I may be able to effect some repairs for you while I'm here. I'll make a point of looking into them first thing tomorrow."

"Thank you, Vincent," Catherine said, kissing him on the cheek as she rose from the dining table to clear the dishes. "I promise to make it worth your while," she added, the playful tone of her voice matching the warmth she was projecting through their bond, "in advance."

"Mmm," Vincent responded, "advance payment. Perhaps I should go into the fix-it business full-time?"

"As long as I can be you're only customer," Catherine called from the kitchen sink. "But I think we should both shower first. I'm feeling a little gritty all over after the day I've had."

"I'm probably grittier than you, my love," Vincent rejoined. "But, by all means, ladies first."

Both of them retired to the bedroom again, and began getting undressed. As was their custom since becoming lovers, they exchanged a number of long and appreciative gazes at one another's bodies, letting their mutual fascination with each other stir their passions in preparation for the extended foreplay that they both enjoyed. Catherine disappeared into the bathroom for her shower, while Vincent stretched out on the bed covers, thinking, not for the first time, how disappointing it was that they could not bathe together in the apartment's tiny shower, as they always did Below of late.

Vincent's ruminations were disrupted, however, by a sense of frustration and anger along the bond from Catherine. He rose, slipped on the bathrobe he kept in Catherine's closet, and stepped over to the bathroom door. Opening it a few inches, he called in, "Is something wrong?"

Catherine was climbing out of the shower, upset nearly to the point of tears. "Oh, Vincent...it's the shower...the water just started running slower and slower, and now it's barely spraying at all!" She rushed into his waiting embrace, wrapped in her bath towel, heedless of the unwashed musk still covering his body. "I just can't stand it anymore, Vincent...this place is falling apart."

Vincent held her until he felt she was no longer unsteady, then pulled back a little and lifted her chin with his finger. "Not to worry, love...Mr. Fix-it will take care of everything." He led her over to the bed in the bedroom, sat her down gently, then went to the other side of the room and retrieved his tool belt.

"Do you really think you can fix it?" Catherine asked plaintively.

Vincent nodded. "We have more plumbing Below than you might realize," he explained. "No showers, mind you, but the basic principles are the same." He buckled the belt around his waist beneath the bathrobe, to allow the use of both hands. "Besides, I have a sizable incentive to complete this job," he added with a grin.

Vincent walked into the bathroom and opened the sliding door to the bathtub/shower. He was familiar with the operation of the controls, after dozens of uses. He turned on the cold faucet handle, watching the water run freely into the tub. Next, he flipped the switch which was supposed to activate the shower head. A small dribble of water, however, was all that would flow from the device.

He stepped into the shower for a closer inspection of the problem. Adding pressure from the hot tap seemed to have no effect. There did, however, seem to be some leakage around the coupling that attached the shower head to the pipes. He removed a small adjustable wrench from his tool belt, and

fitted it to coupling. A slight turn would tell him if the connection was somehow blocking the flow. He applied what he thought was slight force, and coupling spun almost a full turn, tightening back up to create a proper seal.

A forceful spray of water caught him directly in the face, drenching him. Vincent roared involuntarily, dropped the wrench, and fumbled for the faucet handles. Catching one blindly, he spun it, and was shocked to feel the spray get stronger and colder. Ducking to get the spray out of his eyes, he groped for the switch to activate the tub faucet again, and finally found it after several seconds. He then shut off both faucet handles, and swiped wet hair from his face as he straightened up again.

“Are you okay, Vincent?!” Catherine called, panic straining her voice.

“I’m fine, Catherine,” he called back. “Don’t come in here, though,” he cautioned. “There’s water all over the floor.”

He shrugged off the soaking wet bathrobe, so as not to track more water across the bathroom floor. Stepping carefully out of the shower, he grabbed a towel and dropped it on the floor, pushing it around with his bare feet to mop up most of the water. Then, he stepped over to the open bathroom door and leaned against the frame to catch his breath.

Catherine was sitting on the edge of the bed, dressed in a sheer nightgown. Her fright at Vincent’s mishap was instantly replaced by a blood-boiling rush of desire. Framed in the bathroom door, soaking wet from head to toe, garbed in nothing but a battered leather belt filled with a mismatched assortment of hand tools, his muscular chest still heaving from shock, and a slight shiver starting to take over his body, Catherine was stricken with the blinding desire to take him right this instant, before one more drop of glistening water fell from his skin, and tool belt be damned.

Vincent, who had been standing with his head bowed, trying to catch his breath, suddenly looked up at her. The laser-intensity of his blue-eyed gaze told her that he was feeling every shuddering ounce of her passion, and that his own was rising to match it. The force of his response, heart, soul, and body, caught Catherine through the bond like a gale-force wind, and now, it was she trying to catch her breath, stolen away from her by the sheer power of their connection.

Then Vincent spoke, his gaze never wavering. “I think I fixed it,” he half-whispered.

Catherine was on her feet and in his arms in nearly a single motion. “I believe you did,” she affirmed, before locking him into a kiss that lasted long enough, and reached deep enough, to leave them both gasping when they finally pulled apart.

Then, they were in the bed together, and somehow, the tool belt had disappeared. They made love with reckless abandon, as though they were discovering one another for the first time all over again.

Hours later, as they lay together drowsing under the blankets, Vincent asked Catherine how such a ridiculous turn of events could have led them to one of the most incredible nights of their evolving relationship.

“My love,” she told him, “you know how Helen of Troy was said to have had a face that launched a thousand ships?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“Well, you have a body that could launch a thousand women’s wildest fantasies, my dear.”

Vincent looked at her incredulously. “Dripping wet, and dressed in nothing but a tool belt?”

“Especially then.”

“A thousand women, you say?”

Catherine nodded. “You could form your own fan club. ‘The Loyal Order of Vincent’s Toolbelt.’ They’d probably design some sort of crest, slap it on some replica tool belts, annex some land and make you their king.”

“Surely you jest, m’lady,” Vincent demurred.

“I’m serious,” Catherine shot back, “and stop calling me Shirley.”

The next morning, Vincent did launch into the small repairs that Catherine needed around the apartment, interrupted only by meals, and additional rounds of lovemaking that threatened to generate repairs to several pieces of furniture. ‘Mr. Fix-it’ became Catherine’s favorite private pet name for Vincent, and Vincent would go on to find other new ways to explore his desire for his beloved Catherine. But those are stories to be told another day.....

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