

# How Shall I Hold The Moon So Low?

By Cindy Rae



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*For the Yule Celebration on Treasure Chambers*

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*“The moon is a loyal companion.  
It never leaves. It’s always there, watching, steadfast, knowing us in our light and dark  
moments, changing forever just as we do. Every day it’s a different version of itself.  
Sometimes weak and wan, sometimes strong and full of light. The moon understands what it  
means to be human.”  
- Tehereh Mafi*

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She was dancing in her stocking feet, in her apartment.

Staring through the gauzy drapes, Vincent's heart stuttered at the vision she made, doing that.

Dancing. In her mind, *still* dancing. With him. Still dancing, at the Children’s’ Solstice Concert.

A low riding moon shredded itself on the branches of the trees, and there she was. In her apartment. Twirling and sliding, a swatch of peach silk trailing between her fingers.

The children had played several songs that night, including a few waltzes. *The Blue Danube* had been the first one. They'd played it for the concert itself, and then they'd played it for an encore. Every able-bodied person in the room had elected to dance, the second time the tunnel orchestra had performed the song. Everyone, including them.

So they had. Over an hour ago. Closer to two.

Once inside her apartment, she'd shed her shoes, her dance partner no longer nearly six and a half feet tall. The impossibly high heels that increased her height along with her discomfort were playfully cast aside, as she made her own dance floor out of the open space in her living room. She'd worn the tan pumps with the pretty bows on the back for him, he knew, to minimize the distinct difference in their height. And because they'd made her lovely legs look even more beautiful.

Now the shoes were cast-offs near the sofa, while she moved gracefully from carpet to floor and back again, letting the slick fabric of her nylons increase her ability to slide. She half-hummed a tune he could barely hear, through the closed balcony doors.

He'd left her, as he thought he had to. It had been late. Very. So he'd taken her back to her basement exit, and bid her a reluctant good-night.

It was later, now.

And she was still dancing.

He came closer to the cold pane of glass, not daring nor wanting to interrupt her. His breath fogged the view, forcing him to move back a little.

"I could have danced all niight." She sang the words, a bit off key and full of her pleasure. Then she went back to humming the tune.

She swayed back and forth to the rhythm of the melody, delighted with herself.

It was another one of the songs the youthful string orchestra had played for the late night concert. The title of the Broadway staple had made the adults in the room smile. This was the longest night of the year. All the children were up past bedtime. All the adults as well. It was part of the celebration.

And they'd all danced to Lerner and Lowe, just as they'd danced to the Tchaikovsky. Double encore, and the children milking it for all it was worth.

For Vincent, the extra song had been another chance to hold her, as her soft, feminine form gracefully moved with his. It had been wonderful.

She hadn't been humming anything as he'd escorted her back to the area beneath her building, though he could feel the deep level of her contentment. They'd talked of the children, then. Of how hard they had practiced, how long they'd been planning this, and of their joy at being chosen to play for the special night. So, no, she hadn't really mentioned the musical selection as he'd squired her toward her exit.

But she'd obviously thought about it after he'd deposited her, almost wistfully, beneath her ladder.

It had been so late. And he'd wanted to stay with her. And he'd wanted to...

"... could have spread my wings ... and done a thousand things, ... I've never done beforrrre." Her voice drifted through the closed doors out to the balcony, as she turned with her silk dance partner. Eyes closed for the turn, she didn't see him standing there.

He was enchanted.

He'd left her beneath her basement, as he thought he must. Left her pleased and a little tired, and very happy. Too happy to sleep, apparently.

So she hadn't gone to bed, as he thought she would. She'd simply stayed up.

And she was dancing. Waltzing, actually.

He'd felt it from halfway back to his chambers, though he couldn't give what she'd been feeling a name. Their bond had felt ... rhythmic and pleased. A happy ocean wave, beating to

an incoming tide. Cadenced. Lovely. It felt beautiful. And it had drawn him back to her side like a tidal moon seeking union with a sea-swept mistress.

"Dancing" as it turned out, was an emotion, like "happiness" or "fear." He hadn't known. He wondered if she did.

It swept through her on steady, beating wings. Wings that moved her side to side. Wings that kept tempo to her inner music. He hadn't known that "dancing" was its own feeling, and that it felt very different than any other.

He wondered if he'd tell her, or if he'd just hold that knowledge as a small bit of secret pleasure. He wondered if all dancing was an emotion, or if only waltzing was.

She was still in the dress she'd worn that night, a beautiful, frothy confection meant to glide in. Peach silk shimmered across a bodice that included a thin, matching wrap for her shoulders. It had a velvety, flaunting skirt with a layer of peach tulle underneath that teased her calves. The color made him think of a distant spring and the flavor of sweet jam.

Her arms held a waltzer's pose, one arm up and holding the fabric, the other encircling an unseen back. Long-ago lessons, teenage cotillions, and debutante balls had made her the perfect dance partner. The soft dress was high at the neck and a little low in the back, and he'd brushed her bare skin with his thumb, when they'd danced together. The wrap she now waltzed with had kept the dress from being immodest, in the back. Nothing had kept it from being elegant.

*"Shall we dance, Vincent?"* she'd asked him when she'd heard the strains of the first encore.

He remembered that he'd simply nodded to her, and offered her his arm. Kanin had done the same with Olivia. Robert had escorted Brooke to the floor and Zach had squired Jamie. Others, too.

He'd blushed immediately, the first moment he'd accidentally touched her warm, bare skin. She'd worn a dress which bared her back to him, and invited him to dance. Did she know what a treasure that was, and on how many levels? The degree of trust he understood that to be?

She'd blushed back at him a little, at the accidental contact, and given him a winsome smile.

He'd said nothing about it. Simply inclined his head, and swept her gently along with the flow of the music, and the other couples.

Her kind, green eyes had never left his face.

In her apartment, she spun again, and the silk trailed her lovely form, wrapping around her body a moment, before it let go and hung loose. He could sympathize with its desire to enfold her.

He'd left her nearly an hour ago. More, now that he'd been standing on the cold stones of her terrace for some minutes. Unable to bear their parting, and curious as to what had made the bond 'sing' so, he had simply returned, cutting across the night chill of the park to reunite with her. He now occupied the familiar space in front of her balcony doors like a lovesick swain. Which he realized he probably was.

He had no feigned excuse to be here. Hadn't even been able to think of a reason he could tell her. They'd had a marvelous amount of time together this evening. The early, rapid setting of the sun had made it that much safer for him to travel, and he'd cherished every moment with her. Winter solstice. The shortest day. The longest night.

The solstice meant something to Vincent. Something he'd never discussed, yet it was a thing he felt, as much as understood. It always had. Late December's chill could not dampen his love for a night that meant he was free from the confines of his home far earlier than usual.

Summer would find him mewed up in the tunnels much longer. Ah, but winter, especially winter at the solstice...

And now there was Catherine to share it with. Beautiful Catherine.

*Beautiful, dancing Catherine.* He thought it, but didn't want to say it aloud, didn't want her to stop what she was doing until she was ready to.

No, he had no excuse for coming back. The evening had been a full one by every measure of the word. He'd come to her balcony just after sunset - at a prohibitively early hour, thanks to a sun that had barely seemed to clear the trees, that day, then sank like a pale, distant stone.

She'd been applying perfume to her wrists as she'd raced to open the balcony doors for him. He knew she'd come in from work not long before. Her briefcase still sat on the dining room table where she'd tossed it, in her rush to get ready. Ready for him.

*Ready for him.* The sound of that was a banishment to the aloneness he'd carried before he'd met her. *What a beautiful thing to know, that a woman you loved was preparing herself to be with you,* he'd thought.

And she had been. He'd watched her settle his crystal around her neck and carefully place dangling pearls in her ears.

"I'm almost there," she said, fastening the second one. There was a smile of anticipation on her face, even then.

"You look lovely and I am early," he'd complimented gallantly, with an utterly pleased smile. Early. Early because the now absent sun could not keep him from her side. Early, because as the winter evening and the cold air had swept into her warm, well-lit apartment, it had

brought him in, as well. Just a little ways. Just enough so she would know he was here, and ... ready for her.

*Ready for her.*

She'd picked up her wrap and brought him the book he'd come to collect, as he collected his true prize: her. She'd pressed The Selected Poems of Omar Khayyam into his hands as she'd given him another anticipatory smile. He'd been unable to locate his copy, so she'd promised to locate hers, so they could read it together before the concert.

"I know we said we'd read on the balcony, but the temperature is dropping fast," she'd noted, pulling out one of the blankets they used when winter's cold stamped an icy foot. It hadn't snowed yet, but only because there was no moisture in the air.

It *was* getting colder, faster. Another gift of the shortest day, when the impotent winter sun had had less time to warm the air and stones around them, before it had disappeared again.

"The concert is not for a while yet. Why not meet me Below and we can read in my chambers?" he'd asked.

He remembered that it had felt good to be able to make the offer. Felt good to not have "time" pressing down on them like an anvil. They had hours, yet.

*Hours, yet.* It was another marvelous feeling.

As Vincent stood on her balcony and watched her through the sheers, he remembered the wonderful sensation of that. *We have hours, yet*, his mind repeated. The gift of the solstice night.

In a relationship that often counted itself in minutes, or even stolen moments, "hours" felt like a divine gift.

She'd smiled her agreement and did as he bid her. He'd preceded her Below as she'd gathered together a bag of treats for the children and locked up her apartment.

Vincent remembered the discovery that there was an even greater pleasure than the sensation of Catherine making herself ready for him: It was in knowing that Catherine was coming to him.

Coming to him. Coming to *him*. *Him*. In a beautiful silky dress with a shimmering wrap, while the weight of her book swung inside his cape pocket. It was a sumptuous feeling, and he'd let it wash through him as he'd stood beneath her basement entrance, waiting for her to come down.

Her lovely, impractical shoes had appeared on the ladder first, and, being unable to wait for her to finish descending, he'd plucked her off the ladder as more of her peach gown came

into view. She'd laughed a little as she'd turned to set her hands on his massive shoulders, the bag of candy looped over her right wrist. He'd set her down gently, keeping his hands on her waist until he could feel her gain steady footing.

"Impatient?" she'd asked, knowing that he was.

"Very. I wait all year for the longest night," he'd told her, taking the bag from her as he'd brushed the back of her hand with a soft kiss. Her sleeve ended in a point on the back of her hand.

*How pretty*, he'd thought, feeling the fine peach silk brush his lower lip as he'd kissed her. Her hand was beautiful. All of her was.

He'd tucked that same hand securely in the crook of his elbow, loving its welcome, familiar presence there.

*Was there a moment of this night that had not felt dipped in magic?* Vincent wondered as he watched Catherine continue to sway to the tune of unseen musicians and run the soft fabric through her hands. He didn't think there was.

And neither of them had wanted to let it go, apparently.

Though they'd shared her book in his chamber, then more time together at the recital, and then more still, as they'd danced...

She'd lingered during the cleanup, even helping the youthful orchestra put back the chairs and cobbled-together music stands. Some of the younger girls had clustered around her exquisite dress and carefully touched its folds. She'd smiled and shared her wrap with some of them, looking for all the world like she only needed a wand to be a fairy Godmother. Vincent did not mind sharing her. They'd had so much time.

After Cinderella's clock had struck well past midnight, after the musicians had put their instruments in their cases, after the chairs had been put back, after the candy had been distributed and thanks given, after the youngest of the young ones had been tucked into bed, after the tunnel community had lingered over punch and light conversation, then drifted away, after most of the rest of his world (and a good part of hers) had gone to bed, he'd brought her home. Slowly. Reluctantly. And at a prohibitive hour.

And then he'd returned.

He did not want it to be over, yet. Did not want it to be "all done," for another year. *Not yet. Not just yet. There are still a few hours left*, he reasoned, knowing that "reason" had about as much to do with this as her dancing with a swatch of silk, in her living room.



She giggled, on the other side of the glass as she changed her dance step. She did. She'd thought of something that had not only made her smile, it had made her laugh, softly, to herself. Vincent wondered what thought, what memory, had caught her fancy.

*What makes you smile, Catherine?* He'd asked her that at a different concert, not so very long ago.

*Everything,* she'd told him.

A small, almost secret smile tugged the corners of his mouth upward in answer to her good humor. Perhaps she was thinking of Mouse's antics as he chased Arthur away from - and through - the nearly empty punch bowl. Perhaps it was something Jamie had said, or Rebecca, or Father. Or him. Perhaps something he had said that night had delighted her, and she was recalling it, and laughing softly to herself, unable to contain her joy or keep silent.

She turned a little, again, curtsied slightly to her wrap, then just held it loosely to her chest, swaying softly on her feet, dreaming.

*God, how I love you.*

The little clock on her bookshelf chimed. It was two thirty in the morning. *Plenty of night left. Plenty of dark left, for them.*

He raised a gently closed fist to the glass. For the selling of his soul he couldn't have called it back, even though he knew it would end her fanciful reverie.

He rapped at her windowpane before she could tire herself so much with her movements that she would let the evening be over. He both hated to interrupt her and loved the expression on her face when she turned, knowing it would be him.

*Who else would be knocking on her balcony door at nearly two-thirty in the morning? She's glad to see me. She's happy that I came back, that I'm here. She knows she's no more ready for this night to be over than I am.*

Her bare feet made a happy sound, as she ran to close the distance between them.

*It's the longest night, Catherine. We have hours, yet.*

She raced to where he stood, acceptance and joy in every line of her small body as she flipped the lock and pushed the doors open.

"Vincent?" she asked, her smile one of welcome delight.

"Catherine, I --"

"Oh, Vincent! I'm so glad you came back!" She interrupted him with the disarming enthusiasm of a happy child.

"I didn't want the night to be over yet," she declared. "And now it isn't." She drank him in, and felt December's chill nip her stockinged toes as he stood, basking in the warmth of her greeting.

His eyes shone like fine lapis. There was just a hint of mischief in them.

"Neither did I." His voice was a soft, low confidence. "Get your coat. And warm shoes. We can go for a walk in the park." He indicated the way he came with a subtle jerk of his head. "It's freezing, but there will be no one there, but us."

Her smile widened with its brilliance. "Five minutes. Three minutes. I'll meet you downstairs!" She kissed his cheek impulsively, then flew back into her apartment, racing for the coat closet.

A few minutes later (he didn't count whether it was five or three) she emerged from her building wearing a long, black wool coat over her evening gown, and a pair of comfortable black boots on her feet that didn't go with the frothy, peeking hem of her dress. He chuckled in his enjoyment of her and held his huge arms wide open. She went into them immediately.

"Where should we wander?" he asked, taking in the blushing pink of her cheeks. It really was freezing, outside; New York in December, and nearly three in the morning.

"Let's just drift," she replied, matching her step with his as they headed further into the park. She still carried the wrap in her hand, and belatedly tied it around her head, thin protection for her ears. Her coat had a soft hood, and she tugged it upward, liking how much it made them look like a "matched pair."

"I never wanted to stop dancing," she confided, the chill air having no dampening effect on her spirits. He could see her breath, not to mention his own. Yet warmth flowed from her like sunshine.

"Nor did I," he admitted.

"Is that why you came back?" she asked, turning so that she took a few steps backward to his forward stroll.

He looked at her very precious face, framed inside the dark hood. "Yes," he replied honestly. "I could sense ... music inside you. It felt as if we parted too soon." He reached for her gloved hand, and gave it a squeeze. "Like there was so much night left, and we were wasting it, by being apart."

She changed his grip and turned, resuming her more customary position at his side. She kept her face turned toward his, her smile doing more to block the chill than a heavy cape.

"You just said how I felt, perfectly," she replied, as he shortened his stride to match hers. They opted for the tree lined paths, knowing that those were the safest for him. His blonde

hair peeked out from inside his hood, and she longed to reach up and smooth the wild silk and then tuck it back inside his cape where it wouldn't feel the cold. She knew the impulse was a silly one, but couldn't help it. It only made her smile more.

"If I ask you 'What makes you smile,' will you tell me 'Everything?'" he asked, stopping long enough for her to indeed settle a shimmering lock of hair back inside his cape.

"I will," she answered, brushing at the thick fabric across his chest. "But only because it's true," she tacked on, loving how he bent down to be ministered to.

She gently adored the vision of his golden face inside his own black hood. *He is so handsome, she thought. Gorgeously so. I could have danced all night...* The lyric repeated in her brain at his more subtle, answering grin.

They strolled aimlessly for a good while down the concrete sidewalk, the park almost eerily cold and deserted a place. Their booted feet settled into a measured tattoo on the winter pavement.

He dipped his head low again. "You were singing, back in your apartment," he said, as if it was a conspirator's secret.

"Oh, no. Please don't tell me you heard that," she rued with a soft chuckle.

"Heard it. Felt it. It was... lovely, Catherine," he assured her.

She ducked her head a little, knowing full well that her singing voice could not be called "lovely." The song was, though. That much she knew.

"It's from My Fair Lady," she supplied.

"Which was from Pygmalion. George Bernard Shaw had quite the time of it." The happy expression could not leave his face.

"Which was from the old Greek myth about Pygmalion and Galatea," Catherine added. "I wonder if the two of them danced, when the statue came to life," she mused as they ambled.

"How could he resist?" Vincent answered, loving the sensation of her gloved hand in his.

"You mentioned looking forward to this night. I didn't know. Is it because the dark comes so early?" she asked.

He nodded. "Summer is the opposite. The children love the extra time they can play, but the length of the day leaves me inside far longer. The park is more crowded because the weather is warm. I can't... move around like this. Can't have this much ... freedom." He could tell by the tone in his voice the value he placed on the last word.

He drew the icy air into his lungs, aware there was a trade to be made for that freedom. The lengthening dark made for a frigid stroll.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

If her feet had been bricks of ice, she wouldn't have said "Yes." As it was, her nose felt the nip of the frosty air, but the rest of her was fine. She shook her head and adjusted her wrap around her head so that it covered a little more of her face.

"Jenny and I used to go skiing in Aspen. That's nothing compared to this," she assured him, glad that it was at least partly true. At least there was no wind.

Content with her answer, he continued to keep his stride short to match hers, glad that they were covering the length of the park slowly, rather than rapidly.

"I just... I didn't want it to be over yet, Catherine." He felt like he had to explain. "I wanted it to continue. I know we had time together, tonight. More than we often do. I know it was... already a very special evening." He let the sentence stand without embellishment.

"But it felt like there was more left. Felt like... there was something we could still be doing," she supplied.

He nodded at her assessment and the smile that had never quite left the corners of his mouth grew. "Now it is you who said what I was feeling." He brushed the back of her gloved hand with another kiss.

A small, stone fountain, drained of water for the winter months, came into view. It was a white circle in the middle of the wide sidewalk. The kind that served to attract birds during the hot months, or invited joggers to sit down and retie their shoes. The kind where pennies bought wishes and wishes bought dreams. Catherine dug in her coat pocket and produced a coin.

"Does it count if there's no water?" Vincent asked, grinning at her impulsiveness.

"Does it count if all I have is a subway token?" she returned, tossing it in, anyway.

"Everything counts," she decided, hearing the clatter of the brass as the token hit the circle of cement.

"You didn't make a wish," he observed as she kept walking without stopping, tucking her hand back inside her coat pocket.

Her beloved voice was strong, and sure. "This entire evening has been a gift. I shouldn't ask for more. Besides, someone else might need it, so they can get back home. Or start a journey."

She was amazing. Her open heart shone in her eyes and the long skirt of her gown brushed past the cold fountain stones.

"I didn't think," she realized, fishing around in the depths of her coat. I should have given it to you. I only had one token."

"I have everything I could possibly want at this moment," he replied, settling his arm around her shoulders. The only sounds he heard were the ones they were making.

Catherine looked up. Not just at him but at the clear night sky. "The moon is low. Even it is cooperating with you," she said, noting that the waxing gibbous didn't shed much light from its position amid the trees.

"Of course it is," he replied, loving her even more, just because. They continued to stroll, drawing near the deserted area to the left of the band shell.

On an impulse and a whim, he tugged her off the concrete path, and began to take her across the crunching winter grass.

"Where are we going?" she asked, knowing that the tree lined paths were safer for a late night stroll.

"Where they make music," he said, feeling mischievous, again.

He proceeded across the frosty ground to the courtyard, and then to the huge stone amphitheater. They were near the place they'd often sat under to listen to unseen orchestras.



It was absolutely noiseless, on the stage now. Quiet like the peaceful stillness after a performance, when all the people had gone. Silent and still, like the description he'd given to her the night they'd listened to Schubert.

The bare stone platform framed by an oval backdrop dominated the space. Catherine headed for the nearest stand of trees, trying to keep them within the concealing darkness.

"It seems so quiet, now." she whispered, settling with him in the shadows of a nearby pine. Dark branches cut the low moon into oddly shaped fragments.

"It does. Like it's holding its breath, waiting for the next concert," he replied, taking in the scene. *I can still find peace in the stillness*, he thought, loving that he could share this with her.

"We'll be right over there." he pointed in the direction of the drainage grate that covered the Music Chamber.

"So close!" she remarked, seeing it.

"Remember Schubert?" he asked.

"Remember getting wet?" she giggled it, the same soft noise of humor she'd made in her apartment. Exactly the same.

Suddenly, he knew that when she'd laughed before, it had not been about Mouse, or Jamie, or Father, or Arthur, or anyone else. It had been a memory of him. Just him. She had been thinking about him, something he'd done or said. Something they'd shared together that night, which had made her happy enough to chuckle to herself. The laugh was the same. Connections.

They were keeping to the night swept safety of the tree line, looking at the deserted edifice before them.

"Catherine." He stepped away from the shadow-cast trees, tugging her hand forward. She planted her feet a moment, resisting. Even though it looked deserted, this was too open. They were exposed. He was exposed.

Still, he kept her hand firmly in his, and tugged her forward until she followed, and they reached the open stage.

"Dance with me," he asked, taking a smooth leap up onto the circular oasis. He turned back to her and made a 'come hither' motion with his index finger.

He was standing on an open stage in Central Park. He crooked his finger toward her again, a soft, beguiling smile on his face. The same one she'd seen all evening.

"Vincent!" His eyes were mischievous, still, and hers were astonished. "You'll get caught!" She said it in an alarmed stage whisper. Still, she stepped closer to the stage, enjoying his pleasure at his own antics.

"Best to dance with me, then," he rumbled, as he reached down for her. His hands settled at her waist, and he lifted her as if she were made of feathers.

"So I'll run back to cover, sooner," he added, enjoying the sensation of her standing near him on a dance floor, again.

"That's blackmail!" She laughed at him.

"Is it?" He feigned innocence as he kept his hands at her waist, and began to move them to the tempo of an unseen symphony.

He would not let her stay near the edge. He moved them to the center of the very public stage, and danced with her. The rhythm of "I Could Have Danced All Night" made a gliding tempo, in his mind. She followed his lead. And then accidentally stepped on his booted foot.

"I'm sorry." She smiled and blushed. "This is easier when there's music."

"You know the tune. 'I could have danced all night.'" he told her, not singing it, but saying it so that it was in time to the music. He began the waltz pattern again. She shook her head at him, incredulous, and followed.

"How long were you out on my balcony?" she asked as he moved with her.

"Long enough to know how badly I wanted this," he replied, tucking her body close to his as he continued to dance with her.

"This is insane, you know," she chided, but her smile couldn't dim. "If that moon clears the trees it will be bright as evening, out here."

His head dipped so that his lips were near the scar next to her ear. "Then we shall hold the moon low, and dance in scattered light," he replied, keeping her close a moment before turning her deftly then bringing her back in. He held her firmly against his chest, right where he wanted her.

She was nestled against him, warm and alive. Her nose rubbed against his brown vest, warming itself and pleasing him.

*So small. She is so small.* Every time he danced with her he realized it anew. Even in gloves her hands were tiny, and they were dwarfed by his. All of her was.

Yet she moved with a fluid grace, now that she could imagine the tune, and he cradled her back through her heavy coat. He could hear the scuffing sound their boots made across the concrete floor as they moved together. She kept herself close to him. He knew he wouldn't want it any other way.

He reached over and drew his cape around her, keeping her warmer, cocooning her against the winter air, and against all harm. It felt perfect. It felt right. It felt like all the rest of the night had: like there was something magical in the offing. Like the solstice evening had

belonged to him, like the park belonged to him, like the woman in his arms belonged *with* him, if not *to* him...

The moon stayed low and he willed it not to rise, further. He did not want her distracted by it, or afraid for him. Those were the opposites of the things he did want.

"I'm willing the moon to stay down," she said, lifting her head from the shelter of his vested chest, to tell him.

"Then we are both doing that," he replied, brushing a soft kiss across the top of her hood. She pushed it back, not minding its loss, then tugged the makeshift scarf down as well.

"Try that again," she requested, loving the sensation of his kiss on the top of her head. He did so, and he felt her arms tighten about him, in thanks.

*Perfect.* He thought the word again, as she returned her hand to his, for the dance.

They stayed that way for several long minutes, the dance gradually changing and slowing. After a while, they were hardly moving. Booted feet stepped softly across stone to a "barely there" beat. The moon-tinted night kept them partly shrouded, as the cold wrapped around them like an icy blanket, isolating them from the rest of the world.

"I love you." They said it together.

The pathway lamps seemed so very far away. The dark night hugged them like a dear friend, and they felt the bond sing, between them. Catherine knew she should be feeling the cold, but the warmth of his cape and his big body kept it at bay. She stayed nestled against his large frame, loving him. He brought her hand in from waltz position and tucked it against his large chest, simply holding her. She could hear his great heart beating beneath her ear, making a tempo far more beloved than any song.

"I could have danced ... all night." Her shy, feminine voice began singing the words. He listened to her as she half whispered, half sang the old Broadway musical number.

"I could have danced all night," she repeated, swaying a little, as she'd done in her apartment. "And still... have begged ... for more."

He smiled at the words, knowing how well they applied to them, this night. This night that was growing past late. Past late and into "early."

He held her close as she meandered through the verse, loving the sound of her breathy voice. It wandered off-key here and there, but the whispered words were a nighttime gift.

"...I only know when he, began to dance with me, I could have danced ... and danced ... all night." she softly concluded it, as he rocked with her, gently.



The nearest park light blinked out. The automatic timer had just indicated that they had indeed, just danced all night. Morning was still distant, but it was coming.

"I don't want it to end," she sighed. It was still dark. But she knew dawn was on the way. The most devoted of the park's joggers would be rising. And probably here, soon.

"I don't, either. Let's just stay here. Keep dancing." he said, knowing as he did that it was a ridiculous, impossible statement.

"We'll get the Philharmonic to set up. Play us another waltz," she expanded, dreaming with him.

"You aren't tired?" he smiled into her hair, knowing the answer. She was almost drifting with sleep, standing in his arms.

"No. I'm floating." she assured him, using words she'd used once before, just as sleepy now as she'd been, then.

*Floating. In that place where everything shimmers, and floats. Floating. Like flying.*

"On love's light wings..." he began.

"Did I o'er perch these walls." She finished for him, letting him lead her to the edge of the stage, at last, and to the surety of their imminent departure. They had to go. They really did. They shouldn't even be here, now.

Yet he walked like a man who was in no great hurry, and jumped down ahead of her, then turned to collect her beloved form, from the edge of the stage.

"Still floating," he said, holding her high for a long moment, before he gently brought her back to earth. His hood slipped back as he held her up and gazed at her. Neither of them minded that it fell back, even though they now both knew that every delay was an unwise one. They'd been lucky so far, not having encountered another living soul, on their walkabout. Their luck couldn't hold, forever. Vincent was all right with that. He didn't expect it to.

They walked back home more quickly than they'd come, knowing they should have gone in sooner, but not regretting a moment of the amazing night. She walked him as far back as the circular entrance to his home.

It was the dark just before the dawn. He could smell the distant sunrise coming, even though it wasn't imminent. She followed him inside the tunnel as he opened the door, and held it there.

"Shall I carry you back to the basement entrance to your apartment?" he asked, tugging her inside the circular doorway.

"No. It's nearly dawn. The joggers will be out, soon. I'll just cut across the park," she replied. Are you sleepy?" she asked.

"No," he answered honestly. "But you are." His smile was still there. Tender. Indulgent.

Her answering grin was too beautiful to be tired. "Tired" would come, when her head hit the pillow, he knew.

"I don't think I want to sleep," she confessed. "It's like with Samhain. It's admitting the night is over."

"There will be another night, this evening." he said gently, tucking a stray lock of silky hair behind her ear.

She removed her hand from her glove, and touched his dear, amazing face. "Your cheeks are cold." she said, drawing out their time together. He removed his gloves as she had done, and touched her face in kind.

"So are yours," he told her, leaning close. Very close.

The kiss was soft. Cool, at first, then warmer, as their lips brushed each other in a gesture so chaste it could only be described as sensual.

"I don't want to go home," she admitted.

"Don't go home." He said it at the same time she did. Like their "I love you," only more urgent, more wistful.

"I could stay in a guest chamber," she replied.

"You could stay in mine," he returned, lifting her surprised form from the ground with a sweep of his mighty arms so that she stayed nestled against his powerful chest.

"I could," she agreed, locking her fingers around his huge neck after she'd closed the door.

Carrying her like precious treasure, he strode through his home.

"What are you going to say if someone sees us?" she asked, giggling like a teenager with a crush.

"Only the truth," he answered. "That the sun isn't up yet and it's still solstice night. That I went walking in the park, was offered a wish at a fountain and danced with an enchantress. Do you think they'll believe me?" he asked, making his way down the hallway.

"An enchantress?" she raised a lovely eyebrow.

"You sang to me. I'm under a spell," he replied, teasing her.

"My singing has never done that. I promise you." She cuddled close to him, anyway. Even the pipes were quiet.

"I'm the first, then," he insisted, entering his chamber.

He settled her on his unslept-in bed, lit several soft pillars, and tugged her boots off her feet as she sat on the edge. He draped her coat and wrap across the bottom of the mattress, and tucked her in under his blankets, all while she was still wearing her frothy ball gown.

"Where will you sleep?" she asked, an innocent kind of love shining in her eyes.

"I am truly not tired." he replied, knowing he should be. He pulled up his reading chair. "I'm going to read to you for a while, then write in my journal while you rest."

"You are?" she asked, reaching for his hand. He gave it to her as he produced her book from inside his cape and opened it one-handed to where they'd left off.

"I am," he assured, loving the image of her sweet face, as she settled herself on his pillow. It looked very "right," there.

He read in the gentle baritone she loved more than any other sound.

*Come, fill the cup, and in the fire of spring  
Your winter garment of repentance fling.  
The bird of time has but a little way  
To flutter - and the bird is on the wing...*

Not a half page of verses later, her eyes slowly closed, a sweet smile of contentment hovering around her lips as she rested. She was happy, and the cadence of the verses felt like the cadence of the music, earlier. He could feel the similarity, inside their bond.

Not wanting his voice to keep her awake, he set the book aside and gently disengaged his hand from hers as she drifted down.

Staying where he was, he reached for his journal and snagged it off the corner of a table. It opened it to where his pen had kept his place marked.

The last entry had been filled with his anticipation for the upcoming night. About how much he had looked forward to the Solstice Concert, and about how much he had wanted to share the night with Catherine. His joy that they would spend the evening together. His hope that she felt as excited about the upcoming evening as he had.

He re-read his own words, recalling his own sense of pleasure.

He began the next entry simply enough.

*December 23<sup>rd</sup>.*

*Last night was the winter solstice. This morning it is still the solstice, as the night has never ended, for Catherine and me.*

He paused, looking at the beautiful woman asleep in his bed. She seemed so warm, so safe, and so happy, there. She sighed, under his perusal, and stretched her legs down, under the quilt. The smile on her mouth softened, with the deepening of her sleep.

*Catherine is asleep in my bed at this moment, neither of us wanting to be apart from the other,* he continued.

The pen made a soft, scratching noise over the paper as he wrote, pausing to look up often at his drowsing love.

*My heart is full. My life is full. Every doubt, every fear, banished like an unwelcome guest at a long overdue celebration. Our celebration; Catherine's and mine. I can only pray her fears were put to rest as well.*

He watched her shift a bit, in her sleep. Her hand searched a little, and he tugged the quilt up over her, keeping her warm.

*The truth comes like the dawn, and it is a good truth. She loves me. With all her brave, strong heart, she loves me.*

*We passed an impossible night together, impossible yet we made it be real. We were impulsive, and unwise, and though she was cautious for my sake, she was not afraid. Neither was I.*

*We made the whole of the park our own. We stayed out far too long, in the winter chill. Cast a wishing coin into a bare fountain, and didn't even*

*make a wish. No money, but a subway token, because that was all she had. A token to take you anywhere, anywhere in the city. A dream to do the same. We stayed up long past the time we should have been asleep in separate beds.*

He stopped a moment, reveling.

*We willed the moon low, together.*

He looked at the last line for a long time. His blue eyes brightened with checked tears, and he paused, looking at her.

*And so when she wakes, I will ask her if she will consent to be my wife. In the very dress she is sleeping in, in the dress we danced in, all night.*

He tugged over the swatch of silk that had served to accent her gown and cover her head, when she walked. He ran it across his palms, as he watched her rest, then brought it to his nose.

It smelled like winter air, and the smoke from the scented candles from the concert. A touch of her perfume held the center of the slick fabric, along with a trace of the smell indigenous to her apartment. All the places they'd been, that night, all the things they were, to each other.

They would have to make room for all of it, keep room for all of it, if they were to do this. He was content that they could. More than content. He was convinced of it. He was convinced they had to.

He closed the journal and held the silk in his hands, treasuring the look of her, while she slept.

Treasuring the last moments he'd behold her, before she hopefully agreed to become his bride.

"I love you." He said it softly to the angelic figure dreaming before him. He hoped it was a good dream.

She stirred a little, as if she'd heard him. Of course she had.

"Sleep, my angel," he whispered reverently, leaning forward. "It didn't end, the night didn't. It's still the solstice, for us. A celebration of embracing the light that comes out of the deepest darkness. Together. Forever."

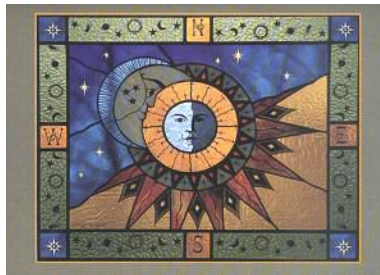
Her soft smile played around her lips.

"Yes," she murmured, eyes still closed, answering all his questions with a single reply.

He opened his journal again and tucked the strip of silk inside the pages, to hold his place. When she woke, they had a life to plan.

He thought he might just start by asking her to dance.

---fin---



*"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." ~ Shakespeare*

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*No matter where you are when the urge to sing and dance overcome you, I wish you love. ~  
Cindy*