



Out of the Shadows

by Angie

"Types and shadows have their ending."
-Thomas Aquinas

Vincent drifted through the tunnels like a shadow, his soft boots silent even on the sandy floors. He was wrapped in thought as completely as his cloak, which he kept close about him.

He didn't want to meet anyone, but there were few abroad, so avoidance was easy. Even the sentries noticed only a hint of breeze or whiff of candle smoke as he passed. They were used to his passing them like this, so didn't speak to him.

Catherine had given him much to think about. His self-regard had been questioned and this time, not by himself.

He made his way to the Chamber of the Falls and stood on the ledge gazing across the canyon. He would not be disturbed so late at night. It was as dark as it ever became in that magical place. The falls were an ethereal mist, their sound resonating with his breathing, mimicking the rushing of his blood.

Catherine had held his hands on her balcony, after he had revealed his most shameful secret to her, and told him as she looked in his eyes, that his hands were hers. Then she had kissed them!

That had created a silence between them for some time. He had let himself relax in her grasp, feeling her obvious love of him, despite what he had told her.

Then she had tightened her grip on his hands and shaken them slightly as she did sometimes to gain

his attention, then moved closer, very close. She grabbed the bottom of his vest, as if to prevent him leaving. He put his arms around her, lightly, trying to maintain the distance he felt necessary after his confession.

“Vincent, I’m going to tell you something you need to understand, about us, about you. I want you to hear me out. Will you?”

“Yes,” he had whispered, not daring to say more. She had looked into his eyes, her face relaxed, beautiful. Her green eyes were soft.

“You know I’m not innocent of the ways of men, at least of those in my world. I enjoy a handsome face, a well-proportioned body, as much as any woman in either of our worlds.

“But you, Vincent, you are so much more than any other man. You are, to put it bluntly, the sexiest man I have ever known. Your clothes don’t hide the strength and length of your legs. Even vests like this one cannot hide the impressive width of your chest and shoulders. Your face is miraculous, beautiful, and I love looking in your eyes, gazing at your lips - and hearing your voice from them.

“I know your body image bothers you, at least with me. You worry about your nails, the hair on your hands and arms. You wear extra long sleeves.

“But Vincent, you must understand that I find the thought of hair like this all over your body pleasant. I ache to stroke it with my hands, to feel your warmth under it, caress you, love you.

“As I lean against you now, I know that you are feeling something for me here.”

She reached between them and touched the bulge between his legs. He groaned softly and his manhood pulsed under her hand.

“There is no shame in this, Vincent. Every woman enjoys seeing her lover aroused. It’s intensely satisfying, a promise of joy to come - if you allow it to be seen that way, let the thought take root.

“And Vincent, I want that thought to take root in you. You must believe that I want to have us both naked, so that I can rub my body against yours, feel all those wonderful muscles and all the textures you keep hidden. I want to feel your hands on my body, loving me as I do you.

“I want you to think about that, Vincent. Because it is the truth.

“I know you have no mirrors in your chamber, so I wish you to see yourself as I do. As Kristopher did in his painting. Clothes could not disguise your virility, even there.

“Lena saw it, Lisa knew of it, and every woman in your world is aware of it. That couched strength, your grace in all you do, in the way you move. It’s what makes you who and what you are, Vincent. That you seem innocent of this effect only makes you more attractive.

“When you’re ready I will take you on a journey of discovery. That’s what I want you to know, to think about.”

She moved away from him, then, and his arms dropped away. He let them hang by his sides, suddenly useless. What use were they when they did not embrace her?

Catherine captured his hands again, brought them to her mouth again, and kissed them, slowly, lovingly. Then she backed away.

“Good-night, Vincent.”

She had returned inside her apartment, although she left the patio door open, as if to confirm that she was not saying good-bye, merely giving him time to decide what to do.

He had not been able to move for long moments, but had then left the balcony quickly, not daring to be seen by her again. He needed to think.

There, in the darkness of the Chamber of the Falls, Vincent removed every stitch of his clothing, including his boots and socks, and left them in a neat pile on the stone ledge.

Then he stood still, looking across the vast space to the falls, letting the breeze from it waft across his body, stroke his body hair, blow his mane in wisps away from his face.

He closed his eyes and let himself truly feel his body in its entirety, without the restriction of clothes. He could feel every muscle in his body, tensed and waiting. For what, he wondered? He forced himself to relax, to enjoy the freedom of his nudity, something he seldom indulged.

He was not unaware that some of the tunnel women found him attractive, but their regard was muted, more like that of sisters, dampened he suspected by Father's obvious disapproval on his behalf. That had been the reality of his life since Lisa left, and he had not questioned it.

Catherine had changed that. As an outsider and a woman from above, she had definite ideas about their relationship and she would not change her behaviour, despite Father's frowns or hinted admonitions. She saw no reason to, he realized with sudden clarity. She believed him a man and treated him as she would a male admirer in her own world.

His appearance seemed not to matter in that respect. Au contraire, he thought ruefully, she had made it clear tonight she found him more than merely attractive. He had accepted her feelings towards him some time ago, difficult as that had been on occasion.

But he had not thought of the women in his community in that way, ever, and could not do so now. The habit was too ingrained, and the prospect mildly shocking. Their world was too confined for him to begin to explore his sexuality with any of them, even if he could conceive of being unfaithful to Catherine in that way - which was itself unthinkable.

Even though he and Catherine were not lovers in the strictest sense, their bond brought them far closer than he had ever been to any woman, even Lisa. Lena had offered herself, but that too could never be, and he'd had to tell her so bluntly. Their bond was what set them apart, and he knew that he must trust it, as Catherine obviously did. Their bond had saved her life more than once and had even saved his.

He considered himself a man of honour. He knew that Catherine had been faithful, despite his advice that she find happiness with a man from above. She had been as remote to the men of her world as he was to the women of his. Apparently, she could no longer conceive of such a thing either, and had pointedly berated him for expecting her to.

Vincent put his head back and gazed into the darkness above him. He asked himself why he was so obstinately wedded to the reality of his differences, when it was obvious, even to Catherine, that almost no one considered him in as harsh a light as he did himself. True, he must remain apart from her world, at least in daylight. That was a reality that no amount of heightened self-regard could change. But his aloneness was mostly self-imposed, he finally admitted to himself.

It had become a self-fulfilling prophecy, since he had never become as close to any woman as he had Catherine. And surely, if she had accepted him for what he was on such short acquaintance, the women of his own world must have done so long ago. He had never considered that, had taken it for granted that they had merely borne his differences because he was their protector and a valued member of the community - and Father's son.

Why had he come to that conclusion? Had Father really convinced him that he was dangerous to the opposite sex, that he could never hope to have a normal relationship with a woman?

In all honesty, Vincent admitted that he himself was the biggest problem in this regard. Father's admonitions had not left scars on his psyche. He routinely ignored what he chose not to obey, had done so even as a child.

After Lisa left, his heart was broken, not just because of the hurt he had given her, but because she had never even written to him. There were ways she could have sent him a message without Father

knowing, yet she had not. For all intents and purposes, she had forgotten him.

He had misread her intentions entirely. It had taken him until her recent visit to understand just how badly he had done so. She was self-absorbed and had callously used him to gain entry to their world again, to hide, taking for granted that she would be welcome. He was not sure if she knew, or cared, about his teenaged heart.

In her life, Lisa did not look far ahead and never looked back. He, on the other hand, had not often considered what his life would be in the future because that meant admitting what aspects of it he must forgo. He would have lost all interest in living. What could he expect being what he was?

Instead, he lived in books, collected unusual mementos, and looked back at happier times with Devin and his other tunnel friends. Although his friends were still around, albeit older, many had families, or had found something to engage them. Pascal had his pipes, Rebecca her candle works, Elizabeth her paintings. Even Mouse had found interests that excluded him.

He had been stuck in a vacuum of his own making - nothing affecting him below the skin - until he had found Catherine. He suspected no strong emotion would go unnoticed between he and Catherine now, that the awareness would ripple along their bond. It certainly left no doubts about their commitment to each other.

He looked down at himself, and moved his awareness to that part of him that made him undeniably male and felt it respond. Here in the dark, it roused, and this time, he felt no shame in that. There was no one near to see. Catherine was above, and she was calm, relaxed, her feelings adding nothing to his. She was waiting, patiently as always, but was not actively seeking him along the bond. He blessed her for that freedom, as for her patience and the continuing gift of her friendship.

Vincent felt a need to move. He clambered down the stony path that led to the river. Beside it, he paused and let the dry sand sift between his toes. Then he lay down on the sandy bank, moved his legs apart, stretched his arms out. The feel of the sand on his naked buttocks was a cool embrace, but gradually it warmed beneath him until it matched his body heat.

Catherine had wanted him to realize the virility of his body, to accept that he was a sexual and sexy man. Now he looked down at that body, his night vision hiding nothing from him, even in the dim light.

He could not consider what Catherine had said, without thinking about what it might mean for them. He fantasized that Catherine was naked beside him, here on the sand and his manhood aroused further. He did not try to suppress it, in fact he welcomed it. He needed the assurance of his humanity here and now.

Soon, that assurance became urgent, and he moved one hand to do what he seldom allowed himself. He did it slowly, sensuously, thinking of Catherine, of the lovely form he could see under her night attire when she had come to him on the balcony earlier. How he loved her!

He brought himself to completion, feeling the warm wetness shoot across his legs. It was an intensely erotic sensation, and he spared a moment for regret that he was alone, that Catherine could not see him this way, spread-eagled for her, thinking of her as he did this. He knew she would understand, knew instinctively that she would find it arousing.

He sent a small frisson of love down the bond, knowing that she needed the reassurance that he wasn't brooding in some desolate place, unable to accept her confession, as he had in the past. He felt her happiness in response.

He sighed then and closed his eyes, let himself relax against the sand, feel again the breeze and the magic of the falls.

After a time, he rose and entered the river. He cleaned himself with soft strokes, drew his hands over himself, wetting every part of his hirsute body. He cupped a double handful of water and splashed his face, inhaling the clean scent it left on his hands.

When he emerged at last, he felt renewed, no longer a creature of unknown origins, but merely a man with differences, just as Catherine had said. He stood for a while on the sand until he was almost dry, then clambered up the cliff to where he had left his clothes.

He looked at the pile of clothing and felt no desire to put them on. He would not meet anyone now and would not be ashamed if he did. Catherine had freed his mind from both shame and uncertainty.

There was no going back now. He felt liberated, virile, eager. He wanted to take her up on her offer, and he would, as soon as possible. He was ready to join the community of man, with Catherine showing him the way.

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